



Third Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 28, 1997

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mobile Screening Unit for Mammograms

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

Obstetrics Closure—Grace General Hospital

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Katherine Maleshko, Harry Ebbs Nolan, Nicole Campbell and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request that the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) consider stopping the closure of obstetric programs at the Winnipeg Grace Hospital.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Obstetrics Closure—Grace General Hospital

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

An Honourable Member: 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 the obstetrics program has always been an important part of the Grace Hospital's mandate; and

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

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

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

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

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

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Committee of Supply

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

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

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the 1997-98 Revenue Estimates.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 44—The Municipal Amendment Act

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Rural Development): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gilleshammer), that leave be given to introduce Bill 44, The Municipal Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les municipalités, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill 45—The Manitoba Evidence Amendment Act

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Cummings), that leave be given to introduce Bill 45, The Manitoba Evidence Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur la preuve au Manitoba), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

* (1335)

Bill 46—The Criminal Injuries Compensation Amendment Act

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), that leave be given to introduce Bill 46, The Criminal Injuries Compensation Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'indemnisation des victimes d'actes criminels), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have this afternoon thirty

Grades 7 and 9 students from Shady Oak Christian School under the direction of Mr. Darrel Goosen. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Cummings).

We also have twenty-three Grades 7 and 8 students from Amos Okemow Memorial School under the direction of Mr. Reg Toews and Mr. Mike Borgfjord. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Bristol Aerospace Sale Agreement

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Acting Premier.

Madam Speaker, last October, Bristol Aerospace, a company that employs close to a thousand people in Winnipeg and is, obviously, a very significant economic benefit to our community, announced that it was putting the local plant up for sale. It was indicated that the sale would be completed within four to six months, and later in the winter, early January, February, we were told that the sale is imminent within the next four to six weeks. We hear now that the end of the month is the target date for the sale.

Can the Minister responsible for I, T and T please inform this House whether any sale has been arranged, and can he advise the people of Manitoba on the success of keeping those working in Manitoba?

* (1340)

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question, Madam Speaker.

The presence of Bristol Aerospace in the province of Manitoba and the over a thousand employees that they have in their factory, their plant, are extremely important to this province. It is truly a cornerstone for the aerospace industry and the transportation industry for Manitoba. I do not disagree, the member has—there

was some information as to the time which they were projecting in which they would have the sale complete. We have been in ongoing discussions. The department has been part of discussions with them, not directly as to who the purchaser would be, but trying to keep track of the fact that there is, in fact, a buyer, and it will take place sooner rather than later. We also are aware of the fact that it is hoped to be concluded by the end of June, and we look forward to a company that purchases it, carries it out and expands its opportunities here in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, with the phasing out of other work that this company was providing to the federal government, the number of employees has decreased almost by 50 percent over the last couple of years. In July of 1996, the federal government secretly awarded, without tender, a \$216-million contract to Bombardier and did not allow any tendering for that work to take place by the Bristol Aerospace company. This untendered contract, I think, works totally against the interests of Manitoba.

I would like to ask the Deputy Premier: What impact has this untendered contract going to Bombardier had on the economic situation for Bristol, because they announced the sale of their company shortly thereafter?

Mr. Downey: Madam Speaker, I cannot indicate to the House any direct relationship as to that contract and to the sale of Bristol by the Rolls Royce company of the U.K. The reason for the sale is that it is not along the type of business that the Rolls Royce company traditionally has carried out. However, any business that the plant would have here in Winnipeg would augur very well for anyone that was trying to buy it and/or anticipating purchasing it.

The province, I can tell the member, is involved through the MIOP program which is supporting the further redevelopment of the plant to change its direction from being so closely tied to military construction activity to more civilian aircraft. We are committed to Bristol to help them do that and are, in fact, actively involved in a project currently.

Tendering Process

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Deputy Premier—in

1986 when the former Conservative government rigged the tendering process and awarded the maintenance contract of the CF-18 to the Bombardier corporation, all Manitobans joined together to call on the federal government to treat this region and this province fairly. This contract of \$216 million was awarded without any tendering whatsoever to a competitive company to the Bristol Aerospace company.

Madam Speaker, we also understand that close to \$1 billion in retrofitting and refurbishment work is being let out by stealth, if you will, in terms of work that is being provided to Bombardier.

Has the Deputy Premier raised this issue in a public way with the Prime Minister, with the federal M.P.s? What are we doing to say that Manitoba should be treated fairly in a tendering process, whether it is a rigged process in 1986 or no tendering process in 1997?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Madam Speaker, there is no secret that this government has stood strong as it relates to the aerospace activity in the province of Manitoba and also—and I give credit to the opposition, joined with us when it came to the Air Command to make sure that we tried to save some of the jobs that the federal Liberals were proposing to and did in fact move out of the city of Winnipeg, which is extremely important to this province.

I can also say, Madam Speaker, we are currently working with some of the proposed bidders—by the way, it just happens to be on a helicopter contract which was cancelled by the current Liberal government and is now being reintroduced under another name. That cost the city of Winnipeg a tremendous amount of aerospace jobs and was callously taken away for political reasons.

We, this government, will stand strong for the aerospace industry in Manitoba and will do what we can to bring as much business to the province of Manitoba.

* (1345)

Education System Standardized Testing Costs

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Education. It is widely

believed that the Department of Education has recently rented the entire Ramada Marlborough inn, over 100 rooms, meeting rooms, accommodation, meals for a month for the marking of their ideologically driven standardized exams.

I wonder if the minister could confirm this and whether she could tell us what the cost of the renting of the Ramada inn is and what portion it plays in the entire cost of standard exams at the Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 levels in three and four subjects.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): I am not about to confirm the location, the secured location of the marking of the exams.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. McIntosh: We know absolutely that the members opposite are philosophically and ideologically opposed to assessing students to any set measurable standard in schools. It is clear. It is obvious. It is known. It is supported in everything they say and everything they do, so they do not wish to see students assessed. They would prefer to have universities and employers not know what 80 percent means. The total cost of examinations from development right through is around \$50 to \$60 per student, and that includes everything.

The criteria around marking is very highly confidential in terms of-[interjection] Well, Madam Speaker-

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. McIntosh: Do they want the exams to go out ahead of their being written so that they can all be utilized and have the integrity of the standard compromised? I really—they do not like exams. That is all there is to it.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Wolseley, with a supplementary question.

Ms. Friesen: I tried very hard to hear the answer there, but I wonder if the minister could explain why Manitobans should be collecting books, string, paper to take on a daily basis to classrooms, why they should be selling chocolate and wrapping paper door to door for basic classroom needs when the department's priority is a million dollars per exam to support an expensive and centralized marking system.

Mrs. McIntosh: The members opposite would be able to hear the answers if they would be quiet and listen to them when they are given.

Madam Speaker, I indicate to the member that which she already knows. When she was going to school and I was going to school, we sold chocolate bars and wax paper and grapefruit and oranges by the case. We sold grapefruit like there was no tomorrow. Everybody had vitamin C because we were going door to door selling grapefruit from our schools, and that is many years ago. We also, at that time, bought our own textbooks; we used to buy our own textbooks at that time. So the fact that schools engage in fundraising is not new.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. McIntosh: I know they cannot hear, they do not want to hear. They just do not like exams, and they will bring up any red herring they can bring up to try to get people to say that they will agree with them, that examination and assessment is not good for children. It is good.

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

Ms. Friesen: I will try a third question on the minister; she has not answered the other two.

I wonder if the minister could explain why it is cost—

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Education, on a point of order.

Mrs. McIntosh: I am following the rules of a point of order as set by the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton). Now this is the kind of point of order that he raises. He knows Beauchesne, so I am sure it is correct, and I trust you to tell me if it is correct or not. I distinctly answered the other two questions. Hansard will show that, Madam Speaker. I think the member is out of order in putting false information on the record.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Education does not have a point of order.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, to quickly pose her final supplementary question.

* (1350)

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister explain why it is cost-effective to spend close to another million dollars on a Grade 12 math exam which students already know does not count.

Mrs. McIntosh: The member obviously and clearly does not understand the purposes of standards exams. Her question reveals her abysmal ignorance on the topic. Maybe that is why she is so ideologically opposed. The whole concept of trying to determine whether or not students have met the outcome designated in the curriculum, whether or not students have achieved the level of learning prescribed by the province as the measurable standard by which Manitoba shall be known has nothing to do with whether or not the marks count for the student.

If you have a mark that is out of 30, and you are able to show by that mark that across the province students have achieved the standard of computation, of problem-solving ability, so that universities and employers and the international market will say, finally, finally, there is a measurable consistent standard of achievement with outcomes that are known, and she thinks it does not matter because it does not count for the student's final grade when the whole understanding—that mark will appear on every report card for people to see and to know what standard has been achieved.

Education System Student User Fees

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): My question is to the Minister of Education. User fees in schools are costing families typically \$660 per year for each elementary student, \$915 for each secondary student in addition to the already heavy property tax burden due to this provincial government's underfunding of the public education system. On April 29, this minister explained the way user fees, as a result of teacher collective agreements—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Question, please.

Ms. Mihychuk: My question: Can the minister clarify how she believes that teachers are at fault for user fees because they have lunch breaks? I will quote: There are opportunities now for teachers in many divisions to have lunch hours.

Does this minister think that teachers do not deserve—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

* (1355)

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, first of all, I will check the figures the member has put forward, and I would appreciate her providing me with copies of how they were arrived at. I would hope that unlike the other day when I asked twice if she could tell me which schools would not let students in if they did not pay a membership fee or a registration fee—she did not give me that information. I would appreciate this so I could check it out.

Madam Speaker, I have to indicate that which is well known. Of course teachers deserve lunch and never would anybody say they would not, but we are talking about—

An Honourable Member: You did.

Mrs. McIntosh: And no, I will not accept him twisting or a misinterpretation of words. It is very clear and well known and verified by school boards across the province—it is not a judgment; it is not a bad thing; it is

not blame. The member says "blame." There is no blame attached here; it is just a fact. Many school divisions now have collective agreements which free up teachers from supervising lunchroom duty at lunchtime, taking a tour of lunchroom duty, as we always did in the past where teachers would take every six or seven days and supervise the lunchroom. That has resulted in a cost to school divisions where they have to hire lunchroom supervisors, and they will often charge students to pay for that. That is just a fact; it is not blame. There is nothing—I do not know why she reads blame into reality.

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

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, the minister has called on me to reveal how many school divisions are charging fees. It is shameful this minister does not know what is going on in—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for St. James, with a supplementary question.

Ms. Mihychuk: Will the Minister of Education confirm that the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, the Fort Garry School Division, the River East School Division, the St. Vital School Division and the Assiniboine South School Division all charge mandatory registration fees? Will she get up to date and know what is happening in public schools?

Mrs. McIntosh: I had called upon the member to give me the names of schools which would deny students the right to enter the classroom because they had not paid a fee, which were twice the accusations she made. She still has not done that. She is talking about registration fees, which many school divisions charge and always have charged. For example, St. James Collegiate charges a registration fee of \$25, \$18 of which is for the student fee and the lockers and so on, and the rest which can be easily not paid if the student does not have the money.

So this is not unlike what my daughter paid in 1981, my daughter who paid money, a hundred dollars, a hundred and fifty dollars here and there for band trips when she was in award-winning bands and once could not go to one because we simply could not afford to

send her. In 1981 when they were in power and their minister was the Minister of Education, we were paying user fees to that amount and that level.

School divisions do have extra costs associated with new realities in collective bargaining—nothing wrong with that, but it does result in extra costs for parents.

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

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, when will this Minister of Education recognize that the increasing trend of charging user fees to students is the result of this government's underfunding of public schools? When will they take the responsibility for that?

Mrs. McIntosh: I have three things I need to say to that. First of all, Madam Speaker—it is a three-part answer—one, we are not underfunding education. Funding to education has increased by \$115 million since we took office, a huge increase and a real increase. In addition, there have been other monies pumped into the system in terms of technology grants, in terms of money for special needs, in terms of nurses in school, in terms of all kinds of things, and that is right, that is correct and that is a reality. So she cannot say we are underfunding.

The other thing I can say is that we are doing this, all of this, in spite of the fact that the transfer payments from Ottawa are huge transfer cuts that they would be the first ones to complain about if they had to deal with them. If they had to deal with a \$220-million cut to health and education, they would be the first ones to complain, and they would not be able to continue sustaining the education system to the degree that we do if they were in power.

Third, Madam Speaker, when will they take the blame for the user fees that we had to pay when they were in power?

* (1400)

Pan Am Games Federal Funding

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Madam Speaker, yesterday in the Sport Estimates, the member for

Kirkfield Park (Mr. Stefanson) stood by the Pan Am Games budget of \$122,064,000. He maintains that there will not be a deficit for the games. However, he admits that there are budget revisions occurring and that the Pan Am Games Society has approached and is in discussion with the government to secure a need for increased funds.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance and of Sport: Given that in 1994 the Commonwealth Games received \$105 million from federal and provincial governments, does the minister think that it is fair or reasonable that the federal government is reported—gave \$62 million to the Victoria games when they had only 11 sports and that now for the Pan Am Games which have 41 sports, they are giving \$37 million?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister responsible for Sport): Madam Speaker, we had quite a lengthy discussion in Estimates yesterday with the member for Radisson. When you look at budgets of various games, there are some differences. Some communities have greater needs in terms of their facility development and so on. We are fortunate here in Winnipeg and Manitoba; we do not have a tremendous need in terms of enhancing our facilities to host the 1999 Pan American Games, but I believe her numbers are correct when she focuses on the federal contribution. In fact, the federal contribution for the 1999 Pan American Games is approximately \$30 million in cash and \$7 million in services and in kind. There still is some uncertainty around the value for that \$7 million in-kind service, so actually the federal contribution to date is \$30 million in cash compared to approximately, I believe, about \$62 million in cash for the Commonwealth Games in Victoria.

Ms. Cerilli: I am wondering if the Minister of Finance and of Sport can explain why the federal support for the Pan Am Games is \$25 million less than the Victoria Commonwealth Games even though the Pan Am Games five years later are a larger event but are now operating on a much smaller budget.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I think that question is certainly more appropriately addressed to the federal Liberal government or perhaps the member for Inkster

(Mr. Lamoureux) who likes to speak on behalf of the federal Liberal government quite regularly in this House. But to date, as the member said in her first question, the current budget is \$122 million. All of the financial requirements of that budget have been met in terms of the development of that budget but, as we discussed yesterday, the Pan Am Games are now going through a comprehensive review of all of their expenditures. There are some changes to their expenditures based on numbers of athletes, lengths of stay during the games. There also are some changes to the revenues based on the recent agreement with CBC and TSN and so on.

So we are expecting a revised budget document from them very shortly and, subject to what that shows, we will be into discussions obviously with the society but, probably more importantly, we will be into serious discussions with the federal government.

Ms. Cerilli: I would ask the Minister of Finance and of Sport what he is prepared to do more specifically about this \$25-million shortfall as compared to the Commonwealth Games, especially since there is currently a lot of uncertainty about the Pan Am Games securing an American television network, and this would, again, affect the budget in Manitoba.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I think initially we have to let the Pan Am Games Society go through the review that they are going through. In fact, the chairman of the games this morning announced or indicated that they are going through that comprehensive review, expect to complete that fairly shortly.

So I do not think we should necessarily prejudge what the outcome is, but if there is need for additional financial support, I think there is a very compelling point to be made with the federal government based on the level of support that the federal government has given for games in Edmonton and Calgary and Victoria and elsewhere in Canada, that by comparison their support for the Pan Am Games here in Winnipeg and Manitoba is certainly less as a contribution to the games. So I think there is a compelling point to be made, if need be, in terms of future discussions with the federal government.

Transfer Payments Increase

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Time and again, whether it is the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik), the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), the minister of social services, anything that goes wrong in the province of Manitoba, they want to blame the transfer payments from Ottawa.

My question to the Minister of Finance is: Once we start to see the increases to these transfer payments as promised, will the Minister of Finance then in return direct that money directly-increases to our public education and health care in order to compensate this government's inability to provide proper resources?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am totally confused where the member for Inkster is coming from when he refers to increases. I think I should point out to him that this year, 1997-98, the federal government is providing \$12.5 billion to provinces for health, post-secondary education and support to families. They were scheduled to reduce it down over the next couple of years to \$11 billion. All that the federal Liberal government has done is halt the reductions at this particular point in time. So they are not providing any increases; they are just stopping further reductions. There is a big fundamental difference.

He talks of increases. There are no increases coming. All that is happening is there are no more reductions, but this is on the heels of a 35 percent reduction in funding for health, post-secondary education and support to families. In the case of Manitoba, it is a reduction of \$240 million, and I say shame to the federal Liberal government.

Mr. Lamoureux: Nice to see the Minister of Finance, Mr. Charest and—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lamoureux: My question to the Minister of Finance is: Will the Minister of Finance commit that his government will provide additional financing for

public education and our public health care system when we start to see the increases in transfer payments towards the block fund? Will he make that commitment today?

Mr. Stefanson: I do not know if the member for Inkster did not hear my first answer, but I really do encourage him to look at the facts. There are no increases coming down the road from any federal Liberal government. Right now the funding for Canada Health and Social Transfers on a national basis to all provinces is at \$12.5 billion. All that the federal government has indicated, the federal Liberal government, is that they will freeze it at \$12.5 billion instead of reducing it down to \$11 billion which was their original plan.

So there are no increases, and the facts are that over the last three years the federal Liberal government has reduced funding in those areas by 35 percent and in the case of Manitoba, \$240 million. Those are the challenges that are facing Manitoba and challenges faced by provincial governments right across Canada because of the wrongheaded policies of the federal Liberal government.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Finance: Why is he attempting to mislead the public on this issue? Either that or he does not know what he is talking about. My question—

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable government House leader, on a point of order.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I invite the honourable member to review what he has just said and perhaps rephrase his question.

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

Mr. Lamoureux: On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, I do understand that "misleading" is in fact unparliamentary, so for that reason I would withdraw it even though—I will just leave it at that.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable member for Inkster.

* * *

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance himself admits that there is going to be a freeze. Your ministers say there is a \$220-million decrease. You cannot have it both ways. What is this Minister of Finance going to be doing with the money that was not originally budgeted? Will he give the commitment that it will go towards public education and public health care?

* (1410)

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the current federal Liberal government was elected three and a half years ago, I remind the member, and immediately in their first budget they started reducing the funding in transfers to provinces for health, post-secondary education and support to families. Over the last three budgets, that reduction from the federal Liberal government is \$240 million in the case of Manitoba, and across Canada it is 35 percent. Those are the facts. Even the federal Liberal government, even the federal Liberals do not deny that those are in fact the facts. All that they have announced is they have stopped the reductions, they have stopped the freezes after that major reduction and are holding the floor at 12.5.

I have provided the member information in the past. I will provide him all the information he wants. I even encourage him to talk to the federal Liberals in their attempts to justify these massive reductions, but those are the facts. In the case of Manitoba, we have \$240 million less today than we did three years ago for those three very important areas.

Health Care System Surgery Waiting Lists

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, bone density scanner waits of 18 months, hip and knee replacement waits of one year to 18 months, cataract surgery or eye surgery where typically a doctor will say, go on the waiting list or for a thousand dollars I will do it in my office today, this is what Manitobans have been living with for years.

For years we have been prodding the government to do something about waiting lists and yesterday, finally, the Minister of Health indicated that the government was going to do something about surgical waiting lists. I would like the minister today to explain to the thousands of Manitobans who are presently on those waiting lists what and when the government will be offering some relief with regard to these terrible waiting lists we have had in this province for the past few years.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, no doubt the issue of waiting lists for various procedures comes up from time to time and is an important one for Manitobans, but the member for Kildonan asks his question as if it exists in a void.

Madam Speaker, since this administration came to power, my predecessors, the former member for Pembina and the current member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae), have worked very hard to improve procedures and the offering of procedures.

I can inform the House things like cardiac surgeries increased 48.8 percent; cataracts 44.7 percent; hip replacements 24.1 percent; knee replacements 125.5 percent, so I am not disagreeing with the member that there is a need out there that we are attempting to address, but let us not make it sound for one moment that work has not gone on to try to increase the number of procedures, because that has happened, and there is need that we still have to address.

Diagnostic Test Waiting Lists

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Can the minister, Madam Speaker, who did not answer the specifics of the question for Manitobans, explain why in Manitoba today the waiting lists for diagnostic services like CAT scans, magnetic resonance and ultrasound are the longest and the highest in all of Canada today and were yesterday and last year and have been consistently under this government?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I am not for one moment going to accept the premise that our waiting lists are significantly, as the member would have us believe, out of line with the rest of the country. But there are a host of reasons that go into waiting lists that we discussed yesterday. Some of

those reasons have to do with the way in which we organize many of those diagnostic procedures, the way we make use of existing equipment.

I know, in one area that the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) has brought to my attention in terms of bone scans, as I have gone back with my department to find ways of reducing that waiting list, it is quite interesting what one finds in terms of the proposals that come forward to solve it which range from a very high amount of money to a very nominal amount because there is a host of factors that fit into it. We are trying to address those as those issues arise, and I hope we are going to be able to bring down some of those lists that we have talked about in this House.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, can the minister explain how it is that we in this House who are Manitobans and the thousands of Manitobans on these waiting lists are going to have any confidence that the minister is going to bring these waiting lists down, when, in fact, he does not acknowledge the fact that we have the longest waiting lists for CAT scans, the longest waiting lists for MRIs, the longest waiting lists for ultrasound, horrendous waiting lists for hip and knee replacements, and the minister will not even acknowledge these waiting lists exist and attempts to find excuses?

Will he tell the House specifically what the government is going to do and stop making excuses?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, the member's comments are very far from the truth. Neither myself nor the previous minister has not acknowledged that there are from time to time and are currently waiting lists for various procedures that we do not find acceptable in the system. We have acknowledged that. We also know that similar lists exist in other parts of the country from time to time.

What is important is not that one just say, well, the only way to solve this problem is just throw some money on the issue today and it will be solved. One has to understand and appreciate what causes that particular waiting list. In some cases, in fact in the case of the bone marrow or bone density scan, it is not a question of money for equipment. It is the way we utilize the existing machine and the need to staff it

more than it is done now in terms of priorities and programming. So if we get to the root of what the problem is, then we can solve the problem in a meaningful way. That is our intention.

Maple Leaf Foods Plant Site-Negotiations

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Since Manitoba has had such a large increase in hog production this past number of years and was the leading province with the largest increases, I understand that Maple Leaf Foods was looking at building a world-class hog processing plant somewhere in western Canada.

Can the minister bring this House up to date as to where the negotiations are with this company?

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): I thank the honourable member for that question and I can indeed indicate to all members of this House and, perhaps more importantly, to the farming community that Maple Leaf Foods, Canada's largest food processor, by the way, is very much looking at the province of Manitoba for a major, major operation that could employ upwards to 800 people, 125 millions of dollars of capital investment.

My information is that Manitoba and Alberta are the two provinces that are still currently being considered as a potential site for this development, and I can assure you, Madam Speaker, and all honourable members that together with my colleague the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey) and my colleague the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach) we are doing everything we can, of course, to ensure that the Manitoba advantage is being presented to the principals of Maple Leaf at every occasion that we have.

Hog Industry Marketing System

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, on a further question to the Minister of Agriculture: Can you confirm that the Province of Saskatchewan is also looking at some changes to their marketing system similar to the marketing plan that we have here in Manitoba?

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): It is of interest, Madam Speaker. You will recall that just about this time last year, very frequently we had visitors up in the public galleries from pork producers, from hog producers that were concerned about some of the changes that were being contemplated in Manitoba. Since those changes have been implemented in Manitoba, let me first of all say that Manitoba Pork is doing an excellent job in marketing the hogs in the province of Manitoba. Alberta has followed suit on the leadership shown by Manitoba and, to answer my honourable member directly, I understand legislation has been introduced in the Saskatchewan Legislature to do precisely the same thing in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, it is of interest to note that that is being done by a New Democratic Party government in Saskatchewan that has seen the wisdom, the visionary future that Manitoba shows.

* (1420)

Disaster Assistance Agricultural Losses

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, it is surprising to find the kind of compensation people can be promised, especially the farming community, when it falls during a federal election. However, it is one thing to make promises and it is another thing to deliver. Will the Minister of Agriculture ensure Manitobans, whether they live in the Red River Valley or in other parts of the province, whether they are flooded during a federal election or at another time of the year, that they will all be treated equally and that we will have a long-term plan as to how farmers in this province will be compensated when a disaster like a flood strikes them?

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): I do appreciate very much that question, because I understand that it is of obvious concern to many primary producers, farmers, not just in the Red River Valley but throughout the province, about the issues that she raises.

I think my Premier, the First Minister, made it very plain, in response to questions by the media that were widely reported, that we are insistent that a program

that is developed be province-wide, that it treats farmers the same whether they are in the Swan River Valley, the upper Assiniboine or along the Portage Diversion or along the Souris, that a flood is a flood is a flood, and to that property owner that is impacted, affected by it, it is a disaster to that particular farm operation. That, by the way, is one of the reasons why there has been a delay in presenting a co-ordinated program to the producers, and this has been made known to the principal ministers in the federal government, Minister Axworthy in particular, and it is my hope that we can bring the officials together.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

House Business

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I understand there is a willingness to waive private members' hour today.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to waive private members' hour today? [agreed]

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey), that Madam Speaker do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be resuming consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Family Services.

When the committee last sat, the minister had commenced her opening remarks, and we request that she continue with her opening statement.

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I think I remember where I left off. I would like to begin all over again, just for effect, but I think in the essence of trying to ensure that we use our time productively, I will continue from where I think I left off yesterday.

Income Assistance clients have responded positively to our government's challenge to seek work. It is clear that clients want to work. I am pleased to inform this committee that the Employment First focus has resulted in a significant decrease in the provincial welfare caseload. In fact, the average caseload for 1996-97 fell below 1990-91 levels.

The new focus on employment has helped hundreds of clients access training and employment opportunities. Since our welfare reform initiative was introduced, the provincial caseload has dropped by more than 1,000 cases. In addition, we have seen an increase of over 30 percent in the number of clients reporting earnings from employment.

This fiscal year we are again forecasting a decrease in our caseloads in employment and Income Assistance and municipal assistance. To complement our Employment First approach, we have developed numerous partnerships with business, local governments and community organizations to create jobs for our clients. Through innovative programs such as the Rural Jobs Project, Taking Charge!, the City of Winnipeg's community service projects and Opportunities for Employment which is an initiative involving our government and the Mennonite Central Committee, we have been assisting Income Assistance clients to obtain jobs.

Taking Charge!, as members will recall, is a pilot project funded jointly by Canada and Manitoba and is designed to increase employment for single-parent clients in Winnipeg. As of the end of March 1997, Taking Charge! had assisted in placing over 400 single parents into employment, and a thousand single parents had entered training.

I am very excited about the progress we have been making in developing innovative ways to help families on assistance achieve economic self-sufficiency. As our employment picture continues to brighten, we can

expect to see fewer people dependent on social programs. I am pleased by the very positive feedback we have received, both from the community and from our clients, regarding the initiatives that we have put into place. I look forward to discussing this area in more detail as we move into the Estimates review.

Another major initiative which is currently underway is the implementation of a one-tier system of Income Assistance delivery in Winnipeg. My department has been working closely with the City of Winnipeg on this project which will reduce administrative duplication and improve service for clients.

In the first phase of this project, a business case for integrating the two delivery systems was determined by an independent consultant group under the direction of a joint provincial-City of Winnipeg steering committee. The business case provided compelling reasons to proceed with the project. We have now begun phase two, the detailed design phase which will lead to implementation. The one-tier project is expected to be completed in 1998.

As I mentioned earlier, I am very pleased we have strengthened our commitment to community living and vocational rehabilitation programs in our Community Living division. The Adult Services component of this division includes programs in the area of supported living, day services and vocational rehabilitation. This year, we have added nearly \$4.4 million or a 7.4 percent increase for services and supports for adults with a mental disability.

* (1440)

The funding we have provided demonstrates our government's commitment to this priority area. I am pleased that our government has again been able to increase funding to provide services and supports for adults with mental disabilities to assist them with living and participating in the community.

Last fall, The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act was proclaimed and members of the hearing panels established under this legislation. They have been appointed and have begun the task of reviewing orders. The Vulnerable Persons' Commissioner Dr. Allan Hansen and his staff have

been busy with public education sessions throughout the province and with implementing the provisions of the act.

This fiscal year will see a review of the status of several hundred persons who had orders of supervision issued under Part II of The Mental Health Act. The original Operations Branch of this division is responsible for the delivery of a comprehensive range of social services throughout the province. I would like to make a few comments regarding emergency social services which falls within this area of the department.

The Emergency Measures Act requires local authorities to prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters. Manitoba Family Services has the responsibility under the Manitoba Emergency Plan for assisting communities with emergency social services. Over the last several years, staff have assisted municipalities and nongovernmental agencies in developing the emergency social services plans that are now being implemented in response to the flood.

As you know, Manitobans have been battling one of the worst floods to ever hit this province. The department's Emergency Social Services area has been actively involved with the Manitoba Emergency Management Organization in responding to the needs of those affected by the flood. Activities included establishing an emergency co-ordination centre at 114 Garry Street, and Emergency Social Services reception centres in Winnipeg and throughout southern Manitoba.

Services co-ordinated through Emergency Social Services include registration and inquiry, food, lodging, clothing and personal services. The delivery of these services represents a co-operative effort involving provincial staff, municipalities, and voluntary organizations.

I would like to add that approximately 115 departmental staff have been working full- or part-time in duties directly related to the department's role in the delivery of emergency social services during the flood, and will continue to provide assistance for evacuees during the re-entry phase until their houses are repaired or rebuilt.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and to express my appreciation to staff and the many

hundreds of volunteers who have contributed their time and energy towards the flood assistance effort.

The area of Child and Family Services has been a very active one over the past year, and will continue to be a priority focus of the department's work. Overall funding for the Child and Family Services Division has increased by 2.7 percent over last year. Child and Family Support is a particularly critical area, and this year another \$2.3 million will be provided for child protection and related services. Even though funding in this area has increased by \$46.5 million, or 62.7 percent, since we have been in government, as I have said on many occasions, money alone will not ensure that Manitoba's children are safe.

The protection and well-being of children is a responsibility shared by all of society. Beginning last fall, a community panel, initially chaired by my colleague Mike Radcliffe and subsequently by Helen Zuefle, reviewed The Child and Family Services Act, seeking advice from Manitobans on a broad range of matters falling under this legislation.

I was pleased to release last summer a policy statement on Families First and a consultation workbook, which formed the basis for the community consultation process regarding the act, to obtain the community's perspective on how we can best assist in supporting children in need. The review examines such areas as the protection of children and adoptions and has provided extremely valuable recommendations to government on ways to improve the adoption procedures and our ability to protect children.

I was pleased to recently release the report of The Child and Family Services Act review committee on the community consultation process, which summarizes the suggestions, comments and advice received throughout the review process. During this session, I will introduce an adoption act and amendments to The Child and Family Services Act, which reflect what we have been told by Manitobans during this process.

Over the past year my colleague Marcel Laurendeau, the member for St. Norbert, conducted a fact-finding mission to seek the views of the community on a range of issues related to the child care system in Manitoba. During the course of this initiative, many helpful

comments and recommendations were received on such areas as administrative procedures and funding issues affecting child care facilities. I want to personally thank Marcel Laurendeau for his commitment and his enthusiasm during this process.

Based on the suggestions put forth by parent users, child care providers and interested persons, my department has recently taken steps to improve client service by reducing the administrative work related to delivering the Child Day Care program. The subsidy application form is being simplified, for example, and a number of related administrative processes are being streamlined. We are in the process of making a number of other changes to the way we do business with licensed facilities that deliver child care services and with the families they serve.

We are working together with the community in examining the regulations under The Community Child Day Care Standards Act, with a view to making them more flexible and responsive to the needs of families without sacrificing the high standards of care for which Manitoba is known.

This positive collaboration will have as its final result an improved child care system that reflects and responds to the needs of families and promotes the well-being of children. I am looking forward to continuing the co-operative relationship which has developed with the child daycare community.

Children's Special Services is another area that remains a high priority for our government. We are seeing a growing number of families with children with special needs. As a result, we have been challenged to ensure that our resources continue to meet the needs of the many families who require support. In addressing this need, our government allocated additional funding last year to provide support to families waiting for services.

In 1997-98, our government has increased funding for Children's Special Services by almost \$2 million, or close to 30 percent, to ensure that the resources are available to support families and to help their children develop to their maximum potential.

In the nine years that we have been in government, expenditures in this area of the department have tripled.

I would at this time like to mention the children's coalition-provincial government joint working committee, which has been established to identify issues faced by disabled children and their families, as well as options for alternative ways of delivering services. The committee, chaired by the Children and Youth Secretariat, has been looking at a number of pilot projects, which would address service issues experienced by families and to enable them to have more say in the way services are provided for their special needs children.

The services of our Family Conciliation Branch continued to be important to Manitobans. The branch serves families affected by separation and divorce. One of its functions is the provision of court-ordered assessments in cases where parents or guardians are in conflict over the custody and access arrangements regarding their children.

I would like to add that our government has supported an innovative parent education project known as For the Sake of the Children. As I am sure you can appreciate, the breakdown of a marriage can be very stressful, in particular for children. This project helps separating and divorcing parents to better understand the needs of their children, how they are affected by family breakup and how to relate more co-operatively to one another. The program has been operating in Winnipeg for about a year and a half, and was expanded to Brandon in March of 1997. It has been well received by all participants.

* (1450)

Family Dispute Services has developed an important part of the range of services supported through Family Services. This area of the department supports the development and maintenance of community-based resources for women who are leaving violent relationships and monitors the quality of existing programs. Last year shelters throughout the province provided approximately 43,000 bed nights and responded to about 17,000 crisis-line telephone calls. This year expenditures for the programs provided by women's crisis shelters, crisis lines and women's resource centres will increase over last year's level. I would like to add that Manitoba has the most comprehensive funding model for women's shelters in

Canada and offers a continuum of services for abused women at various stages of personal recovery, including specialized urban treatment programs and second-stage housing programs.

Another area where new partnerships can be helpful is in services to high risk children and youth. With the creation of the Children and Youth Secretariat, we have co-ordinated various departments in government to deliver services to children and young people that are better integrated and better able to meet their needs. The Department of Family Services is actively involved in a variety of initiatives co-ordinated by the Children and Youth Secretariat. I would just like to highlight a few of those.

We need to work to maintain the highest standards for those who work with our troubled youth. Recently I announced that a new child and youth care worker program diploma program will begin shortly and provide training to workers dealing with high risk children and youth in their care. Our government will be providing \$386,000 in the first year and \$250,000 in subsequent years through the departments of Education and Training, Family Services, Health, and Justice. The program to be offered at Red River Community College will ensure employers can access skilled, knowledgeable workers for group and youth homes and other residential facilities.

In building a supportive net of services, we need to take special measures to assist those children in the care of Child and Family Services agencies. The secretariat has been working with the education and social services communities to develop a placement protocol to transition foster children into receiving schools. We believe that this measure will not only help the child to feel more secure about making the move to a new school environment but will also assist the school in creating a positive environment for the child.

Another way in which the secretariat and my department have been working with the school system to help children at risk is through the Families and Schools Together Program. This program is a school-based initiative targeted to children ages four to nine years, who have been identified as being at risk of future social, academic and substance abuse problems. The FAST Program involves the families of the

children identified who work together on projects aimed at developing a positive image of the school system and stressing the overall importance of education. I would like to particularly note the program's emphasis on single parents, which, it is estimated, represents approximately 50 percent of the participants.

I would like to turn for a moment to the matter of teen pregnancy. There is a strong correlation between poor families and adolescent pregnancy. Costs of providing health and social services to the adolescent parent population are significant. Accordingly, the Department of Family Services has a continuing interest in issues associated with adolescent parenting and pregnancy, and we will be working with the secretariat and the community to find solutions to this problem.

Providing services to children with disabilities, as I mentioned earlier, is a priority for this department. The secretariat facilitated the development of a three-phase, cross-sectoral plan to increase the range and co-ordination of services for technology-dependent children and their families. This initiative provides for the equitable distribution of community-based therapy services for disabled children. Proposals for the provision of these services are currently under review.

The secretariat will also be working closely with my department and child welfare agencies on the development of a Know Your Roots project, which will ensure that permanent wards of the province have the opportunity to learn more about their personal histories.

It has been four years since the proclamation of the legislation which established the Office of the Children's Advocate. It was our government that took the initiative to create this office as a place for children and families to turn for help in representing children's rights and interests within the Child and Family Services system. The Children's Advocate is one of a number of mechanisms which support our efforts to find better ways of serving children and families in difficult circumstances. As set out in the legislation governing the Advocate's office, a committee of the Legislative Assembly is undertaking a comprehensive review of the office, and I look forward to the report of the committee and to any recommendations brought forward regarding amendments to the legislation.

Before concluding, Mr. Chairperson, I want to take a few moments to raise some of the larger issues being addressed by social services ministers across the country. Our government has been actively participating in discussions with other provinces and the federal government regarding a proposal for a National Child Benefit system. This initiative was launched by provincial premiers in August of 1996 and grew out of the report to premiers of the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Reform and Renewal, which the premiers established in 1995. The 1997 federal budget confirmed the federal commitments to join with provinces and territories to establish a new child benefit system in 1998. One of the key features of this proposal is its focus on ensuring an effective response to the need to prevent and reduce child poverty, and promoting attachment to the workforce by ensuring that families will always be better off working than by receiving welfare.

Our government has also been working diligently towards the renewal of a federal-provincial financial arrangement under which vocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities are funded. Last summer there were indications that the federal government was about to abandon VRDP funding. At the annual social services ministers' meeting last September, I proposed an extension in federal funding for another fiscal year while discussions regarding the long-term future of the VRDP could be initiated. I am pleased to report that the federal government has agreed to this extension, and I am hopeful that the discussions on the shape of these arrangements in the future will result in the renewal of the federal government's commitment to vocational rehab services.

Provincial and territorial social services ministers have expressed their strong commitment to work to promote the well-being and protection of children. In the area of child welfare, we have given a high priority to collaborating on issues such as prevention, research and information sharing, best practices, training and certification, integration of services, adoption and child support.

I would like to mention that I wrote to my federal colleagues recently to bring their attention to our government's serious concern regarding the federal

government's plan last year to reduce funding support for the Community Action Program for Children. Many community groups and agencies depend on funding from CAPC to provide preventative programs and services for children and families who may otherwise be at risk. I am pleased that our initiative in calling for the federal government to reconsider this decision has resulted in this funding being reinstated for this fiscal year.

At every opportunity at meetings with my federal counterparts, I bring to their attention the importance of aboriginal issues to Manitoba. This province has the highest per capita concentration of aboriginal people of any province. Special needs of the aboriginal population are important factors in our social services, justice, education and training, and health system. The federal government must acknowledge its special historical and constitutional responsibilities for aboriginal people.

* (1500)

In closing, I want to note that in our allocation of expenditures for 1997-98 we have made every effort to maintain a balanced approach to preserving and renewing services for our most vulnerable members of society. As we continue to face reductions in federal transfers, we have managed to protect those most in need from the impact of these reductions. As I have noted on several occasions, meeting the challenges of vulnerable families and individuals is not only government's responsibility. It is one that needs to be shared by the whole community. The community has shown every indication that it is prepared to take on this challenge, and one of government's roles through this process will be as a partner and a facilitator.

