



Fifth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
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, Hon.	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupertsland	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, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 20, 1999

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Committee of Supply

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Chairperson): 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 Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurshou), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flood Conditions

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

Madam Speaker, my statement relates to the additional rainfall that has occurred over the Souris River watershed last night. We saw an average of about 10 millimetres, which in itself is not significant, but there were some areas that received up to 40 millimetres of rain in thunder showers. The levels of the Souris River rose less than an inch at Melita yesterday but between .2 and .4 feet at Napinka, which is downstream. Forecasted crest stages from Napinka downstream have been revised upward from .3 to .4 feet due to the additional rainfall runoff. The Antler River crested last night as a result of heavy rainfall which caused that crest to occur, that rainfall having come last Friday.

There will be little change in the river level at Melita for the next three to four days. Crests are expected this weekend at Napinka and Hartney, and near the middle of next week at

Souris and at Wawanesa. Additional rainfall of 12 to 15 millimetres is predicted late this week on Friday and Saturday. If this occurs, forecasted crests may need to be revised somewhat higher.

Madam Speaker, sometimes it is very difficult for us in this building and for other Manitobans to appreciate the problems that are occurring in relationship to this untimely and huge amount of rainfall that has occurred in one section of the province. I think it is appropriate that this House be apprised of the knowledge.

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): I thank the minister for his statement. Certainly all Manitobans are concerned about the record-high rainfall and the record amount of rainfall that is falling all across this province and its impact on communities, its impact particularly on farmers, and potentially its impact on future flooding in other areas affected by the downstream flow of the water.

We have raised the issue of the Fairford communities prior to this statement. I would agree with the minister that it is often difficult here to understand what is going on out there in the communities. I know, with the tremendous flooding that took place in the Red River Valley, it was almost like a tale of two cities with the floodway in Winnipeg and the communities that were devastated in the valley a couple of years ago. We have similar concerns for southwest Manitoba, for these rainfalls. There are already indications that many producers will not even get on the land this year to seed and have a crop. That follows on a very, very poor year for prices for some grain and cereal producers. We are all Manitobans, together as one community, and we share the suffering that is going on with people in communities with this record flooding and rainfall.

Our critic, the Natural Resources critic, is meeting with people in southwest Manitoba today, tomorrow and Saturday pursuant to the minister's advice that it is sometimes difficult in

here to understand the realities in our communities. We appreciate the statements from the minister and we appreciate being kept up to date on a timely basis.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure of tabling the Fifth Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for 1997-98.

Hon. Frank Pitura (Minister of Government Services): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the '97-98 Annual Report of the Department of Government Services, including Emergency Expenditures.

I am also pleased to table the '97-98 Annual Report for the Special Operating Agencies under my jurisdiction, namely the Fleet Vehicles Agency, Materials Distribution Agency, Land Management Services Agency and the Mail Management Agency.

* (1335)

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, first I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that Mel Wilson, a gallery attendant, will be retiring at the end of this week. Mel began his service with the Assembly on February 4, 1988, and Mel has indicated he wishes to spend more time golfing in the summer, cross-country skiing in the winter and returning to ballroom-dancing competition.

Mel, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of all honourable members, to sincerely thank you for your many years of loyal service to the Assembly.

Also, seated in the public gallery this afternoon, we have forty Grade 9 students from River West Park School under the direction of Mr. Gary Perrett. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

Also, we have fifteen Grades 7 to 9 students from Long Plain School under the direction of

Mrs. Donna Prince. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

City of Winnipeg Paramedics Mediation

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, over the last couple of days we have been dealing with the everchanging circumstances of the ambulance attendants. According to the media today, there is a confidential report in the City of Winnipeg talking about the option of lockout, which almost defies the reasons for the urgent action in this House a couple of days ago. But, more importantly, we have the firefighters yesterday saying that essential services legislation could hurt almost as much as a, quote, full strike, and secondly, the firefighters stated that fire suppression will suffer if the situation is allowed to go just to The Essential Services Act. It is obvious to us that with all the presentations yesterday, both from people particularly on the front lines, the paramedics and the ambulance attendants and the firefighters that work with them, we need some action.

Will the government be looking at or be appointing—and I would ask this question to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Radcliffe)—a mediator to get the two parties to resolve their differences and get a settlement on behalf of the people of this community, Madam Speaker?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): I think, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, both parties were meeting this morning with a conciliation officer at the table, that is the City of Winnipeg and the ambulance paramedics and attendants. So they are continuing to negotiate at the table, as the Leader of the Opposition is very well aware, being a former head of the Manitoba Government Employees Union. There still are a number of options available to both parties. There is the option of both parties agreeing to going to binding arbitration. There is the option of both parties requesting that a

mediator be appointed. There is the option of the Minister of Labour taking action and appointing a mediator, if that is deemed appropriate.

So there still are a number of avenues available to reach a settlement at the bargaining table. We are encouraging both parties to do that. That certainly was a major part of our discussion yesterday, a major reason behind the amendment that we proposed to The Essential Services Act yesterday, not to make any changes until by proclamation. So again, we encourage both parties to be at the table to work in good faith towards reaching an agreement through the collective bargaining process.

Health Care Support Staff Mediation

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, health care support staff, as represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, had voted in very high numbers to look at the strike option. This will obviously have an impact on many Manitoba communities. Again, it is important for this dispute to be resolved in a meaningful way.

I would ask the Minister of Labour (Mr. Radcliffe) today: has he considered and will he appoint a mediator to bring the parties together and get this situation resolved on behalf of Manitoba patients and Manitoba workers?

* (1340)

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I know today that the CUPE, Canadian Union of Public Employees, put out a news release, and they actually in the news release say that they are requesting that a mutually agreed upon mediator be appointed. So CUPE has requested that. I have learned today that the employer has agreed to that. Both parties are going to be sitting down this afternoon to reach an agreement on a mutually appointed mediator. So again, that is exactly the point I am making to the Leader of the Opposition, that there are these options available. In this case, we have the employer and the union and employees agreeing to a mutually appointed mediator, and that is taking place this afternoon.

Mr. Doer: One of the recently created vice-presidents, one out of the seven recently created vice-presidents in the WHA, was quoted as saying that they receive their edicts from the provincial cabinet in terms of collective bargaining. I was wondering whether the mediator that is going to be appointed, I assume still by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Radcliffe)—that usually is the function of the Minister of Labour. I would ask the Minister of Labour: will the mediator be able to work with the Minister of Health, who is one party of this dispute through the WHA according to the WHA vice-president, and the union to resolve this issue? Will he be able to mediate with his own cabinet who apparently are setting the edicts for this dispute?

Mr. Stefanson: The parties at the table are the employers and the union, the employees. Again, we do have a recent example here in Manitoba where a mediator has worked very successfully in terms of the negotiations with the nurses, where Mr. Wally Fox-Decent was the mediator through that process. He was able to bring both parties to agreement. So again, with both parties now, CUPE and the employer agreeing to the appointment of a mediator, that will take place I believe as early as this afternoon. Again, I think we should let that process continue. It has worked successfully in the past, and we continue to be optimistic that progress will be made and that an agreement can be reached through the collective bargaining process.

Winnipeg Hospital Authority Independence

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): My question is to the Minister of Labour or the Minister of Health, since the Minister of Health did not answer the question from our Leader. That question is: can the minister, any of the ministers, explain how it is that the vice-president of WHA indicates that the edicts and the settlements—they are taking their marching orders from the provincial cabinet, that in fact it is the provincial cabinet that is calling the shots, yet the government on the other hand has created a separate multimillion-dollar body of the WHA as a shield in order to conduct negotiations. So what is it? Is it the WHA and their organizations or their Long Term Care Authority that is

conducting the negotiations, or is it the provincial cabinet as was indicated by the VP of the WHA?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the system is not really any different than was the case when some members opposite were in government back in the '80s, where we even had the Manitoba Health Organization that again had certain parameters, received their funding directly from the government, which is the case today, and they go into negotiations within those broad parameters, but the parties at the table are the employers, are the unions. We have seen examples in many cases where it has worked very well in Manitoba. We now have both parties asking for a mediator, agreeing to a mediator. That will take place this afternoon, and we continue to encourage both parties to work through that collective bargaining process and reach an agreement at the table. So again the overall process, the overall system, is basically very similar to what it always has been. I just encourage the member for Kildonan to talk to the individual sitting to his right, and I am sure he will get confirmation of that fact.

City of Winnipeg Paramedics Essential Services

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the minister can explain to this House how it is that the minister can go out and make public statements about supporting the health workers and recognizing their need and plight while only offering, obviously from the cabinet table, the two and two that they have offered, yet at the same time saying to the workers, oh, by the way, you are essential services and you have to be part of the essential services platform, at the same time not offering them a fair discussion with respect to their wage considerations.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): I find it interesting the member for Kildonan's portrayal that the employers are only offering three twos, a 6 percent increase for a number of reasons. First of all, when you look—and I certainly encourage him to look at other settlements across Manitoba, and he will find that the majority of those settlements have been

in the 1 percent to 2 percent range per year. He can certainly look at other CUPE settlements in the educational sector and elsewhere, and again he will see that the settlements are in that range. So to try and stand in this House and start to portray that as an unreasonable commitment from employers, or an unreasonable allocation, I am quite surprised at, because it certainly is very much in keeping with the kinds of settlements we are seeing right across Manitoba in a whole range of sectors. Again, I think we should all respect the collective bargaining process and let the two parties negotiate that, now with what is going to be a mediator at the table with them.

* (1345)

St. Boniface Hospital Gastroenterology Unit Closure

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, my final supplementary to the Minister of Health: can the Minister of Health outline to the House the reasons and rationale behind the soon-to-be-announced closure of the gastroenterology lab at St. Boniface Hospital because of disinfecting and infectious problems? Can he alert the House what the difficulties are and outline for us what steps are being taken to deal with the problem?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): I thank the member very much for that question. My understanding is St. Boniface Hospital will be dealing with that issue this afternoon, I am told, that they will be communicating with the public, and they will be putting forward all aspects of that issue. So I think we should wait for all information to be put forward by St. Boniface Hospital.

City of Winnipeg Paramedics Lockout

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Yesterday in committee on Bill 27, we learned that in the event of a strike or lockout of paramedics and with paramedics deemed to be an essential service, Winnipeg ambulance service would be operated with less than 100 percent and perhaps as low as 50 percent of ambulances on the streets. Now, in a bizarre turn of events, we have learned that the City of Winnipeg is considering locking out its paramedic ambulance employees.

I want to ask, Madam Speaker: can the Minister of Health or the Minister of Labour, who would normally be responsible for these events, explain how their government through Bill 27 can deem paramedics essential and then allow the City of Winnipeg to lock out the paramedics? How is that possible?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Let us first look at the issue of declaring ambulance, paramedics and attendants essential services. I think we heard yesterday that literally everybody, including, I think, members opposite, agree that it is an essential service, and the whole objective is to protect the citizens and the potential patients here in the city of Winnipeg. I think that is something I hope that we all agree, to put patients and individuals first, Madam Speaker.

The reason that an amendment was proposed yesterday by ourselves, by our government, was to try and separate the two issues of essential services from the current collective bargaining that is taking place. We do not want the fact that paramedics and ambulance services are being reviewed as an essential service to impact on that collective bargaining, and that is why we put in place an amendment that that would not come in force until proclamation. We are all encouraging both parties to be back at the table, to negotiate in good faith, as we heard from both parties, to work towards an agreement.

We have already discussed the number of options that are available to both parties. They can go to binding arbitration. They can jointly agree to go to mediation like CUPE and the employers are doing. A mediator could ultimately be appointed. There are still a number of options available for both parties to reach an agreement through the collective bargaining process at the bargaining table.

Mr. Reid: Then perhaps the Minister of Health or the Minister of Labour (Mr. Radcliffe) can answer what steps they are prepared to take if this legislation, Bill 27, is to pass to prevent the City of Winnipeg taking the unusual step of locking out its employees after this piece of legislation would be in effect, effectively taking away any options for the employees involved.

*(1350)

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I want to remind the member, first and foremost is protection of the patient and the public in the city of Winnipeg. That is fundamental, I hope, for everybody in this Chamber. We have already made it perfectly clear that we are going to do everything we can to prevent having this become a factor in the collective bargaining process.

I also committed to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) yesterday at his request that prior to us proclaiming this legislation, we would consult. We discussed the whole meaning of what the word "consult" means with both parties, being the paramedics and ambulance service union and the employer, prior to any proclamation.

So again, I just remind the member for Transcona, it is our objective throughout all of this to have both parties at the bargaining table negotiating in good faith, using every vehicle that is available to them to reach a collective agreement through that bargaining process.

Binding Arbitration

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Madam Speaker, then perhaps the minister can answer: since we heard yesterday that there does not seem to be a workable contingency plan based on what we heard in committee yesterday, why will the provincial government not take the one step that will guarantee service for the people of Winnipeg and implement binding arbitration on the parties involved in this, instead of having two different laws for parties that are involved in the emergency response department? Why are there two laws involved in this situation?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Well, first of all, Madam Speaker, I do not think the member for Transcona is in any position to talk about a workable contingency. That is obviously incumbent upon the ambulance system. But the more important issue is the one that he just raises about binding arbitration. Firefighters in Manitoba have binding arbitration which was put in place in the 1970s on a unilateral basis by the provincial government of

the day, did not have the agreement of all parties. The provincial government of the day put it in place. In the 1980s binding arbitration was put in place for the City of Winnipeg Police at the request of both parties. The City of Winnipeg police union association and employees and the employers both requested it, and it was put in place.

At the City of Winnipeg, the WAPSO group, the management group, have binding arbitration, again based on co-operation between both parties and voluntarily agreeing to it through their collective bargaining agreement. So only once that I am aware of in the history of Manitoba has a government unilaterally and arbitrarily imposed binding arbitration on parties without the agreement of both parties.

At this particular point in time, the City of Winnipeg has not requested or shown support for having legislation for binding arbitration. But, in terms of the collective bargaining, both parties are at the table. They have a number of ways to resolve their disputes and their issues, and we are certainly encouraging both parties to continue to be at the table, negotiate in good faith and reach an agreement.

Cubby Barrett
Government Contracts

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, when the Monnin report cited Cubby Barrett, Taras Sokolyk, Gordon McFarlane, Bob Kozminski and Arni Thorsteinson, all key Conservatives, for unethical behaviour, the Premier at the time said we have looked at whether or not we can remove people as members, we do not have a mechanism within our constitution that allows for that.

We now find apparently Gary Nestibo has not only been told that he is not a Tory candidate, but his membership has been revoked.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I believe it is contrary to the rules of proceedings for questions

to be asked about the internal workings of the political party in government. They are not within matters of government operations or the public domain, and his question is out of order.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the official opposition, on the same point of order.

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): We had a week of questions last year dealing with the internal affairs of the Conservative Party that led to the Monnin inquiry. The Monnin inquiry was authorized by an Order-in-Council and pursuant to The Evidence Act of Manitoba, again an act of this Legislature. The decisions and recommendations that flowed from the Monnin report were decisions that flowed and were responded to by the Premier (Mr. Filmon). The Premier made certain statements dealing with the recommendations and findings of the Monnin report. Those recommendations and the response of the Premier were made in this Legislative Building, not in PC headquarters or one of the downtown office buildings that the Tories hang out in in terms of running their campaign. So surely the affairs of the Premier and the recommendations thereof are fully within the scope of this Legislature, and I am surprised the Tories opposite want to gag this Legislature in dealing with the ethical behaviour of the Premier and members of the Conservative Party and the inconsistencies that arise daily.

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

* (1355)

Mr. Ashton: On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, I actually had not even posed my question. I understand the sensitivity of members opposite, but I would remind the government House leader that we just passed legislation that put into place the recommendations of the Monnin report which dealt with a code of ethics for political parties.

Madam Speaker, I think if the government House leader will be patient, he will find that my questions are not only in the public interest but are very much in order because I am going to be asking whether indeed the action we took as a

Legislature only a matter of weeks ago is going to be applied not just to Mr. Nestibo but to Mr. Barrett, Mr. Thorsteinson, Mr. McFarlane, Mr. Sokolyk and other Tories that have broken every standard of ethics possible in this province.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable government House leader, I would first of all like to indicate to the honourable member for Thompson that if the question indeed had been posed, indeed the honourable government House leader would have had a point of order.

I would caution the honourable member for Thompson that Beauschesne 409.(6) specifically states: "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government." Also, 410.(10): "The subject matter of questions must be within the collective responsibility of the Government or the individual responsibilities of Ministers."

* * *

Mr. Ashton: Madam Speaker, then I will restate my question, and I will start again because I had not posed a question. I would like to table a copy of a picture showing honorary life member Roland Cubby Barrett and the Premier from 1996. I want to ask the Deputy Premier if the Deputy Premier can indicate that the real legacy of this government is that people like Mr. Nestibo, once there is publicity, are punished, but key people like Mr. Barrett continue in a position where he is not only a member of the Conservative Party but continues to receive favours from this government day in, day out, as we see in land deals and other matters—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, in addition to the other citations, Beauschesne 410.(17) says "Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities." The member asking what action will be taken about those other members within the Conservative Party is clearly out of order.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable government

House leader, indeed I indicated to the honourable member for Thompson the two rules citing Beauschesne 409.(6) and Beauschesne 410.(10). So indeed the honourable government House leader does have a point of order. The question is out of order.

* * *

Mr. Ashton: On the point of order, the government House leader initially rose on a point of order on my question, and I had not finished posing my question. In this particular case, Madam Speaker, you did not give me the opportunity to respond to the point of order.

I would point out that my question was whether people like Mr. Barrett continue to receive favours from this government instead of receiving the kind of punishment that others have received for far, I would say unethical, but far less unethical behaviour than Mr. Barrett and others. That is definitely in order because this government on a day-to-day basis continues to deal with Mr. Barrett, continues to give him favours as a government because of his political activities. That is in order, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I find the member for Thompson's comments extremely offensive to talk about favours to individuals and so on when different questions have been raised and they have been provided information by members here showing that that is not the case, not the case at all. Again, we are certainly prepared to answer any questions that they are asking about this issue or whatever, and I think what our P.C. executive—[interjection]

* (1400)

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Stefanson: To conclude, obviously what the executive of our party has shown is that we expect extremely high ethical standards. I hope that is something that they adopt and that they abide by and that they strive to achieve as they work forward to try and represent Manitobans. We believe as a party in high ethical standards. We continue to do that, and we will be coming forward very shortly with our code of ethics in terms of this entire issue.

**Monnin Report
Recommendations—Ethics Code**

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Deputy Premier when he will recognize that the real offence that has been taken is by the people of Manitoba against the unethical behaviour of this Conservative government and Conservative Party officials, and when are they going to deal with people like Mr. Barrett, Mr. Sokolyk, Mr. McFarlane, Mr. Kozminski, Mr. Thorsteinson and indeed the former Jules Benson, who by the way was not even required to resign because of his behaviour. When are they going to take action for the people that are the main parts of the Monnin report, the unethical behaviour cited by Justice Monnin?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, this started with a question about Mr. Nestibo at Arthur-Virden. As the release that was put out yesterday indicates, and the member for Thompson can certainly read that, his membership has been suspended, and, as a result, his candidacy has been revoked because of the executive determining unethical behaviour. I have indicated to this House and to that member opposite, we believe in high ethical standards. We are coming forward with a code of ethics. We look forward to seeing their code of ethics ultimately. That is going to be interesting to see, and we all await that. Only members opposite continue to attack these individuals. You look at the price many of them are paying today for very inappropriate action when it comes to issues like the kind of publicity relative to them and their qualities, but more importantly losing jobs and those kinds of impacts. I think most of us should be able to identify that those are significant costs for their actions.

Mr. Ashton: Since the Deputy Premier himself referenced Mr. Nestibo, I would like to ask again whether Mr. Barrett, Mr. Sokolyk, Mr. McFarlane, Mr. Kozminski and Mr. Thorsteinson will be treated in the same way that Mr. Nestibo was. When are they going to take real action and deal with the root rot in the Conservative party that is like the root rot—

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

Mr. Stefanson: Again, the member for Thompson continues to rant and rave and put inaccurate information and inaccurate descriptions on the record. We have already indicated what our executive did in this particular case for the very reason that we are committed to high ethical standards. We are going to come forward with a code of ethics having to do with high ethical standards.

I want to see what they are going to do when it comes to a code of ethics for the NDP party. We are all anxiously awaiting that action. We do not hear anything from them in terms of commitments about ethics or codes of ethics. What are they going to do as a party? We are committed to it. Our executive of our party has shown it with the kind of action that the executive has taken, and we are committed to come forward with a code of ethics which we will be doing very, very shortly.

**Education System
Funding—General Revenues**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): My question is for the Deputy Premier. Year after year we have watched a growing reliance of funding public education through property tax. This government has in essence failed to recognize the important issue of the overburden that Manitobans are having to pay on property tax because of this government's negligence.

My question to the Deputy Premier is: does this government have any sort of a target or goal for funding public education through general revenues?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Deputy Premier): Again, the percentage of the property tax bill that is related to education is very similar to what it has been for about the last 20 years. As well, the Lower Tax Commission, chaired by one Clayton Manness, a former Finance minister, along with Norm Cameron and Evelyn Jacks, three individuals who are certainly very well regarded in the province of Manitoba, are going to be looking at the whole issue of lower taxes. One of those issues is the whole issue of property taxes. A significant amount of our public education is funded directly from our direct revenues here as a provincial government.

I always ask the member for Inkster, he likes to talk about a shift, but I ask him: where is the money coming from? He never answers that question. Is he going to increase provincial sales tax? Is he going to oppose personal income tax reductions? What are the actions that he is going to take to come up with money that is currently provided under property taxes. You cannot have it both ways if you are going to try and put yourself forward as governing this province and making decisions. You have to be able to balance your books. Those revenues have to come from somewhere. But we are committed to review the entire issue of property taxes as part of our Lower Tax Commission.

Mr. Lamoureux: Can the Deputy Premier indicate to the House: why is it when his party was in opposition they had a goal of 80 percent, and today it appears they do not have any goal or target in terms of funding public education through general revenues?

Mr. Stefanson: I think what is an important part of that though is, if the member were to do his homework and look at the amount that the property tax bill that is now coming from the Education Support Levy, which is the levy that is put in place by the provincial government, I believe that is now down to about 19 percent of the property tax bills. If he were to check back, he would see that that was up in the high 20s, 30 percent.

So in the areas where we have had direct responsibility, in fact he can go back over the last many years, and he will see that the Education Support Levy has not been increased for many years in Manitoba. That has been one of the many commitments of our government to controlling taxes and keeping taxes down in this province.

Property Taxes Increase

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I would then ask the Deputy Premier to tell the House also in addition to that, and to recognize that the reliance on the public school divisions because of the freezes and cutbacks in public education has resulted in increases in the property tax. I would ask the Deputy Premier to

acknowledge that that is in fact true, along with the fact that this government does not have anything within this budget that gives any faint reason that this government is prepared to deal with the property tax issue.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Deputy Premier): Madam Speaker, the impact of special levies, the other portion of our property tax bill which is related to education, the special levies put in place by school divisions vary significantly across the school divisions for a number of factors. Again, I encourage the member to look at all of the reasons. They vary significantly in terms of the actions taken by individual school divisions in terms of controlling their expenditures, the actions they are taking to co-operate between school divisions to reduce and control cost. So there are a number of vehicles available to control the amount of increase that would be required for the special levy.

But I remind the member, when it comes to the education support levy that we have direct control of, that has not been increased for many years. We continue to provide increases to the public education system, this year's budget alone some 2.3 percent, I believe, and again—2.6 percent, I am reminded—almost with the unanimous support of this House to approve that 2.6 percent increase to public education in this province.

Coast Guard Services Closure—Selkirk

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Highways and Transportation.

Last June in this House, I, along with the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson), raised the fact that the federal government, with the support of Liberal Leader Jon Gerrard, closed the Coast Guard base in Selkirk and is stopping the dredging of the Red River. This will prevent large vessels from supplying isolated communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

In a letter I have from the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, David Anderson, he speaks about a public consultation process, and I quote: "To-date we have not had any major objections."

My question is to the Minister of Highways and Transportation: why has this minister not objected to Manitoba losing this valuable service?

