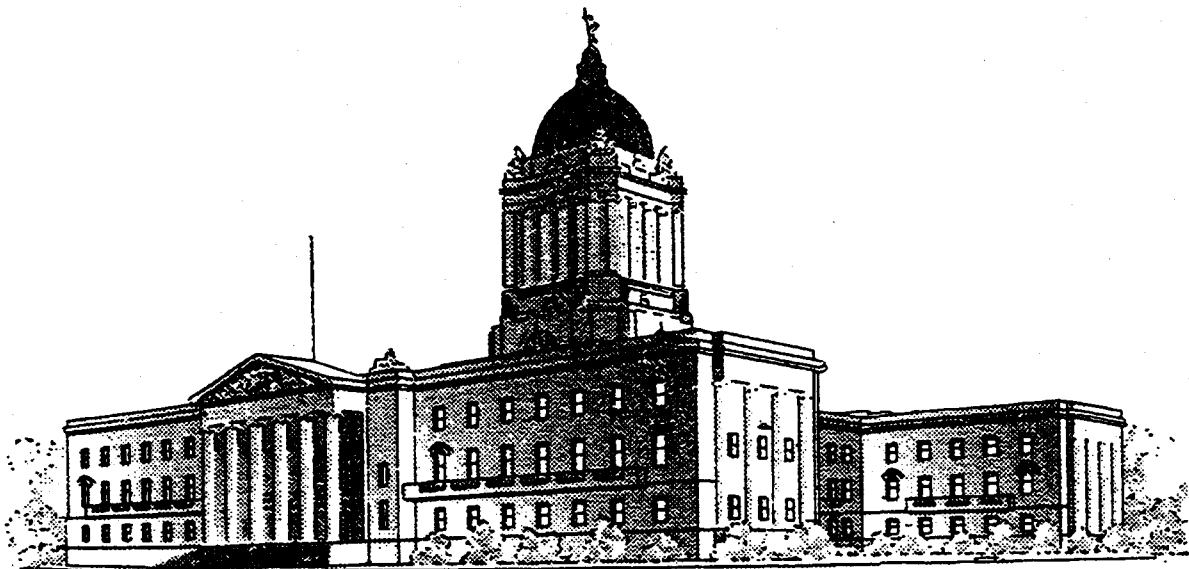




First Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



Vol. XLV No. 12B - 10 a.m., Thursday, June 8, 1995

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Members, Constituencies and Political Affiliation

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 8, 1995

The House met at 10 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
(continued)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)

CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS

Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Ben Sveinsson): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This morning this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. When the committee last sat it had been considering item 2. Consumer Affairs on page 28 of the Estimates book and on page 23 of the yellow supplement book.

Item 2.(a) Consumers' Bureau.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Mr. Chairman, I have just a few more questions in this section, and perhaps we could pass it and move on to the Corporate Affairs section and then on to the Minister's Salary, where we can ask all the questions that we wish.

I would like to know what has been happening with regard to the minister's investigation of the negative options marketing situation of a few months back.

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Chairman, we met with the cable television companies, we met with the Consumers' Association, a number of people in this area to try and determine whether the issue of negative option marketing was a problem or not.

From our investigations it would appear that it is only a problem when dealing with the question of cable television. That has really been the major problem area, because of the technological changes associated with that and the fact that the only way to not use negative option marketing would have been for the

cable companies to go out and install what they call a trap, at not insignificant cost. To do that they would have to go out and install it on every house and then, based on positive option marketing if you will, go back and take it out again. The cost of doing that would be significantly higher overall to everyone than it would be in the negative option marketing strategy.

We have to look at it on the basis of what is in the best interests of the consumer. One is based on principle, the other based on cost. If the cost is significantly higher for the consumer, we do not think the best interests of the consumer are protected, notwithstanding the fact that I know a number of people were upset and so on as a result of it. If the cost was going to be twice as high, it did not seem to us to make a whole lot of sense to pursue the issue at all, and that is where it has been at.

Mr. Maloway: Those are all the questions I have in this particular section, so perhaps we could pass it and move on to Corporate Affairs.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 2. (a) Consumers' Bureau (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$919,200.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): I just want to clarify. The Residential Tenancies Commission is entirely separate from the branch?

Mr. Ernst: Yes.

Ms. Cerilli: I have some questions with respect to the commission as well.

Mr. Ernst: Ask them.

Ms. Cerilli: Yesterday we were discussing the issue of enforcement of work repair orders. Part of that discussion, particularly for substandard housing—I hesitate using the word slum housing or slum landlords, but that is what the common term for the kind of properties that I am having drawn to my attention. It is particularly a concern when those properties are collecting rent from tenants on social allowance. I have heard that there is as much as \$50 million a year being

paid in Manitoba to substandard properties from social allowance.

We were trying to determine yesterday if there could be a better system for City of Winnipeg health inspection orders being enforced through the Residential Tenancies Branch. Part of that would include ensuring that work orders on properties where social allowance recipients live are automatically given to the Family Services department. Can the minister explain if that has occurred? I know that it is something that the former critics for Housing have been asking for. Is that now the case?

Mr. Ernst: You would have to ask the Family Services minister. I do not know.

Ms. Cerilli: Could the minister consult with his staff because it would have to come from this department. Is the information leaving this department?

Mr. Ernst: Let me clarify the question then. You want to know does a question of a work order from the City of Winnipeg go to Family Services and then does Family Services notify us? Is that the substance of your question?

Ms. Cerilli: No. I would prefer if all the work orders from the City of Winnipeg went to the Residential Tenancies Branch. At this point I am just wondering if the properties that are going through the system with Residential Tenancies are brought to the attention of the Family Services department. So let us just worry, first of all, with the properties that are being dealt with by your own department.

Mr. Ernst: If we are in a situation where rent is redirected in order to pay for repairs or things of that nature, then, yes, Family Services is consulted. We do not necessarily know that somebody is on social assistance when they phone up and say, we have a problem. If they do not tell us they are on social assistance, we do not know and, quite frankly, it is none of our business to know particularly what the circumstances of the tenant are. The tenant should be dealt with, regardless of their own circumstances, in the same manner. If there is a rent redirect situation, then

obviously, because the rent comes from Family Services, we have to know that.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, this is a situation where the social allowance recipients often do not pay their rent directly themselves. It just comes off their cheques, so they are really, in a sense, not the tenant paying the rent. It is the Family Services department that is paying the rent, which means that all the money is within the purview of the provincial government, and all the responsibility for paying the rent often to properties that are substandard is within the purview of the provincial government.

It does not make sense to many of us that this should continue. The minister could clarify perhaps the amount of money that is being paid to substandard housing from social allowance, but it is a lot of money, and I think that this is an area where the government could do more to ensure that work orders are going to be complied with when there are social allowance recipients. As I said yesterday, these are often people who feel that they cannot make a lot of noise and complain about their landlords because then they are concerned that they will not get a good reference if they feel that they have to move.

It is a serious situation. The minister yesterday was trying to make it appear that this is not a problem, and in some neighbourhoods, it may not be a problem, but in many neighbourhoods, it is a large problem. I have with me a study that was done in the William Whyte area, which identifies over 200 properties. There are over 200 properties that need repair, and there are over 471 single dwellings with serious structural deficiencies in that one neighbourhood in the inner city of Winnipeg.

I am going to ask more questions with respect to that study, but right now what I am trying to do is encourage the minister to look seriously at developing a better system with Family Services and social allowance so that we can discontinue this practice of spending millions on rent on buildings that are substandard and have outstanding work orders.

* (1010)

Mr. Ernst: Firstly, let me say that it is my understanding of the functioning of Family Services that anyone on social assistance has the option and the right to go out and determine a place of accommodation for themselves within whatever allowed amount is available for rent. So the occupant is in fact the tenant. The tenant signs an agreement with the landlord for occupancy of a premise.

It may be that the amount of money distributed to the landlord is done for convenience sake out of the Department of Family Services by direct payment, but it is the occupant or the person on social assistance who is in fact the tenant and has the contract with the landlord, not the government.

Ms. Cerilli: That may be the case, that they are the ones that are signing the lease. Correct me if I am wrong, there are a number of cases where the rent is simply paid from the department. Again, this should be something that the minister is aware of.

He may try to say that I should be asking this question in Family Services, but the government over and over again is talking about better communication and co-operation between departments. This is an area where it is extremely necessary.

I think we have the ability to ensure that more people who are on low incomes have better housing, have better accommodations, safer, more healthful accommodations, if we can use the abilities that we have to have government departments co-operate to see that work orders for repairs are going to be conducted.

Mr. Ernst: I thank the member for her advice and we will certainly be taking that into consideration in our discussions with other departments as well as the City of Winnipeg, as I indicated to her yesterday.

Ms. Cerilli: One of the other issues with respect to social allowance recipients who are tenants is that a number of them end up drawing social allowance money from their food budget to pay their rent.

I wonder if the minister can confirm that practice and if he could advise the committee if this is something that has ever been looked at, first of all, by his branch.

Mr. Ernst: No, I cannot confirm that. That would be a matter to be dealt with by the Department of Family Services. We would not know that, first of all. Secondly, our jurisdiction relates to rent regulation and rent premises regulation as opposed to what somebody pays. So Family Services would be the appropriate department.

Ms. Cerilli: I would encourage the minister when he is having the discussion with the Family Services minister and staff regarding the payment to social allowances in unsafe properties if they could also look at this issue of more than the 30 percent which is recommended by Canada Mortgage and Housing being paid for housing, also look at the fact that a lot of this money is also going for substandard accommodations, that not only are they paying that money from social allowance but it is more than the recommended 30 percent. I have talked to people who are paying as much as 50 percent for accommodations. I think this is a serious issue that warrants the minister's attention.

One of the other issues that is often a problem for tenants is ensuring that the landlord is on an ongoing basis maintaining the property. I wonder if the minister can clarify for me the percentage of the rental income for properties that is to be spent on regular maintenance and then how that is enforced with landlords in the province.

Mr. Ernst: As I indicated to the member yesterday, I do not know that it would depend on the age and condition of a premise whether it requires more or less maintenance. As I indicated, The Residential Tenancies Act, which governs all of the activities of the department, is set up as a housing court. Our job under The Residential Tenancies Act is to carry out those duties that relate principally to the issues of complaint, both as to amount of rent and condition of premises. We do not regularly inspect premises. We do not set standards. Those are done by the City of Winnipeg in the case of Winnipeg and, outside of that, I suppose, I am not sure of all of the jurisdictions but not ourselves.

The concerns that the member expressed, while very valid, could either in part be addressed by the City of Winnipeg in the case of Winnipeg in terms of health and building inspection orders or alternately, if there

are programs required to assist those kinds of things, as occurred in the past, for instance, landlord RRAP was a very good example, Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, which was in part delivered by the city and by the Department of Housing.

Those are issues that the member should raise with the Housing minister perhaps but not with this department because that is not the mandate and function of The Residential Tenancies Act.

Ms. Cerilli: That is what I am trying to clarify. As I understand it, there is a requirement for property owners to spend 10 percent of the money that they generate from their leased properties on maintenance and repair annually, and I am asking for some clarification on that and to find out how that is enforced and, if it is not by this division of the government, who is responsible for that?

Mr. Ernst: We have no requirement such as the member outlines, nor are we aware of any.

Ms. Cerilli: I made reference earlier to a study that was done by, the north end housing project is the name of the study. It was done in the William Whyte area. I am wondering, first of all, if the minister has had a chance to review this study.

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I am not in possession of a copy of that study, nor is the department. The department became aware of the study by virtue of a press release that was issued by whomever commissioned the study, I assume. They have met with the City of Winnipeg. The City of Winnipeg indicated that they had inspected all of those properties. Yet they have given us no referrals to act upon under The Residential Tenancies Act up to this point.

Ms. Cerilli: I appreciate the minister's comments that, again, as he was saying yesterday, it is up to the City of Winnipeg, if they do the inspections, to refer. Can the minister confirm if there have been any inspections done by his department in this neighbourhood? It is the William Whyte area.

Mr. Ernst: We may have. Without specific addresses, it would be hard to tell. If a tenant called the Residential Tenancies Branch and complained, then, as we indicated yesterday, we would go out and inspect. It may be that some tenants within the scope of that study have called, but we have received no referrals from the City of Winnipeg as a result of this study.

Ms. Cerilli: In an area such as this which indicates that there is a total of 249 units which they deem as unacceptable, and then they go and they list the kinds of problems that it would have—foundation, walls, roof areas—these are major structural problems that could be causing problems for the tenant with leaking roofs, water in the basement, major problems like that.

In a neighbourhood such as this, would the minister consider a project with roving inspectors? In an area that is identified as having a high concentration of substandard housing, could we look at having some projects like that, which I know have been undertaken in other areas, especially considering what the minister said yesterday, where there are only two inspectors responsible for the entire city. We could, I think, do a lot for neighbourhoods like this by having a short program, particularly when a lot of the properties have been identified in a study like this. Would that be something that the minister would be open to looking at in co-operation with the city and a neighbourhood group?

Mr. Ernst: As I explained to the member yesterday, we are a court function, and courts do not go out looking for criminals. The jurisdiction in the case of criminals lies with the police department, and the police department in this instance is the City of Winnipeg, dealing with health or building occupancy-related matters. It is their job to inspect. It is their job to enforce. We can assist them in terms of enforcement, when asked to do so, by redirecting rent to ensure that needed repairs and so on are conducted, but it is not our job to be out policing something.

We collectively, as elected members of governments, get accused regularly of duplicating efforts. That is one of the things that governments right across the country, municipal, provincial, federal, all look at, is trying to eliminate duplication of efforts.

The City of Winnipeg has an inspection staff. It has laws, and it has the jurisdiction to both inspect and enforce those laws. We can assist them from time to time if the owners of the property refuse. We can redirect the rent in order to see that the repairs are conducted, but the mandate and the jurisdiction and the inspection forces all reside at the City of Winnipeg, and I do not think any government should be out duplicating efforts.

Ms. Cerilli: I thank the minister for that answer, but one of the objectives of the division is to provide information and education programs to landlords and tenants and to ensure the provision of The Residential Tenancies Act is understood and complied with by landlords and tenants. There have been areas in the city, probably outside of the city as well, identified where that is not happening.

I would suggest in this area there probably are a lot of people who do not speak English. There are a lot of people who probably have problems in accessing government and following through on government systems. If the minister is not open to having a program with roving inspectors, perhaps then having a special program in co-operation with the city and neighbourhood groups to ensure that tenants in that area would get information so that they would understand how to utilize the court system of this branch, because the way that it is working now, entirely complaint driven, the provisions of The Residential Tenancies Act, I am not convinced that they are being understood and complied with.

Mr. Ernst: In terms of education about landlords and tenants, we do conduct seminars if you want to call them that, but public meetings for people to become aware of the situations related to The Landlord and Tenant Act. We are also looking at broadening that program with some volunteers because our staff is limited, and they do it on an as-available basis. We are looking at broadening that program with some volunteers, and hopefully, by this fall, we will be able to have further programs and we could, for instance, in an area like this go in and conduct one of those educational processes so that people do become aware of what their rights are under The Landlord and Tenant Act.

Ms. Cerilli: I appreciate the minister's openness to that suggestion. I think that it would be a program that would increase the quality of housing for a lot of neighbourhoods in the province, a lot of communities in the province, because I would hope that the objective of the branch is not just to act as a court but is to try to ensure that the standards for housing that are set out in the act are going to be attained. When we are dealing with groups that are of a lower socioeconomic status, I think we have to make extra effort to ensure that they are going to have access to information and be able to have the support they need to follow through and make the system work for them; that is often how I refer to it, so they can make the residential tenancies system work for them and their family.

Mr. Ernst: Well, as I have said, we do conduct educational meetings from time to time with staff on an as-available basis, and we are looking at expanding that horizon by utilizing volunteers as we do under the Consumer area, where we have quite a good body, 30 or 40, I think, volunteers under that program to go out and speak to groups on consumer-related issues. So it has worked well under the consumer side and we hope it will work equally as well under this side, although there are many legalities, shall we say, that have to be addressed. There is an intensive training period that would be required to make sure volunteers were well aware of these things and do not get themselves into trouble, or us or the tenant for that matter.

Ms. Cerilli: I look forward to learning more about this volunteer program. I would think that there are a lot of people from that community who have been working on these issues for a long time that probably would be interested in the volunteer program and could probably work together on developing that, and it could be a good thing for not only this neighbourhood but many others.

I just want to quickly ask a couple of questions with respect to the Residential Tenancies Commission. First of all, I want to ask the minister, what kind of records are kept of the hearings for the commission and what kind of access is there to the record of hearings?

Mr. Ernst: I can advise the member, this is not a court of record such as the Court of Queen's Bench, where

there are taped transcripts or court reporting facilities available. Commissioners would keep anecdotal notes, in dealing with an issue, would keep their own notes of the proceedings, noting information as it is presented and so on, but there is no formal transcript process associated with this as there would be in a court of record. That information is available.

What happens is that when they give a decision of course they give a decision with reasons, and that information of course is the primary focus of what they do.

* (1030)

Ms. Cerilli: First of all, do tenants have equal and full access to any of the commissioners' recordings that they would take?

Mr. Ernst: The commission is sort of the court of last resort, if you will. They go through the Residential Tenancies Branch. Then there are public hearings. There is a decision made. If they are not happy with that, there are two processes in the branch, and then they go to the commission on sort of a final appeal. That appeal is binding so that once their decision is issued, that is it, unless they have erred in a matter of law.

There are roughly between 10,000 and 12,000 cases per year heard by the Residential Tenancies Branch. The '93-94 annual report indicates that 546 of those were appealed to the commission, about 50-50 between the tenant and landlord. Of all of those, 24 filed application for leave to the Court of Appeal and, of those, the Court of Appeal considered one and dismissed it.

Ms. Cerilli: That was not my question, with all due respect.

Mr. Ernst: Well, I am not through. So based on that, while information is available from the records of the commissioners, I do not know what anybody would want to do with it, because there is no further opportunity for the tenant or the landlord, whoever is doing the appealing, to go beyond the commission unless it is on a point of law. So I gave you the

statistics in order to let you know the kind of order of magnitude. You are dealing with 10,000 or 12,000 cases of which about 5 percent get appealed to the commission. Of those, 24 made application to the Court of Appeal.

The problem is that they do not understand, in many cases, that the application of the Court of Appeal is based on a point of law, not on the substance of the matter. So 24 of the 25 were dismissed. They were not given leave to appeal. One was accepted but it was dismissed also by the Court of Appeal. It is the end of the line, so to speak, when the commissioners are dealing with the issue.

Ms. Cerilli: I think that there are often large sums of money at stake with these issues, particularly large sums of money when you are considering from the tenants' perspective, thousands of dollars often. The staff are aware of one case where I was involved and staff were kind enough to have a meeting. It was found out that there was a problem and an appeal was granted. It had to do with the original area I was asking questions about, and my concern is full and equal access on the part of tenants to any records.