We are taking a constructive, innovative approach to helping people find work and become self-sufficient. We have reached out and formed new partnerships with industry and community groups, and we are seeing very favourable results from our focus on employment. As we work with existing and new partners, we will see an increasing number of families and individuals become self-sufficient. The benefits for families and individuals both in economic and personal terms are immeasurable.

I would like to take this opportunity just before I complete my remarks to again thank all members, all staff in my department, for their efforts during the last year. As you will have noted by my comments, this was a challenging year for our department. Hopefully, the significant changes have provided staff with renewed enthusiasm and motivation as they take on the very demanding tasks that we do want to have on a day-to-day basis on behalf of the clients that we serve. So I want to commend them for the hard work and the commitment and the dedication that they have shown and I know will continue to show as we move forward in this ever-changing world and society that we live in.

So I very much look forward to this committee's review of the Estimates, and I welcome comments and questions from my colleagues in the opposition and hope we have constructive dialogue around the issues we deal with in Family Services. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the Minister of Family Services for those comments. Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), have an opening statement.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and I do have a short opening statement. We do not have many hours, so we are going to try and move expeditiously. I too always look forward to well, I look forward to two things at this time of year. One is my birthday and the other is Family Services Estimates, although this year I looked forward more to Estimates than my birthday, which has just passed. [interjection] We will not go into that.

I also would like to thank the minister's staff because I phone them from time to time and they are always very co-operative, although I must say the people I phone most often are the program specialists in Income Assistance. Just to show how co-operative I am as an opposition critic, I think I have done something unprecedented here and that is give the minister's staff some of my questions in advance, both in writing to the minister and in the room today, hoping that will move things along more quickly. I am going to try to restrain myself in terms of getting into arguments with the minister and maybe save that to the end.

But I will comment on a couple of things the minister said in her opening statement. As we always hear in Question Period and in Estimates, this provincial government likes to blame a lot of their problems on cutbacks from the federal government, and we heard again today that the result of the Canada Health and Social Transfer is a cut to the Province of Manitoba of, I think the minister said, \$227 million. However, what the minister fails to point out is that this government has over \$400 million in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, also known as the Tory election slush fund.

So this government does have choices that they could make in terms of program spending, but they will probably save that money for next year's budget, for a tax cut, or for paving highways, or whatever they think it takes to get re-elected.

If there is one area that most affects people that are the responsibility of this minister and affects a lot of people in the province of Manitoba, it would have to be poverty. There are certainly links between poverty and crime, poverty and Child and Family Services, poverty and Health, poverty and Education. Just by way of example, sometime in the last year, I think it was Winnipeg Child and Family Services did an environmental scan, and they were able to identify the factors which put children most at risk of being apprehended by an agency, and those risk factors were being the child of a single parent, being aboriginal and being poor.

We also know that new groups are starting to raise their concerns about poverty issues, particularly educators. So last year, on November 19, we have a story in the Free Press about school divisions who have, as the headline in the Free Press says: Alarm rings for kids; school trustees join poverty fight. Educators have realized for some time now, and it is good to see trustees joining with educators in urging all governments to tackle the problem of child poverty. They had a press conference which was very well attended by Winnipeg media, and they pointed out many of the serious problems that result in the education system from child poverty and asked governments to give it a higher priority.

Then on December 10 we had two stories: one in the Free Press, one in The Globe and Mail about the report

issued by Mr. Ted Hughes on the Headingley Jail riot. It was a very interesting report because he did not just look at the riot, but he looked at the inmates and who they are and why some of them are there. The Free Press headline says: Poor need help, Judge; poverty called cause of crime.

The Globe and Mail headline for December 10, 1996, says: Attack roots of crime, report urges. Mr. Hughes says, and I quote, it is imperative that federal, provincial and territorial governments address the fact that poverty-stricken people with no marketable skills, no job and no job prospects are languishing under explosive conditions in Canada's prisons." Then he says Canada and Manitoba, in particular, must commit more resources to attacking the root causes of crime, one of which he says is poverty.

Then this spring we had a report issued by the United Way, a rather unusual report. I am wondering if the United Way does not regret now that it became public or that they voluntarily agreed to make it public, because there were things in it that we normally never hear from the United Way. We might occasionally hear it from a spokesperson for an individual United Way funded agency but not from the United Way itself. It was the result of a consultation that they had with executive directors, and the United Way, to their credit, listened to the 47 executive directors of human service agencies in the city. But the report itself was actually a very good critique of what is happening in the city and this province, and they said that poverty is the origin for almost all of Winnipeg's social problems.

Anger and despair are rising and with them crime and violence, and I quote from the report: Driven by deficit reduction, governments at all levels are decreasing and shifting funding for services. As well, they are changing their roles in maintaining the social safety net and looking to the community to take more responsibility for creating, managing and sustaining programs. They go on to say that this results in individual and community needs not being addressed fully or not being addressed at all. Agencies fear that the social safety net has many holes and stated that a full implication of these changes has not yet been felt. If shrinking resources force social agencies to cut back too, there will be serious consequences threatening the physical and emotional health of individuals and the

community. It said the number of poor children has risen from 36,000 in 1989, shortly after this government took office, to 42,000 today. I could go on and on and quote from that report.

We have agency directors who are quite forthright about not only the problems in the community, but what they are being told by government in how to deal with some of these problems. For example, one agency director said to me that they needed money to work with youth, and they feel that they are competing with prostitution and drugs, and that those are revenue-generating illegitimate businesses that put money into the pockets of youth. This agency director told this to business people, and they get told, well, you need to be more innovative and you need to get rid of waste and duplication. What the agency directors are saying is, we do not duplicate; in fact, there are not enough services. They have also been told that there needs to be more innovative programming. But they believe that there are lots of innovative programming out there now.

* (1510)

Basically what we are seeing in response to an increasing problem of poverty, particularly child poverty, and we have a story here from the Free Press from October 19, 1996, that says 29 percent of kids in Manitoba live in poverty. Manitoba has the second highest percentage of children living in poverty next to Newfoundland. It is appalling that Manitoba should be compared to Newfoundland, truly one of the have-not provinces in Canada. In fact, I believe, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) was just saying in Question Period the other day that after Alberta, B.C. and Ontario, that Manitoba ranks fourth—and I cannot remember what indicator it is—but to think that we are ninth out of tenth, that we are second worst compared to Newfoundland when it comes to child poverty is appalling.

What we are seeing in response to this is increasingly governments and other people are turning to charity solutions. I think a very good example is the minister's colleague, the Honourable David Newman, suggesting at a public forum at the friendship centre that if people cannot get furniture, which he was told at this public forum, that they should set up a warehouse at the friendship centre and hire people to run this used-

furniture centre which would access furniture from donations. He was quite severely criticized at the forum for that, but unfortunately these ideas take legs, and I understand that the idea is going ahead. I think that is an example of the desperation that people have. They do not believe that charity solutions are adequate to meet people's needs, but out of sheer desperation when they are offered assistance by government to take advantage of that kind of solution, they take it, not because they want to but because they feel forced to.

The minister was also told that it is impossible for people on social assistance to get the \$150 a year special needs funding that used to be available, and this minister said, yes, that sounds like a good idea; do you need it? However, he was told by the audience, we know that the government will not bring it back, and he also was told, we cannot wait for the government to change.

So I think there are much better solutions than the kinds of charity solutions that are being forced on people, but unfortunately I do not think this government is listening to those concerns. I was interested to hear that the minister wrote to the federal government about the Community Action Program for Children whose funding was supposed to run out, I think, at the end of March. I had meetings with people in the community who are running programs funded by CAPC, and they were very concerned, and they were prepared to have press conferences. I am glad that the minister shared their concerns, but all of a sudden the funding was extended for another year. I would like to think that the minister's letter was influential. Hopefully, the federal government got letters from 10 ministers across Canada, but I think that the timing of the federal election was much more important. The federal Liberal government did not want the embarrassment of cutting programs for children just days before a federal election was called, so the funding has been continued, and we will have to see what happens after the current fiscal year.

Actually it would be a shame if the funding was cut next year, because so many of these programs are good programs. Certainly there is a need to evaluate them and to change priorities from time to time and to direct the funding to where it is most needed and best spent, but frequently what funding of this sort does is, it raises

expectations in the community. People find out about a program. They get plugged in. They start taking part in it. It helps them, it helps their children. Then all of a sudden the funding is gone and there is nothing there, and people are very disappointed.

That concludes my opening remarks, and now we will get on to the questions.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable minister for those comments.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is traditionally the last item considered for the Estimates of a department. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of this item and now proceed with consideration of the next line.

Before we do that, we would invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we ask the minister to introduce her staff present.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, I would like to introduce Tannis Mindell, who is the deputy minister for Family Services; and Ken Sharman, who is the assistant deputy minister of Administration and Finance.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the minister. We will now proceed to line 9.1. Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support(1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$468,800. Shall the item pass?

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Chairperson, you can be sure I will have a question about almost every line in the whole book, although I am going to try to restrain myself and try to ask as many questions as possible and not make as many statement as previous years so we can get through all this.

My first question has to do with the organization of the department. I have with me the minister's introductory comments from last year, May 10, '96, and on page 6, she said: "The streamlined department now has three interrelated divisions, rather than four essentially separate divisions." I have the handout, the organizational chart that the minister gave me with three divisions, and now in this year's Estimates book, it looks like we are back to four divisions. So I am

wondering if the minister can explain when these changes took place and why?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, yes, I can explain the reasons why. Under the three-divisional structure, we had an associate deputy minister, Doug Sexsmith, who was in charge of Administration and Finance and our Employment and Income Assistance programs. Doug has left us, actually a loss to the Manitoba government, I think. He has gone into the private sector, a benefit to the private sector, because he was an extremely competent civil servant and provided many years of excellent service to governments. But as a result of that, we determined that we would separate the Administration and Finance function and the Employment and Income Assistance functions under two assistant deputy ministers rather than one associate deputy minister.

Mr. Martindale: When did this change take place?

Mrs. Mitchelson: It was effective in January of this year.

Mr. Martindale: What was the cost of three assistant deputy ministers, and what is the cost of four assistant deputy ministers?

Mrs. Mitchelson: The net saving as a result of the restructure was about \$11,000 annually.

Mr. Martindale: Pass this line.

Mr. Chairperson: 9.1. Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$468,800—pass; (2) Other expenditures \$80,700—pass.

9.1.(c) Children's Advocate (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$220,000.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Chairperson, I would like to thank the minister for, I guess, making it possible to have an all-party committee. It has certainly been a very interesting experience to be reviewing the Children's Advocate section of The Child and Family Services Act, and we look forward to writing our report and submitting it to the government.

At a recent meeting of the committee, a motion was moved inviting the minister to come before the committee, and I think that is something that the minister would not be adverse to doing. I am sure that she can handle herself quite well. I am sure that she could bring Legal Counsel with her to answer any questions that we might have about writing the amendments to the act, and I was quite surprised when the Conservative members on the committee voted against that motion. So now that I have the opportunity, since I know that this minister has nothing to be afraid of, I would like to ask the minister directly if she would agree to appear before the subcommittee on the Children's Advocate legislation in order to have a discussion with the committee with a view to helping us look at what the various options are before we write our report.

* (1520)

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess my sense—I mean, I would have no problem at all appearing before the committee. I think it is somewhat unprecedented in Manitoba for the minister to appear before a subcommittee. I am a member of the Committee of Privileges and Elections, and the subcommittee was struck to make recommendations to me as the minister around what the public had to say about changes or not making changes to the Children's Advocate office. My understanding of the whole process of the subcommittee was to go out and hear the public and come back and make recommendations to the committee and to me as minister around what the public had said and what your interpretation of the public's comments were and report what changes needed to be made.

I have no problem at all discussing issues around the Children's Advocate office here through my Estimates process. Certainly, as the Committee of the Whole gets together when the subcommittee reports, I am sure we will have some dialogue and discussion, because, ultimately, the report will have to be endorsed by the committee and referred to the House.

So I think it is sort of an additional step in the process that is not actually needed. I would believe that the role of the subcommittee would have been to report back to me through the committee on what the public has said

around changes that need to be made to the Advocate's office.

Mr. Martindale: Well, I guess I understand the process. I think one of the reasons why we wanted to have the minister appear is that we are trying to write a consensus report. That is what all members have said. One concern is that we not recommend things that cannot legally be changed in the legislation or cannot be written into legislation.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I would imagine that we could offer—I will ask just for a nod from officials here, but if there was a need for someone with a legal background to be present as the subcommittee deliberates around the recommendations, I think we could make that readily available.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell us when she plans to bring in amendments to the Children's Advocate sections?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess I am looking to—probably we are all, possibly, looking forward to the end of this session being some time this summer and that amendments, probably, given that my understanding is that the committee will not be reporting to the House till around the middle of June, June 12 I think is the deadline for report back to the House, that we are probably looking at amendments next session unless there was something so very minor that was recommended that we might be able to get legislation drafted, but I would presume that it might be next session before we can introduce those amendments.

Once the subcommittee's work is done, if there is a consensus report, we would then have to determine. I do not want to predetermine what the results of that subcommittee will be. If there is a different reporting structure or relationship, it would probably have to be a separate piece of legislation. In itself, it may not fall under The Child and Family Services Act if there is an expansion of role, and those are only ifs.

If those recommendations do not come forward and there was only something very minor or insignificant, there might be the ability to do it this session, but given the timing and where we are at right now, it probably

will not be till next year if there are significant recommendations.

Mr. Martindale: Well, having a new act introduced is an interesting hint from the minister, so I thank her for that.

Mr. Chairperson: 9.1.(c) Children's Advocate (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$220,000—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$82,700—pass.

9.1.(d) Social Services Advisory Committee (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me how many appeals there were to the committee, I guess, in the last fiscal year?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, there were 1,201.

Mr. Martindale: How many were successful?

Mrs. Mitchelson: It takes me a little while to get this figured out. There were a total of 1,201: 68 were allowed, 448 were dismissed, 450 were withdrawn, 78 did not appear, 36 were outside the jurisdiction of the committee, and 40 are still in process.

Mr. Martindale: What percentage were successful?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess if you look at the overall number and the number of withdrawn appeals that were obviously satisfactorily dealt with before it got to the appeal process of 450, with the number allowed, which would be 68, that would be a total of 518 that were resolved in a satisfactory fashion which is almost half of the cases that were brought forward to the committee.

Mr. Martindale: Well, the minister says that the ones that were withdrawn were successfully dealt with. Since the minister has her staff here, I wonder if she could verify that. I do not really know why all those appeals were withdrawn.

Mrs. Mitchelson: My understanding is that either at the municipal level or the provincial level, whoever is responsible for that client or case, there is an agreement between the municipality or the province and the

appellant that the issue can be dealt with without going to appeal. So once it is satisfactorily resolved to the client's satisfaction, then the appeal does not go forward.

Mr. Martindale: If we assume that the minister is correct in this, then according to my calculations, 68 successful appeals out of 518 is about 11 percent, which would be about average. Normally it is about 10 percent, in that range, which I think is a very low rate of success. I always encourage people when they phone me to appeal a decision because that is a legal right that people have, but I always warn them that about 90 percent fail, so their chances of being successful are not very good. Although if you look at the 450 that are withdrawn, that is an avenue that people can use and should use and obviously many people do use.

I wonder if the minister could break it down by legislation because the appeal process is available for The Social Services Administration Act, The Employment and Income Assistance Act, The Municipal Act, The Community Child and Daycare Standards Act, The Vulnerable Persons Living With A Mental Disability Act. I wonder if the minister has stats of appeals by legislation.

* (1530)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay. The actuals for '96-97 were 583 for municipal assistance, 553 for provincial assistance, 17 for 55 Plus, 37 for daycare, one for daycare licensing, seven for licensing of residential care facilities, two for VRDP, and one for The Vulnerable Persons Act.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me if some areas are more successful than others in terms of appeals? Almost all the calls that I get are social assistance, but I would be quite happy to advise people if their chances are better for some kinds of legislation than others when I am referring people to the Social Services Advisory Committee.

Mrs. Mitchelson: It looks to me like it is fairly well equal between municipal and provincial assistance. Under municipal assistance, 23 were allowed; under provincial assistance, 25 were allowed; under daycare

subsidy, it looks like certainly more were withdrawn or dismissed or allowed. There was one allowed for dismissed under daycare subsidy, but there were 31 withdrawn. So it looks like many of those issues are resolved without the appeal process having to take place.

Residential care: one was withdrawn, three were dismissed, and one was allowed. One did not appear, and there is one still waiting for an outcome.

Mr. Martindale: Is this an appropriate line to ask about welfare fraud, or should I wait until we get into Income Assistance?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Probably better to wait for Income Assistance.

Mr. Chairperson: 9.1. Administration and Finance (d) Social Services Advisory Committee (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$183,700-pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$157,600-pass.

9.1.(e) Human Resource Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Excuse me, Mr. Chairperson. Just before Isabel leaves, I do not think I introduced Isabel to my honourable friend, Ms. Furtado—we will have to get that spelling for Hansard—is the staffperson for the Social Services Advisory Committee, and this is Keith Watts from Human Resources, who has just joined us at the table. Thanks, Isabel.

Mr. Chairperson: We are under 1.(e) Human Resource Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$796,000.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to thank the minister for the introductions. It is always good to put a face on the civil servants that I talk to on the phone from time to time. I notice in the Estimates book under Expected Results it says: "Revision of the staff orientation program for the Manitoba Developmental Centre." I wonder if the minister could explain what this is.

Mrs. Mitchelson: What is happening is to ensure that we have continuing education and support so that the staff there are trained to meet the challenges that exist

with an aging population at MDC and some of those issues.

Mr. Martindale: Does this indicate that there are any changes taking place at MDC?

Mrs. Mitchelson: At MDC they are trying a more client-focused approach to improve ratios of clients to staff, a more direct service provision and more people providing direct service and less administration.

Mr. Chairperson: 9.1.(e) Human Resource Services
(1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$796,000—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$89,300—pass.

9.1.(f) Policy and Planning (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$751,600.

Mrs. Mitchelson: If I could just introduce Drew Perry who is the executive director of Policy and Planning.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable minister for that information.

Mr. Martindale: I have some more general questions and specific questions for 9-1, and I am not sure whether this is the right place. So if it is not, maybe the minister could let me know.

I helped one of my constituents apply for a pension from Great Britain and one of the pieces of information that was enclosed with the application form is a pamphlet from the Pensions and Overseas Benefits Directorate, and it is called Customer Service Statement.

Now, I do not really like describing public services as customer service, however my question is: Would the minister be willing to put out some kind of pamphlet, if you do not have one already, similar to this—which I will pass to the minister—about the Department of Family Services, or maybe one for each division in Family Services, spelling out what kind of services the public is entitled to and the department expects to provide? I think it is a good idea, and if your ministry already has something like this, I guess I would be interested in seeing it. But I will pass this over to the minister.

Mrs. Mitchelson: It is my understanding we do have pamphlets on most of the services that are provided from our department, and I will endeavour to obtain copies of all of those for my honourable friend. But I want to thank him for this. I think we always have to look at reviewing what information we are providing to the public, and there might be some good ideas in here that we might want to look at if we are contemplating change.

* (1540)

Mr. Martindale: Of course, I am familiar with most of the existing publications, and I guess my general impression would be that they are descriptions of programs. I think this pamphlet is a little bit different in that it is a description of what that particular department of government provides and what the public can expect in terms of what they call customer service, which I think may be different than the pamphlets that the minister is referring to in her department. So I am pleased that the minister will take a look at it and will hope that she will think it is a good idea and we might see something forthcoming from this department.

I have a couple of documents in front of me, government documents. One looks like it is from a special operating agency, namely Fleet Vehicles, and it has Travel Distance Summary by Client, meaning government department, for a fiscal year. This is pretty old. Oh, I just discovered it is very old, it is 1991, but the reason it twigged my interest is that it has got almost every government department but I could not find Family Services, and I kind of wondered why. So I will pass this over and let the minister's staff look at it, and maybe there is an explanation that the minister can provide? Meanwhile, maybe I will go on to something else.

I have a rather interesting internal document that somehow got out. Oh, it is a Treasury Board submission. I always have fun with Treasury Board submissions. This one has already been made public. It has to do with Partners for Careers staffing. There is some money from this minister's department. It says Child and Family Services provincial funding \$235,000, '95-96. I am just wondering if that money was reallocated from something else or whether that was part of the budget. It says '95-96 fiscal year, so I

guess I am just wondering if that was a budget appropriation and whether it was spent and whether that was a shifting around of money or whether that was something that was budgeted in advance? And I will pass this over to the minister as well.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, I have no recollection of Child and Family Services or our department being involved in this at all, but I will have staff review it and try to get an answer back to my honourable friend.

Mr. Martindale: One question that I ask every year which the minister enjoys answering, not that it is an uncontroversial topic, because it is a cost to the province of Manitoba, but what is the cost to date of the federal government's offloading of social assistance costs for off-reserve First Nations people? I know the minister keeps a running tally on this so hopefully she will be able to tell me.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, we estimate about \$25 million a year and the running total would be about \$100 million now for the last four years.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to thank the minister for that information. It is too bad that the Liberal critic is not in Family Services Estimates. In fact, they seem to boycott Family Services Estimates, they are here so seldom. It is really a shame that they do not have questions for the Minister of Family Services since there still is federal money coming to Manitoba and since there have been cuts from the federal government to the Province of Manitoba, but I guess they have priorities other than Family Services.

I notice in the Estimates book there are pie graphs, for example on page 17, percentage distribution of staff years by category, and there are several pie graphs. I am wondering if the minister can give us percentages of spending by division in her department. This is staff year spending, and that is interesting information, but I am wondering if you could tell us what the percentages are for different parts, I guess the four parts of this department.

Mrs. Mitchelson: That is on page 9, I think, if you look. See if we are talking about the same thing.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you for pointing me to the correct page. I wonder if the minister could tell me if there have been any major changes in recent years in terms of the proportions for different parts of the department.

Mrs. Mitchelson: On page 76, that would be right near the back of the book, I think it does give an indication of what the changes have been over the last four or five years. Employment and Income Assistance I believe would have gone down, and Community Living and Child and Family may have gone up in expenditures. Admin and Finance is down also.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to ask the minister questions about Order-in-Council 90/1997 dated February 12, 1997. This is an Order-in-Council regarding, I do not know what you call this, interim appropriation? No, Special Warrant. In Family Services, there are two items: Income Security and Regional Operations \$3,984,000; and Child and Family Support \$3,129,000. I wonder if the minister can tell me if the reason for this Special Warrant is that those two parts of our department were expected to be over budget by March 31 and therefore the Special Warrant was to provide more money.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, that is absolutely correct.

Mr. Martindale: I assume then that under Employment and Income Assistance that either the caseload was higher or for some reason the demand was higher for Income Assistance clients, higher, that is, than the budgeted amount and therefore a Special Warrant was necessary, is that correct?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Again, I think my honourable friend is correct. We budgeted a certain amount and we found that we were short money based on our expectations or anticipation that the welfare caseloads would go down lower than they actually did. So we needed an extra three point some million dollars, I guess, in order to ensure that we covered the full cost.

If I can just add to that, I guess the caseloads did go down maybe not quite as much as we anticipated, but the cost per case was higher than what we had estimated.

* (1550)

Mr. Martindale: I guess I would like to ask the minister to explain what she means by the costs were higher because—I do not have the numbers here and I guess we will get into it in the next section—but the City of Winnipeg, at one point, was down about 3,000 clients, and I know that this minister put out a press release saying that about 800 I think single parents had gone back to work.

So I wonder if the minister could explain the higher costs per case.

Mrs. Mitchelson: We did reach our estimated goal of the number of people we thought would be off of social allowance. On the single-parent side which would be the provincial caseload, I guess what we overestimated was the saving that would result as a result of single parents going into work, and we might have estimated based on a certain family size. Probably those with smaller families moved off of welfare, so the cost per case was higher than what we had estimated.

Also, it was interesting to note that about a million dollars was for health services related expenditures, that we had spent a million dollars more than what we had estimated we would spend on health services for social allowances recipients.

Mr. Martindale: This figure that we are talking about is almost \$4 million. Could the minister tell us if that \$4 million was expended or underexpended?

Mrs. Mitchelson: We did not require the whole \$4 million. I am just being told that we do not have the final numbers, but it was considerably lower than the \$4 million.

Mr. Martindale: Under Child and Family Support, Maintenance of Children and External Agencies, would it be correct that Maintenance of Children refers to monies given to Child and Family Services agencies?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, that is all for maintenance of children through our Child and Family Services agencies. Now, you know we have some mandated agencies, and in some areas of the province our

Regional Operations provides that kind of service. So that is for support and maintenance of children in our child welfare system.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me if external agencies are the same ones that are in the list of grants to external agencies that the minister hands out in Estimates or something different?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just need a little bit of clarification. We are talking about the special warrants still, the additional money that was provided and that would have gone to—there was no agency that received a grant from the department, external agency, other than mandated agencies.

So it is the mandated agencies or our Regional Operations that deliver child welfare that would have required the additional support. I believe most of that money, by far, went to the Winnipeg Child and Family Services Agency.

Mr. Martindale: So in this line when it says external agencies, that is not the same as the list of grants to external agencies that you table.

Mrs. Mitchelson: No. When we are talking external agencies, that would be the mandated child welfare agencies. Many of the external agencies that we fund are not mandated, and they would not have had their grants increased.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me when I could expect to get the list of grants to external agencies?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Tomorrow.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you. There are a couple of items under Financial and Administrative Services that I have questions about. Well, maybe I will continue on the special warrant. Does this mean that the budgeting was not accurate for Child and Family Support and that the agencies ran out of money and the minister had to allocate more money to these agencies by way of a Special Warrant?

Mrs. Mitchelson: As I indicated, the money primarily went to Winnipeg Child and Family Services, and it

was because they overexpended their budget by some \$3.5 million-plus.

Mr. Martindale: Well, my recollection is that in the past the Provincial Auditor has commented on the inadequacy or the problems in budgeting for Winnipeg Child and Family Services, and so has the Children's Advocate. It seems that every year we have the same problem, in fact problems. I think there are a number of problems. One is that the money runs out before the end of the fiscal year so the government has to allocate more funds to them and, secondly, the budget request is seldom met and so in a subsequent year the grant is increased and it basically pays off the debt from the previous year. So I am wondering why the government is not doing realistic budgeting for Winnipeg Child and Family Services?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I think we have had some discussions around the Winnipeg agency every year, and I do want to indicate to my honourable friend that we certainly have serious concerns. I have said many times, and I have said many times publicly, do we really believe that more money means better service, or is there in fact a way that services could be delivered in a different fashion that would serve the needs of children and families better that would not require millions and millions of dollars of additional support year after year? That is what we have seen in Winnipeg Child and Family. It has been significant. Every year there is anywhere from \$3 million to \$6 million or \$7 million more required in the Winnipeg agency to deliver service, and I guess the big question for us and one of the areas we are trying to work very aggressively with Winnipeg Child and Family Services on is, are we getting good value for the dollars that we are spending or is there a better way that we can work together to try to ensure that services are provided? We struggle. Year by year the agency comes in with a budget and then they end up spending more than what they have anticipated they are going to spend.

So I guess the big question for all of us is, and I do not have the answer today, and I am not sure we do have any concrete answer: Do we need to continue to spend an additional \$4 million or \$5 million every year to serve children? I mean, I guess the big question for me is, are we finding that children are being better served? Are there fewer problems? Do we have less

family dysfunction? Are we really doing the job or is there a better way to do that? I think we need to work co-operatively with the agency, certainly questions that I have asked on a regular basis.

* (1600)

I do know that the agency does attribute some of the issues and the increasing issue and the increasing cost on our aboriginal population in the city of Winnipeg. Now 70 percent of their caseload, they say, is of aboriginal background. I guess I would like to see development and partnership with the aboriginal community in Winnipeg to try to resolve some of these issues. We have nonmandated agencies like Ma Mawi. Surely we can develop some sense of how we can best deliver that service to aboriginal people with support and ideas and suggestions from the aboriginal community. I am encouraging that kind of activity at the Winnipeg agency to ensure that our aboriginal leadership in the city of Winnipeg is very involved in helping to find the solutions.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me if it is the practice at Winnipeg Child and Family Services to submit a budget to this minister and, if so, do you allocate their budget request or are you giving them less than they request and then have to make it up through Special Warrants?

Mrs. Mitchelson: They do submit to us sort of a general budget proposal. We work with them to see what we think might be realistic and ultimately every year they seem to come in over budget.

Mr. Martindale: Well, why do we have this problem every year? Somebody needs to do some realistic budgeting, and it does not seem to happen. Why?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Good question. I do not have the answer. We are trying really hard to work with Winnipeg, to look at what would be a realistic figure for support, but the answer that comes back from the agency, I think, is that they cannot predetermine what kids are going to need to be taken into care, what kinds of services are going to need to be provided, and what the cost might be. I guess I struggle with the whole issue of what Child and Family Services is expected to be to all families and to the community. We have

talked about this with the agency, with the board. What are the services that the agency is providing? Are they providing services that possibly should be looked at being provided outside of our mandated agencies? Are we duplicating services in the agency that could be done by other nonmandated agencies? Certainly protection work has to be the responsibility of the mandated agencies, but I am trying to get a sense or a handle. I wish I had the answer and I do not at this point in time.

We are working aggressively with the agency to try to determine what kinds of service and what the definition of those services should be. As an example, there was some work done by the Children and Youth Secretariat, and I do not have the figures right in front of me right now, but there are some 117 or 127 children in the province of Manitoba that we spend \$17 million on. I do not know if I have my figures right or not. [interjection] It is, and many of those are part of our Child and Family Services system. Is Child and Family the right place to be delivering those services or do we need a plan of action that looks at a different way of delivering those services to those children?

I can probably talk around in circles. I do not have the answers. I wish I did. I have to be honest with my honourable friend. But I am really concerned that we are seeing increasing numbers and increasing costs for children in care, and I am not sure that we are working with all of the community that needs to be worked with in a very meaningful way to try and find some of the answers and the solutions. I honestly feel that if we have 70 percent of our children in care in the city of Winnipeg that are aboriginal, we need to have more aboriginal input into how we find the answers.

Mr. Martindale: Well, we can follow this up later in Estimates in Child and Family Services. I am ready to pass this line.

Mr. Chairperson: 9.1.(f) Policy and Planning (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$751,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$175,700—pass

9.1.(g) Financial and Administrative Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits.

Mr. Martindale: I am sorry that I did not bring Public Accounts with me, but one of the things that I discussed

with people in the Provincial Auditor's office was, I guess, broadly speaking, the issue of holding government accountable. As an opposition critic it is fairly easy to ask questions in Estimates but, when it comes to how the money has already been spent, it is a little bit harder even looking at Public Accounts, because the amount of money that is given to each organization, each individual is printed with the name of the organization and the total amount for the fiscal year.

With Family Services it is about five pages of names and amounts and, except for going through it and reading it one at a time and looking for strange things that you have never heard of before, most of which have explanations, like licensed family daycare operators or bringing it to Estimates and asking the minister individual questions which might take a long time to answer, I wonder if there is a better way of doing it. My suggestion would be to divide it up according to the four categories of your department and then at least we would know under which category of the department the money was spent on behalf of, because the way it is now, well, maybe this is going a little bit too far, but it is totally useless information and, yet, we are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars, and it is extremely difficult to hold the government accountable for the spending of this hundreds of millions of dollars the way it is now.

Now, I suppose this is out of the hands of the Minister of Family Services. Maybe it is the Minister of Finance or maybe it is the Auditor, I am not sure, but I am wondering if this minister is willing to suggest to her colleagues or to the Auditor that the financial information be arranged differently. Would you be willing to do that?

Mrs. Mitchelson: My honourable friend is correct when he says that it really is outside my responsibility. There is a format that provides a listing through Public Accounts that is standard across government. It is not different department by department. Maybe we could look at making it different department by department to try to confuse the opposition, but I think it is more important to have a standard format so you know what you are looking at. But I have no difficulty in indicating to my colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), if that is the appropriate place, that you

have made a suggestion that the format for Public Accounts should be changed, and I am prepared to do that.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to thank the minister for that offer, and I am wondering if she could put that in writing in a letter or memo to the minister and copy me so that we can follow up in Finance Estimates or follow up with the Minister of Finance at some future date.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, I could certainly undertake to do that. It might be very appropriate for my honourable friend to do that directly or to have his Finance critic do that directly to the Minister of Finance. I guess I do have to make a comment that my honourable friend's party was in government for several years. I do not imagine the format has been changed significantly with the change in government, so it has probably been a standard practice for many, many years.

* (1610)

Mr. Chairperson: Item 9.1. (g) Financial and Administrative Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,738,200; (2) Other Expenditures \$470,500.

Mr. Martindale: I am wondering if the minister can answer some questions about some of the agreements that I presume the government has with different associations, I guess, that provide services to social assistance clients, for example, dental. I know that there is a dispute going on with a dentist in The Pas about providing service. Basically, an individual withdrew service, and I understand that the clients were being forced to take the bus to Flin Flon. My colleagues were concerned about this, suggesting that the cost of the social assistance recipients travelling to Flin Flon is probably more than what the government was willing to pay to the dentist. I am wondering if this dispute with this individual dentist has been resolved.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, the dispute has not been resolved, but I do want to indicate that there are negotiations that are ongoing and the dentists have agreed to provide emergency services in the interim until, hopefully, we can come to some agreement through negotiation.

Mr. Chairperson: Before recognizing the honourable member for Burrows, I am just going to, for the sake of Hansard, refer to item (g) Financial and Administrative Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,738,200—pass.

Mr. Martindale: Is the minister referring to negotiations with the individual dentist or with the dental association for Manitoba?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, with the dental association. As I indicated, the dentists in The Pas have agreed to provide emergency services until we can conclude those negotiations.

Mr. Martindale: My understanding is that the government also has an agreement with funeral home operators in Manitoba and that they have not had any increase now for quite a few years. The complaint that I get from them is that they are losing money on funerals for Income Assistance clients. I wonder if the minister has received any request from their association to renegotiate their fees.

Mrs. Mitchelson: We have, Mr. Chairperson, just recently completed negotiations and have a signed agreement with the funeral directors in the province.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister give me more detailed information about the agreement? Was there an increase in compensation to individual funeral home operators for Income Assistance clients' funerals?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, we do not have a copy of the agreement with us, but I believe there was a slight increase in the agreement that was signed. We can endeavour to bring a copy of that agreement tomorrow.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 9.1.(g) Financial and Administrative Services (2) Other Expenditures \$470,500—pass.

9.1.(h) Information Systems (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,512,400.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me what stage we are at in tendering for a computer system for the

amalgamated provincial and City of Winnipeg social assistance systems?

Mrs. Mitchelson: IBM does have the contract. They are in the re-engineering-redesign phase working with the City of Winnipeg staff and our staff to try to determine what the system should look like.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me when the former associate minister Mr. Doug Sexsmith went to work for IBM?

Mrs. Mitchelson: January of 1997.

Mr. Martindale: Does his contract with IBM or do government guidelines prohibit him from working on government contracts for a specified period of time?

Mrs. Mitchelson: There is a conflict-of-interest clause that prohibits him from soliciting business for a year.

Mr. Martindale: It seems to me that soliciting business and working on a contract are two different things. This process was already in the works between IBM and KPMG, Online, and my understanding is that Mr. Sexsmith went to IBM to provide advice on government business, so I wonder if the minister could clarify.

Mrs. Mitchelson: He is working across the country for IBM, and he is not doing anything with the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to thank the minister for clarifying that for me. I wonder if the minister could tell me, if it is appropriate under this line, what is happening with the Child and Family Services' computer system? My understanding is that their new system has been in the implementation phase for quite a number of years, and I frequently hear frustration on the part of staff about that computer system. I wonder if the minister can bring me up to date on it.

Mrs. Mitchelson: The infrastructure is now stable and user support has increased dramatically. The user base has grown from the original 450 users to 800 users. As of December 1996, Western Manitoba and Central Manitoba have completely incorporated CFSIS into their normal work routine, and both agencies are now

paperless operations. The use is increasing on a monthly basis. We have just approved, I think, another 20 work stations for Winnipeg Child and Family.

Mr. Martindale: I see in the Estimates book that there is a single-point-of-contact help desk for staff who use the department's various information systems. Can the minister tell me if that is somebody external to government or internal to government?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, that is outsourced, so it is someone outside.

Mr. Chairperson: 9.1. Administration and Finance (h) Information Systems (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,512,400—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$688,400—pass.

Before we proceed with Resolution 9.2, is there agreement in the committee that we recess for 10 minutes? [agreed]

The committee recessed at 4:19 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:33 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

We were dealing with Resolution 9.2 when the committee recessed. 9.2.(a) Client Services.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, I would just like to introduce staff who are here: Gisela Rempel is the assistant deputy minister of Employment and Income Assistance; Grant Doak, Employment and Income Assistance Policy Co-ordinator, and Dan Haughey, executive director, Welfare Reform.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable minister.

Mr. Martindale: I hope that advance warning for questions means that we will get fast answers. Well, we always get answers from this minister, but this time it should be faster.

I have the provincial Ombudsman's report for 1995, and on page 24 there was a concern raised about confidentiality, and it says: However, they—meaning the department—recognize the potential seriousness of any breach of confidentiality and agree to examine the need for the development of written directives or protocol for the release of personal and private information. I am just wondering if, after their consultation, they informed the Ombudsman of their decision and whether it resulted in written guidelines on confidentiality.

Mrs. Mitchelson: As a result of the Ombudsman's report, a review has been completed. A policy has been drafted, a written policy, in response to the concern that was identified, and that draft policy has been sent to the Ombudsman for his review prior to implementation. So we are awaiting his response to that.

Mr. Martindale: Could I get a copy of that policy after the Ombudsman has reviewed it?

Mrs. Mitchelson: When it is reviewed and it is not in draft form anymore, when it is in its final form, we will provide that.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me if that would just apply to Income Assistance clients or whether it would apply to other parts of this department?

Mrs. Mitchelson: The draft is just looking at the policy in context to our social assistance clients.

Mr. Martindale: Do other parts of the minister's department like Child Care, and Child and Family Services already have written guidelines?

Mrs. Mitchelson: We do have strict confidentiality guidelines in other areas of the department.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to ask the minister a whole series of questions about the amalgamation of city social services and provincial Income Assistance beginning with what is the target date that has been set for full amalgamation?

Mrs. Mitchelson: We have targeted April of '98 as the date we would like to see this take place. The very

latest we are hoping everything will be in place would be September of 1998.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me how many offices still will be open after the two systems are amalgamated?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, the report recommends four to six offices, but there has not been any final determination. That will be through a process that has been started with the City of Winnipeg.

Mr. Martindale: Given that most Income Assistance clients will have to use public transportation to access an office, will offices that are easily accessible by bus be the ones that are kept open?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Certainly that would be one of the criteria for choice of location with the amalgamated offices, but there has been no determination made yet on which offices they might be or if in fact any of the offices are appropriate or we might look at, based on the number of offices, new locations. So we are not really at a point yet where we have determined, you know, what the right number should be and exactly where the location should be, but we certainly will take into consideration accessibility.

Mr. Martindale: Will staff needs also be taken into consideration? I was at 880 Portage, and I heard complaints from the staff, well, certainly about the temperature and possibly about air quality, so hopefully if you are leasing or buying new office space or different office space that this is an opportunity to get out of unsuitable accommodation and get more suitable accommodation.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Absolutely, yeah, I think all of that needs to be looked at very carefully. Certainly we want both those that are serving the public through the Department of Family Services and those clients that have to visit and work with our staff are treated in a humane fashion. If in fact there are issues and problems in specific locations, we would certainly want to at least pick the best locations, or find alternate accommodation if that is necessary.

