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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

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Thirty-Seventh Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 5, 2001

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that the House resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Concurrence Motion

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): The Committee of Supply has before it for our consideration a motion concurring in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditures for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002. The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): Good morning. We will start the questions right away because I know Mr. Cummings has some as well.

To the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Sale), I was delighted to read your paper, your vision for day cares across Manitoba. There were a lot of things in the paper I think that were very helpful to families and to children. There are some actual criteria or some objectives that were outlined.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Chairperson, in the Chair

I would like to ask the minister. There are several things Manitoba families and early childhood educators alike felt that lack of support and welcome changes. That was in the paper from the Minister of Family Services and Housing, things like enhance the current minimum standards to ensure the levels of high-quality care in education as supported through regulations, programs and funding and to ensure

that both the funding mechanisms to ensure appropriate levels of remuneration and benefits are standardized for all early childhood educators and to support the policies and programs that will address the critical issue of recruiting and retaining early childhood educators.

Facilities and outdoor environments are often not meeting the Canadian playground safety standards. Capital funds are needed to be allocated toward this end. New government models should be explored to ensure parents and community members have a role in supporting and advising the centre on program and community needs. The current structure of parent boards needs to be reviewed so that parents are not put in conflicting roles of being both consumers and management.

There was a petition that went around that I know my colleague the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Sale) is aware of. This petition included that new brain research has shown the quality of care for very young children receives and plays a vital role in their development; and that 66 percent of Manitoba's children from birth to 12 years need some form of non-parental child care; and that 11 percent of Manitoba's children have access to licensed child care services while their parents work or attend training; and that provinces such as Québec and British Columbia have already taken significant steps forward to the full implementation of universal child care services that meet the needs of all families; and that child care in Manitoba currently remains a private family problem, even though there is significant evidence that high quality comprehensive service is in the public good.

These petitioners have urged the Minister of Family Services and Housing to consider the recommendations of his Government's own child day care legislative review committee captured in the paper that was put out by the Minister of Family Services and Housing called *A Vision for Child Care and Development in Manitoba*. The

petitioners were asking that the minister immediately address its six main components; that is: standards in quality care, funding, training and professionalism, governance, integrated service delivery, and public education, with full potential and financial commitment.

That is to give you a background and just to refresh the minister's memory, although I am sure he is quite aware of all these recommendations. My question to the Minister of Family Services and Housing is this: *A Vision for Child Care and Development in Manitoba* has been put on paper and has captured the essence of what is needed in child care and development in Manitoba. I commend the minister for that work. Could the minister please inform this House what time lines he has to implement the recommendations in this paper and what money has been put forward to ensure that these six main components of this paper are recognized in the very near future here in Manitoba?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Let me thank the member for a thoughtfully put question that gave a great deal of background information, which I think probably everyone is aware of but perhaps not in detail, and it is helpful to put all that detail forward.

She asks a very broad-ranging question, and so my response is not going to be short, unless she really wants me to not respond to the broad question. If she wants to interrupt at some point and suggest that she has a more narrowly focused concern, I would be glad to try and more narrowly focus it.

Mrs. Smith: Perhaps it would be better to narrowly focus it. Very specifically, when will *A Vision for Child Care and Development in Manitoba* and its six major main components be implemented?

Mr. Sale: I thank the member for giving me a little clearer direction on what she was after.

The time line is this: We have received to date slightly over 23 000 responses. Just to put that in context, when the British Columbia government put forward a somewhat similar exercise in a population of over three million

people they received just over 10 000 responses. So you can see that this is certainly an issue that Manitobans are very concerned about. For any initiative of any government to receive that volume of replies suggests that this is an issue that people have a lot of concern about.

So 23 000 is a few more than we expected, let me say. Our staff has been very busy pulling together these responses. I am sure, as the member would appreciate, probably in the order of 21 000 or 21 500 are in the form of essentially petition letters. I do not discount the value of those at all, but they are a standard form. I think it does indicate that when you have around 21 000 kids in care and around 21 000 responses, you know that their families and their sisters and their cousins and their aunts—it reminds me of Gilbert and Sullivan, the sisters and the cousins, and she has them by the dozens, and her aunts. No, I will not sing it. It is tempting, but it is too early in the morning.

* (10:10)

There were as well a significant number, and I cannot tell the member how many because I have not had the report yet, of very thoughtful, longer, detailed responses from groups like the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, a variety of unions, a variety of professional organizations, training institutions where day-care workers are trained, school divisions and community groups who wrote very thoughtful and sometimes quite lengthy presentations. So the analysis of those is underway. I am expecting a preliminary report later in the summer. I expect to send that report fairly quickly, almost immediately, to the Day Care Regulatory Review Committee. At the same time, I will be asking our staff to contact a wider range of community groups that would not normally be expected to respond to a vision paper in day care, for example groups like the Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba council of business, whatever it is called. What is Jim Carr's group called?

An Honourable Member: Manitoba Business Council.

Mr. Sale: Business Council. Jim Carr's organization. Or maybe I should say Sandy

Riley's organization, and a variety of other groups to ascertain their views. I think that the member would appreciate that there are such a wide range of stakeholders in this whole area. She would probably also appreciate that as you go forward in any major public policy area you want to do that with full consultation, because it is obviously a very important set of decisions. So we will be doing that at the same time that the reg review committee is assessing the responses.

I expect to have a sense of that by the middle of the fall and be in a position to share with my Cabinet colleagues the results of this exercise and then to go forward in terms of longer term shaping of our response.

I want the member to in some ways be of assistance here. I invite her assistance. She will probably know that even though we now have full training courses for the first time in some years because we have increased the wages to the point where ECEs, early childhood educator IIs, can expect a wage level in the mid-20s, which is not a high wage by comparison with many similarly important jobs in our community, it at least is a living wage. As we are able we will continue to support the approach of MCCA and its wage scales, but the member I am sure is aware that even with the efforts that we have made we still have something in the order of between 25 and 30 percent of our day-care centres that are not meeting staffing standards. We have between 25 and 30 percent of our day-care centres that are on provisional licences, which means that they are not able to find enough trained ECEs to meet the full ratio requirements.

Before we can even reasonably begin to talk about expanding the existing system we have got to be able to staff what we have got now. It will be a minimum of a year from September, an absolute minimum, before we are able to make a significant dent in the provisional licence situation. While advocates for expansion have a very strong case, and we acknowledge that, you cannot expand something you do not have staff for. I do not want to make partisan comments here, but the salary levels we inherited when we formed Government meant that people left the day care profession as soon as they could get other jobs because they could not afford to work

there. They wanted to, but they could not afford to. I know that there are all kinds of reasons why salary levels were the way they were, and I am not wanting to make any comments about that. But the reality was we could not afford to have staff working in our system. So we did not. We were on the verge of closing some day-care centres for licensing reasons. Now that has changed, but we have still got a long way to go.

So that is the first thing. We do not have the staff to rapidly expand the system even if we wanted to. The second thing that we have to recognize is the scale of the costs that we are talking about here. While I accept the arguments of day care advocates that there is a cost benefit to quality day care, that cost benefit comes back to the wider economy over time; it does not flow to the Government immediately. So there is a very significant up-front cost to the expansion even though we can argue the cost benefit and I accept the cost-benefit argument.

I think it has been accepted for years that if there is to be a national day care system in Canada, the federal government will have to be a major partner. I will just give the member the same numbers I gave the critic for the Opposition, the honourable member from Ste. Rose. That just to reach a five-dollar-a-day day care maximum in Manitoba, at the present time with the present system with the present salaries, would require almost a doubling of our existing commitment. That would not expand the system; that would just bring the cost down to those who are currently using it.