One of my other concerns is the use of lawyers. I would like some comparison between the number of landlords that go into the appeal court or the court in the commission for the Residential Tenancies Branch with a lawyer and compare that with the number of tenants who visit the commission with a lawyer.

Mr. Ernst: We will have to find that out. There is no requirement, of course, for counsel before the commission, nor is there prohibition. Anyone, if they want to bring a counsel to the table, can do so, but there is no requirement and there is no prohibition.

Staff just advised me, Mr. Chairman, that almost never at the branch level do they ever see counsel, that is, in the first two determinations. So of the 10,000 or 12,000 cases that are dealt with a year, 95 percent of them would be unrepresented and dealt with and the other 5 percent that get appealed to the commission, we will have to determine how many would appear with counsel and how many would not. We do not know offhand.

Ms. Cerilli: So there is an opportunity for either party to bring a lawyer to the commission. We are talking about the commission now. I understand there are no lawyers allowed when it is dealt with at the branch level but, at the commission level, either party can bring in a lawyer? I would like to know the breakdown for either side. How many cases are utilizing lawyers?

Mr. Ernst: As I said in my earlier answer, Mr. Chairman, there is no prohibition anywhere in the system to not have a lawyer, but there also is no requirement for them to have legal counsel represent them. So if they want to bring a lawyer to the very first meeting with the Residential Tenancies Branch, that is up to them. They have to pay for it or have Legal Aid or something, but there is no prohibition.

Ms. Cerilli: I thought the minister just said before that at the branch level, there were to be no lawyers involved.

Mr. Ernst: No, what I said was, the staff had informed me that they seldom see lawyers at the branch level. It is not a prohibition, just most people do not deal with counsel at the branch level. I do not know how many deal with them at the commission level, and we are going to find that out for you.

Ms. Cerilli: Maybe just to conclude this area—it is an area where I think we could spend a lot more time, but I will pass over back to the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway)—I would just like to ask the minister if he would also, through his staff, provide me with an outline of the procedures that are to be followed, both at each level with the branch appeal process that we outlined yesterday as well as, when we go to the commission, the procedures that are supposed to be followed.

Mr. Ernst: There is some information available, and I will send my assistant upstairs to get you one from the office initially, but we are going to be producing, as I indicated yesterday, a policy manual, a guide book, if you will, in kind of plain language so people can have a better understanding in more simple language as to how to deal with these issues. That will not be available yet until the fall at the earliest, but when that is available, we will certainly provide you with a copy.

My assistant will go upstairs and get a copy of that. We have a sheet that we send out. It has to do with rent regulations primarily and the processes associated with that. We will give you that, at least for now, and then, when we have the further one available, we will provide it to you at that time.

Ms. Cerilli: There is one small thing that I meant to ask when I was asking about the recordings. I understand that there is no Hansard or documentation kept, but are the initial proceedings taped?

Mr. Ernst: No, they are not.

Ms. Cerilli: Thank you.

* (1040)

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: Item 2. Consumer Affairs (a) Consumers' Bureau (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$919,200—pass; 2.(a)(2) Other Expenditures \$206,900—pass.

2.(b) Residential Tenancies (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,466,100—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$643,800—pass.

2.(c) Automobile Injury Compensation Appeals Commission (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$553,300—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$299,200—pass.

2.(d) Grants \$91,500—pass.

Resolution 5.2 RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,180,000 for Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Consumer Affairs for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1996.

3. Corporate Affairs (a) Corporations Branch (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$934,100.

Mr. Maloway: I want to begin this section by asking the minister a few questions regarding the Manitoba Securities Commission and its role in the resolution of the Bombay Bicycle Club-Clancy's venture fiasco of last year, where the Minister of Finance failed to collect \$350,000 in taxes owing to the taxpayers of this province.

At that time we were made aware that certain investors in this project had filed complaints with the Securities Commission alleging that there was a case of nondisclosure, that they were not aware of what they were getting into. I would like to know whether the minister could just talk us through that whole affair and let us know what the final resolve was.

Mr. Ernst: First, let me introduce Mr. David Cheop. He is the Chief Legal Counsel to the Manitoba Securities Commission. Now, let me inquire.

The question that the member raises, and I think we even talked about this last year in Estimates, if I am not mistaken, the commission has an exempt status for limited offerings to what they refer to as sophisticated investors who sign off on the basis that they are sophisticated investors and need not have all of the trappings associated with ones that are broadly based.

That was the case with respect to this issue. They had exempt status and, therefore, we did not have any jurisdiction with respect to the subsequent work. It was again investigated at the time it reached public knowledge and so on and was subsequently determined again that it was exempt, and we had no jurisdiction and no cause of action.

Mr. Maloway: I thank the minister for that information. I can, however, tell you that I did get a call from one of the investors, actually several of the investors. This particular person was anything but a sophisticated investor. She was a manager or assistant manager at one of the restaurants and put her life savings of \$10,000 into this venture. Actually, it was the money that she was planning to get married with and she phoned me to let me know that she had lost it all. She felt that she was not given any information, or any real information about the state of affairs of this company. So it appears that while Mr. Talon [phonetic] may have been able to convince the Securities Commission that he was dealing with knowledgeable investors, the plan went astray somewhere along the road because he was not dealing, in this particular instance anyway, with somebody who was knowledgeable.

Mr. Ernst: As part of the exempt status arrangement, investors have to file a declaration with the Manitoba

Securities Commission agreeing that they are knowledgeable and understand what they are doing and are, in fact, "sophisticated investors."

They have filed that with the commission as a declaration.

Mr. Maloway: Can the minister then determine whether in fact the commission did follow this through and investigate all of the investors, no matter how small their investment was, and is satisfied that they did file this form?

With this woman, I am not aware that she did not file the form. She may have. I am not sure. I have no idea whether in fact your investigators did talk to this particular person. Can you assure me that you talked to every one of the investors and every one of the investors did file this form?

Mr. Ernst: We will have to do some checking of the records and so on with respect to this issue, but by and large—and it was looked at twice, investigated twice. How extensively that investigation went into individual investors or not, we are not sure at this point, but the fact of the matter is, once it is determined that it has been exempt, then it is exempt. That exemption has requirements attached to it and it was investigated and determined that it had a proper exemption and, therefore, we had no jurisdiction, but we will investigate further.

Mr. Cheop also advised me that if there was misrepresentation that took place somewhere along the line in the exemption process, that there are expanded civil remedies available to the parties to whom misrepresentation took place. Again, that is their own hook. They have to pursue that in a civil matter, but there are expanded remedies as a result of that.

Mr. Maloway: I believe the expanded civil remedies would be an attempt to recover some of the money from this venture, and it has been proven that there is no money in this venture. The money is lost. The province, the taxpayers are out \$350,000, the investors are out a tremendous amount of money. Why would the assistant of one of the restaurants who put in \$10,000, all of her life savings, why would she throw

more good money after bad trying to recover when she knows that there is no money there?

I think what the investors were looking for is some responsibility on the part of the commission, because they felt that the commission—in fact, in some of these cases, it would be better if there were no commission, because perhaps some of these investors would have their eyes a little more wide open. I think what happens is that the people raising the money use the commission as a shield and pretend that it is a stamp of approval.

They say, well, you know, we are checked through with the Securities Commission, so it puts the investor at ease, and the investor then feels that things must be all right and writes their cheque for the investment. Now the investor realizes that they are out their life savings, they recognize that they will not get their money back but, at a bare minimum, they want the government to come forward and at least charge the parties with misrepresentation or put them in jail or do something to them, because they do not like the idea that the person who took all this money is in Hilton Head, South Carolina, golfing on what they think is their money, and it probably is.

So you have to understand it from how, when the investor phones me, they are seeing it. They feel that there is a stamp of approval there by the commission. They know they are not going to get any money, so offering civil remedies is of no help to any of these investors, because they know there is no money to be got.

* (1050)

Mr. Ernst: The declaration that the investor signs, in bold print across the bottom of the form, says they are waiving—saying the commission is not dealing with this as an exempt status and that they are waiving any rights or information with respect to that.

This is not in fine print on page 29, it is right above where they sign, bold print.

Mr. Maloway: I will have to take the minister at his word. If he endeavours to get back to me with regard

to whether the investors signed these forms, on my part, I will attempt to make certain that these investors in fact did sign the forms. If they have signed the forms, then I guess I cannot quarrel with it because they cannot then argue that they really did not know what was going on, but, in fact, if money is being raised and people have not been signing these forms, then I would suggest that the commission then owes it to the public to take a stronger stand and attempt to get to the bottom of these situations.

Once again, you are dealing with the taxpayers of this province giving up \$350,000 in sales tax and the employees being out money and the investors being out of money and the government apparently sitting back and not being overly interested in the situation.

We had a situation the other day with the Finance minister sitting back and saying a year later, after reports in the newspapers indicated there was going to be an investigation done, when I ask him a year later what sort of investigation was done, clearly nothing has been done, and they have no intention of going after these people for this money.

It seems that the more money you lose, the less inclined they are to track it down. If it is \$5,000, \$10,000 you are looking for, they manage to get the investigators out there and to collect the money, but when it is \$350,000 with well-connected people involved, it seems to me that the government is very reluctant to track this thing down.

Mr. Ernst: Well, not subscribing to any of what the member said in his last dissertation, if he would provide us with the name or names of investors that have contacted him, not—I do not want him to do it here publicly. We will investigate to see if those people signed the forms as indicated.

Mr. Maloway: Just to follow up on different questions regarding the Securities Commission, I am wondering how many other investigations have been conducted by the Securities Commission.

I am aware of a couple of recent ones that were discussed in detail on the Peter Warren show. I think you are aware of those recently. I am wondering if

there is an increased amount of activity in this area of people losing money in these investment schemes.

Mr. Ernst: The level of activity for the commission has not significantly increased in recent time, although there have been some fairly high-profile cases and, of course, the more public hearings that the investor and securities dealer in Brandon—for instance, they had a major hearing out there, were there for two or three weeks I think, plus had significant public hearings before the commission and so on there. So it has been a little more higher profile activity, but I am advised by staff that generally numbers of complaints are roughly the same.

Mr. Maloway: I would like to ask some questions about the special operating agency. The corporation's branch, I believe, is being turned into a special operating agency this fall, and that will be the second special operating agency in this department out of the 10 that are planned, or is it 11 that are planned?

Mr. Ernst: I do not remember exactly the overall number but there are more than five. I think eight or 10 is the number, but with respect to the corporation's branch, they are just going into the process now of doing a feasibility study with respect to special operating agency status. It would not take place until April 1, 1996, beginning the new fiscal year. They will go through the process and create a business plan for the agency, and then it would have to be approved and a number of hoops gone through to put themselves into a position to be a special operating agency starting on April 1, 1996.

Mr. Maloway: The special operating agency then, the plan is to keep it in the same location that it is now.

Mr. Ernst: Yes.

Mr. Maloway: Presumably it is much too early to be asking the minister for a list of the board members of this special operating agency but to follow-up on the question I asked him yesterday, has he been able to get us a list of the existing boards of directors of the five special operating agencies in the government, because we are interested in a list of the appointees to these boards.

Mr. Ernst: You would have to ask the minister responsible for each of those special operating agencies. I am sure they would be provided to you by those ministers.

Mr. Maloway: I thought I had asked for that information yesterday, and I thought that the minister—

Mr. Ernst: I do not have jurisdiction over that.

Mr. Maloway: Perhaps again, I could ask the minister then, would he provide us the list of the government appointed board of directors of the Vital Statistics special operating agency, the one that he has jurisdiction over?

Mr. Ernst: With respect to the Vital Statistics agency, they say it is a relatively new agency, and we have been in the process of looking for people who have an interest or some expertise, because the Vital Statistics agency is somewhat unique and when you are dealing with automobiles like the Fleet Vehicles agencies, it is not hard to find people who know things about leasing cars and so on.

With respect to the Vital Statistics Agency, it is a unique kind of situation. You have a captive market, so to speak, and so on. We are looking at talking to the genealogical society and a few others where we have major users of the system and trying to find people from there, but the board has not formally been appointed and will likely be appointed very soon. We have not finalized the board yet.

Mr. Maloway: I thought that the special operating agency had been operating for a year now, so it has been operating without a board for a year.

*(1100)

Mr. Ernst: The boards are advisory, reporting structures through the deputy minister as the chair. So, while we have not had one, obviously they are not off running around on their own; they are being supervised reasonably closely and, of course, out to follow their business plan. But the advisory board is more on an operational basis to determine how better they can serve their consumers and things of that nature. So we

are looking for the kind of people who would be most appropriate for that kind of operation, and we expect to have that concluded very shortly.

Mr. Maloway: I would like to move on to the Public Utilities Board and ask a couple of questions about some of the issues regarding the Public Utilities Board.

Yesterday, the minister will recall, I asked some questions about the situation in Elmwood cemetery. The situation there is one in which the cemetery has got itself into the situation of tax arrears with the city, and I understand the city is on the verge of taking over the property, and my concern as regards Consumer and Corporate Affairs and the Public Utilities Board was whether or not there might be other examples of cemeteries selling prepaid funeral arrangements under which monies might disappear for operating costs over a number of years and at the end of the day the cemetery may run out of money and then be put in a situation where the taxpayers have to take it over and operate it forever and ever. I would like to know whether the minister could answer those questions that I had asked yesterday about this.

Mr. Ernst: The Elmwood Cemetery is owned by the Elmwood Cemetery Co. The gentleman, I believe lives in Toronto. I believe the name is Brian Stewart, the fellow who owns the company.

First of all, with respect to prearranged funerals, there is no consumer risk. Their money is held in trust in the bank, so there is no concern there with respect to their prearranged funerals. They sell them a plot, the deed is transferred to them at the time of sale, so there is no risk there. There may be some, I suppose, with respect to the opening and closing of the plot at time of use.

With respect to the perpetual care fund, by and large, cemetery corporations are required to establish a perpetual care fund to deal with it, and it may or may not be adequate. They are also required to use ongoing operations to fund their operations at the cemetery.

So it is my understanding that while Elmwood Cemetery Co. is in tax arrears with the City of Winnipeg, they are not bankrupt or have not declared bankruptcy. It might be a better terminology, but as a

result they are still operating to one level or another. They may not be satisfactory to everyone maintaining the cemetery, so that the ability of the Public Utilities Board to act is really in cases of bankruptcy, where they formally go bankrupt.

Notwithstanding that, because of the interests of both, I guess, of the government and the City of Winnipeg for interred persons and families thereof in Elmwood Cemetery, we conducted a preliminary investigation last fall as to potential for bank failure, which is the biggest concern. I mean, if the grass grows a little long is one thing, bank failure is another. Riverbank failure as opposed to putting your money in the bank. Riverbank failure was a concern, and actually in conjunction with the City of Winnipeg we have completed, and I have not yet received the report, a structural analysis of the riverbank by a soils engineer to determine what the problem is and what to do about it.

We cost-shared that with the City of Winnipeg, 50-50, to try and determine—we really do not have jurisdiction at the moment, but it was something that I think needed to be done, and Elmwood Cemetery Co. was not doing it. So, in the best interests of interestees and everyone else, in the process, we went ahead and did it jointly. As soon as we receive the report, then we will have to look at remedial action, but we probably cannot do much about that yet until the river level drops. It is still quite high and not able to deal with it.

Mr. Maloway: Perhaps the minister could provide us with a copy of the report that comes out at the time. Would that be acceptable?

Mr. Ernst: As I say, I do not have a copy of the report. I am told its completed, but, no, we have not seen the report yet, so I will have to contact the city. While we paid half the cost, the city actually conducted it, their Rivers and Streams people.

Mr. Maloway: Well, not being a geotechnical engineer, because that is the type of report, I believe it is, that you have to produce for this riverbank, it seems to me that we are only talking a few hundred feet of riverbank here. It is very high at that area. The minister has identified the problem; that seems to be the

major problem. I do not know how serious it is right at the moment, but certainly it will be a problem in the next few years.

I do not know whether I am correct or not, but it just seems to me that it is just a matter of erosion and that that should have really been foreseen. I mean, you do not build a house 10 or 20 feet from the riverbank when you know that there is an erosion factor there and in 20, 30 years your house will be falling into the river, so perhaps they should not have been burying people that close to the edge of the river in the first place.

One could have probably foreseen that, but I think the long-term problem there is that basically the whole riverbank has to be shored up through either the use of riprap or some sort of stones such as you see at The Forks. So just conducting a study on Elmwood Cemetery is just solving a few hundred feet of your problem because the bank is similar all along the river.

The problem that you are going to find on the Elmwood Cemetery bank is going to be the problem you find in every bank in the city. It is going to be no difference. So I do not know that you want to be conducting little geotechnical surveys. You are going to keep the technology guy busy, but for a few hundred feet of bank, he could be doing an awful lot of surveys, but I mean, I think one survey is probably sufficient for the whole bank area.

Is the minister suggesting, when this survey is available, that in fact the provincial government will step in with the city and actually do something to restore the bank?

* (1110)

Mr. Ernst: First of all, let me say that this, while it is only a few hundred feet of a much longer riverbank, is a unique few hundred feet in that there are people buried very close to the edge of that riverbank and, notwithstanding the fact that the member feels that the whole area needs to be surveyed, yes, it does, but the fact of the matter is that in this little area there are people buried. I would not want to see that bank collapse and have crypts or coffins or whatever collapse along with the riverbank. So I think we have

done the responsible thing in terms of trying to move forward, at least to find out what the problems are, what the potentials are for failure and how do you remedy it.

Now, the question of remedy can take many forms, and we have not addressed that issue up to this point, but there may be, you know, a number of solutions, and we will have to ask that those be pursued. But, again, as I indicated earlier, we have no jurisdiction until that company goes bankrupt, it is my understanding.

Yes, the expectation is that if there is a danger with respect to these graves, it would require an order of the Minister of Health to move them with consent to the families and so on in order to prevent them from being involved in a calamity there. Once we have an understanding of what is required, then we can issue an order to the company that they have to carry this work out, and they will have to go and deal with the issues surrounding all of that and work out a contingency plan in order to solve the problem.

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Chairman, is the minister telling me that regardless of—I mean, I can see this thing being tied up in legal wrangling for years to come, and I am wondering whether the minister or the government plan to step in and do the restorative parts to the bank regardless of what happens with the owner of the cemetery.

Mr. Ernst: No decision has yet been determined. We do not even have the report as to what the problem is. You know, maybe there is not a problem, and maybe it is only in the eye of the beholder, but I think common sense would indicate that there is a potential at least anyway.

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Chairman, the final question then to the minister on this subject. Can he give me a date by which some action will be taken on this matter? I do not need an exact day. I am suggesting a month would be good enough.

Mr. Ernst: Not really. You know, I have not even seen the report. I do not know what the problem is, nor what remedial actions might be considered, and then who is going to pay for them and how they can be

carried out. I mean, it may be that they can only be carried out in the middle of winter. I have no idea, so I cannot give you any date.

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask some questions about the operation of the Public Utilities Board. I am concerned about the—not concerned about what the Public Utilities Board does because I think it performs a very useful function, but I am concerned about the cost of operating the board. I believe the cost of operating the board is in the neighbourhood of \$2 million, but that would not include all the cost of conducting the hearing which I believe are absorbed by the parties involved in the hearing.