Mr. Martindale: After the amalgamation is complete, how many staff will have been let go and how many will still remain?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I think the business case indicated that we should be able to deliver the system with 35 fewer staff total, but that several of the jobs that would exist, would exist in a different fashion, and there should be some redirection to Employment First strategy so there would be some retraining.

Some of the work that might presently be done manually might be done with new technology and with a new system so that the jobs might be different. Those kinds of jobs might not be needed, but we will need people to ensure that we work on an individual basis with clients to help them secure and obtain that employment or training.

* (1640)

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister expand on what she means by new technology and new systems?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, Mr. Chairperson, the City of Winnipeg has one system and we have another. Both of those systems are pretty antiquated and outdated, and what we need to do is build a comprehensive system that will include both the clients that the City of Winnipeg presently serves and our provincial caseloads so we will have one amalgamated system, a new system. What we will have is a more modern system. Information will be more readily available. We will be able to assist our clients and track our clients in a much more co-ordinated fashion. So some of the work that might now need to be done manually, because our systems are so outdated, should be able to be done through our new technology, and we can redirect our focus to serving the clients that need our service and working with them.

Mr. Martindale: Of the 35 staff being let go, how many will be provincial and how many will be City of Winnipeg?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, that certainly has not been determined yet. Maybe, as we move through this transition year, there will be resignations and that kind of thing that will leave staff years vacant, and it may not impact any individuals at all. There is no way of determining that yet.

As we work through the details with the City of Winnipeg and with Human Resources and the unions, we will come to an agreement on the skills that are needed and determine who wants to be retrained, who wants to continue to work, and try to ensure that people have the skills that they need to do the new jobs that will be required as a result of the amalgamation.

Mr. Martindale: Will the City of Winnipeg, or the province, offer early retirement to any employees?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, that is still to be determined, and I would imagine that we would deal with those issues in accordance with what government right across the board would be offering. We have in the past offered early retirement packages, and I am not sure what the future holds in that respect. I do not make those decisions, but I would imagine that that will all be taken into consideration. This, of course, is a transition year, and there is a lot of detail to be worked out yet.

Mr. Martindale: Does the minister have any idea of what kinds of positions will be eliminated when the 35 people are gone? For example, will the majority of these people be financial workers or will they be clerks or will they be social workers?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, we do not have that detail at this point in time. I guess what I have indicated is that we want to place a real focus on employment first and helping people find jobs and determine where they best believe they fit, and help them to understand where the job opportunities might be. So I think our focus will be on working proactively with clients to help facilitate entry into the workforce.

Mr. Martindale: It seems to me that it does make a difference how many staff you have in the system and what kinds of people. For example, a year ago approximately, in the City of Winnipeg, there was a hiring freeze and this affected the department of Social Services. They were requesting more staff and they were not given more staff. At a later point, the director of Social Services, according to Free Press articles that I have read, did get more staff authorized, and they were employed directly serving their client caseload in finding jobs, amongst other things, and it was quite successful. Their caseload was down about 3,000.

They attribute much of that success to hiring people to find jobs for clients.

I think it does make a difference as to whom you keep and whom you let go. City Social Services believes that staff with social work degrees are very helpful in finding employment and training programs for their clients, in getting things that they need like work clothing, that sort of thing, in order to get them off social assistance and into the paid workforce.

So I am wondering if the minister can give us any idea of where she thinks they should go in terms of reallocating staff and hiring staff and letting them go.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I know the issue that my honourable friend was talking about around the increase in staffing component really making a difference to the reduction in the caseload at the City of Winnipeg. It was a valid concern when it was raised, and I think the hiring of additional staff to focus on job opportunities and helping people find employment really worked, and the numbers show that. It was the right decision for the City of Winnipeg to make.

Can I indicate that what I want to be assured of through the amalgamation and through the new service delivery system is that our clients are served to the very best of our ability? I think we are going to need a mix of all kinds of skills. We will need people with social work backgrounds, and we will need people with technical advice and expertise. We will need the right mix of individuals, and I cannot predetermine what that might be. I think, as we move through the process with the City of Winnipeg and with the consultant who is helping to facilitate this process, that hopefully we will come up with the right mix that will serve the people that need to be served in the best manner possible.

I cannot sit here and say today it should be 30 social workers and 40 Employment and Income Assistance intake workers or whatever. I think we need the right mix, and that will have to be determined as we go along. But I think we need a wide variety of skills. I am not the expert. What I want to see happen through this process is the best possible mix, the best qualified staff to do the job.

Mr. Martindale: Well, I think the minister's answers here are extremely vague and general. Talking about

the right mix does not really answer the question. For example, we know that social work degree staff get paid higher salaries. We know that City of Winnipeg employees make higher salaries than many of the provincial government employees; and, given this government's propensity to cut expenses at all costs, I am concerned that you might do something that is penny-wise and pound-foolish because you might decide to save some costs initially on staff salaries that could end up costing a lot of money later on.

For example, one Free Press story that I have with me from May 8, 1996, says: Hiring freeze ups welfare rolls, costs city \$1 million. So, if you do not have the right staff in the right place, instead of getting people off social assistance and into paid employment, those people are stuck on the system and new clients come on, and then your costs of dispensing welfare go way up. So I think it is really important that this minister and this government know what direction they are going with the welfare amalgamation and get the staff in place that will, in the long run—and we are just talking about a matter of months—save the government money rather than costing them more money.

* (1650)

I think the experience of the City of Winnipeg, which the minister acknowledges and says that they did the right thing, is quite instructive. So I think that you could learn from that. Certainly, since you are in discussions with the city, you can ask them all kinds of questions and find out how they did it and how it worked, how it worked best, and maybe even adapt or adopt the city's model in terms of staffing and putting the right staff in place to reduce the caseload.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I want to indicate to my honourable friend that we will take all of his comments very seriously. We anticipate that through this amalgamation process, we will streamline, we will have a better computer system, we will be able to better serve our clients and help them find jobs. So all I can say is that I do not have the magic answer. If my honourable friend wants to share with me how many social workers and how many other staff he believes is the right mix, I would encourage him to do that, but I can indicate to him quite honestly that there will be a lot of negotiation, there will be a lot of discussion.

There already is a lot of discussion, and I think we want to take the best of what works in both programs and amalgamate that into one program that is going to serve the clients that we serve. We, ultimately, will make decisions, and I suppose the proof of how good those decisions are will be in what our caseloads will be over the next number of years. I am sure my honourable friend will have plenty of opportunity to be very critical if our expectations are not met with the kinds of decisions that we make as we move through this process.

Mr. Martindale: You can count on me, Madam Minister, I will be.

If people are moved from one system to another, will there be changes in salaries and benefits? For example, some employees in the City of Winnipeg receive higher salaries. If they become provincial employees, they might consider themselves lucky to still have a job, but might it be at a lower rate of pay?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, no decisions have been made. We have the Civil Service Commission on our behalf working with Labour Adjustment or whoever it is at the City of Winnipeg. When we have the package together and in place, those kinds of decisions will have been made and will be announced; but it is too early to make comment on that while we are in the preliminary stages of this process.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me if the new amalgamated system will lead to increases in staff caseload? The reason for this concern, well, there are a whole bunch of reasons for this concern, but one of them is that this minister already has staff in the provincial system with caseloads of 600 clients or 600 families. We know that when workers have too many clients that they cannot adequately do their job, because they cannot possibly contact them on a regular basis, they cannot do home visits, they cannot find out if they still meet the eligibility requirements. What this usually leads to is higher costs in a system that already costs this government hundreds of millions of dollars. So one very serious concern about the amalgamation is the caseload, and so I would like to ask the minister if she anticipates that there will be increased caseloads for workers?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, as I indicated earlier we are going to be looking at approximately 100

staff within the new system that will have to be retrained in service delivery, and we are anticipating that with enhanced technology there will be less resource needed for some of the activities that are not hands-on activities with clients. I do not anticipate that there should be higher caseloads as a result. I would hope that we can focus our energies and our efforts more on client-focused service on an individual basis. So I would indicate that it would certainly be my desire to see that we spend our time and our energy and our efforts up front, hands on with individuals that need our help and our support.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell us what the average caseload is now for provincial Income Assistance workers, and does she know what the average caseload is for City of Winnipeg Social Services employees?

Mrs. Mitchelson: We are not sure what the caseload is at the City of Winnipeg. It is probably lower than what ours is, considerably lower. Ours is about 250 cases per worker, and I think at the city it is probably significantly less, but the nature of their caseload is considerably different also. Many of those that are on our provincial caseload have never been considered employable, and there have never been any work expectations there. It has just been basically assessing what they need or what their monthly payment should be and doing nothing proactive. In the city's instance, they have a much more aggressive proactive approach to delivering their service and a much greater turnover in their client base, and they have a very aggressive program.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me what the average caseload is by category? For example, it is my understanding that there is at least one worker with approximately 600 disability cases, but how does this compare with single parent caseload averages?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess we have tried a couple of instances where caseworkers have had maybe a specific caseload, but by and large our workers have a variety of different people on their caseloads. The disabled are not in one category served by a certain number of caseworkers. The cases are mixed so each caseworker has a variety of different issues to deal with their clients.

Mr. Martindale: Well, the minister indicated that the average number of cases per worker is 250. So this example that I am using of 600, is that the exception, or is that somebody at the high end?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess that is one of the experiments that we have been trying when, in fact, there are a certain number of individual clients in an office who are unemployable and we know we will not be placing any work expectations on but we will just be continuing to maintain their rates. They have tried in a couple of offices to increase the caseload and put those who are unemployable and do not have any special extenuating circumstances under one caseworker, and maybe put another caseworker with a caseload of 75 that need increased service or support or do have work expectations placed on them. So they are trying those kinds of those things in individual offices, but that would not be the norm.

* (1700)

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me if there will be flexibility in the new system so that front-line workers can assist people to get jobs and have the authority to provide things that make employment easier, for example, authorizing work clothes or authorizing bus fare?

Mrs. Mitchelson: It is my understanding they do that now.

Mr. Martindale: One of the parts of the City of Winnipeg Social Services that I am familiar with is authorization of rental accommodation. In the past, there was a Core Area Initiative- funded program called CARUMP, Core Area Residential Upgrading and Maintenance Program that did housing inspections and helped clients if they had to move. That program is gone, but it is my understanding that the city sends out inspectors from time to time to look at rental accommodation, but the province, I am told, does not have any sort of inspection system. One of the ironic results of this is that landlords complain that the city system is tougher than the provincial. Now, I would like to know what is going to happen after amalgamation. Will there be inspections of housing accommodation?

There are many, many reasons why this is necessary. Quite often people are living in substandard accommodation. Frequently, the government is paying exorbitant rents for this substandard accommodation. We are talking about millions of dollars here. We are talking about \$60 million a year in the city of Winnipeg. I think that one way for taxpayers to get value for money is to require landlords to meet building codes and health bylaws in the provincial health act in their rental accommodation that is paid for by the government of Manitoba. Your department is not going to know if they are getting good value for money or paying out millions of dollars for substandard accommodation unless you have some sort of inspection system in place.

So under the amalgamated system, are you either going to hire staff to do this, working for Income Assistance, or are you going to rely on City of Winnipeg health inspections to do this for you? Certainly, I would be agreeable to using the City of Winnipeg environmental health department. I phone government departments, many, many government departments at all three levels of government. The best department that I have ever dealt with is City of Winnipeg environment health. Their staff are in their office every morning from 8:30 to 9:30. The rest of the day they have voice mail. They will return calls on their cell phones. They will do an inspection of any address within 24 hours and report back to you. It is absolutely amazing, and they do a good job. They write up work orders, and they will tell you what the work orders are.

So I would hope that either this minister's Income Assistance staff will inspect accommodation from time to time, especially before the money is authorized, or that you will use inspectors from somewhere else, such as the City of Winnipeg health department. What are your plans in this area?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, that has not been decided yet, but I thank my honourable friend for his comments and suggestions. Certainly, it will be taken into consideration as we make our decisions.

Mr. Martindale: I guess I am maybe getting into Income Assistance, but unless there is a problem with that, I have questions on that.

My understanding is that the Orders-in-Council changing regulations were passed in February 1996. I wonder if the minister could remind me when those Orders-in-Council took effect.

Mrs. Mitchelson: They took effect on May 1, 1996.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me what the total enrollment was on May 1, 1996?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, if I could just ask for clarification, do we want municipal and provincial?

Mr. Martindale: Provincial.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Provincial, okay. All categories on the provincial caseload were 26,223.

Mr. Martindale: I wonder if the minister could verify that the SAMIN report that I have is correct for April 26, 1997, which would be approximately one year later, 25,359.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, that is correct.

Mr. Martindale: So, for the past year, because both new regulations took effect and Bill 36 took effect, there has been an incredible pressure on people on social assistance to find work. As the minister knows, everyone has to have a job plan, everyone has work expectations, everyone has to do a job search, 15 job searches a month. It appears that approximately a thousand people have moved off social assistance and either into paid employment or gone back to school or left the province, whatever.

I am wondering if the minister had goals for the number of people that her department hoped would get off social assistance, and whether those goals have been met.

Mrs. Mitchelson: We had set our goal for about 700 individuals. So I think we have exceeded that with close to 1,000.

Mr. Martindale: The largest category of people—well, maybe that is not right. There are different categories of people on provincial Income Assistance. They include disabled and they include mothers allowance.

Yes, I guess mothers allowance would be the largest category. So the work expectation now applies to single parents with children over six and, in many circumstances, to single parents with children under six. It seems to me that not very many people have moved off social assistance and into paid employment.

I know the minister put out a press release, I believe last fall, saying that 800 social assistance recipients or single parents had moved from welfare to work. I wonder if the minister could, first of all, clarify or maybe remind me of the content of that press release as to how many people, and what category they were from.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, those were only single parents and general assistance caseload that were referred to in that news release.

Mr. Martindale: So of the 864 people out of 26,223 that have moved off social assistance, almost all of them were what category, single parents?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Single parents, yes, that is right.

* (1710)

Mr. Martindale: Given that earlier today we discussed a special warrant authorizing more money, because not enough money was budgeted under Income Assistance, I was going to ask what the approximate savings were for having 864 fewer clients, but in fact there are not less savings. In fact, the government spent more money on Income Assistance. I wonder if the minister could explain that to me.

Mrs. Mitchelson: We were just trying to get the numbers because a lot of our charts have a combined provincial and municipal caseload and expenditure, but what I have here is what we spent on Employment and Income Assistance in '95-96 for our provincial caseload. It was, I will round it off, \$223 million. In '96-97, although we have not got the absolute final figure, it is \$216 million.

So our budget, what we budgeted—so we spent 223 in 1995-96. We budgeted 215, I am rounding it off, in '96-97 because we anticipated that our caseload would go down. What we found was we needed more money.

We applied for a special warrant. It was around \$4 million, but on the provincial side, from the provincial caseload, we anticipate that it is about \$1 million that we will be spending. So my mathematics tell me that that is \$7 million less.

Mr. Martindale: Well, I suspect that this is a case of the minister mixing apples and oranges because, obviously, it would make it look better for the government. Last year, I got a very helpful briefing from Mr. Sexsmith about welfare reform and the Orders-in-Council and Bill 36 and their effect. Going from memory, I think he added up the different categories of savings based on the cuts to benefits in different categories, and it came to about \$23 million.

So, you know, if we want to talk about your welfare cuts and the results being less spending year over year, that is fine. I will acknowledge that. Sure, there were savings as a result of benefit reductions, but what I was asking the minister about was were there any savings as the result of 864 people moving off social assistance, and, if so, how much was that?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Do you just want to repeat the question, the last comment you made?

Mr. Martindale: Well, to summarize, I acknowledge that the spending year over year was less. I think the main reason was your government's welfare reforms because you knew how much you were going to save in advance in different categories.

I was told it was about \$23 million, but what I would like to know is, were there savings because there were 864 less clients on provincial assistance and, if so, how much was the savings?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, the results of our welfare reform on the provincial caseload would have been a saving of \$2.6 million; that is on the provincial side. The other savings came on the municipal side, so that would have been the City of Winnipeg and other municipal caseloads. But on the caseload that we have provincially, the savings were \$2.65 million. So if we saved \$7 million on the provincial side, the caseload, and \$2.65 was for rate changes, the other savings would have come from reduced caseloads.

Mr. Martindale: Sorry, could the minister repeat that? How much was from benefit changes?

Mrs. Mitchelson: \$2.65 million on the provincial caseloads.

Mr. Martindale: And how much in savings on the municipal side from benefit changes?

Mrs. Mitchelson: From benefit changes on the municipal side, it would have been \$7.5 million.

Mr. Martindale: So the anticipated savings of \$23 million were not quite met.

* (1720)

Mrs. Mitchelson: There were changes to the tax credits on the municipal side, too, which were \$7.7 million. What we had estimated for caseload reduction on our provincial caseload was \$3.3 million, and I think we exceeded that just slightly.

Mr. Martindale: I wonder if the minister could reconcile for me what I think is a difference in the information that I was given when we talked about the special warrant and the information I am being given now. I think I was told earlier this afternoon that the reason that there were increased costs were because there were increased costs per client. I wonder if the minister could clarify.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay, I will try, Mr. Chairperson. What we did through the special warrant was request enough money so that we knew that we would have enough money to pay the bills. We added that up and it was probably a fairly generous estimate of \$4 million. I had indicated that there were a significant numberless clients in our welfare system, but some of the cost to serve those clients was higher than what we had anticipated. One of the reasons was the health costs, the health benefits, we had underestimated and they ended up costing about a million dollars more than what we had anticipated. The other piece maybe was an increase in the disabled caseload that cost us about a million dollars more. So there were more disabled people than we had estimated would come into the welfare system. So those were a couple of reasons we thought we would need more money.

We asked and got \$4 million to ensure that we had enough money to cover our expenditures. In reality, some of that money will lapse or has lapsed because we did not need the full \$4 million. I am being told that it was somewhat over a million dollars that we did require, and I am not sure we have the final tabulations from the end of the fiscal year. So, in reality, we asked for \$4 million. We did not need the full \$4 million. We spent a million-plus in extra costs, but part of the additional costs were because we did not budget for an increase. We did not anticipate an increase in the disabled caseload, which we experienced. We did not increase the expenditures on the health side, but, otherwise, we did meet our expectations of at least a saving of \$3.3 million in reduction in the number of people, the number of single parents who were on our caseload.

Mr. Martindale: Is the minister saying that the approximate 800 people who moved from social assistance who work, mainly single parents, save the government \$3 million?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister give me the savings in benefit reductions and changes by category? For example, existing clients were grandfathered, but new people coming on the system did not get the—I think it is \$60 a month increase after a certain period of time. There are also people turning 60 who were forced to apply for CPP.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I am not sure I can provide that background, and if there was a specific question, maybe we could get some numbers done. But I want to indicate that the rates were not changed for the disabled category. We know that. They were not changed in most instances for those single parents with children under the age of six.

Where the changes were made would be with single parents with children over the age of six. There was a slight reduction in some of their benefits, but I want my honourable friend to understand that we can get into it in great detail, that in many provinces they do not have a higher rate for children as they grow older. In Manitoba, we have significantly higher rates for children as they get older. We do know, for instance,

in British Columbia that they have one basic rate for children which, I think, is \$103 per child. Our lowest rate for a child is \$116, and it goes up to \$189 in some circumstances for older children.

The rates were reduced at the older child level, but they were not reduced for younger children or for the disabled.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to ask the minister about a specific category. For example, my understanding is that, as a result of an Order-in-Council, clients turning 60 are forced to apply for Canada Pension benefits and presumably are off provincial assistance. I wonder if the minister can tell me how many clients this new regulation affected and how much money the provincial government saved on that change.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Those people would not receive any less money. I guess, as we see the offloading from the federal government, if in fact the federal government has a program that our clients can access, we prefer that they access first the money from the federal government, and then we will provide, I guess, any difference. If in fact the federal government does have a program, what we have done is encourage that to happen. We did budget for \$250,000. We are not sure whether that has been realized or not. It will probably be fairly close to that.

Mr. Martindale: Does the minister realize that by forcing people to apply for CPP their benefits are 30 percent less from age 60 to 65, and 30 percent less thereafter?

Mrs. Mitchelson: It is my understanding that we are in line with what most other provinces do in this respect and we are bringing ourselves into line, that we are a program of last resort. Other provinces encourage it, and we were doing the same thing.

Mr. Martindale: Just because other provinces do it does not make it right. In fact, I think the only success story in Canada in terms of reducing poverty is amongst men and women 65 years and older. There have been some pretty dramatic changes. I am quoting here from Poverty Profile, 1994, a report by the National Council of Welfare, which shows that in Manitoba from—well, in Manitoba, in 1980, the percentage of men over 65

living in poverty was 23 percent. By 1994, it was 10 percent, which is a 57 percent decrease. Even from '93 to '94, there was an 18 percent decrease. Amongst women, 1980, 41 percent lived in poverty. By 1994, it was down to 28 percent, a decline of 30 percent from 1980 to 1994.

There are a number of reasons for this. One is that more people have pensions, particularly women. More women were in the paid workforce, so they also have Canada Pension. The other significant reason is that the federal government many years ago brought in the Guaranteed Income Supplement, so it is disappointing to see this government going backward. It means that you are going to have more seniors living in poverty in Manitoba and your stats are going to look worse.

In fact, there is an anomaly in these statistics, and that is that for women from '93 to '94 there was a 16 percent increase in the number of women over 65 living in poverty, and I do not know why that is, but it is disappointing to see a reversal in that statistic.

It is good to see that there are very small savings. Obviously, not very many people are being affected by this new rule, but it is still regressive, a regressive change that this government has made which is going to greatly affect the income of some seniors if they are forced to accept benefits that are 30 percent less because they are forced by this government to apply for CPP five years early. Is the minister not concerned about that?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I will get a bit more detail and provide it to my honourable friend around what is happening across the country, and I find it very interesting to hear my honourable friend say that it does not matter what other provinces are doing. So very often he raises to me the issues of what other provinces are doing and asks us why we do not follow suit. When it suits him to ask those kinds of questions, he asks them, and when it suits him to be critical of government because we are trying to conform to what is happening right across the country, he can ask those questions, and that is one of the benefits of being in opposition.

I remember I had a former colleague the late Abe Kovnats who actually admitted that in opposition you could have it both ways because you did not have to be

accountable for any decisions that were made, and I remember we had some fun over that comment that he put on the record at one point.

* (1730)

But the reality is that governments have to make decisions. The federal government has a program in place, and they provide funding and support to that program. There are many across Canada that are receiving that kind of assistance, and I guess from time to time they make decisions to change the rates or change the focus. Who knows what CPP will be into the future?

So I do have to indicate that it was a decision that we made, a tough decision in some instances, but I have to indicate that we are not out of line with what is happening right across the country.

(Mr. Mervin Tweed, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me how many clients have had their benefits reduced by \$50 a month, how many by \$100 a month, and how many have had their social assistance eliminated altogether?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay, sanctions of the first \$50 have been applied to 124 single parents and the second \$50 to eight.

Mr. Martindale: And the reason for this would be that they did not meet the work expectation?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes.

Mr. Martindale: Are there any sanctions for people who do not fill out a job plan?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, if they absolutely refuse to co-operate, yes, sanctions can be applied, but we strongly encourage them to co-operate and fill out a job plan and become proactive about seeking employment.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me how many Income Assistance clients are in the work incentive program?

Mrs. Mitchelson: It is about 4,000 overall. That includes single parents, disabled and general assistance.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me how many clients qualified for the earned income exemption?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Anyone is eligible for the work incentive provisions if they are working.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me if it is standard policy for Income Assistance employees to tell their clients about the work incentive program and about earned income exemptions?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, that happens at the pre-orientation sessions as people are applying for Income Assistance.

Mr. Martindale: Why is it that a lot of clients do not seem to know about these programs. I think it is a classic case of people not asking and therefore not finding out the information, and if you do not ask you are not going to find out, and if you do not know then you are not going to qualify for it. The result is that I have instances brought to my attention of people who have moved off Income Assistance into paid employment and the paid employment pays less than what they were getting on social assistance, and the impression that I get is that they were not aware that they could keep a certain amount of their earnings or that they might be entitled to a top-up provision. This tends to be a great hardship for individual clients. I am wondering, you know, how it could be that this happens when the minister says that everyone is informed about the work incentive program.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, I have a form here, or a pamphlet, I will share with my honourable friend. It talks about Employment First work incentive, and that is available and explained to everyone at the pre-orientation sessions. It is available to every client that is on social allowance. So if he has got individual specific cases, though, where individuals claim that they have no understanding or no information, I would be very interested in knowing that, because if there seems to be a pocket somewhere within the department that is not providing this information, I would be very interested in knowing. We could certainly work to

ensure—but it is a pamphlet that is available. I will share it with my honourable friend. It is provided, to my understanding, to every individual.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to thank the minister for this handout. It is the first time I have ever seen it, and I will make sure that people who approach me for help get a copy of that and are informed about it. I cannot give the minister individual examples, although the minister has read about individual examples in the Frances Russell column and in other columns in the Free Press. The reason I cannot share individual examples is that these individuals are so intimidated that they are unwilling to allow me to share their names with the minister or her staff. That is unfortunate because maybe there would be benefits for those individuals that they are not aware of. Maybe their complaints could be taken care of but they are so intimidated by their workers and by the pressure of the system that they will not share their names and addresses. Well, certainly I have their names and addresses, but they will not share them with the Department of Family Services and that is unfortunate.

I wonder if I could ask the minister some questions here about the integrated child tax benefit, if this line is suitable. Could the minister tell me what the—well, first of all, when she expects it will be implemented in Manitoba?

Mrs. Mitchelson: There seems to be all indications at both the federal and provincial level that July of 1998 would be the startup, although we have all agreed to work expeditiously to see whether it could happen sooner than that, but it will be happening. I guess it all depends on what the federal election results are and whether there is a new government and a whole new review of the program. But my understanding is that the federal Liberal government is committed to it, and I think the money that they have notionally allocated in their 1998 budget would see it start in July of 1998, and it would be implemented across the country at the same time. So all provinces would be starting at the same time.

Mr. Martindale: Maybe we will have a new government, minority government, and then maybe they might have to enrich it and make it better.

Could the minister tell me what the federal contribution will be in Manitoba approximately?

* (1740)

Mrs. Mitchelson: About \$24 million would be Manitoba's share of the \$600 million.

Mr. Martindale: Could the minister tell me what the Province of Manitoba contribution will be?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, there is no new money at the provincial level, but what will happen with our \$24 million will be that we will reinvest that into children and families in Manitoba.

Mr. Martindale: Is it correct to say that that money will go to families that are working but low income?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, Mr. Chairperson. The whole intent of the National Child Benefit is—there were three main goals or objectives. One was to reduce the debt to child poverty. The other was to ensure that those that are working are better off than people that are on welfare, and the third objective was to reduce the overlap in duplication. The ultimate goal or objective would be to have the federal government invest enough in children so that no child would be on the welfare system in the future, but every child and every family that is low income would receive a child benefit from the federal government.

So the amount that they are investing up front, the \$600 million, is what they say—a down payment. I would argue and say that that is a partial repayment for what they have taken away from provinces through reductions in transfers for health, education, and social services. So it does not even come close to repaying what they have taken away. But the principle around taking children off of welfare and having child support come in a consistent fashion from the federal government is a principle that all provinces agree with. I guess it was recommended by provinces, and we have worked with the federal government to try to make that happen.

So this is a start, and all provinces, in every communique we send out and in every discussion we have, agree that this is just a first step and that there

needs to be incremental and stable funding from the federal government in order to make this happen. So we will be watching very carefully and very closely as the federal government moves year by year to invest dollars in children.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me why the provincial governments and the federal government agreed and decided to claw back 100 percent of the money from Income Assistance clients?

Mrs. Mitchelson: One of the underlying principles that the province has put on the table is that no family would be worse off as a result—and I see my honourable friend rolling his eyes and whatever. This was a principle that was brought in, very strongly articulated, by the minister from Saskatchewan. One of the points that he wanted communicated very clearly was that no family would be worse off under this proposal—and I think supported and endorsed.

The big issue here is that we are not going to claw back benefits and reduce benefits for welfare recipients so that we can assure people that they will be making more when they are working. But one of the underlying principles is people should be better off working than on welfare so that there is some incentive to move into the workforce—underlying principle endorsed by all provinces regardless of political stripe right across the country.

So what we are wanting to do is see more money in the hands of working people. We want to ensure that the benefits that you receive on welfare, the dental and health benefits, are continued through support of your children. You look at our welfare program today and you see that you get X number of dollars per child on welfare. I do not want this to be interpreted wrongly. It is not a huge amount of money, and it is very difficult to live on welfare. But, on the other hand, when you have got a single parent or a family out there working for minimum wage, making less than you might be on welfare, you cannot go and say to your boss, I want a raise because I am having a baby and expect that you are going to get an extra \$100, \$200 a month because you are having a child. It just does not work that way.

So if, in fact, there was a standard amount of money that comes from the federal government for every child

on a consistent basis, whether you are a child that is living in a welfare family or a child that is living in a low-income working family, then, in fact, there would be more encouragement for people to move into the workforce to start somewhere and those benefits would follow through. There would be more money in the hands of those families to make the decisions on how to spend that money on their children.

So that was the underlying principle. That was what all Premiers agreed to when they initially indicated that we needed to work together. It was one of the issues that was discussed at the annual Premiers' Conference. It was something that the Premiers felt so strongly about. They asked all ministers of social services to sit down and work on a National Child Benefit and see if we could get the federal government on board.

So we have been working very diligently and who knows why the federal government came on board. It might have been because of an election, and they wanted to have a profile and something to say about the child poverty issue. But they hopped on board and I will tell you, we probably worked—I know at the officials' level they have been working very aggressively, and I do not think I have ever seen anything come together as quickly at a national level as this has come together but, again, it goes back to the Premiers and their discussions around saying that you should not be penalized for entering the workforce by receiving less money or less support for your children.

There are still a couple of little issues that I discuss on a regular basis with the federal government when I have the opportunity, and one of them—and I will share with my honourable friend—is that I think that, if we have a measurement that measures child poverty and we want to reduce the depth of child poverty, the federal government has to look at where the cutoff is for the working income supplement. Any family that is living below that low-income cutoff should get the National Child Benefit. I am not sure that we have achieved that yet, but I think that the level for support for low-income families does not yet meet the low-income cutoff for the poverty line measurement that we use.

I raise that with the federal government every time I have an opportunity to do so, and I am not sure that we

have addressed that issue yet. I think the principles behind the proposal are sound principles, are principles upon which we can build if we have a responsible federal government that will live up to the commitment of continuing to put more money into families with children through a child benefit.

Mr. Martindale: This is really a targeted program, targeted to low-income working families. I am pleased to hear that this minister has been advocating the use of low-income cutoff lines. Certainly, the only way we are going to reduce child poverty in Canada and in Manitoba is if we include all children living below the poverty line, not just some of them. But, of course, the number of children who are taken off the poverty line figures will really depend on the amount of money that is put into it.

Now the minister said that families on Income Assistance will be no worse off, but it is also correct to say that they are going to be absolutely no better off because of this program, because they will not receive any benefit. If they do, it will be clawed back. Oh, the minister wants to reply.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, I do not think I can let my honourable friend leave on the record that these families will be worse off. In fact, as far as—

An Honourable Member: I think he said, no worse off.

* (1750)

Mrs. Mitchelson: They will not be any worse off, but I want to make the argument for them being better off as a result because, in fact, we will have several millions of dollars to reinvest into programming and into support for early childhood education, early child development, parenting support, possibly pregnancy delay so that we do not have a circumstance or a situation where we have 16-year-old girls parenting a child, choosing to parent that child, and committed to a life of poverty on welfare.

I do not think you will find any government across the country that will ever tell you that our welfare rates will ever be higher than the low-income cutoffs. That is unrealistic, and I do not think you will ever see that.

I mean, I want more for the 16-year-old girls in the province of Manitoba than a life of poverty on welfare with one or two or three children. I think we have to start to address that issue in a really significant way. So, unless some of this money can be reinvested into preventing those pregnancies from occurring, ensuring our young girls get an education and an ability to succeed in life and take meaningful, high-paying jobs in our economy and our society, we are going to have more women living in poverty and more children living in poverty.

So I really struggle. This is something that is really near and dear to my heart, because I do not like to see that and I do not like to see our young women—and they are disadvantaged, to a certain degree. If we can put those resources into significant programs that are going to make a difference, delay or prevent pregnancy, ensure that if it does happen, the tools are there to parent, the desire is there to move off welfare and build self-esteem and make a better life for them and their children to ensure that they are properly nourished as young people and that their children are properly nourished, we can break the cycle of dependence and poverty.

It cannot be government that does it alone either. It has to be all of us working together to make that happen, but if those dollars can be reinvested in some way, I think you are going to find that those families are going to be better off. Although they may not have more cash in their pockets, they are going to have a hope that some day they are going to have more cash in their pockets because they are going to move up the ladder to success, hope, independence, self-esteem, and all of those things that make life so much easier and so much better for them and their children.

Mr. Martindale: I hate to concede anything to this minister and she knows, but I will concede that I forgot that the money that is clawed back from families on Income Assistance will be redirected to what are apparently this minister's priorities, programming for children, parenting, early childhood education and pregnancy delay—

An Honourable Member: Nutrition.

Mr. Martindale: Nutrition, okay. So what I said is partly true, that children in families on Income

Assistance will be no better off financially, but they may be eligible for some of these programs that the minister is talking about.

I wonder if the minister has information about thresholds, and what the current arrangements are in terms of when the money will kick in and how much money, and if there is a chart available based on family size, for example.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just happen to have a federal budget document Working Together Towards the National Child Benefit System that was tabled with the federal budget. This is probably the best document to explain that. If I can just pass it over to my honourable friend.

Mr. Martindale: I would like to thank the minister for that document. I have a news release from the government of Saskatchewan dated March 20, 1997, announcing the Saskatchewan government investing in transition to child benefit as part of social assistance redesign.

I am wondering if the Province of Manitoba is planning to do anything similar.

Mrs. Mitchelson: It is pretty difficult to try to compare apples and apples here as far as what the Saskatchewan government is doing, and what we have done. I mean I know that they are putting more money into child care in Saskatchewan, and I guess I might say it is about time when they spend about \$17 million on child care and we are up over \$40 million. They would have to go a pretty long way to catch up to us in that respect.

It seems what they have done here is they have started to deal with the issues around their family income—what is it, I forget—what is the name of their program, Family Income Plan, that really is dealing with additional support for low-income working families.

That does not seem to me like there is much that is being done on the social allowances side, so it is the low-income working family I suppose enhancing what you might call our CRISP program to some degree. I have to indicate there is nothing in this year's budget here, but I think that those are the kinds of things that

we are going to have to look at, as we move, now we know that the National Child Benefit will have its first support probably in July of 1998. We will have to work towards and possibly announce in next year's budget what some of our initiatives will be in Manitoba as a result, but there are not any changes in this year's budget in Manitoba.

Mr. Martindale: I also have a news release from the Province of Saskatchewan dated February 27, 1997, and it says: Ministers integrate payments to low-income seniors, and in Saskatchewan that would be two federal benefits, OAS and GIS, and the provincial plan called the Saskatchewan Income Plan. I am wondering if the Saskatchewan Income Plan is comparable to 55 Plus, and if so, if the Manitoba government has considered doing something similar.

My understanding is that it does not increase the benefits, but it does mean that people get one cheque instead of three, and this press release says that that is popular with the public because people do not like duplication of government programs and services.

So I am wondering if you have considered doing anything similar in Manitoba, if there is similarity of programs for seniors.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, it is my understanding that we have already integrated the application process in Manitoba, but there still are two cheques that are delivered, and we always look to what other provinces are doing and what works, and I am not opposed or supportive at this point in time.

I think we have to look through what the implications are, but if there is something good that is happening elsewhere and we can do it, I think it is always worthy of pursuing.

Mr. Martindale: Well, I am happy to hear that the minister is interested in pursuing good things that are happening in the province of Saskatchewan.

I would like to thank the minister and her staff for providing me with monthly caseload stats for Income Assistance clients. Now it is my understanding that of employable clients, about 90 percent reside in the city of Winnipeg, which means that about 10 percent of the employable category on municipal assistance would be

scattered throughout the rest of the province. I wonder if the minister could give me stats by municipality. Now, I know that that does not include every municipality, because some municipalities brag that they have no one on social assistance.

Actually, I got a very interesting request. In fact, since the member for Turtle Mountain is chairing the meeting today, I will let him know that I got a request from his home town, which is—Boissevain? No. Okay, I do not have a map of the province, so I cannot finish my sentence here. But the member for Turtle Mountain's home town, I got a phone call, a very interesting one. Somebody is helping a committee member on the regional health board to gather some information about poverty stats, and they said, well, why does the regional health board not gather the poverty stats, and they were told that they wanted this to be a grassroots process, and it would be a learning experience for individuals to do it.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Tweed): Killarney.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, Killarney. How could I forget? Such a beautiful little town. I had a very pleasant visit there last year. Actually it does make sense. I am sure the Department of Health could have gathered the statistics, but it is informative for individuals to find out about poverty in their health region.

Now I cannot provide everything that they want. I did refer the individual to Statistics Canada, but I said, well, I have an opportunity in Family Services Estimates today to ask the minister for caseload by municipality, if the minister can provide a breakdown of numbers.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, no, I cannot. I know that other cities across the province have a caseload of 645 and municipalities 1,064, but we do not have the breakdown municipality by municipality.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Tweed): The hour being six o'clock, committee rise.

HEALTH

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Peter Dyck): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to

order. This afternoon this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255 will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Health. When the committee last sat, it had been considering item 21.1. Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits on page 68 of the Estimates book.

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Just in general, we had mentioned yesterday that we would be dealing today with a number of issues, some issues left over from yesterday and broad general issues. Just for edification, basically I have discussed it with the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), what we are planning to do is we will stay for certain in this section all day and probably tomorrow as well, and we will be asking general broad policy questions and related questions between myself and the member for Inkster.

I had also promised the minister I would forward to him a list of some documents that are normally tabled, and I will be doing that forthwith. Also, one of the issues that we had left off with was of course the organizational chart as well as the issues around the blood agency, so I kind of leave it to the minister where he wants to start off at this point.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): First of all, I think I would like to table to the committee—I hope we have some extra copies. What I will do is I will table two with you. The Clerks may wish to make copies, but one for the member for Kildonan directly and one for the committee.

In tabling this today, just by way of a bit of an explanation because it does not provide all of the information that the member requested, this is in draft form. The reason why, of course, is although the upper parts of it, the minister, deputy and senior associate deputies are in place—Perhaps if we had an extra one. I know there are members of the press here. It would be easier for them to follow. My friend Alice Krueger will get a copy.

Although certain individuals are in place today in the reporting structures here, people like the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. John Guilfoyle, and I believe there are statutory requirements in reporting there, what I did not want to do in reorganizing the department was

to get into a massive process of reorganization today that for the next six months have the department all worrying about how we are going to reorganize and concentrating on that internal matter.

I wanted to be able to basically restructure the senior part of the department because we had positions, people retiring and leaving, and we needed to be able to restructure our executive in essence, and in reassigned some responsibilities we wanted those areas to basically just be moved under different associate deputies without any real disruption to their work as well because our associates are going to take some time to, over this year of transition with so many things on the go, assess their needs within their sphere.

