



Fifth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 20, 1999

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, just a point of note, yesterday when we changed the sequence of Estimates here, it was only for, in fact, one day, so today we should revert back to the regular sequence of Estimates, just for clarification.

Madam Speaker, I will therefore move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Cummings), that this House do now resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Most Gracious Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (1010)

Mr. Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. The committee will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training. When the committee last sat, it had been considering item 16.1(b)(1) on page 46. Shall the item pass?

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Mr. Chairman, at the end of last time I had asked the minister about professional development activities in sustainable development in the past year, and I think the minister was going to—and Train the Trainer, both of them. I wondered if the minister had brought that material.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): Yes, I do, Mr. Chairman, and I will say to the honourable member now that we

made a number of undertakings yesterday, and we do not have all the responses yet, but as they come in, we will give them to the honourable member. We do not want to get too far behind on that. Mr. Carlyle and the department are working very hard to keep up with all the work that we are turning out for them here.

With respect to professional development for teachers, the honourable member did indeed ask about this. In order to address the mandate to communicate sustainable development concepts to teachers, university professors and K-S4 teachers, the Sustainable Development Initiative within Education and Training has organized and conducted the following workshops with Manitoba educators and future educators.

Sessions related to teacher training in Manitoba: On May 5 of this year the Graduate Adult Education course at the University of Manitoba, Teacher Education Program. The professor was Dr. John Didyk. Coming up on September 30, 1999, Undergraduate Social Foundations course at the University of Manitoba, Teacher Education Program, Professor Dr. Fred Drewe. Coming up October 21, 1999, Undergraduate Administration and Foundations course at the University of Manitoba, Teacher Education Program, Professors Dr. John Didyk and Dr. Dao Poonwassie. May 15, 1998, last year, Undergraduate School Organization course at the University of Manitoba, Teacher Education Program, Professors Dr. John Didyk and Dr. Fred Drewe.

Sessions related to professional development for teachers: April 30, 1999, SAG workshop, St. Vital School Division No. 6, How to Integrate Sustainable Development into the Manitoba Science Curriculum, session organized by Barb Shawcross. That was a half-day professional development session for teachers. On December 14, 1998, Integrating Sustainable Development into the Curriculum session at Ecole Guyot in St. Boniface, session for teachers K-6 organized by

the school principal, Gerald Fouasse. The reason I am spelling these is because I had a chat yesterday with Hansard, and I think it is appropriate. October 25, 1998, a SAG workshop at St. Vital School Division No. 6, Integrating Sustainable Development into the K-4 curriculum. Session organized by Barb Shawcross, half-day professional development session for teachers.

Now sessions related to Manitoba Education and Training working with Learning for a Sustainable Future, otherwise known as LSF, to provide Train the Trainer workshops to Manitoba educators: December 1998, a two-day information session and workshop was held in Gimli with sustainable development educators in the province who have received professional development related to educating for sustainability. This was a co-ordinated event with LSF and MET, Manitoba Education and Training, funded by the Sustainable Development Innovation Fund and the organizer was Sandy Margetts.

An Honourable Member: A fine person.

Mr. McCrae: Known to the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Tweed). I believe Sandy comes from the Killarney area or is it Boissevain?

An Honourable Member: Near.

Mr. McCrae: In southern Manitoba, we know that much. With respect to future sustainable development sessions arranged or planned, there is an SAG expected October 22, 1999, September to December of this year, providing sessions to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Education Program. A Francophone Sustainable Development Integration session is in the process of being organized with Gerald Fouasse at Ecole Guyot school.

Now that is what I have to this point. I know I made a number of undertakings, and I am advised that more information will be made available later in the day.

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to ask a policy question about taxation and schools. I do not think I am

on the right line anyway, but it is policy. It deals with institutions which are educational but which do not necessarily follow the Manitoba curriculum specifically, for example, English as a second language institutions or adult literacy institutions. They are charged, on a building that they would lease, the actual education tax which, for other institutions which follow the Manitoba curriculum, I understand would be forgiven or returned in some way.

I wonder if the minister could tell me where this policy lies, what the regulation is, and are there any opportunities for institutions in that position to talk to the minister, to talk to the government and to see if there are any kinds of changes or accommodations that could be made.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, issues related to municipal taxation on exempt or potentially exempt or under consideration for exemption buildings and properties come under the authority of the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach). That is something that the honourable member may want to raise with that minister. However, I know that public schools are exempt, subject to a certain number of acres of property being involved. Beyond that, if the honourable member wants me to, I can also raise the matter with the Minister of Rural Development or the honourable member can do it herself. Either way.

Ms. Friesen: Just for clarification, this would be in the city of Winnipeg. Would it still come under the Minister of Rural Development?

Mr. McCrae: Issues related to assessment and taxation are the responsibility of the Minister of Rural Development.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 16.1. Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$663,800—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$126,800—pass.

Item 16.1.(c) Native Education Directorate (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$358,900.

Ms. Friesen: I was pleased to see the addition of extra staff in this section of the department. This is Native Education Directorate. It increased by one staff person, one professional

person. I wonder if the minister could outline for me what results are anticipated from the addition of one extra person.

* (1020)

Mr. McCrae: As I alluded to on another day, Manitoba and Saskatchewan and other western provinces have a situation that is somewhat different from other provinces in Canada in that we have a higher proportion of aboriginal Canadians in our population. That presents tremendous opportunities for us. It also presents some challenges in achieving those opportunities. So we have an aboriginal education directorate in our department. The directorate is headed by Juliette Sabot, S-A-B-O-T. In that unit, in addition to the director, there is a secretary and three professional staff.

We know that the key to progress in dealing with any aboriginal issue or objective is dialogue, communication and understanding. We often hear that is missing in programs of the past which have resulted in little success and sometimes outright failure. We are going to see a day in Manitoba when many, many of the people seeking employment opportunities will be aboriginal Manitobans. We have to have a system in place which will accommodate bringing those aboriginal Manitobans into the workforce, and education is always the key, as we very well know. So we need, in that respect then, at the K-12 level and at post-secondary levels, more aboriginal involvement in our curriculum development, in the design of our programming. We need more aboriginal people to help us with that involvement. We need more meetings. We know we have lots of meetings, but we need more of those and better liaison with aboriginal leadership at all levels.

We need to forge more partnerships. I was pleased, and the honourable member I think was pleased, to see the relationship developed with Morris-MacDonald School Division and the Anokiiwin school. Now I got into trouble over this the other day. It is A-N-O-K-I-I-W-I-N. That partnership appears to be a very positive one, and no doubt it came about because of good, solid communication, understanding and consensus building. That is important.

This unit has a big job. Even though it is a small unit, we believe that we have made and can make further progress. The activities of the directorate, their overall program overview, is that they provide leadership and co-ordination for departmental initiatives in native education and training. The directorate works with Manitoba Education and Training and other government agencies, as well as with administrators, teachers, parents, students and native organizations, to ensure that the education system is responsive to the education of aboriginal students. I think that the honourable member knows very well that the rate of discontinuation, or drop-out rate if you like, is higher among Manitobans who are aboriginal, and that is an issue that this directorate needs to address and does address. A departmental Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy is being co-ordinated by the directorate. As Indian and Northern Affairs Canada devolves and transfers authority to First Nations self-government, the directorate represents Manitoba Education and Training in sectoral and policy development discussions related to self government.

To ensure a corporate approach to aboriginal education and training within Manitoba Education and Training is one of the main objectives. Another one is to promote the removal of systemic barriers to aboriginal student access in education and training. Another one is to oversee implementation of the department's Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy.

Manitoba Education and Training's education renewal initiative is committed to inclusionary education. The Native Education Directorate ensures that native education priorities are integrated into Manitoba Education and Training programs and activities. Those activities are co-ordinating the implementation of the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, participating in orientation and information sessions with educational stakeholders regarding aboriginal education and training policy directions, the promotion of the participation of aboriginal parents and communities in the education of their children, participation in the native education sector of the Western Canadian Protocol consortium, work

with aboriginal and other educational partners to hold professional development activities and to provide cultural workshops and antiracist education training to department staff, educators, parents and community agencies.

I represent a constituency in which Brandon University is located, and Brandon University has, I think, been seen to be the university of choice for many, many aboriginal Manitobans. As one who attends convocation ceremonies and many other opportunities related to Brandon University, I know that aboriginal participation there is at a high level. I think there are good things to be said about the level of co-operation that exists between Brandon University—I single out Brandon University in this regard, simply because I am a little more familiar than I would, for obvious reasons, be with other universities, all of which, I know, are striving to create better and more opportunities for aboriginal Manitobans.

So I think that we have some very significant challenges and problems, challenging problems that we have on a national basis, and I know that aboriginal governments and nonaboriginal governments struggle along and have done for many, many years. As one who has been involved at the provincial level for 11 years, I sometimes feel the same frustrations as aboriginal people feel at the pace of progress regarding aboriginal issues. I think that there are times when I think we could do better. At times, I feel that aboriginal governments could do better, should do better, in the same way that we should. I sometimes think we inject a little too much politics into issues related to aboriginal Manitobans. I really despair about that. When I have in the past had opportunities to visit in aboriginal communities, I have despaired somewhat because if there could be better levels of co-operation, better levels of trust and understanding, I think we could make better progress.

So I hope the honourable member shares that concern; I think she does. In fact, we all do, but I am still trying very hard to understand—and maybe the Estimates is a good opportunity for the honourable member who is pretty knowledgeable with respect to aboriginal issues and she could shed some light on how we might

go about making better progress. I have heard some pretty interesting proposals over the years. Not all of them have worked, but when there is a real job to get done, it seems that people can pull together. I have seen examples of that too. So I have seen examples of pretty good success, and I have seen examples of outright failure. The failures still bother me as a Manitoban, as a child of western Canada growing up, all my life, going back to the time of my growing-up years and being concerned about this.

So, for me, it is a lifelong concern because I am not planning to leave western Canada, and I know my aboriginal compatriots are not planning to leave either, and our children and their children. So we have to find better ways. I have been convinced for a number of years that education is the key, education for aboriginals, and for nonaboriginals about aboriginal issues, but we need to get aboriginal people into the workplace. We need them in work related to social and community development. We need them in areas related to economic development, and I think that the more attention we can pay to the economic development side of that equation, the more success we are going to have on the social side in the long term too.

I know I am supposed to be the one answering all the questions, but if the honourable member has any perspectives on this, I am sure interested in hearing them.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, the minister, I am not sure, really addressed the question. I asked what difference the increase of an additional person would make in the plans of the department. What did they anticipate? What did the government anticipate as going to be accomplished in the next year with that additional person? For example, last year the government had said that they would produce a human resource development plan in aboriginal affairs for the department. I did not hear that in the minister's statement; perhaps, I missed it. If that was done, could the minister table it?

Basically, this is a very small section of the department for a very large task. It is a section of the department which has been considerably larger in earlier years, and so the reduced nature of this department is a very serious concern,

which is why I said at the beginning that I was glad to see the addition of a single person, and I wondered how the government intended to deploy those additional resources and what additional impact this would have.

* (1030)

Mr. McCrae: I am sorry, I did not mean to be unresponsive, and I will give the honourable member some better detail as to what is happening, what is being achieved. There is an operational framework, and it consists of the necessary structures, processes and data to support the strategy. Actions undertaken include a refocused mandate for the Native Education Directorate, which includes a greater role in policy development and ensuring policy and programming congruency. In addition, staffing was increased by two positions in 1998 and '99, and one position in this budget.

A permanent departmental working group has been established to identify and review activities necessary to achieve the goals of the strategy. An aboriginal advisory council is being established to advise and make recommendations to the minister on an ongoing basis with regard to the strategy. The development of baseline data and systems of indicators to track progress have been initiated. There is a human resource development plan being implemented, as referred to by the honourable member. That is being implemented within Manitoba Education and Training.

Aboriginal employees are being recruited as permanent, part-time and casual positions become available. Training designed to increase sensitivity and operational ability to better understand and meet the program needs of aboriginal people is currently being provided for our department staff at all levels, including senior staff.

It is very important that there be better preparation of our preschool children, if they are going to succeed. This is something we have touched on, and this is true everywhere, but it is acutely true in many aboriginal communities. Preschool children, too many of them, are presenting to school unprepared to begin their learning experience. This is for several factors.

I mean, when you consider that aboriginal Manitobans are unfortunate enough to have rates of family breakup, rates of alcoholism, rates of abuse, rates of suicide, rates of substance abuse, all of those indicators of the health of a society, for the reasons I alluded to, I believe the aboriginal population suffers, and, yes, contact with the justice system is another indicator. All of those things make it very clear and it is very obvious that that is going to have an effect on the children. The kids are coming to school not as prepared as success would suggest they should be.

The department has increased its collaboration with the Children and Youth Secretariat and the Departments of Health and Family Services with programs such as Aboriginal Head Start, BabyFirst and EarlyStart. Areas focusing on aboriginal children must ensure that the necessary linkages are in place to strengthen the meaningful involvement of aboriginal parents, families and communities in education.

When we are talking about programs, I think sometimes we go over it rather quickly, and we forget the human element involved. We need to look very carefully at exactly what is happening in these programs. I am a big supporter of these programs, but I want to know: are they achieving the kinds of results that we should be able to expect with the investment not only of the financial resources but also the human resources?

We have excellent people providing services under BabyFirst and EarlyStart and Aboriginal Head Start, but are they making the kinds of contacts and the frequency of contacts that are making a difference? Is it effective in the sense that are the people being well matched? For example, a public health nurse attending on a new aboriginal mom who has recently given birth, does that particular worker have the right chemistry with the person with whom he or she is working? Part of that, I would assume, would be if you are dealing with an aboriginal family, some background or some understanding of aboriginal culture and aboriginal issues would really be an asset for someone involved in a program like that.

* (1040)

So I am interested in making sure that our hiring policies take that into account when we are hiring people for these types of jobs. Then there is that thing that you cannot really train for or maybe you can, but, still, is there the correct level of commitment on the part of the people working in the programs and are the programs going to be sufficient? In other words, are there going to be enough people in there? Will there be enough funding as we address each and every family, because some families are so dysfunctional, I am sorry to say, that they need a lot of contact, and some of them do not even want to accept much contact. That is something where we have to have people who are capable of dealing with that, because those contacts can be essentially important to the future success of that young child.

I think the commitment is here in this building amongst the parties and the politicians, but, you know, we are not always there at each and every contact that gets made. That does not mean that we are the experts either, but I do want to see evaluations of these programs within a reasonable period of time after they have had enough experience so that we can make good, sound judgments about whether they are achieving what we want them to achieve. I think there is general support for programs like this. I know there is. It is simply a question of making it work, because there is too much opportunity going to be lost if they do not work well.

With respect to curriculum and learning resources in school environments, effective and relevant and high-quality curriculum, learning resources, and inclusive learning environments for all students will increase the success of aboriginal students. The department has undertaken some specific actions in this area. Some examples include: Aboriginal perspectives continue to be developed and integrated in all core curriculum. That is an important thing. If you want aboriginal students to feel that they belong in the classroom, that they do not feel different or that they are somehow being treated differently, I think it is important that the curriculum reflect the true nature of our province and the people in it.

Existing grants such as English Language Enrichment for Native Students have been

reviewed for program and cost effectiveness. Recommendations for improving and strengthening this program have been brought forward and are being reviewed. The students at risk innovations grant for 1999-2000 focuses on proposals for teacher action research, which includes aboriginal perspectives in the areas of instructional resource models. That is for K to S4 and English language arts and mathematics in the early years. A framework for aboriginal languages is currently in its final stages of completion and will be distributed later this year. The department will play a leadership role in ensuring that school and divisional plans provide the opportunity for building success for aboriginal students.

Now, with respect to transition from school to post-secondary and training programs and the workplace, I think there has been more talk about this in recent times than before. That is a recognition of two things, in my view. One of them is that in the past we were not even close enough to success in school and post-secondary and training programs to even talk about transition to the workplace, but I think we are now getting closer to that and we are able to do that.

The departmental transition working group has reviewed current transition programs and is developing a phased and co-ordinated transition strategy. Issues and programs affecting aboriginal students are an important part of this initiative. You do not have to reinvent wheels all the time, but we are going to be very interested in seeing how things work at Anokiiwin, because they seem to have their heads on pretty solid there. I enjoyed visiting with Mrs. Cowan and Mr. Starr when I was there. They seem to have their finger on the pulse of what is going on there. Time will tell and results, of course, everybody is going to be interested and anticipating some good results. There is certainly a good attitude there, and that is a great place to start. Issues and programs, as I said, affecting aboriginal students are an important part of this initiative.

Employment programs and services being accessed by aboriginal people through employment training and youth programs have increased members. Partners for Careers

exceeded its goal for 1997-'98, and that has been expanded. The identification of skills and occupations required in aboriginal communities has been included in the recently released high-demand occupation report. This information is disseminated to all aboriginal communities and reserves.