Nevertheless, there is an enormous amount of legal costs involved in these things, and I wonder whether the minister has done any comparative studies of boards in other jurisdictions, both in Canada and the United States, to see whether there is a possible way of streamlining the process a bit and achieving the same result with less cost.

Mr. Ernst: The cost you see in the budget is the cost of operating the Public Utilities Board, and it is fully recovered from the applicants, so that, while it shows as a budgetary item in the department under the Public Utilities Board, it is fully cost recovered so no tax revenue per se goes into it.

With the question of operating efficiencies and so on, we are constantly reviewing that, but while we are doing that, the issues get more and more complicated and extremely technical in nature so that the board requires a considerable amount of professional advice—engineers, accountants, lawyers, you name it, they seem to find it and use it, because, as I said, it is an extremely technical and complicated situation.

When you are dealing with whether Centra Gas should increase their rates or not or Manitoba Hydro should have a rate increase or any number of other issues, MPIC for instance has a rate increase, then there are, you know, thousands of issues. We are dealing now with return on investment and a host of other issues which I am certainly not familiar with, but it is an extremely complicated process. Hearings take

weeks to deal with all of these issues and so on. It is a very time-consuming and albeit costly situation, and what is not shown here I guess, of course, is the experts and counsel that the utilities bring forward on their own hook. This is the cost of the board and its experts.

The utilities bring forward their own experts and those costs are not shown in here because they are not direct costs to the Public Utilities Board although they are a cost ultimately to the utility.

We are pretty careful in terms of how the board operates and we cannot, because of the important work that they do, hamstring them, but at the same time we have—when the telephone company went under the jurisdiction of CRTC a year ago or 18 months ago, we did in fact reduce some of the costs of operation. What happened was that you are building up, overloading your people on the one hand and then, when you lose one of your major regulated utilities, the catch-up of work, you know, kind of backfilled somewhat, although we were able to reduce some of the costs. They are pretty closely controlled. Nobody is getting wealthy being there.

Mr. Maloway: Well, the minister just repeated what I had said previously, and that is that the \$2 million is the cost to the Public Utilities Board operation, but then there are all these extra costs assumed by the people that appear before the board, mainly, I would think, lawyers' fees and consultants, and so on. It just seemed to me that there is an enormous cost to the regulation, and while the regulation is good, my question specifically was, have you done an analysis comparing the PUB of Manitoba to similar bodies in other jurisdictions, both in Canada and the United States, to determine whether or not there just might be a more efficient method of operating? I think it is probably going to be cumbersome no matter how you look at it, but there just may be somewhere a more efficient way of operating it.

(Mr. Frank Pitura, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

* (1120)

Mr. Ernst: What happens, Mr. Chairman, is that the chair of the Public Utilities Board, Gerry Forrest,

former deputy minister in the government, sits on a council, if you will, of similar bodies, and they regularly review ways and means of dealing with these issues. Because they are very complicated and expensive and time consuming, everyone is looking for opportunities for better ways of doing things, and so they regularly review these operations, each other's operations and ways and means of doing things on an ongoing basis.

I specifically have not ordered a study to analyze all of these things, but apart from in the internal process—and I regularly question the chair of the Public Utilities Board as to how much money he is spending related to these issues and so on. Quite frankly, the people who pay the bill also question it on a regular basis.

There is, I think, certainly a need for them to do this work, and we also have a considerable number of intervenors on a regular basis there as well, Manitoba Society of Seniors, Consumers' Association and a number of others specific perhaps to the one or two Crowns that are being dealt with. But by and large, I think it is under control.

Mr. Maloway: I have one further question. Then the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) will have some questions in this section, and then we can move to the Minister's Salary.

Under the Insurance Branch, I noticed that there is some reference to a Fires Prevention Tax, and I am, just out of curiosity, wondering whether any of you know what that is, and how much money do we make on that tax in a year?

Mr. Ernst: There is a tax on fire insurance coverage in the province of Manitoba. I think it is about 1.5 percent or 1 percent, somewhere in that area. That money, I do not know what the specific amount is, but it is probably in the revenue Estimates somewhere, but the money is used to run the Fire College in Brandon and the programs of the Fire Commissioner's Office here in the province.

I think I have a number here for you. Tax under The Fires Prevention Tax Act in 1993-94 was \$2.6 million.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to start by asking some questions related to the Securities Commission and its authority for handling real estate agents' deposits of down payments on homes. I have had a case brought to my attention, and I want to ask the minister if he can clarify.

When a real estate agent neglects to put the down payment into trust, what happens? What are the consequences?

Mr. Ernst: I guess there could be a number of things. It certainly contravenes The Real Estate Brokers Act, but it also could constitute theft, fraud, and could be a Criminal Code offence, of course, which would be subject to prosecution by the police.

Ms. Cerilli: What determines if it is going to become a criminal offence and fall into the area of the police outside of just being handled by the Real Estate Board and the Securities Commission?

Mr. Ernst: Investigation by the Securities Commission—they would look at the circumstances, if it was accidental or it was reasonably assured that there was not any criminal intention, but if there was, they would simply turn it over to the police and say, go get 'em.

Ms. Cerilli: So is the onus to do that, turning over of the case to the police, the responsibility of the Securities Commission or the Real Estate Board?

Mr. Ernst: Well, first of all you would have to determine if it happened. There are one or two ways that can occur. Either a complaint is laid with the Securities Commission, or we turn it up in a spot audit that occurs from time to time in brokers' offices.

(Mr. Deputy Chairperson in the Chair)

Then the broker may discover it and fix it right away, or the client may say it did not happen that way and call the Securities Commission, and they will investigate.

But if there is evidence that indicates somebody was doing this with improper intent and so on, then it would get turned over to the police.

Ms. Cerilli: In recent experience in the province of Manitoba, what has been the penalty when there has been proof and evidence, and this has been the case where the down payment has not been properly deposited?

Mr. Ernst: I do not have a specific answer for the member. I can tell you, though, that those cases where there is a regulatory charge that turns into a criminal charge and is prosecuted in the courts, we generally do not follow the regulatory charge because a criminal charge takes precedence and, obviously, is much more serious. Staff cannot, offhand, think of a number where it has been dealt with. Just one further minute.

Yes, I just wanted to check in terms of the kinds of numbers that we are talking about here, and it happens quite rarely, apparently. It might happen a couple or three times a year, if that, so that we would have to look at information as to see how the prosecutions went and the court process for those that went that direction. I do not know the information, and we will have to find out.

Ms. Cerilli: How about if it remains just a regulatory charge? What can the penalty be for the agent?

Mr. Ernst: I guess there are two remedies; you can take them to court, where I think the maximum fine is somewhere around \$1,000 or \$2,000 or six months in jail, or we can lift their licence, or we can do both.

Ms. Cerilli: So one to two months in jail—six months in jail, I should say.

* (1130)

Mr. Ernst: I do not want to be held to the exact terms, but from best recollection, the fine is somewhere in the area of \$1,000 or \$2,000, we believe, and/or six months in jail, but we do not have the statute in front of us, and that is the maximum fine that the judge could award.

I should also point out, of course, that there are huge bonding requirements or significant bonding requirements of real estate brokers to hold and obtain a licence, and so there are monies available to claim in the event that something is misappropriated.

Ms. Cerilli: I do have a specific case, and I am going to write a letter and bring it to the attention of the minister, that deals with this issue. Unfortunately, I do not have it in front of me right now. It is a case file, and it is in my constituency office, but I will try and get it here for this afternoon.

It seems like it is quite a serious situation, where the agent in question has now released same property that was in question in terms of not properly depositing the down payment. I am wondering what accountability is there to a complainant, someone who is selling their home and has hired an agent or is working with an agent that is leasing the property that they would like to purchase and there has been an offence like this. Is there a requirement for the initial client to be informed of what the penalties are?

I have a situation where a woman feels like she has really been unjustly treated. It has also to do with them not acquiring a property when there was another offer on the property that had elapsed in the deadline. Then they ended up getting the property and this woman did not. Their offer was still valid, and the expiry date on the previous offer had passed. She cannot understand, for one, why they did not get the property. So there have been a couple of irregularities.

At the end of it she has not been able to find out what penalties were on the agent. She has been assured there has been a penalty. Now she has found out that the house has been listed again at a greater price than what was initially being charged for the property.

Mr. Ernst: Depends on who is dealing with this. If it is the Winnipeg Real Estate Board, we have no jurisdiction. That is a private organization of realtors. They may have taken action against one of their members, which they may not make public. Certainly anything the commission does is public information.

Now I suggest to the member that if she has specific information and specifics related to another case she alluded to where she was bringing it in to the office here, in order not to prejudice anybody's rights or case in this situation, if you had arranged to simply provide that information to the Manitoba Securities Commission directly, then I think that is probably in

the best interest of your constituent or the person who has raised this with you.

I do not think we ought to be discussing it, quite frankly, here. If there is a potential for disciplinary action or court action, I would not want to prejudice that case by having had it discussed kind of back and forth here during Estimates process. I think we are better off to deal with it directly.

Ms. Cerilli: That may very well be the case, but I am just trying to determine what the policies are publicly, so that I can ensure that those are going to be applied. It does sound like, in this case, and I have not used anyone's name, there are some irregularities. As I said, I have full intention of bringing this to the minister's desk.

I also want to ask some questions related to the Real Property Amendment Act. This has been something that both the minister and I have been working on for quite some time.

I just want to begin by asking, why the minister has not yet tabled the bill which was introduced this session?

Mr. Ernst: Well, not that I will not answer the question, but I should point out to the member this is highly irregular to be discussing legislation in Estimates committee. Nonetheless, I can tell her that the bill will be available for distribution shortly. There was one question that needed to be addressed. It came up in the intervening period between the time the bill was tabled last time and this time, although it has been read the first time.

It is my understanding of the agreement between the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition that all of these bills will not be dealt with, in any event, until the fall sitting of the Legislature. As long as all of these bills are introduced and distributed prior to June 30, that was the agreement between the two leaders. While it is not available yet, it will be shortly.

Ms. Cerilli: Am I to understand that the bill has been amended or changed since this initial Bill 2 was first distributed through the house?

Mr. Ernst: There will be a new bill. It will be marginally different from the last: a couple of rewording changes by the drafters who, having had an opportunity to look at it again in the intervening period, decided on using one set of terminology instead of another. There is one amendment raised to our attention which we agreed with and which we have included in the bill.

Ms. Cerilli: Can the minister tell the committee which section of the bill has been amended?

Mr. Ernst: Section 77.

Ms. Cerilli: Seventy-seven is the entire bill. Which subsection of 77?

Mr. Ernst: I do not have the bill in front of me, but I am advised it is section 77 that is being amended. The previous bill had section 77.1, 77.2 and so on. This is a general amendment to section 77.

Ms. Cerilli: So it is an addition, then, that we are going to see? The other sections, 77.1 and 77.2 in particular, that I am concerned about, are going to remain the same?

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Chairman, I am trying to be cooperative as best I can here, but she will have to wait until the bill is tabled. Then we can talk about the bill itself and the appropriate sections and so on.

* (1140)

Ms. Cerilli: I do have a number of concerns about the bill, that it is actually not doing what we have intended to do and I have had it looked at by a couple of lawyers and there is some agreement on that.

Particularly, and I want the minister to clarify if I am understanding this correctly, in section 77.2(1), the original owner of a property that had a mortgage on a property, is still responsible for that mortgage even if it has been assumed when there has been a renewed mortgage and they are not off the hook, so to speak, unless three months pass or they specifically make that request with the bank. Is that correct?

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, this is the subject matter of debate on a bill that has been introduced for first reading in the Legislature, and I do not intend to debate the bill in committee.

Ms. Cerilli: I do not believe it has been introduced for first reading. The minister has just said it is a new bill. It is on the Order Paper but we have not seen the new bill yet in first reading. It certainly has not been distributed for the House, so I mean right now basically we are just discussing policy. I think that I can ask questions of what the new policy is going to be with respect to assumed mortgages.

Mr. Ernst: The bill has had first reading in the House. It has not yet been distributed, but, Mr. Chairman, again, I reiterate this is a subject matter of a bill that is before the House and will be open for debate.

The member has ample opportunity at the time that the bill is read a second time, but before it appears before a committee of the House for public scrutiny, and subsequently in report stage and third reading she will have ample opportunity to express her views on this particular bill, and what it will or will not do in her estimation. That is her right as a member of the Legislature.

I do not intend to sit here and debate sections of a bill that was introduced and has died on the Order Paper previously. So when the new bill comes forward, I will be happy to debate those issues with the member for Radisson at her convenience, but I am not going to do it here today.

Ms. Cerilli: Is the minister considering first reading the reading that was done prior to the election?

Mr. Ernst: No, I am not. It was read for the first time by me 10 days ago, since the new session has started.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I guess if that is the case I will not pursue discussing this bill, but it just seems to me that the minister has used a number of techniques to avoid distributing this bill now with the amendment, or discussing the bill. I am simply wanting to get some clarification. If the minister is not willing to do that, I mean there has been a number of delays with this bill

and I just do not understand the lack of co-operation that the minister is practising.

I think both of us have wanted to see these amendments, and there was some confusion if the minister was really interested in seeing these amendments made to protect homeowners previously, why there was such a delay in the last session, when we were sitting, of introducing the bill. I am curious to find out what the changes are. I would have hoped that the minister would have considered the chance that we have here.

It is not going to be often that the two of us are going to be able to sit down as people that have brought this issue to the forefront in the Legislature and have a discussion about this. I am disappointed at the minister's approach to the issue.

Perhaps I could have a moment to consult with my colleagues if the minister is not going to discuss this issue any further.

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): I would just like to ask, under the heading of Cooperative and Credit Union Regulations, which is in the section we are now discussing, I gather that this is where the remains of what used to be a department of co-operative development a few years back now exists. I regret that. We had co-ops front and centre as a separate department, and we felt that there was a lot of opportunity for a government, through such department, to enhance, promote and encourage co-operative enterprises through the province.

This province does have a history of co-operative enterprises and progress that is made, particularly in the farm sector, but also generally in rural Manitoba.

I think it is not unusual to find the major retail store or the major retail grocery store, if you will, in a town being owned by a co-operative. You do not see the SuperValu, you do not see the Safeways, you do not even see the IGAs in many, many Manitoba towns. You see a co-operative. Those are consumer co-ops, and of course, we have seen quite a bit of co-operation in terms of producers. Many of those are federal, of course, and they are dealing with the grain trade.

Also, you have seen development of considerable co-operative activity through the financial sector, that is, through the credit union movement. I would gather that this department now—unfortunately, it does not include the word "co-operative" in its title. It would have been good if at least it was considered Consumer, Corporate and Co-operative Affairs. Maybe it was too long a title, but I know we have departments here with bigger handles than that. The point is that this minister now has his responsibility. I would like to ask the minister a general question. Are there any initiatives? Are there any new programs that this minister is prepared to undertake looking into that would enhance and foster this very important co-operative sector that does exist in Manitoba?

Mr. Ernst: I thank the member for Brandon East for the question, and I am pleased to advise him that co-op affairs has a split jurisdiction between two departments. Consumer and Corporate Affairs has the regulatory side. Industry, Trade and Tourism has the promotion and development side.

So your question would be more appropriately asked of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey), whose Estimates will follow these, I believe.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Well, I just hope that the promotion of co-ops has not been too relegated to backwaters of that department. I thank the minister for that information. I did not realize that. Perhaps I should have known, but I did not realize that.

Well, in terms of regulation and I guess, therefore, general supervision of credit unions, is he satisfied with the current state of the credit union movement or the credit union service in the province?

Some years back, I know, I guess when we first took office on November 30, 1981, with the Pawley administration, I remember within weeks we had on our tables, on our desks, material about the very, very serious financial problems of the credit union movement in Manitoba at that time. In fact, we had to prevent, by a major bailout, the whole system from collapsing. At least that is what I recall. At any rate, they eventually recovered after some support.

But I was wondering if the minister could comment on the current state of the credit unions that we have in the province.

* (1150)

Mr. Ernst: Well, there has been a dramatic change from that time, when there was, I believe, something in the area of \$20 million plus interest guarantee required by the government to shore up the system to what it is today.

The credit unions, I guess, last year probably had their best year ever from a host of different perspectives. The system is moving along fairly well. They are keeping up with their major competitions. As a matter of fact, they are backfilling some of the areas where other financial institutions have withdrawn. They have taken up the flag and moved in.

Generally speaking, I had an opportunity to attend the annual meeting of the credit union system during the election, I think it was, if I am not mistaken, and I have been very satisfied with the administration overall. There are always little areas of concern, and the odd individual credit union gets itself into difficulty from time to time, but, by and large, the system is working well.

Mr. Leonard Evans: This is it, Mr. Chairman. It seems where the odd, as the minister puts it, the odd credit union local gets into trouble, it would seem to me, usually is a result of taking excessive risk, perhaps taking more risk than it should.

I am just making that as an observation. I do not have any data before me really to substantiate that, but maybe the minister could tell us. Those few who do have trouble, what usually is the basis? Is that the basis of their difficulties?

Mr. Ernst: The member is pretty accurate, I guess, in terms of his assessment of this. It is kind of a combination of excessive risk, bad management, by taking bad loans, inappropriate loans, or making a mistake or, say, bad management practices related to those particular loans.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Yes, how does the minister's department go about checking and assessing the current state of the credit union? Do you have an audit system?

Mr. Ernst: Yes, there is a general audit function of the credit union system in the province. It is carried out by the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation, formally known as the STAB fund. We also, internally, can from time to time do special audits for, you know, whatever purpose is deemed necessary, but sort of the general ongoing monitor audit, if you will, of the system is carried out by the Guarantee Corporation.

Mr. Leonard Evans: So, generally, in so many words, the system is more or less self-policing. I mean, through their central organization, they try to audit and keep track and make sure that the locals are abiding by regulations and are doing what they should be doing in terms of protecting the depositors and so on.

Mr. Ernst: One is a question of abiding by legislation, and the other is, you know, prudent financial practices, and while, under the credit union regulation side, you know, following legislation, we do have some jurisdiction, the prudent financial practice end of it is done by the Deposit Corporation on a regular basis.

The Deposit Corporation is a board of directors of five, two appointed by the government, two appointed by the system and a joint agreement on a Chair. I have had the opportunity of meeting with them several times to discuss the credit union system, how it is operating and so on, and they are, you know, quite knowledgeable people, have had some experience.

I think they have been there quite a while in terms of being members of the board, and things appear to be in very good shape.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Can the minister be more specific in terms of the number of locals that are in difficulty? I mean, do you have any statistics on this, and do you see a pattern?

I gather, generally, it is not a big problem. So I accept the minister's observation but, in actual

numbers, how many are we talking about in this past fiscal year, for instance?

Mr. Ernst: I want to make two observations. The first is, we have no credit unions on a watch at the present time, under watch.