We did not want to get into necessarily identifying everybody who is in particular charge of each area today because there may be some changes coming as we sort these things out. So we have not attached names to each director or person in charge of a program. Some of that is shifting somewhat as we sort of reassigned responsibilities, but the draft chart we have today, which is up to date, indicates the major restructuring into the three line areas of the department. As I have outlined again, there are the external operations, services that are delivered outside of government, outside of the ministry, through regional health authorities, for example, the internal operations which are, in essence, the Ministry of Health and the human resource planning and projects because I am sure, as the member would agree, human resources are a huge part of health care. We need to be spending, I think, more effort on how we deal with our people who work in the system, and we assigned that to Roberta Ellis, as well as some special projects, because of her expertise as a former deputy minister of Labour. So that gives some background again to the chart and where we are at, and it is status as we work it through over the next while.

The second area—if I may—is on blood, to give the member an update on our meeting in Montreal over this past weekend and Monday. The purpose of that meeting—we had a number of issues as provincial and territorial ministers. We have our regular scheduled meeting with the federal government for September, I believe, in New Brunswick, and what we wanted to do was to have an opportunity to develop our own

provincial, territorial positions on a variety of issues in preparation for that meeting with the national government.

Blood, of course, is one of the most pressing that is facing us today. I do not think there is a major city in the land that has not had some shortage of blood supplies over the last while. We are advised by the Canadian Hemophilia Society that we are down somewhere around 400,000 donors across the country. So we are facing a problem, a major problem. A lot of it stems, of course, from the whole issue around HIV and hepatitis C and the procedures in screening blood in the 1980s. The blood system up until that point was really left to the purview of the Red Cross as the delivery agent and the Government of Canada as the regulator. We recognize that change is very much needed.

* (1440)

We would have liked, of course, to have had the wisdom of the Krever inquiry in April as was expected, but as members know the Red Cross and another agency, I believe, have appealed some aspect of their ability to provide that information. They have appealed it. They are in the Supreme Court now and there is some delay. The fact is we have to develop a strategy as to where we want to go, and because it is important to have the strength of as many provinces together to make a system economical and safe and I think well practised and uniform as much as possible across the country, we are trying to develop, some call it a national blood agency, others an interprovincial or interregional blood agency to the best of our ability.

So what we did in Montreal was do a number of things. We have looked at all of our options, including the future involvement of the Red Cross, if any there should be, how, in fact, and what each option would mean. We have assessed those. We have looked at data with respect to how we would go about setting up an agency, obviously, if that option is being pursued and come to some common view as to where we want to go. We would expect, following the federal election, whoever should win or whoever should be appointed Minister of Health, that we will be meeting specifically on blood with them within a couple of months of that election to sort of put together what our options are.

Obviously, we would like the federal government, who has talked a great deal about their role in a national health system, to be at the table with some dollars to help us move forward to where we think we want to be and we also would like, of course, the advice of the Krever inquiry which we do not expect until September.

I would put on the record today for both my critics, if they would like to have a confidential briefing with our staff on some of the detail in those assessments, I would be very much prepared to provide that. I think that is important in the interests of democracy. One difficulty that we as provincial ministers have been privy to is a great deal of information that I think affects bargaining positions with various people, including the federal government, over the next number of months that we have not made public. I am somewhat unwilling today at this committee to get into all the detail of that in a public forum, but I would be prepared to ensure that is sufficiently shared with my two colleagues if they would like to avail themselves of that opportunity, if that is acceptable to them.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for those comments. I do have a series of questions with respect to the meetings with the blood agency, but I may delay those pending discussion with the minister in terms of the briefing session. I do have one question with respect to the fact that after last year's meeting, the ministers had arrived at some kind of an interim arrangement with respect. There was a plan in place, as I understand, agreed to by the ministers, and there were dollar figures attached to the implementation of such a plan. I wonder if the minister might outline what the status of that plan is.

Mr. Praznik: I believe the member is referring to the stated public position of the ministers to move forward on a national blood agency of some form which would look at how we would go about setting up that kind of system and what the role would be of how we would go about setting up that particular blood agency, what role, if any, the Red Cross would have in that. Also, there was a recognition, and I think this is an important point to make in meeting, and I have had the opportunity to meet with a number of the blood consumer stakeholders in the last while, those people who are regularly dependent upon the blood supply. One of their great

concerns is that whatever agency we set up has sufficient independence in its operation, I guess for lack of a better term, independence in its operation, that it could proceed to act quickly in a timely and factual scientific-based manner to ensure that testing of blood is carried out such that we reduce as much as humanly possible potential and newly discovered risks in the blood supply.

Their concern with any type of agency, obviously where government is funding, is that our universal budgeting, our ability of providing a grant, budget restraint that we live in, overseeing decisions, minutely managing that blood authority, could interfere even if it was not intended to cause problems but could cause problems and difficulty that potentially could undermine the safety of the blood supply or unnecessarily put people at risk.

We have agreed, in whatever manner we do move toward that, accepting that there has to ultimately be a financial accountability in this system, that that kind of independence of decision making be there and that comfort be given. We are exploring a variety of ways to do that. One suggestion that has come forward is that currently we pay by way of block dollars for our blood supply, so that the blood, in essence, is supplied free of charge, virtually free of charge to the system. It is not free. We have paid for it up front in a block way.

One method that has been suggested, and I know in speaking with representatives of the Hemophilia Society, when I was in Montreal they had a representative to be around or available at the conference, that by moving to—once this is established—a unit pricing system has the advantage of taking that universal budget and watchdog approach away from that decision making, thereby giving it independence.

It also, and I raise this with the member, has another interesting side effect. It then encourages the use of alternative methods of dealing with blood, bloodless surgery, recycling of blood so an individual's blood is being kept and recycled back into them, et cetera, and it provides an incentive for that in fact to happen. So these are some of those kinds of issues that have to be sorted out and debated in the next while. The information I am interested in providing confidentially

to the member has more to do with some of the economic sides and liability sides and those types of things that may be of interest to him and why we choose some options over others.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Acting Chairperson, the danger of putting a chart like this in front of me is I really want to actually go down this road, but I am going to resist the temptation because we do not have our normal 60 hours, and we really should use our time expeditiously here. So I just have some general questions on this organization chart. I may come back on some specifics, but just in general. This strikes me as a relatively significant change in structure, not necessarily negative as well, because I see some merit in the actual way that the department has been structured, and it has been no secret that publicly for some time I have been critical of the departmental—not the people of the department so much as the management of the department and overall management, so I see some merit in some of the draft provisions made.

It is interesting that, under the external programs and operations, each of the areas has now been broken down to consist of a transition team and specifically I wonder if the minister might comment as to—I mean, it is obvious that transition was chosen than a formal structure of a branch or department. I wonder if the minister might comment on that.

Mr. Praznik: I appreciate the member's comments, because in coming into the department, again, as I pointed out yesterday, the previous minister spent a lot of time with me on offering his comments and suggestions, both the things he felt were strengths in the department and issues that he felt were weaknesses, and obviously, with the change in ministers, did not have the time to complete, and he made a number of suggestions to me. One of the problems that I have seen, and I know the member will appreciate this fully, given the enormity of the issues with which we have to deal, is that the previous structure—I know the previous minister had the same difficulty—never lent itself well to having an executive group within the department who could meet regularly and, on a more regular basis, deal with major issues that touched on a variety of areas and have that kind of input and come to a decision and then be carried out in, I think, a rational way.

* (1450)

So this system gives us and it gives myself as minister an ability to meet regularly with a small body of my senior staff and to include other people whose issues are there for discussion to have a good general discussion with my staff how it affects all areas of our department in a co-ordinated way and then make a decision and have it implemented, with everybody knowing what the decision is.

In a department this big, from time to time one of the complaints that I have picked up and I know Mr. DeCock had found in his role as an associate deputy, often it was hard to keep everybody up to date on what was happening, and often people did not know necessarily when decisions were made or the reasons behind them. The member may also be interested to know that one of the other changes that I have made since I came in, again on the advice of the previous minister and of Mr. DeCock, is every four to six weeks or so we now have an extended management meeting of probably 150 people, of all of our senior staff in the department. It is a chance to update everybody on the initiatives, where things are going, why things are happening, and I am trying to overcome some of the problems of a large organization with just pure information flow and everybody being up to date. So I hope he notices over the next year or so some improvement, and I would appreciate his comment on that at that time.

With respect to the transition team, specifically to his question, the reason why those are there, the hospital and community services, is we are dealing now with regional health authorities. The idea of the transition team that Sue Hicks is responsible for is to sort out with them in, I think, a common sense, logical way, what things they will run best and what pieces should still remain in the department and are best served in the department.

Obviously things like the enforcement of standards will remain in the department. The development of those standards, et cetera, has to be a co-operative approach. The service deliverables stay within the department, and some of our staff, as I have discovered, have been working on all of those things. So how do

we sort them out and make sure that those lines are there?

I do not know if I have answered his question, but that is the approach that we are trying to use with identifying transition teams.

Mr. Chomiak: The minister did answer the question. It will make for interesting developments in terms of how the program-spending side works and co-ordinates with this, but that is for something that will be developed in the next few months.

I notice there is a category for Health Information Network SmartHealth. That appears to be a new addition, and I wonder if the minister might explain that.

Mr. Praznik: Yes, that is there because we are reaching the point with the Health Information Network where I guess some of the first elements of it are scheduled to come on line at the end of the year, certainly before the end of the fiscal year I would expect. That is why the privacy legislation is being brought forward in this session. We have housed it currently and, again, when we set up this chart, one of the things I assigned to my three associate deputies, and I am a great believer in delegating managers with the responsibility to do their job, was I charged them and my deputy to get in a room and sort out what they wanted under each category and the reasons behind it. It was placed here initially, I understand, because it is in the developmental stage and a lot of the work is how it would react between people in the system.

Once we have got past that hurdle that the users of it, in essence, are comfortable, then the day-to-day operations, I understand, will be transferred over to the internal programs and operations side to be housed in the ministry.

Mr. Chomiak: That does anticipate my next question and, in fact, I probably will desist from getting into those organizational questions that I do have because of the transitory nature of it. I want to go, though, to the issue of the—actually, I overheard the minister doing an interview on this issue, so some of the questions that I had have actually been answered. So I do not want to, again, go over territory that has been generally covered

to my satisfaction, but I have a number of questions with respect to the aboriginal health unit.

There was formerly a branch called the aboriginal health strategy and at one time, certainly in the last, under the last Supplementary Estimates, John Ross was responsible for it. I wonder if the minister might outline for me whether the new aboriginal health branch or agency or whatever the correct term is that the minister announced yesterday, exactly what the function and role of that agency will be, where it will be located, who it will report to, et cetera, all of the operational, organizational functioning of it.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I apologize to the member and to Ms. Krueger from the Free Press because I had only met one individual in that unit, a Loretta Bayer, but I understand there is a second staff person by the name of Elaine Isaac and also Mr. Ross, whom he referred to, is working with us on contracts. So, in essence, that is the unit they report to and are managed by John Gow, who heads up our rural and northern transition team. This particular unit, I guess, is—the member overheard my interview, and I am glad he did because it does save us some time. The point is to have a group to deal with a number of these aboriginal-related issues that come up, and often we get into difficulties because of jurisdiction.

My experience as Northern Affairs minister is jurisdiction can so easily be used not to do anything and not because people choose not to; it is a big problem. It is very hard to roll into an area where you do not have the jurisdiction and say, I am here to help you now, without people saying, please, this is our problem.

So my experience has been you have to recognize the appropriateness of people's jurisdictions, their right to make decisions, and then figure out how you build working relationships. So that is one of the challenges of this particular group today as the First Nations community negotiates with the federal government to take over what is currently funded through Health and Welfare Canada and how they organize themselves to handle those dollars and programming.

We want to make sure that we are able to dovetail with our regional health authorities, so that is one of the jobs that they are doing. They are housed in the

external programs today because so much of their work has to do with the regional health authorities, the delivery of programs through them, their relationship with aboriginal health organization today. So they will be there. Once that work is done, it is likely they will move perhaps within the ministry. We will see where they are particularly needed.

On that question of relationships for a moment, one of the things we have explored—and I have no problem putting it on the record today—is even some joint cross ex officio appointments between the regional health authorities and aboriginal health organizations however they organize that.

So, if they decide to organize on a tribal council basis, those tribal councils will probably have a person or two who sits ex officio on the regional health board, and the chair or vice-chair or one or two people from the regional health board are likely to sit ex officio on their board so that there is a good working relationship and people are not working in isolation, because for aboriginal people in the province, Status First Nations people, their health delivery system comes out of two different jurisdictions, and the community health side will be theirs, federal, the hospital doctor delivery system to some degree is provincial. So we have to make sure that—I do not want jurisdiction in two different boards to be not resulting in good service, and it would not be right to not recognize the jurisdictions that are there.

That is the approach we are trying to use now, and the ball, to some degree, is in the court of those First Nations organizations and rightly so because they are still sorting out how they want to organize themselves and deal with the federal government. Once they have done that, I think we will be ready to move very quickly on building relationships.

* (1500)

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate specifically where we are at with respect to the integration of the aboriginal community into the regional health boards?

Mr. Praznik: I think the original plan had recommended that at least one aboriginal person be appointed to boards where there were aboriginal

communities within the region. That has happened in a number of cases; there have been appointments. It has not been, I think, the success that was initially hoped for, and one of the reasons, very strongly, is that as a province we do not have the power or authority or jurisdiction to be able to manage that area that is currently managed by Health and Welfare Canada in federal jurisdiction for aboriginal people in First Nations communities. I guess my advantage in this is that I am a former Native Affairs minister and worked on many of these kinds of issues.

The First Nations community, which wants to have a role, and I would argue strongly has to have a governance role in health care if they are going to feel that these programs are theirs, if they are going to be able to deliver them and actually reach people in a meaningful way, and they have—the federal government has the jurisdiction and the ability to delegate it, assign it, transfer it, recognize it, whatever terms you want to use. So as those First Nations communities, in whatever forum, take control of that jurisdiction that is now federal, with the dollars that come with it and set up their organizations to run it, I envision those organizations having a good working relationship with the regional health authorities.

As I have suggested, one idea we are floating now to see if it has some merit is to have those aboriginal First Nations health authorities, or whatever they envision, to have cross-appointments so that people are sitting on each board so the boards are not working in isolation. Obviously, the CEOs have to have good working relationships, because we want to make sure that we can build a continuum of care for people. We are dealing with two different governance structures, and so it is harder to do but not impossible. I know of no other way that has been presented to me today that is going to get over that jurisdictional hurdle. We want to make sure it works rather than see it stand in the way of building relationships. So there will be some problems with it, no doubt, but we will just have to work to overcome them.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister indicate what overtures have been made toward First Nations communities either through MKO, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, or other organizations? What overtures have been made from the department to First

Nations people as opposed to the communication in the other direction? I have attended a conference sponsored by AMC that dealt with regional health, but I do not know if the reverse has taken place.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I cannot remember if it was a month or six weeks ago, it was before the flood, I had over the space of a week—we had arranged meetings with, and I do not know who initiated them in each case, but I had a meeting with MKO. I had a meeting with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in which MKO representatives like Grand Chief Muswagon were a part of that meeting. I have also had some tribal councils in to see me, Southeast Resource Development Council being one. I think Swampy Cree—I cannot recall if Swampy Cree has been in. We have talked about how do we make this work. They have let me know they are negotiating with the federal government to take over the Health Medical Services Branch dollars and programs, and they want to say: How do we make this thing work?

We have played around with that idea of them and our regional health authorities and their health authorities, councils, however they set it up, building those relationships, having cross-appointments on an ex officio basis, et cetera, and co-ordinating together. They seem to be very responsive to that. They like that idea, but one problem that was evident was they have not quite sorted out internally how they want to proceed in taking that over, whether it is going to be on a province-wide basis, whether it is going to be on a tribal council basis. I know Southeast Tribal Council has been very well developed in its health area over the years; Swampy Cree is. Others may not be. So they have to sort it out. If they choose to deliver their programming through tribal councils then those tribal councils will be matched with regional health authorities and each having their own piece of the jurisdiction. They have to kind of sort that out today.

The way we have left it is that our Ms. Bayer will be co-ordinating on our part with them. So we are exchanging information administratively, and when they are ready to sit down again with us to sort of formalize this kind of arrangement, we will. But they have to take some time to figure out how they want to organize first so that we then know on what basis we are setting up the structure.

Mr. Chomiak: So you are calling this branch or the aboriginal—what are you calling it?

Mr. Praznik: We moved so fast on some of these things in the last while that we have not got around to giving it a name yet, to be blunt, and we will sort that out when the appropriate name strikes us, but right now it is part of our policy development area in aboriginal issues, and we have not given it a name yet. I will have one for you by next year, though, I will tell you. We will know a little more about what we are going to do with them

Mr. Chomiak: I was encouraged yesterday when in the minister's opening statements he indicated the establishment of this branch. I guess we will get to see how, in fact, it will function and how it will interact. It is clearly in the initial phases. For what it is worth, it seems to me that given the significant policy issues involved and given the significant effect that this could have on programs and the ramifications in terms of—and I am going contrary to what I said earlier about giving advice on the organizational structure. In this case, it seems to me that it is at least an item and a priority that would be on-line in terms of directly, some kind of direct relationship with the minister; it would seem to me as well as because of the significance that aboriginal issues are and will have on the evolution of health care in Manitoba and the devolution of health care as it moves from Ottawa.

So yesterday I was under the impression there was a branch set up that was going to be perhaps fairly significantly involved—and the minister can correct me if I am wrong—and I now see an agency that is fledglingly starting out in a co-ordinating role and may or may not institute programs like the wellness program that is being instituted at the aboriginal centre. So, for what it is worth, those are my comments in that regard. Maybe the minister may want to comment on that.

Mr. Praznik: I appreciate the member's question. It is not our intention, just by way of definition, to set up a branch that will actually be delivering specific programming. It is a small unit obviously, and it will probably remain such, but its job is to co-ordinate, to champion particular issues and ensure that however best we meet need, we are doing so, whether that be through regional health authorities and programming,

whether it be through funding outside services like the Wellness Centre. I do not suggest the member is saying this, but I do not envision it being a large part of the department that is delivering a host of programs in the manner of actually seeing patients and visiting homes, et cetera, in that extreme of it. I see it as our champion or policy group that is flagging the problems, finding solutions, working with people to deliver solutions and making sure these issues are being met as best we can.

The delivery mechanism for a good deal of health care, particularly public health, health promotion, et cetera, is going to come at the regional level, including the aboriginal delivery mechanism. If you ask me to gaze into the future somewhat, I would think if First Nations communities are able to reach an agreement with the federal government to move dollars directly to their network, you will find many of those networks that are up and running now like some of the tribal councils, Swampy Cree and Southeast particularly, who already have health people and do a delivery of certain programming and promotion, that the mechanisms are there. We do not want to reinvent them. We just want to make sure they have the people, the resources from where they are found to be good delivery agents and do the job.

* (1510)

That is how I kind of envision this unit, and who we put into it obviously becomes important because they have to be individuals who are able within the department to continue to command attention and get things done and move things forward, because in a big department it is very easy for issues to be lost in the shuffle, and we all know that happens. I am looking for this group to really be a champion of these issues within my department as a tool, a resource, to provide the information, move things forward and continuing to meet needs. So that is the way I envision it being, as opposed to a specific delivery-of-service branch.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, what about the function of outreach and co-ordination, which may in fact be the most important role, wherein will that lie?

An Honourable Member: Can you explain a little more what you mean by that?

Mr. Chomiak: With respect to the aboriginal communities, whether intentional or not, there certainly is a gap between the aboriginal communities understanding of where health is going and perhaps the Department of Health's understanding. There seems to me to not be clear lines of communication or in fact a real working relationship. I guess that is where I am trying to—that is what I am trying to go down.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I am glad the member clarified because you know some of the priorities our group has identified are, obviously, midwifery, under our legislation and how it is going to be set up in aboriginal communities, home care, obviously, and First Nations is important, diabetes, child health, aboriginal children's health needs, aboriginal AIDS strategy, mental health, First Nations communities, all those things. I think he flags in his clarification a broader issue, and that of communication.

My experience as Native Affairs minister, and I think it is borne out here, and the member, I think, is very keenly aware of this as well, is the aboriginal community is not a single community or speaks with a single voice. There are many, many organizations out there pursuing their goals, and I do not want to, in any way, take away from those goals. One of the difficulties government always has is who do you talk to, and who can deliver. In the space of a couple of days, I had, and some of it was by accident, that I had the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, I had MKO and Swampy Cree, I think, in to see us, and then a few days later, I had Southeast Tribal Council, all First Nations organizations, all coming to see me more or less about the same issue; about how we have a relationship with the RHAs, but not one voice.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, which is the provincial-wide organization, is made up of its members, you know, has members who are at different degrees in their governance. Some of the tribal councils are very well advanced in delivering health programming now; others are not at all. So those are issues that they have to sort out. You know we have agreed that they have to come back and decide how they are going to deliver that program. It is not my decision; it is theirs, and when they do that, we have to plug them in.

The member has rightly flagged one of the difficulties because I know as well there are groups within the city of Winnipeg who will be promoting aboriginal health and we need to do this, we need to do that, et cetera. Who out there do you deal with? That is part of the difficulty. How do you arrive at a flow of information and communication when you are dealing with a variety of groups? The fact that there is a variety of organizations is no one's fault. It has evolved over time, but I think it is incumbent upon the leadership in that community in the next number of months, and if they are going to negotiate an agreement to transfer dollars for First Nations communities, to the bands, in essence, how they are going to spend them and administer and organize that system becomes very, very important. I do not think that dollars will flow until that is sorted out.

Once that is sorted out, then I know who we can deal with at a minister's level, with which leadership, and be able to reach agreements that are going to give us the principles of administration across the province. Today I cannot do that, and if the member gets, I think rightly so, the sense that there are a lot of voices that are not all saying the same thing, and the communication with the government is not good, I would agree with you wholeheartedly. I think a lot of that comes to do with the fact that there are so many players and it has not really been sorted out.

Again, I have met with Grand Chief Fontaine, with Grand Chief Muswagon, actually in the same meeting, and I have met with a number of tribal councils. We have agreed on some principles and left it with them having to sort out how they want to organize to deal with the province. We are lucky I guess; we are already organized.

I hope I have given the member a sense of where I am coming from here.

Mr. Chomiak: In the throne speech, the government made a commitment to the Aboriginal Wellness Centre. I wonder if the minister could table or outline the commitment to the programs and a general description of precisely what that is.

Mr. Praznik: I am having to refer to my notes on this particular issue. This is one that the previous minister,

I know, had worked very hard on with staff. So I am inheriting this and I am very happy to do so, but I understand that we are looking at a funding of approximately \$1 million, which we have approved for this facility, which will be housed at the Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg.

The overall goal of the Wellness Centre, in what will be a 36-month pilot project, is to improve the health status of the urban aboriginal population by providing access to resources and services that are based on a comprehensive wellness model of service, culturally based, culturally appropriate and responsive to the particular health needs of the aboriginal people who will use that particular facility.

The Wellness Centre will offer programs and services within three main areas of community development, education and outreach, and primary health care and services as well. So community development, education and outreach and primary health care services are the three areas that they were addressing. I understand they will have physicians as part of their area and be accessible.

If I may just add one comment from my days as Native Affairs minister, I am looking forward to the next batch of census data from the last census, but my recollection of the previous data was that, if you look at the aboriginal population in the city of Winnipeg by census district, there is a trend that you find that the high unemployment, the greater health needs, et cetera, tend to be related, obviously, with the core area. If you look at aboriginal people who reside in suburban census districts, I seem to recall statistics that demonstrated that they would have a higher employment level than the general population in those districts, often a higher income level and, I would suggest, probably as good as, if not higher, health status. It just comes back to make the point, as the member has done many times in the House and I think we all agree, that the issues really relate to poverty, lack of information, lack of education, lack of, often, resources to be able to have a healthy lifestyle.

* (1520)

So I have somewhat of a difficulty when we talk about urban aboriginal population. What we are really

talking about is the core area urban aboriginal population or a population that is in poverty or in transition from northern remote communities and coming into Winnipeg, that the trend is that aboriginal people who are here do receive an education and become employed, become very much a part of the regular community, the city of Winnipeg, and have, in the case of employment and education and income, above average actually in the census districts in which they live.

So it is just an interesting point that I make because we often tend to look at a whole community as aboriginal when really we are talking about a component of that, albeit the majority component today, but, certainly, it does tell us that if we are successful in allowing people to get education, have opportunities to develop and grow, that many of the other problems that we treat today become resolved. I do not think the member would disagree.

Mr. Chomiak: It is not clear, but I will ask it: Will the Wellness Centre be offering clinical services?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, the short answer is, eventually, yes, I believe that is their plan.

Mr. Chomiak: Historically, one of the difficulties with pilot projects is when the funding runs out, they tend to die on the vine, and I am wondering what the criteria are for this project that have to be met in order to have this continue as an ongoing function.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, the member's comment is an excellent one. I think all of us have seen projects that sound great. We fund them and then—the federal government has a terrible habit of doing that in so many areas of funding pilots. The money dries up and they never get refunded, and they come to others to look for dollars to continue on.

It is our intention if this can be demonstrated to be very good and efficient—and what I mean by efficient is that it is being used by the community it is intended to serve—if that is the case and it is getting the results that I think everyone predicts will happen, it will be popular, well utilized, efficient in affecting the health life of aboriginal people in the city, then our intention

would be to carry this on as a regular program of the Ministry of Health and continue funding.

With respect to coming up with the criteria by which we will judge it, I am advised that we are currently working with them to establish those criteria by which they will be judged to measure their efficiency over the next number of years. Again, just so I am not misunderstood, what I am looking at is to ensure that this facility, obviously, can operate and be well managed. That is important, but, also, and even more important, that it is able to attract and be relevant to the aboriginal community in the city of Winnipeg, that they will use it, that they will find it meets their health needs, and that we can measure, ultimately, improvements in the health status of the people who are using this particular service.

The details of that have to be put together with them so that they are comfortable, but that is our intention, and if it all works out, this would become a regular part of our funding and probably move into a relationship with one of the two regional health authorities at some point, who we would then flow the dollars through that health authority to them.

Mr. Chomiak: It probably goes without saying, but I will say it, that within 36 months is a difficult, short period of time in order to measure the success of something that is geared towards wellness, and it is a longer period of time that we clearly have to look at, and I am sure that officials and the minister are aware of that. Which line item in Health will this centre be funded under?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, today it is being funded under the Healthy Communities line, and I agree with the member, 36 months is a relatively short period. I think what 36 months will prove is that the centre can administratively run efficiently and well and that it can build up a client base. Obviously, it is going to take some time to demonstrate that they have affected the health status of that client base, and I recognize that and it is worth putting on the record.

Assuming success, we would eventually see this move into the budget line of the Winnipeg Long Term Care and Community Health Authority and for that, as well as our local, our rural and northern regional health

authorities, there will be in their budget a number of services obviously that become really a flow through of dollars. Personal care homes is one that comes to mind very quickly, and this would probably be very similar to that.

Mr. Chomiak: Just then, generally, will the presently operating community health centres in Winnipeg, therefore, come under the Continuing Care advisory board or will they come under the—

Mr. Praznik: The member is correct. They will come under the Long Term Care and Community Health board.

Mr. Chomiak: On the draft organization chart we see a new creature, the health implementation strategy committee. I wonder if the minister might outline for me what that is.

Mr. Praznik: Well, I am glad the member has asked this question. One of the difficulties—this is somewhat my temporary creation—when I assumed this portfolio on the 6th of January and my mandate was to get on with implementing seven or eight major initiatives, the Winnipeg health authorities, lab consolidation, a host of issues, physician remuneration changes, et cetera, what I—and at that time the member should appreciate that I was in a transition period with deputy ministers. My former deputy was about to retire. We were recruiting a new deputy. We had some other changes coming in senior staff with secondments of people out, and recognizing that my mandate to achieve many of these objectives, particularly with the rural and northern health authorities taking over effectively on the 1st of April of this year, I felt what I needed to do was have a committee that reported to the deputy and myself directly, that I would actually be part of on a regular basis where the issues related to implementation can be brought, sorted out and decisions made.

So what I did is, with some consultation with some of my colleagues, put together—it is rather informally a health implementation strategy committee that consists of a number of people—my senior people as needed in the department. We have Lynn Raskin-Levine from KPMG, who worked on many of the plans involved in that to make sure there is a continuity there. We have involved our Treasury Board. We have involved our

Policy Management Secretariat in the Executive Council, so that I had literally all of the people who are involved in significant decisions at the table on a weekly or biweekly basis to deal with issues as they arise.

* (1530)

Just to give the member one example of how I have used this committee is, sometime earlier in the year, I know he was critical of the original funding targets that the department had put out to regional health authorities. I think in total they were somewhere near 6 percent, 4.5 percent on budget line in the first year, an additional \$20 million or something or \$2 million out of the system—I do not remember what it was—for a fund to be moved between groups. That was far too high. When I got out in the field and talked to people, I realized it was not really going to be achievable; it was probably detrimental. We thrashed it around as a group and came to a conclusion that we would have to go to Treasury Board and change our recommendation since the Treasury Board, having staff from Treasury Board there, helped ease that decision, and we got a very quick decision to go to a 2.25 percent target for the beginning of October, I believe. So I have been using it in that role. It goes up and down depending on where we are in implementation, but it is a group. I can pull together a variety of decision makers really quickly to make some recommendations and decisions that have to be done. In any implementation process you need that.

The other comment I just make that the member may be interested in, in the internal operations of the ministry, is there were a lot of issues that I was using this committee—and by the way, I attend the meetings of the committee and also my legislative assistant, Mr. Tweed, joins me at those meetings, and effectively we chair this group when it meets. Many of the issues that went there initially often were administrative issues in the department, because we were in a transition. With my senior executive changes now, we deal with those at that basis. So the issues that come here really are those that deal with the major implementation issues, and the work is diminished somewhat over the last number of weeks. So eventually when most of those are well underway and running, this committee will just, quite frankly, disband.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister explain the presence of the Co-ordinator of French Language Services? Did that come over with the minister?

Mr. Praznik: I am just looking at the chart. I think he is referring to Edmond LaBossiere. Yes, I am still—is that the position you are referring to? [interjection] Yes, I am still the Minister responsible for French Language Services in the province, and so that budget line gets transferred to Health. My assistant, M. Godin, looks quite relieved by that fact.

Mr. Chomiak: Can I read any significance into the fact that there is an appeal-panel structure now under the Manitoba Health Board?

Mr. Praznik: Well, yes, perhaps prematurely it has significance. There are a number of appeal panels that we have created to deal with—home care is one of them, obviously, and I certainly would not want to lose those functions. We sort of lumped them in this chart temporarily over there. The Manitoba Health Board, despite its name, is in effect an appeal board on fees for personal care homes. So at some point in the next year, I would like to have a look at how we organize these things administratively so that we have some commonality in process and forms and those kind of things so we maybe can streamline and make it easier to operate.

So, currently, we have just put those appeal panels and advisory committees and things sort of over in that particular area, because they really are answerable either legislatively or where they are created administratively, I believe, the daycare—not the daycare, the Home Care Advisory committee that Paula Keirstead now chairs is one that was created by ministerial policy and, under that policy, reports and advises the minister. So we kind of lumped those things because they answer to the minister as opposed to come under another line.

Mr. Chomiak: I am actually reading into this chart here. I note that the advisory committee on Continuing Care and the Appeal Panel for Home Care is at one end of the chart, and there is a new function under Manitoba Health Board for appeal panels and, I guess, that was my—

Mr. Praznik: Oh, I am sorry.

Mr. Chomiak: Perhaps my question was not as clear as it should have been.

Mr. Praznik: You are right, and I apologize to the member that some of these have been put on the other side of the chart. I believe there is an appeal function to the Manitoba Health Board on residential charges and boundary changes for health districts. I think that is why it was just put in that way, but I do want to indicate that at some point we may look at how we handle appeals generally to get—you know, if we can make them better and give the people a comfort that there is an appeal mechanism for many of the decisions that are made in the system and they obviously have a commonality in administration to them, that might be a way of raising their significance somewhat and give people a greater comfort level that they are not left to arbitrary decisions.

Mr. Chomiak: I am wondering if it is possible for the next time or the time subsequent when we meet to have lists of who is on each of those, who is on the Manitoba Health Board, the appeal panel, the advisory committee on Continuing Care, the Minister's Advisory Committee on AIDS and the Appeal Panel for Home Care.

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Mr. Chair, I would be delighted, and I think we have some copies, too, but we would like to get copies made. If the member is fine, we can have them for tomorrow and I will table them with the committee.

Mr. Chomiak: Has the minister had occasion to have any meetings recently with the faith-based institutions, and can he update us as to how those have gone?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I have had a host of meetings and I have more planned. We have discussed this somewhat in the House from time to time. There are some issues arising out of faith facilities with regionalization. I think the issues that we face, quite frankly, when we get down to it, are going to be easily worked out, or worked out I think without too much difficulty, between facilities and regional health authorities.

Obviously, when you are changing a system or the governance of a system—and I would like to say, Mr. Chair, by way of background and by way of history, we as a society, and the member well knows this, always organize ourselves to fill a need in the best way that fills that need at the time, and we are constrained by the technology that is available to us. Our current health system is largely, up to the last number of years, organized around institutions, because for many hundreds of years that was a very efficient way in which to organize the delivery of health care. The flow of information on paper supported that. Bringing batching services together to be able to provide a complete package was certainly there. Most of our health care services have been delivered on an institutional basis as opposed to a community basis in the last 75 to 100 years. So we built our system.

Also funding mechanisms supported that, were created for that, and continued to foster that. Today the trend—changes in technology, computer systems, the ability to move information electronically including diagnostic information—has broken down the walls somewhat of institutions. The rediscovery of home care, the Grey Nuns tell me, Sister St. Yves tells me that the first health care provided by the Grey Nuns in Manitoba was really going home to home to deliver. It was really, truly a home care program. As we develop those systems, we need to better integrate both our facilities with each other and noninstitutional services with the institutions.

So regionalization is a model that I think lends itself well to that. Now, having said that, in the case of the city of Winnipeg for hospitals, we have four faith-based facilities with long traditions in this city and in our province with great contributions by their founders and their volunteers, and we certainly do not want to lose that.

The faith-based agreement that the government entered into last fall with those facilities recognizes the authority of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority in operating programs, in dealing with finance, in directing the system. It also recognizes the importance of respecting certain faith principles in the operating of those facilities, of those four facilities maintaining a role through their CEOs and other things.

What I am hoping is that within that context of the faith-based agreement, within the context of the objectives that we are trying to achieve, which is to improve the delivery of health care for Manitobans and also to keep those things we do really well now, that we are going to be able to work out in an operating way many of the issues today that some of these facilities or some in these facilities view as highly contentious. In examining them, I really do not think they are.

* (1540)

I met today with the chair and vice-chairs of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, and we will be meeting together later in the week with the faith-based organization on that agreement, and I think when they get down to actually working out their day-to-day arrangements, everyone at the end of the day, I think, will be quite happy with the result.

With respect to two other areas where faith-based institutions fit into the plan, one is personal care homes, obviously, and there is a concern by some—I know in the member's own community, Holy Family, that board—I know it is south of his constituency but still part of our common Ukrainian community—has some concerns about regionalization. I say very clearly on the record today that personal care homes have virtually 100 percent occupancy. They deliver a very direct type of programming. Often because people live there in their latter years, the cultural, linguistic, religious milieu of a facility is very important to those people.

It was never envisioned by our plan that those facilities would have to be governed by or changed or evolved into regional health authorities. For those that wish to remain in their own governance model, I think the only difference they will find is that their relationship, rather than being with the Ministry of Health directly, will be with a long-term care authority and that the cheques they receive will not be Province of Manitoba but will be the Winnipeg Long Term Care Authority. They should see virtually no change.

There will, of course, be the ability to do better purchasing and have some savings by working in a larger group, and I do not think that is a faith issue or

affects any of their principles. It may be from time to time that the authority may want to have them deliver some additional programming—it might be an adult daycare program, et cetera, out of their facility—which would have to be negotiated and worked out and funded for them to do that. So I say that clearly on the record, and I have said that to them personally.

The third area is faith-based facilities in rural Manitoba, and many of them have issues around culture and language. I think of Ste. Anne, for example, the hospital. I am pleased to tell the member today that we have worked out with the regional health authorities and many of those organizations a variety of provisions that are working their way into their operating agreements that will continue to respect faith, culture, language in facilities that are evolving into the regional health authorities, so that those are not lost in those facilities, and as the member knows, in many communities that is a very important aspect.

In the legislation that I am about to introduce to the House with respect to amendments to the regional authorities act, we will be putting in some provision to ensure that regulations can be made to protect the French language services that are required in a variety of our facilities in the province pursuant to the Gauthier report, and that was an oversight in the last bill that we will want to correct now. I have had meetings with the Société franco-manitobaine, and they have helped in producing those regulations. The concern was, of course, that smaller facilities with local boards would protect and enhance the Gauthier report, whereas regional boards may not take that into effect. They wanted some protection for that, and we have been prepared to do that. So that is sort of the overview. I know the member may have more specific questions.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that informative response. The minister, I believe, chose deliberately to distinguish the relationship between faith-based institutions in the acute care sector and faith-based institutions in the personal care home sector. Am I correct in that observation?

Mr. Praznik: Yes, absolutely.

(Mr. Ben Sveinson, Chairperson, in the Chair)

Mr. Chomiak: How does the minister see the functioning of nonfaith and private personal care homes interacting with the regional health authorities?

Mr. Praznik: We may want to explore a little later the hospital personal care home issues. But with respect to the personal care home issues the question that he asks is many of the facilities, whether they be proprietary, nonproprietary, who wish to maintain their own governance, will have to—they will contract or they will work with the regional health authority who will be delivering the funding, in essence, and working with them.

In rural Manitoba our experience has been many of the personal care homes are neither faith based nor proprietary, that they are often municipal, that they are sponsored by their local municipalities. The vast majority of those have evolved into the regional health authorities today and so are literally governed by that regional health authority. In Winnipeg some may choose to do that. Most, I would suspect, will remain to be governed under their current basis, and their operating relationship, funding relationship will be with the regional health authority.

Now, one caveat I would like to put on that, because the member is raising the issue after the Holiday Haven incident, a new minister coming and examining this area. I recognize very fully that it is important that there be consistency in how we treat facilities, et cetera, and, obviously, issues like what we pay for service. Since we will be flowing dollars through the Winnipeg authority, we will want to make sure that there is a consistency and a transparent approach, and we obviously are going to have a very large role. If there are any changes in funding formulas for personal care services, that will be done, the ministry will have a large role to say, and I look at Mr. Potter who knows this issue well to date. So I hope that gives him a sense of where we are coming from.

Mr. Chomiak: With respect to the role and functioning interrelationship between personal care homes, acute care centres and the respective authorities, is it correct that the relationship will be one of a contractual nature? In other words, an acute care sector or a personal care home—the minister can correct me or clarify if I am wrong—will be offered a contract between

themselves and the regional health authority to provide a certain amount of service, a certain kind of service over a period of time. Is that a correct interpretation of how the relationship will work?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, with respect to personal care home facilities, it will be a contractual relationship, whether it is one that is a contract for a set amount of deliverables or whether it is for service provided, is something that obviously may evolve or change over time as we look at how we fund personal care homes and how we purchase long-term care beds. It is somewhat different for hospital facilities, and we may want to get into that discussion just by the nature of their facilities.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, I thank the minister. Perhaps, we can pursue that for a moment. If looking at the specific issues of faith-based institutions, if an acute care hospital: (a) wishes to offer a wide range of programs and the regional health authority designates that there is an excess or there is no need for those wide range of programs, presumably will it be that that faith-based institution will only be paid for the programs that are acceptable to the regional health authority; and for those programs that are unacceptable or not deemed appropriate, they will be on their own, they are on their own hook, in order to provide those programs?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I think by the nature of a regional structure, and this is perhaps why there has been a lot of discussion with the four facilities under the faith-based agreement with the interfaith group. It is going to be a very mixed system. I want it to be practical, I want it to make common sense, and I want it to be able to deliver what is best most efficiently for the citizens of Winnipeg and Manitoba, and I am sure the member wants the same.