* (1410)

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Selkirk for that question. It is one that is a concern to me personally as an MLA, part of whose riding is coastal area on Lake Winnipeg and who has had many constituents who rely on that lake for their living. I remember, as well, the former Liberal member of Parliament for Selkirk, Mr. Fewchuk, promising his constituents that that base would never be lost, and yet it has been. I can assure him though that the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Cummings); the former Minister of Highways, the member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay), in that capacity; as well as I believe the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Pitura) have all filed or indicated objections to the closure of that base. In fact, the Minister of Natural Resources advises me that he in fact had written a letter. So it surprises me that the federal government would not have viewed those as being valid objections.

Mr. Dewar: Madam Speaker, I will table the letter from David Anderson for the minister.

My next question, as well, is for the Minister of Highways and Transportation. Does the minister know, or can he enlighten the House, as to the impact that the loss of both the Coast Guard and the dredging services will have upon those who use the Red River and Lake Winnipeg for recreational and commercial purposes?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I can tell the member that that will be a very significant loss. There are a number of potential dredging projects now that have been brought to my attention that are critical to continued operation. In fact, one of them is the lagoon at Victoria Beach which perhaps the federal Liberals forgot is also home to Lloyd Axworthy and Sharon Carstairs. Those seem to have been forgotten, as well the member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford), but they will be a very significant loss. What I find most surprising about this is the federal

government continues to insist on its jurisdiction over those waterways for the purposes of environmental assessment but is abrogating its responsibility in terms of maintaining the basic infrastructure on those waterways.

Education Facilities Playground Space

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Education. Schools built in older neighbourhoods are often shortchanged, particularly when it comes to the amount of playground space available and often in communities which are already short of green space. Will the minister agree that the playground at Greenway School is substantially undersized for the 600 children that attend that new school?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): I would be happy to review the allocation of land made available by the school division for that school.

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Education: will he agree in principle to supplement green space for those older neighbourhoods when land becomes available and affordable and accessible? Will the Department of Education look to supplement those schools which have been shortchanged in the past?

Mr. McCrae: I would be happy to review the issue, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Mihychuk: My final supplementary to the Minister of Education: will the minister then undertake immediately to take steps to obtain the recently vacated land adjacent to and south of Greenway School which used to be the home of Canadian Linen which has been recently demolished? That property is now available and is adjacent to Greenway School. Will the Minister of Education provide that land so that more children have the playground which they need and deserve?

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, I would be happy to review this matter with the honourable member.

Apprenticeship Training Instruction

Mr. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education. I understand the government may currently be placing new apprentices in workplaces without the supervision of a certified journeyman, one of the fundamentals of the very valuable apprenticeship model of training. I wonder if the minister could confirm for the House whether this is indeed the case.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): I probably will be able to address that matter in just a few minutes when the honourable member and I resume Estimates review.

Ms. Friesen: Madam Speaker, would the minister be prepared to table an account of how many apprentices may be in the situation of being trained by people who have not experienced apprenticeships themselves or do not hold a journeyman's certificate?

Mr. McCrae: I would be happy to review that with the honourable member when we resume Estimates shortly. I am certainly pleased to see the activity going on in the area of apprenticeship training in Manitoba. There is a tremendous growth of that going on in response to the magnificent job done by the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) and the former Minister of Finance and the present member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed), all the economic ministers in this government who have created such magnificent economic activities. We can hardly keep up with the demand, but we are sure working hard to do so, and we are doing a good job at it.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister—[interjection] She says they have a part in this, but unfortunately are not able to give the minister the answer. Could he explain how the government is ensuring that those who have not experienced apprenticeship training themselves are able to instruct effectively these new and inexperienced apprentices?

Mr. McCrae: We are getting closer and closer to the time when we can address that very

question, Madam Speaker, in the review of my department's Estimates, but again, can you imagine, can you even picture in your mind's eye, the wonder of the amount of activity going on in our economy, the opportunities that are being presented for Manitobans, and more and more apprenticeship is being seen by Manitobans as the option of choice to provide for a better life for themselves and for their families in the future. On the question raised, the specifics of the question, I would be happy to go into some detail with the honourable member later this afternoon.

Child Care System Staff Training

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Between 1991 and 1996, this government cut \$10 million from our provincial child care system. While we know that now in grand pre-election style the funding has been restored, the damage is done. Our destabilized system sorely lacks trained workers, which is evident in the fact that there are 1,860 untrained child care aides in this province compared to a combined total of 1,722 trained EC1s and EC2s.

I want to ask the minister, who must know that the application for child care aide requires no experience at all with children, if she is aware of the high numbers of untrained staff both those currently in our system and those currently being recruited.

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I thank my honourable friend for that question. I do not, however, accept her preamble or any of her preamble in the question, because our government has a record second to none across this country in increase and support for child care facilities and, in many instances, many very qualified people that are working in our child care system. We are a government that has expanded programming in child care centres through our EarlyStart program because we recognize the qualifications and the good job that our early childhood educators do with the children that they serve in Manitoba.

Our child care budget this year is \$54 million, almost double the budget it was when we came into government and far superior to the

\$17 million or \$18 million that NDP Saskatchewan spends on child care.

Ms. McGifford: The minister of course failed to answer the question.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member was recognized to pose a supplementary question. Would she please pose her question now.

* (1420)

Ms. McGifford: I would like to ask the minister to tell us since she claims a commitment to quality child care, if she will explain how a system with more untrained than trained staff promotes quality child care.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I want to say that kind of a question is a slap in the face to people that are working within our child care system with children in the province of Manitoba on a day-to-day basis.

Ms. McGifford: That answer is a slap in the face to all—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Would the honourable member for Osborne please pose her question now.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, Madam Speaker. I would like to ask the minister if she will answer this question, if she could explain to us the impact of contravening the trained staff ratio policies, and they are being contravened, if she could explain to us the impact on quality care for Manitoba's children?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Contrary to what the New Democratic Party might believe, I know that there are many, many people working within our child care system that are providing the very best care for our children in the province of Manitoba. We have increased on a year-by-year basis the amount of money that we spend on child care, the number of spaces, and I have every confidence—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member for Osborne is being very disrespectful from her seat. I listened very intently to her questions, and I take some offence to her interruption and her chirping from her seat when I am trying to answer a question that is a very serious question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Family Services, to complete her response.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate your calling the member for Osborne to order and asking her to try to control herself because this is a serious matter.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, I think on occasions some of us have had a few words to say from our seat. I certainly have done that on occasion. I look to the minister, turn slightly to the right and look at her seatmate because I know other members have done that, but I do not think continuing on about this, on what was a normal level of exchange back and forth, is really helpful.

I would suggest perhaps that you ask the minister to complete her answer, which is what she should be focusing on, answering the question, a very important question raised by the member for Osborne.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Thompson, I would remind the honourable minister to quickly complete her response. The time allotment had expired prior to the completion of the honourable minister's answer. Quickly.

* * *

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Speaker, that is why our government has taken very seriously the

whole issue of working with the child care committee through the regulatory review process with parents, with early childhood educators and with government to try to ensure that as we move forward into the new millennium, we have the right method of funding in place for attraction, recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

2003 Western Canada Summer Games

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise and offer my congratulations to the city of Selkirk and to the towns of Gimli, Stonewall and Beausejour who have been chosen to jointly host the 2003 Western Canada Summer Games.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Could I please ask for the co-operation of all honourable members. Members' statements are extremely important to all members of this Chamber, and I would appreciate it if we could all show a little common courtesy. If you wish to have private meetings, please do so either in the loge quietly or outside the Chamber.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Over 1,800 athletes, coaches and officials from the western provinces and territories will travel to these communities to participate in the summer games which are a stepping stone to national and international competitions.

The 2003 Western Canada Summer Games are expected to generate some \$7 million in economic activity, and they are a great opportunity for the Interlake and Eastman regions to gain a higher profile in western Canada. Our government has committed some \$500,000 to assist in the operations of the games, and a grant of \$75,000 through the Manitoba sports facility program was recently approved to help cover the costs of developing local sports facilities in preparation for the competition.

So, with the World Junior Hockey Championship and the upcoming Pan Am Games, Manitobans have seen that through community partnerships we are capable of hosting first-class sporting events. The success of this joint bid by Selkirk, Gimli, Stonewall and Beausejour is another good example of what can be achieved through community co-operation.

City of Winnipeg Paramedics

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I want to quote from a letter that was presented by the representative, Mr. Forrest, from the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg. I quote, it says "today Mr. Forrest appeared on behalf of the firefighters of Winnipeg. Firefighters have always made the public well-being and safety their paramount concern. We are here because we are seeing an injustice being done to the paramedics. These are highly trained and highly professional people who work side by side with firefighters in Winnipeg. To take away their right to strike and not give them binding arbitration is wrong and does no service to the citizens of Winnipeg. We have given up the right to strike for decades; however, we have also had the right to binding arbitration. The end result is that firefighters of Winnipeg have never taken any type of job action, and the citizens of Winnipeg have never been without firefighter protection. If you go forward with this piece of legislation—and I believe it will not mean uninterrupted paramedic service in the city of Winnipeg—if you pass this piece of legislation as it stands, it is a recipe for future problems. You will have frustration, anger and hard feelings. What you are doing is penalizing a group of individuals for wanting to serve the public. You serve the public, and I believe the public would want fairness to be given to paramedics. Why do you not wish to support these individuals who every day deal in life and death decisions? Fairness, honour and orderly conduct are the reasons the paramedics should have binding arbitration."

Quote from the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg, and I think it speaks volumes towards what this government's intention is with respect to Bill 27 and how it will penalize and put at risk the lives and limbs of Winnipeggers because of this government's stubbornness in going towards

essential services legislation instead of having binding arbitration which will guarantee that all of the ambulances will be on the streets of Winnipeg. Thank you.

* (1430)

Spence Street Neighbourhood Clean-up

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): I would like to ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join with me in congratulating the residents of the west-central area of Winnipeg, the Spence Street neighbourhood, who under the leadership of the Magnus Eliason community neighbourhood centre last weekend spent a good part of Saturday cleaning up the back lanes and the main streets of the community. This, I think, is the fourth annual event of such a kind in the neighbourhood, and it is certainly one that has grown over the years. It began with, I think, half a dozen volunteers who lived in the area, and it has since grown to include volunteers from outside the area and to grow in size. I think over 50 people participated last weekend in a series of crews which scoured the neighbourhood for the debris of the winter.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the crew that I work with. Captain George, as well as Livia [phonetic] who worked with me, and the various volunteers from the downtown branch of the Royal Bank who came out to help the residents of this neighbourhood. Many businesses of the area were represented in support of this operation, and, particularly, of course, we want to thank the community police and the city crews who helped with the clean-up and particularly with the larger items that had to be removed.

As in West Broadway, about which I spoke a couple of weeks ago, this clean-up-the-community initiative is one that really contributes not just to the sense of neighbourhood, it not only enables people to participate in the restoration of their own community, but it also is, as the community police will tell you, a very important safety issue, and one that enables the community police and other residents of the neighbourhood to approach a long and, we hope, warm summer with some comfort in the sense of

security and safety that they have a right to expect.

City of Winnipeg Council

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I want to say a few words about Mayor Glen Murray and City Council. Mayor Glen Murray and City Council have put this Legislature in a difficult position by asking us to do legislation to deal with their labour negotiations. Yet not one person from City Council, not one elected representative had the courage to come before the committee.

You know, it is probably not a very smart thing for me to be making these remarks considering I will be going back to the police force and Mayor Glen Murray will be my ultimate—but I have never been accused of being that smart. I say this because of my deep disappointment, especially when so many labour unions, and I know the Police Association and so many other civic unions, were looking forward to better relations under Mayor Glen Murray and supported him in the last election. You know, I guess it is a lesson to many unions that sometimes if they support their political friends on the left, as they did to Bob Rae and Glen Murray, that once they get into power, they govern from the right. So maybe people should take that as a lesson in future elections. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Committee Changes

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Sturgeon Creek (Mr. McAlpine), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am experiencing difficulty hearing the honourable member for Gimli.

Mr. Helwer: —for Tuesday, May 25, 1999, be amended as follows: the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe) for the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae); the member for

Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) for the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou).

Motion agreed to.

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources for Tuesday, May 25, 1999, for 10 a.m., be amended by as follows: Transcona (Mr. Reid) for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale).

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I would move, seconded by the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources for Tuesday, May 25, 1999, at 10 a.m., be amended as follows: Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) for the vacant spot.

Motion agreed to.

House Business

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, if the House will just bear with me for a moment in outlining this afternoon. We do know that there are some issues with respect to the amendment to our Essential Services Act that are being worked out this afternoon, and there are discussions that have been going on between House leaders.

What I would like to do, first of all, is to seek leave of the House to return to the Estimates, Committee of Supply. I think there will be agreement to do that.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to move into Committee of Supply? [agreed]

Mr. Praznik: The committee will then return at five o'clock where we will, depending on discussions this afternoon, hope to deal with The Essential Services Amendment Act at that time. Obviously, that will have to be done with leave, and some of that will have to be sought at that

time. I understand, as well, that there is a willingness to waive private members' hour, if Madam Speaker will canvass the House.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to waive private members' hour at 5 p.m.? [agreed]

Mr. Praznik: Before I move the motion to go into Committee of Supply, just to recap, we will go into Estimates from now until five o'clock. We will return to the Chamber at five o'clock. There are discussions underway with respect to the process for dealing, this afternoon, with The Essential Services Amendment Act, and I appreciate for all members that this is a matter, as the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) has rightly pointed out, that has been handed off to this Chamber by the City of Winnipeg. It is a complicated issue, and it will take some time for discussions this afternoon. We have waived private members' hour. If we do not proceed on the bill, then I take it we will go back into Supply, but we will be coming back at five o'clock into the Chamber at that time for further discussion.

So, Madam Speaker, I would move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson), that this House do now resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Most Gracious Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

* (1440)

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr. Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This afternoon this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training.

When the committee last sat, it was considering item 16.1. Administration and Finance (c) Native Education Directorate (1)

Salaries and Employee Benefits, on page 46 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Mr. Chairman, I think the minister was giving us a competitive review of Saskatchewan and Manitoba which kind of surprised me. I think the minister was actually mixing apples and oranges. The long-term historical economy of both Saskatchewan and Manitoba are quite different. Manitoba has always been more diversified than Saskatchewan.

I think what the minister was actually talking about was the diversification of agriculture, a smaller portion of Manitoba's economy than it is of Saskatchewan's. The minister may well be right in the diversification in Manitoba, although I would certainly like to see the numbers on that. But I think the argument was actually mixing apples and oranges.

I was surprised, shall we say, at the competitive response on Saskatchewan. I had anticipated on behalf of all prairie governments that there would be some co-operation. As the minister had indicated, there was. I guess it depends upon the circumstance and depends upon the audience.

I wanted to ask about curriculum in native education.

Point of Order

* (1450)

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): I am happy, Mr. Chairman, to go to this area, but there are some items left over, you know, leftover undertakings that I have made that I could discharge now before we go into the next topic if that is what the honourable member would like. I have things to table and things like that.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister does not—

Mr. McCrae: You do not need to rule on it, I guess, though, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairperson: A point of order has been raised. The honourable minister does not have a point of order, but the honourable minister would like to offer some tablings for the benefit of the committee.

* * *

Mr. McCrae: I would indeed like to do that. As discussed, I am tabling a School Achievement Indicators Program report from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, respecting science. I also have, Mr. Chairman, a similar report respecting mathematics and a similar report respecting reading and writing.

I also want to clear up something that I said which may not have been 100 percent accurate. I would not want to mislead the honourable member in any way respecting The Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Act. Under Section 15: the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make recommendations and orders prescribing the hours of labour, rates of wages and scale of increases of wages at fixed intervals for apprentices.

I think I said to the honourable member that there is no setting of rates, and that was not quite correct because there is a minimum. In the new act, The Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Act, Section 24, it says: subject to the approval of the minister the board may make regulations governing the objective standards and requirements for apprenticeship training, including the hours of work and rate of wages for apprentices.

Section 26.5 says: a regulation made under the former act that is enforced on the coming into force of this act continues in force as if made under this act until replaced, repealed or amended under the act.

All regulations made under Chapter A110 have a section that sets minimum wages for apprentices. The general regulation states that wages cannot be less than the provincial minimum wage, plus 10 percent in the first year and increased by 10 percent in each subsequent year.

Many trade regulations set wages at differing but greater amounts than that stated in

the general regulation, either by setting the increments at a higher percent or using a method that establishes wages as a percent of the journeyman rate; for example, 45 percent of the journeyman rate. These regulations also provide for higher wages if agreed to by the employer or are set in a collective agreement.

Although The Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Act and regulations have authority to establish minimum rates of pay, the enforcement of payment of wages is, as I stated before, a mandate function of the Department of Labour, Employment Standards Branch. The Apprenticeship branch administers the payment of wages, components of trade regulations and pursues compliance to the regulation while the branch works in conjunction with Employment Standards regarding enforcement.

I also referred to documents setting out active and new apprentices year over year, and I am going to make that document available for the honourable member. We also talked about the origins of full-time international students in Manitoba, and I have information relating to the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg, Brandon University and Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface for 1997-98; same universities, same type of information for 1996-97; same again for 1995-96; same for 1994-95; same for 1993-94; same for 1992-93, and for 1991-92, and for 1990-91, and for 1989-90.

When we compare the surcharge placed on foreign students studying at Manitoba universities, we find that on average our rate is the third lowest in Canada. Thus from a competitive point of view, nationally our institutions' ability to attract foreign students is as good or better than in other provinces. It is important to attract foreign students to our campuses, but we have to balance that against the fact that we should not be asking the people of Manitoba to subsidize foreign students to the same extent as we do our own students. That is why we consider the surcharges being a reasonable thing to do. That is what I have to say about that.

Now, I am sorry, where were we? Is it in your court or my court?

Ms. Friesen: I had indicated an interest in discussing curriculum issues. There are two aspects of the curriculum issues, well, three actually, that I would like to look at.

One is the integration of aboriginal perspectives into curriculum generally across the board, and I am interested in what changes have been made in the past year in that area. Secondly, I am interested in the native languages framework that the Estimates book talks about, and I have a number of specific questions in that area; then, thirdly, the social studies curriculum.

So the first question, then, deals with the integration of aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum generally. I wonder what changes have been made this year and if the minister could point me to the documentation on this.

Mr. McCrae: While we are compiling information respecting that, I would refer also to the honourable member's comment about competitiveness between Manitoba and Saskatchewan and then comment about co-operation.

Just because there is competition does not mean there is not co-operation. I think that I have had personal involvement in many instances of very positive co-operation between Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I signed an environment agreement with the environment minister for the Province of Saskatchewan and forged a personal friendship with that minister through many, many discussions and meetings extending over days and weeks.

I spent a lot of time with the Saskatchewan delegation respecting constitutional issues back in the time of the Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown Accord, and I was extended many courtesies by the Attorney General from Saskatchewan, the Premier of Saskatchewan, and our delegation, in turn, extended courtesies to them. All in all, we had a very positive working relationship, so I would not want any competitive talk on my part ever to be confused with not wanting to be totally co-operative with our provincial colleagues to the west or to the people of Saskatchewan, many of whom are my relatives. So I want the honourable member not to take from anything I said that I am being competitive in any way that is not positive.

* (1500)

Yes, I will plead guilty nine times out of ten to wanting my province to be competitive and to achieve, because what that means is a better life for our children. That will happen working side by side with provinces like Saskatchewan with whom, I think, traditionally, no matter what the stripe of government in either province, there has been a long history of a good working relationship, and that is something I value and I think all Manitobans and the people of Saskatchewan, as well, would value very much.

So having said that, I hope that is clear enough. There are differences indeed, as the honourable member says. Even before the changes since the grain transportation subsidies, Saskatchewan was less diversified than Manitoba. I acknowledge that, but I do think that the pace of diversification is significantly greater in Manitoba than it is in Saskatchewan. I might even go so far as to say Alberta. There will be Albertans, no doubt, ready to get into that debate with me, including my brothers, who live in Alberta, but I think that they have got further to come than we do as well. So the honourable member is absolutely right about the fact that Manitoba has, for some time, been more diversified than these other provinces to the west. We have made much more significant progress than either of the two provinces I have named in recent years, which is something I am very proud of.

Now the honourable member asked about the aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and changes in the past year. The questions are, of course, very important questions, and they are extremely appropriate to any discussion of education in Manitoba. But I have to remind the honourable member that the directorate itself is not a unit that is responsible for developing curricula. That responsibility, as the honourable member knows, resides in the Schools Programs Division or the Bureau de l'éducation française or, to the extent that curriculum is a division responsibility, in the divisions themselves.

Having said that, I can provide quite a bit of useful information respecting the questions raised by the honourable member. Details would be better handled when we get to item

16.2. I am not trying to make it hard for the people helping me from the department either, but I would say that the Schools Programs Division has undertaken a number of initiatives in support of the government's Aboriginal Education And Training Strategy.

The inclusion of aboriginal perspectives in the curricula and learning resources—this is the direct question asked—is under New Directions, A Foundation for Excellence. It specified that aboriginal perspectives will be integrated into all Manitoba curricula to ensure that all students have opportunities to understand and respect the history, cultural heritage and contemporary society of aboriginal peoples. As new curricula are developed, aboriginal perspectives are reflected either directly in specific learning outcomes or in the suggestions for instruction and assessment provided for teachers to use in curriculum implementation. Criteria for the selection of learning resources to support curriculum implementation also specified that learning resources identified for use in schools include content by and about aboriginal people. The curriculum development teams and learning resources review teams include aboriginal representation whenever possible.

An Aboriginal Perspectives Curriculum Steering Committee was established to provide advice on the integration of aboriginal perspectives into curriculum. This committee is being reconfigured and will function as part of the development team to prepare an aboriginal perspectives integration support document for use by curriculum developers in Manitoba Education and Training. It is similar to Technology as a Foundation Skill Area—A Journey Toward Information Technology Literacy.

The Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Languages is a joint project of the western provinces, Yukon and Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan and Manitoba share the lead. Here is a case of the co-operation that I spoke of. We share the lead in this area with the province of Saskatchewan.

Regional vetting has included practicing teachers, language instructors, elders, aboriginal institutions and cultural specialists. Saskatchewan and Manitoba as the leads and Alberta

as administrator met in Regina on February 9 of this year to develop a proposal on procedure and costs for the final editing and production of the document for review by the aboriginal working group. Approximately \$30,000 remains in the pooled funds for preparing a final version of the curriculum framework.

The current status is as follows: the first complete draft was reviewed by the aboriginal working group on March 17 of this year. The document is in the editorial process. Two editors, cultural linguistic and English, have been contracted. The concept of spirituality and its inclusion in the curriculum framework has been developed to positive satisfaction by all jurisdictions. In the future, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta plan to meet June 9 to 11 in Regina to develop a proposal on procedure and costs for final editing and production for review by the aboriginal working group and submission to the ADMs' forum. On completion of the editorial process, this draft will be vetted as appropriate by the provincial committee of aboriginal language teachers and elders.

With regard to social studies and the Western Canadian Protocol project, and the Manitoba curricula, original New Directions' date for implementation of new Manitoba social studies curriculum was June 1996. Time lines have been adjusted to accommodate development of a common curriculum framework under the Western Canadian Protocol Social Studies project. To better represent the diverse nature of Canada and create a more authentic social studies curriculum framework, the Western Canadian Protocol project team comprises ministry representatives who work in three subgroups: Anglophone Multiculture, Manitoba leads that one; Francophone, B.C. leads; and aboriginal, the Northwest Territories leads.

The Western Canadian Protocol Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies, K to 12, will be released in English and in French. In 1998, the Western Canadian Protocol project team created a work plan with direction from the protocol assistant deputy ministers' steering committee. It was finalized for jurisdictional sign-off in January '99. Currently the project team's initial work has focused on preparing a foundation document. The purpose of this

preframework document is to provide practical and philosophical direction to the developers of the Western Canadian Protocol Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies.

Following completion in March 1999, Western Canadian Protocol ADMs approved the documents released for jurisdictional consultations April to November 1999. In Manitoba, the consultation process includes four facilitated sessions with educational stakeholders, two in Winnipeg, one in Brandon and one in The Pas; a system-wide mail-out of the foundation document and response form; and provision for on-line input using an electronic response form.