With respect to post-secondary programs, financial support, campus environment, and support services, the Council on Post-Secondary Education is developing an aboriginal post-secondary strategy. The Aboriginal Apprenticeship Training Initiative will be expanded. A post-secondary partnerships committee with membership from universities and colleges with teacher education programs has been established and is examining ways of collaborating on short-term and long-term initiatives. As a result of this collaboration the summer institute on aboriginal education will be a joint institute for the first time since its inception. The partners are the University of Manitoba, Red River College, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg School Division No. 1, and Manitoba Education and Training.

It is more inclusive than it used to be. We have still got work to do here, but it used to be that the institutions, each having their own boards and their presidents and various autonomous aspects to their existence, were operating somewhat in isolation one from the other. Thanks to the Roblin report and thanks to having the Council on Post-Secondary Education in place, we are seeing greater levels of working together.

The honourable member asks what is different. Well, the U of W are involved now and the Red River College are involved. That is the difference, but that is a very significant thing. I know that one of the main reasons that the honourable member has supported the budget this year was that we have established the strategic fund for bringing universities, colleges, the workplace, the school systems together and collaborating so that we can get co-ordination in our system bringing about better results. So that is what is different. It is a very positive change. The old system simply was, I guess, fine at one time, but the realities of modern life suggest that

the old isolationism was no longer going to meet the needs of the society of today and of the future.

With respect to partnerships on economic, social and health issues, the department has been participating with the federal government and aboriginal organizations and other provincial departments to address economic, social and health needs. Much more work needs to be done to work effectively across departments, across sectors and across jurisdictions. The same can be said across institutions. Much more work needs to be done. We are very pleased at what has been done, but we would never want to suggest that we have done all we can. For example, we need stronger linkage to the provincial framework for economic growth which has a direct relationship to skills development. Manitoba Education and Training is a key department and has been working very closely with the Manitoba Round Table on Sustainable Development to ensure a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to the urban aboriginal strategy.

* (1050)

The Native Education Directorate chairs a recently formed committee with membership from the federal government, the province, the City of Winnipeg and aboriginal organizations like the Manitoba Metis Federation, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg. This committee will develop an action plan focusing on literacy. The government has approved the goals and principles of an Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, and the goals are to strengthen partnerships with the aboriginal community and other stakeholders. I think that we have seen examples of those strengthened partnerships. I know that there were some people who showed up at the Legislature who did not want to be a testament to the strength of the partnerships. I recognize that, but the people who attended here, I believe, are not the ones that are involved in those partnerships to the extent that we would like them to be, I guess, because they had certain things on their minds that day. But I do know that there are some very good partnerships.

It was just a few days after the demonstration here at the Legislature—it was not a very nice demonstration either—but shortly after that demonstration, I had the privilege of attending at the announcement of the partnership between the Anokiiwin and Morris-MacDonald School Division. There was a representative there from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs who said we are breaking down different kinds of barricades today. This was only a week or so later. It made me wonder why barricades were being broken down a week sooner when there is a will on the part of some leaders to make a positive difference and to do it in a positive way. So I was pleased because I was a little bit concerned; I guess, it was on opening day of this Legislature when the demonstration happened here. There were some things that happened that day that I just cannot support. I was pleased to be there to see that some people did not really mean it. That is okay with me because it demonstrates a willingness to work together and put the politics aside.

Another goal is to increase the graduation rate. These are the main goals of our strategy. They are so obvious that they hardly need to be said, but we do need to strengthen partnerships with the aboriginal community and other stakeholders. We need to increase the graduation rate of aboriginal students, and we need to increase the labour market participation of aboriginal people.

In order to achieve the goals of the strategy and in addition to continuing current renewal initiatives, the Department of Education and Training has developed and is implementing an action plan. This plan includes special measures that make education and training more responsive to the aboriginal community. The plan continually evolves and is being used on an ongoing basis. Actions related to the strategy have been organized around seven major areas. In my comments, I have been referring to that operational framework. The framework consists of the necessary structures, processes and data to support the strategy, and they include a refocused mandate for the Native Education Directorate which includes a greater role in policy development and ensuring policy and programming congruency—I have already talked about this—which is part of the action plan related to the Aboriginal Education Strategy.

Ms. Friesen: Well, I enjoyed the minister's comment that the strategy was so obvious as to need hardly to be said, which I think was the point I made last year when it was confidential. It boggles the mind that it could take you five years to do that and then keep it confidential. But, yes, I absolutely agree with the minister on that one.

I had asked the question earlier about the training for all levels of department staff that this section of the department was to have done last year. I wondered if the minister could give me some report on that. I am particularly interested in the minister's plan to increase the aboriginal staffing in the department, and I wonder how that is going to be accomplished with a 10 percent cut in the provincial government staff that was promised in the throne speech.

Mr. McCrae: While I am talking about the increase in staffing, I will ask my staff to prepare for a response with respect to the training. I guess we need to know what kind of training the honourable member is referring to.

With respect to an increase in aboriginal staffing, the honourable member asks about how you can do that with a 10 percent cut. I think you need to go back to what was said. There will not be anybody leaving work unless they want to. It is expected that there will be a turnover in the foreseeable future, and that turnover should be in the area of 10 percent or so, which will allow us to reduce the level of the civil service. But it has always been an objective to hire as many aboriginal people as we can possibly hire in the public service, and that is done through the various programs that allow for certain points under affirmative action which allows for us to increase our complement where that is possible. You have to have people applying for jobs that become available.

I just wonder if the honourable member, though, is saying that—I guess they are opposed to reducing the civil service by that 10 percent which was announced in the throne speech, and that makes an interesting debate all by itself. Whether you are aboriginal or whatever you are in Manitoba, you need a government that is providing the services that it is supposed to be providing, but you do not need to have a

government that has staff that are not necessary for the delivery of the programs.

* (1100)

So that is a bigger and wider discussion which goes to the very heart of the differences between the honourable member's party's approach and that of my own party. I am very happy to engage in that discussion because you cannot support the budget and then turn around and pick it all apart either and disagree with it. I mean, you cannot do both. You can, but you cannot do both and be believed by anybody.

An Honourable Member: This is the throne speech, not the budget.

Mr. McCrae: This is true. The budget carries out—[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. We will try and avoid these private discussions. The honourable minister will continue with his response and the answer to the question.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, I think that when we are talking about the reduction in the size of the civil service, that does not preclude civil services anywhere from trying to meet laudable objectives. I did not mean to get into an unduly animated debate with the honourable member about that, but I can see that it is clear where she stands with respect to reducing the size of the civil service. So I am just saying that that is a clear indication of the differences in approach of the two political parties. That is the only point I was making, and I did not mean to get things going unduly.

With respect to the training of departmental staff, the directorate has been engaging executive management and managers in the department with sessions to gain a better understanding of aboriginal people and their culture and their issues so that we can deliver programs in a more appropriate way. Then it would be the expectation that all executive and management would make their staffs aware of those issues as well. There is a need for us to do that because, if we are going to achieve our mission as an education and training department, we are going to have to do that in order to make the progress we want to make.

There are a number of ways to increase aboriginal staffing, but you still have to have a workforce out there that is appropriately educated and trained to take the jobs that we can make available. So it is not a vicious circle, but it is a circle nonetheless. It is a circle of opportunity. We need to have increased awareness of the needs and the benefits in each branch of adding and recruiting aboriginal staff. Then we need to recruit aboriginal staff through the system of competitions and bulletins. That is an ongoing thing.

We have increased aboriginal representation over the years. There is opportunity for us to do that more, but the fact that an overall government policy relating to reducing the civil service, if you think it through, you can see that life goes on and governments go on, and in any given month or year in any given department, there is a turnover of staff and opportunity. Each time there is a staff vacancy, there is an opportunity to consider matters related to how we could make it possible for aboriginal people to fill those positions and provide services to Manitobans, whether they are aboriginal Manitobans or not. We cannot have two separate societies. That is not what is happening; that is not reality. So we have to have a society in which both aboriginal and nonaboriginal Manitobans can be comfortable working together, to build together a strong future for aboriginal people and for non-aboriginal people.

So I think we have the right attitude. I think we are moving in the right direction. I think that the people in the department have that right attitude. We know that we have some definite goals that we would like to achieve in terms of getting more and more aboriginal people accessing education opportunities which will make them fit for the many job opportunities there are. It would be interesting to know today how many eligible, able-bodied aboriginal people there are out there who are unemployed and look at the job market and link everybody up. That is the constant struggle, I think, of labour and education organizations to match the right people to the right jobs. But, at this point, we do not have everybody appropriately trained and educated. That is not something we can do by ourselves. It is not something the honourable

member can mandate or that I can mandate, because you cannot force people to do things that they are not yet conditioned or wanting to do. That is what has to change as much as the other end where we need to make the opportunities available.

If we knew that there was a strong demand for a certain type of training and that there would be a significant uptake from the aboriginal community, we could identify that and design it and get it going, but you do not want to go and invest a bunch of money that is wasted too. So we have to go right back to virtually to conception of children in Manitoba and work from that point on. To me, that is one of the best things that we can do: to create a better formative period for young Manitobans so that by the time they are in the elementary school they already have a good attitude about education and about how to proceed through their formative years. As I understand it, a lot of Manitobans, a lot of aboriginal Manitobans drop out of school. What are the reasons for that? If we can make better progress answering that question and dealing with the answer, we will have a brighter future for those people. In filling every position, we have a very firm and effective employment equity component or selection criteria that we use in assisting declared candidates to achieve success in employment interviews.

So I think that we try in every way we know at this point. It is the ways we do not know yet that we have not tried, so we are always open for suggestions that will help improve that situation.

Ms. Friesen: Last year the minister's predecessor told me that the human resource development plan would include training for all levels of department staff. The minister is telling me today that it has been for executive management. I suppose the best reflection we could have on this is that the department has, as it has elsewhere, adopted a Train the Trainer mode and is assuming that the managers are training other people in the department.

I am interested then in these initial training sessions for executive management. How many managers have been trained? What is the nature

of the training in the sense of how many training sessions were held, how many people attended, and what kind of resource materials were made available to the participants? Has this been done outside the department as well? I am thinking of across government with other partners.

The minister mentioned earlier, his recent answers have been wandering over a wide field, shall we say, encompassing a wide range of discussion. He talked at one point about the aboriginal Headstart Program. I wondered if he could tell me what the provincial participation in that is.

*(1110)

Mr. McCrae: A couple of years ago a report was prepared in our department. We can update that report and make its contents available or known to the honourable member. We do have a role, but it is not our program. But I can make that provincial report and its contents, at least, available to the honourable member. This being essentially a federal program, we are a little unable at short notice to give very much information. What information we have we will make available to the honourable member.

Ms. Friesen: It was my understanding that it was a federal program, so I was a bit concerned when the minister put it in the same context, I think in the same sentence as the BabyFirst pilot project and the Children and Youth Secretariat co-operation. So I will be interested in receiving that.

The other part of my question dealt with the nature of the executive training that has gone on in the department.

Mr. McCrae: Just in general response to that comment, I really think that it is good if we can view these partnerships as something we can talk about. I cannot always be responsible for everything the partners do, but anything that is good for young aboriginal children, provided it works, is going to have my support.

That was what was missing in the previous response, Mr. Chairman. The honourable member took from my answer, rightly so, given the way I gave the answer, that the training and

cultural awareness issues, the impression I left was that that was simply with the executive and the management, and that would have been incorrect.

There are programs being built with the input of management obviously for staff in the department, and the secretariat is engaged through the Program Development Branch of the department in providing this kind of training for staff of the department, not just the managers and executives.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, could the minister tell me how many staff have been trained, and could he give me some idea of the nature of the training?

Mr. McCrae: We will get a piece on that, and then make that available to the honourable member at the next sitting. Perhaps, this afternoon, maybe tomorrow.

* (1120)

Ms. Friesen: The obvious goals of this section of the department, as the minister has stated them, are to increase the graduation rates of aboriginal people, and I questioned last year the base-line data for this. I notice in one of his answers the minister talked about the development of base-line data in a number of areas of education for aboriginal people. I want to come back to that in a minute, but the minister last time, the minister's predecessor told me that the department staff were working with the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics on aboriginal school-age population statistics division by division, and I wondered if that had been completed yet.

Mr. McCrae: I will have to review the commitment that was made to the honourable member, but in terms of—

Ms. Friesen: Shall I pass it to you?

Mr. McCrae: Well, that would be helpful. The part outlined by the honourable member, from Hansard from last year—my predecessor says that we work with the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics. That is true on aboriginal school-age population statistics, division by division, which might be

interesting to the honourable member when it is compiled. Now I know why the honourable member is asking it this way.

It would be interesting to me too if it was compiled. That is the point. I have some information to share but not very much, unfortunately, because, simply put, there is no requirement in our system that anybody has to declare that they are a Status Indian or a non-Status Indian or a Metis person or whatever. This problem will persist until we can develop an acceptable definition of aboriginal and a workable means of identifying students, i.e., through self-declaration, for example.

So here is an area where I think the honourable member might understand the problem of definition. I mean, even the definition of what is a graduate I suppose could become an issue. It is a difficult area, but it is an important area. If that information was better and we had a clearer picture, I think it would be so helpful in developing responses and programs.

According to Manitoba Education and Training, English language enrichment—no, this is not going to help me very much. I would prefer to give the honourable member a complete answer, and I do not think I have one in this regard. We know by the demography of our province where the population centres are but, in terms of absolute numbers, it is not an easy one. I think we have to keep trying to deal with the issue raised by the honourable member as effectively as we can.

It is imprecise, some of the information that we have. That creates some problems, but it is not as serious a problem as you might think. I think it is pretty clear where some of the needs are. We can apply health data to these issues too, and I might recommend that to the department if they have not already done so. Organizations like the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation have some pretty good data. Manitoba Health has very good data. I am told that one of the better databases anywhere is there. In terms of determinants of health, it can be helpful to us in our planning and education too.

So if the department has not already done so, I would certainly recommend that that is a source that they could turn to in addition to the Manitoba bureau of vital statistics and maybe Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and agencies like that. We are encouraging parents and children to self-declare when we do workshops. We are considering a letter to school divisions to encourage this, but the honourable member knows and I know that that is not something that you can demand.

Ms. Friesen: It is a difficult area. I acknowledge that. It is certainly one that is sometimes made more difficult by the changing definitions that Statistics Canada is using. I do not know if the minister is familiar with the most recent census data. It makes it very difficult to make comparisons, which is the first principle one would think in census data. So that was going to be my follow-up question, essentially how has that most recent changed—it is not really a changed definition. It is a changed acceptance, I think. Basically what Statistics Canada did, it seems to me to have double-counted people, to have identified people who considered themselves part aboriginal and to have identified themselves in census data as both aboriginal and something else. So for Metis people, I mean, the numbers simply are not comparable, and they tell you that. I mean, that is how they alert you. It is not comparable to the previous statistics, which makes it very difficult. I wondered how that had compounded the issues for Manitoba Education.

Manitoba Education and Training has been attempting to deal with this since all the time I have been in the Legislature. The pilot projects that were run on school database. It was not only aimed at aboriginal identification, but that was part of the issue. It was essentially trying to track students with a student number, and that had been going on before I came to the Legislature in the 1980s, late '80s, early '90s. There were pilot projects which—I will not go into the money that was spent on it. I assume, and we will get to the Schools Information project later on, that some of that is being dealt with now.

Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Yes, the issue is self-identification, but if self-identification remains as the constant, then at least you have got something comparable. That was why I was hopeful of the initiative that the minister talked about last time, of working with the Bureau of Statistics at least to enable us to have comparable data to track whatever success we can have in increasing the numbers of aboriginal graduates. That is the context of the question that I am asking.

The minister talked about, in an earlier section of one of his responses, developing a whole series of base-line data and systems of data, including areas of post-secondary education, so I wonder if the minister could tell me what the department's plans are in that area for systems of base-line data dealing with aboriginal education.

* (1130)

Mr. McCrae: I have been around this place even longer than the honourable member, and my viewpoint, I guess, is quite different. I see some excellent progress. I see change in terms of attitude in this province which is a lot more positive than it ever was a number of years ago. That is very clear in every indicator that you can imagine. We believe that there needs to be an Education Indicators project. We have a unit for that. This has been created since the last Estimates. There is a secretary, there is a director, and there are two staff.

With respect to the aboriginal question, I know that we will be greatly assisted if we could get past the problem of identification and get greater participation in terms of self-declaration. We made some progress there, but we would like to see more. The complement for this indicators unit was completed in February of this year. It is composed, as I said, of a director, a statistical analyst, a research analyst, and a clerical officer shared by those people. The mandate of the unit is to develop sets of education indicators that help monitor the performance of the province's K to S4 education system, promote critical inquiry, support provincial and local decision making and, where possible, enhance educational practice.