Why I say it is going to be mixed is because even under the faith-based agreement, the decision as to program delivery is with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. It is our interpretation, view and plan that the Winnipeg Hospital Authority may, in many cases, be the deliverer of that program, although the program may be housed in a variety of sites in those facilities.

I will even compound—and I am sure the member will appreciate this organizationally—the issue somewhat

because the indication we have from the Health Sciences Centre is it is their intention to evolve into the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. So I would suspect some of our facilities will not even have boards after this process and do not want to have boards, while others, like the faith based, will still have a board of governance and a role to play in governing their facility. So it is going to be very much a mixed system.

But the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, where it views itself as being the deliverer or best able to deliver a program, obviously, things like heart surgery already are one program on two sites. Obstetrics is one that comes to mind. Emergency service is another that has to be considered. Where they will be delivering one program in one or multiple sites, they have that role. They will not likely be contracting; they may be in essence paying for space in a facility or funding space for that program. Those are details that they have to work at what works out administratively best to be able to do it.

* (1550)

Some programming may be directly contracted with current boards or faith-based facilities to deliver, if that is a very good mechanism with which to do it. Obviously though the budget for the system will be housed by or transferred from us to the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. Even under the faith-based agreement, there is a recognition that financial decisions is that purview of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. So if a faith-based facility wanted to offer certain programming, they would have to ensure that the delivery mechanism was agreed with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority and the funding was in place with them in order to do that. If it was not, then that would be a decision on which they were on their own and would have to find another source of dollars. In very practical terms now, those facilities really cannot deliver programming unless they have approval of the Ministry of Health, who funds, so it is not a huge change in that matter.

Just to put some perspective on this, as we look at where roles are to be, I know in some of the discussions that I have had with some of the faith-based facilities and people who have been involved with faith-based facilities, I think it is really important to identify which

needs those faith facilities, or faith communities, wish to address where there is a need that they are best to fill it or is unfilled today, and I would be most encouraging. I know in the area of palliative care, for example, there is a very large role for faith organizations to play, particularly religious orders in palliative care. That is an area that we have to address.

There are other areas that come to mind. I know we have issues in the chaplaincy program that the member has flagged. As we have shorter stays in hospital, how do you ensure that the spiritual needs of someone who is facing maybe a terminal illness or a long period of recovery, even if it is at home with home care, are plugged in to get that other kind of support? So there are a lot of these issues that have to be worked out operationally. One of the difficulties I have had in sorting some of this out, as a new minister, is that often we want to argue or debate a particular principle, and whether you take one side of the principle or another or accept or reject it, when you get down to operational decisions, often that will settle an issue in a very practical and simple way.

So I do not want to get into my preference. It is not to get into debating every principle as to how this works. I am not trying to say that to the member for Kildonan. I am saying that in terms of some of the relationships we have had with some individuals in the faith community, but take the faith-based agreement as we have it, take what our intentions are of trying to improve a delivery system and get those faith-based facilities through whatever mechanism with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority—board to board, chair to chair, CEO to CEO—whatever they decide collectively, and start figuring out how we are going to make this thing work. It is going to be a mixed system. I think that method will give us the best of all worlds, and that is what I am trying to achieve.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. Is the minister saying or suggesting that the present board of the Health Sciences Centre is going to evolve into the board of the Winnipeg Health Authority?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I do not want to speak for that board. They have to make a decision. There has been some discussion or some indication from that board that that is an option they are very seriously

considering. It is one that they have to obviously come to, and I do not want to prejudge what decision they will make. But, if that is a decision that they make, one can obviously see how that compounds many of these issues, because the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, then, in essence would be truly operating our largest facility directly rather than through another corporate entity.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): One of the things that I have always respected is the co-operation that I get from the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) in terms of facilitating questions that we have as a party to this particular Ministry of Health.

Having said that, I have done what I can in terms of listening in on some of the comments that the minister registers in the committee, and one of the things that he provided or offered was that there are some discussions that are held in confidence, and he had indicated that he would in fact be prepared to bring us in. I do appreciate that, and it is not necessary to say no if the circumstances arise in which it would be deemed necessary for me to do that. I just might take the minister up on those types of suggestions.

Having said that, I take a great deal of pride in being charged with the responsibility on behalf of our party to look at the whole issue of health care and the direction that it has been going over the last number of years and its future direction in the province of Manitoba. There always has been a great deal of concern for my part in terms of how we manage the change that is necessary. We acknowledge right up front that we do have to acknowledge that there is a need for change. I would argue it is a question of how we manage that change. There have been areas in the past with the former minister where there has been some disappointment. At the same time, we were pleased with the minister.

More than any other issue, personally I thought that it took a lot of political courage for him to change the recommendation with respect to Seven Oaks Hospital, as an example. I think that is the type of courage at times that it takes for the politicians to ensure that the right thing is, in fact, done.

I guess that is where I want to start off with some of the questions that I have with this minister. I go back to a very personal, good friend of mine Gulzar Cheema,

and the minister knows Mr. Cheema well, who has moved on to B.C. for whatever reasons, but he and I had many discussions on how wonderful it would be—[interjection] Nothing to do with the weather, I am sure—how wonderful it would be if a provincial election came by, and there was nothing but positive things to say about health care. I still believe to this day it would be wonderful. Is it realistic? I am not convinced that it is. I think that there is so much that is happening within the Department of Health that it is always going to be an issue during elections.

The question then becomes, is it possible to minimize the types of controversial issues that could arise if, in fact, the government was not doing a good job at managing that change which is necessary. I think that we see, whether it is in by-elections, provincial elections, that the government has not been as successful as it could have been in managing those changes.

I want to go to some of the core areas and go back to the Action Plan. Gulzar, at the time, had indicated on behalf of our party that we supported the Action Plan. Why did we support the Action Plan? The simple answer is because we really do believe that the best way in which you can enhance the quality of health care and at the same time reshuffle some of those valuable dollars is by bringing it closer to the community.

I can recall campaigning on that back in 1986 when I first looked to seeking office, Mr. Chairperson. That is, in essence, the core of any sort of health care reform, and in order for us to be successful, we have to be able to address that issue head on.

* (1600)

In the past, I have talked a lot about community health clinics, for example, as one of those things which we need to expand upon. I had the opportunity to visit the province of Quebec, and I was fairly impressed with just what the CLSCs, as they refer to them in Quebec, are doing, everything from home care delivery to very limited tertiary care, Mr. Chairperson, and the staff who are brought into the community health clinics is most impressive in terms of their backgrounds. I think that in Manitoba we should be

moving more toward enhancing those services at our community health clinics.

I have one, Nor'West, which is located in my area, and I have seen it over the years and ultimately believe that there is a lot more that it could be doing if, in fact, we had a department or an infrastructure that was playing more of a supportive, enhancement type of role for these particular facilities, and maybe we will see more of that in time.

The other issue, our hospitals, and I think that is what touches the hearts of so many Manitobans, is the whole hospital debate and what is happening within these hospitals. I think it is because they are so high profile. You see the big H, and so many of us drive by them; we have family, friends, who use them on an ongoing basis. We have to get away from the idea that the hospitals are the be all and end all to our health care services, that there is a lot more to it.

But the hospitals are, in fact, important. The community hospitals are very important, and I do not like what we have been seeing over the last couple of years with respect to the government relying less and less on some of our community hospitals. In fact, we should be seeing a more expanded role in certain areas of our community hospitals.

You know, it has always been interesting with some of the CEOs that I have had a chance to talk to. They will say one thing on the record and it is another thing off the record, and I will not say which CEOs I have talked to. But what I find interesting is that off the record the talk is very positive towards community hospitals. On the record, what I detect is a lot of turf protection, and I think that is in essence the biggest challenge. That is what I want to talk about, the challenge that the politicians have is to try to get over that turf protection and try as much as possible to do the right thing.

The minister, I am sure, and I, could go back and forth on the right thing. How many teaching hospitals does the province of Manitoba need, for example? How many acute care beds should be in our hospitals? There are many very controversial issues that do need to be addressed, and some of them have to be political. Some of these are up to the politicians to make the

decisions. That is why when the government came up with the regional boards, as a political party, we opposed them, primarily because we felt that the government was going to be using these regional boards in order to make the decisions and allow them to pick up all of the flack.

Well, I would argue, Mr. Chairperson, that these regional boards are an extension of the government and do need to be given some sort of guidelines. A clear example of that is with what is happening over at the Grace Hospital. At the Grace Hospital we have the recommendation, even though it is brought from the community board, but for many different reasons, that the obstetrics leave that particular facility. I would think that the obstetrics should be playing a role in that particular facility.

I would even go further and argue that the Seven Oaks Hospital, and one might even want to consider the Concordia Hospital, depending on their acute care beds and other programming being provided, should be delivering an obstetrics program. What is that based on? Look at The Action Plan itself.

How many births are given at the Health Sciences Centre that could in fact be delivered at other facilities, in particular the Grace and the Seven Oaks hospitals? Now, the minister could come back and say, well, look, by doing it in this one concentrated area, we are going to save this amount of money. Well, for all intents and purposes, the obstetrics unit, for example, at the Grace Hospital adds a lot more than just the delivering of babies for that particular facility. It is a part of an infrastructure. It is a part of what I believe the public wants to see, and that is births being made available within the communities, and for what cost? Well, even though on the surface one might be able to argue that the cost would be less by having more babies being delivered at the Grace and Seven Oaks than Health Sciences Centre, which is the most costly hospital in terms of average stay or overnight stays, if one digs a little bit deeper you might not necessarily be able to validate that particular argument. So there might be an additional cost, potentially, that could be talked about from within the ministry. We do not know that. It has never been talked about. I do not know if the government has actually looked at some of those hard numbers. I would be interested in finding out, failing

the government being able to demonstrate the cost, because there is a valid argument to be said that the costs are actually less by having it in the community hospitals.

Well, if, in fact, that is the case, then it makes absolutely no sense whatsoever for the concentration of obstetrics, Mr. Chairperson. If that is not a valid argument, well, then let us talk about the politics of providing a valuable service in our community facilities and how that service complements that particular facility in many other ways, whether it is food services, indirectly, to the more very direct in terms of a community service of obstetrics. So that, in itself, could justify remaining in the Grace.

So why do I bring it up? Because these are the types of guidelines that I believe that the province has the responsibility, not the regional board. The province, the Ministry of Health and the minister responsible, should ultimately be deciding whether or not obstetrics is warranted or not at the Grace Hospital, whether or not it does make some sense to have it at the Seven Oaks Hospital.

I would acknowledge if the Minister of Health said, well, you know, the member for Inkster has some valid points, and, yes, we are going to look at the Seven Oaks Hospital, there would be phenomenal resistance to it, resistance from within possibly the teaching hospitals to other groups that might be out there. You might even get some resistance from the local Seven Oaks Hospital, but it is a question of whether or not it is the right thing to be doing.

When I look at the Action Plan, Mr. Chairperson, I think that it clearly demonstrates that, yes, there is merit to having these sorts of services. The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation, and I brought this up I believe in last year's Estimates, had an interesting report on tonsillectomies done between '89 and '93. What was clear in that particular report is that there was a growing reliance on this particular operation being done in our teaching facilities as opposed to community facilities. Yet many doctors would argue that this is the type of service that could be done in our community facilities.

Well, here we have something that is moving in the other direction. Now, again, it might be because of the

Children's Hospital, over at the teaching facility. There could be other arguments as to why it is being done, but the other side, I believe, is not being listened to.

* (1610)

The reason why I believe it is not being listened to is because of the biases from within the system, in part, not entirely but in part. That is the reason why, again, I argue that the minister, more so than any other person, has to be very sensitive to those particular arguments.

You know, again, I would go to another report that came out from the Manitoba Centre for Evaluation, very interesting comment. This would have been hospital case mix costing project '91-92 in which it states in part of the conclusion on page 74 that less expected perhaps was the finding that teaching hospitals also treat a considerable portion of low acuity, low resource intensive cases suggesting they function, not only as a tertiary care institution, but also as large community hospitals, particularly for pediatric and obstetrics admissions.

I did not raise this in Question Period, and it would have been a wonderful thing to support, for example, what was happening at the Grace. This comes from the policy guru, if you like, of the Province of Manitoba. It gives phenomenal credibility, to a certain degree, to those who would advocate that we are not doing what we can to sustain those community facilities.

That is the type of thing which I believe that the Minister of Health has to take into consideration. That, I guess, I would leave open as somewhat of an open-ended question to the Minister of Health, that being—and my questions will be shorter from this particular point, but to emphasize that we think the government, in particular the Minister of Health, has to look more at the role of community hospitals and provide clearer guidelines, a better definition of their future in the province of Manitoba.

Maybe just to conclude it on a very positive note, we applaud the government on its actions with respect to the Boundary Trails hospital, something long overdue. It is more than money that keeps doctors in rural Manitoba. Here is a facility, once it is complete, which will be able to attract and retain doctors in a better

fashion, and we are going to see two other facilities, from what I understand, converted into some other possible usage, but we are going to have a first-class facility in rural Manitoba.

That is on a positive note. Now I will let the minister respond to the other part that might have been a little bit more negative.

Mr. Praznik: The member for Inkster has made a very long statement with a host of things, and I appreciate that, in fairness to him, he did not avail himself of an opening statement at the beginning of the Estimates process, and it is his opportunity to, I think, put things in context. It is very important to have these kinds of discussions, so I in no way am critical of the length of his statement. I appreciate where he is coming from.

One of the observations I have made in the few months that I have been a Minister of Health is that there is no shortage of advice for ministers of Health, and it comes not only from colleagues in the Legislature and from critics—and I am sure our colleague Mr. Chomiak who has been a critic for many years probably sometimes feels the same way as I do as he gets bombarded with much advice as a critic as to where he should be taking on government. Sometimes, I am sure, some of it is contradictory from the organizations which ask him to advance causes, as they are with ministers.

Often the advice I get is very, very technical, often contradictory to the same kind of advice I am getting or advice being offered on the same subject. I do not, for one moment, profess to be an expert in medicine or many of the technical aspects of medical care. So sorting out how one makes things work is often a very difficult task, and we will never have a shortage of critics in the delivery system because you cannot receive so much contradictory advice and in a decision satisfy everybody.

It is a reality that I have come to accept. At the end of the day, I hope when we do make decisions that they are based on some common sense and that the consuming public out there for whom we are all doing this work, the people who require health care, are generally satisfied with the service that they receive,

and it is delivered in an efficient, cost-effective, health-effective, well-practised manner.

With respect to regionalization and the decisions that one makes, this is often the great dilemma of how we organize the system. If you asked me today what was the major issue facing health care or the major area of change or controversy, I would easily concede that it is how we organize the system. That may seem to some not to be an important issue because it does not, in their view, affect delivery directly, but I would argue that how we organize the system will have a huge effect on the outcomes, the way we deliver the system.

The way we operate today, because we do not do these things in a void, from my observation of working with it, is—and the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) works with me very closely as my legislative assistant and we have often shaken our heads at how the system works today—it is probably one of the last ways in which you would ever organize a health delivery system in the last years of the 20th Century. It is one really caught between two different waves of technology, two different eras. Today we have multiple facilities and multiple services with, in essence, one publicly funded system, publicly funded, and with funding—and I cannot emphasize this point enough—comes ultimately so much of the direction as to how a system will operate. Although there are many who argue that governments should just be the funder and others should be the deliverers of the system, that we should say we need so many babies born, we will pay so much, you go out and manage it, ultimately that kind of system does not necessarily always lead to efficient delivery—[interjection] My colleague from Whitemouth is lobbying me for a facility in his constituency as we speak. But it does not lead often to the efficiencies that you need.

If you look at the Canadian health care system, and this is one area I think we all agree on, compared to most of the western world, we have one of, if not, the best delivery system for health care. No matter what standards you look at, health outcomes, we are pretty high, maybe not the highest, but in health outcomes we are pretty high, certainly better than the United States, and in cost-efficiency of running the system, way better than the United States, and moving up the ladder in the world. When we started these exercises of reform a

few years ago, we were probably the second most expensive system—we are now probably eighth or ninth on that list—so we have improved in the cost-effectiveness of our system. We have one of the best health outcomes. We have virtually universal coverage for so many things, and we have areas of service that we provide that even other industrial countries do not. We are not perfect. There are people who do things better than us, but overall, Canada—and I would argue Manitoba within that context—is pretty high up on that ladder. That does not mean you rest on your laurels with that reality. A good reason why we are that way is because we have had a one payer, centrally planned and directed system, by and large, that we are able to deliver services efficiently, particularly high-cost technological services.

You know, I had occasion when I worked for Jake Epp, who was then minister of national health, and certainly as Workers Compensation minister, because we had a health care component there—I had an opportunity to compare our system with the American system, for example, and one of the great benefits of our system is the ability to utilize resources. Because they have multiple-payer, multiple-delivery mechanisms, they have way more capacity in high tech and facilities than we do, much of which is underutilized, all having to be paid for and maintained. One of the great savings in our system is that by having a one-payer system, public system, we are able—they call it rationing; I do not at all, I term it good utilization—to make determinations that we need a certain amount of resources for our community and direct how we fund it and put it into place.

MRI is a good example. I think there are two or three—I do not know how many MRIs in North Dakota—I heard six at one time—Magnetic Resonance Imaging—six in North Dakota with half our population. We have one today, soon to have two. Properly utilized, they should manage our entire capacity. Now, we may get into some debate—are they properly utilized today, because there are some waiting lists and those things? I imagine a very strong case could be made that we have improvements to do there, and I would concede that. I know there were some issues around that when I was Workers Comp minister, but certainly with two now in the province, we should be able to

manage that technology, state-of-the-art technology very efficiently.

* (1620)

What worries me—and Gordon Webster, our new CEO at the WHA, we got talking about this, and his great fear is that the next wave of new technology coming into the system is going to be so very expensive that our ability to be able to pay for it and provide it is going to be difficult unless we properly manage it and get maximum use out of it.

The American system is going to lend itself to a lot more inefficiencies and much higher costs, and that is why they are spending now \$3,000 or whatever it is per capita for health care, and we are at \$1,800 or \$1,900. They just keep going up, and then their health is not any better. They may not have waiting lines like we do, but they also have 30 million Americans who have very limited health care or charitable health care. So we are doing pretty good, because we have that central system, and I do not think we would be well advised, and though we may debate parts of it like privatization of some pieces of home care or certain supplies, we will have those debates, and they are there.

Generally speaking, if we were to privatize our health care system holus-bolus, our delivery system, I think we would give away one of the best advantages Canada has in a globalized world, and that is our ability to deliver efficiently one of the major needs of our citizens, which is health care. The cost of health care ultimately ends up in the cost of doing business, in the cost of competitiveness of a nation. The United States today has a huge competitive problem because of a health care system that is out of control, not operating efficiently and making poor use of very expensive resources. So, for Canada in a globalized world, I would argue very strongly that our central system, one-payer public system, which is by and large the principles of the Canada Health Act—there are a few problems with that in flows and other things—but by and large is a huge advantage to Canada as a nation, and certainly a huge advantage to our population in giving them a decent health care delivery.

There will always be problems, and we have to keep working at them, but in that overall objective. So you

come back to why, and again it is because of the way we structure our system, and in that context of regional health authorities, that is the next step to which we go to again get better efficiency, particularly in anticipation of many of the new high-cost technologies that we inevitably will have to purchase for our citizens to make them operate efficiently.

I will give you one example today that is on my desk. I had a group of physicians from the Concordia Hospital led by Dr. Krahn, who I believe is their head of surgery, coming to make a pitch to me as minister for an additional ultrasound for that facility. Under our current way of governance, although we are centrally planned, we have 180 boards of directors for facilities across the province. When I come in as a new minister I have got 180 facility boards that I potentially could be meeting with. They work today under MHO, Manitoba Health Organizations, for many of their issues, but still when they have a specific problem for their facility and they have dealt with the department and not got the answer they wanted, their ultimate appeal is to come to see the minister. So here I am, a new minister, and you are experienced, sitting down, saying, Mr. Minister, please fund another ultrasound for our facility because we have a nine-month or 15-month or seven-month waiting list.

Well, I sit there and my first question when I get into it is what is the waiting list across the city? Well, they vary hugely. In fact, there is a very short waiting list, I am told, at Selkirk, all kinds of new requests, which is out of the city. So when you start exploring, and I ask some more questions, I am told the story by Dr. Krahn or by one of the doctors that they have a patient who lives in St. James, sees them at their office downtown—they practise at Concordia Hospital—needs an ultrasound, not urgently but needs one, calls the Grace Hospital where we have two ultrasounds, I guess, and are told that the waiting list is much less there, but the doctor does not practise at the Grace Hospital and so you cannot use our ultrasound.

Well, something is wrong with this picture. The issue is not the ultrasound at Concordia Hospital. It may be. We may need to have two there. But, when you start asking the questions, you realize you cannot answer an even more fundamental question: How are we using all the ultrasounds in and around the city of Winnipeg?

Are they at their maximum today? I do not know because I am dealing with a whole bunch of different corporate structures delivering the service and looking after their own turf, as they should within that structure.

So the regionalization, just with respect to my example of ultrasounds, where the Winnipeg Hospital Authority will now be sorting this out, can determine, or develop a system by which all of those diagnostic tools—by the way, every facility needs at least one ultrasound for emergency so I am not saying you would not have one. But ultimately, are we co-ordinating so that any physician in the city of Winnipeg, in and around Winnipeg, can dial in on their computer to one central place and find out what is available for ultrasounds, and make a booking for their patient, for whatever day works, so they can get an ultrasound, whether it is in Victoria or Seven Oaks or Selkirk or wherever, and that the results will be available to that doctor through our information network on computers inevitably, and we know that we have an acceptable period for waiting for ultrasounds for nonemergent purposes across the whole system?

The only way to ultimately do that, because the hospitals under their current system have not been able to do that easily or well, and even some of the administrators who are not as accepting of regionalization have said to me that, yes, they have made progress but nowhere near as far as they should in co-ordinating these services. By the way, in fairness to those hospitals, I understand the Ministry of Health kind of imposes those guidelines, I am told, or something on who gets ultrasounds in what facilities. So it even gets more complicated.

My point is this organizational tool will give us the ability to be able to ensure that, whatever services, we are maximizing the use of our resources as much as possible within the system. Now does that mean the minister escapes the responsibility? Absolutely not. If the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, after coming in and being able to deliver this, is not maximizing the use of its resources, then I have an administrative problem with that health authority, but if they are maximizing the use of the ultrasounds and we ultimately need another, and that has to be purchased out of public funds, then that is my responsibility and I will accept

that. Today, I cannot justify to a Treasury Board whether I need an extra ultrasound, or not, easily because of the diverse nature of how the system operates.

So the long and the short of it with my visit from the Concordia doctors was that there is a need to improve the system. Whether we need an ultrasound, or not, we have to sort out, but the current model of organizing the system was not really an efficient one. They pointed out to me a host of other examples from having to do with the installation of pacemakers at St. Boniface, rather than Concordia, when they practise at both hospitals, because the item comes out of the stores budget at St. Boniface, rather than being included in the budget for Concordia. It gets even more complex.

Those are delivery items that do not affect principles of faith. They do not affect the principles that we want to maintain with faith-based agreements, but they do improve, if we are able to achieve that kind of efficiency, a better use of our system. It may not seem so important today, but I will tell you, it will next year or the year after when we are faced with the next big rounds of technology that are extremely expensive, and we have to make sure we use to their maximum.

* (1630)

Just one other example I give you, because it may come up later in the Estimates, and that is the area of bone marrow density testing. I know we have discussed this in the House, and the format of Question Period does not lend itself well to the kind of detail of question or answer that a matter like this deserves, and I appreciate that for both of us as critic and minister, but we know we have a waiting list. We spoke to St. Boniface about it. They have the one position now, and I think the initial proposal we had was for \$500,000 and four new machines, et cetera. Wow, this is huge. Well, we started to ask some questions, and what comes out is we have one machine with a 0.2 staff year attached to it. It is a technician we are talking about. So we ask: What happens if we can give you a full staff year for a technician? Well, all of a sudden, they can do 15 procedures a day. We do a quick calculation on how long it takes to do a procedure and we think they should be able to do 32 a day or 30 a day.

So for \$30,000 to \$50,000, we can probably bring that bone density down in months, but remember when we went out there and said how do you solve the problem. We had a proposal for half-a-million dollars. If I had just accepted that right away and did not do the questioning, I would not have had the money I am going to need to improve some of the other waiting lists.

I do not want to cast any doubt on why people put in that proposal. The answer was so simple, and then the system now, should ministers who run \$1.8-billion budgets be having to ask those questions and make those decisions? Yes, if no one else is doing them. I am hoping, by establishing things like the Winnipeg Hospital Authority where instead of negotiating with seven or nine boards and everybody is looking for what do I get in my facility within that system, that we will have people who will ask those questions and find those economies and make things work without every one landing on my desk. But, yes, I am ultimately responsible and will continue to be, and if the Winnipeg Hospital Authority does not have the resources to do the job, we are responsible in government. If they administratively cannot do the job then I have an obligation to replace them because I am responsible.

We are not doing this regionalization to pass off bad decisions to others. Yes, politically that sounds great and sounds easier to do, but ultimately the buck stops here and it will always stop here. In terms of getting the tools to do the job, the more I have gotten into this, the more I am a very strong believer that regionalization gives us a chance to deliver a better system. And rurally, now that we are into it, I think somewhere near 90 or 95 percent of the facilities in rural Manitoba have either evolved in the process of doing their agreements or have indicated a date by which they will evolve within the next year to their local health authorities.

Already in meeting with the chairs and the CEOs as they start looking, how do we better deliver services, some of their proposals that are coming up just make such eminently good sense, could never have happened without a larger organizational base with which to do it. I just give you one example we are facing now is in emergency docs. You know, we have a problem. We have 34, or so, small facilities in rural Manitoba, some of whom, including Beausejour in my own

constituency, are on strike today and will not provide emergency services.

We have committed to a 90-day process to find a solution. We think we have the makings of a very common-sense solution without a huge price tag that solves the problem of most of the doctors. We are working with the MMA now to see if we can put that together in the next few weeks. One issue doctors raise, in rural Manitoba with lots of small facilities, there is not enough doctors needed in the communities or available to provide 24-hour, seven-day-a-week coverage in every current hospital in the province of Manitoba.

The chair's committee, the chair, for example, the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson), in the Whitemouth Hospital, they have one doctor in Whitemouth.

An Honourable Member: Let us go to Ste. Anne.

Mr. Praznik: Well, you have eight in Ste. Anne, I think. But if you go to Whitemouth, they have one doctor and yet I recall reading a letter to the editor in one of the local papers where a citizen said we recruited that doctor. How dare they do emergency service in Beausejour. They should be doing it in Whitemouth. Well, you are going to kill that person if you expect them to be on call seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

The regional health authority gives the facilities within a region an opportunity to be able to put together a plan that will give them the right number of emergency centres to meet the standards that are there of how far to be away from an emergency centre, that can give seven-day-a-week, 24-hour emergency care to a region of the province in a sustainable fashion because they are utilizing a larger physician base than attempting to keep 24-hour emergency in absolutely every facility where you have one and two doctors. You are not going to be able to do that.

Although I recognize the argument about passing off decisions, ultimately the decisions—and my party will be judged in the next general election on how we handle many of these matters, and I am sure there will be criticism, but ultimately regionalization is an

organizational tool that I think time is proving today, in this context, is the appropriate tool to be able to deliver better service and make changes in the system.

I work very closely with those boards, and ultimately I will hold some responsibility for their decisions, but if we do not do it, the alternative quite frankly is continued frustration over and over and ad hocking decisions and funding projects here and pieces of equipment there without a rational approach of whether we need it. What is really coming down the line is higher costs, particularly diagnostic equipment, that this province will not be able to afford unless we can purchase it to operate on a province-wide basis. So in the long run, I do not think we have a choice. I appreciate the discussion with the member.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I want to pick up on one of the examples the Minister of Health said, and that is ultrasounds. Now in his comments he said, you know that in Manitoba maybe what we do need to do is have a better organized approach at dealing with individuals that are on waiting lists because in some facilities the waiting period is nowhere near as long.

But then at the tail end of his comments with respect to that, he says, but of course we would have one ultrasound in the different facilities.

Mr. Praznik: For emergency.

Mr. Lamoureux: For emergency uses.

Mr. Praznik: Where appropriate.

Mr. Lamoureux: Now the point that I want to pick up on is that by making a statement of that nature what we are talking about is saying that, look, a facility has a certain expectation by this government. So if we carry that on, one could ask does the government have an expectation, for example, that an obstetrics program should be delivered in community facilities? If the regional health authority decided, once it has its powers, to take the ultrasound out of a couple of the community facilities, the minister, given his comments, would say, no, no, you cannot do that. We want you to put them back in.

Well, does the minister, or the ministry, have guidelines as to what it believes are those core services that some of these facilities should be providing?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, just to get back to the ultrasound, the reason I made my comment about the expectations is the ultrasound is a diagnostic piece of equipment. It is fairly commonplace, very much a part of standard of care in a facility. Why I made the comment is there is still expectation if you have a facility delivering a standard of care such as a hospital, it is like an X-ray machine, you need certain medics. If you have someone who comes into a hospital in an ambulance and is in an emergency situation, in that case you need that technology or level of technology, unless it is highly specialized, there and available.

The question is—so every facility needs a certain level of diagnostic equipment, depending on their level of facility, to meet that emergency need. The question though at this hospital is that where it is not emergency, do you need to have every facility geared up for all their caseload, or can you better utilize the system?

So please do not take that comment with respect to an ultrasound at Concordia out of context. Any facility operating as a modern hospital today is likely to need one of those pieces of equipment for emergency situations. You are not going to put somebody in an ambulance to take them to St. Boniface for an ultrasound to bring them back if they are in an emergency situation.

What I am talking about is nonemergency diagnostic equipment. We should have a more rational way of delivering that so that because my doctor practices at Concordia, I have to wait six months, but if your doctor practices at Seven Oaks, you might only wait five weeks, you know. We are all taxpayers. It is one system, so we would expect some rational way of ensuring proper delivery of service. That is why I put it in that context.

* (1640)

The member's question, if I gather it correctly, is will the government direct what services will be offered in what facilities? Well, there are obviously guidelines if a facility is going to be a hospital, and I do not mean to

put off the member, but I think it is worth just noting. If a facility is going to be a hospital, it has to meet certain standards of service delivery to be a hospital, whatever class of hospital it is or however we rate hospitals. So if you are going to be that facility there are certain things you have to offer to meet. But the question is, in discretionary service, are we going to direct hospital authorities to do that?

There are two sides to that coin. We have appointed regional health authorities and we have charged them with being able to develop rational delivery mechanisms for service, rational programming. I do not want to be in a position as the minister to be second guessing them all the time. I do not want to be in a position as the minister where on every single program issue I have to spend hours and hours to study every detail and make the decision.

First of all, I do not have enough hours in the day. The people that I appoint, ultimately, because these are ministerial appointments, I have to have enough faith that they will be able in their bailiwick to be able to sort these issues out rationally and be able to make decisions. If they are making decisions that I ultimately think are way off base and in the long run are not very helpful, then I should change the board or I should talk to them about it. But, by and large, I want them to sort these things out not because I am evading that responsibility, but the practical matter in so many of these services, and we get this as MLAs, is that we all represent areas and communities.

People can sometimes get caught up in, we need to have a service here today because we have always had it, et cetera, and at the end of the day the numbers, the service needs of a community do not justify it, but it becomes really, to be blunt, a political decision. What I am trying to do here, and we all recognize politics is part of any system when government is involved, yes, but I am trying to take as much of that out as possible, because I do not think at the end of the day that serves the health needs of Winnipeggers all that well, and if we are going to have a system that works, it has to have some rational planning behind it.

Just to give you an example. You know, when the Misericordia Hospital ended its obstetrics, if you look at the number of babies born at that hospital in '92-93

there were 794, less than 800. This year it was 452; that was the number. Last year it was 615. It has been a declining number of births. Some would argue, well, maybe that is because the place has been uncertain in practicing patterns of physicians. Others may argue it is demographics in a community. But there is a constituency for the Misericordia to deliver obstetrics. When I attended their dinner the sister from the Sisters of Misericordia who I sat with reminded me very strongly that the Sisters of Misericordia came to Winnipeg at the turn of the century to look after unwed mothers, to meet the needs, the birthing needs of unwed mothers whom no one cared for. That was their mission. That was their purpose in coming to Winnipeg. That is what inevitably led to the creation of the Misericordia Hospital. Of course, it has grown well beyond that, but that was their need.

She reminded me of that and was gravely concerned, with the closure of obstetrics, that this was not their mission. The fact of the matter though is, the numbers did not warrant maintaining that particular service. The politics said it is great, let us keep that service in that community hospital. The numbers did not warrant it. So these kinds of factors have to fit into making those decisions.

(Mr. Mervin Tweed, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

Now, in fairness to the community hospitals—and I do not know what the decision today is going to be ultimately for the Grace. They are down to 1,000, 1,100 births a year there. I am told that we have found, or they have found coverage, or they are working on it. They have identified some physicians to extend the coverage period to the fall to give the Winnipeg Hospital Authority a chance to make a decision as to how they are going to deliver the program, but what is incumbent on us with respect to community hospitals—and it comes back to the member's question, what is a community hospital? As we move to a Winnipeg hospital region, I think the distinction between community hospital and teaching hospital is going to start to change, certainly blur. This is my prediction. The reason being is because programming will be very much controlled centrally by the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. Many programs are going to be

one program with a program head, delivered in a number of sites. What I would like to have that system be able to do, particularly with programming that is age-specific or age-sensitive, things like obstetrics, there is only a certain portion or age group of the population that requires that service.

The demographical need for that service around the city is going to shift from time to time. St. James, I understand today, has an older population. Certainly there has been a decline in the need for obstetrics. There are other parts of the city, in the northeast, in the whole south area where there has been big suburban growth, lots of young families. That is one of the reasons why the Victoria Hospital is up, in fact, I think continues to increase its number of obstetrics. It is one of the few hospitals that has because of that.

The Winnipeg Hospital Authority, with that one program delivered in the number of sites, has to have the flexibility over time to maybe change those sites to meet the needs. So at one particular time maybe it will not work at the Grace; it is in the Victoria Hospital. Twenty years from now, 15 years from now that part of the city may be, by and large, an older part of the city, and St. James may be a booming suburb with young families because of how people have moved into that housing and that program may want to move. It may be Seven Oaks, it may be Concordia.

What my objective is in charging the Winnipeg Hospital Authority is to have that flexibility to adjust the delivery of programming, the sites where we are delivering programming as time requires change. Now, in fairness again to the facilities, that does not mean if you take a program out of a facility you are going to have a cavernous empty space where it once was. The challenge for the Winnipeg Hospital Authority is to get the best use out of our space as well. That is another part of their mandate.

If you are going to say we are no longer going to do this service here and we are going to move it over here because that is where it makes sense, the question is: What are you backfilling with? If a population is no longer as large in the child-bearing years but has a host of other issues because they are an older area, then a service should be moved in there that is appropriate.

I do not want to see the time when we have unutilized space. I know at the Grace Hospital, there are three, four, five operating rooms. I look to the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), perhaps he knows better than I, that are locked and are not used today. Why would we build new operating space in one facility if we have underutilized in another? Is there operating space at Seven Oaks Hospital today that is underutilized? There is as well.

So that is another part of that dynamic that the Winnipeg Hospital Authority—I know we have some major work to do at the Health Sciences Centre, but we will be reducing their operating space. I think we are taking out—how many operating theatres? Two in total, or more, whatever the number is. We are going to be revamping and rebuilding them, but they will have less operating space than they have today. That slack I would like to see the Winnipeg hospital be able to take up an existing underutilized operating space.

They have to be able to manage those things and all those pieces together. The practical matter is, if we sat here as government and said we want this community hospital to deliver this program here, and this one here, and that is your entire mandate, why would I have a Winnipeg Hospital Authority. I am responsible for those decisions. If I have some trouble, I will express that to them but, by and large, I do not think it is appropriate for the minister to be doing all that under a system where we have created a hospital authority. If I am going to do that as minister, then I should be running the system.

Today, I am sort of doing that through boards and through the ministry and through funding. I will tell you the real shortfall in this, and Frank is losing even more hair and I am starting to, it is turning grey, because we are dealing with so many different facilities in a very fragmented approach and ad hocking so many decisions without necessarily rationale, and even the question of obstetrics is a perfect example. It is all tied up in a lot of local politics about what is our community hospital. What should it be? Should we have two teaching facilities and two community, or three and one, or whatever the ratios, and often the logic behind it is lost. What becomes important is the politics of what I have in my community.

I can tell the member, rurally, I have some communities that come in to see me because they want a new hospital. You start asking questions and you realize the current one has a 50 or 60 percent occupancy rate, and they are half an hour in one direction from a hospital and half an hour from another, and they have a thousand or 1,200 people in their community and, oh, by the way, they cannot raise the 20 percent community contribution, it is too high. Well, why is it too high? Because we do not have enough people to raise it.

If you were starting with a clean chalkboard, you would never build a hospital there in the first place. Can you justify building a new one? That is a question, but I tell you the politics of doing that are very good. Is that good health care? Is that good use of resources? I think not.

* (1650)

So what we are trying to do is deliver a system that is well organized. I accept the member's comment that, yes, I am ultimately responsible if the Winnipeg Hospital Authority is delivering a product at the end of the day, which is election time, that the people of Winnipeg or Manitoba are very angry at, as the party and the government that appointed them and ultimately has to take responsibility for their actions. I, ultimately, when they do that, will have to defend those in the House to your questions, but ultimately if the people are unhappy, they will turf us out and they will put you in, or Mr. Chomiak in, and you can reorganize the system or make those decisions.

But I believe sincerely at the end of the day there will be a logical, rational approach to that, that generally speaking I think most people will be satisfied, and I think to the facilities and the communities around them, that they will not find their facility with cavernous voids where things used to be. What they will see is, from time to time, change in services, and I would expect and hope and have charged the Winnipeg authority to make sure that they are delivering, given the space requirements and given what facilities have—because you know, if you have operating rooms and we want to use them, that they are relevant to their communities as much as they can be within that system.

So that is what I am hoping happens. We may disagree on a few things, but at least that is my vision of it.

Mr. Lamoureux: As the Minister of Health speaks, there are a number of things that go through my mind. I would not like to comment on each and every one of them, but, you know, I would put a challenge to the Minister of Health and that is that over the next couple of days—the minister has resources. Certainly there is a lot more than what I have as a critic, and I am sure he will more than acknowledge that. Can the minister and his staff clearly demonstrate that it costs less at the Health Sciences Centre than it does at the Grace Hospital to deliver a baby, and if in fact the minister can say yes to that, if we can actually get a comparison towards the two costs, that would be most interesting to see, and I am prepared to wait a couple of days before I actually receive that particular response, or he might even have it right now, which would be great.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

He is putting up his hand indicating yes, but I do want to continue on—

Mr. Praznik: Let me just answer this and then I will—

Mr. Lamoureux: So, short questions, sure.

Mr. Praznik: The poor member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) has to listen to our debate.

Again, you know, remember it is easy to say one hospital is cheaper than another or a community is cheaper than a teaching. If you do one birth a year—I am just talking in the theoretics here—at a community hospital and you have a whole ward geared up, staffed, and you do one birth a year, it is the most expensive birth in the province, right? If you have a high-tech, high-end, whatever we call it, tertiary care birthing facility and you put through a high volume of births, you ultimately will probably have the cheapest per-case delivery, and that in fact is one of the issues. However you build your facility, you want to maximize its use.