Secondly, I am somewhat reluctant to comment on the health of a financial institution in a public forum. I have a concern that I do not want to create any hardships for the operations of those financial institutions either and—

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Evans: I want to make it clear. I was not asking the minister to discuss the individual credit union local by name. I was simply talking about asking for statistics, you know, like, do we have five that are in trouble this year, compared to three last year or two last year, or whatever. I was not asking the minister to divulge any detail on any specific credit union.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: The honourable member for Brandon East does not have a point of order. It is a clarification.

* * *

Mr. Ernst: Again, my concern is that I do not want to cast any shadow of any doubt upon any financial institution, because one branch bank, for instance, which does not make money for their parent corporation and closes up does not reflect unnecessarily on the overall health of a bank.

When you have individual credit unions, whether you name them or not, and you are saying they are in trouble, then it starts to reflect on them. I just have a concern that I do not want to cause any concern in the mind of the depositing public that their money is at risk if they deposit it in a credit union. It is not.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Mr. Chairman, so the minister does not want to give us any statistics on this. I see him looking at a document. It is possible it is on a particular page, but it would seem to me that that type of information is available on banks.

I would have thought that the federal government, which is responsible for the banking system under the Bank Act, would have reports indicating the number of branches that had problems without indicating which town or which area or the name of the company, so that there would be some data on this aspect of branch banking, for example, because the fact is, if you do have branch banks, let us say in one-industry towns, and if it is a mining town and the mine goes bust, then the bank does not do very well.

I am using one specific type of example, but there are other examples you could use as well. Perhaps the minister has some data that he would like to share with us.

* (1200)

Mr. Ernst: As I indicated to the member earlier, we have no credit unions under our watch at the present time.

In other words, there is no supervision or overview other than the normal run-of-the-mill thing that would apply to every credit union. I suppose one might construe from that that they are all healthy. That is your choice to make that decision or not.

I can give you a little bit of information, though, in terms of the overall operations of the system. Total assets in 1992 were \$3.3 billion and that grew to \$3.5 billion in 1993. Total deposits in '93 were \$3.3 billion over \$3.1 billion in '92. Total loans went from \$2.4 billion in '92 up to \$2.6 billion.

In '92, there were 334,000 members and in '93 that grew to 341,000. There are in both years 77 credit unions with a total of 162 locations. That is for the credit union side.

For the caisse populaire side, they grew from \$341 million in total assets in '92 to \$355 million in 1993. Total deposits went from \$317 million to \$333 million. Total loans increased from \$265 million to \$281 million. Membership went from 33,508 up to 35,607.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 12 noon, committee rise.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (1000)

Mr. Assistant Deputy Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This morning we will be in the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255. We will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training.

When the committee last met we had been considering item 1.(f)(1) on page 37 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Mr. Chair, we are looking at Management Information Services still, and I think at the end of last time my colleague from Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) was raising a number of issues about a line that is to come later.

I want to go back to the questions I was asking about the relationship between Student Information Services and Management Information Services and to ask the minister whether she could give us an idea that when and if the Student Information Services is on-line and running, what will be different about Management Information Services?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Chairman, the MIS concept in the whole evolution of communications and collection and storage and retrieval of data is an old concept still being used, but it is becoming outdated in most organizations. So as society and organizations that utilize information systems move away from that concept and more into the current technologies to the new innovative technologies, of course, we are moving along with that as well.

We may even some day see the name of the branch changing to reflect the new order of things, but the role is to be responsible for all aspects of information technology in order to allow managers to use all available information, software, things like that, as well as being able to access information from a wide variety of sources, Internet, schools, school divisions, and to

have that on a network that can be accessed and utilized without having to go through a whole series of separate communications to compile it all. So it will be swifter, and it will be more encompassing.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, what I am getting at is, how will the role of this section of the department change if and when Student Information Services becomes workable? What will change about the purpose of this section, and given the information the minister just added in her last response, it seems to me also that MERLIN will be taking over some of the responsibilities as outlined by this department, that is, technology, advising the selection and use of hardware and software, that sort of thing.

So we are looking, presumably in these Estimates, at both of those, MERLIN and the EIS systems being up and running by the end of this next fiscal year, so how should we expect that this department will change in the next fiscal year?

* (1010)

Mrs. McIntosh: Not just in the technical things but in the purpose and the way in which information is used.

I am just going to do two things here. I have a sheet that staff has handed me that might be of interest to the member, and I will pass that over. If she would like to, we could maybe—and I will give another one for the others that are here.

Mr. Assistant Deputy Chairperson: Honourable minister, would you wish to table this?

Mrs. McIntosh: Sure, we could table it. I thought it just might be useful for the member.

Mr. Assistant Deputy Chairperson: For the record, the minister will table, and the Clerk will distribute.

Mrs. McIntosh: And the heading at the top of that, it says MIS Relationship with other Organizations. It is a very simple little sheet.

In answer to the member's question, how will the role change in terms of how will we use all this new way of

gathering information, I give one example that kind of sums up the types of things that we will see happening. It used to be that MIS would scan all the exam sheets, for example.

But with this kind of technology, the local areas will be able to do that. So you will see more of a decentralization with the central people training and preparing and assisting the local-area people in how to do some of the functions that were previously done centrally. So it will lead to more ability to work at the local level, and MIS, you will find, will be involved in training and preparing and assisting local authorities with assuming some of those tasks which will now be easier for them to assume. Right now, a lot of the stuff is done centrally because it is awkward and inconvenient to do it any other way.

Ms. Friesen: Yes, this table is helpful. What was concerning me is that we are adding MERLIN. We are adding the EIS or have been adding EIS for some time, and, yet, I know that the budget for this line, for Management Information Services, has remained pretty stable for about the last three or four years. It has been approximately around \$1 million, and I do not see it diminishing.

I see material and additions being made which seem, at least in the short sentences that are given in both annual reports and in the Estimates, there seems to be overlap. Anyway, those are the reasons for my question, and I will have a look at this, and we will have a chance to come back to it at 16.1(c).

I wanted to ask about the Internet, to ask whether the Department of Education had a box on the Internet, whether it was providing information to others through the Internet. I see from the chart that it does enable others to use the Internet, that is, to have access to other data, but does the department, as some departments in the Manitoba government do, have its own box there.

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, just checking with staff, the way we get on to the Internet is—Internet through the School Programs division which has now moved to MERLIN, through that, we have an agreement with the University of Manitoba, and the University of Manitoba provides us with an Internet server, and it is called MINET, and

the department can use that through the University of Manitoba.

The University of Manitoba is very interested in this kind of liaison, so we can utilize Internet through that vehicle.

Ms. Friesen: That was not exactly what I was getting at. I assumed, as most people do, you can use the Internet through the U of M, although it does raise the issue of who is paying for that. The U of M is now charging people for that service in ways that it was not last year, and I wonder where that is reflected in the department.

But that was not what I was going to ask. My question is, is there—for example, does the department have an E-mail address? Is there a section on the Internet where people can speak to the department and summon up information from the department? What are you putting into the Internet that people can access?

The example I might give is, I believe, the Department of Natural Resources. I know Culture, Heritage and Citizenship has one that was recently reported in the paper, that dealt with immigration issues.

So where is the Department of Education taking out material through the Internet to any citizen in Manitoba?

Mrs. McIntosh: We operate somewhat differently from all of the other government departments because our department does not utilize the Manitoba government server. We do, from that, take labour market analysis, but that is all, so we will get a labour market analysis report from the Manitoba government server, but other than that, we have our own MB service and that is the MINET that I mentioned earlier.

That is specialized to the department and the schools out in the field. On that, we do not pay an annual fee. We have a subscription. We pay a fee-for-service which is much less costly than what the public uses. I do not have an exact figure here, but it comes in a lot less expensive than what the public might pay for that

type of service. We do have an E-mail number and it is, the person's name, then MINET.M.CANADA.

* (1020)

The other question about how it is used, what information people can access, right at the moment from the department there is not a lot they can access right now because we had the pilot going last year. Schools have a fair amount of information on that and we anticipate having things like blueprint information, that type of information available for people to draw out, and MERLIN will be giving us assistance. That is one of the ways in which MERLIN will be assisting the whole education realm in terms of helping us set up things for this.

There are about 150 staff on that MINET service right now, so it is beginning to bloom.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister tell me what the cost of the subscription is, and is it on this line or should we be looking at another line for the cost? Is it included in this?

Mrs. McIntosh: The information for all of this sits on the MERLIN line, and we do have a small piece that we pay as a department all based on the time that we use on the equipment. All the staff people who are on it will bill their time or identify their usage individually and that will go through their own branch, so we do not have it here.

It will show on the MERLIN line that we do have some direct amount that we pay, but by and large, if it is going through the branches and through school divisions, school divisions will pay directly. It goes through the Manitoba Textbook Bureau, all of the billings. They do not come through the department. They go through the Manitoba Textbook Bureau and they pay direct to the university.

So school divisions will pay but they pay the Textbook Bureau. It goes through there to the university. We do have some direct costs which will come up on the MERLIN line. It is not a large amount for that specific, direct central function but each staff

member will identify their usage through their own branches.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, as I understand it MERLIN pays the university, for what? Could the minister identify what that bill is from the university to MERLIN? What does it list?

Mrs. McIntosh: There are some fixed costs that will come with MERLIN, and I do not have the exact figure here today, but we will get them when we get to the MERLIN line. Without being held to this figure, I will tell you it is in around the \$30,000 mark, give or take. That is a very approximate ballpark figure.

We will get the exact number when the MERLIN people are here. Those fixed costs that we pay will give us the benefit of a lesser rate, which is ultimately a cost saving to us in terms of use of all of this technology.

Ms. Friesen: I recognize these are approximate costs. MERLIN is then billed by the Manitoba Textbook Bureau on behalf of all the divisions within the Manitoba Education department.

Mrs. McIntosh: MERLIN sets up the agreement that school divisions and—the Textbook Bureau is the place where divisions will send their cheques. The Textbook Bureau then will forward it to the university.

So MERLIN is like a broker. I do not know if that is the correct term, but in my mind, that is how I envision the function. They will bring the parties together, help them develop an agreement, but then the money will go from the school division to the Textbook Bureau to the university.

Ms. Friesen: I understand that. So that is dealing with the agencies outside the department. What I am looking at, if you remember in the beginning, was how is this division going to change? How should we anticipate the budget of this department changing as a result of adding MERLIN and having a student information system that is on-line and running.

The use of the Internet and the expertise of this department, it seems to me—and I accept the training

aspects for a year. What is going to change as a result of those presumably two new, able, hi-tech, dedicated agencies? They seem to be dedicating themselves to areas that have been here before.

Mrs. McIntosh: This was never a function previously of MIS. It was with the School Programs division and transferred over to MERLIN. That is a new entity to deal with these kinds of emerging capabilities. The Internet has only been around for about a year on a pilot basis, so this is still a relatively new—it is in its infancy.

* (1030)

Ms. Friesen: The minister referred to a pilot project on the Internet, and I assume that was done through this section?

Mrs. McIntosh: It was done through the School Programs division.

Ms. Friesen: Maybe I could give notice to the minister then that I would like to ask about that pilot project and if there is an evaluation of it, if it could be tabled when we come to the School Programs division.

I wanted to continue then to ask about the future of this division of this section of the department. The minister indicated that there would be, since there are new technologies—I forget how it was expressed. Does the minister anticipate any change in the focus of this division or in the kinds of activities that it is involved in at the moment, will there be any changes in the MIS?

Mrs. McIntosh: The short answer to her question is yes. A little detail surrounding that, just looking at the history of what has been happening in the last half decade, five years ago there was no network at all in the department, there were about 70, 75 PCs now. There now is a network that is department wide, it has about 500 PCs in it. Most of that growth has come on stream in the latter part of that five-year period. It is really growing.

What the functions will do, we will be going from scanning and direct service into preparing those in the field to be able to do those functions themselves. An

analogy I could maybe use that puts it in terms that are layman-type terms would be that, prior to this, we used to do the fishing for people and now we are going to give them the equipment and teach them how to fish. That kind of switch in assistance.

Ms. Friesen: Are we now speaking, when the minister says "them," are we still speaking within the department? Are we expanding the department's computer literacy? We are not talking about the scanning of materials for school divisions or school programs or that kind of thing?

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, the role of the MIS is departmental.

Ms. Friesen: Will the MIS still continue to collect the information on the independent study programs?

Mrs. McIntosh: That flow of communication will not change, in essence, because we provide the services to Winkler, not to the independent study. That is the way it was and that is the way it will continue to be.

Ms. Friesen: The service to Workforce 2000, could the minister describe how this section of the department interrelates with Workforce 2000? What kind of information is collected, what accessibility can be provided through information services to Workforce 2000?

Mrs. McIntosh: MIS is not the information gatherer now on any of these things. They have worked with Workforce 2000 to help them develop their own data base, but it does not have its own data base for Workforce 2000.

Ms. Friesen: In the Workforce 2000 area, what kind of assistance has the department rendered in the past year?

Mrs. McIntosh: MIS will help with Workforce 2000. They will help participating companies, for example, in an analytical capacity to—not the companies, I am sorry—help the Workforce 2000 staff who are working with companies—I beg your pardon, that is a big difference there—they will work with them in an analytical capacity to make sure that their systems are

accurate in terms of commitments and timing and those types of things. So it is, again, not doing the work for them but giving them systems advice, systems assistance.

* (1040)

Ms. Friesen: The schoolnet and the department, I assume part of that can be dealt with under School Programs, but I want to look at it from a policy and planning issue, which I assume would remain with this section of the department, Management Information Services. What I am interested in is, does the department have representation on government-wide committees dealing with the Internet, and does this section of the department deal with that or is it another?

Secondly, what is the connection of the department to the national—I would not call them planning—but certainly the national co-operative organizations dealing with schoolnet? Is there a connection there and where does it come in the department?

Mrs. McIntosh: It was through the programs division. It is now through MERLIN. Those things are still going on but in a different entity.

Ms. Friesen: Will the CEO of MERLIN be assisting the minister later on in Estimates?

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, he will be when we get to the MERLIN line. We will have him here. He will have detailed information that I do not have at my fingertips at this point, and will be able to assist us.

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to look at the expenditures in this department and the increase under Equipment Rental from 132 to 151.

Mrs. McIntosh: Two basic reasons, Mr. Chairman. One is that we consolidated office space and added some more space that was lacking. The other is that the telecommunications network has grown and we have been adding components so that we can have the electronic communications between various bodies.

Mr. Assistant Deputy Chairperson: Item 1.(f) Management Information Services (1) Salaries and

Employee Benefits \$597,000—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$537,900—pass.

2. School Programs (a) Division Administration (1) Salary and Employee Benefits \$244,100.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, the two professional and one managerial people in this department, I wonder if the minister could outline the three jobs that exist there, the job descriptions and how they relate to each other.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, there is an ADM, a program analyst, a financial co-ordinator and two secretaries.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister indicate what the work of the two analysts has been over the past year?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, the program analysts have been responsible for the co-ordination of the renewing education, the achievements there, the co-ordination of the writing of documents in that regard. The financial co-ordinator has been responsible for all financial activities across the division and realigning all the financial activities for the entire division.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I noticed in one of the renewal documents that the government anticipated a video. I wonder if the minister could tell us whether that work has been completed or whether it is included in the Estimates here.

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, they have been able to acquire some preprepared videos, preprepared by ASCD, and additional videos are going to be purchased as well to support parental involvement, so some of the videos are available now.

* (1050)

Available right now is a video called Involving Parents in Education, which is a 30-minute video, and that has been produced by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the ASCD.

Ms. Friesen: I am not familiar with that organization. Could the minister tell me where it is located and when this video was made and what the price of it was?

Mrs. McIntosh: We do not have the cost of the video here right now, but it was produced by the association which is called the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, which is an international organization, a professional organization, international in scope. There is a Manitoba affiliate. I do not have the address, but this particular video has five strategies for parents, teachers, administrators and school boards to work together, indicating how they can work together in constructive, positive and meaningful ways.

So they have strategies under there, like help parents at parenting, developing better ways to communicate, how to increase parent volunteer support, how to help students learn at home, and how to involve parents in decision making and policy making.

We do have four copies of the video. As I say, this is a professional organization. It is international in scope, and there is a Manitoba affiliate.

We can get the cost of the video for you later. We do not know the exact price offhand without looking it up.

Ms. Friesen: Is it possible to see a copy of the video?

Mrs. McIntosh: There is a copy available, and we would be very pleased to provide it if you would like to see it.

Ms. Friesen: Is that through the library or through the department?

Mrs. McIntosh: Through the library.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman—[interjection] Yes, I understand, it is through the departmental library.

How would a citizen have access to this, and how is the department planning to distribute it, other than on request?

Mrs. McIntosh: All parent groups can have access to the video through the library, if there are copies still available. If they all ask for it at the same time, they may have to wait a turn, but I think we have got four copies available so that many could be out at any one time.

Ms. Friesen: Does the department plan to purchase other videos, or does it intend to create any videos of its own to accompany the changes to education curriculum?

Mrs. McIntosh: We have the beginnings. We are developing a bibliography for starters, as we begin to acquire more material. Our intention is to acquire more material for community members, parents, teachers, all those involved with the education of a child, to be able to peruse, to study, to view, to discuss, in groups or individually. We will be looking at purchasing additional material, a preference being to purchase, if possible, as opposed to producing our own simply because of cost considerations. If there is material that is preprepared, that is screened, and seems to be suitable, then, of course, we would acquire that as opposed to producing our own.

Production of our own is not precluded, but why reinvent the wheel if something good is already there, so we will be looking to acquire print material, video material, audio material, to develop a reference library for access by parental groups, community groups, teaching groups, groups that are composed of all of those people, with a bibliography that will give them an indication of what is available for reference material to expand their base of knowledge.

Ms. Friesen: I understand and support the idea of not reinventing the wheel in areas like this, where there is some commonality, but it seems to me the other side of the coin is that Manitoba has some circumstances, particularly multicultural schools and particularly urban aboriginal schools where there are conditions here that might enable us to produce materials for other people.

Perhaps the minister would want to do it in a market sense, or the alternative, of course, being a co-operative sense, working with other agencies.

I wondered if the Western Canadian Protocol, for example, or the co-operation across the West, and I would think Alberta and Saskatchewan, particularly, would have interests in the kinds of conditions which exist for large parts of Winnipeg, for example. Is the department looking at that from an aspect of longer-range planning?

Mrs. McIntosh: I am actually quite excited about some of the things that are starting to be done in this area, because I believe the more information you can make available to members of society who are concerned about education, be they parents, community representatives or those who actually work in the schools, the better off we are going to be. I see some of the initiatives going on in the department. I really want to just pause and compliment the staff for some of these.

* (1100)

There has been a document prepared for aboriginal parents prepared by the department staff, and they also have a brochure that they have put together on how parents could help children, again, both of these targeted for aboriginal communities in the city.

They are working, as well, with the western consortium to see if we can produce some common projects. That is still at the discussion stage so we do not have specific outcomes there that we can identify at this time, but those discussions have begun. Is there some common thing that we could produce that would be of benefit to parents and educators and community members who are interested in the success of the schooling system?