The focus of the indicators program is on developing outcome indicators. Additionally,

the unit is also responsible for co-ordinating department-wide responses on all requests for information from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. An advisory committee of stakeholders provides consultation to the department on the development of education indicators. This committee is chaired by Doug Edmond from School Division No. 1. Since its first meeting, in October 1998, the committee's major accomplishments include an action plan for developing education indicators being developed and shared with all Manitoba superintendents and board chairs. In conjunction with the department, a public document on historical education statistical trends in Manitoba is being prepared for release this coming fall.

I think that, with the New Directions beginning to take hold in Manitoba, it is about the right time for this project, because, again, we want to measure individual students and basically the system through the standards and testing program that is part of New Directions. Well, we want to be able to find some way to measure the system-wide indicators of how the children are doing. An advisory committee, I talked about that.

There are current indicator developments that should be mentioned. Emphasis is on developing outcome indicators related to the following: student flow from kindergarten through public school; rates of student promotion, retention, mobility, school leaving, returning, migration and graduation; patterns of high school student course loads. The department is working with public school institutions to have the Manitoba Education and Training student number carried on to their administrative systems.

Student academic achievement is important. Test result rates related to a variety of factors, such as gender, size of school, qualifications of teacher, et cetera, comparison with other provinces of student performance levels on national assessments, receipt rates of academic scholarships and awards, student transitions and skill relevancy of graduates, a longitudinal study that has been initiated which will track students for four years after high school completion. First phase of the study is a survey of S4 students, which is currently in the field. It is a

20 percent sample of S4 students. The survey will collect information on the students' intentions following high school and their evaluation on how high school has prepared them for their planned future.

In 2001, these same students will be recontacted to find out what actually occurred to them after leaving high school and how they at that point reflect upon the preparation they received in high school. Future indicator developments: there is an area related to student citizenship achievement; participation rates in extracurricular activities; receipt rates from nonacademy awards; participation rates in community-based activities; rates of school-based crime, violence, suspensions; youth crime rates; youth employment and unemployment rates, et cetera.

Specifically a first task of the unit, as recommended by the indicators committee, is a survey of Senior 4 students, and it is looking specifically at student transitions. It has a question, No. 19, that is about aboriginal heritage. Here, again, the question goes like this: the Department of Education is working with aboriginal peoples to better understand opportunities afforded to aboriginal students. Which category best describes your heritage? The various aboriginal categories are status or treaty, nonstatus, Inuit, Metis, do not know, or, obviously, not of aboriginal ancestry. I assume nobody is compelled to answer questions, but that question is there, with a view to attempting to make this a more complete survey.

There is an interorganizational advisory committee for Education Indicators. This committee will be composed of two representatives from each of the following education associations or organizations. They include the Department of Education and Training, the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools, the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, as well as members at large as appointed by the minister. The minister asked Doug Edmond to act as chair of the committee.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Representatives identified to initiate committee work include the following: from Manitoba Education and Training, Jim Glen. Now, as we pointed out, Mr. Glen is retiring after some 25 years of yeoman service to his fellow Manitobans, and when his replacement is known, that person would be part of this. Suzanne Adnams is also on that. From the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials, Deann Lane and Linda Clark; Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Doug Edmond and Jerry Storie. Now, the honourable member will know Jerry Storie, and even Hansard will probably have a record of how to spell that name. I remember Jerry Storie very well in this Legislature, and I have had the pleasure more recently of doing some business with him as a school superintendent for the Turtle Mountain School Division. Funny, Jerry is quite different today than he was in the other life when I knew him around this place.

* (1140)

The Manitoba Association—

An Honourable Member: Perhaps you only had a nodding acquaintance before.

Mr. McCrae: You did?

An Honourable Member: Perhaps you only had a nodding acquaintance before, or not a nodding acquaintance.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Hansard has difficulty recording more than one conversation at a time, so we would ask the committee to please come to order and the minister to finish his response.

Mr. McCrae: Jerry Storie is a product of south-central Manitoba, although he represented the Flin Flon constituency for—and I am sure did so very well in the opinion of the voters there because they kept returning him, and that was their judgment which I respect. But Jerry Storie is, in my view, a different person than he was when he was here. Something happens to us when we walk into that legislative Chamber.

We become a different type of creature, and Jerry Storie was no exception to that rule, but he and I have, I think, hit it off fairly well in our new business relationship.

Representing the Association of School Trustees is L. Schieman and Jerry MacNeil. Now, I do not know if it was intended that the president of the association should be the representative. Then we have a new one, Mr. Doug McGiffin, and Mr. MacNeil will continue, although I understand Mr. MacNeil is planning retirement before too long, and that then would have to be reviewed as well. I guess the idea here is to get leadership from these organizations. Organizations' memberships change, and their leadership changes from time to time.

The Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools is represented by Reg Klassen and Kirk Baldwin, and the Manitoba Teachers' Society, Ian MacIntyre. There, again, with the recent defeat of Mr. MacIntyre as president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, they may review the membership on this committee as well. Then the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils will be represented by Doraine Wachniak and Peggy Lidstone. There will be members at large, Rodney Clifton and Diane Snyder, and ex officio will be John Carlyle.

So, the department, through the Education Indicators unit, will provide analytical and research support to the committee. The thing that I see here, and I am glad the honourable member raised this because in overall terms, something like education indicators can be extremely useful, especially as our society becomes more and more mobile, and people are exercising so many options that used not to exist and do now. This type of work will be extremely important but it is a big job, there is no doubt about that. So I am glad we have got these partnerships involved in the Education Indicators interorganizational advisory committee.

It is like so many other things. There are advisory committees respecting things like school finance and curriculum and all these really important areas of endeavour in our education system.

I think Manitobans, generally speaking, have felt, and continue to feel, quite proud of our achievements in the education sector, and it is because we pay as much attention to detail as we do that we have built an education system that is probably second to none, or second to very few, in the whole world. So the indicators will, at some point in the future, be very reliable in terms of our ability to use them for policy development. I think that that will set us on a good course for the longer-term future.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I thank the minister for the information on the indicators project, which is further on in the department's Estimates. It is certainly something we have argued for, for a long time, brought to the attention of the department the Saskatchewan program, which has been going for a long time and which reports publicly, I think, in a very informative and responsible way. We look forward to those kinds of public reports from this section. Many of the things that the minister has outlined that are projects for the indicators section of the department, of course, would have answered questions that we have been raising in Estimates over the last 10 years in education.

As the minister says, of course, the proof of this is in the future. It is longitudinal; it is the comparisons over a long period of time. So, whereas I am glad to see this, I will point out that Saskatchewan and other provinces, although Saskatchewan is the one I am most familiar with, has done this for a long period of time, and that Manitoba over the last 10 years has been extremely slow to move in this area. It is not something which just affects the education planning and the education policies of Manitoba in this period. It is, of course, the absence of data for 20 or 30 years that will affect the kind of planning that goes on in the future.

Better to start it late than never. I hope that it has more immediate success than the department's statistical plans that are still underway and still apparently are not providing the kind of information that we would like to see. What I assume from the minister's answer, and I will let the minister confirm or add to this, is that when he spoke earlier this morning about the Native Directorate preparing base-line data and systems of data, what he was referring to was, in

fact, this indicators project. He was not referring to any particular subset of data that was specifically aboriginal, other than the question 19 that the minister read into the record.

Mr. McCrae: While the indicators unit is developing its work, the Native Directorate will, of course, rely on whatever quality information that it can in order to provide the overall policy advice that it is expected to provide to the various parts of the education system.

I heard what the honourable member said about the Saskatchewan indicators system, and I have no reason to disagree that they may be further advanced in terms of collection of data. I will always want to know a little more, I guess, about the quality of it and so on, but I take no issue with the honourable member.

I think that in Manitoba we take our place quite well. I suppose that, if you want to do a direct comparison of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, you would have to extend it beyond simply whether they have a better data collection or better indicators system than we do and take it beyond that and look at results.

* (1150)

I think of comments made about Manitobans and their level of skill overall, and we rate very well in surveys like that. Where are Manitobans today, the ones that we have, you know, in terms of taking their place in the world? I do not think Manitoba takes a back seat to anybody, including Saskatchewan. Where are we in health care? Well, we are head and shoulders ahead of Saskatchewan in terms of health care, which is a pretty good indicator of the quality of a society.

One of the best indicators of the quality of a society is the education system, and while I think we can acknowledge that because we have set up an indicators unit, that we have got work to do, on the other hand, I look at the economy generally, I look at how our economy in Manitoba is so much further along in terms of diversification than the province of Saskatchewan.

I do not mean to speak ill of Saskatchewan. I have relatives there, and I have a long-standing

relationship with the province of Saskatchewan, but I essentially am pretty positive about the province of Manitoba. I do not like to be foolishly positive or naively positive about Manitoba, but I look at export numbers and I look at jobs in high-tech industry, I look at the diversification of the economy.

Our economies were very similar not that many years ago—and the honourable member disagrees, but that is okay; that happens from time to time around here—when it comes to the reliance simply on the primary production of agricultural products is really where I am making my case here as much as anywhere. But moving on and even beyond value-added in agriculture to manufacturing and financial services and those sorts of indicators of diversification, I would challenge the honourable member who tends to disagree with me about this.

I would say that Manitoba is moving along quite nicely. I mean, just drive down Highway No. 1. I do it all the time. Drive down Highway No. 1, and remind yourself as you leave the area of the Perimeter Highway and you are driving west on No. 1 highway. You have only gone a few miles and you have come to Elie, Manitoba, where there has been developed over a hundred-million-dollar strawboard manufacturing plant which is value-added.

Drive a little farther and you come to Portage la Prairie, where they are producing a million pounds of French fries every day mostly for the American market. This was not there always. We are developing a potato industry which is second in the country, and there is still lots of interest. Drive down the highway just a little further and you get to Carberry, and there is another potato plant there. Drive a little further and you get to Brandon, where we are building the largest and most state-of-the-art hog-killing plant in the whole country, and we are putting virtually thousands of people to work in the plant alone, let alone out on the farms across the province.

I am not saying none of these things are happening in the province of Saskatchewan, but their rate of adjustment to the whole issue of grain transportation rate changes is different

from ours. There is still a far greater reliance on primary production of things like wheat and barley and oats and canola and that is not wrong, because they have a lot of space in which to do that. The fact is that here in Manitoba we have taken advantage, and now in walks the legislative assistant to the Minister of Education and Training, the honourable member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), he knows down in his area, all of the—no, it is in a neighbouring constituency, the largest book bindery in the country—

An Honourable Member: In Altona.

Mr. McCrae: —in the whole country is right there in the town of Altona. We have—

An Honourable Member: The largest recreational vehicles . . .

Mr. McCrae: Recreational vehicles, that is Winkler, is it not? That is in the honourable member's constituency, but we have canola crushing. I mean, we are talking about canola crushing. Head on up to Russell, Manitoba, where 1,200 tons of canola is crushed daily. Just get your mind's eye wide open and figure out how many carloads, railway carloads, of product comes out of that plant at Harrowby every single day. It is amazing. I say this because I made the point for the benefit of the honourable member for Pembina, that Manitoba is diversifying its economy faster than Saskatchewan is. I met with some disagreement from the honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) on that point. I am just trying to go through that a little bit.

An Honourable Member: You need more examples?

Mr. McCrae: There are dozens of examples. In manufacturing—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I would remind the members of the committee that we are trying to keep some decorum and order, so that the Hansard can record everything that is being said, which is normal and expected. So I would ask all honourable members to use some

discretion when they are speaking outwardly. I thank all honourable members. The honourable minister to finish your response.

Mr. McCrae: Okay. I will finish up. I have probably got the honourable member for Pembina excited, and I do not mean to do that.

But I drive you down this road, Highway 1, or in the case of Russell, the Yellowhead Route, which is Highway 16. If we could come back from Russell on the Yellowhead Route you would see a lot of other developments along the way back to Winnipeg that demonstrate that we are diversifying.

Now diversification like that does not happen if you do not have an education system to support that sort of activity going on in our communities. What I gave was a tiny, tiny précis of the diversification and other activities that are going on which have diversified well past the farm gate, where a generation or two ago the majority of Manitobans were working in agricultural related industries. We now have financial industries employing more people than the agriculture industry.

An Honourable Member: Winkler itself has 400 businesses.

Mr. McCrae: Four hundred what?

An Honourable Member: Businesses.

Mr. McCrae: Winkler alone, I am told, has 400 businesses, which is a pretty significant point to make. But I am making a point, and the point is that you do not do this by not paying attention to the education requirements of your jurisdiction. I am not saying that Saskatchewan does not, but I am trying to be positive about Manitoba rather than negative. I think progress also requires a state of mind and Manitoba is different today than it was a dozen years ago.

It is a very, very different place. I am proud of that difference. It is important to point out that these directorates are not program units. They are directorates. They provide leadership, and they help co-ordinate others who actually do program. These directorates, they promote and they advocate and they advise. So the Native

Directorate collaborates with the indicators unit as well to ensure that the plans and actions of the indicators unit address the needs that are identified by the Native Directorate unit.

A little while ago, for example, I referred to the S4 survey. With the S4 survey, a 20 percent sample of S4 students has been selected using a stratified random sample procedure applied at the school level. Stratification was conducted according to the region of the province; enrollment size of the school, whether it is a small or a medium or a large type size of school; the type of school, whether it is a public or an independent or a band school; the program, whether it is English, regular, français, French immersion, business, or vocational. In total, 4,200 students within 62 schools are being surveyed as part of this sample in order to facilitate analysis on issues such as aboriginal students and geographic remoteness.

Frontier School Division and band-operated schools are being oversampled. In both these areas, all schools with S4 students will be included in the survey, adding 700 students in 200 schools to the survey. The survey will be mailed to selected schools in early May. Principals will be asked to have all S4 students in their school complete the survey during class time. In order to prepare classroom teachers for classroom implementation, an information sheet will be provided on the purpose of the study, as well as instructions on how to encourage students to complete the questionnaire. Principals will be asked to return the completed surveys to the department in postage-paid return envelopes. All student responses will be confidential. This is where there should be some comfort about identifying your ancestry. Hopefully that will be one of the results.

A public report will be released in late fall of 1999, this year. This document will not report results at an individual student or school level, but rather in aggregated format. The primary benefit is that the survey findings will be used to facilitate improved school division and department planning, as well as policy development related to the delivery of high school education across Manitoba. This is the purpose. These are good purposes, of having indicators and doing surveys, but I will bet you, when our indicators

unit is up and running, when the results start pouring in, I should say, we will put what the honourable member said to the test because, much as I admire the things that go on in the province of Saskatchewan, there are some things that are not quite as admirable, but I admire a lot of things about Saskatchewan.

Essentially I think that you build yourself up by building yourself up and not by putting the other down. You certainly do not build yourself up by putting yourself down. That is what is so important about what is different today than a decade ago. Manitobans are feeling strong, Manitobans are feeling confident, and they have those feelings for good reasons. We have a good education system, we have had a good education system, and we are going to have a better one. Manitobans will just get stronger and stronger.

My point is that if Saskatchewan does not, well, they are going to be in our dust. We do not want that, because that is an important part of Canada too. As I say, we do not build ourselves up by kicking the other fellow. I do believe that the reference to Saskatchewan really is not all that helpful in a discussion of a quality education system like we have here in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I am interrupting the proceedings for the time being. We will recess until at the discretion for rising.

Committee rise.

* (1000)

HOUSING

Mr. Chairperson (Ben Sveinson): Good morning. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This morning this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255 will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Housing. The consideration of these Estimates was started in the Chamber yesterday, and the minister has already given his opening remarks. Leave was granted for the opposition critic, the honourable member for Radisson, to give her opening remarks when she is next at committee. Does the honourable member for Radisson have her opening statement ready?

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Chairperson, I am just going to make a few comments.

Mr. Chairperson: If so, we will ask the minister's staff to temporarily leave the table during the consideration of this opening statement.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Chairperson, I am pleased that you got started yesterday with the minister and the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale). I may be following up on some of the issues that were raised there, but the approach that I am going to take this year, I think, is to start off dealing with some specific issues that I have been involved with and following related to the department, and then, after that, get into some of the more specifics around the budget and the Estimates book as we have it presented before us.

I have asked the minister to provide me with information that I have received from the minister other years, and we had an agreement yesterday that he would provide me that information prior to my getting rolling, so I just want to make sure that that is available. I guess I want to start off by saying that I am concerned at the lack of co-operation and the closed shop that has occurred in that department recently, not only in terms of disclosing information that is public information, information like vacancy rates, the arrears, schedule of budgets and maintenance, information around the devolution agreement which I had written about to the minister before, and I believed that I was going to get that information once the agreement was all completed. That is what the letter I received from the minister at that time suggested. Now I have got no information, and I have had letters, as the minister knows, suggesting that I direct all my calls to his office, even though in the past I have simply had to get the information from his staff, which I would suggest have more accurate information than his office, and that is where he is going to get the information from anyway.