In urban facilities, where distance is not the factor that it used to be even 10 or 15 years ago, if you have built a facility that has a maximum capacity, you want to get as close to that maximum capacity as possible

because it brings your cost per case down. There are always exceptions, of course, in tertiary facilities where you have a premature baby or you have other things.

So part of the rationalization in obstetrics is to take the 10,000 or 11,000 births a year we have in the city of Winnipeg and to be able to provide, given our space requirements and all those other factors of what you need, and staffing abilities, et cetera, to be able to maximize the use of a certain number of facilities to get the unit cost down to your best and most efficient level. That ultimately is part of it because, now, again, you do not necessarily, you do not want bad service and all of those things. You have to provide a good and acceptable level of service, but that is what you are attempting to do. You could operate an obstetrics unit in every hospital but, if you are only putting through 1,000 births a year or 600 births a year, your cost per birth would be probably very, very high. We will endeavour to get some of those numbers.

I am a little reluctant because I always question whether all the costs are worked in, capital and all administrative costs and all those kinds of things, but I am advised that on a per unit case that our tertiary hospitals today have less cost than Grace because of volume. Now, in fairness to the Grace, if the signal has been out there for a few years that they are going to close and obstetricians or practitioners change their practice patterns and they do not get the volume, well, it is very easy to show they are very expensive.

What I have done in buying this time—I hope we are able to buy it. If we cannot find practitioners, they will have to close, but if we do have practitioners, and I am trying to appeal to those who keep making the argument that the Grace should stay open to give them a chance to prove it, to get the numbers up to deliver the service, let us see if they can. That is part of where this is.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, it would be interesting. The number, the dollar figure that I would be most interested in is the cost difference between delivering at Health Sciences Centre to the Grace Hospital, and it could be very easily done in terms of getting the numbers up because, quite frankly, a lot depends on the doctors and referrals, availability, convenience, and so forth. What we are talking about is the convenience of the public and what it is that the

public ultimately want to be able to have. That has to be factored in. Why does it have to be factored in? Because the minister says, well, the most cost-efficient. Well, some might argue the most cost-efficient health care system would be one huge gigantic hospital in the city of Winnipeg and have all of the services administered in that particular facility, but we decide that, no, we want to be able to have these types of facilities out and about within the different communities. So sometimes it is worth paying that little extra in order to deliver a little bit better of a service possibly to more communities, and that is why I would be interested in knowing.

When the minister said, for example, Misericordia Hospital's births have been going down, well, Health Sciences Centre's births have been going up. Has the Health Sciences catchment area been enlarged? I would argue that, yes, it likely has been enlarged because, at one time, Seven Oaks Hospital used to provide obstetrics services. If you had more doctors facilitating the community facilities, that in itself could see the numbers go up. If the government says that we want to see and we believe that obstetrics can be delivered in our community facilities, well, then, challenge the civil servants and whatever boards might be out there to prove otherwise and then part of proving that otherwise, they can factor in the cost element because, as I stated right from the beginning, I believe that there are biases that are out there that do not necessarily favour community hospitals.

Our job is to hold the minister accountable and the best way the minister can respond to that accountability question is by holding the civil servants accountable and whatever other boards that might be out there. The minister himself said, he indicated that if the regional health boards are way off base, well, then maybe he should talk to them. I guess the question then is, does the minister believe that obstetrics cannot be worked in some other way or facilitated in some other way? Does he have to wait until a recommendation, like if this would have been the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority making this recommendation. The department, within the Ministry of Health, they should have some sort of an idea. I would be interested. The minister did say that he did have some guidelines. If he can provide me with the guidelines for the hospitals in

terms of equipment and if he has anything, if the department has anything else with respect to services that he as minister or as government they believe should be provided at our community facilities, I would be interested in receiving that also.

* (1700)

Mr. Praznik: Just to put some factual information on the record, I think the member may find interesting as do I that from '92-93 until today with I guess our actuals here I noticed the number of births at the Health Sciences Centre has dropped almost 400; St. Boniface has dropped, again about 400; Grace is down between those years; Misericordia was down significantly before its closure. Victoria Hospital is the only one that is up, and it is up a couple of hundred. The fact of the matter is we have dropped down almost I think 900 births in the city of Winnipeg during the same time. Well, 900 births, just looking at the number, is more than Misericordia and almost the equivalent of Grace. So what he is missing in his analysis is the fact that Manitobans are not having births in hospitals—or probably children to the same degree—as they did just a few years ago, so the number of births is declining. If you take out, just a quick look here at my numbers—just looking at those numbers of some 900 births, that is just under the equivalent of one of those community centres.

So obviously you have an issue here, and we can debate a lot of parts of it, but I am just looking at my numbers, so that has to be taken into account of how you manage these particular systems. Another point that I would make that I think the member has to take into account is the two tertiary hospitals in Winnipeg are also community hospitals, in the sense of community, that St. Boniface is a centre for Francophone services for the province. That should not be forgotten and it has that role and it attracts a client base because of it. The Health Sciences Centre as well in many ways is the hospital of choice for the aboriginal community in the province, both from northern Manitoba and again especially because it does have a very high percentage of its customers are from the aboriginal community. That is one of its challenges is to be responsive to the needs of that base. So those two facilities both have a role in that effect.

If I may just get back to a comment that the member made, and I touched upon ever so briefly in my last response, is the lines between community hospitals and tertiary hospitals. I had mentioned that I see those blurring, and I think I should expand on that a little bit. Because as you move to one hospital authority and you get into issues of privileges for practising, specialists and practitioners, generalists, as you get into program delivery as opposed to program delivery in multiple sites, single programs, multiple site delivery as opposed to a variety of programs, instead of having four or five obstetrics units, you have one program delivered in a variety of sites. It will make it immeasurably easier to integrate the teaching university components on a city-wide basis than the way it now currently exists, which are in two so-called teaching hospitals. So the Winnipeg Hospital Authority is, in essence, a teaching hospital authority. Of course, there is lots of detail to be worked out with the university and with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority and with facilities about how you do this, but at the end of the day, whenever that should be, somewhere down the line I would expect that physicians or students or residents or whatever within the system are going to have opportunities within programs that they may not just be at what currently we call the Health Sciences Centre or the St. Boniface General Hospital for that matter, that they will have learning opportunities at a variety of sites operated or working under operational agreements with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. I make the difference, the distinction with respect to the faith-based facilities.

So that is going to change the way that operates as well. You are really looking at the evolution over a period of time to one more integrated and unified system, taking into account some of those differences with facilities under faith-based principles. But you are looking to one more unified system delivering services to the public in numerous sites. That gives you a great deal of ability to overcome some of those reasons today that you have concerns about community versus tertiary.

The member is very right. I share with him that same concern that there are biases with the system, and there are many who advance the cause of the super hospital; everything at the Health Sciences Centre. That is not what we are trying to see happen. Obviously in our

capital program we will reduce the number of operating theatres at the Health Sciences Centre. As we take a whole bunch, refurbish them, they will have less at the end of the day. I would imagine, in fact our intention is to see the Winnipeg Hospital Authority utilize the ones we have already built and paid for which are in the so-called community hospitals.

So, as we integrate these facilities under one hospital authority, I think the distinction between community hospitals and teaching hospitals is going to start to blur a little bit and that will grow over time until inevitably five, 10 years out, or whenever, you really will not make the distinction. They are sites of different sizes, delivering programs for a whole host of reasons: capacity, need in a community that they are nearby, space available, whatever, so that you do not have those kinds of rivalries and those kinds of things, and you are delivering service on a rational basis.

So, the long-term vision, I think, really blurs that distinction. I think I would be loath to get into saying a community hospital should deliver this to be a community hospital. That is going to change, and it is part of a greater operation. I think the concerns about what makes a community hospital over time will also change because the public, I would hope, will find that their services are being met in a very practical way and in a reasonable way.

I might just add, as well, if you do some crystal ball gazing here, it is very likely, as we look at new methods of physician remuneration, as we look at ways of improving service to the public, that space in many of our so-called community hospitals today will see integrated into them physically the community health clinic because it is a centre in that community, not because it necessarily gets taken over by someone but it is a logical place to deliver service, that people may see themselves going to those for much of their primary care that may not involve an overnight stay or even a day-surgery program.

The opportunities are as endless as our imagination and the practical ability to make it happen. So I think we have to start looking at it from that objective. I say to the member, I have been immersed in this for a number of months and seen a lot of these possibilities, and I think as we move to this that people are going to

find that this gives us an ability to not diminish community hospitals but make them very relevant. They may not get all the services that they used to get. They may get new services, different services, things may change.

I want a system that is flexible and able to respond to changing needs. I underline the demographics issue because if you look at the history in the city of Winnipeg of demographic change, suburban, core area, different suburbs—St. James, a classic example. During the '50s and '60s, lots of young families, big growth in schools; by the '80s that generation—the kids were now grown up; people were still living there. It was their home, a much older area—closure of schools, different health needs. I would suspect in the next 10 or 15 years a lot of those people will choose other kinds of housing as they get older. Those homes will come on the market. If they are bought and become a preference for young families starting out, you could have a whole other new baby boom in that part of the city while in another area you might have a decline, and the hospital authority has to be able to maybe alter its resources around to meet those kinds of needs. I am hoping, at the end of the day, that is what is going to happen. I would not want to see those dictates made strictly because of the politics and the debate of what goes on, and I think the public, as we get into this, will be more comfortable with that approach.

Mr. Chomiak: I am just wondering if we should just take five minutes for a break.

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

The committee recessed at 5:08 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 5:20 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The honourable member for Kildonan, I believe, has the floor.

An Honourable Member: No. Inkster.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, the honourable member for Inkster.

Mr. Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I appreciate the flexibility and the name change there.

Mr. Chairperson, just prior to breaking we were having some dialogue with respect to what I refer to as guidelines, and I guess I would emphasize to the minister that I really do believe that you need to have controls from within the system in which we can feel comfortable that any expectations the government might have of these regional boards are in fact being met. The best example that I could give is what we were talking about for the last 45 minutes, and that is, if the government believes in community hospitals, it has to be able to clearly demonstrate that belief to the regional health authority. If it does not do that and it does not give it some direction, what I refer to as some basic guidelines, then I feel a little bit uncomfortable primarily because you have what I believe is a very fairly significant potential of having a bias which would be to the detriment of some facilities.

It is not to call into question the integrity per se of individuals, but it is just to realize what I have experienced by having discussions, and I think the minister himself has acknowledged this to be the case in some areas where there has been a bias. That is the reason why I requested the minister to provide some sort of, whether it is government policy, government guidelines. I am not too sure exactly what it is that the government would have that, in essence, sets the course of what they believe community hospitals are about and the type of services they should be delivering, so that one day we do not look at the Seven Oaks Hospital, for example, and it is doing something which is completely politically unacceptable.

An easy way of getting an overall assessment with—such as strictly geriatric care. A good way of getting at the core of the issue, if you like, is to say, each facility, when we started talking about the health care reform in a very significant way, in terms of with respect to acute care beds and the closing of potential hospital facilities, at that time, and this would have been I guess November of '95, and the Health Sciences Centre had 854 beds, St. B had 557, Seven Oaks had 290, the Grace had 261, Misericordia had 224, Victoria

had 221 and Concordia had 136. We had a total number of 2,543 acute care beds.

The discussions that I had with the previous Minister of Health was that we have too many acute care beds. At the time, I concurred with the minister. We did have too many acute care beds and we needed to work that number down, and there is a reason why we had too many. There is a lot more ambulatory type care out there today, but if you do not have those control mechanisms, if you do not have some sort of basic beliefs on what those community facilities should be providing, I believe you are giving just too much control over to the regional health boards and you are going to be reacting far too often and potentially trying to pass the buck in terms of public opposition to something that is happening from within the health care services.

I think the very best or one of the best examples that I gave already and would reiterate by just stating is that of the obstetrics. The government needs to give more direction, and that is why I ask if in fact they do have anything of that nature so that the regional boards have a basic idea of what they are supposed to be doing.

Mr. Praznik: I appreciate where the member is coming from and the balance that one has to strike. I would concur with him that I think within the system one can see individuals who do have that view, whether it is expressed directly or privately that so many more things should be centralized in one major facility. There are others who have argued with me that no, many more things can be decentralized, and the debates are made each way and yes, one does not want to see a system where everything ends up being centralized, and what we today call community hospitals have an extremely limited role within the system.

What I do not want to do is—and again, it is finding the right way to balance things and that is what I suggest the member is getting at and he has proposed, if I read him correctly, we put some guidelines and some direction as to this is what we would like in so many centres and where we want them directed.

I am a little loath to do that, but I recognize his concern that is there. One of the things we have done

and are doing in establishing the board is that we have canvassed each in terms of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority which I think, where this is a really critical matter, it is not so much the issue with the long-term continuing care board but with the hospital authority for Winnipeg. We have as we did rurally—trying to balance the boards to make sure that a wide variety of interests are represented on them.

The Winnipeg Hospital Authority, we approached each of the current nine facilities that will be operated under this new regime either directly or with operational agreements. We approached each of those to provide me with three names for a nomination. We have gone through that list with cabinet, and as each of those facilities works out its intention with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, whether it be to evolve into it directly or whether it be to have an operating agreement as the faith-based facilities agreement calls for, once that direction is there, we will be appointing from their list of nominees one of those individuals to be on the board. So the board, when it is completed through this transition year of its 21 members, will have at least nine who are from facilities. So the so-called community hospitals today, the two long-term care facilities will have people who have—in fact, I think all of their nominations were people who serve on their current boards. So they will have individuals who come from that, which I think will give a balance.

The community people whom we have appointed, several of them are fully cognizant of the need to have that balance. So we are trying to ensure that the blend or the flavour of people on those boards will be reflective of that balance so that that becomes part of their decision making.

I know, in terms of the chair and the two vice-chairs of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, the current chair, the first chair, Mr. Neil Fast, is the outgoing chair of the Concordia Hospital; M. Paul Ruest, who is a vice-chair, comes from St. Boniface, although a teaching hospital but very much a community hospital for the Francophone community; and Mr. John Langdon, who comes off the Victoria Hospital board, again another community hospital.

* (1730)

So, although Mr. Gordon Webster was a vice-chair of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, is now CEO, the chair and two vice-chairs of the board are very much from a community hospital vein, and I include M. Ruest in that. So, again, that gives that balance, and I know in discussions I have had with them, you can see that balance starting to come out as they deal with issues to work them through. So I am hoping that addresses some of those particular concerns.

What we cannot know going out into the future, particularly in a field like medicine and health care that is so much tied to technology, where technology is moving to such a rapid degree, we do not know five years from now or 10 years from now entirely the opportunities that technology will give to provide service differently. What I do not want to tie today—and if he detects a reluctance to say, yes, we are going to say these are the services that will be provided in these facilities, why I am reluctant is not because I do not want to do that, not that I am reluctant to see obstetrics delivered in a number of sites, the community hospital system that the member is talking about, it is because if you asked me to characterize how I envision this regionalized system, what my personal flavour that I would like to give this is I would like to have a system whose primary characteristic is it is extremely adaptable to change.

Let me just expand on that a moment, because I think it is important to understand what I mean here. That is not to say a system that is very likely to continue downsizing because of budgets, that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about adaptable to change, whether it be change driven by technology and a new piece of diagnostic equipment, for example, or a method of treatment can dramatically change how you organize the delivery of that service. We have seen that time and time again in health care. Laser surgery, for example, has dramatically changed the way we deal with surgery, because it has taken it from being a very intrusive big-cut method, long hospital stay to make many, many surgeries, day surgery, short-term stay. That has had effects on how many personnel to deliver that service, how you deliver it, a greater need maybe for home care, all those things. It has revolutionized, to some degree, how we deliver that service, also demographics, changing needs of a population, demands in a population because of demographics.

So I would like to see the system, and the flavour I would like to give it is that it can adapt to the changes that are required to meet technological change and demographic change in an easy manner, so that every change does not bring a jolt to the system. It does not result in a major hardship for anyone, does not result in battles within the system, but the system can change to meet the demands of changed technology and demographics easily and remain effective and does not require reviews and huge interventions to make change happen

Today I would argue our system, the way it is structured and the components of it, change does not come easily. It is not well structured for change. One particular area that I flagged—and that is why I have an associate deputy minister for human resources—one area that we probably, collectively across Canada, have not managed well is human resources change in health care, and I do not blame anyone for it. We have organized on institutional basis, our collective agreements that we have been known for, of course, labour relations get organized, how we organize the system.

Our collective agreements, when they were originally negotiated, I do not think ever contemplated massive change in the system. So we have collective agreements and systems with respect to seniority, within the system, with bumping privileges. I know talking to some who have been in the system for over 30 years, they tell me one of their greatest difficulties in making change is that the system makes it difficult even to move people from one floor or one ward to another. You set off a chain reaction in seniority rights and bumping, et cetera, that make it extremely painful for not only the administration but for all of the people who deliver the service.

If you try to be able to move a program or a piece of equipment from one facility to another—the public out there thinks we can move a program—and the one I have been talking about and very, very valid is heart surgery. We have a heart surgery program, one program delivered in two sites. Today, we are under pressure at Health Sciences Centre, because we do not have enough intensive care space to maximize the surgery program there. We do have capacity at St. Boniface Hospital. So the people who would run these programs

say the logical common sense answer is move a surgical team from one facility to another so that we maximize our intensive care needs at St. Boniface and continue to maximize the number of heart surgeries you can do. It sounds simple. The public out there thinks we can do it, because it makes common sense.

The reality of it is—no one's fault—that our labour relations structure means we cannot move a team because the employing authority issues; and only in a real crisis, I guess, like a flood, we were doing that. On a temporary basis we can do it, but we cannot do it on any longer basis than that, so it makes no sense. What I am hoping that we can get out of the system is we can deal, and I have spoken to some of the labour leaders in health and they recognize that. It is not going to happen overnight, and it is going to take a lot of time to give people a comfort level and work out seniority issues and other things. But I am hoping over a number of years that we will have a system that allows us to be able to move people around that system, respecting their rights and their concerns and seniority but giving the system the ability to be able to move people as we best need them without having to lay them off, delete their positions, ask them to re-apply, et cetera which does not make any common sense for them or for the system.

That is one area that I make reference to, so I am looking to see us create a system that can deal with change easily and be able to move our resources around the system, within its facilities, between facilities, to be able to deal with those changing needs that are going to be there because of technology and demographics. So, if I seem reluctant to spell out specifically what I want where, it is because I am trying to build a system that is flexible for the long term. Yet, I appreciate the balance that the member talks about. Yes, I would not want to see the Winnipeg Hospital Authority say our community hospitals really are all going to be single-purpose geriatric facilities, or single-purpose whatever facilities, that there is a community around that hospital that views it as its primary centre of health care, that that has to be worked into the planning, and we are ensuring that there will be enough people on that board to give some balance. Ultimately, that is some of the charge and direction I will give to them. Some of it may appear in writing. I will be looking at their

decisions and operations, but I would not want them to expect that the planning will really be done by the minister and they will just administer it. There has to be that right balance.

So I share his concern. I guess, what we are really debating is the best way to give it effect, and I appreciate there are differences.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I did want to move a little bit over, but before I do that, just very briefly. The types of commitments that we talked about in obstetrics, there are other things such as number of operating rooms in a particular facility to emergency services. These are things, to a base number of acute care beds, where the government could give some direction and the regional boards would then be obligated to follow that. I really do think that this would, in the long run at least, allow for some accountability in terms of what is actually occurring or more accountability in terms of what is already there.

The minister—and this goes on to the regional boards themselves—made reference to some individuals who were on the board saying they are from this community hospital, this person is from that community hospital, and so forth. I would be interested in knowing if anyone, for example, who sits on the board lives in the north end or lives out in the Elmwood area or in the Rossmere area, because that is something that also needs to be taken into account, and the minister can respond to that if not today maybe some other time.

The idea of elections of these regional health boards has been something in which we have advocated, and I must say right at the beginning we did not want the regional boards in the first place. Having said that, the idea of having these regional boards elected is something in which we believe the government should be moving on. The government's response to that has been, well, what do the Liberals have to say of taxation rights and, quite frankly, I do not believe it is necessary for them to have to come up with the dollars or levy the taxes, and the minister might have some problems with that. That is a point in which we might agree to disagree on.

But there is something that the ministry can and should be doing and that is moving much quicker towards some sort of an election of the super boards. Now, it can take many different ways it can be done. When I was in Quebec, it was interesting to find that some of the elections were done through professional groups that would through a nomination, in essence, they would elect a person who would be going on to that particular board. The government of the day has a certain number of appointments to that particular board also. So there are many different ways in which we can ensure that the minister, ultimately, will have the influence that is necessary or through the minister's office having that necessary influence but to the degree in which they have it currently. I do not believe if you want to try to say that, look, these regional health boards are going to set the future direction or they are going to be, in essence, the deciding group that comes up with ultimately recommendations because that is, in essence, what they would be because the government minister could overturn them. If these regional boards are going to have that, then why not allow assurances through some form of elections that we are getting individuals that are on there in which a wider number of people would be supportive of? In Saskatchewan they tried something in terms of direct election right from the public as a whole. That might be a way of doing it. There are many different ways that could be approached.

We had suggested to the minister a while back to include it into the municipal elections. We have municipal elections coming up in 1998. If not all, a percentage of the board members could be elected much the same way in which we have school trustees that are elected during municipal elections. That could be taken into consideration. You are going to have a much higher turnout, I would ultimately argue, than what Saskatchewan had. If the minister's concern is in terms of having that direct government input, you can have a certain number of them being elected and a certain number of them being appointed, but what we are not hearing from the government is anything other than, maybe someday in the future we will have them elected.

That is in essence all we are really getting from the Ministry of Health. I think that what we need to hear in a more tangible way is what the government is doing to

ensure that there is going to be broader input brought into the process through some form of an election, if not in whole, at least in part for these regional health authorities. That applies both to rural Manitoba and the regional health boards in the city of Winnipeg.

The other thing that I would like the minister to comment on is the current boards. I know the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) has brought up to a certain degree this particular issue and especially those based on Christian faith or other faiths, if you like, that are already today on boards or make up the boards of some of those 150, 160, 170, 180 boards that are out there.

What sort of a role do they see them playing? I say that thinking of the government—the Minister of Education, Mr. Mansness, had, the report escapes me, but it in essence said, you have parent advisory councils, and here are the responsibilities of parent advisory councils, here are the responsibilities of principals, here are the responsibilities of the school divisions, here are the responsibilities of the Ministry of Health.

Do the minister and the department have something of that nature? I am interested in hearing some very specifics. Again, because of the time, and I think both the member for Kildonan and I really to a certain degree regret we could not have more time in the Estimates to deal in more detail on some of these issues, but I am interested in knowing if the minister does have these? Great, maybe he could table it now. If he cannot table it now, it would be nice to be able to get these sometime before, let us say, the end of June. If he does not have them, maybe what the minister should be looking at is trying to convene some sort of an open public meeting that would facilitate people to have some input on the type of responsibilities, if in fact the minister currently does not have them, or at least indicate to us to what degree he has been soliciting for input on it.

With that, I am sure that will likely be my last question for the day.

Mr. Praznik: First of all, I would like to deal with the issue of elected versus appointed boards. We have debated this in Question Period in our exchanges, both him and the member for Kildonan, on numerous

occasions. We have some very fundamental differences in principle. We have acknowledged that. We agreed to perhaps disagree. I think they are very fundamental to the success of any board, and I would like to discuss that somewhat.

First of all, by way of context, let us not for one moment dismiss or ignore the reality in which we operate today. There are virtually no popularly elected boards in the province of Manitoba delivering health care. Many of the boards that we have are self-perpetuating boards, in many cases. Some of them, in fact probably the vast majority, are municipal based where the municipalities who are elected appoint representatives to their board. That is the case outside of Winnipeg, largely. They appoint representatives to their board and they are ultimately responsible for the deficits of those facilities to go back to their taxpayers to raise the dollars. So there is an accountability.

There are many organizations that own or sponsor hospitals, various religious orders, for example, that do that. They ultimately appoint as the owners of facilities of those boards, because they ultimately have a financial accountability and responsibility for those facilities. They are not elected boards.

We have some that I consider to be very strange, actually, not by way of history but by the reality of today. One was the former Dauphin board. I think something may be similar in The Pas where they have an incorporation and are run by, in essence, their governors. In the case of Dauphin, I think anyone who lived in the community who paid a \$5 annual fee became a governor and then the governors elected the board of directors. In the case of Dauphin, I think you had 43 or 46 governors of record, three of whom had passed away in the last year who contributed their \$5 each and were responsible for running a hospital for 14,000 people, the funding of which all came from the public.

So let us make no mistake about it; we do not have a system today of popularly elected boards across the province where the public are voting for their administration of health care, the people who would be administering it for them. They are not. So the creation of our regional health boards is not taking away something that people have today. It is replacing

it, to some degree in many areas, certainly in rural Manitoba, with publicly appointed boards that the elected officials appoint.

Previously, and as I said, in rural Manitoba in most cases it was municipalities, elected municipal people who appointed the boards, and should there have been a deficit it went on their taxpayers. So today the provincially elected people are appointing the regional boards, and if they are in deficit or in financial difficulty the responsibility comes back to those politicians. So I do not want it to appear that people are somehow losing popularly elected boards today or directly elected boards. They are not.

* (1750)

When the previous minister drafted this legislation and brought it to the House, I remember this debate quite well. We had it in our caucus and we saw it move to the Legislature, and the bill in fact does provide for appointment initially and at some time in the future for election, and that is a decision that at some point may be made. I do not disagree with that. There may be a role for popularly elected health boards. I do not oppose that, but I think one has to have some parameters around it to make it work.

First of all, I do not think you would get a disagreement from me or anyone else that, if you decided to have popularly elected health boards, it would be inappropriate to elect them at community meetings, because that is not in effect a one-person, one-vote system. That is who goes to the meeting and it is very open to various interests groups.

I think the community of Dauphin over the years, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) may remember, from time to time in Dauphin the battle over whether they will do abortions or not in the hospital broke out in terms of who bought memberships to be governors and meetings to elect boards of directors. That was not a democratic decision in the sense that the 14,000 people who live in the region participated in. It was those who had their various interests. So that is not a way to do it.

So, if you do move to popularly elected boards, then you have to have an elected system with secret ballot where everyone has a chance to vote, and the most easy

way to do that, I suspect, is to have it at municipal election time and elect health trustees. You would probably have to devise wards to ensure that there was a distribution of members throughout your region to elect health trustees. It is all easy to do from that perspective. There is some cost, but that is fine, and you could do it very easily as part of your municipal election process. We do not disagree with that. In fact, the act anticipates that.

The difficulty comes in in terms of responsibility and authority. When you appoint someone to fill a role, unless it is an arm's length role with no ability to remove them, et cetera, such as a judge where a person has true independence, they are ultimately—if you have the power to appoint them and remove them—responsible to the person or group that appoints them. When you are elected, your responsibility is to the people who elected you, the constituency you were elected to serve. The boards today have a mandate to organize and implement regionalization. They are responsible to me as Minister of Health and I to the cabinet in the Legislature for that task. If we were to move to an elected system, those elected would be responsible to the communities directly that elected them.

The Ministry of Health is the funder. I have the financial responsibility with the money voted by this Legislative Assembly to deliver health services. What, in essence, I would be doing in that case is contracting with those boards to deliver that service. Those boards, if they should overrun the contract price or not deliver the services as per the contractual agreement that I was prepared to enter into given the mandate of the Legislature to spend money that I have received, would have no means to make up the difference or to be financially responsible. They would require, just like school boards have today and municipalities who are also a creature of this Legislative Assembly—they have no constitutional standing other than an act of this Legislature. They have, granted by this Legislature, a taxing authority. They have the ability, the responsibility, in fact, to go back to the people who elected them to meet and be responsible financially for the decisions that they make.

We were all elected and as elected people we have a taxing authority, and I believe—and this is where the

Progressive Conservative Party differs significantly with the Liberal Party on this issue—[interjection]Yes, we did freeze it one year with respect to school divisions. We did, because they are, in fact, a creature of our Legislature, and we have a right to do that. But, ultimately, if we were to create an elected body responsible to their constituents, as they should be, without that financial taxation relationship, I would think—and from the experience of Saskatchewan—we are setting up a relationship that is not at the end of the day going to be as productive as members of the Liberal Party would suggest.

So that is why the point I have made is the day that we decide that we would like to move to an elected health care system, and I would argue very strongly—we may disagree on it—that the time to do that is once you have established the regions, gone through all of the issues of regionalization, of getting communities to think regionally, of working out all the battles of communities that happen in that system so your system is now functioning, I would suggest that is the time to look at moving to publicly elected boards, broadly based elected boards—I am not adverse to it—but with that must also come a financial accountability of the boards you elect.

You know, in a small way, I saw this in my own constituency some years ago when we were amalgamating. We saw the Lac du Bonnet District Health Authority, which was appointed by their municipalities, and the Pinawa General Hospital, which is appointed by the LGD of Pinawa when they were amalgamating to create the Winnipeg River Health District, and they looked long and hard at the issue of governance and how the Winnipeg Health Board would be appointed, and very much they looked at electing board members actually by way of community meetings, et cetera, to serve on the board.

Then they started, because the municipalities were the founding groups here, to recognize that in doing so, they as municipalities, three or four municipalities who constitute that health district, had a financial responsibility that they were going to turn over to people who were elected in the community and they financially would have to answer to the taxpayer for the decisions of that board who did not have to stand there to defend their decisions. It was amazing how quickly

that board decided, no, no, if we have to go back to the taxpayers for the decisions of this health authority as municipal people, then we will appoint that health authority, because if they screw up, we can remove them. If they make errors we have to go back and explain, they should be our appointments. So although not all the board appointments were councillors they were appointed by their constituent municipalities.

We believe in this party that it is a fundamental part of democracy that there should be a taxation power or authority that goes with elected office, so that people who are elected are responsible to the taxpayers for their decisions. That is one of the fundamental reasons why in fact the Senate of Canada does not have the power to defeat a government on its money bills, because it in fact has no direct financial accountability to the taxpayers, because it is not elected. It is a fundamental principle.

If we are at some point to move to elected boards, and I can envision that happening, then with that, like school trustees, would have to come some power to allot a tax levy should that in fact run a deficit or badly manage. Because, remember, if they are badly managing their district in their three-year mandate, the minister does not have the power to remove them, because they are elected, nor should I have the power to remove them. But an appointed board that I am today responsible for, I have that power to remove them. So right now, the trade-off is, if you do not want me to have the power to remove them, and they would have the longevity of their term, they have to have the power to go back and be responsible directly by way of taxes for their errors and mistakes to their ratepayers. We may disagree fundamentally on that point, and I accept that, but that is the logic behind that.

The mechanism for election, I do not think the three of us as critics and ministers would be far off on agreeing on an elective system. The only probably controversial issue would be where you draw ward boundaries within the health district, and that will always be controversial. The method would not be hard, how you do it would not be hard. The one fundamental issue is taxing authority, and I recognize that. It is our position as a party and as a government that with elected office would have to come a taxing authority. By the way, the Union of Manitoba

Municipalities, when we have discussed this with them, in exchange at meetings, I do not think they are particularly too keen on seeing another taxing authority.

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

JUSTICE

* (1430)

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Good afternoon. Would the Committee of Supply come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Justice. Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber at this time.

We are on Resolution 4.4. Corrections (b) Adult Corrections (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$28,516,500, on page 96 of the Estimates book.

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Just before conclusion yesterday, we were talking about the follow-up to the recommendations set out in the Hughes Inquiry report and the minister at the time was going through a synopsis of the follow-up.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): That is correct, and I can certainly continue that synopsis. The recommendations of Mr. Justice Hughes were, firstly, the return to an acceptable workplace environment. As indicated I believe in our discussions yesterday, the Headingley labour relations committee has been in operation since January 27, 1997, and has been organized as outlined by Mr. Hughes. I will not get into the exact organization. The committee has addressed, as its first order of business, the revitalization of unit and case management at Headingley Correctional Institution. The institution has developed a new approach for unit management that has as its primary focus the elimination of the split between the unit managers and the shift operations managers.

The part-time, full-time issue is being addressed by the provincial Labour Management Committee, with agreement having been reached on the approach to this issue. A joint Labour Management Committee continues to work out the logistical details. I am

advised by Mr. Graceffo that, in respect of the part-time, full-time issue, that issue, in fact has been resolved.

Harassment in the workplace continues to be an issue that the committee struggles to resolve. While there is no disagreement at the committee level about the elimination of some tensions between staff members, it is equally clear that there are very concerted efforts being made to bring that issue to a head. I think in saying this, this is nothing new, but very positive steps are being taken to eliminate those kinds of problems. It is often very difficult for management to deal with issues that occur between staff and not management directly, so the issue is, I think, a real challenge for management to bring all parties to the table to get a clear understanding of how the direction of the institution is going.

As much of a challenge as this may be for the management, I think it is also clear that this is a challenge for the union because its members are on both sides of Corrections' issues, members having different views about how corrections should occur in the province, so then tensions develop between the two parties in the staff. The union has been very, very responsible in its approach to this subject. It recognizes the problems, and has been working in a very positive concerted effort with management in order to resolve this.

Again, I think it is clear that some of these problems took many, many years to develop, 15 years to develop; it is not going to be eliminated in the course of a month, but certainly having Mr. Scurfield in place and having that mandate not only in Headingley, but as I understand it his mandate has been extended to the Winnipeg Remand Centre to deal with issues, perhaps not of the same magnitude or exactly the same type, but clearly these are labour relations issues that need to be resolved. In so doing I am very, very pleased that Mr. Greg Graceffo has accepted the full-time permanent position of assistant deputy minister. The assistant deputy minister is on site at one of the operational sites within the division on a weekly basis, and certainly is in regular contact.

I might just point out for the record that I have toured Headingley twice in the last number of months, and

without getting into the appreciable differences that I saw from the first to the second time, the one thing that should be noticed is the direct contact that Mr. Graceffo had with the staff there. He knew them, he talked to them. Indeed, while I was being toured around, being shown things, he would disappear from time to time and emerge from various meetings with staff. I think it is an indication of the level of trust that the staff have of Mr. Graceffo, and I think that the high recommendations that Mr. Hughes had of Mr. Graceffo seem to be borne out certainly in my day-to-day activities when I have contact with Mr. Graceffo and also with his contact with the institution.

The labour-management meetings that used to be held on a quarterly basis are now held on a monthly basis for institutions and probation, and this allows for a rapid surfacing of issues that may not have come to the attention of the assistant deputy minister and allows for timely discussion of these types of issues. I might say that the initial agreement was that they occur on a monthly basis. The union, indeed, has approached management, and we have jointly agreed that it is no longer necessary to meet on that monthly basis, but both parties are satisfied that it is sufficient that they meet on once every two months. So that is, I think, an indication of the amount of work that has been done, the direction that we are moving into, and so I am very, very pleased about that type of progress.

The Corrections division has recently begun to review its organizational structure as recommended by Mr. Justice Hughes, and a full paper will be prepared for my review in the next little while. Perhaps in the next month or two, I will have an opportunity to at least review a draft of that paper. To date I have not yet had an opportunity to see that. At the same time, terms of reference for a consultant to assist with long-term strategic planning and career succession planning will be developed.

I would also point out that a new superintendent for Headingley Correctional Institution has been appointed and has assumed his new duties on April 7, 1997. The selection of the new superintendent came as a result of a national competition, a written exercise and two subsequent interviews. Our final selection interviews were conducted by senior divisional staff and a representative of the federal Correctional Service of

Canada. I am very, very, pleased with the appointment of Mr. Jim Ross. Mr. Jim Ross was formerly the head of the Manitoba Youth Centre.

* (1440)

I do not think they use the term superintendent there. [interjection] Superintendent as well. I am always mindful of the distinction between youth facilities and adult facilities, sometimes they do not always use the same terms. But in terms of being the head of that facility, he was the head of that, the supervisor of the Manitoba Youth Centre, and now he is here at the Headingley Correctional Institution. I think he brings a real wealth of experience. He has been in the correctional field in Manitoba. I believe he started out as a probation officer in the Manitoba Youth Centre. Indeed, I stand corrected, it was a juvenile counsellor in the Manitoba Youth Centre. So he worked his way up through the system, very familiar with the system, and I am very pleased that the committee saw fit to appoint him or recommend his appointment, and certainly that was done.

Also, Mr. Hughes, in his report, recommended that we look at the broader issues with respect to social conditions that lead to crime. We have put together a committee that has been tasked with bringing a plan forward for consideration by myself at a future meeting. In Manitoba, the Child and Youth Secretariat of course has begun to work on a number of long-term projects intended to address a number of early childhood development issues. Again, that is very, very important, and I think very consistent with what Mr. Hughes recommended.

In respect of the remaining recommendations—and I am trying to summarize as quickly as possible for the member; I know there is an issue of time—the Corrections division has implemented noncontact visiting at two of its institutions and is currently considering expanding this practice to at least one more institution. Early indications are that the implementation of noncontact visits has drastically cut down on the transmission of drug contraband into the institutions. This has resulted in safer, more stable institutions for both staff and the inmates. What this has done has resulted in considerably less pressure on family members to bring drugs into the institution.

The way it used to work, I understand, I am advised that gang members would pressure people to have their visitors bring in drugs. So it was not the gang member's family bringing in the drugs; it was a third party's family that would be bringing in the drugs. Those drugs would be passed on during contact visits and then passed on to the gang members. There seems to be indeed a welcome relief that there is no contact visit. It appears that, by and large, the majority of prisoners other than those who used to make a bit of a living at peddling drugs in the institution do not complain and certainly encourage this type of activity.

I should also point out that this government brought in a regulation as a part of an institutional gang strategy to limit the influence of gangs in the institutions. That gang strategy included random drug testing. It included the monitoring of telephone calls. It banned the use of gang insignia and also is in the process of developing on institution-by-institution basis a no-smoking policy. It is a very sensitive issue. But all four of those which are now recognized by law provide our Corrections staff to make, on an institutional basis, the decisions that are required in order to keep staff safe and in fact to keep the inmates themselves safe. I believe that if we have a safe institution and our staff is safe, then the public is safe.

So the training division continues to operate as it did in the past, and the restructuring of this training function is in large measure dependent upon the future direction of the division as a whole and, of course, will be realigned in accordance with training needs identified with the strategic plan.

Operational reviews have been done and are ongoing at all of our institutions, both adult and youth, and in addition equipment has been ordered for the Emergency Response Team at Headingley Correctional Institution and the Winnipeg Remand Centre. As well, a new Emergency Response Team for the Brandon Correctional Institute has been equipped and has completed training. Storage space for the Emergency Response Team for Headingley Correctional Institution has been identified as part of the space requirement for the intermittent housing unit.

So the joint provincial Labour Management Committee has been working on a code of conduct

which will govern conduct in the institution, governing the staff, including management, and we expect to have a final draft available in the near future. This code addresses a wide variety of behaviours and situations and, as I have indicated, is intended to serve as a guide for all staff of the Correctional division.

A request for a proposal for the redesign of the offender-based system into a single integrated system has been completed and Treasury Board approval has been received, and we are going to proceed with the first phases of that project. Current planning indicates that the total scope of the project will take approximately 18 months to complete.

So in terms of the actual building and I think it is important to talk about the actual changes made to the Headingley Correctional Institution in terms of actual changes, because we saw so much in the newspaper regarding the state of that particular institution, and so I think it is important to point out some of those things. My information may be a couple of weeks out of date, but if there is any further improvement I can indicate that at the conclusion of my answer.