As well as having done those two that I have just identified which are specifically geared to aboriginal parents, the department has also produced a language learning handbook for parents which is produced currently in seven languages, and, again, that was done by department staff.

These types of initiatives are underway, and I commend the staff for the work that they have done on them. I also indicate to the member that this is just the beginning of the building of a reference library, and, in answer to one portion of her question, would we be producing our own, I say, the two-part answer: Wherever we can acquire preprepared existing material that answers the needs we have, we will acquire it that way because it is less costly, but where we cannot do that, then we will be examining doing our own producing to tailor-make material if it is not already in existence and cannot be acquired elsewhere.

I am pleased and encouraged by the support that I heard in the words you used here for us doing that, if we need to, because it could cost money, and so often people will say, well, you know, government has produced this video and it is costly and it is, you know, just a public relations exercise, or whatever.

I do not know what criticisms could come up, but inherent in the question you asked, I heard some support for the need to have material that would bring parents in, and I appreciate that.

So, if we need to, we would produce our own. We hope that we could avoid that expense if we can find preprepared material, but we will be doing both, if it is needed, to make the whole reference library as full and complete as it needs to be to meet our needs.

Ms. Friesen: I think the handbook for native parents was completed two years ago. I wonder if the department could tell us how many copies have been distributed, and what the brochure was that was listed—I think the minister indicated it was a separate item. Was that completed this past year? How different is it from the original?

Mrs. McIntosh: The brochure has just been completed this year, and I will—it, first of all, is more user-friendly in that it is quite easy to read, and it is concise. The information has been, sort of, concentrated and put down into fewer sentences, less verbiage—not that the other had excess verbiage, but they have tried to streamline it for easy use, and it deals specifically with how parents can help children at home. Staff indicates to me that we have distributed some 3,000 books and some 5,000 brochures at this point and they seem to be popular with those who are reading them.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, could the minister indicate how those are distributed, the 3,000 to 5,000? Are they sent to school divisions? Are they sent to individual schools? Have the bulk of them been distributed in the city or are they going to reserve communities or to non-Status communities outside the city?

Mrs. McIntosh: They are distributed across the province and they are targeted or distributed mostly to

those communities that have high aboriginal populations. They go both to schools and to parent groups directly.

Ms. Friesen: So, in the past year, what the department has done is to prepare a simpler version of an existing booklet and to begin discussions with the western consortium. This is in terms of parental connections, parental support in aboriginal education.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, in terms of the things that are being done for parents, in addition to updating existing materials and starting discussions with the western consortium, we have also embarked upon a number of enterprises that are not just reading or viewing but active participation in terms of parental involvement, parental education, providing parental support and support to community members.

We have nine regional parental involvement workshops currently underway. They started back in April; they should be finished at the end of this month, and in those we have 34 divisions and 71 school teams participating and they are taking place in Winnipeg certainly, but also in Winkler and Thompson and Portage la Prairie, Brandon, Cranberry Portage, Dauphin, Gimli, Morris. So those areas—and I do not have a listing with me right now as to which have already participated, which are complete and which are yet to come—but they are underway and I believe they are about two-thirds of the way through, and they will be finished at the end of the month.

* (1110)

Those are really good regional workshops because they bring parents and community members right into the whole milieu of education with trained administrators, with parents and school teams and trained administrators all working together in these settings, and they focus on increasing the communication between parents and schools and implementing parental involvement activities in the schools. So they focus right in on teamwork and partnership, interjurisdictional so to speak, instead of having parents over here and educators over here and another group over there, they are together as one team. These are all important people in the lives of the

student and it is, I believe, critical that they come together and understand each other's influence on that child that they service.

So that is underway. Of course, we have those two documents on New Directions, advisory councils and school, that is the guidelines which are preprinted. I think the member has copies of those.

We have documents for Advisory Council for School Leadership and for Partners in Education, Renewing Education: New Directions, Parents and Schools.

In terms of this particular initiative with the nine regional parental involvement workshops, we have identified a half staff year that will provide a focus and the required departmental expertise for this initiative which will take full effect in the fall, in all likelihood. So we will see this kind of initiative, come September, really taking off. We have actually assigned a half-time person just for that function.

I also want to indicate to you, in terms of your desire for information on aboriginals, that through student support grants we support parental involvement in some 60 schools and some 24 divisions. These 24 divisions are ones with high aboriginal populations and high multicultural populations. Those student support grants to those 24 divisions, to those 60 schools will enable them to receive funds which can involve parents in the education of their children.

Again, the same focus that I indicated, when we talked about the regional meetings, will be a focus that is involved here, where parents are included, where parents have an opportunity to understand what is going on in the schools, to opt into being a strength and a support for those who are delivering education and where educators have an ability to interact with those who have the largest influence on the child which is those who are involved with the child at home either as parents or guardians or fosters.

I will just read some of the other program headings. The home-school programs, the early schools language development programs, the early literacy programs, the home math programs, the family and the inter-generational literacy program, which is an interesting

one, because so many people feel we have lost that intergenerational ability. One of the things our children suffer from is the lack of having grandparents and great aunts and great uncles around them. Certainly, in some of the ethnic communities and some of the aboriginal communities that extended family is very much a factor.

So we have intergenerational literacy programs which, again, will do a great number of things in helping to prepare students for school success.

We have parent education programs, I have listed a few. We have parent volunteer and mentor programs. Mentoring and those types of activities, harkening back to the multigenerational thing, are ways in which we can utilize people who have a sincere and genuine interest in the educational success of students. Mentorship programs are very important. We feel it is important that we do an outreach to them, provide them with back up materials so that they in turn—sort of training the trainer type things.

We have governance and advocacy programs to help people understand how decisions are made and where the lines of authority flow, and those types of things.

We have a number of initiatives underway that we believe will be extremely beneficial. We work with native agencies, community parent councils, all these different groups that have, to date, held some workshops in some 40 schools in the year that we are just ending now on these types of things.

I do not know if that gives you an overview or if you would like further detail, but I leave that with you at this time.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I understand that the minister has met recently with aboriginal people in Winnipeg who are interested in forming a separate school division. I wonder if the minister could give us a sense of where the government is going with this one and whether the minister plans further meetings.

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, I had a meeting with Bill Sanderson of the Winnipeg school division board who asked to see me and came to see me with an individual

who was part of the aboriginal community, and I am sorry that I forgot her name at the moment. Their interest and request was that a separate aboriginal school division be set up along the lines of the French school board governance.

My reply to them is that I really do not know that would answer the need they were trying to address, their concern being, of course, that aboriginal students should have access to cultural awareness and traditions and history and so on.

My indication to them was that local school boards have the ability to deliver services that can address those specified needs and that indeed Winnipeg No. 1 in setting up the Children of the Earth school, for example, was in fact setting up alternative schools, alternative education within the public system that would do what I felt to be very much the same thing that a separate school board with separate governance would deliver.

I expressed concern about the cost of running parallel systems and indicated that the French school board governance, while it is indeed addressing a particular cultural group, is linguistically based and there are constitutional factors that are at play in the delivery of French language education to the section 23 parents. So the aboriginal needs I felt fit into a different category, and the governance situation also came under a different jurisdictional commentary.

Having said that, however, Mr. Sanderson asked if he could continue talking with me, and of course I absolutely indicated that most definitely I am quite willing to meet with and talk to any person, individual or group that has a keen interest in meeting specific needs of students. Having indicated my reservations about the effectiveness of that kind of governance versus the ability of school divisions to already deliver alternative schools that would meet those needs, I nonetheless am willing to explore the needs that he would like to bring forward to see if there is anything that government should be doing to try and address those needs over and above what local school boards are able to deliver.

* (1120)

My personal feeling at this point is that the school boards are able to deliver services to meet those needs. Never, however, would I ever turn anyone away who wished to further explore dimensions and depths within those issues that they live with, that I do not live with, because if they can enlighten me and build my awareness then I can only benefit from that as minister. The more I grow and learn, the more I may be able to help divisions try to address needs that may in truth be already met or may in truth be still in need of further meeting.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, does the minister plan on a series of meetings on the aboriginal school division over the next year, or is it going to be by request?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairperson, I indicated to Mr. Sanderson that he is free to give me a call at any time and if I have free time in my schedule I would be delighted to sit and talk to him, and I would be. I would be delighted to sit and talk with any number of people, and have been doing so with everybody I can fit into my schedule. I most enjoy those meetings.

I have met with several individual trustees from various divisions. I have met with a couple of individual boards to date and have indicated my willingness to meet with other boards, if they would like to come in.

I always find, when those boards and individual trustees leave, that I have learned something, be it just a small thing or a fairly significant thing. That is extremely beneficial, and I hope that they are able to take away with them some further knowledge of how government works and the terms of reference within which we must, by virtue of our obligations and limitations, function. So I think it is always a two-way street. The only thing that limits really extensive dialogue in some cases are the restrictions of time, and I think the member is aware of the time limitations on all MLAs and particularly on ministers of the Crown.

I just wanted to add something to the previous question, because our provincial strategy in curriculum will be in terms of the question about aboriginal needs being met in schools, but our provincial strategy in curriculum will be the integration of aboriginal content

and perspectives in kindergarten right straight through to Senior 4, so as we develop those new curricula, we do have an aboriginal perspectives resource team, and they have aboriginal educators in that, and that is not yet up and running.

But it is going to be established, and we will have targeted aboriginal educators on that to help us make sure that as we develop new curricula, we are addressing some of the needs that Mr. Sanderson and others have identified as being desirous.

Ms. Friesen: I want to discuss under this line, if it is appropriate, two areas which I do not see anywhere else. One of them is independent schools, and the other is home study programs. Is this the place to discuss them?

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes.

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): My question is firstly one of process, I guess. When we look at the annual report that we just received, there is a section here on independent schools, and yet in the Estimates book, I am having difficulty in locating a line item on that or some identification of the supports provided to independent schools.

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, under Implementation Branch and under regional teams are two lines that should be examined for that topic. We have one dedicated staffperson who works in those areas in terms of the regulatory process, for example; inservice programs, that type of thing, that both public and independent schools are included in. Those would be the two areas to look at.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can the minister share with us the student population in the nonfunded schools and the funded schools for '94 and '95?

Mrs. McIntosh: There are 1,289 students in the nonfunded schools and 11,471 pupils in the funded schools.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can the minister please explain to me the difference between the nonfunded and the funded? What are the criteria that defines the two?

Mrs. McIntosh: The basic difference is that in the funded schools, if they are receiving a portion of their operating costs from the public purse, then they must abide by our curricula.

They must have certified teachers. They must have a board of trustees. They must function essentially not unlike public schools in that regard, but they are allowed to have, for example, a religious—for example, Joseph Wolinsky Collegiate. They are allowed to have a religious atmosphere permeate all their learning experiences. So, for example, if a yarmulke is required, then that code of dress can be mandated. Certain dietary observations in the school cafeteria can be mandated—those types of things if they are a school of that nature.

That would be one of the differences because, of course, you could not do that. You could not have those cultural aspects permeating a public school, but you can in an independent. They have to follow curricula, have certified teachers, a board of trustees, those standards. They are allowed to vary according to the particular atmosphere they are wishing to create in their school. The milieu—that was the word I was looking for.

The nonfunded schools, on the other hand, do not have to have those criteria as fixed. They may decide, for example, that instead of a certified teacher to teach chemistry, they may hire a chemist who is straight from the workforce to come in and teach. They may decide that instead of a certified music specialist, they may just have a performing artist who teaches music, a musician, that type of thing, and, indeed, a lot of the private schools that operate will do that or have done that type of thing.

* (1130)

They may be able to specify then that they want all their staff to be members of a particular religious order. They do not have to have certified teachers. They can choose from other arenas those particular people they wish to have educate their children. They take assessment tests, and, by and large, on the assessment tests, like for science, that type of thing, they come within about 1 percent of the other student population,

so we can assess their progress in that way. In terms of their knowledge, I mentioned science and I will use science for the example.

Ms. Mihychuk: Could the minister, on the same vein, give us some indication as to the regularity of assessment processes?

How does the department ensure that the private schools are in fact following curriculum, and is there a monitoring of the qualifications and certification of the staff members in those schools?

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, we have a regional consultant that does that.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can the public be assured that each school, for example, is assessed annually? What regularity would there be for that type of assessment?

Mrs. McIntosh: It is done annually, every school.

Ms. Mihychuk: Under this independent schools, is this the area that also includes home schooling?

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, that comes under this area.

Ms. Mihychuk: Can you share with us the number of students that are now in home schooling? Is there an increase? Is there a decrease over the past few years? What assurances do we have in terms of their learning environment?

Mrs. McIntosh: The number of registrations for home schooling in the '94-95 year was 831, 686 of them being in kindergarten to Grade 8 and 145 of them being in the high school area, Senior 1 to Senior 4.

Ms. Mihychuk: What was the number for '93-94 please?

Mrs. McIntosh: There were, last year, 666.

Ms. Mihychuk: When families choose to home school, whose responsibility are those families? Is it the home school division? What type of materials are provided for the families that choose home schooling?

Mrs. McIntosh: They register, not with the division, but with the department so they come under direct line with the department. There are three basic requirements that home schoolers must go through. Each student has to register with the home schooling office. They have to submit an educational plan each year when they register. So they, (a) have to register; (b) at the time of registration submit an educational plan to the department and twice a year have to have progress reports submitted for analysis to the department.

Ms. Friesen: The department to which these reports are submitted, how many staff are there?

Mrs. McIntosh: That branch works out of the office in Winkler. They have one full-time dedicated person who is there all the time.

Ms. Friesen: And this one person then analyzes and responds to 1,600 reports a year on 1,600 students and provides materials for 1,600 sections of study and I assume also looks at final outcomes of those 800 students.

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

Mrs. McIntosh: That individual, yes, does that, and in addition to that, also will make home visits where required, work with other agencies where required, work with other members of the department where required, but the individual is basically responsible for monitoring on a twice-yearly basis the progress reports of some 800 students and does, in fact, as well, get out into the field to do home visits and meet with parents, as well as being the supervisor for receiving the reports.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, how many home visits were conducted over the past year?

Mrs. McIntosh: I did not get the question, I am sorry.

Ms. Friesen: Approximately how many home visits were conducted over the past year? If we have 800 students, does the staff member, for example, plan to visit a quarter of them every four years?

What kind of planning goes on, and how many home visits can be accomplished by somebody who is reading 1,600 reports a year? I do not know the individual involved, but it certainly seems to me an enormous task and a very large responsibility.

Mrs. McIntosh: The visits are done on an as-need or as an identified need basis, and the individual who does the assessing, of course, does not do the teaching, so if you consider a person who is like a full-time marker, it is not as onerous as one might think at first blush, because the teaching is all done by other than the person who is doing the examination of the progress reports.

I do not have the exact number of home visits, but I indicate to you it is not a regular rotating schedule of visits. It is done on an as-need basis and, as well, working with the other agencies is done on an as-need basis, as well as working with the other staff members, et cetera, is on an as-need basis, so that is why you do not have more than that directly associated with it, because that one individual interacting with others, as need be, is able to supervise that particular program.

I want to indicate, as well, though, that a lot of students use the Independent Study Program, and that is regulated. It is departmental. It is regulated again through the Winkler office. The correspondence-type courses—I spent one year of my life getting a grade through correspondence with my mother teaching me just because of the isolated circumstances in which we lived, and even way back then, which was a long time ago, those correspondence courses were extremely good because I was able to complete that particular grade with A-level results just by being taught at home by my mother with a very good guide of the correspondence courses.

So you will have many reasons for home schooling. You will have people who decide to home school for religious reasons, for physical reasons, you know, for a wide variety of reasons, and you will often find some very good teaching occurring in those circumstances.

The independent study I referred to earlier, those assignments are not marked by the individual I spoke about in Winkler. The independent study courses, of

course, are marked by the department because they are correspondence courses, and they write exams, of course.

So I do not know what percentage of the 800 students we are talking about is taking the independent study, but I know it is a large portion of them. The written exams that they take at the present time, the students in the public system are not submitted to the rigor of those written examinations marked to a standard by an external source in the department, and we are able to assess progress through those.

Having been the recipient of a correspondence program for one year, I can attest to the amount that can be learned if you are in isolated settings.

Ms. Friesen: I would be interested in having the minister provide us with information later on the proportion of those 800 students who are taking the correspondences courses.

* (1140)

Mrs. McIntosh: We will break out that number from the overall number and bring it back to you.

Ms. Friesen: I have asked questions in this area before, and my concerns, of course, are obviously the rate at which it is growing and the impact that this has upon local school divisions, as well as concern for the standards and progress that the children are able to make.

That is why my concern is for only one person who is looking after—and I would disagree with the minister here. I do not think it is like simply being a marker of 1,600 reports. It is much more a combination of marking of reports and evaluation of teaching, because you are not just looking at the progress of the child, but you are also looking at the nature of the education that is being imparted, and I assume that those as-need visits are made on the basis of request, since the minister said that there was not a rotation involved, that it is by the request of the parents.

Again, from a broader educational perspective, that gives me some concerns, as well.

Mrs. McIntosh: I have just a couple of points in response. The member is absolutely correct, and I agree with her that the person does much more than just mark. I hope that however I phrased my answer, I did not give the impression that I think that is all that individual does.

That is part of what he does, and I was responding to what I felt was an indication—I maybe picked it up wrong—that the person would not have time to mark all 1,600. I was just referring to that one component, but, certainly, the person does much more than that. The member is quite right. The member is also correct in indicating that one should have a concern about people who are being educated in isolation from the system in terms of ensuring that they are learning.

On the as-need thing, the as-need is not just a parent making a request. The as-need would also be in response to the—in fact, the majority of these as-need ones would probably fall into the category I am about to describe, which is where the person responsible for overseeing home education notices in the reports he is assessing that there seems to be some irregularity of some sort.

That would be one thing that would spark him to say, I must go out and see these people, because this report looks to me like it is not the way it should be, or if he or she has any concerns in any way about what might be going on with the home schooling, then he will describe a need to himself that that home school requires a visit and would then go out.

So we will find, once we get our measurable standards into place, and everybody is writing standardized tests, these students, of course, will be included. So I expect two things will happen. The member is quite right. There is a big acceleration in attendance at independent and home schools, and one of the things people indicate in conversation that they are seeking are these measurable standards.

So once they come in, those people in home schools will be required to write the standardized tests, as well, and that will help, as it will all students in Manitoba but will specifically help with this area in terms of being able to assess, can they measure to a standard of

problem solving? Can they do independent thinking? Have they acquired certain skills? Can they do deductive reasoning? Do they take a logical approach to solving problems? Can they interpret items to be read, not just for words but for content, and can they then reveal that content in a written form that is grammatically correct, and can they pass on their knowledge of the content in a way that is easily read and understood by the reader?

Those are all part of our new direction for accountability and monitoring progress, both in the public schools and at home schools, and so they will be participating in those tests for standards, and I think that, again, should give the member some comfort that yet another vehicle will be there to determine whether or not students are learning as they should be and to step in and take corrective action as needed.