The federal government was told by the Department of Finance about two years ago that a fully mature national day care system would cost an additional \$11 billion in 1999. The federal government put forward \$300 million for early childhood education this year. Now that is good. We are glad that the federal government is making a commitment to early childhood education. All governments of all stripes across Canada are welcoming that and are doing new and I think very important things with that new money, but you have to put the \$300 million in the context of an \$11 billion cost just for the day care component of early childhood education. So that is the struggle we are facing. As we respond to the demand in Manitoba, we have to say to the

federal government: You have the fiscal capacity; you ran a surplus of \$19 billion this year.

I am glad the fiscal situation is in order at the federal level, but I think the member knows that the fiscal capacities in Canada are largely at the federal level and the fiscal responsibilities for the most expensive services, health, education and social services, are at the provincial level. So if we do not rebalance the federation, then we are going to make very slow progress at implementing the kind of cost beneficial but costly changes that we need to make. Now that is perhaps a fuller response than the member wanted, but I wanted to put the time line in the context of what is doable.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the member for that answer, and I do compliment the minister on *A Vision for Child Care and Development in Manitoba*. I fully believe that the parts of the main components in there that were addressed are something that we all know about, and it is good that it is written down. I guess my major concern is that I have seen so often when wonderfully looking papers and focus papers are put out and nothing happens. I can appreciate what the member opposite is saying about the federal government, that in actual fact this present Government came in with balanced budget, came in with the biggest transfer payments from the federal government that we have experienced in a lot of years, and I am in support of this minister's paper. I also appreciate that things do take time, but I guess my bigger concern is: Are we really going to really see any results within the next year from this paper, *A Vision For Child Care and Development in Manitoba*? The second part of that question is: Does this minister intend to increase the subsidies for child care?

Mr. Sale: Well, first of all, I obviously cannot comment on next year's Budget, which is where any subsidy changes would be made. Secondly, I am not going to prejudge at this point what the response of the rate review committee and the broader community consultations will be and, therefore, the shape of what a Cabinet paper might be. So I cannot comment on that.

* (10:20)

What I can comment on is, that I think you have to say, what you see is what you get. We have made an unprecedented investment in child day care in the last two years. We have increased the expenditures by 27 percent in two years. Now, that is not an insignificant commitment in a situation where Government is very hard pressed to meet its commitments in terms of its health system, its highways, the desperate situation facing our northern communities, particularly First Nations communities. I am not going to go on and list the pressures, but in any situation where there are the pressures, which I am sure the member would acknowledge—and yet a government has put 27 percent into one area. I think you have got to say that is significant.

I think you also have to recognize that we significantly expanded the number of spaces in the last couple of years. I cannot give the member off the top of my head the exact number. I know it is in here somewhere, but it would be over 2000 spaces in total. We have now got a situation where our training programs are full, and we are beginning to graduate people who actually work in the system and stay.

I am happy to tell the member that we are getting anecdotal reports from day-care centres of people coming back into the profession because they now feel they can afford to work in it. We have 23 000 licensed child care spaces, currently. That is a significant increase. I think that if the member goes to kind of check the health of our system, she will find that there is a sense of hopefulness and progress out there which is extremely optimistic, considering the struggles they have had over the last number of years to even maintain the existing system. So when we add infant spaces, which we are doing this year all over Manitoba, the highest-need areas, where we are seeing people actually planning to build spaces because they know that there are resources now to do it, I think the sense of hope and the sense of real change is there for all to see.

So I would invite the member to be optimistic and, at the same time, to continue her

advocacy on behalf of the system, which I welcome.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for his answer. Clearly, as I said earlier, I fully support the minister's vision paper and commend the minister for that. What I am trying to ask right now is, it is one thing to produce a paper; it is another thing to implement change. I appreciate what the minister has said about some changes that are needed.

Could the minister please answer this question? Many families have not been able to access subsidy due to the inappropriate eligibility levels. These eligibility levels need to be reviewed and changed. Does the minister have any plans to do that to support the families that are not able to access subsidy?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I think I have already indicated to the member that I cannot comment on next year's Budget, and to comment on whether my plans include increasing subsidies would obviously be to comment on next year's Budget, so I cannot do that.

What I can tell her is that there is no waiting list for subsidies, at present, within the existing system. I have acknowledged that over many, many, many years, the previous government did not increase the eligibility in terms of its subsidy program. We have got the same levels that were in place for many years prior to our forming government. I think that anyone would acknowledge that first of all, the initial levels were low; secondly, the effective inflation on those levels has made them lower yet.

I would also say to the member, that one of the things that we are pressing our community to understand, is that the affordability of day care is not just a function of provincial policy, it is also a function of federal policy, and for at least some of our lower-income families, the combined effect of the provincial subsidy and federal income tax provisions makes day care much more affordable than people would initially think.

I will give her two examples so that she would understand what I am talking about. I will give her an example of a single parent who has

got a total income of \$18,300, including all forms of her income, including the child benefits. Her actual fees per year for a child who is in full-time day care are \$754 after the effect of the subsidy. That is only \$3.14 a day. That includes the effect of the federal income tax system, her deduction, as well as the provincial subsidy.

Now, she might argue that for a family with an income of \$18,000 that \$3 a day is still too much, but that represents a subsidy of over \$12.50 a day in the total cost, almost \$13 a day. In fact, it is \$13 a day in subsidy. So we are looking at a situation of 85 percent subsidy already at that level.

If I go to a single parent who is making a somewhat more significant income of around \$27,000 or \$28,000, that person with children in care is looking at an average daily cost after the effect of the federal income tax system of just over \$5 a day. So when we are comparing ourselves to Québec or B.C. we need to recognize that we are already at the \$5 a day or less level for people of the working poor, lower middle-income levels. The place where child care is very expensive is as soon as our subsidy ends. It becomes extremely expensive for parents.

So some of the hardest costs to bear are for people who have incomes of \$30,000 to \$50,000, not people under \$30,000, where we actually do quite well at the present time. So there are some real questions, but I would invite all members to think about the big picture and not just about the provincial side of the system.

Mrs. Smith: I appreciate the clarification of the complexity of the subsidies for parents. However, I do not feel my question has been answered, with all due respect. Families are not able to access subsidy due to inappropriate eligibility levels. My question to the minister: Is this going to be reviewed and changed?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I could answer, yes, it is under review, but I cannot answer the second part, and that is the third time I have told the member that. Is it going to be changed? That is the issue before the regulatory review committee. It was the issue before parents and

others in Manitoba through the vision paper. It will be the issue before us as we respond to the recommendations which will come to us in the middle of the fall. But I cannot answer her question without, in effect, answering a budget question, and I am not going to do that. I am sure she understands that.

Mrs. Smith: Could the minister tell this side of the House: Is this going to be a top priority for this Government in the next budget, because when you read—the minister laughs, but unfortunately it is not a laughing matter. This paper that was put out has been received with great anticipation and great expectation because of this vision paper for child care and development in Manitoba put out by the members opposite and by the NDP government. The child care workers and the parents across Manitoba fully expect this Government to address the situation. I know right now there are many talks about what is going to be in next year's Budget. What are the priorities? My question to the minister: Have you been pushing for this to be a priority from your side of the House?