Firstly, the commissioning of a new electrical locking system and control station is virtually completed. It is certainly in the last phases of completion if it is not yet completed. Close circuit surveillance cameras and threshold alarm systems have been installed. A new fire alarm system is operational. Annex A renovations have been completed and inmates are again housed there. Annex B is projected to be open in the next few days or week or two, and as of its reopening, sex offenders from Dauphin and at the other institutions will be repatriated to the Headingley Correctional Institution.

Planning continues for the new intermittent minimum security unit and the project is at the design stage, and assuming all things are achieved, are acquired, this could be operational sometime by mid next year. Planning continues for the new maximum security unit, and projected completion of this unit should occur sometime in 1999. That then will give the member an indication of where we are in terms of the Hughes report and also in respect of some of the actual redoing of the Headingley Correctional Institution.

Mr. Mackintosh: What recommendations made by Mr. Hughes have so far been actually rejected by the government?

* (1450)

Mr. Toews: I would indicate that the recommendations that were made by Mr. Justice Hughes are essentially threefold, and I went through the three various recommendations. In the context of each of those recommendations, there were comments that he made and what I would call sub-recommendations or areas for review.

To my knowledge, and I have spoken to my staff in that regard, we have not rejected anything that Mr. Justice Hughes has indicated, so we have not ruled out anything. One of the things, as I recall, reading the Hughes report, is that Mr. Justice Hughes indicated that some of his recommendations should be subject to review by the appropriate authorities and that those authorities he had confidence would be making the right decision. So it was not that he specifically said certain things should happen without reviewing the appropriateness of putting that into place.

I think one of the very important things that Mr. Justice Hughes recognized is that the institution, the jail institution is—I am sure he did not use the word, but it is almost organic in nature. You cannot just look at it as a fixed system and hope to accomplish everything by simply stating this needs to be done, and when it is done it will be finished. That is the wrong attitude, and Mr. Hughes would have never suggested that we go that way.

It is perhaps not the appropriate time yet, but I think that once my staff have had a further opportunity to implement a review, it may well be appropriate for my staff or myself to again meet with Justice Hughes to discuss where we are, where we are going, and bounce some of the ideas that he may have, because I think he has a tremendous insight into what happened here in Manitoba, but it may be that in the implementation there are things that are not exactly the way he perceived them to be, and I think Mr. Justice Hughes would be the first to admit that he, like any other person, is fallible.

Given the very, shall I say expeditious way in which he handled the making of the report, it would not be unlikely that there are areas that he ignored on which we might require some direction or further guidance. So I see nothing wrong as this process evolves, as the implementation continues, that we may have other discussions with Mr. Justice Hughes.

I would say on the record, though, I have never approached Mr. Justice Hughes in that regard, and it is simply one of my thoughts that I have discussed from time to time with my officials.

Mr. Mackintosh: Can the minister tell the committee, what is the status of the government's capital project of \$10 million to upgrade Headingley and, in particular, the construction of the 60-bed maximum-security unit?

Mr. Toews: As indicated earlier, the planning continues for the maximum-security unit. The project has reached the stage where site selection has occurred and conceptual design work has commenced, and, as indicated, the projected completion of the unit should occur—the target date is 1999.

Whether that is, in fact, the day it will be completed on, I could not, of course, guarantee. Construction often has a way of being delayed by weather or other things, but that is the projection that we are looking to.

Mr. Mackintosh: Are weekend sentences again being served in Manitoba? Because of course we know that weekend sentences were cancelled following the Headingley riot.

Mr. Toews: Just in respect of the prior question, I just wanted to add another statement, that in terms of the development of the project of the maximum security unit, line staff are involved in the committee which is developing that unit. So we are very pleased to see line staff involved in that capacity, because these are the people who walk those ranges every day. They know what the problems are. When you look at what Mr. Justice Hughes was saying about things like range bars, those are things that staff who work in the institution recognize as problems or concerns on a day-to-day basis. So to proceed to the development of a new unit without taking their views into account I think would be

a great disservice to the eventual construction of any facility.

In respect of the intermittent sentence management, I would indicate that, indeed, intermittent sentences are being given to prisoners and, since November 1, 1996, the Salvation Army has housed up to 20 intermittent offenders diverted from Headingley Correctional Institution. Intermittent sentences normally are sentenced to work or to weekend custody and they serve one-sixteenth of their sentence at the Salvation Army site and are required to complete community work during the Saturday and Sunday daytime hours.

Upon successful completion of that preliminary part of their sentence they are released under temporary absence to their own residence and subject to weekend, evening curfews and weekend daytime work at designated supervised worksites to completion of their sentence.

There are on average about 15 intermittents housed at the Salvation Army and 35 under temporary absence work release to their own home. Staff assigned to the adult community release centre ensure work assignments are carried out, that curfews are monitored and that the army is assisted, that is, the Salvation Army is assisted with security screening of all offenders. Intermittents in breach of conditions may be detained, lose remission, or be returned to their custody.

Now, I understand that during the flood there were some arrangements because of difficulties that the Salvation Army had and other arrangements were made during that time, but I think we are almost back to normal in that respect. Indeed, my staff indicate we are back at normal.

Again, as I indicated last date, the contribution of prisoners to the flood effort was well appreciated. They certainly did a very, very good job, and I think it was a very positive way for these prisoners to put something back into their community.

Mr. Mackintosh: Just to be clear, are intermittent sentences being served at the Salvation Army by way of accommodation there on Friday and Saturday night and in the daytime hours and, if so, at what location is it, at the Booth Centre or where?

Mr. Toews: I made a mistake in terms of, I think I said one-sixteenth of the sentence. It is one-sixth. I am sorry. I am unsure as to whether I should give the address of the Salvation Army, for a number of reasons, but I can indicate to the member that these people are housed at a regular facility owned by the Salvation Army here in the city of Winnipeg and they sleep there overnight.

* (1500)

Mr. Mackintosh: What are the per diems that the province is paying to the Salvation Army for the intermittent sentences on a daily basis?

Mr. Toews: Twenty-nine dollars a day.

Mr. Mackintosh: I understand that there are contemplated staff reductions at Headingley, that there will be reductions from three officers per unit to two officers per unit after midnight. I am just wondering if the minister can advise if that is accurate and, if so, why is that being contemplated?

Mr. Toews: It certainly is an exciting question. I know the Chair may not always appreciate the nuances of some of these questions but, indeed, a very important question. All of us here sitting with rapt attention in the House have something to learn from perhaps the insightful question of the member for St. Johns. I will try to be as insightful as the member opposite.

The answer to that is, yes, the member for St. Johns is correct. That is being contemplated, and it is being done in consultation with the staff, and that is the union. There have been a number of discussions with the union in that respect and, indeed, there is an agreement that they are moving towards in achieving this. There are a number of reasons why this can be done and why staff understand that it can be done. First of all, during the night there is a lockdown, so you do not have any movement of inmates occurring. Also, because of the extensive changes in security and because of the changes in the building itself, it lends itself to a reduction in staffing at that particular time. So, lest anyone think that this is being done unilaterally, no, it is not being done unilaterally. It has the concurrence and the discussion of the union and staff members.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass?

Mr. Toews: I am just going to indicate that this matter has been discussed with Mr. Scurfield and he has approved it. He knows of it. Maybe I should not say approved it; that is a little too strong. He knows of it, and it is certainly something he is aware of, so it is not, again, something that is being done unilaterally.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass? The item is accordingly passed.

4.4.(b)(2) Other Expenditures \$5,093,600—pass; (3) External Agencies and Halfway Houses \$336,800—pass; (4) Less: Recoverable from other appropriations (\$80,000)—pass.

4.4.(c) Correctional Youth Centres (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$9,748,500.

Mr. Mackintosh: I understand that a couple of studies were done for the department, one relating to boot camps and the other, I believe, relating to the supervision program for those released. I am wondering if the minister can either provide copies of those reports or summarize what the main findings of those reports were.

Mr. Toews: Other than an internal review that was done by the manager in charge of the—and I always get the initials wrong, but it is the ISSP, the supervision and support program, which is essentially the monitoring of offenders once they are out in the street. That was done internally, and there is no formal report in that respect, but it is an ongoing process.

In respect of the evaluation of Manitoba's youth correctional facilities which I think have popularly been called boot camps, there, in fact, have been some studies completed. I have had an opportunity to review some of the issues with my staff, and indeed, had occasion a day or two ago, perhaps yesterday, to meet with the authors of that report, and I will decide what the appropriate time is to release that. I think that it is encouraging in many respects, and I intend to make those reports available very, very shortly.

Mr. Mackintosh: I have to correct myself. I referred to the facilities as boot camps. Of course, there are no

boot camps as the term is generally defined on the continent, but I was referring to what the government has referred to as boot camps. That is not my characterization, just to make it clear for the record.

Is the minister prepared to describe the mean findings of the internal study, then, on the ISSP review?

Mr. Toews: Yes, I would be pleased to share some of this information with the member for St. Johns. The intensive support and supervision program was developed by the custody support unit and implemented in November of 1994. The primary goal of the program is to facilitate the successful reintegration of high risk young offenders in a manner consistent with the protection of the community. The target group includes young offenders in open custody who are eligible to have temporary absences for reintegration purposes in Winnipeg and, secondly, young offenders who are bound by a probation order following the expiration of a committal and residing in Winnipeg.

* (1510)

The program focuses on relapse prevention in the community and addresses identified factors associated with offending behaviour. There is intensive support and supervision provided to these young offenders, and the core expectations of the program participants include that the majority of one's time is occupied in a constructive manner, reporting weekly or more frequently to a youth worker, participating in programming, abiding by a curfew and abiding by all probation order conditions. Youths are held accountable for their behaviour in the community through the provision of immediate and real consequences, and the service providers work very closely with the young offenders, their families, correctional staff, and all other community representatives and agencies.

Mr. Louis Goulet, the Executive Director of Community and Youth Corrections is present at the table here today, and Carolyn Brock is the probation officer or worker in charge of this particular program. The reason I hesitated with the name is that I knew her under another name when I was a prosecutor out in Brandon, not that she changed her name and moved to Winnipeg as a result of any direct involvement that I

had in a professional way with her, but she in fact married, changed her name and moved to Winnipeg. She was a probation officer in Brandon, a very, very skilled, well-recognized probation officer, and very, very pleased when I was appointed Minister of Justice to see her in this very, very responsible position and doing an excellent job. This is the kind of public servant that Manitobans can be proud of. She commits much of her time and her effort into ensuring the success of what I consider a very important program.

I think, based on workers like Carolyn Brock, that there is tremendous success with this program. We have to recognize that all of Corrections, whether someone is in a facility or on supervision, there is always a risk. Correction philosophy, I am advised, is risk management. That is essentially what we have to do. Under our system of justice, we recognize that everyone virtually, certainly in the provincial system, is eventually going to walk out on the street one day. The question is: How do you effectively manage that risk to ensure that the integration of a person occurs with the least chance of reoffending? I think there is evidence today, in fact I know that there is evidence today that when supervision is merged with rehabilitative interventions, the correctional treatment then becomes more effective. I think that is the reason why we see the success that Mr. Louis Goulet's staff, including Carolyn Brock, has been achieving.

A statistical report for young offenders for temporary absences for the period ending February 1996 indicates an overall program success rate of 85 to 91 percent, that is, no reinvolvement occurred while a youth was a participant of the program. The success rate of the overall program, that is, in the temporary absences and the postcustody supervision, is 75 percent. At any given time, the program services approximately 110 higher risk offenders. To date the program has serviced approximately 800 young offenders who have served custodial dispositions. It is also important to remember that this support is provided to these young offenders on a 24-hour basis.

This has given, I think, management additional challenges, has given staff additional challenges. I just want to compliment the management and the staff for working in such a positive way to provide that type of service. We recognize that crime is not an eight-to-five

job, and members of our staff recognize that as well. Again, I would just simply like to thank them for the commitment that they make in order to ensure the successful reintegration of offenders into our communities.

Mr. Mackintosh: In terms of the other study, can the minister indicate what pattern, if any, may have been studied in terms of relapse by those who are released?

Mr. Toews: I think it is premature for me to get into the specifics of that report. I might indicate that there are some aspects of the report that indicate the program of the government is—the benefits are not clear, but on whole there are benefits to the particular program and some very significant benefits which I am very pleased with.

(Mr. Mervin Tweed, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

But I think I need a few more days or indeed, perhaps, a week or so to review those findings to ensure that I understand exactly what the report is saying to me and that I ask the appropriate questions to my staff, so that I can move in any direction that needs be. But the report itself has been rendered. That is not going to change.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yesterday, we asked about whether work done by inmates was paid, and the minister indicated that work in the correctional youth centres was not paid. I am wondering what the rationale for that is.

Mr. Toews: I want to consult with my staff on that, but one of the issues that we have to remember is that youth correctional facilities are significantly different than adult correctional facilities. I think we are at the point where we recognize with some of the adult facilities that protection of the public is the highest concern, and rehabilitation, while important, is clearly when you are in one of these correctional facilities something that must be done with a view to safety of the public.

The issue of money and being paid I guess is an important one. We look at how do we best reward people when they are in these institutions. I think it is

very important whatever institution you are in that good conduct is rewarded. Sometimes the appropriate mechanism of rewarding inmates is to pay them for their work and, as indicated yesterday, the amount of payment is rather modest—I think we said, \$1.90 a day to \$3.75 a day, somewhere in that range, as I recall.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

I think we also have to look at the issue of how, then, do we reinforce good behaviour for youth who are in these facilities, and there are other ways that we may well wish to look at in dealing with youth. I think the boot camp, if I, again, can euphemistically use that term because I do not know if that is an official government term, but it seems to be the term that I have heard before I came into this department, and I think that term brings about erroneous connotations that may or may not be appropriate for the type of youth correctional system that we are developing in Manitoba. But when we look at this particular study, I think we also have to take a look at, are our inmates in these residences, in the youth facilities, being recognized for appropriate behaviour?

* (1520)

So I think the point that the member is raising, I, personally, from a philosophical point of view understand why he is saying that. I agree. Whether money is the appropriate way to reward these young offenders is an entirely different issue—if I might just have a minute with my staff who may well contradict me.

Yes, my staff say I am correct, but they do add another facet to this discussion, and that is the emphasis on schooling in the youth facility and on other programming that traditionally has not been a part of the adult correctional institutes where work is more emphasized, and it is assumed that education has already taken place. I think that might not be an assumption that is necessarily valid given that we now, of course, have all kinds of schooling programs in Headingley or other institutions as indicated in last day's discussion.

We are reimplementing the schooling program in Headingley, but traditionally it has been schooling and

other programming that has been emphasized in these facilities. The point still remains, are there better ways, more effective ways, of rewarding young offenders when they are in the institution, so that they have this understanding that there is a connection between appropriate behaviour and recognition, positive recognition, in our society.

So the point the member makes is a good one. Traditionally, it has never been done, but I certainly am open to any way we can more effectively remind our young offenders of this very important principle.

Mr. Mackintosh: Can the minister tell us the number of escapes from Agassiz in the last fiscal year?

Mr. Toews: In respect of the Agassiz Youth Centre, there have always been fluctuations in terms of the numbers of people escaping and for what reasons. Clearly, there have been some concerns over the past two years to address the number of escapes from youth custody facilities and, in particular, the Agassiz Youth Centre.

For example, in the Agassiz Youth Centre, there were newly installed windows in resident cottages at Agassiz to prevent escapes. Also, youth identified as high risk for escaping are put under extra security, and a security fence has been erected at the Agassiz Youth Centre.

One of the things that we have to point out about Agassiz in particular is the type of offender we have there and also the type of programming. Traditionally, the emphasis at Agassiz has been less on overt security measures and more on a positive peer culture program. I think that is very, very important that the youths in these units are responsible for each other. That is a tremendous way of not only reducing the number of escapes but also of instilling a sense of responsibility and commitment of these youths to each other in I think a positive way and not simply in a negative, let us say, gang connotation. So this positive peer culture has been very, very beneficial.

As indicated, there have been a number of fluctuations in the amount of escapes. It appears that simply because you take extra security precautions, in terms of enhanced fencing or enhanced bars, in youth facilities like Agassiz where you rely on a particular

kind of programming, that does not necessarily translate into fewer escapes.

For example, in 1989 to 1990, there were 53 escapes; 1990-91, 29; '91 to '92, there were 15; '92 to '93 there were 11; '93 to '94, there were 28; '94-95, there were 33; '95-96, it went way down to 12; and then '96-97, it is back to 32.

The issue of what type of enhancements you now take to bring that level further, I am not so sure. Many youth, you put up a fence and they will see it as a challenge. It may well be that putting up a fence may in fact tempt certain individuals to escape where they would not have otherwise. The jury is out on that particular issue.

I know that when I visited Agassiz, and given the rural setting that it is in, I thought there was no particular benefit to further enhancing those security measures, which would include the inclusion of razor wire or things like that to prevent these young offenders from going over the fence. I simply made my observation in that respect.

The staff, of course, are ultimately the ones who are responsible for those decisions. I will not interfere on those kinds of security decisions, but there has, I would indicate, been very limited public reaction to runaways at Agassiz Youth Centre. Most of these youths are caught very, very quickly, given that this is a fairly isolated area. Not that Portage la Prairie is not a large community, but if they are running to Winnipeg they have a 50-mile hike down No. 1 highway, and a lot of them seem to be picked up somewhere between Portage and Winnipeg.

I think also what needs to be pointed out is the nature of the offenders there and the risk management which I think goes a long way to allow us to not necessarily concentrate on the enhancement of security but concentrate on programming. In those cases where these youths do escape, the negative impact in the community in terms of especially violent offences is very, very minimal, if at all. I am not aware of any violence associated with residents in Portage during an escape over the last year but, again, I could be corrected in that respect. But what I am trying to emphasize is that the potential for violence in these type of escapes

are very minimal and, perhaps, it is because of the type of programming that these children or offenders receive. They may not want to stay there but at least they have learned something while they have been there.

* (1530)

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass—pass.

4.4.(c)(2) Other Expenditures \$984,000—pass.

4.4.(d) Community Corrections (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$7,311,900. Shall the item pass?

Mr. Mackintosh: I do not know where to ask this, but I did have a call from a concerned citizen saying that an individual had heard a rumour that there were sex offenders being housed in a new facility, or a different facility, in Portage la Prairie, and I am just wondering if that was a program under Justice or not.

Mr. Toews: That is not a Justice program. That is under the Manitoba Developmental Centre.

Mr. Mackintosh: Can the minister tell us whether probation officers are given direction as to how much time they should spend and how often they should meet with youth on probation, whether they be medium or high risk?

Mr. Toews: I guess what I would have to say initially, it is very, very difficult to provide a standard answer, that for every probation officer there are so many cases, for every offender there are so many contacts.

I have had an opportunity to speak to a number of probation officers throughout the province, including a very, very innovative and aggressive probation program in Brandon. I met with a Dennis Provenski who is the head probation officer there. I do not know exactly the title—[interjection] senior, area director, all right—but he is a very important man there anyway. Not only is he an important man but when I started prosecuting, Dennis Provenski was in that area. It was remarkable the type of change that has been made since 1976 until today in terms of the integration of this program into the community and the resources that are being used in the community under the direction of very capable

people like Mr. Dennis Provenski. A probation officer may have a certain caseload. He also, though, in that area has the assistance of a huge and very competent volunteer contingent that assists him in managing his caseload.

I was given a very thorough briefing for about an hour one morning there, and I have had a chance to meet with Mr. Provenski on other occasions and other probation officers in other areas of Manitoba, and again it comes back to me the concept of making linkages in the community so that the community takes an active participation in the supervision. Because there are many retired people, for example, retired doctors, psychiatrists, police officers, social workers who, at age 55, suddenly find that retirement was not exactly what they thought it would be, that they need professional challenge and stimulation. So these people are being brought back into the areas of their expertise on a voluntary basis and indeed have contributed immensely to the success of some of these programs.

The volunteers cannot be underestimated and the strength that they provide to the professional probation officers who indeed are taking not only a direct approach in terms of writing reports or meeting with offenders, but supervising local committees who then have the direct contact with the offenders on a regular or an intermittent basis. And I say that by way of introduction because one cannot approach this answer in a standard way.

The four principles that Manitoba Community and Youth Corrections takes into account in determining an effective correctional program in this respect are: Firstly is the risk principle and that an effective treatment program must be able to differentiate offenders in their risk to re-offend and then match their risk to the level of service. Obviously higher risk offenders require more intensive services while lower risk offenders require very little or no services.

Manitoba Corrections, as I understand it, is leading the country in terms of risk assessment programming and is in the process of implementing the offender's risk management system which will help to determine which offenders fall into a high risk category. Again, this initiative, a very important one, by Manitoba officials to deal with this issue.

The second principle is the need principle, and this makes the point that there are two types of offender needs. Now, this is a technical term and so, not that I cannot pronounce it, but I will spell it out for the Hansard. It is c-r-i-m-i-n-o-g-e-n-i-c and noncriminogenic. The first category of needs are the offender needs that when changed are associated with changes in recidivism. Community and Youth Corrections provides several intensive cognitive-based programs to offenders; and there are specific programs for sex offenders, family violent offenders, substance abuse offenders and assaultive offenders. When I did a tour of a probation office out in Weston-[interjection] In Midland, I again had occasion to meet with workers that I had worked with in Brandon.

It seems that all these workers from Brandon eventually come into Winnipeg as very senior people. I do not know whether it is something about the training that they receive out in Brandon or just the quality of people there, but I met a number of people at the Midland facility who again were involved in the sexual offender counselling program there. These are people on probation and then are required to take specific courses outside of the jail, so we have the sex offenders taking courses in the jail but also on a continuing basis outside of the jail. The counselling sessions were in fact conducted by two probation officers or counsellors, one male and one female, and I think it certainly made a positive impression upon me.

The third principle is the responsivity principle. That basically says there are certain personality incognative behavioural characteristics of the offender that influence how responsive one is to types of interventions and how these are delivered.

In Manitoba Corrections, domestic violence program materials have been translated and are delivered in several different languages. Program facilitators must constantly adapt materials to meet the learning ability and the learning styles of participants.

* (1540)

I think it is very important to note that in our multicultural society, issues like domestic violence, people coming from other countries may not accept initially what our expectations are of them in respect of

treatment of each other. So it is very important that we make it clear that things like domestic abuse in Canada are not acceptable. We have to ensure not just that there is English material in that respect, but that we are responsive to people wherever they come from to join us here in Canada. So, again, the delivery of these programs in other languages I think is essential and is responsive to a particular need.

Program facilitators I think must constantly adapt materials to meet the learning ability and the learning styles of the participants, because it is also important to remember that things like domestic abuse—we are not talking necessarily of a specific educational level or a specific cultural background. That occurs in all cultures. It occurs in people of all educational backgrounds, so again the programming must be responsive to the types of people that we are dealing with.

The fourth principle is referred to as professional discretion. This is obviously a principle that is applicable to any professional person in the Department of Justice; and Community and Youth Corrections is no exception in that respect. Offenders may present unique characteristics and situations that are not adequately considered but under the other three principles. In other words, no risk assessment instrument and no intervention programs could ever adequately describe or consider the range of possible offender characteristics, so I am not trying to avoid the question here as what is an acceptable level.

There are all kinds of factors that need to be worked into this issue, so if you consider Carolyn Brock's ISSP program and compare that to Dennis Provenski's program in Brandon or consider a regular person out on probation who has to take the sexual offender counselling or the domestic abuse counselling program, the nature and the number of times they have to see a counsellor may change, but I think what this is all getting to is, is this an effective way of dealing with it? We have certain standards, we have certain aims, we have certain goals, and once we put the offenders into this mix, is this an effective program?

Manitoba, just for the information of the member opposite, has five programs that are deemed to be provincial programs, and these are programs that are

carried out by Community and Youth Corrections, and these are partner abuse programs, an anger management program, one version for adults and one for youth, a relapse-prevention-based program for sex offenders, and in respect of the partner abuse program, there is one version for group delivery and one on individual delivery. The one that I saw at Midland was a group delivery of sex offenders. So that is not the partner abuse; it is the sex-offender situation.

Offenders, it should be pointed out, receive the same program whether incarcerated or on community supervision. I might point out that Dr. Jane Ursel from the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba recently evaluated the program that Corrections delivers to domestic violence offenders, the short-term violence program for domestic violence offenders, and she concluded that Manitoba is a world leader in its management of this particular client group.

So, again, I think this speaks very highly of the type of staff, the type of public servants, that we have administering our programs here in Manitoba, and, again, they are to be commended.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): How many area directors are there in Probations?

Mr. Toews: In respect of area directors, there are 10 in Manitoba and four in Winnipeg.

Mr. Kowalski: How many of those area directors are in acting positions, and how long have they been acting for?

Mr. Toews: There are three acting, one in Thompson, one in Selkirk, and one in Winnipeg, and the time that they have been in these acting positions varies anywhere from a year to three years.

Mr. Kowalski: How many levels of management or supervision are there between a probation officer and area directors? Are there other levels of supervision and management in between that?

Mr. Toews: I could provide that material to the member. I think it would be a lot easier than my trying to communicate. I know that there are assistant area directors or associate area directors, and they do not

necessarily have all of those in the same units. Rather than try to put that on the record, I would prefer to just give you the information and you may want to ask me further questions either in the Estimates process or otherwise.

Mr. Kowalski: That would be more than acceptable. I would like to get that information at a later time. That would be very acceptable. The reason for the questions is it has been expressed to me by some individuals about the number of people acting in probation, that there are more people acting in positions for lengthy periods of time, and it can have an effect on the ability to take creative action, to bring new policies, new initiatives because, when you are acting in a position, you are less likely to shake up the tree as when you have that position permanently. That is the concern that I am addressing, that there are a large number of people acting in probation services at the different levels.

I have further questions but if the minister would like to respond to that concern.

* (1550)

Mr. Toews: I agree that a person in an acting position does deserve some amount of stability to know where he or she is going to be the next day. That is an important issue. We certainly do not want to reduce the amount of creativity that each of these individuals may bring to any particular position. We talked about professional discretion in the context of the last answer. It is also very important that we recognize professional discretion in terms of the development of programming.

This is not to say that probation has suffered from a lack of innovative programs. I think it has succeeded in doing remarkably well. If I hear what the member is saying, I agree with him, and maybe I will just put on the record what I think he is saying and what I agree with. That is that probation officers, not necessarily people at the assistant deputy minister level or the deputy minister level, often in their particular area should be given more authority to make responsive programming to particular challenges that they meet.

I think one need only go further than to go to Brandon and talk to Dennis Provenski and talk to how he has managed his resources in a very effective way.

I mean, talk about creativity, talk about professional discretion. Those are the types of things I want to see happen in the department, people acting, yes, pursuant to a consistent policy, but that there is that flexibility within the government structure to ensure that these people develop programs in local areas, even though they may not be programming right through the province, but where needs are identified, we should be encouraging these individual people to take charge of the area and, in fact, do that kind of initiative.

I know that at present—and the concern about the acting positions is noted. It is something that I have expressed some concern about, but there is a study of the entire area going on at headquarters right now and then it will move down to the next level or move on to the next level rather than saying move down to the next level. I think the member can agree with me that to place people in permanent positions, remove the acting and then restructure does not really do anything. I think the onus and, of course, the challenge for us is to ensure that we move in a prompt manner.

I thank the member for those comments and if he has any specific suggestions that would assist us in moving in that direction, we will certainly take any of his comments very, very seriously.

Mr. Kowalski: The probation officers that are assigned to liaison with Justice committees, how are those assignments handed out? Are these volunteer? Do they volunteer to liaison with the Justice committees? Are they just drafted to liaison with the Justice committees out of the different offices? How are those assignments made? Is there a special criteria in selection of those probation officers and do they receive any training in working with volunteers?

Mr. Toews: Just in terms of a preliminary answer and a very summary answer, and I want to talk about some of that detail as well or the detail involved in this summary is that, in short, some are assigned, some are voluntary and some, especially in the more remote areas, this is simply a regular part of their duties. So whether they volunteer or not, that is a part of their duty.

I think the point is well taken about youth justice committees generally, and we had a lengthy discussion

here about youth justice committees. Manitoba is recognized as having one of the largest numbers of youth justice committees, not only in relation to its population but, indeed, simply the number of youth justice committees. Since 1987, the number of youth justice committees has increased from 28 to, I understand, approximately 70, so there are new ones being created. Indeed, I believe the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe) is either involved in the creation of a new one or the reactivation of an old one, but I think it is the creation of a new one in that area. I know the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski), the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) are all involved in these committees, and I think that is a tremendous credit to all MLAs when we act in such a positive way.

The authority for creating these comes under the Young Offenders Act, and there are certain designations that I make in respect of volunteer probation officers or honorary probation officers, as they are called. They are very, very cost effective. They are adaptable within very diverse environments. I believe that 17 of these are in aboriginal communities. I do not know specifically whether it is First Nations, but certainly inclusive of First Nations communities, there are approximately 17.

So they can deal very, very effectively to local needs. One of the points that the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) raised and, perhaps, even the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) the other day was the lack of referrals of some of these committees. No, I believe it was the member for St. Johns who specifically raised that, that there was no consistency in referrals, and that is something that we have to, in fact, take a look at.

I indicated on the record that I was meeting with the probation officers who are involved in this particular program delivery. I want to stress specifically how important these committees are to the overall functioning of the Justice system, and not just in terms of monetary impact, because the impact is tremendously beneficial in terms of the money it saves in prosecution, in terms of the restitution orders that these people administer and then bring back to victims, so again very, very positive.

One of the comments that I have noted previously from the member for The Maples is the issue of, do these probation officers understand what it means in every case to work with volunteers? These youth justice committees are volunteers, and they do this out of a sense of responsibility to their community. They do not get paid for this. The issue of working with volunteers and probation officers I think is a very, very good one. I want to raise that issue specifically with my staff. I believe the suggestion that was made by the member for The Maples, which he is to be commended for, is: Should we be looking at things like somebody from the Volunteer Bureau? Should we be looking at bringing in police officers to talk about communications with volunteers? All very, very valid points, and I have raised these with one or more of my members of my staff. I think they are positive, because dealing with an offender is quite a different thing for a probation officer than dealing with a volunteer committee member.

That sensitivity needs to be instilled and reminded. That is not to say that many of them are not already very effective. I have had occasion to speak on an individual basis with some of these probation officers who have approached me. They are committed to this concept. Sometimes they feel frustrated that more things cannot be done quickly. What I want to do is make sure that we, in fact, encourage our probation officers, who are this essential link to the community. To that end, we are looking at a number of things.

I might indicate that the newsletter which has been identified as being an important aspect of communicating, letting these people know that there is a community of youth justice committees who all share similar goals and issues and challenges, well, the newsletter, it is called Rapport, and has been released, has been sent out to the various youth justice committees. So I trust that if the member does not receive his copy of Rapport, he will advise me very, very promptly, and, again I would say that to the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) as well.

Now a newsletter is not the full answer, but it brings the links of these community groups together. I also want to state, in a very brief conversation that I had with the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) and the member for St. Johns in a West Kildonan school,

the whole issue about bringing the youth justice committees or, at least, the leaders of these committees together on an annual basis or for some kind of a training session is another one that was raised. I know that there is a training manual that is available or will shortly be released. I am not exactly sure whether it has been released. The member for St. Johns indicates that it, in fact, has been released; I have had a chance to review it. Those are the kinds of things that we need to do to encourage those youth justice committees. This also makes the probation officer's job a lot easier.

The essential point, though, getting back to the member's question, do they have training in dealing with volunteers, that is one of the issues, of course, that I want to continue to explore. Some will have greater skills than others, and I want to see that we facilitate any necessary training as quickly as possible.

Mr. Kowalski: The probation officers who are assigned to liaise with the justice committee, it takes a certain amount of their time. I imagine the department has an expectation of the number of cases, the number of files, they will handle. I do not know how they measure it, by a portion of a staff year, how they measure the work expectation from each probation officer, but what portion is given to working with a justice committee?

Are they given one day's work a month? Are they given so many hours? Is it a portion of a staff year? How do they decide how much staff time should go to working with a justice committee by a probation officer who liaises with the justice committees?

Mr. Toews: I can give the member a very rough answer to that question, and that is approximately 5 percent to 7 percent of the probation officer's time would be spent on youth justice committees and especially when these committees are being set up, so that more time would be spent. Obviously, as the committee is set up, that would be reduced, depending, again, then, on the activity level of the particular youth justice committee.

Maybe I am anticipating the member's concern or question, but I can see the concern that there is if you set up the committee and you have all the stuff done, there might be a tendency on the part of a probation

officer to say, well, now it is all set up, let it run, and that probation officer, because of other commitments, might devote less than that percentage of time.

I think we do have to recognize the ongoing commitment that must be made to these youth justice committees, and I am certain my staff are mindful of that in their discussions with probation officers and the allocation of time that they spend. But the question is a good one. It is an important role.

Now, Roger Bates, who is the probation officer who is responsible for these youth justice committees, is doing this on a very extensive basis, I believe virtually on a full-time basis. One of the other questions I have to look at is, is that whole area being properly resourced? I want to look at that issue, and there are certain questions that I have of my staff. That is the direction that I am moving in.

My staff, I think, are being very mindful of my concerns and my priority in that respect, but, again, if there are inside or outside opinions that could assist in how we strengthen that—I had a very interesting conversation just the other night with the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) and a probation officer by the name of Rosemary Broadbent who, coincidentally, happens to be the Liberal candidate in the federal riding that I live in.

I am not here to advocate for people voting for Rosemary Broadbent, but she talked to me about perhaps looking at certain issues inside the department, specifically in respect of community youth justice committees. She, of course, assured me that she would not be back to the department for some period of time given that she was going to unseat Mr. Bill Blaikie in the riding, and I know she did have a conversation with my wife about the possibility of my wife voting Liberal. I do not get involved in those conversations with my spouse. I feel that each of us are mature enough to make our own decisions about voting the right way, and I know in my experience it is certainly the party that I have joined, but that is quite another issue.

But I had a very interesting conversation with her. I know that my wife and, indeed, the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) was at the same function. We seem to do nothing but run into each other; it is a small

community. But my wife had a very interesting conversation with Rosemary Broadbent, one of the very capable probation officers in my department, and that is the kind of insight that I am receiving into the department.

I think one of the things that needs to be stressed is the vitality of these workers and the enthusiasm of these workers and the desire to make these kinds of things work, and that is not a campaign plug. I think that is a feature that is very, very common in the Department of Justice, and I know that the Minister of Environment, who was formerly the Attorney General, could attest to the very capable people that we have.

Anyway, that is enough of that.

Mr. Kowalski: Yes, just one more question along these lines as far as probation officers working with justice committees. I imagine probation officers receive an annual assessment and, within their assessment, is this one of the criteria that are looked at when their performance is reviewed, working with the volunteers? If it is, I know as a volunteer I have never been asked about the probation officers that I have dealt with in the last seven years on justice committees as far as their ability to communicate and that.

I will just go a little bit for a few minutes on this. I know I use a parallel of the police force, and on the police force, I know when community policing was first introduced it was not popular amongst many of the constables. It was seen as not real police work, and one of the things to make it more valid was that in Edmonton, for example, no one got promoted unless they had been a community police constable. Part of being a community police constable in their assessment on their performance was how well they worked with volunteers and community members.

* (1610)

So the parallel for probation officers, if their ability to work with volunteers, that the performance of the justice committees they work with reflects on their assessment, on their performance and possibly their future promotion, then if it is seen within the department as something that you have to be good at in order to be successful, as a probation office, I think it

would be a strong, positive motivator to even get higher levels of performance out of our justice committees and better effort put in by the probation officer to liaise with these volunteers.

So in summary, the question is: Does the liaison probation officer's performance working with volunteers reflect on their annual assessments?

Mr. Toews: Well, that is an excellent point. When I met with the Springfield Youth Justice Committee, one of the things that they mentioned to me was the issue of feedback. Is what we are doing recognized in the justice system? Do the Crown attorneys really care about what we are doing? Do the probation officers really care about what we are doing? So I think, again, the member for The Maples has asked another very insightful question, and certainly that kind of feedback is important, and I would encourage my officials here to make note of your comments so that if it is not being done on a consistent and regular basis, that is something that I would certainly see subject to, of course, any barriers in a collective agreement. I do not want to have that type of a problem in my stay in this department.

I think the point is a good one. We have to be more sensitive to the needs of these volunteers. They are spending their time for the community, and they need to be recognized, not in a monetary sense but in a sense of satisfaction, that what they are doing is an important aspect. I can only say here for the public record that their efforts are truly appreciated by myself and certainly by the senior members of my department that I speak to on a regular basis. I intend to communicate that message to those probation officers when I meet with them very shortly.

Mr. Kowalski: I think this will be my last question on the line. The minister has already mentioned about bringing different justice committee members together for a joint training session. He talked about the value and was very supportive of that; talked about recognizing the volunteers' contribution.

I remember years ago there was an annual volunteer appreciation event put on by Community and Youth Corrections. A number of times it was held in the Concert Hall. The last one I remember was at Investors

Group. The probation officers, it was part of their task to organize this event to show that they appreciated the volunteers. It was something that many of the volunteers very much looked forward to. There was a small reception. There were door prizes. In fact, I won a trip to Minneapolis once. There were awards. There was presentation of a one-year, two-year, five-year plaques and that.

Now, I know what the justification was for cancelling that event. There was a survey done, and I guess I have to be cynical and skeptical of this survey. I believe that it did take a lot of staff time for an already very hard working staff to organize this event, and they came back and said, well, the volunteers would appreciate more of a personal appreciation. This year, for example, as a volunteer my sum effort was a card that I got. That was my sum of official appreciation from the department. Now in comparison to the event put on, the recognition and the words from the assistant deputy minister, this is in pale comparison to what volunteers are being asked to do, more and more.

Now, we are looking at justice committees possibly even going into doing alternative measures for adults. We have already talked about the need for training, and I think we should not be going backwards on showing our appreciation to the volunteers who work within the youth justice committees or in the Youth Centre. There are volunteers in many other areas. I think we have gone backwards for those who have volunteered for a long time. There is less appreciation now than there was seven years ago.

Mr. Toews: I know that for the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski), the work is its own reward. I know that for him, it is not that he requires any recognition beyond the recognition he already receives in his community as being a fine, outstanding citizen there. But the point in respect of other people who may not get the daily praise and adulation of the member for The Maples is a good point. I might indicate that in speaking to my officials, the department, I say, was receiving mixed messages in respect of these gala events, the larger events, and perhaps it was inappropriate to continue in that direction. There were some concerns expressed in favour of smaller events. The problem is, when you create smaller, more localized events, the issue is are they occurring in every

area? Sometimes some of them fall off the wagon and the appropriate recognition that members of these committees, perhaps the committee that the member for The Maples is on, did not receive anything beyond the card. It is not to say that our appreciation is any less. It is certainly very, very important. I think this is again another issue that we need to discuss with the probation officers and, at least, if we are not consistent, at least, there must be some tangible way of ensuring that the members of these committees are, in fact, recognized for their efforts. I do not think the member is suggesting that we expend inordinate amounts of money on this kind of events, but that we do make some effort to recognize the tremendous contributions.

The issue raised by the member in respect of alternative measures for adults, again, that is not unheard of already. When I spoke to a particular youth justice committee, they indicated to me that they were serving people from the age of 12 years old to mid-50s, so that is already being done. It is being recognized that these youth justice committees have a much broader potential in terms of their impact on the justice system. So the points are well made, and I do not want to get too far ahead of my department in terms of placing unreasonable demands on them. I think I have made it clear to them on a number of occasions that this is the direction that we are moving in, in Justice areas. It is always a concern when we deal with alternative measures, it is the public safety aspect of the matter being addressed. I think there is enough work for youth justice committees that would not compromise public safety issues.