Ms. Friesen: I have a number of questions arising from that. What corrective action is available to the department, presumably after some concerns about reports and after a home visit? What corrective action has been taken in the past? What is the experience of the department?

Secondly, I am interested in the application of the new program to home schooling. Who will be marking those? Will it be done by the department, or will it be assigned to the home school division, as I assume, other marking of standardized tests is going to be.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, there were a couple of questions in that last round of questioning there, and I will try to go through them in the order, I think, that I remember them coming.

When the staffperson responsible for supervision of home schooling decides that there is a need to go to the home and investigate what he feels, or she feels, is an irregularity, there are several things that happen. It may be that there has been a simple misunderstanding that can be easily corrected. It may be that another agency has to come in. For example, we recently had a child with cerebral palsy being educated at home. This of course is one of the reasons for being educated at home, that kind of disability in some instances where the parents live far from a local school and they may

choose to keep the child at home and educate them at home. This is one of the valid reasons for home schooling. In that instance we brought in an outside agency and the agency was the association for learning disabilities who came in and offered assistance to that parent in the learning situation because communication can be a problem sometimes with certain types of students.

* (1150)

If the problem is not corrected, however, and if the authorities here feel that the learning experience is not adequate or is not proceeding as it should, then the registration is simply revoked and the child then must attend either a public or an independent school and is subject then to all of the violations inherent in regulation if they do not. Just registering for home schooling does not mean that you can always continue home schooling. Like everything else, you have to be doing your job to keep your job, so to speak.

We have got, in terms of various reasons why people meet, why people take schooling at home. We have got 20 percent of Manitoba's home schoolers at home taking their schooling due to sickness or isolation perhaps, or, not perhaps but definitely, student safety and personal conflict of some sort in a particular school setting. Those are about 20 percent of the reasons.

You have got another large group, almost the balance of the rest, who are part of a network of home schools. These are people who home school for religious convictions. They have standards and morals that they feel are compromised by being in an integrated setting in a public system and so they prefer to segregate their children, as is their right, but they network with each other so they share learning experiences and materials. They assist each other much the way as any other educational organization would.

Just to give some examples of schools in that network—and I should indicate that sometimes students register for more than one course. You may find a parent in a home-schooling situation registering for one course in this particular network and then registering for another course in that particular network. You will see numbers that are not reflective of—two registrations

but one student, if you follow what I am saying. We have Seventh Day Adventist families that choose to have their children educated in a nonintegrated setting at home.

In terms of the network of home schoolers, the ACE, which is a Christian home-schooling program, most of these people have no objection at all, in fact are quite supportive of the standards of literacy and mathematics, computation and all of those things and would have no difficulty at all in terms of the course content of most of the courses that are provided through the department.

They may not believe in some of the societal standards that are evident in schools. They may prefer to have a certain code of dress. They may not approve of certain kinds of music. They may have religious beliefs that they feel their children might be exposed to influences that they prefer them not to be exposed to, not particularly with the schooling but with the influences in the milieu and the atmosphere outside the protective custody of the home. I am just indicating that there is support for literacy there. It is not anything against literacy or computation.

Ms. Friesen: Has the department prepared any evaluation, any report on the rate of growth over the last few years? I think it is of some concern to local school districts.

Mrs. McIntosh: There has been an increase over the last decade from 1985, at which time there were 109 home schoolers, to 1995 where we have reached 800. You do indeed see a growth. One of the reasons we are so intent on bringing in our blueprint and providing the measurable standards and those skills that we have in trying to give teachers the power to enforce greater discipline in the classrooms is to make our schools places where people will wish to go. Sometimes people will be home schooling because they are considered about standards of behaviour and so on in school. Sometimes they home school because they feel that they cannot get an accurate assessment of their student's progress because they do not know what 50 percent means. They do not get a 50 percent for starters. They do not know what satisfactory means. The member is correct. There has been a growth over that decade, a very large growth. We will be ensuring

that the standards that all Manitoba students will soon have to meet will be met by all students who are studying in Manitoba.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Tweed): Order. The hour now being twelve o'clock, the committee will rise.

HEALTH

* (1000)

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Will the committee please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be dealing with Estimates of the Department of Health. We are on item 1.(b)(2). Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber at this time.

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Just before we commence, I guess we are still on item 1.(b)(1), and the minister has indicated that this afternoon—is it this afternoon that we will be—oh, Mr. Toews is here, welcome. That being the case, we have discussed informally the fact that we have tried to deal with the child strategy as much as we could.

Will Mr. Toews be with us all day, Mr. Minister?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): As the honourable member knows, Mr. Toews has a lot on his plate these days, and he has, of course, a busy schedule, but, if necessary, he will adjust that schedule to be here today for whatever is required.

If the honourable member needs it to be that way, that is fine. If there is another way to do it—he could be somewhere else between two and five this afternoon; however, if it is necessary for the honourable member's purposes, he will arrange to be here.

Mr. Chomiak: I suspect that there will be a fair amount of questions that could probably go the balance of the day on this section, but if we want to reschedule Mr. Toews for some other time next week, we could do that as well, so whatever expedites it.

Mr. McCrae: It is felt that if it could be handled today, it would be better.

Mr. Chomiak: Just one other item of clarification. The minister had indicated on Tuesday that they wanted to pass item 4.(b). They wanted to get at item 4.(b) at some point because of an official's attendance and that. Do we have at least until tomorrow to deal with that, or are we talking about today?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, Mr. DeCock will be available all next week.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister and his staff for making arrangements to assist us in this process. Can the minister clarify at the onset precisely what the status is of the Youth Secretariat, how many staff positions there are, where the budget allocations come from?

Mr. Chairperson: Could the Chair ask the indulgence of the committee to possibly inform us which line we are now dealing with after that dissertation?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I think it is probably, there is a line item that I suspect deals with this, which is—[interjection]

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, the Youth Secretariat does have a separate appropriation altogether which is found on page 20 of the Estimates document.

I can answer some questions but the lead minister on the secretariat is the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) so that, with respect to that appropriation on page 20, it would be the honourable minister who would be having conduct of that separate appropriation.

Mr. Chomiak: The Youth Secretariat has activities that probably bear on every single appropriation, or every single aspect of the Department of Health and probably, more precisely, under community and mental health services.

That particular appropriation, the nature of the office and the nature of the release of the government's report on the health of Manitoba's children, which serves as the framework for the work of the Youth Secretariat, has resulted, I think, in a request from us to have Mr. Toews attend to answer questions in that regard.

It seems to me the most logical and most appropriate place to deal with it is the section we are dealing with now, 1.(b) under Executive Support which is why we are still at this appropriation and dealing with questions of this kind. That is the reasoning. We are not averse to moving to some other appropriation to deal with this, but I think, functionally, it would be my view and probably the minister is agreeing by virtue of bringing in his staff member that this would be the best appropriation to deal with this issue.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee, then, that we will deal with this line of questioning for Mr. Toews under 1.(b)(2)? [agreed]

Mr. McCrae: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, that is agreed, and we have Mr. Toews here because he does head up the Youth Secretariat. We will answer all questions that we can, and if it is appropriate for us to refer some matter to the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson), then I assume the honourable member or some other member of his caucus can take up such questions with the honourable Minister of Family Services at the time we deal with the appropriations set out on page 20 of the Estimates, but we are here to cooperate and to try to answer all questions that are put to us.

Mr. Chairperson: I would like the honourable members though to keep the line of questioning under the Department of Health and not move into the department which the other minister is responsible for. I think that would make it much simpler.

Mr. Chomiak: That is an interesting observation, Mr. Chairperson. I do not know if you have had a chance to read this report. The very nature of the activities of—[interjection] That is no reflection, it is just that I know how many reports one has to read.

The very nature of Mr. Toews' office and operation is such that it impacts on every single department, and one of the questions I actually have for the minister is I look forward to the day, and I think the minister would concur, when we will sit in Estimates and deal with—we will sit with an array of ministers as well as an array of critics dealing with the question of children and just dealing with the broad questions in general.

We have not functionally moved that way in terms of our system, but I think that ultimately that is where we will be heading if the recommendations in this report are actually implemented.

I think all members of the House, certainly members of the government side and certainly our side agree at some point we should be dealing with this on an intersectional, interdepartmental basis. So it will be very difficult to isolate questions solely to the Department of Health by nature of the activities, but we will attempt to do what we can.

* (1010)

When the announcement was made of the establishment of the Youth Secretariat, it was indicated that Mr. Toews would be half time at the Youth Secretariat and given that Mr. Toews is an employee of the Department of Health, can the minister give me an idea of the structure of the Youth Secretariat, the staff years, et cetera, and how that is—is the minister apprised of the budget and the structure and the like just in general on how it impacts on Health?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, the Youth Secretariat is a very, very important endeavour on the part of this government, and we are pleased to note the support from the honourable member and his colleagues for the direction in which we are trying to go.

I know that there are some aspects that may be the subject of some critical comment from the honourable member, but I know that the honourable member's support for the child health strategy as laid out in the child health report signals to me that we are going to see support for the directions that we have proposed to take.

It is not going to be something that is administratively easy to do because, as the honourable member knows, there is the involvement of at least four departments and probably others as we go along, but those four main departments are the departments of Health, Family Services, Education and Training, and Justice. In order to operate this secretariat, Mr. Toews has a staff of six people, and those people are all seconded from those four departments. They are

people at the sort of program management level or program specialist level. There is a budget for operations for this secretariat of \$144,000. Of course, the actual expenditures for the program now and probably into the future will be run out of the departments themselves, those budgets.

It is a little different for the purpose of examining Estimates. There is no question about that. The secretariat itself does not have what one might call a huge budget for operating programs. It does not operate programs; the departments do. The secretariat is charged with the responsibility of bringing departments together, and that includes bringing ministers together, bringing deputy ministers together and assistant deputy ministers to work in a corporate way, with the focus being on the young people of your province.

The Director of the Youth Secretariat, Mr. Reg Toews, is spending about 80 percent of his time on secretariat-related work and some 20 percent at his responsibilities in the Health department. It is not going to be the type of work that is going to allow Mr. Toews to take a lot of free time, obviously. He is going to have his hands extremely full and busy, and we appreciate his efforts and those of those with whom he is working, but those six staff with whom he is working and he have a real job of liaison with all of the various departments.

We have to change the culture of the way we address our work, as we work together to understand that children and young people in our province need the focus of more than one department, and to get departments working in a way they have not always worked is a big job. So we look forward to the support of the honourable member and his colleagues in these endeavours.

Mr. Chomiak: At the conclusion of the health of Manitoba children report on page 141, there is a recommendation that a Standing Committee on Child Health be established which will report to the Human Services Committee of Cabinet. Is that structure in place and functioning?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, there is a committee of the kind envisioned in the report and in the recommendations, and it is a committee of the secretariat. The secretariat reports to the Human Services Committee of Cabinet.

Mr. Chomiak: So that the Standing Committee on Child Health is the committee that Mr. Toews chairs? Do I understand that?

Mr. McCrae: The committee that we have, Mr. Chairperson, is a committee to work through the recommendations that are contained in the child health report and to report to the director of the secretariat. What the committee is presently working on is looking at all of the resources and looking at all of the possibilities contained within the recommendations to marshal the resources that we have and to get a good handle on how we can proceed with moving forward with the recommendations.

Mr. Chomiak: I do not mean to belabour the point, but I guess I am not totally understanding. So there is a standing committee that is looking at all of the recommendations and they are being assisted by the Youth Secretariat in this regard, in this capacity? I just do not know how the Youth Secretariat interfaces with the committee.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, it is a committee put together by the secretariat. It is composed of people from the departments whose job it is to rationalize and to work through the recommendations.

Mr. Chomiak: Could we get a list of who is on this committee?

Mr. McCrae: Yes, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chomiak: If—and I have had this already occur on several occasions—there are initiatives or suggestions in the community for activities that might be appropriately directed, that fit within the context of the overall child health strategy, should we be referring these individuals and persons to the standing committee and/or to Mr. Toews? Is there a procedure that we should follow?

Mr. McCrae: It would be appropriate that any ideas or suggestions that are outside the recommendations that we already have been made known directly to Mr. Toews.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. The committee is going to publish the state of Manitoba children annual report. Is there a time frame on the—what are we looking at? Are we looking for the state of Manitoba children in '95-96 or end of calendar year '95? Is there any time frame that has been outlined? What would be the time period? What are we looking at?

Mr. McCrae: That decision has not been arrived at yet, Mr. Chairperson.

* (1020)

Mr. Chomiak: With regard to the youth health forum, to review recommendations of the report, can the minister give an update as to what the status is of that particular activity?

Mr. McCrae: The honourable member, I should tell him that about a third of the recommendations in this report are in the process of being implemented. With respect to the specific recommendation he is referring to which makes a reference to a youth forum, we intend to engage in major consultations in one way or another. Perhaps there is going to be some kind of a forum; I do not know at this point precisely what form such consultations will take, but they will be major, they will be important, and we expect to see activity in that regard this coming fall.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I will be going through the report relatively systematically in dealing with the recommendations, a lot of the recommendations made to try to determine status of direction. To expedite the process, does the minister have any update that would outline for us the one-third recommendations that have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented to expedite this process?

Mr. McCrae: The honourable member I am sure will understand that the kind of detail that he is proposing is

going to be difficult to proceed with at this early stage. I do not mind hearing what it is he wants to know. That is okay. I am sure the department will make every effort to help us be responsive to the honourable member's questions, but I believe it was mid- to late-March that the report was—

An Honourable Member: March 17.

Mr. McCrae: —March 17 that the report was released to the public, and I had only had the report in its final form a very brief period of time at that time. So the honourable member will understand that when it comes to implementation of all of these recommendations we are really in the fairly early stages.

Mr. Chomiak: I appreciate the minister's comments, and I recognize some of the difficulties, but I will still proceed to go through the report and try to—and I appreciate the fact that the minister has offered that the staff and the department will try to respond as best possible, and I recognize the early stages of the implementation of this report.

One of the very interesting recommendations that bears directly and completely on the Department of Health with regard to the report is the recommendation that Manitoba Health look at the alternative of block funding of Children's Hospital.

The recommendation is on page 140 of the report, and I am wondering if the minister might comment on the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing that particular recommendation in the context of hospital funding overall to the Health Sciences Centre.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, in a very real sense the results that one might hope to achieve through the alternative of block funding of Children's Hospital have already been achieved. I say that because the consolidation of children's pediatric services at Health Sciences Centre, at the Children's Hospital, has had the effect of improving services to children at that facility. So while this recommendation can indeed be explored and that, really, all it says that we should do is explore the funding itself. The Children's Hospital is a part of the Health Sciences Centre and is administered basically as part of the operations of Health Sciences

Centre, but the department will indeed follow up on that particular recommendation.

There are lots of alternatives to funding mechanisms for various services in Manitoba, and as the honourable member and the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) will remember from our discussions relating to remuneration for physicians, our minds are open on these topics, because we are trying to find the most efficient way to bring the maximum levels of service to the people of Manitoba.

If there is a way for there to be savings through a block-funding mechanism that would perhaps be made available to more direct services to people, that is something we are always interested in looking at.

* (1030)

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Before we continue, would it be possible for the committee to get a couple of copies of this report that we seem to be dealing with at this time, so that we have something to follow through with?

Mr. McCrae: Yes. Pursuant to your request, Mr. Chairperson, Mr. DeCock is arranging right now to obtain three or four copies of the report.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Mr. Chomiak: It is very interesting. My next question, I was going to ask the minister if copies could be supplied for the many members of this Chamber, who will be paying attention to these issues as we go along, to assist the process. So I think that is a very valid suggestion. You scooped me.

Mr. McCrae: Just to demonstrate for the honourable member the interest that has been generated by this report, it is very much a groundbreaking, very much an innovative report. We are extremely proud of it. There were some 1,500 copies printed, and I think there are some 800 already gone. That is the kind of interest that this report is generating.

We will look at our ability to make copies available. I do not know how many exactly the honourable

member wants to have, but if he puts a request in through my office, we will—

Mr. Chomiak: I will need at least 20.

Mr. McCrae: —I think we can make arrangements for the honourable member to have that number.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for that response.

The minister's response to the question about funding was interesting, and it was informative. The minister indicated that block funding may not be necessitated because of the consolidation of children's services at Children's Hospital. The latter part of the minister's answer suggests an openness to look at alternatives.

By indicating that it may not be necessary as a result of consolidation, that raises a question in my mind because the recommendation that was made in this report came down after the consolidation and seemed to suggest that block funding to Children's Hospital was necessary to ensure provision of services post-consolidation. I am wondering if the minister might comment on that.

Mr. McCrae: The honourable member makes interesting comments on this point. The outcome of this recommendation has not been determined, so I do not propose to argue the merits or otherwise of block funding for the Children's Hospital versus the present situation, other than to say that children's services are an extremely important part of all of the health services that we provide.

We want to make sure that children's services are given appropriate priority. If that can be achieved by implementation of this recommendation, then that would be something that we would seriously look at doing. On the other hand, I do not want to lose sight of the importance of an integration of our health system in which children's services are a part but not separate and totally separate from everything else that goes on.

I think that throughout this report there is an emphasis on integration so that we get the maximum benefit of all the resources that are available for

children and other Manitobans. It is an open question in my mind, and if the honourable member wants to continue to develop a case here, in a sense of filling us in on his views with respect to why it is important to block fund or what benefits might be derived from that, we are very interested in hearing what he has to say on the point.

Mr. Chomiak: The danger of pursuing this to any great extent could result in a major philosophical difference and a long discussion, and we have a lot of area to cover.

Presumably, the report recommended block funding, and the report was co-chaired by the head of Children's Hospital on the basis of some feeling that, perhaps as a result of government initiatives in terms of funding to acute care hospitals, Children's Hospital is suffering from the effects of those funding cuts at a time when it is felt the resources ought to be augmented and not decreased. Presumably, the recommendation was made in order to ensure that a separate budgetary line is allocated to the entity of Children's Hospital to ensure that, when changes are made to the overall acute care system, the children's system not necessarily be brought into the context of those cuts. In short, I think it is probably felt that a number of the cuts and decisions made at Health Sciences Centre have impacted negatively on the operations at Children's Hospital. That is the long and the short of it.

Presumably, that would be the philosophy and the thinking behind the idea of block funding. I recognize what the minister indicated in his previous response, that there is a move toward integration of services, which is, I think, a fair point, as well as the fact that, paramount in all the recommendations of this report, is a consideration that we have to always consider—in fact, it is a recommendation of the report, and I quote: Every government policy or initiative be focused on correcting socioeconomic inequities that result in an increased number of children living in poverty and, by virtue of that, dealing with the situation with children.

I think it is pretty clear why the recommendation is in there. Notwithstanding the minister's comments about the integration of services, I think, from my perspective, that was the reason the argument was

made and the suggestion has been advanced.