* (10:30)

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I think it would be obvious to most disinterested observers that children are an extremely high priority of this Government. There are only three committees of our Cabinet—the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, Treasury Board and the Economic Development Committee of Cabinet. I think any time a provincial government has only three standing committees of its Cabinet and one of them is the health of its children, then it is pretty clear that children and families are a high priority. If you read our Budget for last year. I think you will see that that is the case.

It would be impossible to read the Budget and not be impressed by a 27% increase in child day care. It would be impossible to read the Budget and not be impressed by the fact that 29 million new dollars have been spent on children, primarily on preventive or early childhood development services ranging from pre- and post-natal, FAS/FAE, Baby First, Healthy Start, Early Start, day care and other initiatives, which in total add up to \$29 million over 2 years, only

\$11 million of which came from the federal government, and \$18 million of which came from own-source resources. So these are enormous statements of priority.

As far as my colleagues and my priorities are concerned, they are obvious. Children and families are our priority. That is why we invested over \$50 million in the operation of our public school system as juxtaposed to a previous government's level of investment. That is why we have invested over \$120 million in the capital for that system, again, as compared to the previous government's record.

So I would invite the member simply to do what it says in a couple of places in a book she is familiar with. What you see is what you get, and you are going to get what you have already seen, which is a priority on children and families, because we know, and I believe she knows, that investing in the earliest years is by far the best investment, both from a human and from a family and from an economic perspective.

Mrs. Smith: With all due respect, what we see is what we get, definitely, but I must say, I have seen a wonderful paper and vision for day care. I guess what we are going to get from that paper is what I am most interested in, and this is why I am questioning the minister in this House today. Members on this side of the House and myself—I am saying it is a wonderful paper. I am saying that I agree with the paper. Paper is only as good as it is written on, and what I am trying to zero in on, without offending members opposite, is just to ask: What are the plans for making this happen?

Now, we have talked about early childhood, and a more integrated system of early identification and intervention for children in early childhood programs is also needed. Will the minister comment on this? Is there anything—more specifically, I know he was engaged in a discussion with someone else, and I appreciate that because sometimes we get interrupted. But my question is: Is the minister going to ensure that a more integrated system of early identification and intervention for children in early childhood programs will be put into the planning process, and will we see some actual action from this promise?

Mr. Sale: The area of children with special needs is one of the two most rapidly growing areas of provincial expenditure. I think the member might be interested to know that we now have 24 regional teams, early childhood teams, across the province, 12 in Winnipeg and 12 in other parts of Manitoba, all parts of Manitoba, in fact. In some of the areas that are larger, these teams are broken into subgroups. For example, in Burntwood there are four subgroups, subregional teams, because of the challenges of geography in the North. Those teams are made up of public health, early childhood development, parents, early childhood educators, teachers, community recreation workers, medical profession and a variety of others who, in different areas, are part of these teams. They range in size from 10 or 12 to 20 or 30 in terms of the members.

Now, with the introduction, in fact on the 3rd of July, of the Healthy Baby program, we are now in a position to increasingly be able to contact women in the lower half to third of our income population in Manitoba who we hope will take part in this program. As they do, we will be able, because they will apply to us, to contact them directly and to invite them into the kinds of friendship-building, skill-building, knowledge-building programs which I think the member knows are very well received by all women.

For the tiny minority who do not respond, we will be in a position to reach out to them, because in fact the monetary benefit of Healthy Baby is significantly smaller than the additional services which we are providing around that program: nutrition education, parent or parent-to-be groups where people can learn about their pregnancy, learn about the importance of vitamin and mineral intake during pregnancy, can receive social support, et cetera.

Our public health system, frankly, I think are the heroes of our early childhood development system. Public health nurses are my personal heroes in terms of the kind of work they do. I am impressed by communities like Brandon, Flin Flon, other areas outside of Winnipeg who have run fairs inviting children and their mothers in for early diagnosis and early intervention. I think we are increasingly seeing

the kind of integration the member is asking about. One of the really helpful things about the last couple of years has been the way in which turf wars have diminished and people recognize the contributions that each profession has and each parent has to making the community healthier.

I think one of the things I would like to share with the member, I would like to table, that she will hopefully find helpful—perhaps I could give these to the page and she will give one to the member immediately—is the components of Manitoba's early childhood continuum. I do not know whether the member has seen this document before or not but if she has not I hope she will find it useful. She will see that we portray this as a puzzle. We portray it as a puzzle because when you are putting a puzzle together—if the member enjoys doing that, I hope she does; I do—you find that you kind of have to search around to find the pattern that works for a given puzzle. We recognize that in each area of our province that pattern is different. So the puzzle pieces may go together somewhat differently in, let us say, Marquette than they do in St. Vital, but the pieces will probably be similar; they will just have different patterns to them.

We are trying to recognize that communities know best how to put the puzzle together in their area but that the goal of the healthiest possible outcome, the earliest possible diagnosis and intervention is one that we strongly support. So I welcome the member's concern in that area, and I think we are making real progress. Hopefully, very soon we will be in a position to announce some quite significant progress province-wide in this area.

Mrs. Smith: Thank you for that answer. Indeed, as I said, I very much support the vision paper. I know initially when members opposite came into government I have to commend the member opposite for beginning the regulatory review committee and then releasing the vision paper. It is very exciting. It is very good to see.

I guess both of us understand very clearly that it is one thing to put out a very nice looking paper, a very thoughtful paper, but we have to be able to deliver the systems. The expectation is

that these systems will be put in place and funded. Day-care and child-care centres and family home centres are crucial. Day-care workers, the training, the early childhood training that is needed for day-care workers, is something that definitely is needed. The salary scale, I am not sure it is a living wage. I think that the administration of the province needs to be looking at that as well.

* (10:40)

So today, as we are talking about this, I wanted to get a better view of what was really going to happen over and above the ideas and the paperwork. I understand that the Budget does not come out until next fall and I understand it is very, very difficult to predict the Budget, but what I am trying to get is a commitment from the minister to state that it is going to have some ramifications in the Budget that we will see, the six components, as outlined in the vision paper, addressed.

In the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the minister was quoted as saying that the minister is telling Manitobans not to expect much in the way of better child care unless Ottawa ponies up. Only then will the Province be able to make incremental changes in line with our financial capacity. I have to point out that this minister came into a government that had a balanced budget, that had the biggest transfer payments in a long time from Ottawa, and, to be quite honest, the money is there. It is what is done with it.

When I saw the vision paper and when I saw the thrust in child care, I was very excited because as an educator I have taught early childhood before I went into the higher grades and studied child development and studied brain development, all the things that you talk about.

Having said that, I really think that early childhood and the day-care components so moms and dads can feel that their children are not only being taken care of but that their capacity to learn and understand is being addressed as well, that that is of paramount importance. Certainly, there has been a lot of noise from members opposite saying that this is a priority. I would agree. It has to be a priority. In the year 2001, child care has to be a critical factor in any government's platform.

So the questions are coming forward, when this is going to happen and when is it going to be implemented. It is no political statement. I am excited about the paper, but I want to see something happen. I want to see the day-care workers being treated as professionals. I want to see children and parents being able to go into a child day-care centre that does have the early intervention.

I can understand it takes time. I understand what the minister is saying, because it is a complex problem. But it is my belief that you are in support of this, very clearly. I guess you know from this morning right away that I am in support as well, but there is more that has to be done. The six components have to be implemented.