The way that I would expect it to work is if I make a request into, for example, the executive director for the Manitoba Housing Authority, I certainly expect, as I identify myself, that that informational request is going to go to the minister's office and the deputy and they are all

going to know, so I will get some information and clarification on this new approach in the ministry. I want to have a chance of looking at specifically the information I have requested because I think it makes these Estimates a lot more fruitful when we are considering something like the management of the Manitoba Housing Authority if I actually have some of that information to go from, or it makes this Estimates process not a useful exercise if I am just requesting in this process information. I mean, I can do that in a letter. If I have the information in front of me, then we can actually have an intelligent discussion about what is actually going on in the department. So, if the minister does not want that to happen, I guess he is not going to give me the information.

But the housing situation in Manitoba is very serious. There have been a lot changes going on. There have been a lot of new things happening in the community, and we have a lot to discuss. There has been a lot happening across the country in the areas of homelessness and housing as it relates to poverty. I have said before, I do not think that this government and Housing has been keeping step with that. The cutbacks over the years have had an effect. I would say the lack of innovation in terms of dealing with the aging demographic, dealing with the changes in those people who are living in poverty, those demographics.

There have been longstanding problems with existing stock of Manitoba Housing in terms of vacancies, in terms of the way that properties are being changed or modified to deal with the changing demographics. This government has had 11 long years to try and resolve some of these issues. I have referred in Question Period recently to studies that I have come across fairly recently that go back to the early '90s that were making recommendations. I will be interested, as we go through this Estimates process, to see what has happened with some of those studies and recommendations in this department.

* (1010)

In terms of the specific challenges in Manitoba, I want to try and spend a little bit more time dealing with issues in the North. I am

particularly concerned about the way the housing stock or portfolio has changed in the North and how the provincial government is dealing with that in co-operation with the federal government, because I realize that some of those communities are federal responsibilities, as the minister I am sure is going to be quick to remind me. But I also want to spend quite a bit of time dealing with the challenges that we are facing in our urban areas, since the minister is also the minister for urban sprawl or for Urban Affairs—and urban sprawl. But I want to spend some serious time looking at this government's plan for the urban area in Winnipeg, as well as a lot of other communities that we know that are also having problems with urban decline and older housing stock that is on the private market.

There have been a number of recommendations put before different levels of government from community organizations and see where the government stands on some of those. I am concerned generally, after listening to the throne speech where I was initially encouraged to hear that the government had recognized finally that there were some problems in Winnipeg in our older neighbourhoods, then quite concerned that when it came to the budget there has been no comparable budget allotment for initiatives to deal with, I would say, a community-development approach in resolving the deterioration of housing stock and the whole surrounding problems related to poverty and decline in the urban areas.

This government and the minister talk a lot, at least they mouth the right words it seems, when it comes to working with the community, but I am very concerned that there are no dollars and no commitments and no specific programs that go along with that. There has to be, I think, some leadership on the part of this government in dealing with these organizations. We know that the charitable sector is not going to be able to meet the huge need in terms of renovation of homes and redevelopment of the urban core without government leadership in terms of policy direction and funds.

I am also hoping to spend some time dealing with the devolution agreement which now we should be operating under, as I understand it. I have had calls to my office, particularly from

some of the not-for-profit corporations, expressing concern about how that new scheme is actually working on the ground and lack of co-ordination with CMHC, the fact that the transition seems to have not gone smoothly for a number of housing corporations.

I hope that we can conduct these Estimates in a way that is actually going to address issues, and we are not going to spend a lot of time just sort of skirting around things and having, I guess, long-winded answers that do not really go anywhere. I hope that the minister would treat the Estimates as a chance to deal with some new ideas. I am actually going to put forward some recommendations that have come to me as I have done consultation with community groups, and I am quite interested in seeing what the government thinks of these recommendations.

So I am not going to simply be criticizing or attacking the government without trying to put forward some constructive suggestions, and I hope that the minister would meet that and his department would meet that with a similar approach in terms of trying to have this process be meaningful and actually add something to the challenge before us which is trying to meet the housing needs of all Manitobans.

So with those few comments, I will welcome back the minister's staff.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member. We will now resume consideration of line 30.1 Housing Executive (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$391,100 on page 98 of the Estimates book. We would also ask the minister's staff to rejoin us at the table. The honourable minister.

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister of Urban Affairs): Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: Well, talk about co-operation.

Ms. Cerilli: As I said in my opening statements, I am waiting for my information.

Mr. Reimer: In a response to the member, I think what we have done before in regard to the Housing Estimates is sort of just let it flow as the

member for Radisson would like to ask questions. I do not believe that we are restricted to necessarily line by line at this particular time. I think that it is more or less an information gathering by the member for Radisson and that the questions and the answers will flow on various topics that are brought forth. So I have no problem with that type of approach to the Estimates, and we can proceed with it.

The member mentioned the information. We have brought some of the information that has been requested.

Mr. Chairperson: I would just like to have the okay by the rest of the committee that the discussion will flow as the members wish throughout the Estimates instead of going line by line. Is it agreed? [agreed]

Mr. Reimer: It has been pointed out—I guess in the rush to get over here, because I had originally told the staff that we were meeting after Question Period, and I think that they came over in a bit of a rush—one of my staff has mentioned that the file folder in regard to the information for the member is back at the office. But it has not been lost; it has not been forgotten. It will be brought over after lunch, if that is okay or we can send for it. I can have a phone call put. What we can do is we can phone over and have it brought over. That is okay?

Ms. Cerilli: I would prefer that. I am not suggesting that I am going to wait here and do nothing until we get that information. I am quite prepared to start, but I do not want to go through the whole morning and then just get it this afternoon.

Mr. Reimer: He has a cell phone, so it is great. These things are great.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Chairperson, I am glad that we have had an agreement there. Considering that, I am going to take a minute to sort of figure out where I am going to start, because I was going to start with that issue.

I think I am going to actually start off with the issue that we were dealing with most recently in the House. That is the situation at

101 Marion Street. The minister may want to have some more sport with me on this one, but I have had another set of correspondence from there that is going to change the debate a bit I think. I am going to raise a new issue that I think is actually quite serious, and it has to do with the death of some of the tenants who have lived there. I am assuming that the minister has received the same correspondence that I have from one of the tenants there. It is dated March 17. It was sent to Gary Doer, MLA for Concordia, and the minister as well as copy to myself.

The serious concern there is that some of the tenants have passed away in their room and have not been found for quite a few days. The minister's expression on his face leads me to believe he is not aware of this situation. Can I ask the minister: is he aware of the situation at 101 Marion?

Mr. Reimer: I was not aware of that particular incident in regard that there had been deaths. I would not say that there has not been, because I think that it is a building that is occupied by a fair amount of seniors. I guess there has been the unfortunate passing away of some of them in that building but, as for their not being discovered for two or three days, I am not familiar with that particular aspect of it.

Ms. Cerilli: That is one of the claims I have been trying to follow up on. That is why I am raising it here, because the minister and others there have suggested that I am not following up on things properly before raising them publicly, and I do not want to do that. But we have tried to make inquiries about this, and we are not going to get anywhere with this. It is going to have to come from, I think, the minister's office.

* (1020)

I would hope that there would be investigations and that the minister would see what the legal requirements are or policy is when a coroner's investigation would follow on these kind of deaths. I am wondering if he could make some commitment to do that.

Mr. Reimer: There is no formal mechanism within Manitoba Housing as to checking on the

tenants in buildings and things like that. I think what has happened in a lot of the public housing buildings is that the tenants associations have undertaken on their own initiative a system of buddy checking or a buddy system of knocking on doors or leaving something on their doorknob in the morning when they wake up to indicate that someone has been there and knocked on it. They have done that on their own initiative. We, as Manitoba Housing, do not have a policy of physically checking on individuals on a regular basis in the sense of seeing who is in the room or whether the person is in problems.

I do know that we do have alarm systems in some of our buildings, the Poole [phonetic] Alarm Company. That is available to some of our structures, and those systems are utilized. I know some of the tenants do carry also the Victoria Life Line system, I believe it is called, and we encourage that if they feel that there is a problem of anxiety or fear of being alone. Those things are made available on a voluntary basis to the individual tenants in various apartment blocks.

So I would think that in the majority of the cases, the buildings sort of self-manage, in a sense, through the tenants association and through the various resources that we do have and the resources that are available for the tenants to take advantage of it but, like I say, we as Manitoba Housing do not have a policy of checking up on people.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, I appreciate the minister's answer, but the question I am asking specifically first of all before we get into those issues is, will you—I can actually provide you a copy of this letter; I will get the Clerk to copy it for you—which outlines four deaths that occurred. The person I have talked to who lives there said that there have been 20 in the last four years, which may not be a lot for a seniors apartment that has this many units. But what I am asking is if the minister's department or office will follow up.

Mr. Reimer: Certainly. I do not recall seeing that letter come across my desk. We certainly will follow up on that for her.

Ms. Cerilli: That is actually an issue I want to deal with with the minister as well, because the

letter was actually addressed simply to whom it may concern. It was sent to the Manitoba Housing Authority. It was not addressed specifically to the minister unless it was just handwritten in. The response that has been given to this particular tenant has been sent by the deputy minister.

I am wondering again: is this common practice for the deputy minister to respond under his signature to tenants without the information coming to the minister's office?

Mr. Reimer: I would think that there is a fair amount of correspondence that is directed through the various departments that I am not privy to or it does not come across my desk. That may have been forwarded to the deputy for a response. To my knowledge, I do not recall seeing that letter coming across my desk, and, as the member said, it may have been directed to him by my staff at Manitoba Housing for a response, but there is a fair amount of correspondence that is sent out by the various administrators in my department that I would never be privy to or never see, in response to queries and questions and concerns that possibly tenants might have. So some of the correspondence I never see.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I want the minister to see this, so I am going to take my copy apart. I thought I had two copies with me; maybe I gave one of them to my research staff. So, if the committee will bear with me, I am just going to check through this pile to see if I do have a copy in here. No, I do not have another copy, so I am going to have this copied for the minister. [interjection] Well, I want him to see it.

Just so we do not have quite so much dead space, I can proceed.

Mr. Reimer: I was just trying to get some information in regard to the letter whether anybody in the department had seen the letter and just get some background on it. I understand that one of the staff is going to get a copy.

Ms. Cerilli: I was just going to say that, while we are waiting to get the copy so that we can deal with the issues around this specific kind of investigation that would follow, I want to pick

up on some of the other issues that the minister was raising in terms of the type of buddy system which the tenants' association can be involved with in a seniors complex to try and provide some security for seniors who are living in Manitoba Housing properties.

Can the minister, with the assistance of his staff, explain sort of the procedure for how the buddy system is supposed to work and what the role of the Manitoba Housing staff is?

* (1030)

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, as was mentioned a little earlier in regard to the buddy system, our tenant relations officers that we have throughout, we encourage them when they are talking to the tenants associations to try to incorporate some sort of buddy system of lookout for each other, sort of a local neighbourhood watch, if you want to call it, within their own building.

It is encouraged. There are very innovative ways that some of the tenants associations respond to being awake or being aware of their occupancy. That, as was mentioned, is sometimes a card similar to what we see sometimes in hotels, where the card is turned around in the morning signifying that they are awake and they are there. There is even the incidence of turning over their floor mat in front of their unit to indicate that they are there. There are innovative ways of encouraging this type of awareness program. In some of our apartments, they even have what they call floor captains where someone is designated the responsibility to more or less keep an eye on that floor, the residents of that particular floor.

So we encourage it. It is something that is in a fair number of our buildings, and it has worked fairly successfully in its application wherever it has been utilized. It is something that, like I say, in our conversations with the tenants association, we encourage this type of program.

Ms. Cerilli: I understand you are saying the tenants association helps to set up the program and explain it. Is the tenant relations person the one who gets contacted? If there is a problem,

whom is the tenant who discovers the problem supposed to report the problem to?

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that usually if there is a problem, if it is a very serious problem, naturally 911 is called immediately or the caretaker is notified. In some cases, if it is a building that is equipped with the distress call cord, that this is pulled, too. Then that goes to our housing communications centre which is manned 24 hours a day, so there is an instant response on that.

Ms. Cerilli: So in the case if tenants contact Manitoba Housing Authority staff, are they in turn just supposed to phone 911?

Mr. Reimer: If it is an apparent emergency, we would recommend that 911 is called immediately. If it is a situation where the cord has been pulled, what happens is it comes up on our monitor at Manitoba Housing, and it instantly recognizes the individual's unit and its phone number, and a phone call is made immediately to that person to ask him what the problem is. An evaluation is made, and if it means sending an emergency responder or something of that nature, then that is handled in that manner. As I mentioned, that is on a 24-hour basis, and it is available for the individuals too.

Ms. Cerilli: Maybe we should go then to the specifics of this case now that the minister has these letters in front of me, because it talks about a Mr. Lapointe [phonetic], who was being sort of monitored by friends, tenants in the building. The claim is that a request for assistance was made and nothing was really followed up on, that there was no referral to a medical professional. Staff simply said that they would look into it when they came back from holidays, but Mr. Lapointe [phonetic] did not make it that long and he passed away. Again, on page 2 of the letter I have given to the minister, it said that there has been no inquiry into this. This is pretty serious and raises the question of how medical personnel are contacted. If we are giving responsibilities to tenants to help each other and to then flag somebody, and if that person is not a medical professional, then how is it that medical professionals are going to be contacted to ensure that there is follow-up? It certainly is not going

to add to the security of the tenants if they feel like the buddy system does not result in any response.

Mr. Reimer: I can only think that anytime there is any type of—you know, the passing away of a tenant in one of our suites, we would want to be aware of it; and, if there is a responsibility or a concern of the way the person had been treated or looked at, we would want to do some follow-up on that. I can only make the suggestion that I can direct the department to look into this a little bit further and get a little bit more background on it to find out a little bit more as to exactly what transpired in regard to the individual, Mr. Lapointe [phonetic], that the member is referring to, and try to be more cognizant of the background. At this particular time, I cannot speculate as to what transpired or what may have been the position or the condition of how this happened. So, if the member is willing to bear with me, I can try to get more background material on this particular incident.

Ms. Cerilli: I would appreciate him getting back to me with that. I mean, he has already made the commitment that he is going to inquire about the specific cases raised in this letter. But this raises a number of issues. First of all, I want to ask about the training that the staff have who are working with seniors in these blocks. I know in discussions we have had over the years, the minister has made it clear that the staff that are there are not necessarily support staff, that Manitoba Housing does not provide the kind of support staff that would deal with medical conditions or social work or those sorts of issues. Maybe he can clarify that again for me, but because the staff that are there with Manitoba Housing are in a caretaker role or tenant relations role, I am wondering how Manitoba Housing is dealing with the actual needs then that present themselves to the staff in terms of the training that the staff would get related to emergency response, related to dealing with the kind of enquiries that are brought forward in this letter?

* (1040)

Mr. Reimer: Sorry for taking a little bit of time on that, because I just wanted to get some

background as to the number of people we have employed in that position with the tenant relations officer and the tenant resource officers and some of their responsibilities. Their responsibilities are a lot of times in the co-ordination and the administration of the apartments and the buildings that they have been assigned to. They work very closely with the social workers in the area, with the Health department. They work closely with some of the resource people in the communities in looking after trying to co-ordinate activities for seniors.

It is an interesting overlap in regards to myself as Minister of Housing and Minister responsible for Seniors that I see both ends of the spectrum, in a sense, in working with a lot of seniors, because more and more of our apartment blocks now are becoming seniors-occupied units. The shift in the utilization of these buildings for more and more seniors is becoming evident because they were built under certain conditions back in the '60s and '70s. Now with the transition towards more seniors, the demands and the facilities that have to be accommodated for these seniors sometimes put these buildings into an awkward position just because of their conformation. So it is a matter a lot of times of juggling different type of structures and scenarios.

We have been working at trying to even refit some of the buildings to accommodate seniors in some of the facilities of kitchen design. When we are doing remodelling, we are looking at a different type of aspect of remodelling in some of these buildings now, taking into account the fact that we are dealing with a different type of segment of our population which is geared towards the seniors. A lot of our M and I and things like that are going along in that direction and recognizing how we have to accommodate that part of the sector. Like I say, the tenant relations officers and the resource people work very closely with the home care people also in trying to accommodate their requests. They do a fair amount of different types of scenarios, but as for specifics in regard to health care, they are not trained in that type of facility. Some of the people who we have working, their backgrounds, a lot of them were from human ecology and from social work. So they have the training ability to work with people, and that is very,

very important, especially like as was mentioned, working with seniors in today's society.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the point the minister makes in terms of the changing demographics, aging population and more seniors living in Manitoba Housing properties, that is the point I was making in my opening statement, and I do not think that Manitoba Housing is necessarily keeping up with that as best as they could. The minister has made the point, as well, that perhaps there has to be re-examination of the kind of staffing and the kind of qualifications that people have that work with the seniors who live in our Manitoba Housing properties.