Manitoba's consultations are scheduled during May and June of 1999. They are a joint effort of School Programs Division, the Native Education Directorate, and Bureau de l'éducation française. So these three may also conduct separate sessions with particular groups of stakeholders to obtain their input. With respect to future direction, subsequent phases of the Western Canadian Protocol Social Studies project are based on the following time line. Phase 1, K to 9 Learning Outcomes: December 2000, K to 9 Learning Outcomes completed; February 2001, French immersion adoption completed. Phase 2, 10 to 12 Learning Outcomes: May 2002, 10 to 12 Learning Outcomes and French immersion adaptation completed. Phase 3, Learning Resources Review: Alberta, Lead Expenditures over Four Budget Years: 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. So January 2001, K to 9 call; June 2002, K to 9 review; June 2002, 10 to 12 call; December 2003, 10 to 12 review.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 16.1.(c)(1).

* (1510)

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, when the minister was dealing with the incorporation of native perspectives into curriculum generally, I think what he was reading was a statement of ideals and goals. I did not get a sense that anything had changed. I wanted to ask the minister in the past year if he could point me to the documents, to the areas of tests, to the outcomes where there has been some change and which had

incorporated aboriginal perspectives. I am looking for some progress over the past year in that area.

Mr. McCrae: I think we have a small misunderstanding actually because there has been a significant amount of curriculum work which has built, into those curricula, the aboriginal perspective. That has to do with math and language arts. We are working through the Western Protocol with respect to aboriginal languages and social studies. So I guess it is the implication in the question that I was having a little trouble with, that is that not enough or nothing has been done, which is not correct because there has lots been done. Aboriginal involvement is part of the development of all of these things, and we have work in progress.

I guess I am a little troubled because on the one hand we are told, slow down on New Directions, and on the other hand we are told, speed up. If you ever tried slowing down and speeding up at the same time, you will find that that is a very, very hard thing to do. Now, maybe the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Tweed) is one of those few people who is able to do that, but slowing down and speeding up at the same time is really hard. But I say, in addition to what I previously said, the Western Canadian Protocol has an aboriginal dimension to it. We are going to have a Manitoba-wide curriculum that is going to be culturally sensitive to the aboriginal reality of Manitoba's history.

Ms. Friesen: I am asking for specifics, and I have asked now twice for specifics. I have suggested curriculum, outcomes, examinations as examples of specifics where aboriginal perspectives may or may not have been incorporated. The minister's answer basically says, yes, we are doing it. Well, what exactly is it that the department has been able to do in the past year, and I make no assumptions about progress or lack of progress, but what has been accomplished? Can the minister point me to particular curricula, particular resource documents, particular examinations, particular lists of outcomes that have changed in the past year, that indicate an incorporation of aboriginal perspectives by Manitoba teachers in the classroom?

Mr. McCrae: With respect to math and language arts, no, because those curricula and the supporting materials and professional development is either done or well underway. As I say, we have integrated aboriginal perspectives in those curricula in all schools, and we are now developing phys ed and health, and it too will have aboriginal perspectives integrated. That, I would expect, would include whatever supporting documents or teaching aids and whatever that would include in all of those efforts.

Now we are working with the western counterparts on, as I said, aboriginal languages and social studies. These will obviously, more important than ever, address aboriginal perspectives. It takes somebody better at it than me to design a math curriculum, for example, that has an aboriginal perspective. I would not know where to start. That is why I have to consult people who do know how to do these things, and that is why we are fortunate to have input as we go through the process. I think there is a sense that New Directions is all done and over and done with, and that is far from the case. There is lots more to do. We have, in response to concerns expressed, slowed down implementation of curriculum change and tried to be responsive to concerns raised, certainly by members of the teaching profession who are at the forefront of making sure that our children receive the benefit of the new curricula, including in this year's budget, which the honourable member so graciously supported, adding \$900,000 to professional development, all with an effort to assist in getting our New Directions implemented in an orderly way.

* (1520)

As we develop our tests, these too pay attention to aboriginal perspectives, especially in the reading and the writing portions. The Special Education Review, which we talked about the other day, also has aboriginal perspectives, and it is pretty obvious that that is exactly what is needed. So our response to the Special Education Review will include aboriginal perspectives.

It is as if somehow aboriginal people and issues are hived off somewhere and they are not

part of our society. To a very large extent, aboriginal Manitobans are integrated into our society. They live in the same communities as I do and as the honourable member does, so we need to have a curriculum that is there for everybody but that is sensitive to the history and the culture of all of us. That is not an easy task, but we have some pretty dedicated people around who are giving that their very best effort and, of course, we are producing students of a high calibre who are going to be able to compete in this world. If anybody thinks that we can get through our lives without having to face competition, they are living in some kind of paradise I have never known or been aware of. Competition is the way the world works. It may be a good thing or not such a good thing, but it is the thing, and I think for the most part we find that it is a pretty positive thing. If we understand aboriginal perspectives, we are going to be more competitive than ever before, and I think that we are working properly in the direction. I have given the honourable member I think the kind of detail that she has been looking for.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, well, I did not actually hear any reference to specific new curricula. What the minister essentially said was that the math and English language arts incorporation had been done and that the department is at the moment working on the physical education and health, and that the social studies is essentially in its organizational stages, rather than in its preparation stages for curriculum resources. The physical education and health one then is the one that is in process in terms of the preparation of resources and of the actual writing of the curriculum, and I think that has been the case for some time. I think that curriculum is being written for at least 18 months. So I understand the answer on that one.

I wanted to ask about the aboriginal language framework that is being done in co-operation with other jurisdictions and to ask about the impact on Manitoba. How many students in Manitoba are currently taking courses in aboriginal languages and/or taking challenge exams in aboriginal languages, and in respect to challenge exams, does the minister have, obviously not with him, some sense of the record of challenge exams in aboriginal languages over the last five or six years?

Mr. McCrae: I regret if the honourable member feels that I have not answered the question. It is just that I have several times pointed out that what is new is basically the question, and I am saying what is new is native languages, social studies, health and phys ed, and that is what is new.

Ms. Friesen: That is what I summarized.

Mr. McCrae: Right.

Ms. Friesen: The first two are frameworks. They are not at the stage of developing resources.

Mr. McCrae: I am not denying what the honourable member is saying. I am saying that we are making considerable progress and so much progress that we are being asked to slow down, and that is what we have done in a few occasions to try to make New Directions something that is more acceptable to everyone. By doing it too fast, I think we have put pressure on the system that does not need to be there and so we have also reduced that pressure in certain ways, in several ways.

So the next part of the question has to do with aboriginal languages, the number of students taking them and the number of students taking challenge exams, and that is information we will get for the honourable member.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, the social studies framework is certainly an area the government has slowed down. Obviously, from the perspective of opposition, one of the reasons for this is the hiatus of—it must have been at least three years where the government was in a position of arguing that it was not going to have a mandatory senior level, Canadian History.

Now I notice that every other province in the western consortium has a relatively new curriculum. Manitoba is the only one that has a social studies curriculum that is quite dated, and I wonder what the prospect is for Manitoba in this context. We can do it in a comparison basis. We have British Columbia with a curriculum that is, I think, only three years old; Saskatchewan with one that is about two years old;

Alberta's is a little older; but Manitoba has nothing since 1983 in changes in its senior level history curriculum, and that is quite a distance.

I am wondering how the minister is going to approach this. Yes, wait for the Western Protocol and the frameworks, but in the meantime what kind of material, what kind of text, what kind of resources, what kind of contemporary solutions is the minister offering to Manitoba schools?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, I do not think that history teachers in Manitoba would appreciate very much the implication that they are teaching children only the information that is contained in a curriculum that dates back to 1983. I do not know a lot about history, but I think the honourable member sometimes knows less about history than I do, which is saying something. I say that because it is really quite insulting to history teachers to suggest that they are relying on a 1983 textbook. I mean, they are not stupid, our history teachers. In fact, they are anything but stupid. They know how to use resources. They know how to read the newspapers and make their students aware, put some perspective forward about history.

So I am not saying that we are not going to need new curriculum and that we are not going to need new textbooks, but I think the honourable member makes a lot out of this and, in doing so, does so as a real slap to our history teachers, because our history teachers are very, very mindful of what is going on today and yesterday and last week and last year and in all the years since 1983, having experienced those years firsthand as living human beings. I mean, you cannot really have a relevant review of history without some reference to what is going on today and how did we get here. I am no history scholar, but I would caution, certainly myself if nobody else, not to offend history teachers by telling them that they cannot do a good job, because I think they can do an excellent job.

The province of Manitoba is, as we have discussed, developing social studies curricula in step with the Western Protocol. As the member says, the other western provinces have new social studies curricula. They too see that it is

needing to change or to improve since they are going to be continuing to work with us. So, you know, there are all kinds of ways you can put this. I mean, I do not want to be seen defending a delay that has no sense to it, but I do know that there are a lot of teachers out there who are saying: we like your curricula a lot, we think it is great, but would you please give us the resources that we need in order to get the job done.

That is exactly what we are trying to respond to and are responding to. The other thing is, it is a lot of work, and it is coming at us pretty fast. That is an appropriate concern if it is true, which it is. That is worth our taking account of and adjusting accordingly.

So we are very mindful of wanting to be good stewards not only of the public's resources, but also we want to be responsive and sensitive to the needs of our teachers, who are doing so much these days to make the education in history or in any subject matter relevant to the requirements of today and the future.

We are not going to do what they did in B.C. I understand that they rather unceremoniously rammed through new curriculum in social studies. They are also working with us in the Western Protocol. Soon you know what is going to be happening in B.C. Maybe this is what the honourable member wants to happen here. But it will not be long before the teachers there are going to be saying, well, which curriculum do you want us to teach now? I mean, first you do not change them at all, and then you change them too fast. So I think that what I am seeing is an appropriate effort on the part of the province of Manitoba to partner with our western Canadian partners in developing a curriculum in social studies.

* (1530)

Lastly, while it is true that we have not established new social studies curricula yet, we have not established it, but we have put out regular updates to assist teachers, we are embarking right now to do some updates to our existing social studies curricula as we transition to the Western Protocol curriculum.

The question totally ignores the very existence of the Internet, which is available now for history teachers and other teachers. Having visited in a number of schools recently, I get a real sense of the enthusiasm that teachers are beginning to show. I think having gotten through the adjustments to new curricula, which I acknowledge has been a real difficult task for the teachers, they are feeling pretty optimistic and they are very enthusiastic in their working relationships with their students.

So I think that we are making progress which is steady, as promised, and we are also—well, it is not bullshit. It is not bullshit, with all due respect, Mr. Chairman. We are, as the honourable member for Wolseley says, what we are doing is we promised progress—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I would have to ask the minister to withdraw the word. It is unparliamentary.

Mr. McCrae: Pardon me, Mr. Chairman. I withdraw it. I was simply repeating what I heard the member for Wolseley say.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable minister for that. The honourable minister, to continue.

Mr. McCrae: I am sorry if I offended anybody. I did not mean to do that. It is just that our teachers have their hands full now, and they are telling us, even through the honourable member, that their hands are full and that we are trying to do all of this work, and then the criticism comes on the other side that you are not moving fast enough. That is why I made the comment that only maybe the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) can slow down and speed up at the same time. I mean, which is it? I think that we have to set a pace that is indeed reasonable and achievable by human beings in attempting to do a good job. I think that is what we are doing.

Ms. Friesen: Well, the implications about the teachers in the classroom are entirely ones that the minister is drawing. My questions dealt with the comparability of curriculum changes across the country, particularly the Western Protocol, and an indication that other parts of the Western Protocol have moved independently and more

quickly and sometime during the same period as this government. It is certainly true that there are many resources on the Internet. It is certainly true that the teachers are crying out for more resources, and I am very pleased to see that the minister in this particular time has moved, is it in the last two months or in the last four months, to develop some new resources for teachers of social studies? I think that is very useful. I think what I would like to ask the minister to do is to table the papers that he referred to earlier. I am not sure if he called it a framework document. It is certainly moving towards a framework document that is going to be discussed in Winnipeg and Brandon and if he could table that and perhaps give us an indication of what he expects in terms of new resources in the coming year in terms of social studies.

Mr. McCrae: I might add other western provinces that are moving ahead quickly are getting into a fair bit of trouble for it, too, as I made reference to British Columbia. I was reading in the Western Report a story about Alberta and the debate going on there about maths and a number of the things had a strangely familiar ring to some of the debate in Manitoba and probably elsewhere. But I say be careful what you compare yourself to, I guess, because you want to hold up British Columbia as an example, let us talk about all of the examples that are flowing from B.C. these days and, you know, you tend to get into a rather unpleasant subject matter these days. I have a lot of relatives in B.C. too, and I tell you I do not hear anything good about the government down there.

An Honourable Member: Have you ever driven out there?

Mr. McCrae: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The honourable member for Wolseley, did you have a question?

Ms. Friesen: No, Mr. Chairman, I merely had a comment that it is the minister who keeps raising British Columbia. I am asking for comparability across the western provinces and indicating that there is a problem here. There is a problem in timing, and one of the problems is that each of

the western provinces, that is, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, have moved at a different pace in their social studies curriculum. I should refrain, I think, from expecting a logical response. I wonder if the minister could perhaps indicate whether he is going to table the material that is being distributed in Manitoba.

Mr. McCrae: We are indeed talking about comparability and that is exactly what I have been explaining. It is true that we are trying to get some sense of something standard across the West and that is what all the provinces are working for, and I guess the only point I am making is that those that get ahead of the pack have to backtrack too and get themselves into quite a bit of trouble. That is the only point I was making. I have answered the questions.

The honourable member asked about the consultation process, I think, with stakeholders, the facilitated sessions, Winnipeg, two of them, one of them in Brandon, one in The Pas, and I will get that for the honourable member. I am advised the other provinces are not ahead of us in developing our new social studies curricula. In each jurisdiction they have consultation processes underway, so there is really quite a lot of comparability, not only of content but also of process.

*(1540)

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I think again we are discussing apples and oranges, the issue of existing relatively new curriculum in other areas and the process for a western framework consultation are two separate things. The minister's response seems to mix the two of them.

I wanted to ask in this section of the department about relationships and connections and partnership, discussions with, meetings with parents of aboriginal students. I wondered what had taken place in the past year in this area.

Mr. McCrae: I can only speak for the last three months for myself at least, and I have taken a direct role in that. Maybe there have been developments before that as well, but certainly in the first month or so, month and a half of my

tenure as minister, I invited Manitobans from all parent councils across the province to join with us. That opportunity was made available, but again we did not make records of how many of the parents that came were aboriginal parents. For my part, that opportunity was there for me and it was there for parents to join us in discussions. I understand there have been aboriginal family and community workshops—I am sorry, there will be an aboriginal and community workshop being planned. That is being planned now to provide information to aboriginal parents, families, and communities about the education of students in Manitoba.

The primary target audience is aboriginal parents, families, and communities, but the workshop is open to the general public. It has the following goals: consulting with people; providing information on New Directions initiatives; working with regional teams to build local capacity; and to provide an update on initiatives related to aboriginal education in Manitoba Education and Training.

There are two workshops planned, a rural one, so-called, they call it rural because it is not in Winnipeg, but it is in Brandon, another major urban centre—actually it is becoming the major urban centre in Manitoba—at Crocus Plains Regional High School. The tentative date for that is October 9, '99. Then they are going to have an urban workshop in that other city, Winnipeg, at R.B. Russell School. It is that competitive thing coming out of me again I guess. The tentative date for that is October 16. Neighbouring First Nations communities will be invited to attend the workshops. In addition, the Native Awareness consultant has already performed 56 workshops for administrators, teachers, and students in 34 schools province-wide.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, last time we had Estimates the minister suggested, when I asked about graduation rates for aboriginal people, the minister I think quoted me 7.6 percent of the overall population as a Manitoba number, I think. I was checking that with her to make sure it was Manitoba, not a Canada-wide number. I wonder if the minister has any new information since 1996 to give us any indication whether that number has changed.

Mr. McCrae: The number the honourable member gave us, I have no reason to question except to say, as we discussed earlier, it may be difficult to be precise about that because of the difficulties we mentioned earlier. No, I do not know if there has been any improvement or change in that in recent times, but that number alone reflects the nature of the issue we have in front of us. I do not think anybody disagrees that education is something that we all need and that aboriginal communities need education too in order to make better their social and economic circumstances.

I spoke of my frustration last time we talked about these things. This is still just another statistic that if you do not put some human dimension around it, you are really no better than a number cruncher. We need to be doing more than crunching numbers. I challenge governments, aboriginal governments, the federal government, and provincial governments, I challenge everybody to put aside all of the politics and think about the implications of that particular statistic.

The first one I ever hear from the honourable member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin) or somebody like that is, oh, unemployment is so high. Well, guess why. A 7.6 percent graduation rate may have something to do with it. I talk about the development of Manitoba overall and I gave credit for that development to our education system and to the fact that Manitobans achieve education. But we know that not all Manitobans are achieving levels of education that would generate a better life for themselves and their families.

So I challenge everybody. The province is trying with the resources that it has and the best and the brightest minds around to make a difference in that area, but as long as we maintain the system that we have, which has plagued aboriginal people for 150 or more years, as long as we have that kind of system, we are going to continue to have this kind of statistic to debate in Estimates on a Thursday afternoon in the Manitoba Legislature. It is just simply unacceptable and should be more unacceptable than it is to aboriginal governments. Aboriginal governments need to partner with Ottawa and with Manitoba and in Saskatchewan, with the

provincial government there, and Alberta. We are simply not getting enough partnership.

We simply have plenty of committees and task forces and work groups and all of these different ways of trying to get at the issues that are facing Canadians and Manitobans. Well, I guess I am impatient. I plead guilty on that one. I have been watching too closely for too long I guess. I have seen some progress, but I have not seen enough. As long as you have a partnership that is dysfunctional, we are going to have results that are not going to be acceptable. I say dysfunctional, because we are always having skirmishes about jurisdiction. Well, I regret that. I have worked very hard to try to break down those jurisdictional barriers and get some real work done, but unfortunately we do not always achieve the success that we want.

The 1996 census data indicates that the aboriginal population of Manitoba is the youngest and fastest-growing population in Manitoba, with the most significant growth occurring among those under 15 years, 20 percent of the total population, and 15 to 24 years which is 16 percent of the total population. The latest data indicates that 61.9 percent of aboriginal peoples over the age of 15 have not completed high school, compared to 39.2 percent of the nonaboriginal population. A smaller proportion of aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are in school, 44 percent of aboriginal youth compared to 59 percent nonaboriginal.

Participation rate in the labour force is lower for aboriginal Manitobans, 54 percent compared to 67.6 percent for nonaboriginals. The unemployment rate is much higher, 6.4 percent for nonaboriginal, at the time this was written, compared to 25.5 percent for aboriginal people. The trend to urbanization by aboriginal peoples is continuing while employment opportunities continue to be low for this highly undertrained population. This is putting additional strain on city and provincial social service delivery systems.

* (1550)

Well, those facts and figures tell of the urgency of the problem. This is past politics. It has been past politics for a number of years. We

still get demonstrations and things, but it is past politics. It is time for people to get serious and stop playing games and get on with doing the right thing for ordinary aboriginal people in Manitoba. When I say ordinary aboriginal people, they are the ones that get lost in the shuffle of debate over who is responsible for what and who has jurisdiction over what, and who has the power.

That is really a troublesome thing, this power business. The people do not care about the power. They want a little for themselves as ordinary human beings, and they are not getting enough power. That is a regrettable thing.

Ms. Friesen: I think the minister had some numbers which were more specific than the ones which we had in Estimates last year. I think, actually as I read through what was said last year, I do not think we ever actually got clarification. What we were working with was a number, a Canadian number, from 1996 which indicated 7.6 percent of aboriginal people over the age of 15 have completed high school, up slightly from the 1991 census where it was 7.4 percent.

Now, the minister has some different numbers which break it down by age groups, which is obviously important in all, whether you are looking at aboriginal or nonaboriginal people, when you are looking for changes in graduation rates or the same problem is their literacy rates, as well.

Does he have new numbers from anything later than 1996? Are we still operating on the basis of the '96 census?

Mr. McCrae: Unfortunately, the 1996 statistics are the latest ones that we have available. We get this demographic information from Statistics Canada. That is our source and that has not been updated since that time.

Ms. Friesen: What is the source for Statistics Canada's material? Is it the census or is it specific educational statistics that are submitted by Manitoba?

Mr. McCrae: It is the 1996 census data that I was relying on. I might just add that as part of

the whole Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, there is an education statistics committee of which the deputy minister for Manitoba is a co-chair. Mr. Carlyle tells me that this council is trying to achieve better statistical data, especially data respecting aboriginal Canadians.

Mr. Chairperson: 16.1. Administration and Finance (c) Native Education Directorate (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$358,900—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$108,800—pass.

16.1.(d) Human Resources Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$611,200—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$113,200—pass.

16.1.(e) Corporate and Administrative Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,214,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$456,300—pass.

16.1.(f) Management Information Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$700,200—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$254,500—pass.

16.2. School Programs (a) Division Administration (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$278,700.

Ms. Friesen: I wonder if the minister could give us a brief summary here. The management team is addressing priority issues. I am interested to have the minister tell us what the priority issues are for the department that these project teams are working on.

Mr. McCrae: If the honourable member could just run through the question one more time so we can prepare ourselves.

Ms. Friesen: I am working on 16.2.(a), the activities of the Division Administration, which talks about priority issues and teams to address priority issues. I am interested in knowing what the priority issues are.

* (1600)

Mr. McCrae: Whatever the line in the Estimates, I have always had a little difficulty figuring out which line was which, but I think the honourable member is asking us about

addressing priority issues. I guess we need to talk about what those priority issues are. I think that is something that has been talked about a lot but certainly bears repeating. The priority function of the Department of Education these days is to bring our education system into conformity with a system that has standards and sets standards. It is a big job. We are doing that in a way which brings in our partners from across Canada, but certainly in a more direct way across western Canada, making sure we are administering our New Directions policies appropriately, making adjustments when it is determined that in some areas we are moving too slowly or too fast and making those sorts of adjustments. Special needs, of course, when it comes to implementation, will be a serious, serious priority item in terms of implementation. So we are talking about technology, as well, which is an important part of our preparations for preparing children for a future that will be in a whole different world than the one that they started out in, and we keep trying to build relationships and maintain partnerships.

We have talked about aboriginal issues in Manitoba and the importance of those issues. We have talked about special needs as well. I always hate giving out a list in case I miss out an important priority speaking off the cuff, but I believe those are pretty central. I know that when I came into office, I was and remain interested in developing a new relationship with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and I have begun that process.

One of the first things that I did was to accept an invitation by the Teachers' Society to attend at one of their meetings. I think it was a regional meeting. There were sure a lot of executive members of the MTS there. We had I think a very meaningful initial discussion. We had a number of contacts with various members of the MTS since, including the new president. I have known the new president or the president-elect, I guess it is, I have known that person, Jan Speelman, for the majority of my life, and I look forward to a positive working relationship. I mean that very sincerely. I look forward to actually getting some things done that would be meaningful for teachers and meaningful for the people of Manitoba and result in better education for the children.

Those are priorities, too. They may not be set out in any document, but, for me, in order to get anything done you need good partnership. I met with the Manitoba Association of School Trustees very early on. The member knows that I have been meeting with parents and others as well. I think, aside altogether from the Estimates to talk about, establishing relationships and building partnerships is very important. The reason we have come as far as we have in new directions is that we have indeed established partnerships and established working committees and steering committees and oversight committees so that we can work in partnership.

I have had cordial contacts with the people in the education system. The present president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society and I, even though we have not had 100 percent agreement, I think both of us have maintained our sense of humour which is an important thing to do in a relationship that is sometimes seen as somewhat adversarial.

We have discussed a number of the priorities that the department has relating to aboriginal education issues. We have talked about various liaisons. We have to work with school divisions to ensure that they are enabled to do their work. It is important from one budget year to the next, and everything seems to be dependent on budgets, that is a reality, but given that matter which kind of governs us all, I think we have had some pretty good and meaningful discussions. I have learned from them. I have brought those insights back to the department, and I think we have seen some progress in a very short time.

I measure it by various things. I know we have to use indicators and measure how many kids are graduating and all of those things, and you cannot do that in the space of three or four months, but in that period of time I think I have succeeded in making significant headway in developing some relationships with people in the field that are going to be very important. My experience in previous portfolios suggests that some of the contacts you make early on in a new job are the ones that you can call up later on, too. I have proved that in the past. So I was glad early on to be able to touch bases with some of

the leadership of some of these important organizations such as, again, the school superintendents associations and the regional ones, as well.