Having said that now, I will go on to two more quick questions. We will go on now to the Manitoba Provincial Strategy on Disability. Again, this strategy is an excellent one as well. It is very interesting how it is put together because, again, it is well put together. All the components are in it that are needed. I am very pleased with the paper. I have a concern about the lack of accountability for service providers. Is the minister going to extend this paper and put something more in terms of the accountability factor for service providers, because as you know, service providers—

I will give you an example of one child who was hired at a store, and there were comments made about the child's work skills. This child was disabled but was functioning quite well, however, the service provider at this particular place of business did not have the time or the initiative to be very careful about how they assessed the work of this disabled student, this disabled young person, I should say, because they were getting older in age.

In this paper, albeit it is a wonderful paper, and I really liked what was said in the paper. I do have a concern about the silence on the accountability factor for service providers. Could the minister comment on that?

Mr. Sale: I did attempt to get recognized in regard to the member's previous statements in concluding the day care question. I just want to

make a couple of comments there that conclude that section, and I will try and respond to this question that she has asked now.

I just invite the member to consider that a 27% increase over two years primarily directed at wages of day-care workers is not only 27 percent more than was provided by the previous government over its entire time, but it actually reverses some cuts that were made to that system. So when she says it is not yet a living wage, I would say it is not yet an adequate wage representing the skills of people, but it is a darn sight better than was available under the previous government.

I will wait until the member is finished chatting with the critic. *[interjection]* You can chat and listen at the same time. I am impressed.

I think the second thing that I want to say to the member is, in effect, a challenge. If her party has and shares her views, then I would hope they would make that plain and public. If they indeed support the vision paper and they believe in the six priorities that were put forward by the RAG review committee and they want to see the Province investing in day care and in quality early childhood development, then I expect to see them come forward with that as a policy. Then we will see a non-partisan, finally, approach to the development of early childhood education in this province which will be, I believe, as the member has said, welcomed by parents, by the day-care system, by the early childhood education community and ultimately by all the children who benefit from the wise use of scarce public resources.

So I would say to her that if she indeed is representing the policy of her party in her statements, first of all this is different from the previous policy of that party, and secondly, it is very welcome. I would ask her and ask the critic to come forward with the party's position in regard to the vision paper, to say publicly that they endorse a universal, accessible, affordable high quality day-care system in this province and that they will advocate for that both in opposition, and if someday in 20 years they are returned to government, that they will make that a high priority. Now that may be early. *[interjection]*

No, you do not get to be recognized until I have finished. I have the floor, so he will

recognize you when I am finished. Secondly, in response to the question that was raised in regard to accountability, I believe I am aware of the situation the member is referring to. I think it was a person who was employed actually without any wage at an IGA store in the south end of the city in regard to that teenager.

Well, let me respond that I think the situation she was talking about may well have been that the employer was not providing to the employee the appropriate supports. I believe in the case I was thinking of we have resolved that. In fact I wrote to the private sector organization to commend them for their change in views.

* (10:50)

In terms of accountability, let me again tell the member, who was not part of the previous government, so she would not know this, that the previous government did not have any mechanisms for even collecting the annual expenditures of the organizations that are funded to provide community living or community day programs.

So when we were faced with the questions of wages in the \$6- to \$7- or low \$8-an-hour area, we were not oblivious to the fact this was causing people to leave that system almost as fast as they were leaving our day-care system. We realized we had to do something to stabilize the community agencies. When we started to try and do that, we found we did not have the information to do that on, because there was no system in place to collect accurate information about the expenditures of all of those programs.

When we came forward last fall with our staffing stabilization initiative, we had first to gather information that would allow us to even answer the questions that are very important. When we decided that we had to act on staffing stabilization and invest money in that area to try and make sure that people could afford to work for these very challenging organizations who deal with very challenging behaviours on the part of the adults whom they serve and the students whom they serve, we found that we did not have the information. So we gathered that over the last year.

At the same time, our Treasury Board and Cabinet committee have been very clear that as

we increase wages to the point where this is not a minimum wage job, we need to have standards of the same nature, not necessarily, obviously, of the same content but of the same nature as our early childhood education system has so that there is more accountability for the quality of service. But frankly when you are paying people \$6.50 an hour, it is very hard to say to those people: We want you to be highly professional, highly trained people. We want you to go to Red River for two years and become a developmental day services worker and invest that amount of time and energy and money, but we will only pay you \$6.50 an hour. I think the member would understand that that is not on. It does not work, because people cannot afford to take two years of post-secondary training to make \$6.50 an hour.

So she is quite right that we need to move in the area of standards and accountability, but we need to do that at the same time that we raise the wages so that we keep the people in the system. Then we can hold them accountable for the standards of service that they provide.

Mrs. Smith: I am going to just make comment and give it over to my colleague from Ste. Rose. This morning I find it regrettable that the minister was angry and upset at my questions, because I said quite clearly that I supported the paper, and the two documents have some things that need to be discussed. This morning I never really got any concrete answers. The message sounds good, but it is regrettable that the minister is that upset. I would remind the minister that you are in government. You have the ability to do this, and we are supporting you from this side of the House. We have said nothing against your two papers, but the implementation and the action plan and the time line are the biggest parts of any plan.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Thank you. A specific question for the minister, and his colleague from Thompson is within shouting distance, so I believe this is a fair question. Earlier in the year, Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre had withdrawn from providing services to the Women and Infant Nutrition program, and now the Healthy Child program. I am wondering was the minister able to come to a further understanding and reinstate them within the

system for the delivery of the program, or are they still outside of the program?

Mr. Sale: The short answer is that, for a number of the former WIN sites, which are now Healthy Baby sites, some of them, most of them, we have extended part-year funding because of concerns about the levels of service that were provided and the numbers of people who were using the service. So our work with Ma-Mow-We-Tak has been ongoing. They are continuing to receive short-term, I think it is six-month funding at this point. We very, very much hope that they will continue to be a long-term service provider because we intend our sites to have multi-year funding to be stable and permanent long-term resources for women and families in the community. So we are continuing to work with Ma-Mow-We-Tak towards this end.

Mr. Cummings: Well, a number of women that they were able to be in touch with—I believe they had a pretty successful program when they see the numbers: some 293 eligible participants along with 71 non-eligible participants that they had contact with. They are dealing, I believe, with some significant areas of our population that do need some sensitivity in the delivery of the program. So am I to understand from the minister that they in fact are still continuing to work on behalf of the women in their community on the short-term contracts? Because the letter I received, which was, I grant, three months ago, was indicating that they were not going to sign a contract because they felt they were in some difficulty to continue on short-term funding, and if the minister is familiar with it, all I am interested in: Are they continuing to deliver the service?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I will take that question as notice and get back to the member before the end of today, but my understanding is that they are continuing to receive short-term funding and that our intention is to regularize that into long-term service contracts by the fall of this year, is my understanding. The letter he has, I think he says, is three months old. I signed a letter to them two days ago, indicating our desire to continue towards a stable long-term funding pattern, and I would be glad to share that letter with him later today, but I will ascertain the actual facts of their current level of

funding and current numbers and get back to him before the close of the day.

Mr. Cummings: As I mentioned before, I think in many respects the manner in which this department provides services to people is a complete cross-sector representation of how services can be delivered. I think the fact that there are so many third-party deliverers is both a good thing and organizationally can be problematic obviously, when I look at the number of funding and partial funding. But in this area, specifically, my colleague had raised questions earlier about whether or not the design of the acceptable model, if you will, or the parameters for third-party delivery of the Health Baby program in rural communities seemed not to be compatible, although it was probably designed to be compatible with larger urban centres. I think I am describing it correctly. I see a puzzled look on the minister's face, but I want assurance from him that, in fact, he now believes the parameters for delivery of the program are such that it can be delivered by types of organizations that we would normally find available in our small rural towns, as opposed to the types of organizations which are somewhat different, same general objectives but are often structured differently in a city setting or in a large urban centre. There were some concerns brought to my attention in this respect in the early days of his announcement around Healthy Baby.