But before we really get into that—and I am going to spend quite a bit of time on that. I have been doing a fair bit of consultation on those kinds of issues, not just as it relates to seniors but more broadly. But I want to stick more specifically right now to the specifics around this case. The question I had asked is about the training for the staff that are there. For example, do they have even first aid training, the staff who are working in a seniors block as a caretaker or as an administrator, that are working as a tenant resource worker or tenant relations officer? Are those staff trained with first aid?

Mr. Reimer: Other than CPR, they are not given first aid training unless some of the individuals have taken it on their own. We do not have that as a mandatory requirement in regard to working in some of these apartments or seniors complexes. No, they do not have specific training in regard to health.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Chairperson, considering these kinds of cases and the kind of clientele or tenants they are working with, do you think that that is a reasonable policy change that could be made for the staff who are working in either seniors or family blocks? There are lots of professions that require their staff to have first aid training and that is required then to be updated. Part of the first aid program, it includes CPR, is that it is required to be updated and upgraded on a regular basis. Would the minister consider that?

Mr. Reimer: I think that is possibly a suggestion that we should explore a little bit

further possibly in the fact that, as the member has pointed out, we are working more and more with an aging population, and to be aware of some of the problems that an awareness program of some sort certainly would not hurt or would not harm the tenant relations officer to be part of. Maybe we can look at some sort of awareness program or the availability possibly of a training of sorts towards that end. Yes, we can look at that.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. How about as the minister was talking earlier about the tenant resource worker, in particular, that their responsibilities co-ordinate with social workers in the health field. I know that in some of the not-for-profit housing corporations they have gone to great lengths to develop relationships with home care or other supports. How about with Manitoba Housing, with the ones that are operated, like 101 Marion, by Manitoba Housing? Does this block have a co-ordinated Home Care program where the same nurses are coming in on a regular basis, and it is co-ordinated so that a few nurses are coming in and seeing all the patients, that we are not having a system where each tenant is having to co-ordinate home care on their own, and we get, you know, umpteen nurses coming in at all different hours? Has that been co-ordinated for 101 Marion? Is that something that your department is working on?

* (1050)

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that one of the primary functions of the tenant resource officers is that exact function, to co-ordinate these types of activities, whether it is 101 Marion or any of our other areas of buildings that these tenant resource people are responsible for. It is to do that co-ordination of home care and nurses and other programs that are needed in that particular area.

We have six of those officers that do that. That is their primary function, to try to bring the resources together in a more co-ordinated and effective manner within the complex that has been under their jurisdiction.

Ms. Cerilli: So that is six tenant resource workers for which region of the Manitoba Housing Authority? It does not sound like you

are going to have one per block, and maybe that is not reasonable to request, that that means that you are not going to have someone onsite then. So maybe answer that question first. Six tenant resource workers, how big an area are they covering?

Mr. David Faurshou, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Reimer: The six that I referred to are in the Winnipeg region, and they are assigned each one or two or whatever blocks or buildings to manage. We also have one in Brandon that co-ordinates the Brandon requests. Like I say, they may look after more than one or two buildings, but the six of them are Winnipeg.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, even if it is three to four, two times six, there are a lot more seniors buildings in the city than just that. So I am wondering, as there are for caretakers where I believe there is a policy where they are supposed to have so many units per caretaker, is there a policy like that for the resource workers? Again, is that something that maybe you should be looking at considering the aging demographic in your properties, considering that seniors are having more health problems, and more other problems, are living longer?

There is a fairly high incidence of poverty amongst this group. Can you tell me, if there are a specific number of tenants that are assigned each resource worker, what that number is? Maybe this is another area that needs to get some reconsideration in terms of resources. Maybe that should not necessarily all come from Housing. Maybe it is the old partnership thing that has to happen with Health or Family Services. Did the minister agree that this is an area that needs attention, and is there a specific policy for the number of tenants?

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that it is reviewed annually with Health as to the needs and where the program should be co-ordinated out of. It is not based necessarily on units because I think the member can recognize that in some apartment blocks we may have a number of seniors, but there may not be that much of a need for co-ordinating of efforts in that particular building. So we work fairly closely

with Health, looking at where the demographics and the needs are more severe for utilization of these programming co-ordinations.

So that becomes a criteria in which type of load, if you want to call it, that each of these tenant resource people take on. But, as I mentioned, it is reviewed annually with Health and we work very closely with Health in trying to allocate where the resource persons are utilized.

Ms. Cerilli: To answer my question though, there is no specific policy that says as it does for caretakers: so many tenants or units per worker.

Mr. Reimer: That is right. We cannot do that because the caretaker's job is a specific number-related function whereas a resource person is related more to a needs function.

Ms. Cerilli: That makes some sense. I think what the minister is saying is that you cannot assign a specific number because the client's needs are different, and one tenant may take a lot more time so it cannot be a number. I would think though that there is still some need for some kind of policy examination in this area and reviewing it on an annual basis. I do not know if there is a report that is made from Health. Is this something that the department is currently trying to focus on given what we have just been talking about in terms of the growing needs in Manitoba Housing properties?

Mr. Reimer: The member alluded to the co-ordination and the co-operation between the Health department and that. In discussion with the staff, they mentioned that this is becoming more and more of an ongoing dialogue with Health because of, as the member mentioned, the demographics and the aging population and the condition of the buildings and the spread throughout the areas of Winnipeg and Manitoba with seniors, that the awareness of trying to satisfy the needs for the seniors is becoming more and more evident. As has been pointed out, there are more and more meetings that are being co-ordinated with trying to facilitate the co-ordination of resources and needs and manpower. So it is becoming more prevalent. It is something that I, as Housing minister and Seniors minister, am becoming more cognizant

of. If anything, I would think that it has to play a greater role in some of the decisions and the directions that government has to take, that is, recognizing where the needs are and assigning or reassigning resources to try to satisfy those needs. That is something that maybe we have to be more aware of within our departments, that is, this co-ordination. I think that is something that we would take very seriously. We are there to try to serve the public better in a certain situation in regard to either their age or their physical condition or their economic condition. There is a social responsibility that government must fulfill.

* (1100)

Ms. Cerilli: As I said earlier, I am going to spend a lot of time on this particular area, but right now I just want to clarify one more thing and then move on. As you are having these discussions with Health then, do you have actual written agreements in place, contractual agreements in terms of the home care provision? I just want to get a better sense of how this is working in terms of—well, we will stick with this specific example of providing home care. I know you have also mentioned mental health services. There are a whole range of services that would need to be co-ordinated.

Mr. Reimer: There is not a fixed set of contracts or conditions in regard to the various aspects of dealing with Health. The only place where there are agreements between Housing and Health is in the funding that is provided to the Housing for the meal program that Health provides. There is a contractual agreement there, and also in the allocation of funding by Health for the support services for seniors, that is done on a contractual basis.

As for the other overlaps, as was mentioned, those are done on interdepartmental meetings and co-ordinations, but not in a formal contractual basis of working together.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, this is what we are talking about though is these support services, so maybe give me a little bit more of a description of what that contract includes with Health, the contract for support services for seniors.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Reimer: I was just getting some clarification as to the funding on the support services for seniors. It goes for staffing. It goes for the meal programs. There is a bit of a difference between the city and the rural area, because in the rural area a lot of times the building is provided by Manitoba Housing, and the meals are prepared by a nonprofit or volunteer group and the funding goes to them. So there are various types of arrangements with that. But in our locations in Winnipeg, there are cooks that are paid for by the support services for seniors, so that is where that funding usually goes towards.

Ms. Cerilli: Can we get a little more specific? I mean this is Estimates. You said before that there are six resource workers. I am assuming that those are the ones that are paid through this agreement. How many other staff?

An Honourable Member: How many in numbers?

Ms. Cerilli: What the dollars are for Manitoba Health in this kind of agreement that cover them and the number of staff.

Mr. Reimer: I can get the newest figures, but the figures that we have available right here are from 1997-98. It was \$122,000 that was obtained from Health. There are 12 food service workers that are under that umbrella of funding. The total amount of money that was paid out was \$172,000, so the shortfall was picked up by Manitoba Housing. We can most likely get that number in the next day or two regarding what the current numbers are.

Ms. Cerilli: This is very interesting, because this is an area that I have been talking about for a number of years now in terms of the kind of co-operation between Manitoba Health for services and Housing. As I was saying, I think this is an area that really has to be expanded, given that Manitoba Housing is not providing these kinds of direct services. So the \$122,000 then was to cover 12 food service workers and six resource co-ordinators? [interjection] No? Just the cooks. So the resource workers are paid through Housing then?

Mr. Reimer: No, they are also paid by Health but under a separate line or a separate issuance of funding.

* (1110)

Ms. Cerilli: Rather than going through this back and forth, I can just ask: can I have a copy of last year's agreement on this, just to get a sense of what is involved?

Mr. Reimer: Sure, we can get that for the member.

Ms. Cerilli: I am going to go back then to this issue where it originated, and that is talking about 101 Marion. The letter that the minister now has, I think it asks a question, you know, what kind of relationship there is between—I am not sure if this is in the letter or not or just in a conversation I had with the tenants—you know, common sense relationships that would occur between a property like this that is so close to St. Boniface Hospital and the issue we were discussing earlier about the kind of investigation or inquiry that would be done after these types of deaths.

I just want to clarify, then, if the minister's department received any report from the Chief Medical Examiner or any information on the deaths, or is that not something that would occur if there was an investigation into any of these deaths by the Chief Medical Examiner?

Mr. Reimer: Nothing has been brought to our attention.

Ms. Cerilli: Attached to those letters as well, the minister also has a couple more letters exchanged between this tenant and the deputy minister. It was surprising to me that, in the response to this original letter, the deputy minister had said: Maybe you should use the buddy system. Then the tenant wrote back and said: We did use the buddy system, and the result was there was no follow-up and the tenant that we reported as having difficulty has passed away.

Is the minister not concerned that the deputy minister would respond to this tenant to use the buddy system when the buddy system was used

and in place? Is that not something that should have been followed up prior to that kind of response being written by the deputy minister?

I am concerned that this has occurred. The deputy minister seems to not be aware of what is in place at 101 Marion Street and to have written that kind of a letter.

Mr. Reimer: I am not really sure whether there is a buddy system involved in 101 Marion. One of the things that we have to be aware of too is that it is a voluntary system. It is a system that some people do not want to be involved with because they feel that it is an invasion of their privacy and they do not want to be bothered with that type of scrutiny, if you want to call it. I think that it is something that has to be aware of. If the tenants' association recommend it, that is one thing, but it is another thing whether all the tenants want to participate in it. It is a voluntary type of involvement by the tenants. That is something that has to be taken into account.

As to 101 Marion, I really do not know whether they have any type of system of checking up on each other in that building or not, but I am sure we can make inquiries to find out exactly whether they have some sort of awareness system in that building.

Ms. Cerilli: I can appreciate what the minister is saying. The tenant claims that there was a buddy system, but if I understand what the minister is saying, maybe that is not sort of a formal program that is being run through the whole apartment. But, in the minds of the tenants that contacted the Manitoba Housing Authority staff, they were a buddy; they were this fellow's friend. They asked for him to get some support, and that did not occur. I am interested to know if, in fact, there is some kind of a program. This is a large seniors block, a very active tenant association that certainly sounds like they would be receptive to doing something like that. In fact, they are doing it on at least an informal basis, on a friendly basis currently.

But I think that what this incident shows us is there has to be a more clear process for following up on tenant complaints about their fellow tenants and their friends, especially if

there already is an agreement with Health providing services in those buildings where home care is coming in. I do not know if this particular individual was receiving home care or not. I am sure all of that would become part of the investigation or the kind of inquiries that the minister is going to be making. It goes back to the whole issue I was raising earlier about the training that the staff have had. It would make sense, you know, if this client was getting home care, that the staff that were involved would know that and would be able to have someone probably the same day or the next day be investigating the kind of complaints that were coming forward about the tenant.

I am wondering if that is how the process would work, if the minister would agree that this is a concern, if there is a response that is not satisfactory to tenants, if they really are concerned and they feel like they are doing a good deed by trying to help out their fellow tenant and feel like they are not getting the kind of response that is warranted.

Mr. Reimer: I think that there is a lot of merit in what the member is alluding to in regards to trying to be on top of situations that happen in any building, whether it is 101 Marion or any other building. This is one of the reasons why, if there is a strong tenants association, which the member has alluded to—I believe that this building does have a tenants association. I believe that they are in the process of being re-established right now, because they are going through some restructuring of their membership. These are some of the things that should be talked about, possibly by our resource officer in the establishment of some suggestions of guidelines, some working with the tenants association in setting up some sort of system of volunteer participation and an awareness to the problems there and then working with the tenants in that manner.

* (1120)

I think that there is a recognition that we have to be very careful because some people are just very jealous of their time and their personal lives and they do not want to be involved. No matter how we feel that there is a need for some sort of awareness program, they have the

freedom of choice. I think that what is important, though, is that the options are outlined to the tenants, pointing out the advantages of some sort of neighbourhood watch type of program within the buildings, because it has been proven that on a larger scale, Neighbourhood Watch has significantly had strong benefits in any community that it goes into, whether it is in a residential area or whether it is in an apartment block. Neighbours watching neighbours has a great benefit to reducing crime or, as mentioned here, if a person is sick or has an injury, there is a contact made to try to help these persons.

These are some of the things that I think have to be addressed by possibly the resource person in talking to the tenants association. As mentioned with 101 Marion, I would think that with the new tenants association that is coming on stream that these are some things that should be brought to their attention.

Ms. Cerilli: One of the other issues that is raised by the tenant that is written to the department is—and this has been raised a number of times in other buildings—the practice by the department to change the 55-plus exclusivity of these buildings and start integrating other people, particularly those that have a variety of other medical conditions.

This is a difficult issue. I know we have discussed this before. I am wanting to see what kind of progress the department is making in terms of some of the same issues around the staff that are working there and the kind of supports that people have.

When I was visiting 101 Marion, there was a young gentleman who approached us looking for change, and the tenant that I was meeting with informed me that he was a schizophrenic patient. Particularly in the case of 101 Marion with their close proximity to St. Boniface Hospital and the psych ward, if there are vacancies in that property, then work can be done to try and integrate other folks, but the supports have to be there.

The question I am getting at is: are there currently specific agreements with Health, with the Mental Health division in terms of the

supports that are being provided for the tenants that are living in Manitoba Housing properties that have mental health problems? Can you give me some more specifics about the nature of those kind of supports; and the number of people now that are living in Manitoba Housing who are psychiatric outpatients or who have a history of mental health problems; if they are being dispersed—this is the third question, I think—throughout a number of the properties, if they are being concentrated in certain buildings where there are the spaces available? And I will stop there, three.

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, it is indeed a very interesting topic. As was explained to me by staff, dealing with the mental health aspect of tenants in buildings, one of biggest items that was brought to my attention that I was not aware of is the so-called labelling of mental health patients, that that is not done anymore. Theoretically, with our public housing, people can make application, and if eligibility criteria are met, they can go into our facilities. Unless there is a specific notation made by that individual that they are under the care and concern of a medical social worker, that is the only time that the building superintendent or Manitoba Housing becomes aware that there is a problem there, you know, that the person is seeking treatment. The other thing is that we do not have agreements with Manitoba Health in regard to the housing or the care of people with mental health problems.

In dealing with the resource officers, here, again, it has been pointed out that there are ongoing meetings with Manitoba Health. There are also discussions of probably the training possibility of some of the resource workers in their recognition of problems and possible handling of some of these problems.

So what we are faced with is the confidentiality of the person, the patient, and the fact of Health wanting to have people dispensed into the community and not concentrated in one particular area. Those are some of the challenges that staff and the two departments are trying to come to a resolve on, but I guess it is just something we have to work at even closer.

* (1130)

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I appreciate what the minister is saying in terms of confidentiality, and I understand that. I guess I should also be cautious, you know, conscious of the way I am referring to this, as well, but I have had discussions with quite a few people in the community, and I know that the ministry has had a committee that made a number of recommendations, so this is not as ad hoc as the minister is suggesting by his last answer.

There has been a decision made by Manitoba Housing and other community organizations to place people who have mental health problems into Manitoba Housing vacant properties, vacant suites, particularly in the elderly housing. That is correct, right?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, that is right.

Ms. Cerilli: I know some of the research that I have done only going up to 1983, but it is a pretty shocking figure when you look at statistics that show, this is Canada-wide, that between 1960 and 1983, the number of psychiatric hospital beds in Canada fell from 47,633 to 7,935. That is pretty incredible. So all of those people have been, as the minister has suggested—and the trend has continued into the 1990s—released into the community without the necessary supports. Housing is one of the key areas that there have not been the dollars flowing from Health into other community services to provide the kind of supports that these folks need.

I guess what I want to ask, first of all, is if the report done by the committee in Manitoba Housing that involved mental health community agencies and Manitoba Health staff has been released to the public or if I can have a copy of that report, and if all the recommendations have indeed been implemented.