Lots of networking should be job one for a new minister and leave the operations to the people who do it best, and that is the people in the department. We are very fortunate in Manitoba to have an Education department that is sensitive to the needs of their fellow Manitobans. I have enjoyed working with them and I trust that I will be doing that for quite some time, although it is the Premier (Mr. Filmon) who makes that decision. I just put that little hint forward right now, that I like this department. I like working with the people involved in Education.

Just last night I was in Tyndall, Manitoba, to let the people there know that their communities of Garson and Tyndall will have their old schools replaced and a new school for both of them built. It was a very happy occasion. It is one of the times when you really stop and think about how lucky you are to be in a job like this. I was able to remind the people at the meeting, many of whom were parents and trustees and people like that, but there were, as it turned out, some teachers there too, I did ask the community to bear in mind that what we are doing was building a building and it is what goes on inside that building that is really going to count.

One fellow taught in that very school that we are going to be replacing for 28 years of his life. So there was some emotion at that meeting last night in Tyndall, a very moving occasion for myself and for the honourable Minister of Highways and Transportation (Mr. Praznik) in that this is a town that wants to thrive and wants to have a quality of life in both these towns, Tyndall and Garson. I think the announcement made will help ensure that that happens and that those are communities that will be there for a long time to come. It is because of the people who live there who have done so much to make it a quality place to live. They obviously care a lot about their children. So there was a fair bit of interest generated.

That is not a very good description if you are looking for a point form answer in terms of

the priorities of the department. I am just telling you what my priorities are. I hope that the honourable member shares those priorities. I think she does.

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to ask the minister about desktop services. The issue of increasing costs for desktop services I think occurs in a number of areas of the department's Estimates. So although I am asking on this particular line where the increase is from 10.9 to 14.6, it is actually one of the smaller increases. I wonder if the minister could give me a sense of what the cost is for the whole department.

This, I assume, is part of a multiyear program of costing the transition to a new type of contract. We talked about it in a number of Estimates last year, so I wonder if the minister could summarize for us what the impact is on the department this year and how many more years this impact will be there in terms of increases in desktop services.

* (1610)

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, here is what I propose: I would be happy to provide this information if at the beginning of our next sitting we could do that. I could have the appropriate person here and give you the detail that you are looking for.

Mr. Chairperson: 16.2. School Programs (a) Division Administration (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$278,700—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$77,900—pass.

2.(b) Manitoba School for the Deaf (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,876,400.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to note that my colleague the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) had asked some questions already that had reference to this, I think, earlier. I was not here for everything he asked. I just wanted to ask about enrollments and if there had been any change in enrollments at the School for the Deaf.

Mr. McCrae: The honourable member for Dauphin indeed did ask one or two very insightful and important questions, but the honourable member for Wolseley arrived fairly

soon thereafter so he did not get into very many questions about the School for the Deaf.

The numbers have not changed much year over year. This gives just simply the number as at September 30, 1998. The number of students enrolled at the Manitoba School for the Deaf at that time was 89. Off campus at John Taylor Collegiate there were four. Residential students numbered 12. With regard to staff there were 13 deaf staff, educational including administration; 28.75 staff years of hard of hearing staff and one vacant seat; with respect to support people, like residence, janitorial, office people, seven deaf and four hard of hearing, for a total of 20 deaf, 32.75 staff years hard of hearing, and one vacant.

In 1999 we expect possibly 11 graduates. This is the point that was being raised by the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers). He was asking about the Professional/Technical item on page 47, second number item from the top, from 49.85 to 50.85. That reflects two new students coming in who are exceedingly needy children and we need additional professional and technical support for that reason. That was what the honourable member for Dauphin was asking about.

Ms. Friesen: I am interested in the kind of support that is being offered in rural areas to those students who are part of a regular school system and again going back to the special needs review and to the recommendation for the training of teacher assistants. The department obviously provides some services in that area and from what I have heard, at least in some areas it is not enough. There are waiting lists. There are people who feel they are dealing with deaf students who they do not feel competent to do so. I wondered if the department had prepared a report on that. Has it summarized any of the needs that it sees in northern areas as well as rural areas? Has there been any reflection on that, on policy changes or needs, waiting lists, that kind of thing?

Mr. McCrae: An educational interpreter consultant position has been filled by several part-time deaf and hearing staff who travel to schools throughout Manitoba. The educational

interpreter consultant assists school staff to improve their ASL skills when instructing deaf and hard-of-hearing children. Sorry, I am stumbling over my words a little bit. Too much talking in one day.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister tell us how many students are deaf and hard of hearing in Manitoba and how many students are being assisted by this part of the department, by this kind of program?

Mr. McCrae: If that is not immediately available but yet is available, I will make it available for the honourable member at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 16.2.(b) Manitoba School for the Deaf (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,876,400—pass.

Point of Order

Mr. McCrae: On a point of order, just because we passed the item does not mean that we will not make the information available.

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

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Item 16.2.(b)(2) Other Expenditures \$641,000—pass.

16.2.(c) Assessment and Evaluation (1) Salaries and Employment Benefits \$5,149,700.

* (1620)

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): I would like to ask a few questions in the area of Assessment and Evaluation. One, just looking at the number of staff, is that we have seen a considerable growth in the number of people in this section, nine at the professional level and four at the administrative level. That makes it a total of 74.5 positions. Can the minister tell us if we expect to see continued growth of the number of staff in this branch?

Mr. McCrae: There is a critical mass of activity and cost respecting the implementation and ongoing administration of an assessment

system in our schools, so, yes, there will be a cost. As we add other curricula to be tested against, we expect to see some growth in this area. However, I do not think it will be as significant as the initial growth because of the critical mass part that I mentioned. So, yes, there will be some growth in that, but I do not think as much as we have seen thus far.

The first part of it is going to be the largest part, I suggest, and the investment is something that does get debated from time to time, as some people say, as one group, I think, is putting out information about tests, saying: well, save the \$15 million, as if to say—well, actually, they are against the tests, so they use that as a reason for putting their case forward. I simply think that less than 1 percent of the total budget to be spent in this way is appropriate when we are spending \$781 million for our school system. It might be worth less than 1 percent of all of that to identify whether we are getting our money's worth. That is basically what it comes down to. But, yes, to answer the honourable member's question, we do expect to see a bit more growth in that area, but probably not as much as we have seen to this point.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can the minister be more specific and indicate how many more positions will be hired in the upcoming year?

Mr. McCrae: It is an increase of 13 staff years.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can the minister inform us, given that they have a plan of testing, what they would expect in the year 2000-2001?

Mr. McCrae: I expect to be able to answer that question before we are finished at 5.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can the minister indicate, I guess maybe review, the overall testing program? Some of the standards tests have changed a bit. It was going to be in a number of courses at the four levels, and some of those, if I remember correctly, have now been dropped. Can the minister indicate which courses are going to be tested in the four grades? Let us start that way so that is for the record and people can have a handle of what the plan is for standards tests in Grades 3, 6, Senior 1 and Senior 4.

Mr. McCrae: I think the honourable minister knows this, but for Grades 3 and 6, it goes like this. It is already out there, as I understand. It has been made known, but I will tell her anyway. In 1999, in June, Grade 3 English language arts and immersion française, also Grade 3 mathematics, also Grade 6 English language arts and immersion anglaise in 2000, Grade 3 Added to the above in 2000 in the month of June would be Grade 6 français immersion and Grade 6 mathematics. I think that is correct. In 2001, same as '99. In 2002, same as 2000 with the addition of Grade 6 science. From that point on, science in Grade 6 will be tested in alternate years. So 2003, same as 1999 with the addition of—maybe there is a better way of putting this, and if so, I think we should use it, because I saw the honourable member scribbling away and I do not think it is going to do any good to use that. Not your fault, but mine.

I think we will just take the time to put it into an understandable format. Maybe the one I had been looking at is understandable, but when you put it into English like I have been trying to do, it does not come out so good. So maybe we can build something like that and share it with the honourable member, or if it is already out there, find that material and make it available to the honourable member. That might be the best way, and we can do that tomorrow. Is that okay? So we will table that information tomorrow.

Ms. Mihychuk: It is my understanding that some of these exams will be marked locally by school divisions. Can the minister indicate which of these exams are now going to be the responsibility of school divisions?

Mr. McCrae: Some that are going to be marked centrally—so here we go: Senior 4 mathematics marked centrally; English language arts, marked centrally, Senior 4, that is Grade 12 to me; Grade 3 mathematics standards test will be marked centrally; Grade 3 language arts standards test will be marked centrally.

Standards tests will be marked locally for English language arts, English LA immersion, anglais, français, français immersion at Grade 6 and Senior 1; mathématiques at Grade 6 and

Senior 1; social studies, sciences humaines at Grade 6; and science, science de la nature at Senior 1.

Ms. Mihychuk: As the minister probably knows, doing marking at the local level or centrally requires training and time and certain expenses to do the marking. Has the province provided additional supports to school divisions to cover the expenses incurred by local marking?

* (1630)

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, \$9 a test, and there is an evaluation system set up and it is good so far, but the evaluation is ongoing. Teachers like it. I know the Teachers' Society has made some comments about it, but teachers like it. We are deriving a professional development, and now watch what happens. Somebody who does not like it is going to come forward and say so. But the fact is, the experience that I have had, what I have been hearing, is that they see this as a professional development tool that assists them in their work as teachers. But there is never any black or white. I know there are always gray areas.

We are deriving a professional development benefit from the standards testing initiative as teachers reference their participation on test development committees and marking teams as one of the best professional development experiences of their careers. So that is an interesting comment. It is more than just interesting. I am not very surprised, and I am quite new at all this, but I am not very surprised because what I have learned about these tests is that they have very significant teacher input, in-the-field teachers who are involved in the writing and designing of these tests. So overall one tends to wonder sometimes what this is all about, but there are legitimate arguments on both sides. There always are. But the fact is that I think that anybody who is involved in this marking experience comes back saying that they are far better equipped to teach this type of curriculum having been engaged in that type of activity. There is \$9 per test.

Ms. Mihychuk: Will the minister indicate which budget line includes that allocation and what the total amount is?

Mr. McCrae: While they are looking for that, Mr. Chairman, I will just point out to the honourable member that local marking training sessions were held for this year at the end of April, so we are not just throwing people to the wolves here. I know that it has been difficult for lots of people to get into this, but I think we are starting to be able to find some better levels of satisfaction with people involved in the process. Anything new is sometimes a little tricky to adjust to.

We have just about got your answer here. I know it is \$280,000. It is in 16.2.(c) under Professional Fees. In the appropriation, \$2,104,800, you find the \$280,000 in that amount somewhere.

Ms. Mihychuk: There are a couple of concerns that parents have expressed, and one of them is that having their homeroom teacher be pulled out to do marking means that our own children then do not have their homeroom teacher, which is always viewed as a disadvantage because there is a special relationship between the children and the teacher. We have seen over and over again that type of support from parents to have one teacher in the classroom. When they are pulled out for administrative work, the students have perhaps a less rewarding day when their homeroom teacher or their regular teacher is pulled out.

Is the minister concerned about this, and how do we respond to all those parents who are concerned about the number of days that their teachers are out of the classroom?

Mr. McCrae: I guess the first thing that the honourable member's question begs is that, if this were the main issue, is the remedy to get rid of testing? You have to weigh all of these things, and I have been doing that. This is for the marking, right? And the teacher is out marking and there is a substitute paid for by the department and the issues that arise from that as enunciated by the honourable member. So you say to that: well, now, okay, the teacher is not there, there is a substitute, but because the student is disrupted because their own regular teacher is not there, we should just dispense with having any kind of accountability or assessment in the system. That alone does not do it for me.

An Honourable Member: They take more time off to go to the teachers' annual general meeting.

Mr. McCrae: Well, that is the point.

An Honourable Member: The same substitutes that nobody complains about.

Mr. McCrae: And we got talking—[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

An Honourable Member: And the opposition does not complain—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. There is some difficulty with Hansard in terms of their recording for everybody and for the benefit of the committee. I think it is important that they be given the opportunity to record one comment, and we are listening to the minister's comments now. Would the minister continue, please.

* (1640)

Mr. McCrae: The honourable member's question made me think of Mrs. Hammond. Now, Mrs. Hammond, Nellie Hammond from Brandon, used to quite often serve in the capacity as a substitute teacher. Well, in our community, maybe it is the magic of Brandon, I do not know, but I have known Nellie Hammond all my life because of those early experiences. She was a good friend to the students, and we have to be careful when we raise issues that we do not in some way offend the Mrs. Hammonds of the world either. There are a lot of people out there who are substitute teachers, and they are darn good substitute teachers, as well, but if that is true on marking day, then it must be true on other days when the regular homeroom teacher is not there. Now, that is one example. I understand that in order to attend MTS meetings, teachers have to get substitutes, and the children do without their regular homeroom teacher on that day, too.

So I do not know if there is that much of an issue with respect to that part, and you can agree or disagree, but I believe that some form—and in her heart of hearts I think the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) agrees with this. There needs to be some form of

province-wide standards and province-wide testing against those standards. Sometimes it comes down to a question of are we implementing it as well as could be done. Sometimes we are; sometimes we are not. When we are not, we make some adjustments or corrections, because this is a human thing we are doing, and so we are going to make mistakes along the way, hopefully not very many. I do not want to preside over very many, but if we do, then we should acknowledge that and admit there is a better way, and so let us do it that better way.

But having made a terrifically important decision under New Directions that we are going to have standards for our children, and they are going to get into a society in the future in which they can compete and they can be happy and they can pass on those qualities, especially the happiness one, to their own children—I mean, we are affecting more in terms of a whole generation of people with this in a positive way, and that is the whole debate. Is it a positive or negative? If you are on the negative side of it, of course you are going to be upset about the local marking and having to have a substitute. You are going to be upset about the Grade 3 exam, which has caused some people some discomfort. You are going to be upset about all the different things that are being raised now in response to a changed system.

I have met an awful lot of people, and I have not found a consensus that is anywhere close to suggesting that we ought not to have standards in testing, even in Grade 3 where there is a larger number of dissenters, I suggest, than with respect to the other grades, but still not a majority, I would not think, at all.

So that is the way I have to answer that question. I do not know, maybe some children will be disadvantaged by having a substitute teacher in there, but, you know, there are some very good substitute teachers out there. They are certified teachers, too, and they do an excellent job from my own experience and that of those that I know today.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can the minister tell us how many days a marking teacher will be out of the classroom for the evaluation process?

Mr. McCrae: The teacher coming in to do marking for central marking could be away for four to five days. If it is mathematics, three at the most, simply because of the different natures of the different tests.

Ms. Mihychuk: Let me just understand that if they are seconded to do central marking, they would be away for four to five days for central and three days for mathematics. If they are locally marking, how many days are they going to be out of the classroom? Can the minister tell us how many days of professional development go along with that, because people cannot really be pulled out without being given the guidance or the training on how to mark?

Mr. McCrae: With respect to the local marking situation, the training is done locally but by departmental personnel, and the marking really depends on the division involved.

Ms. Mihychuk: The minister talked about this being a positive experience, and in some circumstances I have heard that, too, from teachers, that one of the benefits of this type of evaluation is the professional development that goes on amongst professionals when they sit in a group and discuss the questions and the interpretation, how children answer those questions. There is a professional growth that occurs with this type of marking, and I hear that from people who go into the central marking pool, that that is a positive experience for teachers to get together and talk about how kids learn, how they respond to the tests.

Is the minister concerned about that type of professional development for those teachers who are doing it locally?

Mr. McCrae: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think that we are here again. We are in a danged if you do and darned if you don't situation, and that is not the bad words like I said before, so I do not have to.

Mr. Chairman, on the one hand, I guess the central marking experience is a good professional development experience, yet it takes one away from one's classroom. Actually, you can get the same benefit from a professional development standpoint locally, I am advised,

but with a smaller number of teachers involved. So I guess I need to know from the honourable member which one of those ones she likes the best.

Ms. Mihychuk: I would like to continue a little bit on the process of assessment and evaluation. As far as I understand it, provincial exams are a way of measuring the results or outcomes of a certain test that you provide to students, and part of that evaluation or consistency would be that the evaluators somehow know how to mark the answer. Sometimes one teacher may give a mark that may vary considerably from another person who reads an answer.

So I wonder if there is a concern about consistency of marking as we move to the local level. Marking is a very complex process, especially in language arts, for example, where there is no clear-cut answer. It was not one of my strengths. I preferred the sciences and mathematics actually. The language arts component exam is quite an extensive and multifaceted test.

So one of the clear problems, I would think, that the Assessment branch has to deal with is consistency, and I wonder if the minister would make some comments about provincial consistency with local marking.

Mr. McCrae: Well, I understand those are legitimate concerns, and I think the department has viewed them as legitimate concerns. That is why there is training for teaching professionals coming in either centrally or locally to mark these exams, but that is why, also, in language arts, you are right, I used to disagree with my teacher and said so.

An Honourable Member: Good luck with a provincial exam.

* (1650)

Mr. McCrae: You see, that is why we have to have some kind of a random audit, and 20 percent of the tests that are done are audited, so that neither the student nor the teacher is going to win on that. It is going to be the system, I guess, in that particular case. It is going to come out with some kind of provincial result from

which people can arrive at conclusions and make some kinds of judgment.

But, no, the member is right. Language arts is that kind of—I mean, I am sure the honourable member and I could read a poem and take something different from it. But, on the other hand, that is why you do have the training which is part of it and the random audit system, so that we can have some level of consistency.

But it needs to be stated, as well, Mr. Chairman, that appeals are also allowed, and that can also help. If there is a deviation of as much as 2 to 3 percent, or as little as 2 to 3 percent between markers, it can be marked by a third marker as well. So I think there are some safeguards there. Again, if the honourable member, I know she has some experience in these things, so if she has some advice for us, we are interested in hearing it. That is why I asked a little while ago which system do you like best.

Ms. Mihychuk: Has the department done an assessment or can you provide the statistical variability of central versus local marking?

Mr. McCrae: While I am looking for a response to that, the rotation is kind of like this: Grade 3 mathematics and language arts is something that is for every year; Grade 6 science every year; language arts and math in alternate years; Grade 9 by 2004 social studies every year and every three years mathematics, language arts and science; Senior 4, which is Grade 12, mathematics and language arts every year.

This is the first year for this local marking, and so we have not really developed much of a database yet, but the results of all of this do give us the opportunity to have a look at what is happening with the one system and the other system and to maybe make some judgments about it. I do not think there is really anything wrong with the local marking option. I guess it was brought forward because of concerns that people raised, not unlike the honourable member who raised the concern that the central marking took the teachers out of the classroom for too much. So the department responded by saying, well, okay, we will try to help you out with that problem and make the option of local marking available. So then after that happens, we hear

today that, well, maybe the local marking is not valid, or something like that.

So I am having trouble again reconciling the two positions. But, again, I think it goes back to my very first reaction, are you against testing? I am not trying to put the honourable member on the spot, but really that is the question it raises in my mind. It is never somebody who favours testing and standards; never do we hear those people coming forward and saying, well, yes, but it takes a teacher out of the class and all the different things that get said by those who are opposed to the testing. I saw a sheet, I did not bring it with me, but there are some people who are going to have a test-free day, and they have all these reasons laid out as to why tests are bad, and yet tests have been part of school since—well, for a long time, I know that.

The thing that is bothering me, I guess, is the children. We are trying to teach them to get ready for life, and life is all about being tested. Life is all about being accountable. I am having trouble understanding the arguments being put forward by those who oppose a system of standards and testing against meeting those standards. I am actually not having too much trouble understanding those arguments because I think some of them are based on something that goes beyond the children, and I am here about the kids. I know my predecessor was, too, and I know the honourable member is. If we could focus on the kids and work carefully with our partners, the Teachers' Society and all of the others, work with them but putting the kids' interests ahead of our own at every step—I say that to the stakeholders. Leave your stakes outside the door; come on in and let us talk about the kids.

So I hope that is what the honourable member will do. I know that her colleagues and herself have taken positions. I understand, but it is interesting that the positions often mirror the positions put forward by the Manitoba Teachers' Society regardless of whatever other positions there are out there, and some of them are pretty legitimate, too. The Teachers' Society now says that central marking is a pretty good thing, I understand, but they, as I understand it, lobbied hard to get rid of it in favour of local marking. Now the honourable member comes in and tells

us local marking may be suspect. I know you have not gone that far, but you are getting close to that. I am detecting that that is the next thing. The point is, if we agree on the premise that standards across this province, across western Canada are a good thing, if we agree that we need some way to measure whether we are meeting those standards, all of the rest of it becomes let us get the details as smooth as we can.

I believe that is what it is about. I believe in standards, and, you know, I wish those standards and tests had been in place for when my children were going through the system. I still have one in Grade 11, so we are not totally out of it, but I know from our family's experience that children in my own family would have benefited had the system put in by my honourable predecessors—if that had been in place, my children who are in their 20s now would be having a better time of it.

I am not saying that they are having a terrible time because, as I said before, we have an excellent and have had an excellent education system. My kids are well ahead of their counterparts in many other parts of the world, but I am telling you, not all of my five are exactly the same. They go through a different rate of success and different challenges affect them differently. But I wish New Directions had come sooner than they did, because they are the right thing to do for the children of Manitoba because, goodness sakes, we are not doing them any favours if we teach them from Grade 1 or from kindergarten on that life is a beach. You know, life is partly a beach, but there is a whole lot of other parts of life too that those kids need to be prepared for, and we needed to bring our system up to speed so that they could grasp the opportunities that are going to be there for them and their families.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., I am interrupting the proceedings for House business. Committee rise.

* (1440)

HOUSING

Mr. Chairperson (Ben Sveinson): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please

come to order. When the committee last sat we were considering the Estimates of the Department of Housing. I believe we were on 30.1. Housing Executive (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$391,100. Shall the item pass?

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): I am just looking at the documents that the minister has provided me with based on my request and both that and the folder he gave me in the House. This is quite a bit different from what I have received in the past when I have asked for this information. Maybe the way that Manitoba Housing Authority and the department keep track of vacancies has changed in the way that they set up their database, so I am just going to do some comparison now. In the past there was this format that showed the applications, the waiting lists, the vacancies and the arrears, and sort of what was called turnovers all on one page. This time I have just gotten the vacancies, and it is not clear to me if these are the vacancies for the whole portfolio which you now manage, including the new CMHC ones. It does not seem like it because there are not enough.

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister of Housing): No, they are not. The ones that I just gave her recently were just the direct managed ones.

Ms. Cerilli: In the past I have gotten separate sheets for Winnipeg-sponsored housing, the private nonprofits and co-ops, the direct managed, and I am interested in seeing the same stats for the CMHC portfolio that you have taken over. So that part of it is kind of incomplete.

Mr. Reimer: I am told that the federal government does not do that type of monitoring and tracking. We do it in our department, but I guess we do not have the figures available on the federal side of it.

As I mentioned, or just been told, that the feds have never had that monitoring or tracking system.

Ms. Cerilli: I remember that, when we were in discussion in Estimates before, that was one of the sticking points with the negotiations with the federal government as you were wanting them to fill vacancies and report vacancies and deal with

this whole area prior to the signing of the agreement, so this is kind of a surprise to me. I want you to respond to that if that issue did not get resolved because I thought you were requiring that they would give you some kind of a report on vacancies in the federal portfolio before you signed the agreement.

My other question then is: are you going to start requiring a report from the nonprofits that you have inherited from the federal government on the status of their vacancies in arrears?

Mr. Reimer: In dealing with the federal portfolio, there are various components of arrangements and agreements that the federal government was involved with. Where this government had no cost-sharing arrangements, it was totally managed and controlled by the federal government. As I mentioned earlier, the reporting mechanism was not there for vacancies or vacancy management of sorts.

Where there was also unilateral funding by the federal government, there, again, there was no recordkeeping or stats on vacancies or vacancy management in the federal portfolio. Where there became an analysis on our part as a provincial government in looking at the federal portfolio was where there were projects that were in difficulties. This is where there was an availability of the history of the project, the vacancies, the units that were occupied. Those we had were made available so that we could analyze the difficulties and the costs involved with those, but as I mentioned before, where the federal government had a unilateral arrangement with the private nonprofits or where there was no cost-sharing involved of the provincial government with the federal government, those types of statistics were not available.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the minister really did not address my question which is are you going to start doing this now, considering that you now have management responsibility for all of these units? You must get that information now in their reports to you.