I wonder if he can assure me that, to the best of his knowledge, the program is structured with appropriate guidelines that will make that program deliverable in the rural areas.

* (11:00)

Mr. Sale: I think the member asks a very important question, and my answer is that partly it is a work in progress because we are working with the 24 early childhood teams that there are across the province. For example, the area of Hamiota I met with last week, travelled out to Hamiota and had a wonderful time with their local team from District 1 of the Marquette health district that Hamiota is part of. Our direction from the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, the ministerial direction to staff is that we need to be very flexible in terms of the

organizational shape that services assume in different parts of our province. My sense is that that is what we are doing.

We are flexible enough that the Ma-Mow-We-Tak, the Swan River Friendship Centre, the Brandon Friendship Centre and other organizations are able to be the locus for Healthy Baby programs. Now, I do not expect that is going to be trouble-free over the next 12 months as we stabilize this system, but I would invite the member to bring to my attention any areas in which he feels we are not being sufficiently adaptable or flexible in regard to the rural parts of our province, because while I grew up in a rural area, I do not live in one now, and he does.

So, if his sense is that we are missing any boats here, I hope that he will bring this to our attention in any way he chooses, but hopefully quickly so that we can take appropriate steps to reflect fully that puzzle piece that I shared with him, because we do recognize it is going to be different in each area. If it is not assuming a different shape, then there is something wrong because our communities are not all the same.

Mr. Cummings: It has come to my attention that the minister was in France, I believe, not long after coming into office, to take a look at some of the programs that are in place there. I wonder if he could share with us the genesis of what—I know there are a lot of people looking at France right now in health care. Was he looking at their day care structure as well?

Mr. Sale: It was a very useful trip. Canada, New Brunswick and Manitoba were the three sort of levels of government or three governments represented, and the genesis for the trip was our desire to launch the Healthy Baby program and to take a look at best practices around the world. We reviewed a lot of literature.

Interestingly, France, in the post-war era, had the worst neonatal morbidity-mortality rate, in post-war Europe, starvation, just all kinds of things the member would probably readily understand. They took steps starting in 1947 to try to address this. It has taken time but they now have the best neonatal morbidity-mortality rates in the world. We wanted to find out why, because we face many not dissimilar situations,

particularly with our highest risk populations, where nutrition and deprivation are unfortunately the daily reality facing many people.

So we wanted to look at how they had achieved that. You know, it is interesting, you often learn as much finding things that you do not think fit as things that you do. For example, in France, to be the operator of a day-care centre you have to be a pediatric nurse, puéricultrice. That is not the model I think we would want to follow here. We do not see children at the preschool level as a medical issue. We see it as a more holistic early childhood, having social, physical, mental, health, many dimensions. The French model is very, very medical in its orientation.

The second thing that is interesting about the French model, which we discovered when we sort of dug into it as opposed to just reading about it, which is what had attracted us to it, was that the model is not as much an early childhood development model as it is a cultural model. France, as the member probably knows, is very acutely conscious of being the bearer of French culture. So a great deal of what is done in early childhood education in France is to promote acculturation, and particularly acculturation of minorities, their immigrant workers, their migrant workers, their guest workers. They have a very large and growing problem among youth and families who have come from North Africa in particular.

We found that their model of financial support was very effective at getting women in contact with their health system at a very early stage. That part of their system we found useful. The administrative mechanisms they use, we found that very useful, but the early childhood component we found to be interesting and obviously appropriate for them but not one that we would want to import here.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Cummings: So the minister is saying that there were elements of what he saw there that were integrated into his Healthy Baby program. I also find it interesting that in many respects the

framework for what is now Healthy Baby was already in place here. So by way of being self-congratulatory, I take it that I can assume that what he had was a solid foundation to build on.

Mr. Sale: I just recall that during our Estimates debate itself, I took some care to commend the previous government in regard to the early childhood initiatives that it had begun, and the fact of offering prenatal pregnancy diet allowances through the welfare system I think was a commendable element. The difficulty is that there are many, many, many poor families who are essentially earning or receiving very similar to welfare levels of income working in our society who were not benefiting from that program. We believe that it needed to be made much more accessible to lower income families, which is why we did what we did.

We also did not share the view that compulsion was required to get women to take part in programs. The experience is that women avail themselves of programs at a very, very high level of enrolment without compulsion. It is our belief that it is better to know who the women who are not coming are by virtue of the fact that they have applied for a program and to be in a position to contact them and to reach out to them. Rather than saying if you do not come you will not get any resources, we think it is better to say: We would like to help you with the costs of pregnancy. If we do not see them at any programs, we have means now to contact them and to find out what it is that could be done that would help them to make use of these programs, because we know making use of the program is going to help their baby. We also know that compelling people usually just means they do not either get the allowance or take part in the program, so we think that those are important changes.

* (11:10)

That said the fact that the previous government started this program, I think, is a good thing. Indeed, we have folded the program elements of the WIN sites into the new program. In terms of giving the information a bit more information about the actual WIN sites, we had 25 agencies confirmed for one-year funding in April 2001; 21 were renewed for one year; and

four programs across the province were provided with conditional funding, with expectations that certain financial and program standards would be met. Ma-Mow-We-Tak was one of those. We are continuing to work with them.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

A couple of sites have said that we do not think this is something we are doing effectively at this point, and they voluntarily said, that even though they were offered funding, that, no, they do not want to do that anymore. We respect that, and we expect that new sites will be opened.

Thompson and its region had three WIN sites, which are now Healthy Baby programs. Baby's Best Start of the YWCA has been receiving, and continues to receive \$25,000, and Ma-Mow-We-Tak had been receiving \$57,000, and was offered a continuation of that level of funding while we worked through some questions that had to do with attendance and other problems. I also agree with the member. They work with a challenging group and we need to be supportive of them in doing that, but we also need program accountability. It is a delicate balance between those two challenges.

Mr. Cummings: I thank the minister for that answer. I think he took a little umbrage at some of the questions from my colleagues, but I think the message we want to leave with him is that we were a little bit dismayed, I think is probably the right word, not any other description, that perhaps there is an expectation being raised in a number of the communities that he deals with, about the delivery of day care programs and the delivery of a number of programs for the disabled that, in fact, will be extremely expensive.

The minister acknowledges that. I think that in itself says a lot about whether or not he understands the reality of his portfolio, because the demand will undoubtedly always outstrip the ability to deliver, but as Opposition, I think it is our responsibility to point out, just a minute folks.

The minister put some flesh on the bones, frankly, when he said that to deliver a program of the standard that the day care community, for example, believes would be appropriate in this

country, might be \$11 billion dollars, with a "B." I mean, we know that that is likely not in the foreseeable future possible, unless the economy of this country continues to generate huge surpluses for the federal government, but we are also carrying, as almost everybody knows, but perhaps the generation just entering the taxpaying and child-rearing stages of their lives. Perhaps they do not remember the Trudeau years, when spending outstripped a year-over-year increase in government revenues at a rate of 18 percent and they outstripped that by another 10 percent to create a deficit at very buoyant time in our history, and we are still paying.