Mr. Reimer: I have been told the report that the member is referring is a joint departmental report with Health and Housing. It has not been released yet. I believe that it was a working document-type of report, was it not? It has not been released. No.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the obvious question is: Why is it not being released? If the recommendations are being followed up on, then can the

minister tell me what recommendations are being implemented? How many recommendations were in the report in total and the kind of direction that it is providing to the department? Is that being followed?

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, I have been told that, as to the exact number of recommendations, we would have to check the report on it, because we do not have the report with us or the timetable of events or functions on it or recommendations on it, but from what I have been told, there are still reports being worked on. There is a working group committee to review the existing practices, the consulting team. There were people from Manitoba Housing, Canada Mental Health Association, the Salvation Army, Mental Health Services, Home Care. They have tried to identify the components on the overall plan. The working group still meets on an as-required basis. That is as much as I can relate for the information part that we have at this particular time on that.

Ms. Cerilli: So we have a working group that meets on an ad hoc basis that is implementing these recommendations. Can you tell me when the last time they met?

Mr. Reimer: We can try to find that out. We do not know offhand right at this particular time, but we can try to find out when it last met.

Ms. Cerilli: I guess you can tell me that this afternoon. Well, I am concerned about this. I will come back to this area, I think, maybe after. It is an area that I know is causing concern for some of the tenants that live in Manitoba Housing, and as I have said before, it is a difficult issue to sort of balance the needs of the various tenants that live there.

How is the government responding to tenants who are seniors that have lived in some of these properties for quite a few years and are now coming into conflict with some of the younger tenants that are being moved in? How does the government deal with that?

* (1140)

Mr. Reimer: In an overall statement I think that what we try to do is in a lot of the buildings that have a fair amount of seniors, we try to keep it

that way. We want to try to have the building more or less occupied by seniors. What does transpire or what does happen from time to time in some of these buildings, because of the configuration and because of the mix of various suites in them or units in them, there is a vacancy problem that persists, and then it becomes necessary sometimes to mix, if you want to call it, some of these buildings into younger residents moving into them. It is not necessarily done to all of our buildings. I am told there are approximately maybe six or eight of our buildings that do have that type of designation of having younger people in there. In some cases where there are problems with some of these seniors who are in those buildings, we have actually moved them if they feel uncomfortable, and we will pay for their moving, too, to accommodate them to another block. So it is something that has grown out of the necessity to try to get a better utilization of the building, but like I say, it is not prevalent in all our buildings.

Ms. Cerilli: So the minister's response then, and the way they are dealing with these conflicts between tenants that are seniors and younger tenants that are being moved in, is you will offer to move the senior to a building that is exclusively seniors. How many tenants have you had to move?

Mr. Reimer: I am told that we have only had to move one.

Ms. Cerilli: I understand, and the minister can maybe confirm, these are the six properties that have been sort of declared or designated as non-elderly now that previously were seniors 55-plus Manitoba Housing buildings. Those are 375 Assiniboine, 24 Carlton, 260 Nassau, 170 Hendon, 195 Young Street and 330 Blake Street. Is that the extent of the list or are there a few more? How many non-seniors or non-55 plus tenants have been moved into those buildings?

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that 330 Blake has always been family. The one on Young Street, I forget the address, 195 Young Street was always designated as a mixed unit.

Ms. Cerilli: The minister did not answer my question. It was: how many people have been

moved there, and are there any more than on this list?

Mr. Reimer: There are four others that should be on that list: 515 Elgin, 269 Dufferin, 185 Smith and the one that we were talking about earlier, 101 Marion. As for the turnover, it has been pointed out to me that with the younger tenants, there is a fair amount of turnover in that sector, but the seniors even though they are in those buildings still remain in those buildings, and in fact there have been incidents where a lot of the seniors do like some of the younger people in the buildings. A lot of these younger people will work with them and help them and carry their groceries. There is quite a lot of interaction, intergenerational co-operation, so it is not as if—even though there are seniors in these buildings—there is a conflict. A lot of times they enjoy some of the youthful activity that goes on in these buildings.

As seniors minister, I have found that the designation of seniors becomes quite broad in the sense of participation and activity and energy of some of the seniors that I have come across. It is hard to classify people as seniors now because they can be very, very active.

Ms. Cerilli: Just to clarify then before I go on, it was 269 which street?

Mr. Reimer: 269 Dufferin, 185 Smith, 101 Marion and 515 Elgin.

Ms. Cerilli: I am pleased to hear that there are positive examples. I guess we often get some of the negative experiences raised with us. I do not want to suggest that this cannot potentially be a positive thing for some seniors and other tenants that are moving in there as well. I am interested in getting some of the specifics on the turnover and vacancies in some of these buildings, and I just want to inquire then again. It is 10 to 12. Have we had the information sent down here that I was requesting at the beginning?

Mr. Reimer: The package was sent over, but I am told it was the wrong package.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, we will have lots of time to deal with this because the issues that I am wanting to get into now have to do with, I think,

a combination of what we have been talking about, trying to adapt Manitoba Housing properties to meet the needs of our changing populations and at the same time trying to fill vacancies. That has been, I think, an ongoing problem for the minister and for the department.

I am wanting, first of all, before I go on, to see if the government has been reviewing two reports. One I referenced earlier this week. It was done on July 23, 1990, Elderly Persons Housing Vacancy Study for Winnipeg: A Discussion Paper. The other one was actually done by CMHC. It was done in 1991, Policy Perspectives on Public Housing. I am wondering if the minister and his staff have looked at these two reports and what has become of them in the department.

* (1150)

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that the department is aware of the one report. The one in regard to the CMHC, the staff that are here may not be aware of it, but if a copy can be made we would certainly make that available to staff for review also.

Ms. Cerilli: I will be pleased to copy this for you. It is actually an Appendix 3 of a larger document that I do not have, and I do not know what it is a part of. But am I to understand then that this is not something that Manitoba Housing has looked at? The kind of report it is, is not necessarily making specific recommendations, but it deals with the pros and cons of a number of issues, everything from the kinds of things we have been talking about of providing the support for seniors in public housing, to dealing with vacancies, to dealing with redesigning, to dealing with training for staff. It is a very good report. So am I to understand that this is something that has not been—and I will pass it over for you to look at.

Mr. Reimer: Maybe I should have qualified the statement. It may be in our department. It is just that possibly—from 1991. It may be in the department; it may have been utilized. It may have been by some of our policy people. But what we can do, as mentioned, is we can make a copy of this and then maybe get it back to the member, or if she wants to make a copy and

make it available. [interjection] Okay, then we will take this and make a copy.

The policy department may be aware of this. It is just that the people who are with me today do not have the instant recollection of this one from 1991. So we will make a copy of this and get it back to the member as soon as possible.

Ms. Cerilli: I am actually going to give my colleague for Transcona here a chance to ask some questions specifically about his area, and we will come back to these reports after.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Chairperson, thanks to my colleague for giving me this opportunity to ask questions dealing with public housing unit stock in the community of Transcona and Radisson, which is part of the community as well.

I have written to the minister in the past and asked questions on this in the past relating to housing stock, in particular, work at, I think it is, 460 Dowling East in Transcona. I notice just recently, in communication with my constituent, the department finally, after quite an extensive period of time, has commenced some of the repairs. I thank the minister for having his department undertake those works, and I hope they will be completed in short order.

There is still the outstanding issue, though, of other housing units in the community, essentially side-by-side living accommodations, which would be on Dowling East at the other end of that same block, that have been for some time without any significant repairs done to them. There are other streets in the community that have public housing units on them as well, most of it in East Transcona.

I am wondering what efforts you are making. Are there budget allocations for the upgrade, maintenance and repair of those facilities, so that my office does not have to continue to receive concerned calls from neighbours and from residents living in those units about the deplorable state of repair? The residents living next to those units are complaining to me, because they tell me it is lowering the value of their houses. The mortgages that they have on them, of course,

they are continuing to pay, and yet their values are dropping. So they are concerned about that, and the people who are living in those public housing units are concerned about the lack of maintenance that is occurring.

Now I know you have put some chain-link fences around some of them and attempted to repair the yard itself. You have taken down the old wooden fences that were lying in a dilapidated state for an extensive period of time, and I am talking years here. But there is still the ongoing need for maintenance of those units, internal to them and external. Even a coat of paint sometimes would help. There does not seem to be that ongoing maintenance, and it is becoming, in some cases, an eyesore for the surrounding community.

So perhaps the minister can give me some update on what the plans are for his department with respect to upgrading those public housing units that I have described.

Mr. Reimer: The ongoing repairs of a lot of our units is something that we take very seriously. In fact, we allocated last year, I guess it was, \$10 million for upgrades and improvements for our stock, and this year I believe our budget line on that is around \$11 million for the same types of expenditures.

I have been told that the area that the member is referring to is something that we have identified as an area where we do have to do some upgrades, we do have to do some improvements in that area. In fact, I believe that senior staff are going to be going out there and taking a physical assessment and a walk-about, if you want to call it, and look at those particular areas. It has been identified as an area that needs repairs and some sort of upgrading. We have included in this year's budget for some of these, and we are looking within the department for reallocation of funding towards some sort of improvements in that particular area.

Mr. Reid: I appreciate when the minister says that he has identified or the department has identified need or are in the process of doing so. I do not think it is a secret. I mean those needs have been identified for some time. I am sure the department has this information. I know my

constituents have called the department and have expressed concerns and have been working with the department for over a year, perhaps more than two years in some cases, with respect to the maintenance of those units. I know this one unit at 460 Dowling East, it took us the better part of two years to get any movement on that particular facility, and if was not for the begging and pleading of both myself and the constituent, that project still would not be in the works and well underway.

So I am looking here for some concrete assurances that you will have the opportunity to commence those repairs and that needed maintenance in this budget year and not put off to another budget year for further reconsideration and identification as seems to be taking place.

Mr. Reimer: No, I will make the commitment of having someone out there next week to take a walk-about and do an assessment of it. It has been identified, and we will look at finding funding within.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The time being twelve o'clock, committee rise.

HEALTH

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

*(1010)

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): I did table I think two pieces of information the member had asked for the last time we met. I think it was the makeup of the RHAs, and it was the listing of the grants. We will continue to bring the information forward as available.

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Just by way of background for the minister and all those present and staff, et cetera, my guesstimate is today we will continue along general lines, and then I am almost certain we will be moving to line by line this afternoon and anticipating that when we meet early next week we will be at the

line dealing with Information Systems, which is 21.2.(c). That is roughly where I am anticipating going between now and when we meet next week. So that is what I roughly anticipate happening.

I just wanted to ask a general question of the minister while staff is here. It is an advisory question, and that is: if an individual was suffering from an illness that required palliative care and was admitted to say the Health Sciences Centre, what would be the recommendation of the department with respect to the palliative care to be provided with that individual, i.e., if that individual would be committed to hospital, should that individual go through the Health Sciences Centre? I would presume we see palliative care through Riverview, or could the individual be admitted to St. Boniface Hospital through their palliative care program? The minister might guess why I am asking this general question, but if he could just maybe provide me with a response or general recommendation as to how the processes work vis-a-vis palliative care and a need for palliative care by a patient who is present at the Health Sciences Centre?

Mr. Stefanson: I think the member was basically right how he outlined the process. If a patient was at the Health Sciences Centre, they would obviously have a discussion with their doctor, the family would most likely be involved. If there was a desire to go into a facility, the physician, the family doctor or the doctor in charge probably would have a discussion with either St. Boniface or Riverview in terms of admitting into one of those two facilities.

To varying degrees, there are some aspects of palliative care in most facilities, but those are the two that have specialized areas for palliative care. If the family and the individual wanted to go back into a home setting, the doctor again would discuss what services are available through Home Care and so on, to accommodate them in that fashion. So, again, the member's understanding of how it currently works is basically accurate, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response, and, just supplementary, if the

individual wished to remain in the community, presumably it would be through the VON portion of the palliative care program, and they would be provided—this is a case of cancer that I am specifically referring to—with a bed and the various resource persons on a 24-hour basis if they so choose. That would be an option available as well, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Stefanson: The member again is basically correct. That service in the home would all be co-ordinated through the Home Care program, and it might very well involve a VON nurse. Not necessarily, but in many cases that would certainly be the case, but other than that everything he outlined in terms of the opportunity for 24-hour care and the services being provided would be done through the Home Care program.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): I am interested in this line of questioning right now. If the person chooses to receive that treatment in their home or apartment—if they are in the hospital all their drugs are covered. If they are at home, do they have to pay for the drugs themselves? Is there a way of having those drugs given to them through the hospital? How does that work? If they stay at home, do they have to pay for their own drugs?

Mr. Stefanson: I appreciate the question from the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski). It has certainly been an issue that has been raised with me recently, particularly on the heels of our announcement about the more comprehensive palliative care program that we just announced a few weeks ago. So, under that program, it is the intention to cover the drug; that is the question that the member asked. It is the intention that, because a person is now in their home under this comprehensive palliative care program, if they were in the hospital, the drugs would be paid for, the same should apply by being in their home. Under the current situation, it is a combination of both. In some cases the drugs are being provided by the hospitals, but in some cases individuals are paying for them. So, under this more comprehensive program, where we have announced the additional, I think, about \$1.1 million was the amount recently, we are now in the process of finalizing that entire issue.

So the short answer to your question is, yes, it will be covered. I know in the past it has been a combination of both out there, and that will be resolved now through this total comprehensive program.

* (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Chairperson, I had actually a number of questions that I would like to be able to ask. Some of them are fairly specific in terms of numbers, and the minister can indicate whether or not they are too specific, that he would rather wait for different staff that might be at the table. A lot of it has to do with acute care beds and emergency services. Is this an appropriate time in which I can pose some of those questions?

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to inform the honourable member for Inkster that we had agreed to do policy questions at this time. We were going to leave those types of questions until we went line by line so that the minister would have the staff present to deal with those exact issues that the honourable member is bringing forward. This was an agreement that we struck when the committee first sat.

Mr. Stefanson: Thank you for that clarification. If, as part of a broader policy question, the member is saying he is asking some detailed questions that most likely would require the compiling of information, which is what the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) has done, I do not mind that. In fact, I would welcome that, because then we could bring that back probably at the time we are into the line items. Certainly, as you outlined our agreement, you are absolutely correct in terms of basically trying to keep to general policy issues as much as possible.

Mr. Lamoureux: I appreciate the response from the Minister of Health. Maybe what I can do is just give a general outline of notice, and then when the appropriate time is, I will try to arrange to be in here, given that we have three committees and a number of other things that are going on currently.

What I am very much interested in is a number of acute care beds in our different health

care facilities. I do believe I have some numbers back in '95 that I would want to be able to confer in terms of what changes have actually been there, but if the minister has some sort of history with the number of acute care beds over the last number of years, whatever number is definitely beneficial. I am going to be asking some very specific questions in regard to procedures within our hospitals. The minister, I know, experienced first-hand an overnight stay in an emergency area. I, too, experienced—not me, but someone within my family experienced the same sort of a situation, and it is an issue which has been raised in the past.

So what I am hoping to be able to do is to get some detailed information as to the differences between hospitals. I do not want to just limit it to the city of Winnipeg. I would like to expand that to some of the rural facilities that are out there. As much detail as possible that can be brought to the Chamber, I think, would be definitely beneficial. My intentions are to approach it in as much of an apolitical fashion as can be, so I would really appreciate whatever details the minister might be able to make available. I know that the ministers of Health in the past and the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) have scheduled certain items for when they do come up just so that the department is better able to manage the staff that it has here. If I could be kept into the loop when it comes close to that discussion so that I can be myself a little bit better prepared in posing the specifics of the question, again, that would be appreciated.

Having said that, Mr. Chairperson, I do have a general question in terms of Emergency Services. That being, back in the late fall, there were considerable line-ups in our hallways, in emergency hallways, and the government was indicating at that point in time that it had a lot to do with the flu and so forth.

I am wondering if the Minister of Health can give an indication today in terms of what is the rationale that government is using in terms of defending the hallways or the line-ups at our different emergencies in Winnipeg. Maybe he can just enlighten us in terms of to what degree the problem exists.

The committee recessed at 10:25 a.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 10:33 a.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The committee will come back. The honourable member for Inkster, sorry for the inconvenience.

Mr. Lamoureux: Again, I do not necessarily want to go into the details right now. The minister a few months ago attributed the increase of demand of services in our emergency was primarily due to the flu, the time of the year, type thing. I am wondering if the minister is in a position which he can comment on that issue generally and indicate if there are some areas or some facilities for example that are having more of a difficult time trying to cope than others. Late last night, I understood, on the radio they talked about a nurses shortage at the Health Sciences Centre which was causing some problems. Even though it sparked a bit more of an interest because of some personal things that are going on which I do not want to go into, the interest has always been there and, given that we happen to be in the Estimates at the time, I thought it would be an appropriate time to pose the question.

Mr. Stefanson: On the first question about the number of acute care beds, we can certainly provide that information. The member for Kildonan asked for what is called the bed map, which is the global numbers, but then I know we have the ability to provide a more detailed breakdown of our rural hospitals, and so on. I think that has been provided in the past, if I am correct, so we can certainly provide that again.