So we will, in fact, look at this particular aspect of the Estimates very, very closely in terms of the suggestions that have been made here, both by the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) and the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski). I would commend the reading of Hansard to my staff in this area, so that next year when I or somebody else is here to answer questions in respect of the department that we can say, yes, we took your advice to heart and that we are moving very positively in respect of some of the very positive suggestions that have been made here this afternoon.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass? The item is accordingly passed.

4.4.(d)(2) Other Expenditures \$1,281,800-pass; (3) Program Development \$1,348,000-pass.

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$55,378,900 for Justice Corrections for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1998.

Now move on to Resolution 4.5. Courts (a) Court Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,876,300.

* (1620)

Mr. Mackintosh: I understand there are some time constraints. There were a number of questions that the minister has been given notice of that should be dealt with under this appropriation, but there are other avenues, other forms that we can raise those questions in.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 4.5.(a)(1) \$2,876,300-pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$1,328,800-pass.

4.5.(b) Winnipeg Courts (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$7,222,500-pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$1,303,700-pass.

4.5.(c) Regional Courts (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$3,896,500-pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$2,137,000-pass.

4.5.(d) Judicial Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$7,514,700-pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$824,400-pass.

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$27,103,900 to Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1998.

We now revert to Resolution 4.1. Administration and Finance (a) Minister's Salary \$25,700. At this time we ask the minister's staff to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Mackintosh: I wanted to add a few comments on the Minister's Salary at this time. I think this department has certainly suffered over the last few

years with the lack of leadership and, I think, a lack of forthrightness with the public on a number of fronts.

We have seen an emphasis moved from public safety to public relations and what I would call puffery. So the minister is fully aware of the expectations that are on him now coming into this position, to get the department back on track, and to give the public greater confidence in the administration of justice.

Unfortunately there have been some indications that this may be more difficult to achieve than what the public or members of the opposition expected. We have noticed a theme developing with the minister, particularly in answer to questions of sloughing off responsibility and particularly accountability for shortcomings that have been identified as of late in the department.

I would think, for example, of concerns expressed by sheriffs as to their personal safety, and how the minister said he would not interfere with the Health and Safety Committee process. A simple question in Question Period from the member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford) about the timing of the Lavoie report receipt and a response that the minister would not dare interfere with judicial independence which is not the issue here.

Another example of Lisa Drover and the travesty of justice there where the Crown went to trial with no witnesses, and this is not the first time it happened. Actually the first time an issue like this came to our attention was just two years or three years ago, and we were assured that this would not happen again because there were new directions given to Crown. But there the minister, in the Drover case, blamed the police.

Then the other day, with questions of the application of zero tolerance policy in Manitoba, in light of some allegations that the policy may not be applied consistently and fairly, the response was, well, that is a Prosecution and police matter.

These are all matters where the Attorney General has a leadership role. He has a bully pulpit available to him and, as well, he has authority, both direct and indirect. The kind of response that we have been receiving in this House is of concern.

We also have been concerned about lack of accountability in dealing with the Nancy Friday book. We were in the House asking questions, fairly detailed questions, about the role of the Crown opinion and how that was developed, and meanwhile outside of the House a senior departmental official was speaking to the radio, and there was a transmission that was explaining that in fact the opinion had been rejected, and that there were serious concerns expressed about how the Crown attorneys were able to deal with the demands on them. Yet in the House the minister was continuing on the same line of answers as the previous day as if there were two different worlds here. I think it was unfortunate the minister did not, in his statements, reflect what the department was saying. It is important that this institution be the most relevant institution in terms of question and answers and detail like we expect.

We have had increasing concerns about a number of senior management positions in the department not going to public competition. We think that of all the departments of government, it is important that there be an appearance of fairness and of merit in the department. This is not to say that the individuals filling those positions do not have merit, but it is important that the public be assured through the open competition system, except in the rare circumstances, that the positions are being filled according to the highest standards of civil service.

* (1630)

You have had some embarrassing, I think I can say, difficult exposés of faults in the justice system in just a short time. We have seen the mistaken release of Mr. Guiboché from the Remand Centre. We have seen not just the travesty of justice in the Lisa Drover case, and I said that was the second such instance in recent time, and two that came to our attention. I do not know how many others there might be, but I think it unfortunate that the minister did not take some action in ensuring that the Prosecutions branch was diligent to ensure that other charges could not be laid. There was not even an apology to Ms. Drover, and I thought that was a sad day in this province. It was one of the more regrettable things I have seen, and I felt bad that the minister did not have the compassion that the situation demanded. As well, I am not aware of any follow-up or any

disciplining, any change of procedures at any level or in any agency as a result of the Drover travesty.

We have recently had an exposé of a serious shortcoming, it appears, in the zero-tolerance policy's application. As well, we have had a flip-flop on a legal opinion regarding whether the Nancy Friday book is an obscenity. These are all matters that affect the reputation of justice and, of course, that reputation is absolutely a prerequisite for people to trust that there is law, that there is a functioning society where disputes and wrongdoings are dealt with fairly and consistently.

We all are suffering under horrendous crime rates in this province that do not appear to be abating. In particular, we are concerned about the violent crime rates, and not just the rate but the growth in rates year over year and, as well, motor vehicle theft rates. We are also all deeply concerned about the growth of gang activity, particularly in the city of Winnipeg. We are consistently demanding of the government that it deliver a comprehensive response to that. We did put forward a positive 18-point plan for the government to consider, and I hope that that will be considered in a comprehensive way by the government. It is based on research of what other jurisdictions in North America are doing and, in particular, we look at what the needs and ideas of Manitobans are. We have looked to jurisdictions like British Columbia. We looked at American jurisdictions. We even went to Missouri to look at their young offender—we did not go to Missouri, but we looked at Missouri's young offender mentoring program that are models on the continent.

We urge the government to move, and I am afraid that the passage of time already has made a real difference, and I fear that the gangs may be becoming institutionalized in this province because we know how difficult it is for a gang member to get out of a gang and yet how easy it is for one to be recruited. We are continuing to challenge the government on its inaction on following up to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry recommendations, and I have said time and again, particularly in this House, I think it is the blackest cloud over the government, that is, the lack of comprehensive response to the inquiry. We have not even seen a framework put together in partnership with aboriginal governments to work towards the implementation of recommendations.

I also want to add to our list of concerns the decreasing funding affecting victims of crime. We have seen promises broken in that regard. We also have seen a promise broken in regard to the Law Reform Commission and the government's current plans to kill that very important body which ensures that our laws are kept up to date and deals with laws that may not be politically sexy but are nonetheless very important for a well-functioning society.

We have seen the pattern of reductions funding to the Human Rights Commission. As I said, I take this issue very seriously. I have invested a lot of my volunteer time and my career path toward the reduction of discrimination and hatred in Manitoba, and I hate to think that the dignity of Manitobans will be negatively affected because the Human Rights Commission is unable to act as effectively as it could. Of course, we are also concerned about the loss of the designated officer position for maintenance enforcement at Dauphin, and we will be pursuing that with the minister.

Finally—and I know the Justice Initiatives Fund is to be dealt with next—we note that there does not seem to be any parameters as to what that fund is used for. It appears to be a testament to the fact that the government does not know what it is supposed to do, but it has done this. It has at least admitted through that Justice Initiatives Fund the fact that there has to be some new resources dedicated in Justice in light of the relatively recent and frightening increase in violent crime and gang activity, particularly in this province. So I suppose that is at least one bit of hope there. We also have some bit of hope that the Lavoie inquiry will soon be released and that the government will put in place an implementation plan, because we on this side, particularly those involved in the NDP caucus Task Force on Violence against Women discovered that zero tolerance in Manitoba is just not so, particularly in certain communities and strata in this province. We also are heartened that there is a study with recommendations to deal more effectively with auto theft, although belated.

I thought about whether I should go to the caucus with a recommendation that the minister's salary be reduced. The minister should be aware that the minister's salary for Justice, we have attempted to

reduce that three years in a row. I think that may be a modern day record for one particular minister.

But because of the bits of hope that we do have, some improvements in some areas, limited as they are, and given the minister's relatively short tenure as Justice minister, we will pass this with some trepidation and just let the minister know that we certainly are watching very carefully his performance and that of the government in dealing with the justice issues that I have outlined.

Mr. Toews: I just want to thank the member for putting his comments on the record. While I certainly do not agree with much of what has been stated, I think some of the issues that he has identified continue to be concerns, and I certainly am hopeful that the staff that I am working with in this department is moving in an appropriate way to resolve many of his concerns.

Politics aside, this is a very important department. I have a lot of confidence in the staff that I work with, and I believe that we will be able to address some of the real concerns and dispel the concerns of the member and some of his imagined concerns. But with those comments then, I would end.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass? The item is accordingly passed.

Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,517,400 for Justice, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1998.

This concludes the Department of Justice. We will now move on to Justice Initiatives.

ENABLING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Does the honourable minister have an opening statement? No? Thank you.

* (1640)

Does the honourable critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): We had a question-and-answer exchange on this earlier on in the supplementary Estimates. I am wondering if the minister, though, can briefly advise the committee, if he is in a position to, whether this fund now has been divvied up in terms of where the monies are to be allocated, and if he wishes to do so in writing, I would welcome that.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): What I can indicate at this time is that—I have asked staff to develop the criteria that I read into the record, and it has been on that basis that they are making certain determinations in respect of what one would call an A list and a B list and a C list. Ultimately, they have to come to me in terms of where we go, and cabinet will eventually approve those expenditures.

But I think the input of my staff in establishing criteria, as indicated on the record here the other day, will go some way to assure the member that this is a responsibility that we take very seriously, that the monies are to be expended on Justice Initiatives, including and, indeed, may well primarily concern Aboriginal Justice Initiatives. So actually I have nothing further to report at this time. It seems to be premature to suggest that the monies have been divvied up, given that there has been no approval in the Legislature here, so we have to be very cautious before we make commitments. But I can indicate to the member that the basis upon which these decisions are made are those outlined in the criteria, and we will attempt to and endeavour to conduct our conduct on that basis.

Mr. Mackintosh: I would like the government to know that we have very serious concerns about how this fund is structured. This is \$1.5 million that has not been directed to any particular area of justice. Justice is a very broad term, and we would think that agencies like the Provincial Auditor would have concerns about such a fund, but we will be watching very, very carefully to ensure that the funds are expended in a fair way to areas of greatest need and that there is a detailed plan at the earliest opportunity as to how these monies should be spent.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 26.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$1,500,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Justice Initiatives, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1998.

This concludes the Justice Initiatives. We will now be moving onto Education. At this time we will recess for five minutes or so until we get the minister and critics into place. Thank you.

The committee recessed at 4:43 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 5:01 p.m.

EDUCATION

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Education. Does the honourable minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) have an opening statement?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): I am looking forward to this year's Estimates process. I am looking forward to the debate that I trust will focus on critical challenges and opportunities facing our education and training system. Despite significant federal cutbacks, which will continue to have an impact for a number of years, the spending level on Education is second only to Health in this province. Education is a key priority of this government, and this will be reflected in our 1997-98 Estimates. The quality of our education and training system is not determined merely by how much money we spend. We must spend the hard-earned dollars of Manitobans wisely and prudently. We must strive for excellence in education through cost-effective measures. This government's commitment to excellence, accountability and efficiency will also be reflected in this year's Estimates.

The purpose of reviewing the Estimates is to examine how dollars are allocated and the reasons for the allocations. This government has set a clear direction

for education and training which will be demonstrated in the Estimates process. Therefore, I will reiterate the department's mission, guiding principles, and priorities which are the basis upon which resource allocations are made.

The mission of Manitoba Education and Training is to provide access to relevant education and training that is of high quality, affordable, available, and responsive. This will enable Manitobans to develop their individual potential and contribute to the economic, social, and cultural life of Manitoba in a global context.

In carrying out its mission, the department is guided by the following principles:

Excellence, providing a climate for education and training that fosters dedication, determination, creativity, initiative and high achievement.

Equity, ensuring fairness and providing the best possible learning opportunities for Manitobans, regardless of background or geographic location.

Openness, being receptive to ways of thinking and acting that result in ongoing renewal, meaningful involvement of people in decision making and a spirit of inclusiveness.

Responsiveness, meeting the education and training needs of individuals by taking into consideration personal background, individual characteristics and geographic location.

Choice and individual responsibility, providing alternatives to meet diverse learning needs and interests, recognizing the right and responsibility of individuals to exercise and support their choices.

Relevance, providing education and training that is current and meaningful to students and meets economic and community needs.

Integration, connecting components within and between education and training and social and economic systems in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and services.

Accountability, ensuring that the expected educational outcomes are realized through effective and efficient use of resources.

My priorities for the department are many, and they include furtherance of education renewal; recognition of the central role of curriculum, including teaching and learning, assessment and technology; a commitment to partnership; a commitment to quality accountability and reporting to the public; well-educated teachers; increased choice; more parent, student and community involvement; improved co-ordination, program articulation, and credit transfer among institutions from kindergarten to Senior 4 and post-secondary; enhanced business, education and training partnerships; strengthened linkages between education and training and the province's economic and social development initiatives; strengthened linkages between education and training and labour market demand; a commitment to improve accessibility to our post-secondary institutions; a commitment to improve the skills of our graduates, so that they are more job ready; and many others, Mr. Chairman.

As we review the estimates, it will become evident that our resource allocation decisions for 1997 and '98 support this government's direction for education and training.

In 1997-98, we will continue the implementation of a set of initiatives for comprehensive far-reaching renewal of the education and training system in Manitoba. Much progress has been made. I look forward to continuing on this path, so that Manitobans can benefit from the enhanced educational and training opportunities available in this province.

Taking a look, Mr. Chairman, at kindergarten to Senior 4 and post-secondary initiatives, I would like to just highlight a few.

Curriculum: Students, parents, teachers, trustees and Manitobans from across the province recognize that our children need a high-quality education that equips them to be competitive in a rapidly changing world. To assure success for Manitoba's youth, the development of world-class outcomes and standards-based curriculum is key to both determining and delivering excellence in education. Although there are challenges

posed by introducing rigorous curriculum and standards into the education system, challenges that some are afraid to face and meet, only by working together can we expedite the transition to a system that will better meet the needs of tomorrow's global economy.

Work continues in curriculum development and implementation for language arts and mathematics. Regional orientation in-services for kindergarten to Grade 4, Grade 5 to Grade 8 and Senior 1 English language arts and mathematics were completed in the fall of 1996. Follow-up in-services and parent information sessions took place in the spring of 1997 for kindergarten to Senior 1 English language arts and for Grades 5 to 8 and Senior 1 to Senior 4 mathematics.

Curriculum projects underway include Pan-Canadian Science and Manitoba Health Education and Physical Education. A Western Canadian Protocol Social Studies curriculum project—English and French—has been initiated, and Manitoba is the lead jurisdiction for the English curriculum.

These co-operative ventures with other provinces, Mr. Chairman, I think, underscore that we are headed in the right direction, and the naysayers who criticize us are also criticizing the other provinces when they do so. But these are moves that cross party lines. They cross provincial boundaries. They are in the best interests of education, not parochial or political ideologies. These are commonly agreed upon goals for the students of western Canada and in some places, all Canada.

* (1710)

Multimedia resources are being integrated into curriculum.

Comparable development and implementation work is also being pursued in mathématiques, English language arts-immersion, anglais for Francophone students and français first language, and français-immersion curricula.

Assessment and Evaluation: Going hand in hand with the establishment of world-class curriculum is the establishment of province-wide, curriculum-based student testing. Standards testing has been introduced

as a means to assess student achievement and identify areas for improvement.

The Grade 3 mathematics/mathématiques standards test was piloted in June 1996, and will be run yearly starting in June 1997. Standards tests being developed and to be piloted are Grades 3, 6, and 9 language arts, English, français, and français immersion; Grades 3 and 6 English language arts and immersion, Grades 6 and 9 mathematics/mathématiques and Grade 6 Anglais. Provincial exams will be conducted in Senior 4 language arts, Senior 4 français, and Senior 4 mathematics/mathématiques until standards tests are fully implemented.

These standards tests of course are very much desired by the people of Manitoba. As you recall, during the election it was a major issue, one which was made very clear by the people that they wished these initiatives to take place. This first came to our attention in a concrete way during the parent forums that were held by my predecessor where 500 parents chosen at random in two separate sessions, the No. 1 thing that those parents wanted for their students was measurable standards and high academic learning.

So we reflect the public's desires as well as our own desires, and we would invite those who have differing perspectives to take a good look at what we are doing and join with us in making things better for our students.

National and international assessment activities: The School Achievement Indicators Project, SAIP, continue to take place. In January 1997 the School Achievement Indicators Project released the latest assessment completed in science.

Within and between school divisions, choice of schools will come into effect in the '97-98 school year. This will enable parents and students to choose the school that best meets their educational needs and has been extremely well received by parents who have long sought this kind of opportunity.

Adults in public schools: School divisions will receive funding for adults attending schools to complete high school graduation requirements. This demonstrates this government's commitment to lifelong

learning and to ensuring that Manitobans, regardless of their age, have an opportunity to complete a basic education.

School planning is currently being piloted in approximately 80 schools in order to gather data which will be shared with other schools and school divisions. Such data will be helpful in development of planning processes and school plans. All schools will be expected to develop the first phase of the plans during the '97-98 school year, with comprehensive plans to be put in place in 1998-99. Of course, the linkage between school plans and the planning at divisional and departmental levels is critical, and I look forward to strengthening these linkages to support a coherent, effective, and accountable education system.

Learning technologies is a critical component of the education and training system, and I will work closely with education partners, including the Council on Learning Technologies , in realizing the benefits for the province. Significant accomplishments and opportunities include a project linking colleges and universities to the school network and providing infrastructure for development of high quality adult learning materials, establishment of a website for online information, a new \$1-million initiative to support acquisition of hardware and software for schools, thereby improving access to computer technology for students and teachers.

I am pleased that school divisions are achieving cost savings through collaboration and partnerships with each other. My department is working with school division officials on this.

A review of special education is taking place, the results of which will be used to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of special education and to help ensure all students are able to reach their full potential.

Information on our education system is vital, reflecting how effective our educational institutions are. This includes the quality of programs, how well our students and teachers are performing and how effectively our resources are utilized. The department is involved at national and international levels. We will

work with our education partners to develop relevant measures of the effectiveness of the education and training system.

The Education Information System Steering Committee is but one example of the department working with stakeholders. As part of the initial stage of the '95-96 profile of elementary and secondary education, statistics will soon be sent to school divisions and parent councils. It will provide useful descriptive information about our education system.

With regard to public schools, Mr. Chairman, this year's funding levels to public schools were announced this year at \$746.5 million compared with \$745 million last year. To assist school divisions in more effectively planning for the future, government also announced that at the very least the funding level would be maintained for next year, barring any unforeseen reductions in federal funding.

Other significant changes include divisions being able to keep surplus funds resulting from cost savings in the areas of operations and building maintenance, and central administration. Funds from such savings can be redirected to the classroom. Support for students at risk will be better targeted. Funding coverage will be expanded for students, including adults studying regular curriculum courses outside of standard school hours.

In terms of post-secondary, the impact of federal cutbacks continues to affect post-secondary education. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, those federal cutbacks affect all of education because their depth was so intense that it could not be confined to just one area. This government continues to see post-secondary education as a critical force for social, cultural and economic prosperity. To this end, my department has undertaken several initiatives towards supporting post-secondary education. As well, the Council on Post-secondary Education will seek ways of enhancing cost-effectiveness of the post-secondary system.

Two initiatives included in this list are the Manitoba Learning Tax Credit that will provide \$17.3 million, \$5.3 million more than was budgeted last year, and which is the first and only refundable tax credit in Canada that provides direct support to students and

their families, and which has also been extremely well received in the field; and a new \$1-million Scholarship and Bursaries Initiative, which is a matching fund that will generate up to \$3 million in new scholarships and bursaries for students attending public post-secondary institutions. Both of these initiatives will ease the financial burden and reduce the debt loads faced by many of our students.

A Council on Post-Secondary Education has been formed to bring better co-ordination, articulation and planning to the post-secondary education system by having universities and community colleges brought together under a single body. A taskforce has been appointed to review the future of apprenticeship training in Manitoba. The apprenticeship system is facing a number of challenges, including the total elimination of federal funding for the purchase of in-school training, changing market conditions, and emerging technologies. Apprenticeships provide exciting career opportunities for many Manitobans. I have just received the report of the taskforce and look forward to reviewing their recommendations.

* (1720)

Government is maintaining its commitment to youth programs. In addition to existing programs such as CareerStart, a new program called Partners for Careers intended to improve access to jobs for aboriginal youth, is being introduced.

It is important that young people have opportunities to learn about leadership and what the future holds for them right here in Manitoba. To this end, a Young Leaders of Tomorrow conference was held on March 8. This one-day workshop featured speakers, discussion groups, and local businesses, and was designed to encourage today's young people to get involved to participate and show them the benefits of leadership and volunteerism.

Mr. Chairman, that was a tremendous success, and the young people who attended that conference gave incredibly good feedback that we were pleased to receive, and we were delighted to have organized that conference for those very enthusiastic and talented young people.

Literacy training and literacy programming continue to be a cornerstone of Education and Training. In 1995, the government committed an additional \$500,000 to literacy programming to be used over the next five years, and this will be of benefit to community-based literacy programs.

The department is planning and carrying out actions to strengthen aboriginal education. Aboriginal perspectives are being integrated into curriculum frameworks in all core subjects, and partnerships are being formed. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, there is the new Partners for Careers program.

Changes in Manitoba's welfare program have been in place for a year now. The focus is on increasing self-reliance and economic independence. The Departments of Education and Training and Family Services are working together to this end. A number of private sector and community partnerships have been developed to accomplish this objective, including the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, Canada Summer Games Society of Brandon, TeleSpectrum Worldwide and the Manitoba Trucking Industry Education Advisory Committee, and we will continue to build on successes of this nature through this kind of initiative.

In dealing with Employment Insurance reform and the federal offer, Mr. Chairman, Canada approached the provinces regarding control over the delivery of federal Employment Insurance related programs. Negotiations have been completed and an agreement was signed on April 17, 1997. This agreement provides an opportunity to improve the responsiveness and relevance of employment and training programs.

Through my department's Better Systems initiative, the department is in the early stages of a partnership with the Department of Family Services and IBM to develop an integrated system to manage programs across both departments that share common clients. It is planned that this initiative will improve services to our clients by providing a one-stop shopping single-window approach through the use of new and enabling technologies. Future benefits would include improved client information that will help both departments to implement preventative measures in helping our clients become more self-sufficient.

The department must be both a leader and a partner in carrying out its mission and initiatives. This involves balance—local autonomy balanced with provincial direction, a need for flexibility balanced with a need for consistency, change balanced with maintaining existing strengths and striving for excellence balanced with a need for practical considerations. This is a challenge that my department has gladly accepted as it is a necessary one if Manitobans are to have the education and training system they deserve.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the Estimates review and the comments which I hope will be constructive and the questions which I also hope will be constructive from the honourable members opposite.

I conclude my remarks, Mr. Chairman, with that.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable minister for her opening comments. Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Wolseley, have an opening comment?

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): I wanted to thank the minister for her outline of the department's activities, and I think also take this opportunity, although the minister's staff are not here, to thank them all for their work.

I know that this is a department where the staff work very hard. Often they are doing two and three jobs. There has been a considerable loss of staff in this department in certain areas and particularly in the area of native studies of the Native branch of the department, as well as in some of the areas of employment, and, of course, the whole post-secondary area has changed.

So there has been a good deal of change, a loss of personnel, and staff have, I think, had to work at jobs that they sometimes do not feel qualified for, sometimes that they have to get up to speed on very quickly, and they are dealing in a very difficult educational environment as well. They also, I think, as all civil servants do, have to deal with ideologies which are not necessarily their own, and that, of course, changes with every government. The civil servant's job is, in fact, to serve the people of Manitoba in the best way they can. So I think it has been a difficult task, as

it has been in other departments, and I think we should recognize that at the beginning.

I think we are also dealing in a period when there are many divisions within education, divisions of ideology, divisions of policy, serious concerns about underfunding and an enormous pressure on families to look upon education as the only option for their family's future.

In the past, I do not think that always was the case. There were many opportunities for people who had not necessarily formal education or an extensive formal education to acquire it, to go back to school. I think there were in the past many jobs which did not require the kind of formal education which is often now used as a screening process.

* (1730)

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

So as parents look to the future, they look to, I think, a future with great anxiety. The sense of jobs that are no longer there, jobs which require increasing amounts of formal education, a formal education which is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain as fees increase and as, in some cases, places are reduced. So staff, ministers, anybody, I think, who works with the public in education is working in an area which has become increasingly fraught with pressures and anxieties about the future that it was not imbued with in the past. So the pressure is there for staff as they go out to meet with parents and teachers and students across the province.

The minister has given us a long list of the activities of the department this year, and I hope we will have time to examine most of them. Some of them I am particularly interested in, and I will give the minister an indication of some of those in a minute, but I want to put some perspective on the big picture of where I think the government is going in education. I think in the area of K to 12, the big picture that they are hoping to achieve is the introduction of a competitive market system into education, both within public education itself and between public and private education. The government's ideology, whether it is this government or other Conservative governments across the world,

believes quite sincerely, I think, that the way to improve education is to introduce elements of competition between schools, between classes, between districts, and in that way, to create a market system which will inevitably have the effect of lifting every boat. The rising tide lifts every boat, I think, was the analogy that President Bush used to use.

High performing schools will survive. Those which are not high performing or high performing classes or high performing teachers, however, the government is going to define it, will not survive, and I think the government genuinely believes that that is the way to introduce improvement.

What concerns us, of course, is that this is a definition of education in very narrow terms, that the government tends to define success of schools and of education in terms of an emphasis upon examination, and examinations have their place—all teachers will tell you that throughout the ages—but I think where we see the great energy of this department and this government going is into defining education only by the results on examinations.

Schools, as they now become competitive one with another to attract students, are using a variety of means at the moment, and I am pleased to see that. I have noticed, for example, some of the advertisements that the St. James schools are using. They are including in their advertisements—drama, cadet programs, all of the things that go to make up a school that go beyond the classroom and beyond the formal education and which are so very much a part of the schools.

I am glad to see that schools, in fact, are taking upon themselves the opportunity to go beyond what I see as the government's very narrow emphasis upon examinations and upon league standings, upon tables of results such as the government creates, and I think chooses to create deliberately, and it is the way in which it releases those results and the way in which the minister also spoke about them, too.

Our concern is that this is a narrow way of defining education. It is one way that parents would want to consider, but it is not the only way, and whether it is between public or private or whether it is in the public system itself, the move to create that kind of market

system is not the way to distribute the social goods of a society in a fair and equitable manner. The market does distribute consumer goods in an efficient manner. I will not say it is in a fair manner, but it does it efficiently, but does it--this is the broader question, I think, that the government, by its policies, is answering in both health and education. It is attempting to use the market to distribute what should be considered social goods.

School choice is part of this and the minister has made reference to it as one of the things which she is very pleased with this year in the government's policy, and I would say that the jury is still out on that. I would not be so hasty to run to that conclusion. Many school divisions have had school choice. Winnipeg No. 1, for example, has had school choice and a number of other urban divisions have, and so it has been long established there. As the Norrie report suggested, there has been school choice of a certain type across school boundaries, 200 or 300 students a year across Manitoba.

But what is being introduced is a school choice which, I think, carries dangers with it. The minister knows of these; I have spoken of them before. Our concerns are for school choice in areas where there are small schools, where there are boundaries of divisions, and where a couple of families--and sometimes it does come to that--a couple of families with four or five children between them make a choice to remove themselves from one school, and, in effect, they have made the choice for everyone.

So I would like to have seen guidelines for small schools and some consideration of the dangers in some rural areas of school choice. But, as I say, I think the jury is out on that. We will see what the impact is over the next four or five years. There are limits on school choice, of course. There are natural limits, and, again, within the market system there are natural limits. If the school does well because it has small classes, because it has a particular homey atmosphere, it has a particular kind of ethos, then the admittance submissions of many, many students to a school like that, of course, are going to change all that.

So there are limits in some cases to the number of students that schools can accept, and that is the point at

which then they can become highly selective. As we know, in the end, in these school choice systems where they do work on a very wide scale--and I am not convinced that they are actually going to in Manitoba, but we will see--in the end the schools end up selecting the parents and the students rather than vice versa. That is one of the dangers, and it is one of the ones I have drawn to the government's attention before.

I do not think we are going to see the results of that for a number of years yet, so my enthusiasm is perhaps tempered by some of those concerns for rural divisions as well as for the ultimate ends that might result from that.

The government at the same time, I think, if we are still looking at the big picture, has accompanied its attempt to introduce a market system by considerable amount of new regulation and new bills which increase the minister's role. There is that deceptive sense, I think, amongst Manitobans that the government has been a decentralizing government that has devolved responsibilities to trustees and increasingly to parent councils. I think increasingly people are recognizing that, although that has been the public face of the government, within regulation and within the workings of parent councils, the government has become quite centralizing at the same time; and, from the perspective of some people, quite prescriptive regulations are being offered in some areas.

A narrower curriculum, I believe, is something which continues to be a danger for Manitoba students. There are, as the minister knows, concerns in Manitoba about the music curriculum, about the curriculum in social studies, about the curriculum in home economics and in industrial arts. I think different divisions have dealt with these differently, and there are different concerns in each area. But there is generally a concern at the school level and at parents' level about the rapid introduction of new curriculum without adequate supports. So the speed at which new curriculum is being introduced, particularly in certain subject areas, and what is perceived by the field to be an absence of support, both in material terms and in training terms for that new curriculum, I think, continue to give people some misgivings about the government's purpose in introducing new curriculum so rapidly.

This is not to say that the new curricula are not welcomed. I think every generation, whether it is within schools—I imagine the generations are smaller; we are looking at seven to 10 years—every generation in Manitoba has renewed its curriculum. Some would argue very passionately that in the past Manitoba Education has renewed curriculum in a much more collegial sense, a much more co-operative sense.

I am sure the minister is aware of this. There are people in the field in Manitoba who believe that new curriculums are being forced upon them, and they have not had the same kind of opportunity to participate in the testing and the modelling of that curriculum as they have had in the past. They feel divorced from it; they feel separated from it. That is something I think that the minister is aware of. It is something that any department should have concerns about, because of course it does affect how this is dealt with in the classroom as well. The greater commitment that teachers have to the curriculum, the greater sense they will have of being part of something new and something very valuable to their students.

The curriculum itself, as I suggested, much of the new curriculum I think is welcomed as new curriculums always are. That is why I think the minister may need to slow down a bit to ensure that that sense of participation is there. I hear very good things about the new math curriculum. I hear more criticism perhaps of the English curriculum, particularly of the loss of hours in the senior level. So in each of the new curriculums, as we look at them, I think perhaps we will have some comments to make on those.

The growth of private schools, private school education, and the changes in funding to private schools are of concern to Manitobans. The lack of public accountability of private schools is of concern. The minister made reference to the booklet that she has published, at least I think that is what she was referring to, to the profile of Manitoba education. There were a number of criticisms made to me at the time that this was only public education, that it did not give the same level of accountability or profile to private education but, given the amount of public money which is now being devoted to private school education, I think the minister will need to take a second look at that.

* (1740)

I remember in Estimates last time she had—no, perhaps it was not in Estimates. I think it was when we were discussing bills. When we looked at the bill which provided for new forms of record keeping, accountability, and freedom of information on school records to parents, I asked for the same, in fact moved a number of amendments suggesting that this be made the same for private schools, given the amount of public money which is now going into private schools, given cases where parents in private schools have had difficulty getting the kind of information which ought to be normally available.

The minister at that time promised me that she would be introducing a whole set of regulations dealing with exactly those issues for private schools. So I look forward to discussing those and perhaps in the broader context of how much public information ought the public of Manitoba have for the amount of money that they are putting into private schools.

I would think that the minister should be concerned about what might politely be put as the demoralization of teachers, that sense of apartness from the department, the sense that they are no longer a valued partner in education, the sense that their professionalism has been diminished. There are a number of ways that this can be changed. I think it is a tough job for any minister to do, and it is particularly difficult, because I think this minister had an agenda that was presented to her. She had an agenda which particularly was to deal with both curriculum and teachers. I think what has happened is that it has become increasingly difficult for a minister who has been involved in those kinds of government policies to bridge the gap that is needed to be bridged to teachers.

What ought to be a sense of optimism in schools at the end of the 20th Century I do not think is there. I think the educational opportunities, and I know the minister agrees with this, have never been greater. The enormous international opportunities for education that we have are as a result of the Internet, of widely increased publishing activities, and of a school population which, through television and through other means, often travel, and of an increasingly diversified community around themselves. The school population

is much more aware than, say, 10 years ago about international affairs and about the place of Manitoba in that.

So for so many reasons, the changing nature of Manitoba, the changing nature of educational opportunities, I think we ought to be looking for it, ought to be a measurement of Manitoba education, that that sense of optimism be there, but I do not think it is. I think the department as a whole has to look at ways to try and re-create that for Manitoba students.

Post-secondary education, of course, the minister has made reference to, on a number of occasions, the withdrawal of federal funds, and she is absolutely right. That is one of the most crucial aspects underlying the difficulties facing all institutions of post-secondary education in Manitoba. We simply cannot take that amount of money out of the system that quickly and expect that you are going to have the same kind of quality, the same number of students, the same accessibility that you had five and 10 years ago. It is an enormous shift, and the federal government should be held accountable for that at every possible occasion.

I notice in this election that the federal government is talking about new initiatives and student loans. I would be interested in exploring with the minister what the cost of that is to the province. My sense is that there are costs to the province in that, and I wonder if the department has looked at those.

The loss of federal funding goes beyond simply the post-secondary transfers, but it also includes research. From the economic perspective of Manitoba, the loss of those research funds from all of the granting agencies, I think, has been quite serious. It has introduced an unpredictability that, say, was not there seven and 10 years ago. It has introduced a much more narrow basis for funding. It is one where every province has found it very, very difficult to pick up the slack. They are not numbers which easily come together. You have to look at each of the major funding agencies. You have to look at the funding for research throughout Health, through Agriculture, through Environment. It is not a number that you can put your fingers on, but it has affected Manitoba, and it has affected the economic future of Manitoba, as well as the kinds of research concentrations that we might have been able to have

introduced. It is a very, very serious issue, and it has its effect in the daily lives of students, as we look at the laboratories that are available to them, the equipment that is available, the number of graduate students who are available as lab assistants and as people who might make their potential home in Manitoba.

The minister has made reference to the Council on Post-Secondary Education, something which we welcomed as long overdue and is now several years, three or four years I think since Roblin reported on that. That council and its goal of co-ordinating post-secondary education in Manitoba I think is a useful one, one we applauded at the time and lamented over a number of occasions the long delays that there were in appointing that. I hope that the opportunities of those last few years are not going to be counted against Manitoba, but I do think that there has been a sense of lost momentum and lost opportunities in post-secondary education, in fact, since 1988.

In the community colleges, I think there are some very serious financial concerns. Again, the reduction of federal funding has been crucial, leading to unpredictability and apprenticeship, in the unemployment insurance seats that used to be bought at community colleges and, of course, the withdrawal of the federal government entirely from so many areas of apprenticeship has put a burden upon the colleges and upon the government to meet those needs very, very quickly. I think it is an opportunity that both the government and the community colleges are looking forward to take on, so I am not burdened in the sense of the speed at which institutions have to adapt.

What concerns me is the fact that we have not had this council in place. We have had some very immediate changes to adapt to from the federal government's perspective, and I think we might be in danger—and this is an area I want to explore with the minister—of getting a very haphazard approach to apprenticeship. The minister made reference to the report that she is looking at. What concerns me is that things may be moving much faster than the report. I do not know what her timetable is for examining that report, but I believe that courses in community colleges, the way students are approaching them, the way the colleges are, are moving faster than perhaps the council is able to deal with.

There are other areas that are important. The minister has given us a long list of the programs for youth and for adult training. My general sense of those has been that we have very little information about them, just as we have very little information on Workforce 2000, an area that I do not think the minister mentioned this time, but they do tend to be a substitution of short-term training for what used to be longer-term training programs within the department. The emphasis upon short-term low-wage jobs is one of concern. It is an area I want to explore again with the minister.

The special needs review, if we were to look at some of the specific things, I would want to pick out the special needs review which has been in process now for, oh, it must be almost four years. The minister is looking for a report by the end of the year. In fact, I believe that was noted in the throne speech and we, too, and many parents involved with special needs education, will be looking forward to that review.

The minister has in place now a consultant who will lead the research and convene whatever meetings are to be convened, but our concerns on that are that it is now end of May, the minister expects a report by, say, November at the latest. We are looking at a very short period of time for an area of significant spending and a significant area of increased spending in the department. As far as I know, there is no work plan yet in place, so we are looking, let us say even charitably, we are looking at another three to four weeks before anything is underway. Again, reflecting the concerns of my constituents, as well as other people in education, the three and four-year delays that we have seen on special needs education, I think, has not been a help to that sense of optimism or to the sense of the participation of parents and teachers in Manitoba in the new proposals for Education in Manitoba.

I noted that the Auditor had concerns about Manitoba Education, not in a financial sense but in the sense of forms of reporting, and it is something I wanted to go over, a few of those with the minister later on. I am particularly interested in the private vocational schools, private school accountability, as well as Distance Education. Distance Education comes toward the end of the Estimates book. In the past, we have not quite

ever got to it. I look forward to dealing with MERLIN, with the post-secondary distance education, about which I have a number of concerns, as well as the availability, the equity of the availability of information technology across schools in Manitoba.

Home schooling, flexible learning, these are all constituencies within Education that I have heard from in the past year, as I am sure the minister has. I will be raising their concerns during these Estimates.

And finally, the labour market issues that the minister made reference to are worth a debate in the House. We have had some discussion of it in the very limited form of Question Period, but I would like to explore some of the direction that the department would like to take, the new labour market agreement that it recently agreed to with the federal government, particularly, I think the minister made reference to it, to the linkages between schools and the labour market, the programs that the department envisages as well as the role of the department in information, in providing to schools information in developing areas of employment, as well as in developing skill needs, not just in Manitoba but across the country, and because, of course, what we are losing again with the federal withdrawal from this area is that sense of a national labour market, the sense of opportunities that may be developing up, short periods of time, longer periods of time across the country.

* (1750)

That is one of the senses of being a nation, not just of language, not just of region or of culture or of farm or urban way of life, but the sense that our students know of opportunities across the country, are able to use them in an educational sense, as well as look to them for employment purposes as well, and Manitoba offers them the best of that world across the whole of the nation. So I think much of this post-secondary is coming down to a real sense of lament for federal withdrawal, a sense of the implications not just for the education system but for a sense of nation. Each of them I think has that. The department in some cases has welcomed that devolution I think in terms of labour market training. The government welcomed it. In post-secondary education and I assume in research as well,

the provincial government has not welcomed it, but in each case the government has to move very quickly to meet the needs of students in Manitoba. Those are some of the things that we will be looking at.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable member for her statement. Seeing as the hour is now about seven minutes to six, by the time we got the staff down for questioning I think it would probably be past six o'clock. How about if the committee recesses until six o'clock and at that time we will adjourn? Is that the will of the committee? [agreed]

We will recess until just before six o'clock.

The committee recessed at 5:51 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 6 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour now being six o'clock, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Marcel Laurendeau): The hour being six o'clock, this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. (Thursday). Thank you and good night.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 28, 1997

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