I look at the delivery of services in the day care community, and there is one issue that, surprisingly, the minister and I probably see in the same way, but would describe it differently. That is that the working poor are the ones in this society who generally have been poorly treated. Much as the minister might not be too generous in this respect, I would say that the administration over the last 10 years was trying to make life a little easier for the working poor. Sometimes at some very significant political expense in other areas. This was one area where that probably manifests itself, but we do not need to get into that debate, I suppose, a whole lot further.

But I do think it is worth flagging for those who might sometimes read Hansard, once they get past the irony of two men, the farmer and a preacher, sitting here discussing child welfare and the future of the prenatal condition of expectant moms, the fact is that we do have to have a social underpinning in this society that works for everybody, not just either the working poor or for the totally disadvantaged. But it does come at some limitations, or our ability to draw money out of other areas of government.

I am going to ask the minister a philosophical question related to delivery of services to the disabled, and I think it has broader ramifications for the healthcare service, to be blunt about it, because I believe that—*[interjection]* Well, he says that we talk, and we did talk about the mandatory participation of mothers in the WIN program in order to achieve the benefits that were within that program. I link that from a philosophical perspective to the same

situation with those who are disabled and should have the right, in my mind, and some frustration on my part from our own administration that we were not able to go further, in the self-determination of services by the disabled.

It is my understanding that the pilot, if you want to call them that, or the absolute minimal amount of movement that we were able to make in that area, is now not in place. The minister has a puzzled look on his face, and if I have misunderstood that the self-determination for care is still proceeding at the same level or growing, then I will be glad to hear that. But that in itself, I think, is a very important aspect of creating independence. Frankly, I do not mind putting on the record that I think that is also true in some levels of health care in the home care field. Of course, that opens up a whole series of questions about unionization, training, qualifications, accountability.

But consider for a moment the relationship between delivery of services for those who are disabled, and delivery of services for those who need long-term home care in terms of their independence, in terms of their self-worth, in terms, and frankly in many respects, of the convenience that they can achieve out of self-management of the services that they are receiving. In remote communities, sometimes it is your nephew or your niece or your sister or your sister-in-law who might be the one. Or your daughter-in-law who might be the one most available to provide the service.

Now take that back to the area that this minister is responsible for: Can he tell me, has he maintained the levels of numbers of people who are on self-determination for any services that they need? If he has, I would also encourage him to expand that.

Mr. Sale: I thank the member for the question. Briefly, my understanding, and I am going to get numbers for the member as quickly as I can, is that there has been no change in the model—self-managed care model. It is called self-managed care. What happened through the pilot stage, and then afterwards, is that I think there was an optimism in the community that this model would be appropriate for a wider range of people than it has turned out to be, because when you

are responsible for managing your own care—hiring, training, supervising and accounting for the dollars involved—that is not a trivial job.

I think there was an optimism that more people would be able to use that model than have turned out to be the case for a variety of reasons. It is hard to find trained people who will stay with someone for a long period of time and be as flexible as people need who work. For example, a person like David Martin, who has always worked full time but requires a fairly high level of attendant support and manages his own care, and has since the outset of that program. But it is a real challenge to do that. So I will get the member numbers, but I can tell him from a policy point of view, the option of self-managed care is there for anyone who can use it. There is no cap on that, but the challenge of actually making it work is more significant for those who are doing that. I will get the member some numbers.

* (11:20)

In terms of expanding that approach, we are in the process of looking at expanding that approach to include vocational rehab so that a person would be responsible for managing their own voc rehab resources instead of having that micromanaged by staff in all cases. We think that will be a very helpful expansion of the right to manage your own life, but in the area of voc rehab. So I will get the member some numbers but I can tell him from a policy point of view, it is an option that is open to anyone who wishes to undertake it and has the supports to do so.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the honourable Member for Ste. Rose, may I take the opportunity to welcome the youth exchange group athletic organization, people who came down from Holland.

* * *

Mr. Cummings: Well, I thank the minister for that answer. I know it is not his area of responsibility. I would expect that he could now appreciate why, when there were discussions about opportunity for people to contract their

own health-care aids or their own home-care support, there may well have been much more than just a union issue at stake. There was an independence, a convenience issue, an opportunity for people to have their own sense of self-worth and self-management and be able to organize their lives in a way that they felt was appropriate as opposed to organizing it around a schedule that might have been developed for other purposes. So there is an element of personal independence and responsibility that is very important and flies in the area for which he is responsible.

I will leave my questions at this point. Obviously, there are a number of areas in which there is some continuity as to how we approach these issues. I am surprised and a little bit disappointed that the minister says he has found that self-administered programs may not be able to be as broadly applied as we had originally thought or hoped. I do think that is a real concrete way of demonstrating to those who need these sorts of supports that they are, indeed, functioning members of the community, that their input for those is valued whether or not they are able to provide also opportunities to work.

I am pleased to see that he may be looking at expanding opportunity for people to manage their vocational rehab, because that is also another area of significant importance for this measurement of a person's self-worth and confidence. So I will leave my questions there, because there are some questions for the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) that I believe one of my colleagues would like to ask.

An Honourable Member: All of your colleagues.

Mr. Cummings: I see he is here. Well, maybe a lot of us would like a piece of the Minister of Education. I will leave my questions there. Thank you.

Mr. Sale: Just to conclude, I thank the member for his questions. I hope that he understood, and I expect he does, that when I say that this has not been as broadly applicable as we had hoped it might be, it is not because of the program or because of regulations or rules. It is because if

you are a severely disabled person you have already faced a lot of challenges. The challenge of recruiting, training, managing and accounting for the dollars involved proved in some cases to be more than the person could manage. What has happened in some of those cases is that friends, through the company of friends or through family, have taken on some of that responsibility, and that helps, but it still has not grown as fast as I think he or I might have wanted it to.

Mrs. Smith: My question is to the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell). It is concerning the Kola School. Just to refresh your memory, there was a problem there. I believe the minister is meeting with the people from Brandon Friday in the morning. That is my information that I got on that issue, but from the Kola School there has been a problem there where the parents have wanted to put one grade in an independent school setting. Does the minister have the proposal for Kola School in front of him? Is he familiar with what I am talking about, or should I give you some background?

* (11:30)

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Thank you to the Member for Fort Garry for asking the question. I do not have the Kola issue before me, but I am familiar with the Kola School issue, at least in a peripheral sense. As the member indicates, I am going to be meeting with the parent group from Kola in the near future to have a further discussion about this particular issue and get a perspective from the parent association.

Mrs. Smith: It is my understanding that this parent group has had permission and support from Fort La Bosse School Division for transportation and curriculum. So all that is needed right now is the minister's approval to back the proposal that these parents have put forward for La Bosse School Division. Could the minister give me any ideas in terms of, is he open to looking at this proposal and willing to support it based on the fact that Fort La Bosse School Division has approved it.

Mr. Caldwell: I am meeting with the Kola parent group to further ascertain exactly what action I will take in this matter, Mr. Chair. So it is premature at this stage to have any finality on this issue.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that. I understand that the meeting with the parents is very important. I guess I am encouraging the minister to take a very serious look at it, because the parents and the school board and the community have arrived at a reasonable solution, in my view. It is hoped that you would look very favourably upon this proposal on July 6.

My next question to the Minister of Education, legislation is introduced and probably will be put through today to change the rules for teachers pensions now. It was noted in the *Winnipeg Free Press* that Jon Singleton, the Manitoba Auditor, was alarmed about the illegal process the minister took prior to this bill being introduced. It is a very important bill. It is one, Bill 18, which members on this side of the House support. I know the minister certainly supports it and I thank him for that. It has to do with the pensions for retired teachers. Now, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act, as critical as it is—it would be very inadvisable to not follow procedure, so it was noted that Mr. Singleton had no quarrel with the amendment, which was necessary to make sure the board continues to give retired teachers a cost of living increase.