On the whole issue of people in our hallways in our emergency rooms in our hospitals, we did reach a high level during what is called the flu season. The member for Kildonan as well asked for any information that we can provide that points to the fact that the flu played a role in terms of reaching some excessive numbers of people in our hallways back a few months ago. We have undertaken that we are going to provide him some data that shows that there is a relationship to the flu at that particular time of the year. Really that is not

unique to our province. We see it happening. I am sure the member for Inkster followed the media coverage, watched the news and saw examples in provinces right across Canada.

I know he has heard me and others on our side say on several occasions that having people in the hallways in our emergency room is unacceptable. We are working to reduce and eliminate that. That is our objective, and we have made significant progress on that issue. If you look at why that is happening, it is for a few reasons. One of the reasons is the commitment to be opening more personal care home beds. While we are waiting for the completion of the permanent beds now at some 850 net new beds coming on stream, we have been able to open a significant number of interim beds for people who require a personal care home environment.

In our system today, the number of panelled people that are waiting for a personal care home is at a level of about 50 right across the entire system. You go back several months, it was up at a level of about 250. That has provided significant relief within our acute care setting, having the ability to provide the care for those people outside of the acute care setting.

Mr. Ed Helwer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Another part of that of course is the whole issue of the Home Care program, dedicating the dollars to make sure that if people can be kept in their home that the resources are there to do that. That is why this budget is now up to \$147 million for the home care.

The third area is this whole issue that again I think the member is quite familiar with on the utilization of our beds right across the system. The Winnipeg Hospital Authority has been continuing to develop our bed utilization strategy. Just to bring the member up to date on where we are at, there is now a regional director for bed utilization in place. There is also a physician, a regional bed utilization physician position that is established and is in the process of being filled. In fact I believe a physician has now agreed to fill that, so that will be announced fairly shortly as to who that physician is. Physician bed managers are appointed now at all

of the sites. I will not go into all of the details, but I think the member—it really gets, in part, to the question—saying that you might get some pressure on one facility, you might have some relief in another facility and you really need a bed utilization strategy across the entire system to make sure you make the best use of all of the acute care beds that are in the system. So this bed utilization strategy is another key component to reduce and eliminate having people in hallways in our emergency rooms.

So those are some of the key strategies that I believe will accomplish what we want to accomplish, and what I think has the support in this Chamber is to eliminate having anybody on a bed in a hallway. Right now our system really is functioning at a hundred percent capacity, and we have to work towards achieving some flexibility in the system to deal with pressure points, whether it is a flu season or whether it is some other pressure that is brought to bear on our acute care system, on our emergency medical.

*(1040)

So I think the strategies that we are putting in place, more personal care home beds, a comprehensive Home Care program, a bed utilization strategy, those are all the key elements to accomplish exactly what the member is asking us to address and that is to make sure that people do not have to be on a bed in an emergency room hallway, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Kowalski: Yes, I have one general question, and I am looking to be educated here, something about the health care system.

When we talk about no beds being available, sometimes I found that difficult to understand that concept. When I walk through Seven Oaks Hospital and I see wings where there is a nursing station, there are beds and stuff, but it is not functioning. Physically, there is a bed there. Physically, there are areas of the hospital that are not being used. So I am assuming that when we say there are no beds available, we are talking about funded beds, that each facility is allowed to have so many beds that are funded by the government.

How does that differ from the number of beds that are actually capable of being there? For example, Seven Oaks Hospital would be the one I would have the most interest in. I hear during the height of the flu season when there was hallway medicine and there were no beds available, there were actually areas of the hospital that were not being used. Now what is the difference between the number of funded beds and the capacity of that building to hold beds?

Mr. Stefanson: Sorry for taking quite so long. I am not sure if the member for The Maples said when he last went through Seven Oaks. I know at the peak of what we will call the flu season, when the peak of the pressure was on the system, that additional beds were opened wherever they were available. Certainly Seven Oaks was one facility where additional beds were open at that particular point in time. His question about funded and unfunded, it is certainly our intention to be using all of the beds that are available in the system. So I am obviously going to go and check on the current status of Seven Oaks.

We have had some discussion with Seven Oaks on a go-forward basis that they might well be the one facility that could have some flexibility in the system to meet the pressure points of a flu and so on, but that is a different issue. That is trying to determine whether or not there are steps that they could take to assist in terms of being a focal point to deal with, say, the flu season and so on.

Although the member did refer to a specific wing or a whole wing on an individual bed basis, we get back to the discussion I had with the member for Inkster, the whole bed co-ordination, making sure we are using beds that are available if we have got pressure on one facility and there are beds in another facility. I think that is a different issue from what he raised. He seemed to describe for me that he walked through a wing or an area of the hospital that had a number of beds that would appear to be available for use that were not being utilized. So I am certainly going to look into that, because it is my understanding that we are utilizing all of the acute care beds that are available. That is certainly our intention. So I will pursue the

issue with both the WHA and the Seven Oaks Hospital directly.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister please update us on the status of the combining of the public health functions of the City of Winnipeg and the province that has recently been undertaken, and if he can update us as much as possible in terms of (a) what the status is, (b) what the budgetary allocation is, and (c) how services and then the staff members that are available? I appreciate the minister may not have that today, so this is by way of notice if he does not.

* (1050)

Mr. Stefanson: I will return with all of the details. My understanding, the public health officers basically were transferred January 1 to the Winnipeg Community and Long Term Care Authority. The whole objective of the transfer from a financial perspective was on a cost-neutral basis between the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba, but I can certainly return with the financial impact, the dollars involved, obviously a current status of that transfer and the number of employees and the services being provided.

Maybe just while I have the floor, one other tabling I will do right now is that the member for Kildonan asked for all of the departmental committees. I have three copies of the departmental committees as of April 1, 1999, that I would like to table at this time.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

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

Can the minister provide us with the status of the VON contract, who is negotiating it, and when and if last year's contract will be signed and where we are at in terms of this year's contract?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I guess the short answer is negotiations are ongoing. I will certainly undertake to see if there is anything beyond that that I can provide for the member for Kildonan. I think, not really a contract issue,

but really related to the VON was the issue of the nurse co-ordinators at the individual facilities. Again, I think, as the member for Kildonan knows, those positions and individuals were transferred to the WCA recently. But, in terms of the contract itself with VON, I know the deputy has been involved with some of the discussions, and discussions are ongoing. At this point in time it has not been concluded. I will look into it again. If there is any more current update other than that general answer I have just given in terms of any specifics or any expected timing of conclusion, and so on, I will return with that information.

Mr. Chomiak: In that regard, I just wonder, we are aware of the changes, we are aware of the announcements made by the Winnipeg Long Term Care Authority in terms of some additional programming.

At present, for example on weekends, I am sure the minister is aware that a great number of clients—I do not like that word—a great number of patients do not receive, are backed up in terms of calls from VON. I mean, that is a reality on a weekend basis. I wonder how that fits in with the present negotiations for the renewal of the contract, because I am assuming that that is part of the ongoing negotiations between the government and VON with respect to how issues are covered and how the funding arrangements work so that those particular patients are covered. But the reality is that I get reports on a regular basis that weekly, quite literally on weekends, the calls are not being covered. I wonder if the minister might comment on that, or am I off base?

Mr. Stefanson: As the member knows, part of the contract with VON is this issue of weekend service, but I really would be curious about any further specifics that the member can provide me on this because, as he knows, there has been no cutback in services. If anything, there has been a continual expansion of services. That is why we are seeing the kinds of dollars allocated that we are, now \$147 million in this budget, up from \$127 million just one year ago. So I really would welcome any specifics, whether it is in confidence, any individuals that are having problems or any detailed aspects of this concern that he has raised that he can provide me.

Obviously I would look into the issue immediately.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. I will correspond with the minister with specifics, as he related.

On page 22 of the Estimates book, there is reference to a specific policy of initiatives to address emerging health care issues and refinement of the provincial plan for health delivery. Can the minister table the provincial plan for health care delivery for us in this Chamber?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I know the member for Kildonan has seen various elements of the plan through the communication that has been recently provided to Manitobans, and I am sure he has had a chance to read some of that material, the brochure that went to all homes in Manitoba. The comprehensive plan, the document that backs up all of that and more is in the final stages of completion. It certainly is our plan and expectation that that will be made available for anybody who obviously wants to access or go through that. We are also talking about making it available on our Manitoba Health website and so on, so that anybody who really wants to look at the more detailed aspect of the comprehensive plan can do so. Many of the key elements have been outlined over the course of the last several weeks. They were outlined, as I say, in summary form in that document that was circulated to all homes and so on. So again, in terms of the final document, I expect that fairly shortly, and I am sure at that point in time the member for Kildonan will take a great deal of interest in it and read it from front to back.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, the minister made reference in his recent capital announcements to the establishment of primary health centres. I wonder if the minister could provide us with the background material and studies as to the purpose, function of those centres because I presume, given the status of the capital plan, that those are available, as well as the proposed locations and the proposed funding of those centres. If it is not appropriate at this juncture, at some later juncture would be fine.

* (1100)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, once again, I will return with the information on that. Really, on both aspects, there is information available on the concept of the primary health centres. We are working very closely with the WCA on the initiative. We have some detailed information from them, so part of that analysis and review with them includes the scope of services to be combined into the primary health centres and also prioritizing what region of the city should be done first, what area has the greatest need and therefore should be the first. So we are in the process right now of doing that review with them. I would expect that we will be able to come forward fairly shortly with precise details of what areas of the city we are starting with those primary health centres, but I can certainly try to get back very quickly with some of the documentation on the concept and when we are ready to go forward with specific details, I will also provide those to the member.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, two questions in this regard. Can the minister provide us with dated information in terms of the status of the Assiniboine Clinic project? The second question is: does it, in any way, impact on the decision to proceed on the primary health centres, or is in fact there a relationship in terms of the experience of that project? So two questions, can we have information as to the status and the effectiveness of that program, and secondly, does it bear any relationship to the primary health centre model?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, a good question on both issues. On the Assiniboine Clinic as it stands today, they are now back on a fee-for-service arrangement. We had that pilot project with them on a block funding. For various reasons, it was decided to go back for a fee for service. Having said that, we are having ongoing discussions with them still about the concept of block funding, and as well, part of that is an ongoing discussion with them about a role as part of a primary health centre.

Physicians certainly have to be an integrated part of a primary health centre, whether it is done on the basis in some regions of them actually being physically right in a location or

within the region that they are directly linked to that primary health centre. The whole concept, again, is not to be creating competition for existing clinics, existing family practitioners. It is to develop a continuum of care is really what it is and really a co-ordinated and centralized location where people can readily access whatever component it is of the health care system that they require in the various quadrants of our city, because right now, again as the member knows and perhaps he knows his region of Winnipeg where he lives better, in some cases, but it really varies across the city just how well co-ordinated they are and how centrally accessible they are. So that really is one of the overriding objectives of the primary health centres.

The role of physicians is key to that, and discussions are ongoing with physicians not only at the Assiniboine Clinic but literally throughout the city about this very important issue, because they are a key component to it in terms of how they are going to basically be functioning within that framework.

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

Again, two questions. Are these perhaps dependent upon the outcome of the arbitration with the MMA in one form or another, and who is the minister negotiating with on behalf of the physicians, both in general and specifically?

Mr. Stefanson: The first question, no, they are not dependent on the arbitration process or outcome. Secondly, discussions are ongoing between the WCA and Manitoba Health with individual physicians and clinics across the city. The various governing bodies, so to speak, are aware of the concept, are aware that the discussions are ongoing, but they really are taking place at this stage with individual clinics or physicians at varying degrees across the city at this particular point in time. That is obviously all part and parcel of the final recommendation in terms of the issues the member asked me earlier about in terms of what areas are being done first, which are the areas of greatest needs, what will the final model represent, including physicians. They are taking place on that kind of a basis, but certainly the Manitoba Medical

Association and the College of Physicians and Surgeons are aware of the primary health care model that we are pursuing. When I say we, Manitoba Health with the WCA.

* (1110)

Mr. Chomiak: Do I take it that the funding for these primary health clinics will be on a block basis as opposed to a fee-for-service basis?

Mr. Stefanson: As I have said, I will return with more details for the member. I do not want to leave the impression at all that these are physician-driven models because they are really just one component of the primary health care. Again, as the member knows, they are meant to encompass public health, home care, the whole continuum of services that are available to the public. So physicians are a key component of it, they are a part of it, but they are only one component. As to the final agreement with physicians, in any of the regions with the primary health centres, I am sure at the end of the day we will have probably a combination of both to varying degrees within the models, whether it is on a fee-for-service or on a salaried basis. So it is not being driven necessarily by being one or the other. It can be either or a combination of both, depending on ultimately the agreement that is reached with physicians in the various quadrants of our city.

Mr. Chomiak: It is the point where I am tempted to go off into a specific area, but I think I will try to keep it general, and I will be coming back to this pending the information that is coming from the minister. I have just received, and I thank the minister for a copy of a document entitled Manitoba Health Departmental Committees. Can the minister indicate whether this document includes all of the advisory committees to the minister and the appeal boards and panels of committees that show up on the Manitoba Health organizational chart?

Mr. Stefanson: The short answer is yes, unless something was missed unintentionally. But the short answer is yes.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister give us any information on the status of

the provincial nursing resource task force and or any documentation in that regard?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think as the member realizes, the listing I have given are committees that basically I appoint directly that report to the Minister of Health and so on. We do have a number of working groups, of which you just asked about one of them, the provincial nursing resource task force, which I think in part was created at the request of our RHAs. We have actually supported them recently to do an analysis, a database of the status of nursing, the number of nurses, vacancies and so on.

The reason we were taking a few minutes here is the last time I read some background on this, I know that the report is imminent and I was trying to determine whether or not I could be precise in terms of giving the member a sense of when I am expecting that report, but it is not here. I will check on that, but I really am expecting the report from them separately. So we have that group which is really dealing with vacancies, some of the issues around nursing, which is very different, as the member knows, from the nurse retention and recruitment committee which is administering the \$7-million fund.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for his response. I take it, therefore, that very shortly we will be seeing, either in this committee or publicly, a release of the nursing resource task force report. Did I understand that correctly?

Mr. Stefanson: I fully expect that would be the case, yes.

Mr. Chomiak: Is it possible for this committee, obviously not today but during the course of these Estimates, to have a copy of the list of the various working groups and participants the minister referred to?

Mr. Stefanson: The way I understand the question, it would be any working group, whether it is our internal people or external, or internal and external. I think the simplest might be for me to provide a listing of just those groups, and then if the member wants more details on any individual one, we would be more than prepared to provide that. So I will under-

take to provide him a summary listing, and then we can go from there, if that is satisfactory.

* (1120)

Mr. Chomiak: That is satisfactory, and I thank the minister in that regard.

I wanted to talk about a policy issue at this point. I would like the minister's position. This is not meant as a criticism of any specific individual, but from a policy standpoint we thought it was inappropriate to utilize the associate deputy minister in the recent ad campaign. I wonder if the minister might outline for us what the policy is in that regard.

Mr. Stefanson: I thank the member for that question. I do not think anybody is in any way obviously taking that personally. I think this is an issue where we probably agree to disagree.

The member for Kildonan refers to ad campaigns and so on, and he has heard me on many occasions refer to this as an information campaign. I have certainly had the benefit of being in contact with a lot of individuals, seeing the results of different surveys and so on, and the reality is the public wants information on their health care system. I guess I will do everything I can to try and convince the member for Kildonan and his colleagues that it is important to provide information on the health care system, just like you see us do on the finances of Manitoba.

In fact, when I was Finance minister, I would do a quarterly financial report so that Manitobans would know the state of their finances. They would know whether we were on target to meet our budget and so on.

Manitobans want information on their health care system. So if you look at the campaign that was put in place, various individuals were involved in the campaign, and the role of the Associate Deputy Minister of Health was the overall policy of the provincial government. The other individuals gave specific elements within the health care system, but certainly her role was to outline and be a part of that overall policy of the provincial government.

So again, if you look at the brochure, you look at the information that was produced, it was done with the objective of providing information. If you look at the descriptions of the government and you look at everything, it was all done on that kind of a basis. I know in the past, there was sometimes criticism about how you might refer to the government or that kind of thing. Very clearly in this, it is referred to as the government of Manitoba.

I encourage the member for Kildonan to go through that brochure and to look back at the information, and he will see that it is done on the basis of purely providing information to Manitobans about a number of issues affecting health care. I fundamentally believe that that is very important to do, and we will continue to do that to varying degrees to provide the citizens of Manitoba with information on their health care system. They want it, they should have it, and I think we have a responsibility to provide it.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, the minister is correct. We will have to agree to disagree on this issue.