Mr. Reimer: I think that is something that, as was just pointed out, the department is still looking at, the qualities and the quantities of information that could be used and to what

degree. There has not been any directive to be on top totally of monitoring every unit, because if units are managed properly, there are no problems. The vacancy rates in a lot of these private nonprofits are very, very minimal. There is very little turnover. There is a fair amount of consistency in these units. Unless they get into difficulty, that is when there is a need to monitor them. They are reportable naturally with their year-end statements and their accountability and the transparency of funds and how they are managed, and that would be a very strong indicator of the management capabilities where and if there are problems coming up in regard to those units.

So a lot of them are very, very well managed. They are very well subscribed to for residents. The vacancy rates are very, very low. We seem to always deal as a department where the difficult ones are, and that is where there is close monitoring set in, and that is where there is a different type of approach for possibly marketing the units. That is what the department seems to concentrate on. The good ones, they manage themselves. The accountability mechanisms are set in. The reporting mechanisms are set in, and I guess if they do a good job, we work with them.

* (1450)

Ms. Cerilli: My question is in the reporting mechanisms that they have, they have to report their vacancies on an annual basis, month by month, is that correct?

Mr. Reimer: On an annual basis.

Ms. Cerilli: I understand you are not going to be managing how they deal with their vacancies, but do you not think that it is in the interests of your government to know, even if they are nonprofits, what their vacancy rates are?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, I think what it comes down to is the yearly monitoring of the situations at the various locations and the reporting mechanisms and the accountability that they do have to subscribe to. If in the reporting mechanism at that time, there is a problem that is recognized, well, that is when there should be closer scrutiny and possible remedial action set up at that time.

But to do it on a monthly basis for the manpower and the time involved, I think is something that we have not looked at in a serious manner.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Chairperson, I am not suggesting that Manitoba Housing should be getting a report from these nonprofits on a monthly basis. I understand there is a process where they have their budgets approved and they have to report to you at least annually. In that annual report, there would be a monthly indication or a month-by-month indication of their vacancies, and that is not occurring.

Mr. Reimer: No. It has been pointed out that when the report is given to us on that yearly basis, that is when the stats are made available to us at that time. I believe the report does not have a—[interjection] Yes, a snapshot at year-end, but it does not have the month-to-month occupancies.

Ms. Cerilli: The minister had mentioned that there were some properties, though, that were identified as having some difficulties in the portfolio that you got from CMHC. Can you give me some sense of the number of those properties, the number of units involved, where they are, that kind of thing?

Mr. Reimer: I have been advised that it was less than ten projects that were identified in difficulty. We do not have the exact names and locations, but that can be supplied to the member.

Ms. Cerilli: That would include co-ops, I am assuming?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, it would.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to ask questions then again about the other information that you gave me. The repair maintenance expenditures are, I would think, probably just information that is in the Estimates material. This is pretty different from what I received in 1995, and I think I have it from 1997 as well. I can show you. It is The Criteria for Priorizing Capital Expenditures for a three- to five-year period, and then it lists each of the regions and each of the projects, the amount that was going to be spent on both

modernization and improvement. Then there is a similar schedule that was for maintenance and ongoing repairs. Also, with that, I had been given a listing of all the properties in the different communities and regions that were going to be declared surplus and sold. I am wondering if I can have the same kind of information. This is what I wanted to have prior to starting the Estimates process so that we could have a more thorough discussion about what is happening with the management of the stock throughout the province. Hope to get that.

Mr. Reimer: I do not know whether that is the same. I realize that what we have given the member is quite a bit different than that. Maybe what we can do is go back into our file, and then we can try to duplicate it for the member.

Ms. Cerilli: Just to clarify that, that is much more extensive and detailed, and that is the kind of thing that I am looking for that will really make this a much more meaningful discussion.

Mr. Reimer: We can work this into the same type of format, you bet.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, well, we have to wait to deal with all those maintenance and budget issues then until next week. I guess I will go back to some of the issues we were discussing before the lunch break in terms of how the government is dealing with some of the changing demographics and this report that I have been referring to.

I received back a copy you made of the one that CMHC did, but this report, Elderly Persons Housing Vacancy Study, was done by your own department. I was wanting to get some explanation of how far this report was taken in terms of implementing some of the recommendations or following up on some of the analysis. I will get into more specific questions about it in a minute, but just sort of generally, was this a report that was sort of implemented and taken seriously or was it a report that just sort of was done and has not really gone anywhere?

Mr. Reimer: I can assure the member that the report has been utilized in the sense of analysis and direction of some of the ways that the department is moving. I think that it has been pointed out that one of the things that we have

moved along in utilizing that report is moving towards some of our support of housing projects that we have initiated on a trial basis on Arlington Street, 880 Arlington. I have had an opportunity to tour that facility, and the condition and residents there and the people that are involved with that are very, very optimistic and quite enthusiastic about that approach with support of Housing on the way. I believe part of the basis came out of analysis of that report that the member is referring to.

* (1500)

Ms. Cerilli: That is somewhat disappointing, 880 Arlington is only one complex, and this has recommendations that would really to the full extent utilize Manitoba Housing properties that are vacant. So in talking to some people, I am not sure if the vacancy picture has changed that much in the last year or so with your properties. I know just from the material you provided me in the House that I did some quick arithmetic and it looks like the vacancies in total are still over 1,100 units, and there are 331 bachelor units that are vacant, that are still just in the portfolio that is managed by Manitoba Housing.

So how does the department characterize the vacancy picture at this time? Is it still seen as necessary to try to utilize units in another way? This report recommends turning units into long-term care facilities, into hostels, into student housing. There are recommendations here for housing for victims of elder abuse. Are all those things still being considered? Do you see the picture of vacancies in the portfolio to have changed and that this is not warranted anymore?

Mr. Reimer: One of the biggest advantages and one of the deciding factors that came into consideration when the provincial government looked at taking over the management of the federal portfolio was our ability to make decisions on a local basis. The report that the member is referring to has some excellent suggestions and some excellent areas of utilizing Manitoba public housing stock in its various components and various directions, and those are all very, very valid ways to look at the best utilization of Manitoba housing.

One of the things that restricted a lot of those types of new endeavours was the fact that,

because we were in funding arrangements with the federal government and the federal government had to be part of any decision that was made in regard to reconfiguration or redirection or an innovative new program that we felt we wanted to carry out in Manitoba Housing, we had to have the federal government's concurrence. That usually was a very onerous burden to try to get the changes and to try to convince them of changes and to try to still retain the funding for changes that we felt were needed. A lot of the suggestions in that report are excellent suggestions that we still feel that we should be moving towards. We have the ability now, with the signing of the federal government's devolution agreement; as I mentioned, one of the biggest advantages was the fact that local decision making can be made now in regard to what is best for Manitobans.

I think that what has been very exciting for the department is to look at some of these challenges and some of these new directions that they can take Manitoba Housing because it gives us an opportunity to be creative. It gives us an opportunity to look at the best utilization of our stock. It gives us a best way to make different types of arrangements or partnerships with private, nonprofit organizations. It opens up an awful lot of opportunities to look for the best way to utilize Manitoba housing stock.

Another strong point that goes along with the devolution offer is the fact that any savings that are incurred by the provincial government in its undertakings of new directions stay within the province and stay within the department for the redirection into possibly brand-new programs or brand-new subsidies or brand-new arrangements that we can make with organizations or components of housing so that we can turn that money back into a better way of dealing with the housing problems here in Manitoba.

The report is a very, very good blueprint to start looking at how we can manage our vacancies in our portfolio. It has always been a very, very big problem with us, especially with the configuration of some of our buildings that have an awful lot of the bachelor units which pose a big problem in trying to fill those. What we have done in some of our locations, and it is something we look at as possibly a partial

solution to some of the problems is looking at converting some of the bachelor units into one-bedroom units, if it is feasible and possible. Sometimes it is just as easy to put a hole through the wall and join the two units. It is not always possible in some units because of the architectural structure and the configuration of some of the buildings where it looks easy but cannot be done once you get an engineer's report in there. But in some of the locations we can do that. We can eliminate some of our bachelor units that way. It gives the opportunity for people to enjoy a more spacious area, and, in all likelihood, they do get occupied, whereas before where we had two bachelor units sitting vacant maybe for months and months, we now get one unit drawing a resident in there. It gets utilized, and it becomes a home for some person.

Those are some of the things we are looking at on an individual basis. We have approached and we have initiated what we call a marketing strategy also to market some of these units in areas, and what we have assigned as a team of two people to get involved in a marketing strategy in some of these complexes. A good example is the unit on 601 Osborne, where there was a high vacancy rate in there, and the marketing team went into the community. They did community drops; they went around and talked to some seniors groups, telling them about the availability of these units in this project. We had, as I say, some information pamphlets made up. We had some signing put on the building, and I believe right now the vacancy rate in there is down significantly. There is a fair amount of activity in that unit.

We have looked at various ways of trying to accommodate more utilization of these units. As I mentioned earlier, with the ability to make decisions locally now, a lot of new programs can come about, because, as I say, we do not have to be in concurrence all the time with the federal government, who were very reluctant to do any type of change, other than cut back in the funding, which they unilaterally did to the Housing department back in 19—[interjection] Yes, the federal Liberal Party—the federal Liberal government, pardon me—cut back in 1994, I believe it was. Then, in 1995-1996, they capped it. So we have risen to the challenge of still meeting the needs of the Manitoba government,

even at the expense of the federal Liberal government cutting back.

* (1510)

Ms. Cerilli: May I remind the minister about my opening statement in terms of dealing with the specific questions that I ask, because we have been going through this a few years now, hey, Mr. Minister? I have been asking these questions for a few years in terms of your vacancy rates and your plans for your vacancy rates. You have had 11 years to deal with this. Eleven years. One specific question, because every year you have talked about converting bachelor units into one-bedrooms and joining them together. I am wondering how many of them you have converted. In 11 years, how many conversions have taken place of bachelor units into one-bedrooms? Let us start there.

Mr. Reimer: As mentioned, the conversion on a lot of these units, because of the bearing walls and the architectural design and things like that, as much as there are units available, sometimes you have to make sure too that they are right next to each other because of the configuration of the buildings. Here in Winnipeg, and I will just mention the places anyway, in Columbus Courts we converted 12 units; at Oak Lake Manitoba we converted four units; at Rapid City we converted four units; at Plum Coulee we converted four units; and in Flin Flon we converted a whole building actually over to a PCH.

Flin Flon was a conversion of nine units, and two units at Teulon.

Ms. Cerilli: So in 11 years we have converted in Manitoba Housing Authority 35 units, bachelor units into one bedrooms. So I guess you have also done the cost comparison, the cost that it was costing you by having these vacant, the amount of money invested in terms of the renovations and conversion costs. What did you come up with? What is the picture for these 33 units in terms of the bottom line for the department?

Mr. Reimer: Conversion costs are actually not that expensive. In fact, in a lot of the units it can be done for less than \$2,000. I think that some

of them are even around a thousand dollars. In the frame buildings, it is very, very economical to convert them, because I have seen some of them. It is just a matter of literally putting a doorway through a wall and framing it up. It is very, very economical, so the costs are not very high.

They then become rentable and rented out as one-bedroom units. I guess we would have to do a calculation as to the prior when they were vacant and how long they were vacant before we converted and the history from then on. But I would think that it would be on the positive side with the occupancy rate of these now compared to what they were before.

Ms. Cerilli: So it is a good investment; 35 times two, that is \$70,000.

Mr. Reimer: It would be less than that.

Ms. Cerilli: Less than \$70,000. So I am certain you are getting more than that from the rent, right?

Mr. Reimer: Unless we had the figures for it, but I would think that the return is substantial, yes.

Ms. Cerilli: So this would be a good management practice in terms of—

Mr. Reimer: As Martha Stewart would say, it is a good thing.

Ms. Cerilli: Again, the minister and I have been having this discussion for a few years now in terms of your approach to dealing with these vacant units. This is I think the most sort of concrete numbers that I have had in these conversions over the years, but I want to go back to the whole question then of the cost that it is costing the department for having units vacant. And I want to refer to this report that I have been talking about, the Elderly Persons Housing Vacancy Study that was done in 1990. On page 8, under the 4.3, Maintenance and Design Problems, it talks about how given the current market situation and natural turnover rates, officials from the Department of Housing feel a vacancy rate of 5 percent is acceptable. Presently bottom-line budgeting is being

practised with the allowance for a 3 percent vacancy rate. If a project carries a vacancy rate higher than 3 percent, funds available for maintenance and upgrading are sacrificed in order to afford the higher vacancy rates.

Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

That is a pretty strong statement. Then this is the scenario. Coupled with the existing portfolio of housing units approaching 20 years of age continue to contribute to a cycle of increased vacancy rates and sacrificed maintenance. Not good management, not a good story outlined in this department report.

I have heard different figures of what the vacancies are costing Manitoba Housing. Now the staff are also talking about the savings that you make in paying for the conversions and then collecting the rent does not account for the subsidy that you have to pay, but I would think that the calculations have been done in your department. So what I want to know is: what is the bottom line in terms of what the vacancies are right now, and what they are costing the department?

Mr. Reimer: I think one of the things that has to be taken into consideration when we talk about vacancies and we put a number on it, that we will always have a certain percentage of vacancies. One of the reasons why there will always be a certain amount of vacancies is because of turnover. Turnover happens very, very frequently in public housing. What happens with turnover, units have to be usually refurbished or repainted or cleaned up after an occupancy turnover, so that unit then becomes a vacant unit while it is getting ready for some sort of clean-up process or maintenance, or that it has to go into before it can come back for occupancy.

So occupancy, turnover and vacancies are actually three components of a vacancy percentage number. We will never come down to a zero vacancy or 100 percent occupancy because just by the nature of public housing there is a tremendous amount of turnover. With that turnover, it creates usually a vacancy of a couple of months or more, maybe two to three

months by the time the place is recleaned or fixed up and put back into a position where people can see it, visit it, and we can try to rent it out again. That is a constant factor.

* (1520)

I think generally what we talk about is a vacancy rate overall of about 10 percent within all our properties as a general number, but that can fluctuate from various portions of the city from almost right down to zero right up to 15 percent or 20 percent depending on the complex. So vacancy rates we will always have. I guess the biggest challenge on our part is to get those units back into the marketable position so that someone can rent them again as quickly as possible. A lot of times, because of the size of the unit or the location of the unit and the sudden vacancy of the unit, because people just move out on us, the management of the vacancies is a fairly complicated part of our costs. It does cost, as the member says, to have vacancies. We try to minimize it, but the circumstances some-times take a life of their own.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the minister did not answer my question. I am not sure if you are saying that right now you think you have 10 percent vacancy. Can you tell me how many units that is, and what that number is costing you? Maybe that will include some of the units that are just being in that two- or three-month transition or turnover period. But I think what we are talking about is there is a chronic vacancy problem, and 10 percent is higher than what is recommended in your own report here that says 3 to 5 percent is what is allowable, so that you are not having to sacrifice money for maintenance to pick up the costs. Now, is that true, and can you tell us what the costs are?

Mr. Reimer: The overall vacancy right now as of April 30 is 9.3 percent. For elderly housing, it is 7.67 percent. In just doing a rough calculation—staff are just doing a rough calculation—if 3 percent was acceptable, that would mean a cost to our government of about \$383,000 per year based on those figures in the elderly housing component which comprises about 5,500 units here in Winnipeg.

Ms. Cerilli: I just want to clarify this to make sure I am understanding what the minister is

saying then. You are telling me that the elderly persons' housing has a vacancy of 7.6 percent and that the cost for those vacancies is \$383,000.

Mr. Reimer: What I am saying is that if we take the figure of 3 percent as being reasonable, and that is the industry standard, then subtracting that from the 7.6 and prorating it on a cost basis, that would be our total expense, if you want to call it that, to maintain that vacancy rate here for elderly housing in Winnipeg.

Ms. Cerilli: To clarify further then, what you are telling me then is the \$383,000 for the elderly persons' housing vacancies is really only for a vacancy rate of 4.67 percent, because you are subtracting the 3 percent that is kind of a given, and that fits in with what you said earlier, that there is never going to be a zero percent vacancy. So there is this sort of 3 percent cushion.

So we would be able to extrapolate that because you told me that overall the vacancy rate is 9.3 percent as of April 30, '99. So it sounds to me like it is probably—and this is annually, that \$383,000 is an annual cost?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, that would be sort of on an annual basis, taking those figures.

Ms. Cerilli: Is that taking into account the fact that then you are not paying the subsidy on those units?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, the subsidy cost still is there if it is a vacant unit.

Ms. Cerilli: So then that \$383,000 on 4.6 percent is really then the loss of the rent plus paying the subsidy and that is how you are arriving at that figure.

Mr. Reimer: Loss of the rent, yes.

Ms. Cerilli: So you are not counting this as a subsidy at all. That makes sense. Okay. So if we actually looked at this then for the whole portfolio, it would be for sure more than half a million dollars a year.

Mr. Reimer: That is a reasonable estimate, yes.

Ms. Cerilli: I am wondering if the department has a more accurate figure.

Mr. Reimer: What we were trying to do there was just sort of get a bit of a general number as to the approximate cost, as the member is referring to, based on the snapshot that was done on April 30 and taking into account that sometimes the figures can move around. Extrapolating that out, it comes to about, on a province-wide basis, about \$890,000.

* (1530)

Ms. Cerilli: Well, there are a number of questions that flow from this then. If you are losing \$890,000—let me go back up for a minute then. I want to just clarify the question I was asking earlier; it had to do with, generally, is the vacancy rate improving. I have heard that a lot of the apartments are filling up, that this sounds like a bit of an improvement. I remember the total figure used a while back was 1,300 vacancies. I think that was the total from the last time I had one of these update reports, that there were over 1,300 units that were vacant. Do you have that total now, and can you show that there has been an improvement in the vacancy rate this year over, say, a couple of years back?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, the member is right. The vacancy rate is going down. For example, in April of 1998, the vacancy was, as she mentioned, almost 1,400, and now in April of 1999 it is 1,201. So it is going down.

Ms. Cerilli: So if we look then at this report from the department that talked about what ends up happening is that maintenance and upgrades are sacrificed because you are not increasing the budget to deal with the vacancies, what is the accumulated impact on the maintenance budget of having carried over a 10 percent vacancy rate for so many years?

Mr. Reimer: I am going to ask the member to ask that question again, I am sorry.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Chairperson, it is fairly logical. Your report says that if projects carry a vacancy rate higher than 3 percent, the funds available for maintenance and upgrading are sacrificed in order to afford the higher vacancy rates. To me

that means your maintenance budget would have been higher over the years if you had not been carrying a 10 percent or more vacancy rate. So what I am asking is: what has been the impact on the budget totally over the years? I mean, we are talking millions of dollars less that has gone into maintaining the investment of the asset of all this housing because it has had a vacancy rate of more than 10 percent.

Mr. Reimer: I think what should be pointed out is our maintenance is not based upon our revenues; our maintenance is based upon the needs and the requirements for keeping our stock in a manner that is safe for the people and for occupancy. The revenue naturally is important, but that would not dictate our responsibility to keep the stock in a proper manner. So our maintenance budget in fact has increased. It has stayed strong. In fact this year I think we are up to just over \$11 million in our maintenance budget. Last year it was over \$10 million. So that has remained fairly constant, but we do not tie it in with our revenue stream.

Ms. Cerilli: So is what the minister saying then that if you had been getting more from rents over the years because you had maybe 3 percent or 4 percent vacancy, that you would have not then been spending as much from general revenue on your Housing budget line because you would have just traded the money from the revenue for general revenue monies instead of having that revenue from rent. I mean it is logical that if you would have been getting more money from your properties, and that is what this report suggests, there would have been more monies available to be turned around and invested back into those assets.

Mr. Reimer: It has to be pointed out that it is not as if we are the sole funder of the stock of Manitoba Housing. There are the various arrangements with the federal government and in some cases even municipal government in regard to the expenditures and also would apply to the revenue stream, so it is not as if that money is totally coming into the provincial coffers. Because of the arrangements with the various, like I say, the federal government and some municipal governments, there is a sharing of the costs as there is a sharing of the revenues

so we have to look in the picture of the situations of what controls those individual units.

Ms. Cerilli: So what the minister is saying to me is that because of some of the federal responsibilities and cutbacks there, that necessarily would not have meant that there would have been increases in the budget if there had have been more revenue from the increased tenures or less vacancies.

Mr. Reimer: The member is right because, in fact, what the federal government has done is that has literally capped our funding in I believe it was '95-96.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, how do you explain this report that was done in 1990, a couple of years into your government's tenure, that says if a project carries a vacancy rate higher than 3 percent, funds available for maintenance and upgrading are sacrificed in order to afford the higher vacancy rate? How do you explain that?

Mr. Reimer: I do not know how that—whether the explanation is in the interpretation or whether—you know, I think that it is a report that was done—it is an excellent source of report. It is a report that has a lot of good recommendations in it. It is something that can be worked with. It is a document that I think has a lot of merit to still include in a lot of decision making.

* (1540)

Ms. Cerilli: Well, this report is not done by one specific person. It is done by the department, by your Planning branch. I am sure, because it is done up, that it is approved by your department. Actually, I did not notice this before but in the introduction it talks about how the current EPH units in Winnipeg, with close to a vacancy rate of 10 percent, some projects as high as 25 percent, and this level of vacancy translates to an annual loss of approximately \$927,000 in revenue and represents approximately 6 percent of the total possible revenues. Given existing federal-provincial cost-shared arrangements, currency vacancy rates translate to a direct revenue loss to the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation of approximately \$464,000 annually. So this report is very clear in suggesting that the vacancy rates are costing the

department money, and this cost has to be borne somewhere. How has the department dealt with the reduced amounts from rents because of the high vacancy rate?

Mr. Reimer: I think that one of the ways we have tried to manage costs and expenses in regard to the expenses of units is, looking at what we have done, we have looked at the utilities, the hydro, conversions of hydro to gas. We have looked at water conversions. We have looked at energy efficiencies in the upgrades to buildings and things of that nature, insulations and things like that. I think all those things they may seem sometimes very small but in the overall picture they all add up to fairly significant savings that can be realized through just efficiencies of the maintenance dollars that are available. This is done on a very conscientious manner by the department and I think it is something that we look at very seriously to try to cut back on the expenses.

I know the member is referring to the loss of revenue because of vacancies, but as I mentioned earlier, that is something we continually work at and try to bring down. It is an ongoing situation that I do not know whether there is an instant panacea for correction on it because it, to a degree, is just part of public housing that there is going to be a vacancy rate there.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the minister said that they are dealing with the loss of almost \$1 million a year in revenue because of high vacancy rates by doing conversions and efficiencies in gas and water. Would you not do those anyway, even if you were not having a high vacancy problem?

Mr. Reimer: It is an ongoing program naturally. When we are looking at the costs of units, the expenses on units, we look at all ways of trying to bring in some sort of efficiencies into that unit. I know that we have done windows, a lot of replacement of windows in a lot of units. We have a fairly aggressive program this year in a lot of our units in maintenance replacement of windows. I know that we are, I think we are even looking at cladding a couple of buildings that we are replacing. These things, like I say, our maintenance budget alone is over \$11 million this year. Morden Legion is another example, so

these are some areas where we are trying to look very closely at how we can make these buildings efficient.

Where was I at the other day? [interjection] Oh, yes, Portage la Prairie, where we just put in a new water system with the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurischou). We were out there on the weekend and they converted water or gas there, too, did they not? Yes. The people are quite pleased with the operation there. We put some esthetic changes in there, some carpeting, a little bit of furniture and some partitions in there, and it came in way under budget.

I should take time right now to give credit to some of the department heads and the managers, because I was very, very impressed with what they have done in, like I say, Portage la Prairie. The district manager out there was very, very ingenious in looking at ways to try to help the residents in a couple of complexes out there. The place looks very, very good. A lot of it was done, like the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurischou) said, under budget, and esthetically very, very pleasing. It usually is because the department is quite frugal and quite astute in trying to get the best buy for their buck. So I give the department a lot of credit for a lot of the things that they have come up with. It is not just a matter of going out and spending money. They are being very, very prudent in their management of the taxpayers' dollars.