Mr. McCrae: I appreciate the comments the honourable member has made, and I also appreciate his view of why he felt he needed to make them. I understand that he believes that reallocations and redirection of funding in various areas have had a negative, rather than a positive or neutral, impact. That is an area where there is disagreement between us. For support for my argument, I refer to the reports of the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation. It is not going to be good enough for me to take one person's word for these things or the honourable member's word, with all due respect, or anybody else's. We are going to base our judgments and decisions on acute health spending on assistance we get from the Manitoba Centre and others who are in a more independent sort of position to provide advice.

At the same time I am not going to stand here and tell the honourable member that we do not face fiscal realities in our country and in our province. The secretariat knows that. The secretariat knows that there are not going to be significant increases in funding because there is no question but that our ability to raise revenues is more and more constrained all the time.

We discussed that when we talked about it with the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) when we talked about the pressures that are being exerted through very, very serious budget changes at the federal level resulting in transfers that will be diminished, and who knows to what extent. But today we do not know to what extent. I do not exactly, but I do know that it is significant and the department is aware of that, and so rather than try to make the argument that, you know, these revenue shortfalls must not happen, that argument is taken away from us. We do not have that argument.

* (1040)

We are not going to get huge sums of money from Ottawa that are additional to what we are getting. I do not like it. The honourable member does not like it, but simply by standing up on our hind legs and screaming bloody murder about it is not going to change that, because no government in Ottawa is going to go back

to the spending habits of the past. Indeed, the reverse seems to be the indication, so we cannot pretend that the fiscal realities are not there.

That does not mean that we have not placed a high priority on health spending in Manitoba. The honourable member may know that our budget this year is \$1.85 billion. That is a very high level. It is more than \$500 million more than it was in the days when his party was the government of this province. So the commitment to health care has increased quite significantly since our government has been in office, over and above the commitment of the previous government.

That still does not mean that there are not new pressures that have been brought to bear on the system. The honourable member knows that we have that aging population that we have discussed and that creates pressure for the health system. There is a new emphasis on the health of our younger population. I welcome that emphasis. I welcome the honourable member's emphasis on that area.

If we can learn how to spend the dollars we have in a way that has some kind of outcome in mind as opposed to the simple method we have employed in the past, which is just to spend more so that we can tell everybody how much we have spent, I do not really think that is a popular approach with the people that we represent, because nobody is impressed anymore when we make the point that we sure know how to spend a lot of money. I think that the recent election results here and elsewhere demonstrate that people are no longer impressed with governments who claim and brag about how much money they can borrow, spend and tax.

It is in that environment that we are working, and yet we are placing more emphasis on children. How do you proceed? I think the report before us recognizes what I have been saying.

In fact, if I could quote briefly from the executive summary on page 4 of the report, it says: Fiscal realities will challenge the existing systems to assess cost-efficiency and effectiveness, and will serve as a catalyst to look for new ways of promoting health and

wellness while continuing to deliver services for those with existing health problems. The importance of collaboration and co-operation among all those concerned with the future of Manitoba children, including families, communities, service and care providers, agencies and government cannot be stressed enough.

For emphasis, Mr. Chairperson, I am going to read that sentence again: The importance of collaboration and co-operation among all those concerned with the future of Manitoba children, including families, communities, service and health care providers, agencies and government cannot be stressed enough.

Well, I read it twice. I should read it several times because it cannot be stressed enough. I feel very strongly about that.

The honourable member knows, it is a matter of some frustration to me that there are those who put their own vested interests ahead of the health of Manitoba's children. The days when we can afford to pander to the vested interests are over. They are really over. We cannot be like that anymore. We cannot operate that way anymore. The people of this province will not let us, and I do not blame them.

The vested interests have brought us to a point where our health system has been endangered, and the very vested interests who helped us put our health system in danger, if they were listened to and obeyed, would continue the process until we choked the very life out of our health system to a point where we would not have one anymore. I do not want to preside over something like that, Mr. Chairperson. I think that we have to put the health of our children ahead of those narrow interests, of vested interests.

I continue with this brief reference to the executive summary: This will precipitate the need for an overall review of the structures presently in place that influence the healthy development of our child population. Much has yet to be accomplished. This document provides an overview of the factors that influence health and recommendations on where to from here. Traditional systems and roles will be challenged. Families and communities will be called

upon for stronger participation, and this will require the development of new and innovative approaches to health and health care. If this process is embraced with a common vision for healthy children in our province, we could all meet the challenges that lie ahead.

This reference to a common vision was not put into this executive summary by accident. I dare say nothing was put into this report by accident, and that was very carefully considered. Indeed, I understand there were over 50 people involved in the preparation of this report. That is the kind of collaboration and co-operation I am talking about.

The challenges that lie ahead are real. They are not simply the product of some politician's imagination. They are real, and when I say that and when this report says that, it is not meant to scare anybody, but it is meant to try to encourage that collaboration and co-operation among all those concerned with the future of Manitoba children in mind. That is going to be central to many of our efforts in the next few years in Canada, that collaborative approach.

I am pleased, with qualifications, about the federal health forum. The qualifications are known and deal with the exclusion of the provinces from the process, but if the forum can achieve a sense in the population that we need that co-operation and that collaboration, even flawed as I believe the forum to be, if it can do that, then we should all celebrate, because that is very important.

The federal authority is leading with this forum process, and I have said to the federal minister that, while I am disappointed that she will not let us be a part of it, I still am hopeful that something can come out of that forum by way of a public discussion of health issues.

The hospital issues are health care issues and they are very important, of course, but health issues are more and more important in this day and age. We must consider the health issues. You cannot measure the health of our population by counting hospital beds or even by counting doctors or health professionals and saying, well, we have got all these doctors, so therefore we are going to be healthier. It does not work that way.

The honourable member knows as much as I do about the determinants of health and that this report goes well beyond simply the acute care sector of children's health. We clearly have a responsibility in that area, and we propose to live up to our responsibility, but we are not going to achieve results that are meaningful as quickly as we might unless we can get the debate focused and get working from the same page on these issues.

* (1050)

I do put out this plea quite often, because I would like to see an end to the partisan bickering that is part of health care in our country. We have produced by co-operation one of the best health systems in the world, if not the best system in the world, and I do not think we make it better by downgrading it all the time or attempting to have the public believe that the health system is not the best in the world.

So I hope that those who read this report read that section repeatedly, because it does say it. It requires a lot of emphasis, and I hope that honourable members in this House will place some emphasis on the importance of working together, as opposed always to trying to tear down, trying to be unduly and harshly and unconstructively critical, which has the effect of frightening people. I think that that is a disservice.

We are not going to improve our system by frightening people. We are going to improve our system by improving our system.

Mr. Chomiak: I have an idea for how we could expedite matters in this committee, and I took the time during the minister's comments to jot down some standard themes and lines that the minister engages in when I ask questions.

Number 1, line No. 1 is the vested-interest speech that we get from the minister. We have only heard it once or twice today, several times yesterday. Speech No. 2 is the NDP scare tactics. Speech 3 is the determinants of health, which the minister engaged in partially in this context. Speech 4 is the Michael Decter speech. Speech 5 is why-I-am-a-Canadian speech, and speech 6 is elements of—we heard it today

as how we should all live together to be nonpartisan in health care.

Maybe we could expedite matters. The minister, instead of going through his long dialogues, can just say, well, I will go, you know, speech 1 ditto, and we could save a lot of time in the committee, or speech 2 ditto, and we do not have to go through this.

An Honourable Member: Give me No. 3 again, please.

Mr. Chomiak: Number 3 was the determinants-of-health speech. Number 4 was the Michael Decter. Number 5 is why I am a Canadian. You remember that speech. That is the one about choosing to be—having the chance to do American, and there are elements of your daughter, the obstetrics of your daughter's having been birthed here and tying in with the speech about how we have the safest and the lowest incidence of birth mortality in this province as a result of the report, that one, and then the latter element of the previous speech was No. 6, let us live together and be nonpartisan. We could save a lot of time by just, perhaps, checking off where we are going in this [interjection] Yes, that would save a lot time. [interjection] It is quite clear that I could do the same thing; I am resisting that temptation.

My question to the minister is that there is also on page 140 a recommendation that the Physician Resource Committee undertake a pediatric needs assessment with a view to provision of primary care. Can the minister indicate whether that has gone to the Physician Resource Committee and whether that will be part of their plan that is going to emerge, as the minister has indicated earlier in this committee, at the end of this year?

Mr. McCrae: I did not realize I had made the same speeches so many times that the honourable member has been able to attach numbers to them. I am not going to make fun of the honourable member's speeches, but, surely, the items that he has listed from one to six—maybe he would like to exclude No. 4 because it is a partisan sort of speech, speech No. 4, or has been a partisan one on some occasions. although if you read Michael Decter's work, you will see that much

of what Michael Decter writes is very much in line with what is happening here in Manitoba and in the rest of the country too.

I happen to respect the work of Mr. Decter. I know a lot of people do not. They think that he was one of the architects of what is likely to happen in Ontario today. Be that as it may, if I was given enough time, I could probably put another six down there and tell the honourable member that I often speak about six other things too.

I hope the honourable member is not saying that vested interests ought to be the ones who run the health system. For goodness' sake, that is the approach that brought us the challenges in the first place. I hope the honourable member does not think that scaring people is the right thing to do, or a discussion of the determinants of health, a repeated discussion in this time of change and transition is not appropriate.

Surely, we should remind ourselves from time to time, what is it about us that makes us special as Canadians? Why, indeed? Well, should we not remind ourselves of the pride we have in the network, in the system that makes our country what it is and sets it apart from so many other countries in the world?

If I wear my pride of being a Canadian on my sleeve from time to time, I do not really apologize for that, as a Canadian citizen in a position of responsibility, as a Canadian who has taken an active part in the constitutional discussions which, they too, have shaped what we are as a country. We are a country that talks about who we are, and why do we do that? Well, some say we have an identity problem, but I do not. I think that helps shape our identity. Canadians have been talking their way through problems for generations. It is better than some other methods of solving problems, I can tell you, as people in some other countries would surely attest.

The last point may be the most important one, the last speech I make that the honourable member referred to about a nonpartisan approach to health care. I just remind the honourable member of Tommy Douglas. Surely, Tommy Douglas must have tried very hard to put partisan considerations aside to get us going with a

quality health system in our country. As one who had the privilege and honour of knowing Tommy Douglas, I can say I believe that is exactly what he did. If partisan considerations had been paramount in Tommy Douglas' day, we would still have the American style health system that the honourable member sometimes talks about in his speech No. 4. So I keep pleading for that. I have made the point.

* (1100)

The election is over here in Manitoba. The people have said, get on with the reforms in health care and do it carefully and do it in a co-operative fashion. I cannot really do it in that co-operative fashion until I get people who are willing to co-operate. So I think that is a very important speech.

I know the New Democrats have been a party for over 50 years, and do you know how they got to be a political force in our country? By making the same speeches over and over again so people will understand what they stand for. It is to their credit.

I had the privilege and honour of working in the House of Commons for eight years, and I listened to David Orlikow, Stanley Knowles, Lorne Nystrom and all those members of Parliament. Their speeches were all the same every day. It did not matter what the topic was. The speeches were about pensions and they were about social issues, and they put themselves forward as the conscience of the nation, and somewhat sanctimoniously from time to time, but that repetition of their message is what identifies New Democrats today.

So the honourable members sitting in this Chamber today can thank their forebears in the party for being repetitive. The NDP, in some places more, in some places less, but they are still a force in Canadian politics, diminishing, but still a force. I do not know how much of a force they are going to be in Ontario after today, but they will still be a force, I suggest, no matter what. How did they get to be that way? By saying the same things for 50 years.

Now there are problems associated with saying the same things for 50 years. One of the problems is that

times change. Circumstances change and hidebound solutions from 25, 30 years ago that are promoted daily in this Chamber, and elsewhere by New Democrats, do not work anymore. They still need to be part of the consideration and I accept that. [interjection]

I ask the honourable member not to make too much fun of my speeches. I will try not to do that about his. It is just that I think those points—I am glad he itemized them for us because as I look them over, they are important points. There is no way around it. I did not realize my speeches could have been identified in the way that they have, so that the honourable member does understand my message that is contained in those six particular topics.

I believe they are extremely important. I do not apologize for talking about getting the partisanship out of health. I think that is the best way for us to proceed.

When I think of the approach adopted by Dr. Gulzar Cheema, and apparently now by the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), which appears to be—[interjection] I will make a note of that one.

When I think of the approach that has been used by Dr. Cheema, by Avis Gray and now by the honourable member for Inkster, I think it has been helpful.

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

When my department or I were not doing a proper job they would tell us about it. That happens from time to time, perfection eludes all of us, even me. Honourable members are there to remind me. I expect that from the New Democrats too, when I am wrong. The other day we were wrong with some numbers respecting personal care. The honourable member made us understand that, and we acknowledge that, and we get on with our work. That seems to be an appropriate thing to do.

I think there is room for partisanship in all kinds of areas. At such a crucial time, partisanship simply for the sake of partisanship, one-upmanship and political brownie points has ceased to impress the people in the public. The recent election bears that out.

That is why speech No. 6 meshes with speech No. 1, the one about the vested interests. It was the vested interest who joined with the New Democrats to try to destroy the government of Manitoba in the recent election. It was the vested interest that put over \$700,000 worth of money into an ad campaign employing actors. Our electoral rules do not even allow political parties to spend as much as unions can spend during an election campaign to try to elect a certain political party. [interjection] The honourable member opposite is trying to distract my attention away from the important matters that I am trying to bring forward and discuss in this place. That is all right.

The honourable member did ask me about the Physician Resource Committee. He asked about recommendation 107 that says that the Physician Resource Committee, College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Manitoba Association of Registered Nurses, and Manitoba Health undertake a pediatric needs assessment with the specific view to the provision of primary child health care and the role of key health care professionals within the context of the community-based model supported by the health reform process.

We put a lot of store in the Physician Resource Committee because, as we have discussed in other parts of these Estimates, there is a need for physician resources in various areas of our province that those needs must be addressed. We also know that the specialists in health care, the pediatricians, the various child specialists are centred in Winnipeg for the most part. We need to understand that certain core services are required elsewhere, too. We do not think that there can be a Winnipeg Clinic or a Health Sciences Centre in every community in Manitoba. That is not realistic. We do not believe that we should try to achieve that sort of thing, but we do have to have certain core services in all of our communities and specialist services, as well.

It is always a concern when you hear that some specialist was leaving our jurisdiction to go somewhere else. When it happens, of course, it is taken as some kind of a sign that we are not going to have any doctors in our province. I just say to those who entertain those concerns that we would be concerned, too, if that is

what it meant. We have a large number of physicians operating in Manitoba. The challenge is to ensure that we have the right specialists in the right places at the right time in serving the people who need them when they are needed, so that this recommendation will indeed be going to the Physician Resource Committee as part of their review as they prepare their final report later this year.

Mr. Chomiak: This question was very specific and the minister did answer it, I think, in the last sentence. I did not ask about MARN and the other bodies because that is an overall recommendation, but I wanted to know whether or not the recommendations on pediatric services was going to be integrated into the final report of the PRC, which is due to report at the end of the year. The minister answered in the affirmative on that front. I thank him for that response.

Moving on to another issue which is very broad based and fundamental, I think, to the entire report, I want to ask the minister what the status is with respect to the provision of health care services in a school-based environment. I recognize there are a variety of recommendations dealing with that, and it is also integrated with the whole issue of primary care and the provision of primary care by nurses. It has offshoots in terms of nurse resource centres, et cetera, but with respect to school-based services per se and the fact that schools are, as a result of this report, recommended to be a source of primary care, I am wondering what recommendations are being looked at, what procedures are being put in place. Because of the very significant role this plays in this report, what is happening in this regard?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Acting Chairperson, I think it might answer a number of the honourable member's questions if I referred to the vision that we have for the future of the Healthy Child Development strategy. I want the honourable member to know that we believe it is critical that the role of schools be strengthened as a primary site for the provision of health promotion, health maintenance in education and primary care services. We began that process on March 17, I think it was, and we transferred some dollars to the Education and Training Department for the provision of some services in the schools. I do not know if the

honourable member has reviewed our Vision for the Future document, but it would probably answer a number of the questions he might have had in mind to ask.

If the honourable member would like me to refer to it, I will; if not, then I will stop. [interjection] I would refer the honourable member to that. It is entitled, Gary Filmon's Plan Manitoba, and it has a vision for the future and pages 45 and on talks about building healthy communities.

* (1110)

On page 47 begins a discussion of a Healthy Child Development strategy and sets out where we propose to go. We have begun the process. As the executive summary to the child health strategy report, Dr. Postl's report, says, there is much to be done, and we certainly recognize that because this is a new direction in child health policy in Manitoba. Basically we almost have to turn everything upside down and start over again in terms of our thinking as a number of government departments delivering services to children, so that we are going to be at various stages over the next number of years in the development of services for children in Manitoba.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Acting Chairperson, I am not sure if the minister recognized the point. I think he did in the latter part of his response, but the recommendation to make schools a primary source of health care for children is almost fundamental. In some respects it is almost a revolution in terms of the approach of health care, and in some respects it is not because it is a reinvention of something that used to happen before in our health care system. It is a sort of a move back towards that. In order to implement that kind of a change, it really does take a fundamental shift in terms of thinking and approach. The minister alluded to that in his answer, notwithstanding the document that he just quoted from, and I recognize numerous announcements were made concerning this.

I guess I was somewhat concerned when the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) made reference to the Boundaries Review and in the context of her press release indicated that the whole issue of health care and

school-based services was going to be looked at further down the road. I am going from memory in terms of my recollection of that particular press announcement.

I think if there is going to be a move towards a fundamental shift, it is going to be school based, as the report recommends. Then we have no choice, in terms of our society, where we are structuring. It is going to mean, not three years down the road, not two years down the road, but immediately, a shift and a move towards placing services. It is going to affect public health nurses, it is going to affect the entire primary care delivery. It is going to affect the allocation of capital dollars. It will affect the allocation of capital dollars over the next five years, if in fact that is what we are doing.

I mean, every time we build a school now, are we looking towards, for example, the provision of primary health care facilities within that school? Are we looking at the school population within that context? It is not a recommendation that I think requires further study. It has to be integral to the operations of what is happening, and notwithstanding the minister's comments, I am wondering, is that philosophy reflected in the activities of the committee on child health and the children's secretariat?

Mr. McCrae: I appreciate what the honourable member had to say on this point. Very briefly speaking, that is the general direction.

I do not know, when I hear the member say that all we are doing is going back, I do not mean he means it in a negative sense. Maybe, in some ways, what we did was good in the past, and we should look at those things in the past that achieved results and replicate or change to fit with emerging trends and modern conditions.

But, in a general sense, it needs to be said that the school is assuming more and more importance. The educators are assuming different roles or differing roles. Although it seems like some time ago I went to school now, but the people, the teaching profession, I am told today that they are being asked to do more and more things: be a doctor, a lawyer, and all the things that they are not trained to be.