However, he did raise concerns after Minister Caldwell told the board in January to go ahead with the changes, before the bill was introduced, in effect, asking them to break the current law. The board did take the minister's advice, as any board would, and I credit the board for taking the minister at his word. I wanted to ask the minister: Is the minister aware that the law has to be passed before he gives instructions for them to follow the particular document? It might put the teachers in jeopardy. We do not want that to happen. As I said, members on this side of the House and members on the opposite side of the House both agree this is a very important bill, and we support it. It will go through, and I know the minister supports it, but could I caution the minister to be very careful to follow the letter of the law in this instance?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I appreciate those comments and thank the member for them. I do note that we did have a very good committee process when we had public hearings on this bill, and I know that the Member for Fort Garry is

also very supportive of Bill 18, and I do thank her for that.

Mrs. Smith: My last question to the minister. It has been brought to my attention that the Level 2 and Level 3 funding has been changed under this Government's jurisdiction, and there are several Level 3 students who have missed out on the funding due to the fact the criteria were changed. So students who were funded at the Level 3 level last year will be missing out on the kind of supports that are so needed in the school. Could the minister please comment on this aspect of the funding formula, and take a second look at the criteria for Level 2 and Level 3, to ensure that the students that were funded in the past will continue to be funded in the future?

Mr. Caldwell: I am not entirely certain what the member is referring to in terms of changes. There were no changes of any substance this year, although if there are individual cases I would be happy to look at them if the member would provide them, and we can put them into the department to try and expedite any problems that may be occurring.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that, and what I will do, I will put the particular case in a letter to the minister, and make sure that you are fully aware of it, and perhaps we can do something to assist the child. The school has done everything they can. It is just that this particular child, because of this funding criteria change, has missed out, so perhaps if we could take a look at that, that would be great. Thank you.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that and appreciate the member's concern for children in the public school system and I know that. I think the member's question is up, so I just want to comment that I felt that we have had a very useful discussion this year on issues of substance in the public education system, and I certainly have learned a lot from the Member for Fort Garry in terms of different perspectives that exist in the public system and I appreciate the comments that she does bring to the table when we have these discussions. I know that the member taught for 22 years and brings a lot of insight from her experience in the public school system, so I just want to, as we are concluding

for this session, I want to express my appreciation to the Member for Fort Garry.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I have an issue that I would like to raise with the minister, and I would just like to read some information that I did receive so that the minister knows what I am asking about, then if he could put some comments on the record for me.

A number of letters have been written and an informational meeting was recently held regarding the inadequate educational facilities at Anola school. We would like to add our voices to the growing number of concerned parents who believe conditions must change. We understand that the Public Schools Finance Board has denied the Transcona-Springfield School Division Board's request for a new middle-years school on two separate occasions. Given these circumstances, it is imperative that the TSSD and the PSFB agree to an alternative plan. Specifically we believe a major renovation/addition should be undertaken at Anola school which will reflect the true nature of a kindergarten to Grade 8 school.

The renovation/addition would involve the addition of learning spaces properly sized for a middle-years program, including gym and library, science and computer labs, plus additional spaces for programs such as band and creative arts. Permanent classrooms should replace the deteriorating portables presently on site. Anola school also requires proper resource spaces for a middle years program, including a properly staffed sack room, revamped canteen, and meeting spaces for middle years students.

Several years ago our community was made aware of the many problems within our rural school division regarding middle years programming. We agreed to the conversion of our school to K to 8 through the addition of portables. However, we believed that this arrangement was temporary. The wonderful staff and students, our children at Anola school have endured less than adequate conditions for some time now, with no end in sight. They deserve a better teaching and learning environment rather than making do with what they have. Frankly, our patience has run out. The debate regarding what should be done has gone on far too long.

We are frustrated. It is time for action. In bold, no more words.

Years of discussion have provided no additional facilities to support more and larger students—I take it that might be a typo. We cannot wait another five years for something to be done. Our children and our community are paying the price. Please do not allow this situation to continue.

Just for the minister, I got this from Rick and Susanne Wastle, Garry and Florence Lucko, Roberta Teleglow, Gerry and Doug Raymond, Tim and Mary Kuzyk, J. Polec, Heather Meginbir and Edward Greene, Yvonne Olson, Glen and Deanna Godfredsen, William and Susan Addy, James and Dale Paci, Hans and Marianne Bucholi, Brian and Sandy Denchuk.

The parents sent me these letters. Again, the frustration out in Anola, I have raised this with the minister. They believe that nobody is actually heeding what their concerns are. I do not want to get into the school board politics. That is not what I am here for and that is also not what the minister is here for. That was my other life, school board politics.

The feeling is that they are underrepresented when it comes to decisions being made in TSSD. The school is continually deteriorating. They do not have the facility to house the students that are there. At this point they are asking for someone to do anything. Can the minister advise?

Mr. Caldwell: I thank the member for his comments. We have had a brief discussion about the Anola school situation. I guess it would have been about three weeks ago that we had a chat in the Chamber here about Anola school and the challenges facing the school right now. I will advise the member, and he can carry that forth to the parents, that the Public Schools Finance Board recently did release additional support of some \$23,344 to deal with link repairs relative to the existing portable classroom project, which should help at least in the short term. I am aware that this is a long-standing issue.

There is a considerable amount of concern in the community about how to resolve the

Anola situation. I know the community does want some new construction, and I appreciate that. I do recognize there are some issues at the school division as well. How this process proceeds is, and we have talked about this before in relation to other schools, through the individual school division to the Public Schools Finance Board, and then a decision is made in terms of the global dollars available to the province and the degree of urgency for either repairs or new construction in individual schools.

* (11:40)

I can say, as I just indicated, that there have been just recently some significant dollars released to deal with the immediate problem. The greater issue about new construction or consolidating existing infrastructure and making it better for the kids in the classroom is something that I know the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) and I will continue to labour towards.

The context provincially, and this is something we have referred to in the House before, is that we do have in the province quite a formidable challenge in terms of accommodating and addressing the infrastructures that exist systemwide which are quite extensive this year, Mr. Chair. The Government allocated some \$76 million in new dollars for public school repairs, infrastructure repairs, which is the largest announcement in the province's history. It is not a drop in the bucket, but it does not also fill the bucket yet. We do have, I think, a number of years of redressing in terms of capital infrastructure, a number of years still to go before we can begin to accommodate the existing needs in the public school system.

We will continue to working towards that. The Member for Springfield has been very good in bringing this issue to my attention, and it is a discussion that will likely continue, but I did want to advise him that some dollars had been made available, just in the last number of weeks, about redressing the linkage problems for the existing portables. I know the member and I will continue to work towards a better solution here.

Mr. Schuler: Before I go into my next question, I did forget Kim Wynnobel and Irene and Ian

Golembioski. They also sent letters. Seeing as I had listed all the others, I should actually mention them as well.

To the minister, and I know from my years on the school board, short as they were, the school sets a priority, usually a list of approximately five projects. They identify for the PSFB the main projects which they want dealt with.

Can the minister tell this House where the Anola school is listed for the TSSD? Does he know? I know there is only so much the minister—he deals with 50-some school divisions; he cannot know everybody's list. But where is the Anola school? Is it even on their priority list that goes to the PSFB?