Ms. Cerilli: But the point here, Mr. Chairman, through you to the minister: is it not the case that you would look for these efficiencies, whether they be energy conservation or water conservation or conversions of utilities, even if you were not losing almost a million dollars on your revenue side by having high vacancy rates? Would you not be doing that anyway?

Mr. Reimer: We would do that normally in our normal process. We would do that anyway, yes.

Ms. Cerilli: So the other part of your previous answer, you were saying that there was no sort of solution or panacea, but earlier we had just been talking about your rate of conversions and the fact that for as little as \$2,000 a unit, you were converting units and then they were rented. So why are you not moving more quickly or

aggressively on these kinds of conversions? I will let you answer that first.

Mr. Reimer: One of the things that has to be considered when you look at some of these conversions is working with the group that is either the sponsor or the tenant of that particular building. One of the things that we try to work very, very closely with is the tenants and the tenants association in trying to not be disruptive. For example, we may have a complex that has 20 units in it, and it may have maybe six or eight vacancies in it, but some of those units may not be interconnected. What happens then is that the person does not want to move, even though there is a vacant bachelor unit right next to this person. So we have to be very careful in trying to accommodate the individual's needs. We try to work with them in saying that we would like to convert this and make it into a different unit but it means moving you, and some of the people feel that they do not want to move. So we do not forcefully move them out because we want to interconnect the two rooms, so that is one of the things that we have to be very, very careful of.

The other one is, as I mentioned before, sometimes some of these structures cannot be converted because of the configuration or the architectural design of these buildings. So that eliminates some of these places that have high vacancy rates of bachelor units. So we have to eliminate those, but usually, if there is a willingness and we have a request to look at a unit in a town or in the city here that has a high vacancy rate and there is the possibility of converting it, we will look at it very, very seriously to convert and to try to accommodate that particular request because it is an easy way, like the member mentioned, to rent out a unit. But it is not an automatic, just because there are so many vacancies in a particular building, that they all can be converted, because some of them may be on one floor and some on the next floor and we have not looked at going through the floor yet.

* (1550)

Ms. Cerilli: I am wondering if there has been any kind of report or feasibility study done in your department that would indicate how many

units could be converted in this way, if you have any kind of assessment of which areas would be suitable to convert into more long-term care facilities. This is something that I have not been able to understand. When you have, in some cases when I look at this list, in certain communities, especially out of the city, it seems like there is almost an entire block or certainly a floor in a block that could be converted to some kind of long-term care facility, and we know that in rural areas that is what is needed. We need to have more personal care homes or supportive housing or certainly not just the bachelor unit without any supports there. So that is one question, how have you dealt with this in doing an assessment in your department to look at the number of units that could possibly be converted or the number of buildings or floors. I look at 185 Smith or some of the other blocks that have had high vacancy rates and their location is good for having more supported housing or long-term care facilities. So how are you dealing with that?

The other thing, just before you answer, you were mentioning the fact that you do not want to disrupt people. So I am wondering how many, really, have you approached and they have said no. I mean when you have only done 35 units, I am not sure how many people that you have approached have said no. I mean when you have vacancies in elderly persons housing as high as there are.

Mr. Reimer: One of the things that is happening is we have established a dialogue with the Winnipeg Long Term Care society, committee, pardon me, committee on long term care with Marion Suski, I believe and her group. This was an initiative that we felt we wanted to be on top of because, as the member mentioned, there is an awful lot of public housing out there that possibly can be utilized in some way, either with a floor or two floors of PCH, personal care home, or assisted living. So we initiated a dialogue with them shortly after we took over control of the total portfolio, because we now had the opportunity to enter into discussions of this nature that we can make some decisions on a local basis. I believe what we have done is we are actually doing an assessment of some of our locations to look at them in a way that they possibly could be utilized and upgraded or

converted to some sort of long-term care or assisted living or something like that.

One of the things that was pointed out right off the top was the fact that we are dealing with an older stock of buildings, as I mentioned previously, that were built in the '60s, '70s and '80s and under codes that were applicable at that particular time for a particular segment of the market and the requirements at that time. When you try to look at the requirements for, whether it is PCHs or assisted living or any type of programming that is expected now under the building codes and the fire codes and the various regulations in regard to the care and concern with people, some of these buildings, unfortunately, the upgrades cannot be done, because it is just way too costly and the structures and the design just will not make it available. But that does not mean that we may not have some buildings that can be utilized this way. So it is a matter of doing the assessment.

I know that there is a fair amount of meetings with the Long Term Care committee. In fact, if I am not mistaken, the meetings are fairly regular in trying to assess our stock and how it can best be utilized. I am optimistic that there is possibly some complexes or some units that can be utilized that way or portions of them or maybe a renovation of sorts that can be utilized, but here again, what we are doing is looking at trying to utilize some of the Health budget into the Housing budget and the co-ordination between the two in trying to get the best utilization of the dollars. That was one of the things that we did with 880 Arlington. We expect, and we would hope that we can do that in other areas too.

The one building that the member mentioned, 185 Smith Street; 185 Smith Street is in an excellent location, but it has been pointed out to me that the architectural design on that building and the bearing walls and the configuration within that building make it very, very hard even to convert two units into one. I know we have had engineers in there, in fact, because that was one of my first queries. I said: why do we not just utilize that building there? The engineering report says that I think it is only about the top two floors, top four floors that could be possibly utilized that way. After that, it

becomes a problem of structure and the design of the building. So we have a building there that is in a good location but because of the engineering design on it, it does not fit into anything that we feel—pardon me, not necessarily that we feel, but what the codes will not let us do. So we have to live with that building the way it is.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to see if I am understanding what the minister is saying here. Is he saying that because of the codes for long-term care facilities being what they are, that the existing older stock could not be, as easily as we might think, transferred to becoming a long-term care facility? So it is the codes that apply to the requirements for long-term care facilities. I see the minister is nodding yes.

* (1600)

Mr. Reimer: Yes.

Ms. Cerilli: Just then to finish off on this, can the minister tell me when this assessment and report are going to be completed by this committee?

Mr. Reimer: I have some good news for the member. I have to tell her that. 185 Smith, the one that we have been talking about a lot, I have just been informed that we only have three vacant units in there—[interjection] Five. I thought it was three. Five vacant units, so that is a tremendous improvement from what it was before.

In regard to the assessment, it has been pointed out that Health identifies certain areas and certain needs, and this is where the assessment is going on. It is not as if it can be done on a total basis, in a sense, because their budget restrictions can only allow them to spend so much, I guess. So it is looked at on an individual basis. It is looked at on an individual location basis as to where there possibly are needs, and those are the types of analyses that are undertaken right now with Manitoba Health, or Long Term Care, I should say.

Ms. Cerilli: So is what the minister saying is that Health is the one that is actually doing the assessing of the Manitoba Housing units and that

they are only looking at it as sort of depending on where they need more long-term care facilities? I am not clear on this. I mean, you have the existing Manitoba Housing properties, you have identified where the high vacancy areas are, or the ones that have a number of elderly bachelor unit suites. To me it should be fairly straightforward in having someone, an engineer or others, go in there and assess which ones could be converted and in what kind of way. Maybe they should not all be converted to some kind of formal long-term care like a personal care home facility, but is there not a way of converting them. It may or may not be so much structural, but what we were talking about earlier today is just providing the necessary staff or resource support so that seniors or others who have those kinds of long-term health requirements would be accommodated, and we would get people out of hallways and get people out of hospital beds that could then be freed up for other folks.

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, it is not just a one-sided analysis. Health and Housing work very closely in looking at the needs. I guess it is like putting an overlay over not only on existing stock but looking at where there is the availability of buildings that would possibly fit in certain types of reconfigurations. It is the locations that Health would identify where they feel that they would like to be located ideally and then working back from there and looking at where our particular buildings are to see whether they configure to what they are looking for. There are a fair amount of parameters that come into place. Like I mentioned, it is working with Health in a way of looking at where there is the best utilization of our housing stock and whether it can be utilized. The analysis goes on, you know, it is one that long-term care and Housing work closely with.

Ms. Cerilli: Let me try another approach with this. I am looking at this vacancy list you provided me with. I look at the one for the Parklands where I can see that Ethelbert has a 20-unit project that has 11 vacancies. Have you checked out Ethelbert? Do we know if that one is feasible for converting it into some kind of personal care home, long-term care, assisted-living kind of facility for the good folks of Ethelbert?

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that in Ethelbert there have been overtures made to the town in regard to whether they would be interested in this type of conversion to some sort of long-term care facility or conversion to a better utilization. Not only that, I guess it is working with the local RHA, the regional health authority, in trying to also identify that they would have to be part of the decision making. I have been informed that there has not been that kind of overture by the town of Ethelbert to pursue that. So they would have to be part of the decision making.

Ms. Cerilli: Getting back to sort of—you are looking at where your vacancies are highest. I remember from last year when we were dealing with the same issue, you were explaining that a lot of these rural portfolios are being offered to municipalities. So then it is up to the municipality to follow up and do the legwork with the RHA or the Long Term Care Authority.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, they would have to be on side; they would have to be part of the decision making and working with the RHA to come to us and say, yes, we feel that we can utilize this or that unit, and we would try to work with them and try to accommodate them.

Ms. Cerilli: I do not understand why Housing would not play more of a leadership role. It is in your interest as well; it is in the interests of the community, the whole province. Are committees struck in this case in Ethelbert? I was looking at the list, Bowsman, for example, a small community, has a project that has nine units, and five of them are vacant. Are there committees being struck to try and get this moving, or is the offer made and it has sort of not gone anywhere?

* (1610)

Mr. Reimer: We try to work very closely with the local authorities and the local municipalities or towns in trying to encourage, you know, the occupancy and the residency for the unit, for the residents in any particular town or municipality and the RHAs in the area. We can provide the physical structure, but the maintenance, the ongoing care, the ongoing commitment to the residents in there have to be taken up by the

local authorities for it to maintain itself. So we have no problem in going to the local authorities and making these overtures, and then it becomes a decision by those officials or those elected officials in that particular town or area or RHA to then say yes or no. We just cannot drop it on them and say it is now going to be yours. But we will make those types of overtures to the local, like I say, authorities and the decision makers in those particular areas. It is up to them to yea or nay it.

Ms. Cerilli: Going back then to some of the questions I had been asking about vacancies as it relates to the federal portfolio. One of the things that has come to my attention from calls from some of the managers of this portfolio is there is going to be a change in policy in how money is given to these projects to deal with vacancies. Is it the understanding of the minister and his department that in the past under CMHC, if there were vacancies in these nonprofit corporations, CMHC would then have some kind of a supplement for them to cover their vacancy costs?

Mr. Reimer: One of the things that is very prevalent and very evident in dealing with Housing, whether it is the federal portfolio or the provincial portfolio, is there is a myriad of arrangements regarding the funding of the housing complexes and with the private nonprofits and the PCHs and a lot of those other ones. It would be interesting to know what the numbers are, because I would think that there are dozens. Yes, there are a dozen or more anyway. Each one of them brings with it its own baggage and its own arrangement of funding and formulas. So it is hard to say in a blanket statement whether the subsidies are interrupted or changed because of the taking of the federal portfolio. What was the question?

Ms. Cerilli: I will clarify my question for the minister. Can you confirm then that there are some housing complexes under a given program with CMHC where the vacancies were covered in terms of costs that would come from CMHC to the not-for-profit corporation? Is that true? Is that the case for a program?

Mr. Reimer: We are not aware of that type of arrangement.

Ms. Cerilli: I think it is best in this case that what I would do then is get more detailed information about the program and the specifics for the case that was brought forward to me. I thought I had that here but I do not, so I will come back to that issue another time.

The other thing though before we leave this whole issue in terms of the conversions and vacancies and all that is to deal with 880 Arlington. I know that this is one of the Manitoba Housing properties that has been transferred over in co-operation with the Long Term Care Authority into supportive housing, and I have a number of questions about that. First of all, how long did that process take, and how many units are involved there?

Mr. Reimer: The negotiations and conversions took approximately a year. What we have there is we have 22 units, 11 units of supportive housing and 11 units of assisted-living housing.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, my next question then has to do with the kinds of supports that are in place for that situation, both for supportive housing and assisted living, the kind of agreement you have with Manitoba Health for the services that they are providing and the cost for Manitoba Health that has been associated with that. I know that under that whole program in Manitoba Health it was \$2.1 million, but I am not sure how much of that is going into 880 Arlington.

Mr. Reimer: I should point out that 880 Arlington is a 10-floor building. There are 121 units in it. Two floors have been designated as what we were talking about. The manager of that complex is Bethania. They manage not only the other units in the other eight floors, but they also have a contract with Manitoba Health in regards to the supportive housing units that are under their purview.

Ms. Cerilli: A point of clarification, then. Is 880 Arlington then a not-for-profit?

Mr. Reimer: No, we own it. They manage it, yes. The dollars, I do not know whether we have access to the dollars that flow through there, from Manitoba Health to Bethania, but they are the ones that, like I say, not only manage the whole complex for us but they also

do the management for the supportive housing and assisted living housing too.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I would be interested in knowing how much money is being spent on health under this contract. This must be a formal contract agreement then, and Housing is still involved even if it is supportive housing, and you do own that property and they manage it. It seems though that that is a fairly reasonable amount of time to set something like this up, one year. So I am just comparing that to the fact that in 11 years, you have only done 35 conversions on your own of the bachelor units into the single bedrooms. I am just wanting to then wrap this up with maybe a clarification of any other long-term care conversions or assisted living conversions that have taken place.

Mr. Reimer: I think, as I mentioned previously to the member, we have converted Flin Flon, and then we are in the process of doing some conversion at the deaf centre on Pembina Highway.

* (1620)

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Chairman, a little earlier this afternoon the minister made comments pertaining to facilities in Portage la Prairie. I just want to add for the record that the minister came to Portage la Prairie last Friday, May 14, to help me or I assist him in a rededication of two Manitoba Housing Authority facilities, Oak Tree Towers and the Stephen's Apartments. The minister mentioned that the Manitoba Housing Authority personnel, and specifically Donna Whyte and Marion Sutherland, how engineering and ingenious and persevering they were in facilitating the esthetics and mechanical improvements to those facilities. In fact, they were able to accomplish the changes significantly below budget.

I might just give the example that they, once hearing of the closure of the Brandon Mental Health institution, attended and secured more than a trailerload of furniture from that facility, brought it to Portage la Prairie for renovation through ARC industries, and then coupled then with a local upholstering firm, were able to put virtually new furniture in both those facilities of which the residents are very, very appreciative. I

might say that their appreciation was shown just hours prior to the minister's arrival. There were more than 30 people out on the grounds attending to any litter or any flowerbeds that were on the premise, and I must say that both facilities were looking extremely appealing when the minister arrived last Friday.

So with those few remarks, Mr. Chairman, I really appreciate the minister taking the time from his busy schedule to come to Portage la Prairie and recognize the residents and certainly his staff within Manitoba Housing, their dedication and commitment to making the housing facilities a very pleasant place in which to live. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Chairperson, I did have a few questions in a couple of different areas that I was wanting to explore with the minister. The first one is the government in the past has entered into private, public contracts in terms of the development of land. The two larger ones over the last decade have been the Ladco, MHRC, and then there was Qualico and MHRC in opposite ends of the city, Qualico being in the north end. Virtually all of the area is inside the area which I represent with respect to the Qualico, so I guess I will start there.

There was quite a bit of expectation that was built up a number of years ago when the government signed the agreement. Individuals felt fairly confident that we were going to see other things starting to develop in that northwest corner of the city. I am wondering if the minister can give some sort of indication to us today in terms of what the current status is with Qualico and that plot of land just north of Old Commonwealth saddling Keewatin Street.

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, the member is right. It is an agreement between MHRC and Qualico. It was entered into in July of 1993, and there are approximately 750 residential building lots. It is just almost 163 acres of land. The portion contributed by MHRC was around 124 acres, the remainder by Qualico. It was a 15-year agreement. The agreement expires in July of 2008 or until such time as all the building lots and other properties have been developed and sold, whichever occurs earlier.

From what I have been told, there have been no overtures by Qualico to start development on it. We are still of the opinion that we are willing to participate in the joint venture and that the sharing of the revenues is by agreement between ourselves and Qualico, but to date there have been no overtures by Qualico to start to develop that property. The contract is current, the intent is still there but until Qualico decides to move on it, it is still vacant.

Mr. Lamoureux: Every year there would be annual servicing costs just for having that lot there. Who would be picking up the cost for that?

Mr. Reimer: The only costs that are associated with it would be our costs for weed control. We do not pay tax on vacant land, no property tax, so our cost would be in doing weed control on that.

Mr. Lamoureux: Is there anywhere in the contract that would stipulate that they have to take action by such—you know, we will go into some discussion on the deal in the south end. My understanding of that one, because I did actually get a copy of the deal but that was a number of years ago, back I think it was in '89. It gave a detailed plan as to what expectations, how many houses need to be met by X year. Was there anything of that nature in this particular agreement?

Mr. Reimer: It has been pointed out that there is no commitment to a certain amount of homes by a certain amount of time. It is a land development agreement for the development of the land with the principal player being the developer himself, which is Qualico. But there is no time frame saying that there has to be a certain amount of development or lots are sold or completions within a certain time frame other than the agreement itself which expires, like I mentioned before, in July of 2008.

Mr. Lamoureux: So there would be no penalty at all for Qualico if it decides that it is not going to build anything on the property?

Mr. Reimer: That is true.

Mr. Lamoureux: Is the government then honoured to keep up the contract with Qualico

for the full duration of the 15 years, or can it opt out if it wanted to go with someone else that might want to come forward with an idea, because I understood that it was actually tendered, and if it was tendered one would think that there might have been others that put in to develop the area? So, because we have one developer who enters into a contract and there is nothing obligating him to develop the land, it seems that the people, in particular in Meadows West and other areas because it has such a dramatic impact on the overall development whether it is in The Maples or Tyndall Park, that if Qualico is not obligated to build anything, does the government have the ability to get out with no penalty?

* (1630)

Mr. Reimer: I do not know whether that has been looked at as an option. We would have to look at it and see whether there was a way of doing it if it was warranted, but I should point out that the land that is owned by Qualico itself also has not been developed, so the whole parcel is sitting vacant. I guess it is a matter of which areas of the city are developing and where the demand is. I guess it is like anything, the market will dictate where people want to move or live or develop, and I guess this piece of property, at this particular time, does not have the demand that maybe other areas have.

Mr. Lamoureux: I think that we have to at least acknowledge or note that we have a bit of a situation in the northwest end of the city if you are going to expand. You really cannot go further west because of the airport. You do not want to go building under the runway type thing, or under the flight path, so that means further construction. There are many people who would like to move into that area just north of Inkster Boulevard or see that expansion occur in Meadows West. Because I think that it is worthy of the government at the very least sitting down with Qualico, and I will come up with some other suggestions right away, but I would think that there is benefit in terms of sitting down with Qualico.

Well, first, before even sitting down with Qualico, finding out whether or not there were, because I thought that there were others that put

in for that particular tender. I could be wrong on that, but I think it is worthwhile finding that out. If not, I still believe that there might be just cause to look at reopening that whole process, and it is because of limitations of individuals that want to remain or build in that community that are being restricted. If Qualico, for example, has a number of sites throughout the city and you cannot build in that area because there is no land available, Qualico is the only one who has the land but they choose not to develop that, well, it does have an impact on the market because we have allowed that to take place. So I think that there is a need for the government to look at that contract and possibly sit down with Qualico because it has been somewhat stagnant over the last number of years. I would look for just the minister's observations on the comments.

Mr. Reimer: The member brings up some interesting points. You know, it is a fairly big piece of property up there in northwest Winnipeg. It has been pointed out to me that there has been development, I believe, north of this property, northeast of this property, and it is sitting there. It would be interesting to know, and I guess I would ask the department to look into whether we have had any other types of overtures in this particular area and look at what our options are as to the agreements, pardon me, the agreement with Qualico, and get a further update on it and the situations around the development of this piece of property. But, again, I guess, as I mentioned before, even with the acreage that is indicated, Qualico has not even moved on their own piece of property.

Mr. Lamoureux: I guess that in itself is somewhat discouraging because on the onset one might speculate that they do not have any intentions of developing that property, at least in the short term, but they have already had rights to develop that entire area for the past six years. What I would be interested in seeing happen, as I say, is that we look into the contract. If it is possible to be given a copy of the contract in confidence, I would honour any requests from the minister in keeping the confidentiality aspect of it in confidence. But I would very much like to be able to see some sort of movement in that area because it is a concern, I say not only for

the people that I currently represent in Meadows West but also in The Maples.

I am wondering how receptive the minister might be if I were to attempt to arrange some form of a public meeting and invite Qualico and someone from the department to come just to listen to the concerns of the residents in terms of the development or potential development of that quadrant of the city. It is something that I know would likely mean a lot to a lot of the residents in the area. I think that MHRC and Qualico would both benefit by an event of this nature. I would be more than happy to provide and ensure that the facilities and the local residents are, on both sides, on The Maples side and the Inkster side, made aware of it, at least those homes that are right adjacent to the property. Would he be open to that?

Mr. Reimer: I certainly cannot discourage the member for trying to represent his constituency in the best manner that he feels proper and in looking at the best utilization of properties in that area and the responsibilities for development of that particular area. I cannot really say yes or no whether there should be a meeting. If the member is of the opinion that is something he was wanting to pursue with the residents in that area, I could not say do not do it or do it. I think any type of information meeting that the public wants to have in regard to any type of aspect of their community, we as elected officials have an obligation to try to hear the sides of all concerned citizens. I can only say that if the member feels there is a concern shown by some of his constituents, and he feels that this is one of the ways to try to get some sort of resolve to the problem or direction on the problem, that is a decision that, as a member and a representative of that constituency, that he feels that he should do, well, then I cannot give him that type of direction.

As the landlord of that particular piece of property, in co-operation with Qualico, I imagine that if there was a meeting to discuss this particular piece of property, naturally, we would have a representative from Manitoba Housing there as an observer or someone to listen to the concerns of the citizens. But as to giving direction, we would not be in a position

to give any type of direction as to what should or should not transpire there.

I think, if anything, it would be viewed as a public meeting to address a concern, so we would be there as an observer, because it would pertain to us, as a landowner, I should say, in that particular area.

* (1640)

Mr. Lamoureux: I think that the request is more so trying to provide the joint partners with what the general feelings are of the area, the type of development, for example, that they would like to see. I think it just assists in the invitation of the MHRC and Qualico, if in fact the minister sees no problem in terms of accommodating an informational type of meeting at which both MHRC, Manitoba Housing, the local residents, can just give some feedback.

I can recall when it was first announced, for example, I extended an invitation and Qualico did show up, and they talked about the plan. It was a fairly impressive plan. Well, obviously that has likely changed, or maybe it has not. I do not know. Just to at least give the minister and his staff notice that this is a meeting that will likely occur, we will be appealing to MHRC to send a representative along with Qualico so that the residents can be better informed as to what the future is. In the interim, as I indicated, if it is possible to get an actual copy of the contract, I would be interested in that, as local representative, and I would ask the minister to look into the original tendering process. Were there others that had made application? Because if Qualico and MHRC jointly feel that they do not want to proceed, maybe there is someone else or another organization or another private company that is prepared to move ahead, especially if you have the local residents wanting to see the development.

Unfortunately, I do not have a map with me, but if the minister saw the map, he will see how critical of a link this particular piece is to The Maples, Meadows West and Tyndall Park. It is in essence the hook-up. The traffic patterns would change tremendously by an extension of Keewatin, for example, Keewatin Street to Adsum.

So there are all sorts of things that could result in some positive, maybe a little bit of negative also, but generally speaking I think there could be a lot of good things, good ideas that could be discussed at this particular meeting.

So the minister can give a comment on that if he so chooses, or I am going to move on to the next area.

Mr. Reimer: Just a short comment. Like I mentioned, if there is going to be a meeting called, we certainly would want to be invited as part land owner in that particular area. We would have someone from our department be there.

Mr. Lamoureux: I thank the minister. Moving on to the Ladco, MHRC deal. I think that one was a little bit better defined. I know I do have the contract for it. I am just trying to get a bit of an update from the minister in terms of I understood that—and again, I am going by memory, and this is a decade ago—I thought it was close to a 10-year agreement in which there were some time frames where they expected development to occur. If the minister can just give an update on that.