I am certainly sympathetic to what they say, but when I went to school, the teacher was a very, very important person in my life, and I think that is not changing by any stretch. The teacher did serve many, many roles then, and that is probably not ever going to be different, because no matter what your training as a teacher, when you are at work, you are with a group of young people, and you are a very important person to those young people, and they rely on you for so much indeed.

However, there are primary health issues that go beyond the—society has changed a lot since the days when I went to school. I think the honourable member went to school some years before that, I am not sure, or maybe it was after, probably after.

In our society today, numbers will tell you that moms and dads are both at work, where there are two-parent families. There are many, many more single-parent families today than there used to be, and all of this creates a quite different environment for the children. I do not think that is a positive thing, but it is a fact of life in the 1990s, so we are dealing with a group or a generation of children the profile of which is different from that which existed 20, 30 years ago.

I think there have been significant changes happening in our school system, and I sometimes think that the teaching profession has not been given enough credit for the changes that they have undertaken. They have changed their way of delivering teaching services. They have been part of changes in curriculums, and all of those things that go into the development of school policy.

So I would like to be on record as recognizing that, indeed, while education reform is something that has to be engaged in, there ought to be a recognition that there has been lots of education reform in the classroom, and the teachers have been a central feature of all of that, and they should be given credit for the improvements that have been undertaken over the years.

With regard to the school as a place of primary health care delivery in brief, the answer to the question that the member raises is, yes, we are going to see schools used differently in the future, and that may well have to

include Capital issues for school divisions and for the Education department.

Mr. Chomiak: When I look at the recommendation on the education system on page 139, I guess it makes a lot of the points that the minister and I both were discussing in the course of my question and in the course of the minister's response.

One of the suggestions that members on this side of the House have made for some time for the development of a collaborative approach is the use of a system of protocols in terms of interdepartmental use of protocols to expedite matters relating to children.

Now, the system of protocols is most advanced in British Columbia. It was put in place, in fact, by the previous Socred government.

We do have one or two protocols in effect in Manitoba. We also have the recommendation that was made years ago from MAST to MASBO, MASS, et cetera, to government that a system be put in place.

* (1120)

I am wondering, given this recommendation and given the fact that it is effective in other jurisdictions, whether or not we are looking at a system of protocols to be put in place in order to deal with the interdepartmental issues relating to children, particularly how it impacts on the education and health care system.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, the honourable member asks about protocols. I am pleased to see that some significant work has already been achieved, done, and that by the time we get going this fall in the school year, we will have an emotional behaviour disorder protocol in place to put into effect a protocol, an interdepartmental protocol. This was something that we announced, by the way, on the 17th of March, as well.

At that time, we said that this initiative completed by the Child and Youth Secretariat is an interdepartmental protocol for children and adolescents with severe to profound emotional behavioural disorders. It involves the Departments of Family Services, Justice, Health

and Education designed to strengthen the existing service network for children and adolescents who require services from more than one department.

The Minister of Family Services at that time said that this protocol is intended to ensure proper case management and will enable departments to work together more efficiently and effectively. The minister also, at that time, said that the secretariat will continue to address other issues and develop plans for the benefit of children served by government programs.

The protocol agreement between the various departments for the co-ordination of services for children and adolescents with severe to profound emotional behavioural disorders is important because these children are at an extremely vulnerable time, and they need their problems dealt with. They do not need to spend, they and their families and their teachers and all the rest, all their time figuring out where the help can come from. They just need the help.

The ministers of Education and Family Services and myself and Justice have mandated the inter-departmental service protocol for increased service co-ordination at the local level for these kids with very severe or profound disorders. So each of the departments still has specific responsibilities for facilitating the delivery of this continuum of services in the context of specific mandates, but the protocol formalizes a shared interdepartmental and multisystem case management approach to enhance good practice and to maximize the effective use of available resources to address the service needs for this high-risk population.

I guess the problem that we developed is simply the result of the explosion of services available over the past number of years, a literal explosion, and it is like anything that is growing and growing and growing.

The Home Care program, I think, is like this, too. It has grown so much, and so much resource has been given to that particular service, and it is astounding when you consider the amount of financial resources that this government has made available to the various services in Health and in all of the Family Services departments and in Education, too. It boggles the mind

to try to ponder how much money this government has made available to those services, and the previous government, while not anywhere near so committed to these things, did indeed place a lot of resource available for these services, as well. I do not mean to say that they did not care about anybody, but they did not care as much, that is all.

The point is that when you have a virtual explosion of funding, as we have seen in recent years in these Family Services, Health and Education areas, you do get, as I think we have seen in some areas, what I have referred to as growing pains. When something is growing as fast as it is, there are indeed problems that develop. This secretariat is simply charged with the responsibility to make us spend the dollars more wisely in order that children can be the beneficiaries.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I wonder if the minister might table a copy of that protocol.

Mr. McCrae: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, we will be back together this afternoon shortly after Question Period, I think, and maybe we can arrange to have copies suitable for tabling at that time.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I take it from the comments of the minister that there is a recognition now that protocols are one of the ways to go, and insofar as they have entered into an additional one and probably several others, that this system that has been relatively effective in other jurisdictions will probably be looked at more with a greater emphasis in the future, which is something that we have been suggesting for some time and, I think, probably makes a lot of structural sense.

On page 139 of the plan there is a specific recommendation concerning the use of lottery money to assess the impact of VLTs on children in rural and northern areas. Have funds been allocated in this budgetary year, or is the minister aware in order to undertake this particular assessment?

* (1130)

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, I looked at that recommendation. Initially, I was somewhat interested

in the concept because of the fact that the law requires that children not use VLTs. So I could only assume this recommendation must be talking about the indirect effects on families and children. There may indeed be that.

I think when it comes to programming respecting remediation for people with gambling addictions, I would be better able to answer detailed questions when we have the AFM people with us. With respect to this specific recommendation, I think that is probably the right time to raise this issue.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Acting Chairperson, that makes sense, and I will repose the question when we get to that line in the appropriation.

These recommendations, every time I look at some of them, I keep thinking, gee, they are fundamental, and my notes say fundamental, et cetera. It is difficult, but I continue to go through this systematically.

On page 137, special needs children, it is interesting that it recommends a province-wide co-ordination standard for special needs be adopted. The minister just referenced a protocol developed for high-level emotional children, so obviously that is part of the path. That is only one segment in obviously a very large undertaking.

I am wondering if the minister could advise what the status is of this particular undertaking, recognizing again, like some of the other recommendations, this is a major initiative that impacts dramatically on many departments. Can the minister outline what the status is of this particular project?

Mr. McCrae: Again, the announcement on March 17 set out some plans for medically fragile children. I understand there might be about 80 new ones coming into the system this coming fall. That day we announced that some \$400,000 would be transferred from the Department of Health to the Department of Education and Training to be used to provide nursing supports in schools for children dependent on medical technology. An additional \$200,000 will be transferred to Children's Special Services to provide medical procedure training for teachers and teaching assistants

and other professionals. All this is going to be in effect for these children coming into the system this September into our schools.

That is the kind of example of response to these recommendations that are made in the child health strategy, but also an example of the work of the youth and children's secretariat in bringing these departments together.

I would hope that each new initiative will be a little easier to achieve than the one before it, because the thinking is the whole culture of government is being challenged by the secretariat. I wish them well in their work, but I suggest that we will start slowly, and later on in the process you will see initiative after initiative coming forward because we will have changed the culture of our thinking.

Mr. Chomiak: The minister is right about it will challenge the entire culture and approach of government. I recognize and welcome those initiatives that were announced on March 17 dealing with this.

This recommendation, per se, is a fairly large and overwhelming recommendation, and calling for province-wide service co-ordination standards for special needs children be adopted by provincial-funded bodies is a major undertaking. There is not even necessarily, for example, in education fields a comprehensive or an agreed-upon definition of some categories within the education field itself. In fact, there is not even agreed-upon definitions as to what constitutes the various levels.

This in itself could occupy, I would suspect, the Youth Secretariat full time for the next four years frankly. I guess I am looking for a response from the minister or the recognition of the significance and the immensity of this particular recommendation.

Mr. McCrae: I believe there is clearly a recognition not only of the importance but also of the immense—how shall I put it—the size of the job that needs to be done is a big one, there is no question about it. I am just wondering what the honourable member's point is. Is he leading to something to the effect that we need a bigger secretariat or more resources to be flowed

directly to the secretariat so it can do its work? If so, that is fine, and I am not critical if he is saying that because as the secretariat requires the skills and the personnel that we have in our departments, it would be the intention of the minister that the assistance be made available to the secretariat as the various tasks are undertaken.

That has been the intent. It was the reason for setting up the secretariat in the first place. I believe we are fortunate in the leadership in the secretariat in that Mr. Toews has played a very key role in a fundamental and, frankly, quite successful reform of mental health services in our province. Everybody I have talked to has said, well, it is a big job that you are wanting to get done here, but you probably have the right person co-ordinating that job.

* (1140)

The resources are there. The honourable member was scolding me a little bit when I was talking about the massive resources that have been made available to the various departments by the government of Manitoba over the last seven years. They are there, so it is a question of how do we get them channeled. That requires a fair amount of skill, and it requires a determination also on the part of the ministers and the deputy ministers to co-operate with the secretariat in co-ordinating all of the work that has to be done.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

I do not want to tell the honourable member that all the recommendations in this report are something that can be implemented very quickly. I think it has to be done in a systematic way, in an organized way. I also think that time is going to be required to achieve some of the major, major changes that are set out in this report, and I think we have the right people to do it.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, for the most part I am not disagreeing with anything the minister has said. I am simply highlighting a particular recommendation that will require I suspect—for example, this particular recommendation on special needs children will require probably the input of thousands of people, and I dare say the co-ordination of hundreds of agencies and

individuals in order to even remotely start to deal with a co-ordinated and unified system, and it cannot be overemphasized because the report points out, and I quote: That a unified referral intake system be developed for special needs children to eliminate the need for families to search for supports.

At almost every level, when a child has experienced any kind of difficulty, the parents and the children will indicate that is one of the major and the most significant problems experienced in the first instance: Where do we turn; what is available; how do we get into the system?

In some respects we have done an excellent job in the health care system by having a system in terms of continuing care and home care that is a one-stop shop—a one-point entry system that has worked very effectively and is recognized around North America and the world as one of the best because of that, in terms of our home care and continuing care system.

I am not being critical of the government, and I am not holding them to guidelines, but this particular undertaking here, and I have said it already, is quite immense. I am just trying to get some sense as to a recognition as to where they might be going on this because it seems to me that as a start point I think every single agency involved ought to receive a copy of this report, and it ought to be highlighted that this is where the report is recommending that we proceed in looking for input from all of the myriad of agencies and individuals who are involved in this particular area. There are many that are very well organized.

We have a very elaborate system of plans for dealing with special needs kids right in the school system once they get through the hoops, and once they are in the system. It is quite sophisticated with case management studies and the individual education plans that apply to individual students. But that is only one small part of it. I am just looking for some recognition as to the multifaceted and complex nature of this particular undertaking.

Mr. McCrae: I would give the honourable member that recognition. I hope nobody wants to understate the magnitude of this job. I said earlier that some 800

copies of this report are already out there. I assume that those numerous agencies that the honourable member refers to are numbered amongst those 800 and they are looking at this report, but it is interesting that the honourable member only read half the recommendation when he was reading it. The rest of it says: This will require co-operation and collaboration among the existing agencies and consumers.

So we cannot all have it our way. The government cannot have it the way it might have wished it initially. Agency A cannot hold up the process—well, maybe they can, but I hope they do not—by saying, well, no, we want it all our way. We want more funding so that we can participate, or whatever they are going to say or might say. I repeat, this will require co-operation and collaboration among existing agencies and consumers. What that means to me is that there will be some give-and-take required in terms of power, authority, who is running the show sort of thing. I do not want to take all the power for myself or for the secretariat or anything like that. I just want to see that the children get the best that we can give them.

We know we have the resources, and I think that had a lot to do with what led us to the formation of the secretariat, a sense, rightly or wrongly, I think rightly, that we have got a lot of agencies out there, and we have people falling through the cracks. People do not even know where to turn. There are so many places to turn that they do not know which one is the right one and sometimes by turning to one, you do not necessarily get appropriately referred to the right one.

So no, I sure do not want to underestimate either the mammoth nature of the work that needs to be done, but I think at this particular time in our history we have got the right frame of mind. We have got people in a place or in a position or of a mind to co-operate and collaborate with us, and only by stretching out our hand and asking for advice and listening to it once in awhile when we get it, people will be willing, and agencies will be willing to work with us, with our secretariat and with all of the people involved.

That is why I do not want to embarrass Mr. Toews, but I say that the choice of Mr. Toews was very carefully made, because there is a sense that it is that

kind of leadership that we need to bring people together.

Mr. Chomiak: I do not disagree at all with the choice of individual, and I guess generally the minister has acknowledged that he is recognizing the points I was trying to make. I will just illustrate, and I will close this out with one further example.

In the education community, their studies of special needs students, most major studies indicate that they probably constitute 10 to 15 percent of the population. Within our education system today we do not recognize that remotely, and the Minister of Education's reform document indicates, in the document, that perhaps 5 percent of the population might require special assistance. So at the very outset, in terms of definitions, there is a difference of opinion with respect to the client base, if I could put it in those terms, that have to be dealt with.

If you canvass the community, you will see a wide-ranging view of even what constitutes the very nature of "special needs" or exceptional children or whatever definition one wants to use. So at the outset even definitions are difficult to come to, but I do not want to belabour that point. I just basically stated my concerns in that area and, unless the minister wants to comment, I am going to move on.

Mr. McCrae: As I listened to the honourable member, I was reminded of our discussion with the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) on what percentage of GNP ought we to spend on health, and I made the point in answer to the honourable member for Crescentwood that a discussion like that without any reference to outcomes, without any reference to the needs that are there, is meaningless.

Even a discussion of how many children are special needs children or what percentage of our children are special needs children is somewhat academic if we are not providing services that appropriately serve that demand anyway. So it goes both ways.

I do not know if it is 9 percent or 10 or 15 or what it is either. If the honourable member wants us to assume that it is high, well, we will take that into account. You

know, if somebody says it is lower than what the honourable member says, well, so be it. We have to be there to deal with the special needs children that become identified as special needs children. There may be a time when more kids will be identified that way, and hopefully we will be able to provide service to them too.

* (1150)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, on page 135 there are recommendations concerning oral health. Now, we could certainly go down the road of my saying, why did you cut out the Children's Dental Program and you coming back with your responses, but I do not want to—I mean, it is very easy to go down this road, but my question is, what is the government's specific response, given they have a track record in this area?—albeit it changed.

The focus and the program changed. Is the government considering a reconstitution of the Children's Dental plan in some form or other along the lines as recommended in the report or where are we at in terms of this specifically?

It seems to me, it is an interesting recommendation insofar as we do have, we still have the physical structure, the physical ability to reconstitute parts of the Children's Dental plan to follow up on this recommendation, and we do have the human personnel available to do that still in Manitoba. It is not too late.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairperson, the question of oral health for our children remains a matter of concern and priority for our government and anybody interested in preventive and health care issues anywhere.

We had problems with the previous rural dental health program. It was set up by the New Democratic government, and, as far as it went I guess you could say there was nothing wrong with it except that people in Brandon and Winnipeg did not get to benefit from it. It struck me as somewhat unfair from that point of view and I remember—I was not a member of this place when it was set up—being kind of critical of any government that would set up a program in the way that it was set up.

The problem, as I see it, with the rural dental program, even though there certainly are good aspects to it and it is regrettable that governments cannot afford to provide that kind of a service, but if you are looking at a population service that is not available to some, like more than half the population in the province, it strikes me as somewhat inequitable. Yet, we also know that a large number of the kids who were getting the services were the children of parents who had dental plans, so that did not make a lot of sense either, as far as I can tell.

I mean the report, in item 65, recommendation 65, talks about children of the working poor at high risk. That was the one thing about the rural dental program that I felt did not do well enough. It took too broad an approach that we could not afford to sustain.

That is the trouble with getting into programs you cannot sustain in the first place. You raise expectations and then, you know, you can make good politics out of it, there is no question about that.

Coming from Brandon, even though the program was not fair enough to be available to Brandon kids, a number of the employees of the program who were affected by it, lived in Brandon and I found myself in a position of trying to be of assistance to those employees to get retrained or to get re-employed somehow because I believe those people did an excellent job.

They did do an excellent job. They were well-received in the communities in which they worked, and all of that. It was not an altogether positive experience, I have to admit, but, on the other hand, I agree with the concept of targeting.

If there are finite health dollars, let us spend them where we can get the most good. I appeal to the federal authority with regard to First Nations children because we have evidence that there is a high incidence of dental caries amongst aboriginal children for reasons that are known to health professionals.

Those dental caries are preventable you know. So what is happening in terms of education? We did not shut down the total rural dental program. The

treatment part of it, we did, but other parts we did not. Prevention is still part of that program.

I know the honourable member will disagree with the approach taken, and I respect that point of view. It would be nice if we could carry on providing the full range that we were providing. Unfortunately, that is not possible. I believe we are able, in Manitoba, to identify the areas of need, and rather than take that broad brush, we can be more selective in order to get a health care outcome. That will not come easily, mind you, because there will be the argument that government ought to be involved in a broader approach.

But in terms of getting a job done, I do not think we can afford the broad approach, and I do not think we can afford not to address the preventive aspects here in a targeted way, because as the honourable member will argue, if you do not prevent, you are going to have a bigger problem down the road.

I have heard the argument many times, and I basically agree with that argument, but not as it applied to the broad approach behind the children's dental health program. So I will be asking for some proposals from the department and working with the people they work with to see how we might address the issue of targeting the dental health needs in this province.

I already happen to know that First Nations children are going to be in that target, and I am going to be appealing to federal authorities for help. I am going to be calling on my colleagues in this House, both in the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party to help us apply pressure. It does not always work. We already know that. We know the fiscal realities that are faced by the federal government, but we have to mean it when we say that constitutionally and in every other way, the status aboriginal population are the

beneficiaries of the federal government, if you can call it that, and we do not see enough federal participation in these programs. Well, maybe it is not a question of not enough.

This is a whole other discussion which I have engaged in before. Maybe it is speech No. 8, but it is the one that talks about the situation in which Canadian aboriginal families find themselves. It is No. 8. It is not fair and it is not right. I have 8 themes now. I will not dwell on No. 8 then, because I sense that there is not a willingness to hear it all, and besides there is not enough time right about now. But I hope the honourable member for Kildonan will agree with me that this is a problem that needs to be addressed with federal assistance. The honourable member is nodding his head, and I knew that all along. It was not a trick question.

We care very much about all health issues of Manitoba's aboriginal population. We just ask the chiefs and the federal government to get together, address that. I have asked them in the past. Address issues of the violence that goes on in reserve communities against the women and against the children. I have seen too little, I am sorry to say. I am not impressed yet, but I am here. I am waiting to be impressed.

* (1200)

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. As previously agreed, the hour being 12 noon, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being after 10 p.m., this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 today (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 8, 1995

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