Further to whether \$70 million or \$80 million or \$90 million is enough, again we do live in a very severe and harsh climate, in that we go from extreme cold, from minus 30 and worse to, we can have easily plus 30. Obviously, that wears on our buildings. The fact that the minister put the largest amount in that has ever been spent for rebuilding and building new facilities, it will never be enough, because you are always repairing. Boilers go, roofs go. I was part of that process. You always had to have contingency funds because you have to repair the heat if the heat goes, or that kind of stuff. So I understand that dollars are limited, but it is also about priorities and I understand that priorities are set by the school division.

Does the minister know if the Anola school addition has been placed as a priority by the division, on the priority list that goes to the PSFB?

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate the members comments, and he does make a very good point that we live in a fairly dramatic climate here. I have two hundred-year-old homes that I maintain, one in Winnipeg and one in Brandon, and it is quite a task, let me tell you. I do appreciate the comments.

The Anola school, I think, has been identified as an issue of infrastructure renewal by the Transcona-Springfield School Division. I am not certain exactly what they were requesting

of the Public Schools Finance Board. I do not have that before me. But I do know that it had been identified as something that needed infrastructure work, and part of that is reflected in the fact that last month it was provided with \$23,000 and change in terms of support. So I think it is fairly safe to say that it is on the school division's list of priority projects. I do not know where that resides in that list, and I refer the member to the school division.

Mr. Schuler: To the minister. I know what the process is, and it is a proper process, that it is the school board that sets up the priorities. How do the parents get the priority up the list? I know it is rated. You rank them first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and I was part of that in a different school division. How is it that the parents can participate in that process to convince those that make the decisions that this should be a No. 1 priority?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I guess first and foremost, the trustees are elected officials. So obviously, the election campaigns and choosing proper candidates, and candidates are going to be responsive to local needs and so forth. There is no doubt. The school divisions, as the member knows, are another level of elected representatives in the province of Manitoba that have taxation capacity and so forth.

This is an issue that is quite common. Parents, in particular, but also just normal citizens, regular everyday citizens, ask me on a regular basis about how can they best influence school division decisions, whether it is for property taxation, or in this case a school project in Anola. I always encourage them to participate actively in the political process, whether that is letting their name stand as a trustee or ensuring that they have, as voters, a relationship with their elected officials. As the member knows being an MLA, likely the most effective way of getting through to us as elected officials is to lobby directly the school trustees or MLAs, or MPs, if we were talking about the federal level of government.

So those processes of lobbying, those processes of making themselves known to their elected trustees, making their issues known to the elected trustees, are essentially the same

process that we have here as elected officials. Our constituents lobby us for issues, and we respond according to the need of the community, according to the logic of the lobby. That is the most effective way of moving these sorts of agenda items forward.

I know this does occur in a number of schools. We have dealt here with Mountbatten. I think the Member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer) is involved with the Island Lakes schools. There are active lobbies taking place in a number of school divisions right now around issues of school capacity, school closures, school infrastructure renewal. The most effective way is the tried and true way. Have an effective lobby, have compelling logic, and make your case known to the school trustees in a reasonable manner.

Mr. Schuler: So from what the minister has said, if I can just synthesize it and make sure I have it accurate. The best thing for the parents to do is to contact their trustees, sit down and meet with the trustees. I take it, meeting with the board would also be something that would be advisable.

Certainly, they have been lobbying their member of the Legislative Assembly. I do know that. I take it from the correspondence I have received they have been lobbying the Minister of Education, and it seems to me that one letter in particular dated June 14, Dear Mr. Caldwell: Thank you for your prompt response to our letter of May 23. We appreciate your obvious concern regarding the situation at Anola school. Clearly, the minister has identified it as being a problem.

So to get it as a priority, the best thing is to lobby the trustees, go through the school division. What about sending letters to the Public Schools Finance Board? That would have no impact of any kind, or is it best left right at the school board level?

* (11:50)

Mr. Caldwell: A couple of things in response. Obviously, the most effective way to make it a priority is that it, in fact, be the priority of the local school division. I am not sure what the context of infrastructure renewal in Transcona-Springfield is right now. I do not know what

specific challenges they have in terms of maintaining the existing infrastructure.

So the most compelling thing is, obviously, if it is indeed one of the top priorities of the school division based upon the condition of the other schools in the division. That is the compelling logic that determines fundamentally what needs to be addressed first in a school division in terms of infrastructure.

Having said that, I think that all things being equal, those who feel most strongly about an issue and make the case most formidably generally have a greater chance of success, all things being equal, than if there is no lobby for a particular project.

So I think the member is right. The school trustees who are charged with making those decisions to put forward to the Public Schools Finance Board is the place to place the lobbying efforts. There would not be any compelling reason or compelling advantage to lobbying the Public Schools Finance Board because the process is such that they take the best advice of the school division and then make their decisions in the global context.

That is not to say that I discourage folks from doing whatever they feel is appropriate in terms of making the case for their community or their school, but it is to say that the process is a very clean one. It has worked very well over the last number of decades, and it is one that takes it out of the political arena really in terms of infrastructure renewal and places it into the context of the school division doing an assessment of its own boundaries and the infrastructure that exists within its own boundaries and then placing those requests to the Public Schools Finance Board which takes an objective look at the whole province.

I have encouraged the community, as I do all the time, to stay active in these issues. I think the public schools and the public school system in the province of Manitoba is worthy of citizen participation. I certainly never discourage active participation of parents or communities in participating in public school system debates.

So the school division is, I think, the best place to start. I do not really have much to add to

that, other than it is good to be back in the House after being sick for a couple of days, although I still feel under the weather.

Mr. Schuler: Well, we certainly hope that the minister regains his health quickly seeing as this might end up being a very long day.

I would just like to ask the minister if he has had an opportunity to meet recently with the board of the Transcona-Springfield School Division, and is this one of the issues that he discussed with them, because clearly, the minister is being lobbied by citizens. In the end, we all represent Manitobans, and certainly the minister is the minister of all Manitobans.

In this case, I know that he has gotten letters and correspondence and that he has been lobbied. Has he had the opportunity to bring this issue up with the school board and what has their response been in regard to that?

Mr. Caldwell: I have not met with the Transcona-Springfield School Division in a number of months. So, no, I have not.

Mr. Schuler: I can only imagine that the minister has a full plate of meetings on a daily basis. Just knowing the amount of school divisions times the boards, the parent groups, the teacher groups, the new student groups that might be wanting to meet with the minister, the chambers of commerce, and on and on it goes. So I know the minister does have a lot of meetings.

Is the minister at all inclined to meet with the parents of Anola school? Again, their feeling is that they are not being heard. If the minister could schedule them in, would he at least be willing or open to a meeting with the parents?

Mr. Caldwell: I do not mind meeting with any group. I frankly do not. For all I know, I may even be scheduled for a meeting with the group. I am not sure. My schedule is pretty much set into next year at this stage, but I have no aversion to meeting with any group.

Mrs. Louise Dacquay (Seine River): I have a question to the Minister of Education regarding the demonstration project or pilot project that is

now, currently, as I understand, underway regarding the school bus strobe lights. I understand that six buses per division have been allowed to have these affixed to certain buses to see if it is going to be effective.

What is the time line for that? When will it start? In September of 2001, I assume. What is the duration of it?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I note that my colleague the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton) is in the

House. As this is primarily the purview of that department, I wonder if it would be appropriate to defer to the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 12 noon, committee rise. We are interrupting the proceedings and we will resume at 1:30 p.m.

We are interrupting the proceedings with the understanding that the Speaker will resume the Chair for Routine Proceedings.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 5, 2001

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