Mr. Reimer: It was a 15-year agreement that began in 1989. It was for a joint venture to develop 1,900 lots on approximately 476 acres, which was 180 acres with MHRC and 296 with Ladco. The current status as of February 28, 1999, is there are 305 lots being developed in phases one, two and three, 241 lots are sold, 64 are remaining in inventory. The cost of servicing the sites and selling of the lots was just over \$7 million. The total value of the sales was just over \$10 million. Our share of the profits was almost a million dollars on that.

Mr. Lamoureux: Does the minister anticipate that they will continue to receive more money or more profit? I was under the impression, and I would have to go back to the original press release, that it was closer to somewhere around \$10 million that they were anticipating. Was that just an overly optimistic price back then. I realize the current minister was not even around at the time, I believe, when that actually was signed, so obviously he is not responsible for it,

but I believe it was an original \$10-million profit that they were hoping to achieve.

Mr. Reimer: I think the number was based on the selling of the original 1,900 lots. I guess you have to do some arithmetic. When you look at, if there has been 305 lots developed with MHRC's share of almost a million dollars, I guess you have to—[interjection] Yes. If it was totally developed, maybe that is where the \$10 million would come in, you know, totally. But it is being developed as one of the areas of growth in the city.

Mr. Lamoureux: So at this point, the government is optimistic that that particular area will in fact be fully developed over the next five years.

Mr. Reimer: Well, that is a good area of town, you know. That is represented by a good MLA too. I guess it all depends on market demand and the growth area. I know there is still a fair amount of growth in southeast Winnipeg. There seems to be a fair amount of homes still going up. As to whether it will develop the full 1,900 building lots, the development seems to be still moving in that particular area and I guess you always live with the optimism, if they continue to grow it may possibly fully develop. I do not know whether that will be in the next few years or when it will happen but with 305 lots developed already since 1989, I guess that is 10 years, and you never know how the market is going to move.

Mr. Lamoureux: Actually when the minister talked about that side of the town type thing, one of the things I should mention, today I posed a question about property tax, and that side of the town even a house of the same value does not pay as much property tax because on the north side of town we happen to be in Winnipeg School Division No. 1 which is the heaviest taxed property-wise in the whole province, so it is a little bit tougher to sell in terms of the amount of property tax, but the quality of life is by far worth the venture to moving into the north end of Winnipeg. I can assure the minister of that, and that is part of the reason why I am suggesting we need to look at reopening or having more dialogue with Qualico because I believe that there is a demand for it.

An Honourable Member: Nothing to do with the MLA, then.

* (1650)

Mr. Lamoureux: With all modesty, I do not think it has too much to do with me, even though my ego might like to think so at times. Anyway, I wanted to move on to another area.

It is an area which I respect the minister is doing a considerable amount of effort in terms of making it happen and that is the whole area of tenant management. We have had a great deal of discussion in the past in regard to it. I really believe that the future is fairly bright with respect to tenant management. The biggest concern I have is more of consistency than anything else, and education. The minister and I are quite familiar with the Gilbert Park tenants' group and association, both their good times and their little bit rough times at times, but I think that the general feeling is that tenant management is a very positive thing. I guess I would look first for just some insight from the minister on how he sees tenant management proceeding in the future.

As I have indicated, an important component to tenant management has got to be education. It is an area in which the department—and I know Ron has been wonderful in terms of trying to make tenant management work. Even though Ron cannot speak at the table, I think it should be noted that it is very much appreciated the efforts that the department puts in, in terms of trying to enable, empower individuals to take a little bit more pride in the areas in which they live and a little bit more pride than you would normally see, let us say, in someone that owns a home or in a housing co-op. It is not an easy task. It would be very easy just to let things dwindle down on a vine. I think there is a responsibility for the Department of Housing to be aggressive at promoting and educating. The reason for that is that I do not think that in many areas that you can just sit back and believe that it is going to happen, and if you have a more proactive approach at facilitating in some areas, initiating, that the long-term benefits are just overwhelming.

I know the minister has seen that first-hand. I have seen that first-hand. As I indicated, there

have been some bumps up and down here and there, but, all in all, I think that, at least in my experience with respect to Gilbert Park, it has been relatively smooth as we see people move ahead, as we see programs that have been initiated that might not have been initiated had the local tenants not had the interest level that they did have. It is not to say that there have not been some mistakes. There have been, and there will likely be mistakes in the future, but I think that what is important is that we do not lose focus on the need to develop.

The more specific question that I would have for the minister on this particular point is that of education. I have often talked to members of the Gilbert Park Tenants Association of things such as having a video, that when you are a new resident, you are provided a video in which the video, in essence, talks about the tenants association, the benefits of a management-tenant. Just to make people more aware, there was the trip that was made to Washington, and I understand that there is a chance that the lady who was in charge out there might even be coming up to Manitoba sometime during the summer. I think it is just inspiring, the video that I had seen in regard to how people have really made a difference. I would like to believe that if we provide the educational tools and are supportive, we can, in fact, make a difference. It is not trying to run the lives of individuals. That is not what we are trying to do. What we are trying to do is enable and empower people who would under normal circumstances not have that sense of pride that is only given through a tenant-management.

I could talk about when I was first elected, and there were many more sad faces in Gilbert Park back in '88 when I was elected. I can recall having a press conference where there was broken glass all over the place; there was no infrastructure or anything of that nature. You know, one would think that the Tories might be kind of cruel in the area of public housing, and I think that if you ever require an example where you have demonstrated good will in terms of social development at the housing level, that Gilbert Park can be an excellent example of that. I would challenge anyone to say otherwise because of what I have seen first-hand occur.

My concern is that that sense of commitment needs to continue and to expand. I have seen it. I believe the minister and the Minister of Housing prior had seen that. So I am just interested in his comments on it.

Mr. Reimer: I think that the member's point hit at some very, very excellent points regarding tenant- managed association projects because we have both recognized some significant changes not only in the area that he represents, but I work very closely with the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) and the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) in trying to turn around some of the housing projects in their areas, and I think that we have seen some fairly pleasant surprises in the way that things can change.

It is usually just by the manner of delegating the authority and giving the ability to the people on-site to make decisions and to make changes and to be part of the decision making and taking sense of community and some pride in their complexes. It is a very satisfying endeavour to see these types of changes and the enthusiasm that these people bring forth because they definitely do make a difference, tenants associations.

My commitment is 100 percent and 110 percent to tenants associations. I think they are excellent, and I encourage them wholeheartedly in any complex, not only in the ones that we have talked about but in all areas, and if they want to form a tenants association, they can.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. As previously agreed, the hour being five o'clock, committee rise.

* (1500)

HEALTH

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Would the committee come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Health. We invite the minister's staff to enter the Chamber at this time.

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Mr. Chairperson, as I indicated, my colleague the

member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford), the future member for Lord Roberts, has several questions she wanted to inquire of the minister. But I wanted to ask the minister one or two questions just before we commence.

This afternoon in Question Period, I asked the minister about the situation at St. Boniface which the minister did not answer, effectively said that there is a press conference going on at St. Boniface, and that is that. So I went down to St. Boniface to attend the press conference to find out what was going on, and I am a bit distressed as to questions of that nature, the rationale and the reasoning behind the government not informing the House as to what was going on.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Well, Mr. Chairman, I am a little surprised by that question because this issue was obviously brought to our attention, there is no doubt about that, and I was made aware that St. Boniface Hospital was going to be dealing with it today. They are putting the process in place in terms of how to deal with it publicly, how to deal with their patients, their internal process, the internal decisions they are making and so on.

Our role is going to be to continue to be sure that this issue—we will be working with them to be sure all appropriate steps are taken, all appropriate steps in terms of dealing with patients and so on. But, again, they were the ones who were going to be communicating this issue. It is an issue internal to St. Boniface Hospital, an operational issue internally that has impact on citizens and on patients. It is certainly not appropriate, I do not think, even though I have some initial knowledge of some aspects of it, for me to be the first one out there talking about an issue which has various sensitivities. I did answer the question as best I felt I could when the member asked it, until the hospital and the people in charge of the facility and the people dealing with this issue have the opportunity to communicate it publicly and to start the process of communicating to the patients.

So I am concerned with the nature and tone of that question, because I answered as best I could, knowing that I am aware of this entire

issue but not about to start putting out any speculation or any information in advance of the individuals who have the responsibility and the knowledge to be dealing with this issue in a very appropriate manner.

If the member did go over there, then he can appreciate the sensitivity of the issue, and we talked earlier today about nonpartisanship and so on in terms of health care issues, Mr. Chairman. This will certainly test that because, again, of what I know of the issue, it is internal. It is an operational error. It is being dealt with by St. Boniface Hospital. It is a very serious issue to be dealt with and not one that I should be making any preliminary remarks about before it is dealt with in an appropriate and comprehensive way.

So I answered the question in Question Period as best I could. I remained in Question Period for obvious reasons, that I have a responsibility to be here to answer questions on behalf of Health and as Deputy Premier in the absence of the Premier (Mr. Filmon). I apologize for being a few minutes late for Estimates because of having to deal with some issues subsequent to Question Period. We are back here now to discuss this issue as much as we can at this particular stage.

Mr. Chomiak: I guess, Mr. Chairperson, my concern is that if the minister would have indicated during the course—the minister had a whole series of questions in a whole bunch of areas to answer on a whole bunch of issues. But I would presume that when an issue of this seriousness and this nature does come up and when it is asked, it just seems to me that perhaps the minister should inform the House of the nature and of the sensitivities and the like, rather than presuming that there is not enough maturity or understanding in this House to deal with an issue of this kind in a responsible manner.

Mr. Stefanson: It is certainly not a reflection on the maturity of members in this House to deal with this issue in a responsible manner. It is really two things. First of all, the lesser, I think this was the second supplement of a question from the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak). I think we led with some questions from his Leader, and then I think the member for

Kildonan was next. He asked me two entirely different questions, and the third question was this one, a very general question about St. Bonifacé, and I indicated to him that St. Boniface Hospital, I understood, would be dealing with the matter this afternoon and providing comprehensive details.

That is the root of the issue in terms of the maturity of this House to deal with the issue. For this issue to come into this House, I think it is incumbent on all of us to bring it forward on a comprehensive basis in terms of the details behind it, what actions are being taken and so on. I am not a believer in any way of taking any action that could unnecessarily cause alarm or concern or fear to people out there.

All kinds of health issues have that potential. We know that very well. In fact, sometimes we see politicians try to fuel just that, try to do just that, to almost scare people relative to a health issue or something else. I do not believe in that for a minute, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, as the Minister of Health, that would be absolutely unacceptable and irresponsible. So if I am going to start talking about this particular issue, I am going to do it from the basis of complete knowledge of the issue itself, what action is being taken, what is the implication to the patients from that facility, and all of those issues.

Even as we stand here today, I am prepared to have this discussion. I still only have a portion of that information, because even though the hospital informed us of this, has given us certainly some information relative to it, Mr. Chairman, we are still waiting for even more information on the entire issue before we as politicians or as a government start talking about it. Obviously, we are going to be working in close contact with them. Our Department of Health will be in very close contact with them to be sure the issue is dealt with in the most appropriate fashion.

As I say, I am prepared to discuss it in a general sense here, but before I am going to start, if the member is suggesting at 1:30 or whatever time it was to try to respond to a question in two minutes on an issue of this nature, knowing what I knew about the issue, I just think that would be irresponsible.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, I will accept the minister's explanation. I mean, that is a fair point, but I still suggest that it would have been useful to advise members of the House in general terms as to the nature in order to inform us, because that is, in fact, our job. I mean, we play as much a role in terms of dealing with issues as do members of the media in terms of education. I just think that matters of this kind when asked are asked in all seriousness. I think it should have been dealt with in that respect. In that regard, I as a result of the press conference have several specific questions in this area.

Now, I am not intending to ask them in the Estimates, but I do want direction from the minister.

An Honourable Member: It is a phone call, Dave.

Mr. Chomiak: Not now, chief. I do want to know to where I should and how I should direct those very serious questions relating to the press conference today. In fact, I do have several questions that I think are going to arise and are going to be asked about. So I am wondering if the minister could give advice as to where those questions should be directed so we can get some specific responses to those concerns.

*(1510)

Mr. Stefanson: I think we have a couple of options there. First of all, some of our main connections to this issue have been with our Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Public Health branch, obviously. We had some of the best expertise we could offer to St. Boniface Hospital on this issue. They have continued to provide us with materials. So I think we have a couple of options.

I certainly would not be opposed to having those individuals have contact with the member for Kildonan if they were questions of a nature relative to those specifics, to the specific functions of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and so on. Another option is if the member wants to give me his questions written out. I am certainly prepared to undertake to give him then written responses or whatever kind of response he wants to that.

I am really open to any one of a number of avenues to provide him with information. We could dedicate some staff who would bring a certain degree of expertise but, again, only in certain areas. If the member wants to just give me the written out questions I could provide a written response very quickly, I would think, to that.

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): I want to ask some questions about AIDS and HIV-AIDS. I wanted to begin by reminding the minister that it was in 1996 that his government, under the former, former Health minister, the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae), released the provincial AIDS Strategy. I wonder if the minister could update me on the status of that strategy and what is happening with it, because I am finding it very difficult to get information.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I thank the member for Osborne for that question. Just a few points, implementation of the initiatives that the member refers to to meet the goals of the provincial AIDS Strategy, as she indicated, have been underway for the last two years, and the AIDS Implementation Advisory Committee which will oversee the implementation of that provincial AIDS Strategy actually just began their regular meetings in January of this year, January 1999.

I think, as the member probably knows, the committee is chaired by Ms. Tessa Gilmore and reports to the Human Services Committee of Cabinet via the Minister of Health, and I do not think I need to read all the members' names of the committee, and there is an ad hoc committee, but I could certainly provide to the member a listing of all of the people who are on that committee. Just to give her a sense, representation on that committee includes persons living with HIV-AIDS, rural, urban and northern representatives, as well as caregivers. So I think it is a representative committee. As well, the ministers of Justice, Housing, Education and Training, Family Services, Native Affairs, Children and Youth Secretariat, the Addictions Foundation and Health are represented on the Implementation Advisory Committee facilitating an intersectoral approach to HIV-AIDS programs and services right across government.

A primary goal, as the member I am sure is well aware, of the AIDS Strategy is the whole issue of the consolidation and co-ordination of AIDS prevention and care services, and that is currently underway. Over the last period of time, Manitoba Health has been working with four AIDS service providers, the AIDS Shelter Coalition, the Village Clinic, the Manitoba aboriginal AIDS task force and the Kali Shiva plus the Winnipeg Community and Long Term Care Authority with other stakeholders to facilitate this consolidation.

That consolidation is finally taking place. It is taking place here on Broadway, at 705 Broadway, which is the building at Broadway and Sherbrook, I think. So that consolidation is taking place. We are providing financial support for that consolidation. We are also increasing some of the operating dollars as a result of that consolidation, and even currently, Manitoba Health provides over \$1 million to community-based AIDS programs and will add several hundred thousand dollars for the capital costs. I can certainly provide the member with that, but I think it is in the range of about \$500,000 to \$600,000, the capital costs, and actually the increase in operating costs will be about \$63,000 more a year for this integration and co-ordination of AIDS-related services. I am told from all of the people on these committees and these four organizations, that that was viewed as one of the highest priorities, was the consolidation of the organization into one location and the ability to co-ordinate their services. So that is taking place, and, as I have outlined, we have the Implementation Committee.

I guess what I could point out is I tabled earlier a summary of all of the committees that report to the Minister of Health at the request of the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), and on that listing, of which copies were provided, is this committee that we are talking about, the AIDS Implementation Advisory Committee. It gives the terms of reference of the committee in it, and it lists both the committee members and the ad hoc committee members.

So this has been circulated. It is available to the member, but if she needs another copy, we can certainly provide a copy of who is on that committee.

* (1520)

Ms. McGifford: I thank the minister for his answer, too. The minister talked about consolidation of these four groups, Kali Shiva, I think Village Clinic, the aboriginal AIDS task force, and the housing group, AIDS Shelter Coalition, and indicated in his response that his department would be offering some funding to the consolidation. My understanding has been that operational funding for those groups has for several years, I think since the '80s, come from the federal government and from the federal government only. So I am very pleased to hear that the provincial government will now be offering some money.

I wonder if the minister could tell me, first of all, how much money that is and whether the province is offering money to cover the process of consolidation or whether he will be offering operational money to those organizations.

Mr. Stefanson: The member, I think, is basically right that there are the four organizations. The federal government is still a partner in all of this, along with the WCA, in this co-location at 705 Broadway. When we are making a capital contribution of which I will return with the exact amount, but I believe it is in the range of about \$600,000—I do not have the figure here, but I will get the precise amount.

As a result of the co-location, we are making a contribution to that whole co-location—the original number I had was \$63,000, but, again, I think that number is slightly higher now, based on this location. At one point in time they were looking at a different location. The capital costs were going to be a little lower and the contribution to these operations was going to be a little lower. I will provide the member for Osborne with the accurate capital cost amount that we are contributing to this whole co-location and what we are going to be contributing as a result of ongoing costs relative to bringing all of these groups together.

Ms. McGifford: I am a little unclear. I am not sure that the minister answered the whole of my question. Maybe I have misunderstood him. But I do understand him to say that he is providing some capital costs, which is

presumably for the establishment of this group, but the other part of my question is: is he going to be supplying operational money on a yearly basis to run this coalition of AIDS service organizations?

Mrs. Myrna Driedger, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: I think I should be able to make this clear for the member for Osborne. I will start by saying that I do not believe this could or would be happening without our support. That is certainly the feedback that we have had from the organization. You will have the four organizations that we have named and she has repeated back into the record along with the WCA all housed in this new location. So there will basically be five organizations.

The federal government pays for the location. Operating costs of three of the organizations, the AIDS Shelter Coalition, the Manitoba aboriginal AIDS task force and Kali Shiva are all paid for by the federal government, and they continue to do that. What we pay for in there as a provincial government, what we fund, is we fund the WCA and we fund the Village Clinic. So as a result of that, our contributions to moving them into this co-located facility are going to go up by originally it was estimated about 63,000. That is where I said I will return with a more exact number because I am told that number is now slightly higher because of this new location.

At the same time, we are making a contribution to the overall renovations for everybody in there, all five organizations, which is in the range of \$600,000. So, again, I think everybody acknowledges this is the right thing to do and by us making those contributions, we are obviously a catalyst to help make it happen.

Ms. McGifford: I understand that the federal government provides operational money for three of these organizations. The minister must be aware that that money is provided on a project basis, and my understanding is that the funding to those organizations will soon run out. It has happened, I believe at least twice in the past, that the federal government has said it will not fund those programs and then has changed

its mind and continued to fund them. My understanding is that the federal government is quite adamant at this point that it will not continue to fund those programs.

While I am sympathetic with the province in that the province should not be expected to pick up every program that the federal government starts and then does not continue; nonetheless, I hear the minister saying that he is putting \$600,000 plus \$63,000 into this centre. If it is forced to close because there is no money to operate three of the five groups, then it would seem to me that it is not a very wise decision. I am very supportive of AIDS services, having worked in that community.

So I wonder if the minister then or the provincial government has any plans to pick up the operational funding of those three organizations when the federal funding ceases. I think that the federal funding ends on March 31, 2000. It might be a year later. I am not quite sure.

* (1530)

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, I guess firstly we will continue to do everything we can to ensure that the federal government maintain their funding for these organizations, and we fully expect them to maintain their funding going forward. This new location that all of these organizations are going into will have a 10-year lease on it, and we will have a memorandum of understanding with the federal government on the issue of the space, on the issue of the lease and the operating costs of the space.

So that unto itself is a partial commitment from the federal government towards, obviously the concept which they were a part of. They supported this consolidation of all of the organizations into the one location. They are going to sign an MOU with us on the rent and on the space.

Now, there still is the issue of the operating funding on a go-forward basis from when the agreement comes to an end, but we will continue to press the federal government for ongoing commitments in that whole area. We believe

that they do have a responsibility, and I continue to be optimistic that they will continue to fund these organizations and uphold their responsibilities in this area and just the whole issue of their share of contributing to health costs in Manitoba and across Canada.

So the member is right that it does come due in a fairly short period of time. I recognize it is a cause for concern, but I am not even prepared to accept or get into a discussion about the possibility of the federal government getting out of this. I think it is incumbent on us as a government, and certainly with the support of the opposition, to continue to press the federal government to maintain this funding on a go-forward basis. So I think the fact that we have a 10-year lease, the fact that they support this, the fact they are entering into a memorandum of understanding is all very encouraging in terms of their overall commitment. I recognize there is a vulnerability there in the years ahead, but I think we can continue to convince the federal government to continue to fund these organizations.

Ms. McGifford: Well, I am impressed by the minister's optimism. He can certainly be satisfied and rest assured that we will be as "go ahead" as he will in pressing the federal government to continue the funding. But, of course, one of the problems for organizations who are caught between, at least they may perceive themselves as being caught between, federal government funding, which may expire, and a lack of commitment from a provincial government is that it is extremely difficult to do programs and planning. So I understand that many of these organizations are concerned and are not as convinced as the minister is that their funding will be in place, that the federal money will continue, and would like some assurance that there will be funding if the federal government does not renew its commitment. I do not know whether the minister wants to respond.

Mr. Stefanson: I appreciate the concern the member raises for any organization that you want a degree of predictability and certainty in terms of your funding. We have certainly argued that for years with the federal government in terms of the funding we receive from them.

I am partly being a little repetitive, but I think it is very encouraging that the federal government has been supportive of this consolidation, very positive about the consolidation. I think in many ways it strengthens all of these organizations on a go-forward basis. If the expiry is March 31, 2000, of some of the federal funding commitments, I will confirm that, and then I think, collectively, we should be aggressively pursuing that issue now, ourselves as a provincial government, along with these organizations, to get an extension of a longer-term commitment from the federal government.

So certainly that would be my immediate action on this, because far too often we have had examples where the federal government has backed away from what I think should be their ongoing commitments. In this case, everything I have seen, the federal government are supportive. They support these organizations. They support the consolidation. They encourage the consolidation.

We should be, and I think we are, in a very strong position to go to the federal government and get those agreements extended. So I will confirm the dates of when these funding commitments are expiring with each of these organizations, and if it is getting as close as March 31, 2000, which is nine or ten months away, then it is incumbent on all of us to start pressing for an extension of those agreements. I will certainly undertake to do that.

Ms. McGifford: I wonder if the minister still has an advisory committee on AIDS.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, well, the AIDS Advisory Committee has now basically been replaced by the AIDS Implementation Advisory Committee because we are now into the implementation stage. That committee actually reports to the Human Services Committee of Cabinet because it does cross other departments, but it does report to them through the Minister of Health. So they are now the committee that provides us with that advice.

* (1540)

Ms. McGifford: I wonder if the minister could tell me the process of reporting. Does the chair

of that committee meet with the Human Resources Committee of Cabinet, and if so, when was the last time that meeting took place? How many meetings have there been?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, I think, as I indicated when we were talking about the committee, as I said, they are chaired by Ms. Tessa Gilmore, but more importantly relative to the question, they began their regular meetings in January just of this year. We have an individual from Manitoba Health, our AIDS program co-ordinator, Ms. Pat Matusko, on the committee. So that is the direct link into the Department of Health. As I say, this committee reports to Human Services but through myself, through the Ministry of Health.

I have not met with this committee yet. I fully expect that I probably will be doing that fairly shortly, but at this point, to the best of my knowledge I have had no request to meet with them. The focus has been really on this issue of consolidation, certainly from a department perspective from everything I have been hearing, and that is why we have been moving it through our process to have the capital money in place and so on. So I would expect that I would be meeting with the committee fairly shortly.

Ms. McGifford: I know that the statistics on AIDS used to be compiled every six months, and then I think that changed and they were compiled once a year. I used to get them automatically, but I have not received them, I do not believe, for some time.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

I wonder if the minister could ask his staff to send me a copy of the most recent statistics on AIDS. First of all, could he assure me that this is still being done and how frequently it is being done? Could he then have the most recent set—because I am assuming it is being done—sent to me?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I will definitely send the member the most current information I have, and I will confirm whether or not that information is being produced semiannually or what the current status is and the timing of the production. But I will definitely undertake to

provide her the most recent data I have very shortly.