I should point out to the minister, when the Minister of Finance began his process of quarterly reports—I am not sure if it is around the time he began—I actually recommended to the former former Minister of Health that there should be quarterly reports with respect to health care. I am telling the minister that, and this may become part of rhetoric in the future. I am saying that to the Minister of Health with full recognition of this because the issue, of course, is how it is communicated, by which means it is communicated, and what is the policy in that regard, and that is where we are going to disagree.

There is no disagreement in terms of information, providing information to the public. Clearly, that is one of the roles of the Department of Health. If the Department of Health does not form an education role, then it is derelict in its duty, and I am also saying that in recognition that those words may come back to me at some future point. Where we disagree, it is going to be a question of perception, in terms of perception as to the methodology, the timing, and the content of the ad campaigns.

But I take it from the minister's response that the minister is indicating that this was an informational campaign, and because it was an informational campaign, there is not a policy difficulty the minister has with the utilization of effectively the civil service to deliver that message. Do I understand that correctly?

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the member's comments, and if I understood correctly his support for providing information to the citizens of Manitoba, I think he said he agrees with that, but it is issues like methodology, and he raised two or three concerns around the issue. But the short answer is yes to what he said. If a government is providing information to the citizens about what a government is doing on their behalf, then it is appropriate I believe for people in the employ of government to play a role in the provision of that information. That is not unique to us.

I think if we were to go back in the '80s, I am told at least in one case, in the case of the Women's Directorate campaign under the previous government, again a senior official was used in some capacity at that time. I am sure we could go back and find examples, whether it is in brochures or correspondence or whatever, where to varying degrees senior officials in government have played a role in providing information. How far do you take that? The Deputy Minister of Health goes out into different forums and provides information on health if different groups ask him to come and make a presentation on what is happening in the health care system in Manitoba, what is happening with prevention, what is happening with access to the system for diagnostic testing or surgery. Again, I think he has a responsibility, as part of the government of Manitoba, to do that. So the short answer to the question is yes. I get the impression the member supports that; then we get down to differing over how it is done and a few other issues.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I do not want to prolong this unduly because we could probably discuss this for literally hours. Part of the roles of the government is to provide information to the public and to educate the public, and there is probably no greater area where that is necessary than the Department of Health. But can the minister not put his old

Finance department hat on, and if we were to take the equivalent to when the minister was the Minister of Finance, we would have had perhaps an ad with Jules Benson on TV saying, you know, our finances are well in hand, and then transferring to Charlie Curtis saying, you know, we do these great accounting methods, and then transferring perhaps to an administrator in one of the banking institutions saying, yes, this government is really—the minister would not have done that and the minister knows that, but at the Department of Health we are doing that. That is where I think it breaks down. The minister used the example of the Department of Finance. I used the example of the Department of Finance when I made recommendations for quarterly reports as information documents, and the minister knows full well that it is the Minister of Finance's document. So that is where I think it breaks down. We are going to disagree whether it is propaganda or whether it is education, but I do not think the minister would have had an ad campaign like they had at the Department of Finance.

* (1130)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, the member is right. I think we could discuss this at length, and in some ways it would be an interesting discussion. But if you look at that information campaign, that was approximately \$500,000. If I recall correctly, the largest expenditure was the brochure that went out. The brochure included, I would suggest, a fair degree of information in terms of why the health care system is changing, the need for change, some of the changes that are taking place, some of the next steps, and provided a significant degree of information to the public. It also had a 1-800 number, I believe, or it certainly had a phone number that individuals could phone to get more information about what is happening in their health care system.

So going by the member's comments, he was focusing very specifically on the television component of the information campaign, recognizing that on a television ad that you can only include so much information unless you are going to have a half-hour ad or a half-hour documentary. Maybe he is suggesting we do that on Manitoba's health care system, but on an

ad you have normally half a minute or a minute. You do have an opportunity to provide some information, but you also then create a vehicle to encourage greater interest and also create the opportunity for it to be pursued through the brochure, through the 1-800 number and so on.

So I am actually curious whether he is criticizing all the components of what was done or whether he is criticizing purely the television ad component and recognizes from his perspective at least that the brochure was something that should be done. I am curious now, from my perspective, while the member for Kildonan acknowledges the need to provide information and says there is probably no greater area that needs it than health care, what advice he would have for me in terms of providing that information to the public, how best to go about doing that?

Mr. Chomiak: We had a very specific—in fact the opposition put together a very specific bill called The Health Care Accountability Act that we tabled in the Legislature four or five years ago. It called for the Minister of Health to provide quarterly information to the House with respect to the specific happenings in the health care field, called for public meetings by various institutions on a mandatory basis. That was part of our response at that time. It continued for a need for the public to have information with respect to what was happening in health care. It is fairly obvious in health care there has always been a fairly strong need for information. That sees its way clear through all kinds of information that is provided by the department, particularly in the public health area where there is no disagreement.

Mr. Edward Helwer, Acting Chairperson in the Chair

Recently, with the issuance of the various reform initiatives under the government, we asked the government to provide updates on a regular basis as to developments. Indeed, we suggested on numerous occasions to various ministers that, for example, an update into the 1992 blue book ought to be approached and ought to be provided on a regular basis so that if the plan was the blue book and if the plan was to achieve those goals, it would only make sense to

update on a regular basis as to where we are at in terms of achieving those goals. I mean, we made those recommendations years ago.

The minister asked for general advice, and that is part of it. There may be a need. If in fact we ever want to make health care less of a partisan issue, there may be a need to utilize the services of this Chamber to provide information to the public, and that is, there may be very well a need to provide or to seek advice from a committee of the Legislature, from a group in this Legislature, as to information that should be provided to the public that is either passed through the group or indeed is commented on by members not just of the government but of the various opposition parties with respect to health care.

Now I know that opens up a can of worms because it can be very much a political forum. But it is true that it would be preferable to move in terms of health care on a nonpartisan basis far more than on a political basis, and if anything could be done from a government side to move towards that, I do not think there would be much difficulty from moving along in terms of as a Chamber, as a whole, all parties, in providing that information. So the short answer with respect to the minister's comments is that we have made numerous suggestions over the past few years, and I believe there could and should be a role for the Legislative Assembly in general to provide information to the public at large in this regard.

Mr. Stefanson: I will go back and look at the health care accountability act that the member referred to, but he outlined, I guess, the key components of it. Sort of going through them very quickly individually, he talked about providing orderly information. We have discussed that.

I certainly come from a previous portfolio where we did that and I found that extremely useful. It certainly is something that I am prepared to look at and I think has a lot of merit in terms of being just one vehicle to provide quarterly information on the issues in health care in Manitoba.

Public meetings of institutions, a mandatory basis, I think he is very familiar that just recently

the WHA, WCA held a series of public meetings relative to their needs assessment and their health care plans. The RHAs across rural Manitoba have done the same thing. They produce our annual reports. They hold various meetings, certainly in public where the public can have input and so on. Again, I think we have seen a lot more of that taking place, a lot more of that opportunity for providing information and for public input. I think we are probably getting off the act a little bit now. Talked about the update on a regular basis such as the blue book and so on. I am told to a certain extent the annual report of the Department of Health does some of that but, again, that really rolls into the whole issue of providing either quarterly reports and so on, but continues to provide status reports of the progress we are making.

* (1140)

I really do appreciate the comments about health care being less partisan. I am not sure if or when we will get to that stage. We all have a chance to see what is happening right across Canada. I have certainly taken an interest in some of the other provinces and seeing the issues and the challenges in provinces like British Columbia and Saskatchewan with their governments, the issues and the challenges in provinces like Ontario and Alberta with some of their challenges, the province of Quebec and so on. One can readily see that the issues and the challenges are not really of a political nature, and they are driven by a number of factors. I, too, would welcome driving towards various processes and forums that are less political and more informative and more constructive in some ways. I am just wondering when we will get there. I think as an objective, it is a worthy objective for all of us, and I certainly would support trying to get there.

I am also told that by the end of the year we will have a report on the health of Manitobans which continues to help us develop mechanisms, again, for less partisan dialogue and to focus on issues like prevention and wellness. As well, I think as the member knows, we have an initiative called Manitoba Measures which requires all the departments to be preparing business plans as departments, again, which will

be a future mechanism to benchmark all departments in government including the Department of Health. So I think there are a number of steps being taken to continue to provide more information, more accountability and, hopefully ultimately, less partisanship.

I just want to correct one issue we discussed the other day just in case it was not reported entirely accurately. I am back on that information campaign where the member asked me about the funding source. I did indicate it is from the Healthy Communities Development account, which is the account that it came out of. I think in the question, he referred to supplementary funding for that. If that was the case, supplementary funding was not required for that expenditure. There were enough dollars allocated within the Healthy Communities Development Fund.

Health required supplementary funding in a number of other areas, which he has probably seen the Order-in-Council in the backup documentation, but I am just going by memory now. I think at the time he referred to supplementary funding for that expenditure. Supplementary funding was not required for that expenditure. It was included in the Healthy Communities Development Fund.

So, again, I appreciate the member's comments. I think it is a worthy objective for all of us to work towards less partisanship when it comes to the health care issues of Manitobans. I am cautiously optimistic that we can continue to make progress on that front.

Mr. Chomiak: In this spirit of nonpartisanship, let me try something out on the minister. [interjection] Pardon?

Mr. Stefanson: This is just coincidental.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, it is pre-Question Period, so we have an opportunity to pose questions here, and it may be less of an opportunity. One never knows. Let me pose to the minister an issue because the staff is here and it is a policy area. I mean, this has struck me, and I have thought about this a lot. I want to hear the departmental response or perhaps the initiative. Let me cite the example. We are talking about

prevention. I mean, it is something that I know the deputy minister has made a cause, very much the case, and we all have in the health care field.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Now, let us talk about smoking as an example, and the wisdom of the population, for example. We have all been active in terms of smoking cessation programs and the advertising programs and the like. I am not specifically asking on those programs, but let me give you an example of the wisdom that came to me in terms of a public meeting. An individual came up to me and said—and we know, I think Rachlis's book says that the cumulative cost of dealing with smoking would save \$50 billion in the health care system. That is a cumulative total. I mean, it is phenomenal. It is literally phenomenal. It is clearly one of the public policy health care issues.

So the wisdom of the public is—a woman came up to me and said: you know, you are always doing these things. Why would you not, for example, offer a tax credit to individuals who did not smoke, a nominal tax credit on the income tax form?

Now, we all know, and I am not asking the minister specifically, the difficulties inherent in that in terms of evaluating, in terms of determining, but it is an interesting idea. If one, for example, is talking about a program to stop young people from smoking, well, perhaps one could use some other incentives. Rather than a negative, why not a positive incentive? Why not an across-the-board, for example, post-secondary scholarship tax credit program verified by a physician if an individual is not smoking?

I know, it is difficult area to monitor, but it is an interesting issue, and it opens up all kinds of possibilities in terms of positive incentives vis-a-vis smoking. So I throw that out as an example. I have actually contemplated putting this to paper and writing out some specific proposals. How would this be addressed and how would an action or an activity such as that be addressed through the Department of Health in terms of follow-up if specific recommendations came in for an actual positive response, using smoking as an example?

Mr. Stefanson: Now this is something we could probably spend days talking about. Because the member is right. When it comes to many issues of prevention, he uses the example smoking, a good one to use. So much of our system is driven on deterring it on the one hand, deterring it whether it is through price, whether it is through the spot checks of retailers selling to under-age and so on, using various deterrents, and, of course, empowering which is important. Through education, through information, becoming well aware of the health impacts, social impacts and so on. I think governments continue to do a better and better job on that front right across the board, federal, provincial and all governments, in terms of recognizing the importance of providing information on whether it is smoking or alcohol. So I think we really are doing a number of things on that front.

I was Finance minister at the time. We had to deal with the issue of the pricing of tobacco, and I think we had total support here in this House, if I recall correctly, on the issue of basically not caving into the pressure from the federal government at the time to reduce our tobacco prices here in Manitoba. As a result of that, you now have the four western provinces holding the line on tobacco. At that time when I met with—I was motivated; I was Finance minister. Obviously money was an issue, but I was more motivated by the representation I had from the Lung Association, the Heart and Stroke Association, the Cancer Society and so on, who all came to see me at the time and made the compelling argument and point that there is a direct correlation to price. So that is the whole issue of deterring and so on.

* (1150)

But incenting, now we are into a whole new area. Again, for a minute I am not suggesting it is not one that we should not be looking at. You really start going down that path. Incenting not to smoke, incenting not to drink, incenting not to do a number of things. That is an issue unto itself. If you are going to incent, should it be focused more on youth as opposed to general population, all of those kinds of things. I am certainly not closed mind on the issue of looking at that being the next step along this path of, are there things that we can do either as a society or

as government to incent prevention, to incent healthy lifestyles and so on?

Mr. Ed Helwer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I think it is the kind of issue, and as the member has said, certainly the current Deputy Minister of Health is a strong supporter of prevention and wellness. I am as well a strong believer in recreation exercise, proper diet, all of those types of things, doing things mostly in moderation, usually in moderation and so on. I am confident that you will see us continuing to look at more and more things that we can do in that area, and I would welcome specific ideas or suggestions from the member from Kildonan, if he has some creative or innovative thoughts about how we can incent the public in this whole area, we would obviously take a serious look at that.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for the response, and he is correct. Actually I appreciate the answer, because I thought it was informative and genuinely sincere in terms of dealing with the issues. I think there might be areas to go in that area. The whole area of consent is really an interesting area. It is a frontier that has not been crossed, and I agree with the minister: I think it is going to be, and the interesting issue is how one proceeds. The point, I guess, the final analysis is that I am glad the minister is open to innovation in this area.

On administrivia, I anticipate we are going to be here all afternoon. Again, I think what I would like to do, subject to, is, as I indicated earlier this morning, get through a whole number of items and then get down to—if we get very far this afternoon, if we get farther this afternoon, then we can probably get into Information Services, not today but probably when next we meet. That is what I am anticipating to proceed.

Mr. Stefanson: Maybe the member was going to clarify, but just to clarify: are we talking about starting to go line by line and the suggestion that I should have appropriate staff available for each line item basically during the course of the afternoon, maybe to get as far as the Health Information Network, but not expecting to get there today? We will be on to

that on Tuesday, I guess, of next week or some time early next week.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, in fact, I would hope that we can get to 2.(c), appropriation 21.2.(c), by the end of the day, and I was assuming and hoping, when looking through it—now I stand to be corrected—that the minister would not probably need any more additional staff than is present here. So that is where I was sort of planning to take it. If the minister can concur, that is generally what the plan, at least from our perspective, is.

Mr. Stefanson: That is useful. The member is right. I think we can probably handle it with the staff that is here. We will look at it over the course of the lunch. If we need anybody on standby, we will do that, but I do not expect it. That is very useful. We will either have no staff or very minimal staff on standby to deal with any issues.

Mr. Chomiak: I have asked this on many occasions. I have had correspondence from the previous minister with respect to the regulations as they apply to personal care homes and standards. I feel like the Pope going to a Michelangelo and looking up at the Sistine Chapel and saying: when will you make it end? Can the minister give me an idea as to when those regulations will be prepared?

Mr. Stefanson: As I indicated in response, I think, to a question sometime ago, we were close to completing the draft regulations. We were then going to consult with individuals. I actually had a meeting this week where we went through the draft of those regulations, and I believe we are now at the stage of going out and starting to consult. What I would be prepared to do is very shortly, if the member for Kildonan thought this was worthwhile, perhaps set up a briefing with appropriate representatives from the Department of Health. They could run through it with him the status of these draft regulations, recognizing that we are now looking for input. They have been basically compiled internally, obviously with feedback and drawing on information from people in the system and others. We are now going out to see if they hit the mark or whether they should be modified based on input from people either operating the system or utilizing

the system. So again, in the spirit of non-partisanship, I would welcome some time soon having the appropriate official sit down with him and give him a sense. I would welcome suggestions he would have if he thinks anything is missing the mark in terms of the current draft regulations, or we could probably do that anytime within the next one to two weeks at most.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, that would be appreciated and accepted. One of my colleagues wanted to ask the minister some questions with respect to two issues: women's health issues and issues surrounding AIDS and AIDS-related matters.

My question to the minister and advice is: should I direct my colleague to ask these questions this afternoon, or should I ask my colleague to postpone these questions to a later date or another date? I am just looking for general advice on this.

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think we could probably deal with it this afternoon if that meets with the member for Kildonan. Again, not unlike some other issues, there might be individual aspects of it, and we would have to return later. Of course we will be into health programs and so on later on in Estimates, so it would be another opportunity then to return to specifics, but I think in terms of general issues around both of those initiatives, again, with this group here we can certainly speak to the policies, to some of the changes, to some specifics and then return with more details if required.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, in that regard then, I expect when we next meet this afternoon that my colleague will be asking questions in the area of women's health and AIDS, and then depending upon how that goes, I will have general questions. Then we can start moving on down the line as directed.

With 30 seconds left, Mr. Chairperson, why do we not just call it 12 noon?

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Helwer): The hour being 12 noon, committee rise, with the understanding that the Speaker will resume the Chair at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 20, 1999

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