Ms. McGifford: I wanted to ask a question that I have been asked to ask on behalf of some community members. I do not know whether the minister remembers the unfortunate death of a young man named Wesley Kent who attended at the Health Sciences Centre and for reasons that were at that time disputable, at least there was a dispute between the family's contention and the hospital's contention, and later on this young man, I believe, was admitted into the emergency room at St. Boniface Hospital where he died apparently quite unexpectedly and suddenly.

The family was extremely upset because they felt that he had been treated quite unfairly by Health Sciences Centre. Some members of the community believe that there should be an inquiry into the death of Wesley Kent, and I wonder if the minister has considered this, if he has received this request.

Mr. Stefanson: I think rather than test everyone's memory, I am better off to return with the specifics to the member on this entire issue.

Ms. McGifford: I am sure the minister and his department are aware that the numbers of persons with HIV-AIDS infections, and particularly among marginalized people, whether these are aboriginal people, intravenous drug users or gay youth, have continued to rise in this province. I wonder what preventative measures his department is taking. I am sure that members of his department are familiar with the—is it the Winnipeg Injection Drug Epidemiology study? I think the epidemiologist was Dr. Jamie Blanchard. I think the study found that 12.6 percent of the city's IV drug users tested positive for HIV, and I believe that in an earlier study, '86 to '90, only 2 percent of I.V. drug users tested positive.

So this is quite an alarming increase, and I wonder if the minister would comment.

Mr. Stefanson: Obviously the member is quite familiar with this issue, and just to put on the record maybe a little bit of background. The

Winnipeg Injection Drug Epidemiology study, or what is called the WIDE study, a proposal was submitted actually by Manitoba Health to Health Canada and was successfully funded for \$170,000 from Health Canada and \$20,000 from Manitoba Health. The principal study investigators are Dr. Jamie Blanchard and Dr. Lawrence Elliott in close collaboration with the AIDS program co-ordinator for Manitoba Health.

* (1550)

I think in total the WIDE study identified about 1,068 injection drug users. Of those, some 610 participated in a full interview. The final results are really, as the member has indicated, a prevalence of about 12.6 percent. A full presentation on the study was just recently made to the AIDS Implementation Committee, in fact, just on April 13, just under a month ago. So, obviously, that data is all being analyzed now by the committee. That committee is also in discussion with the Winnipeg Community and Long Term Care Authority, with community leaders, with service providers and obviously with the Department of Health to review how best to structure the programs and services to address these new findings.

Again, the activities to address these findings are being co-ordinated across departments like Justice, child and family services and so on. So it is really an issue that I expect I will be receiving a full report on very shortly, and I am sure that full report will include recommendations relative to programs and services, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. McGifford: Well, I agree that the numbers are new. I am not sure that the information is new because we have known for a long, long time that one of the ways that HIV is spread is through IV drug use. I guess the real tragedy with regard to HIV-AIDS is that it is entirely preventable and we know it is entirely preventable, and yet it is 1999 and the minister seems to be implying that there is not a preventative strategy in place. I do know that the AIDS Strategy itself does have information on or does highlight prevention, but it remains upsetting that it is still 1999 and this is where we are when it comes to prevention with regard to

AIDS. I do not know if the minister would like to comment.

Mr. Stefanson: Well, I think in fairness to the issue and the data that this WIDE study has put forward, the member is basically correct. I think it is just confirming in many cases what was already expected or known, but in terms of action and steps being taken, without being too repetitive here, I know from the information I have that the organizations themselves indicated a need for much better co-ordination, co-operation to consolidate. That really has been one of the immediate steps being done and is being dealt with.

You know, there are a number of initiatives in place, whether it be initiatives through Mount Carmel Clinic like the street station needle exchange, other initiatives in terms of public health nurse educational initiatives and obviously community health clinics like Klinik, Women's Health and Nor'West, and so on, but I will give the member for Osborne a more comprehensive listing of a number of the initiatives that are in place.

I certainly agree with her on the whole issue of prevention. We had a lengthy discussion with the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) on the issue of prevention. In that particular case we were talking about smoking but our objective in so many of these areas should be to prevent things happening in the first place, and any initiatives, any steps we can be taking, whether it is through education, whether it is through services, programs or whatever, I would agree that we should continue to focus on that, that if we have illnesses or diseases that are preventable, whether it be diabetes or any of these kinds of situations, like HIV, we should be focusing on that. I would welcome any specific suggestions the member would have in that area, and we are always more than prepared to look at the impact that they could have.

* (1600)

Ms. McGifford: Actually, I do have ideas on prevention. I am glad the minister mentions Street Connections, because I have an article from the Winnipeg Free Press, dated Wednesday, April 21, and in it the program

manager, Gloria Enns, is quoted as saying, since they have moved their office, their needle exchange program has dropped by half. I think that they were formerly on Main Street, and obviously the minister is not responsible for that office's closing down and having to move, so I just put it really out as a comment, because it is unfortunate that we have to have needle exchange programs. But we do know that this is one way of preventing HIV-AIDS and also hepatitis C which I wanted to talk about in a minute.

I also wanted to say—and the minister probably knows this—that there is evidence, and I believe it is in the WIDE report as well, that those who are being infected with HIV-AIDS are younger in Manitoba than they are anywhere else in the country, so this seems to me that it is something that should be looked into by this minister with certain of his colleagues, maybe the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson), maybe the Minister of Education (Mr. McCrae), because quite clearly, as the minister recognizes, in the AIDS field, joint and co-operative efforts are extremely important in dealing with these issues. That is more of a comment than anything.

I wanted to ask the minister if he could tell me how many of his staff in the Department of Health are working full time on AIDS, either prevention or delivery of service or in that field.

Mr. Stefanson: The direct service employees that used to be with Manitoba Health are now with the WCA and the RHA, so I will have to get that information and provide it to the member. Within Health, we do have the AIDS program co-ordinator I referred to earlier, and we do have the epidemiology unit which is really focused more on the research side of the issue. I will get a precise number of how many people are in that unit, but the actual service delivery side that used to be in Manitoba Health is now out in the RHAs and the WCA. I will get a summary of that for the member.

Ms. McGifford: The epidemiology people would be working not only in AIDS, I am assuming, but in other infectious diseases. What I wanted to do, and I hope this is all right with

the minister, is ask a few questions about hepatitis C and then ask some questions about women's health issues.

First of all, then, hepatitis C, I know we asked some questions in the House about 10 days, two weeks ago. The member for Transcona I believe was the person who brought up the question of waiting periods. He had a constituent who had unfortunately tested positive for hepatitis C. This individual had no idea how he had contacted hepatitis C. People often do not. He had no idea when he had contacted hepatitis C. The person had been notified when he went to donate blood that he had the virus.

As I am sure the minister can imagine, as all of us can imagine, this individual was quite devastated, and yet had to wait I believe till next February to see a liver specialist, a hepatologist. I wonder if this is standard or if this individual just happened not to phone the right place at the right time or what is going on with specialists.

Mr. Stefanson: I will just make some general comments. I think I will have to either return with the detailed information or when I get to this section of our detailed Estimates and have the appropriate staff here. I know it is part of the negotiations with the federal government for Manitoba's share of this \$300 million that is made available for additional services. Some of the things that are being looked at in the case of Manitoba would be additional hepatitis clinics in the viral hepatitis investigation unit at HSC, some additional community-based nurses at the WCA to deal with risk factors and counselling and monitoring cases and providing education and some specialized diagnostic tests.

I am also aware that we, Manitoba Health, have approved additional resources for the recruitment and/or training of a hepatologist. That has already been approved. I would have to confirm what the status is of that recruitment and/or training. So there are various steps being taken, initiatives underway. I would certainly be more than willing to return with a more comprehensive briefing for the member and/or when I have appropriate staff here at that stage of Estimates.

* (1610)

Ms. McGifford: I have two other questions. They probably are questions that the minister would prefer to answer at another time. Maybe I will ask them, because they are very closely related to the material that he just presented.

I understand that when an individual sees a specialist, an individual who has tested positive, then usually that individual must then have a liver biopsy unless that individual is a hemophiliac. Then there is another kind of testing, I understand, because I assume a biopsy for a person who is a hemophiliac is more serious than it might be for somebody who is not, and that that test requires an additional wait of about four months, that that is about how long that waiting list is. So that is a concern.

I also did want to ask the minister about the Manitoba portion of the \$300 million, that one-time transfer payment, which he just mentioned. I know that he indicated in the House last week or two weeks ago, specifically what our share of that money was. I am sure I could find it in Hansard, but maybe he would be good enough to reiterate what that amount is. What I did want to ask is what specifically was going to be done with that money. He seems to have outlined some of the initiatives. Perhaps that is as much detail as he can get into right now.

Mr. Stefanson: On the first part of the question, I will return the details for the member on, I guess, the protocol behind the liver tests, the liver biopsy, but also confirm with her the status of waiting times and whether or not there are any issues that need to be addressed there.

In terms of the \$300-million commitment from the federal government, Manitoba's share would be approximately \$7.8 million. Now, we have to recognize that that is over 20 years. The federal government is talking about front-ending some of it. In fact, they are talking about making available maybe as much as about \$1.3 million in the first year. The total allocation for Manitoba is about \$7.8 million over 20 years. That does give us the opportunity, as we have discussed before, to look at some enhanced treatment, to look at the whole issue of training and recruitment of hepatologists, and so on. Hopefully that is the information the member wanted.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, I know the minister knows, because I mentioned in the House that the Province of Quebec is advocating, agitating, whatever, to be able to use their portion of the \$300 million to extend compensation to cover individuals who were infected outside the window. I personally think that this is something that we should consider in Manitoba, and I wonder if the minister's position on not extending compensation is firm.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, in terms of a specific commitment, the most recent information that I have is that it is still only Ontario that has actually agreed to a cash payment from pre-'86, and I believe the payment is up to \$10,000 per claimant, regardless of the burden of illness. They have also capped their total contribution, I am told, at about \$200 million, I think. Quebec, I know, did indicate some time ago that they would be looking at a similar program, but I have not seen further details. I am not sure whether the member has further details other than that intention that was indicated some time ago by Quebec.

Beyond that, we have the federal government and all of the other provinces committed to utilizing this \$300 million to provide additional levels of care and treatment. We have talked about some of them, and, obviously, I am awaiting a final detailed submission on the elements of care that we can continue to enhance here. So, at this point in time, other than Ontario and some uncertainty around Quebec, others are waiting to see what happens. We have all of the provinces and the federal government dedicating this money from the federal government to additional care.

Ms. McGifford: But the minister has not told me what his position is.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, we have agreed with all of the other provinces and with the federal government to utilize this money for additional care in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. McGifford: In other words, the minister is not committed or interested in extending

compensation to those persons who fall outside the January 1, 1986, to December 31, 1991, period? Madam Chair, can I just add that I meant, of course, individuals who acquired hepatitis C through contaminated blood or blood products?

Mr. Stefanson: I am probably being repetitive, Madam Chair, that we are committed to use this money, like almost all the provinces in Canada and with the support of the federal government, for additional elements of care. We are committed to certainly continue to provide all of the existing levels of care that we provide through our health care system. These additional resources give us an opportunity to expand some programs, to enhance some levels of care. We are certainly committed to do just that.

Ms. McGifford: I would suggest to the minister that the least of his sins is being repetitive. He is also being, what I consider more serious, evasive, but I guess that is his privilege. So, leaving that, I know that the minister I understand did outline for the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) the status of the \$1.2-billion package for those who fall inside the window, so I know I can get that information from him. But I wonder if I could just ask the minister when he thinks Manitobans will actually get some compensation, those who fall inside the window we are talking about now.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, as the member knows, the total settlement is \$1.1 billion. In the case of Manitoba, that amounts to about \$12 million, and we have set that money aside here in Manitoba in 1998-99. I think we are all hopeful that negotiations will be concluded very soon. They are ongoing, the negotiator on behalf of the federal government and provincial governments along with the negotiators on behalf of the plaintiffs. I am told that they are close to concluding negotiations, down to a handful of items, and I think we all expect that should be concluded fairly shortly, I would hope.

* (1620)

Ms. McGifford: I wonder if I could change and just ask the minister a quick question about the Manitoba Health library, because I had some

phone calls about it. My understanding is that there was a Manitoba Health library in the building on Empress Street and that it was available for department staff, for public health nurses. In fact, I was told that lots of teachers access these resources, that these resources were available across Manitoba for health education, I guess, in public schools and that this health library was, in short, a really rich resource and was well used, and that lots of health libraries in Manitoba depended on these resources, that they collected Manitoba government publications and national publications and that these resources were very necessary to health professionals and, well, just all kinds of people.

I understand that the library was used by, I suppose, policy makers, health professionals, et cetera, by practitioners, nurses, and also by consumers, and now I have been told that the library is closed and that I believe it has moved to the Health Sciences Centre medical school. Some people are concerned that this will mean that these resources are not available in the way that they were previously, because it has been—I suppose a university is a public building, but the medical school, I am not sure that anyone can just walk in there and have access to these resources, which I understood was the case in this Empress Street library. I wonder what the answer is.

Mr. Stefanson: I think I should return with a more detailed explanation, but I guess a general one is the member is correct. This has been consolidated at the U of M medical school, John Maclean Library. I gather the access is still there in terms of audio-video to teachers, schools and community health care nurses. I am also told that there were only something like five contacts per day at the previous site. Again, my understanding is this will continue to provide the service, and it is really just consolidating it at this one additional location. But I will certainly return with some further details on the whole issue.

Ms. McGifford: I wonder if the minister knows if people using the John Maclean Library have to pay to access materials from that library or if that is free.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: Just again, Mr. Chairman, I think I should return with a few more details, but my understanding is there is an arrangement with MARN, an overall arrangement allowing access for nurses. They might have to pay for some specialized services or whatever, but there is an overall arrangement with them. Other than that, it is membership based so individuals would be members to access the services. I am also told that through the other library services, the Winnipeg Library Service, you could access interlibrary transfers, and I would have to confirm what the fees or charges are for those kinds of things. So MARN has an arrangement, there is a membership base, and there is the opportunity for interlibrary transfers, but I have to confirm the fees relative to membership and relative to interlibrary transfer.

* (1630)

Ms. McGifford: The reason I bring up this issue is because we have just been talking, at least indirectly, about the importance of prevention of illness and disease, specifically when we were talking, I think, both about HIV and about AIDS. I know that the minister indicated that public contact with this library, which was on Empress Street, was limited, and there was something like five contacts a day.

It is encouraging to know that there is an arrangement that nurses have to access the materials from the John Maclean Library, but I understand that teachers were able to go to the Empress Street library, and sometimes when you are browsing in the library, you see things, and seeing things is, well, seeing things is believing. It is very important, you stumble across resources that you did not know were there and they prove very helpful.

I think the minister would agree that one of the important places to begin prevention, or one of the very important locations where we should be teaching preventative medicine, is in the school system and, consequently, perhaps down the line preventing some of the illnesses that are so troublesome and so tragic in our society.

The other thing is I understand that consumers had some access, at least to this Empress Street library, and my understanding is

that when consumers educate themselves on their illnesses—and I am thinking, for example, on breast cancer—that their chances of survival increase.

I know there is no answer to what I was just talking about, and I do not expect an answer. I was just explaining to the minister why I think it is important that we do have materials publicly available both to our educators and to consumers of the health system, and that they be easily available. I had understood that this particular library filled that niche. I do not know whether the minister wants to respond. I do not necessarily expect a response.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I did indicate I will return with a few more details on this, but I am reminded that there are so many more ways now to provide information and education to our teachers through our educational system, whether it be through the Internet or other vehicles which is happening more and more or whether it be through a number of initiatives, through public health with brochures and information.

Really, this particular library at Empress that we are talking about, really was mostly an internal library. It was not so much a consumer library, even though teachers could access it, but teachers can still now access the various components at the John Maclean Library, and they can access the audio-video and so on. So I think that resource is still there and still available, and we do continue to provide information in a number of other ways as well.

* (1640)

Ms. McGifford: I am aware that there are a number of ways of obtaining information, but you can only obtain information if you know it is available. Perhaps the minister feels confident that everybody knows where the information is and how to get it, but I will just leave it at that.

I wanted to ask some questions about the Breast Screening Program, the Manitoba Breast Screening Program. Maybe I can begin with the one that is across the street from the Misericordia Hospital, because I understand that this program is restricted to women who are

under 60, or there is an age restriction. I may have that age restriction incorrect, but I have during my canvassing, actually, encountered a couple of women who were denied access to those facilities because of their age. They were upset, and maybe understandably so, but maybe there is some very good explanation as to why they cannot seek service there. I wonder if the minister could enlighten me.

Mr. Stefanson: The member is correct that the Breast Screening Program is for women between 50 and 69 years of age, and I gather that is based on the research and scientific evidence and so on. I gather it is also fairly consistent right across Canada. I think maybe one province has a lower age but I think, by and large, I am told, that that is fairly consistent. Obviously any woman who either has a family history or is concerned can go through her own doctor, her own family doctor, and go through a separate—so long as he or she refers her through the process—testing process. So that is available if a woman is concerned and is obviously younger than 50 years of age, but the screening program itself is for 50 to 69.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the information. However, the case I am referring to is a woman, and I did find the age, that 69 is the cutoff, and this woman is 71, and she had been a patient of the Misericordia Breast Clinic. It was very convenient for her to attend the breast clinic and to attend the screening unit across the street. Then, when she turned 71, she was told that she could no longer seek service there or have service there. This woman was used to the service; she was very impressed and pleased with the service.

I also may as well take this opportunity on the record to compliment the workers there. It is a wonderful place to have this work done. But here is an elderly lady, this is something she is accustomed to, and suddenly she becomes a certain age and she is told that she can no longer be served at this particular centre and was upset. I think we can all understand why she was upset.

I wonder if the minister would consider changing, making some changes. I heard him say that across Canada the ages that are recognized as the important time to have breast

screening are 50 to 69, but women, of course, do get cancer when they are older than 69. In fact, I could be quite misinformed, but I thought the incidence of cancer increased with age, so you are more likely to get it when you are passed 69. I could certainly stand corrected.

This refusal of service because of age seems to me to be, well, just not quite right. I do not know whether it is a human rights violation or not. I presume it is not or the government would not be practising it, but it is upsetting. I wonder if the minister might consider changes or might explain in more detail his rationale, because just simply saying, well, it is from 50 to 69 across Canada does not really satisfy me.

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chairman, it is not really my information or my decision that 69 is the most appropriate cutoff. I am told that is fairly common and is based on clinical evidence and so on. Having said that, if the member for Osborne, in confidence, is prepared to give me this individual's name, we could certainly deal with her particular situation and find out more about it. I was not clear whether it is the screening program or the clinical side of the program that this individual is continuing to access, and we certainly would be prepared to look into her individual situation.

I gather there is also a national review committee on this entire issue that do make the recommendations. Obviously, if they recommended a change in age, then we would comply with that. So, Mr. Chairman, I am more than prepared to look into this individual's particular circumstances and see if anything can be done.

Ms. McGifford: I will check with the individual and then, if that is fine with this person, contact the minister's office. I greatly appreciate his willingness to look into it and also his willingness apparently to recognize that what might be clinically viable is not necessarily viable from a humane point of view. I think this is a kind of human interest question and a human interest concern.

I wanted to ask the minister about the mobile testing units, if the same age restriction applies there, because I know these units go out into isolated areas where women cannot

necessarily just access a laboratory that would do the screening. In fact, I understand that the reason for the mobile breast screening unit is that there is not service there. So I am hoping that the age restriction does not apply.

*(1650)

Mr. Stefanson: The short answer to the question is, yes, the same age restrictions do apply for the mobile screening program, again based on the same clinical information and so on, again a different situation from an individual who might have either a family history or some reason to require ongoing diagnostic services beyond the age of 69. But beyond those kinds of situations, just the screening program does have the same restrictions of 50 to 69.

Ms. McGifford: But the screening program is one of the essentials and one of the first places for diagnosis. Maybe I am missing something here, but my understanding was that a breast screening unit would be in a community where an individual did not have access to another form of testing. Do the screening units not go to remote communities, so that if you are 70, and you do not qualify, what do you do? Where do you have screening?

I understand my information from my physician and information I received at the breast screening clinic across the street from Misericordia was that once you reach 50 you should have a test, I believe, every two years. So it seems to me that if women are cut off once they reach 69, and they live in—I do not know where—a northern remote community, they do not have access at all to screening.

Mr. Stefanson: I think what is important to recognize is the screening program is a program for basically asymptomatic women, women who want and should be having the screening done. Any woman who has any concern or any history obviously would go to her family physician or her doctor and go for a much more detailed diagnostic testing that would be required in that particular case. So wherever they are in Manitoba, that would be the process that they would follow. If they are concerned for some reason, then they should be making that contact and going for the more detailed diagnosis as opposed to just the screening.

So those services are available to varying degrees right across the province, and certainly if a woman beyond the age of 69 or under the age of 50 has any family history of any symptoms, as opposed to being asymptomatic, has any symptoms that cause her concern, then she should be making that contact with her doctor and going for the more comprehensive diagnostic testing that would be required well beyond just the screening, which is really a universal program for all women between the ages of 50 and 69.

Ms. McGifford: With respect, I think it is important for the minister to recognize that one of the principles of the Canada Health Act is accessibility of service. Secondly, I think it is important for the minister to recognize that many women living in remote communities do not have a family physician. My understanding is in many of these remote communities there is not even a physician, period. So I do not know how these referrals would take place or who these referrals would go to.

I understand that the minister is talking about asymptomatic women, and if a woman is symptomatic, presumably whether she is over 69 or not, she could access service through the breast screening unit. But in the spirit of prevention, I would suggest to the minister that he consider, at least in these rural communities, dropping this age limitation.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think what would be useful from my point of view, in terms of the issues the member is raising, if she has not done this already, I would welcome putting her in contact with my associate deputy minister and the people involved in the program to sit down and have a thorough discussion on the clinical background, why it is 50 to 69, and on the basis that there are other services available, if women do have a concern and so on. So if she would be interested in that, I am more than prepared to arrange that. I think, from my point of view, that might be very helpful in terms of either clarifying the issues or then being able to pursue the issue.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being five o'clock, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

*(1700)

IN SESSION

House Business

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, as we discussed with the House earlier this afternoon following Question Period, in order to accommodate passage of the amendment to Bill 27, The Essential Services Amendment Act, as members are all aware, that will require unanimous consent of the House to do a number of things, as I had indicated earlier. So in keeping with that, I would ask now if there is the unanimous consent of the House for leave to revert to report of standing committees.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to report of standing committees?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: No, leave has been denied.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I just want it to be noted that the ability of this Legislature to pass into law that amendment to The Essential Services Act would require leave to proceed in each step. With that denial by, I believe, one of the members of this House, although there was agreement between the New Democratic and the Conservative parties to proceed on that basis, that prevents that legislation from becoming law today with the consequences, if anything happens over the weekend, the responsibility will have to rest on those who deny that leave.

Point of Order

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, given the serious nature of the comments that were made by the government House leader—

Madam Speaker: Are you on a point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, on a point of order, Madam Speaker, given the important comments that the government House leader has put on the record, he is definitely imputing motives on behalf of myself and the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski).

We recognize the importance of the legislation that is before us. We believe that the

sense of urgency is not there. We have faith and trust in what we heard at the committee level, and the government and the NDP are working together to try to expedite this bill. We do not believe that the bill needs to be expedited. We do believe in the importance of all Manitobans and the patients, whom we put first. We believe that the opportunity is still there. Therefore I am not prepared to give leave.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, I think we are in a bit of an unfortunate situation, but with all due respect to the government House leader (Mr. Praznik), I think his comments were basically leading into debate on this matter. Leave was requested. We were prepared to grant leave, but since it has not been granted, the only appropriate thing to do is to move on the next item of business.

I could put on the record all sorts of comments, but I do not think it is appropriate in keeping with our rules, and I would suggest we either adjourn the House or go back to Estimates. We should not be debating the bill or any action related to the bill on points of order or else on comments related to House business. That is getting into debate. It is not to deal with procedure.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) did not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, it has all been put on the record. I would then ask if there is leave to go back into the Estimates debate for the remaining time of today's sitting. If there is leave in the House, then I will move the appropriate motion.

Madam Speaker, I will defer to the will of members opposite. [interjection] And, yes, I would like to have a life. I think if Madam Speaker would canvass the House, she will find that there is a willingness to call it 6 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to call it 6 p.m. Agreed? [agreed]

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Tuesday next.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 20, 1999

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