



First Session - Thirty-Fifth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)**

39 Elizabeth II

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Fifth Legislature

Members, Constituencies and Political Affiliation

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PARTY
ALCOCK, Reg	Osborne	Liberal
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	NDP
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	NDP
CARR, James	Crescentwood	Liberal
CARSTAIRS, Sharon	River Heights	Liberal
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	NDP
CHEEMA, Gulzar	The Maples	Liberal
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	NDP
CONNERY, Edward, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	PC
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	PC
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DOER, Gary	Concordia	NDP
DOWNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	PC
DRIEDGER, Albert, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
DUCHARME, Gerry, Hon.	Riel	PC
EDWARDS, Paul	St. James	Liberal
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
ERNST, Jim, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EVANS, Cliff	Interlake	NDP
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	NDP
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	PC
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	NDP
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Liberal
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	PC
HARPER, Elijah	Rupertsland	NDP
HELWER, Edward R.	Gimli	PC
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	NDP
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Liberal
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	NDP
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	PC
MALLOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MANNES, Clayton, Hon.	Morris	PC
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	NDP
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	PC
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
McINTOSH, Linda	Assiniboia	PC
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	PC
NEUFELD, Harold, Hon.	Rossmere	PC
ORCHARD, Donald, Hon.	Pembina	PC
PENNER, Jack, Hon.	Emerson	PC
PLOHMAN, John	Dauphin	NDP
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
REID, Daryl	Transcona	NDP
REIMER, Jack	Niakwa	PC
RENDER, Shirley	St. Vital	PC
ROCAN, Denis, Hon.	Gladstone	PC
ROSE, Bob	Turtle Mountain	PC
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	NDP
STEFANSON, Eric	Kirkfield Park	PC
STORIE, Jerry	Flin Flon	NDP
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	PC
VODREY, Rosemary	Fort Garry	PC
WASYLYCIA-LEIS, Judy	St. Johns	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	NDP

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, November 13, 1990

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Literacy Programs Corporate Sponsorship

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Minister of Education.

Over the last period of time we have become aware of a situation that I am sure will concern all Honourable Members, where we have corporations sponsoring literacy programs in our schools, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are all concerned about the funding to our education system, the deficiencies in the funding of our education system and the programs that are necessary for children in our education system. We would concur with statements made recently that schools should be a haven from corporate influence.

My question to the Minister of Education is: Will he be taking a leadership position, will his Government be taking a leadership position on the area of corporations in the school system in Manitoba and will he, in that leadership position, ban corporations coming into those school systems as part of the curriculum in our education system in the Province of Manitoba?

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Education and Training): As we have indicated from time to time, Mr. Speaker, education is not just something that involves the teacher and the student and everybody else has to stay free of it, education is a matter for the children, the teachers of course, the school trustees, we as Government and indeed the community as a whole. We have welcomed into our school system parents; we have welcomed into the school system adults; we have welcomed into the school system partners who can contribute something to the overall education system of our province.

We should be careful about indicating that certain sectors of our society are not welcome within the

school system, because they have nothing to contribute to the education of our province. I think that when one makes an allegation of that nature one should be very careful about the motives.

* (1335)

Mr. Doer: I was really asking the Minister of Education to take a leadership position on the education system in our province. Mr. Speaker, we do not want a situation where one school division deals with these loss leader education programs from Burger King and Pizza Hut in one way and another school division deals with it in a different way. Literacy is a very important program and we do not believe that -(interjection)- Well, I know the ideology of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness). He gives them a corporate tax break and now the education system is so broke, they cannot afford literacy programs.

My question to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) is: Will his Government take a leadership position on corporate sponsorship in our education system? Will he indeed look at the curriculum, which he has a constitutional responsibility to deal with, and take a leadership position to ensure that parents and children are not placed in a situation where literacy and other programs that should be provided in a public school system by the public are not being supplanted by the private sector?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, once again the question is very similar to the one he asked just a moment ago. Let me indicate to the Leader of the Opposition that school divisions are responsible for the programs within their jurisdiction. Sometimes school divisions, school boards initiate programs that may be of benefit to the students within that particular school division. We have all kinds of co-operative programs in our school divisions throughout the province. The province as a whole, or this department, sets the general policy in terms of the programming and the curriculum that is delivered in the core area of the curriculum base. In terms of school divisions wanting to supplement learning within their jurisdictions, they indeed have the authority to do that given the responsibility that they have under The Public Schools Act.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, well, the Minister knows he has the constitutional authority to deal with curriculum, to deal with standards. In fact, the Minister is even ordering tests in the Province of Manitoba, standardized tests. He has that authority. He knows that.

My question is: Given the fact that the school division No. 1 was funded by 2.7 percent last year and given the fact that the Government has now given \$8 million away in tax breaks to corporations, will this Minister take a leadership role on the issue of standards for corporations being involved as loss leaders in our classrooms and ban those corporations and return decent funding to the literacy program in the Province of Manitoba through the taxpayers of this province?

Point of Order

Hon. Clayton Manness (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the questions, all three questions. To me, all three questions were identically the same. I would ask you to rule that question out of order.

Mr. Doer: With the greatest respect to the Government House Leader, he did not delineate between the question that was asked first of all to the Minister of Education (Mr. Derkach), then to the Premier (Mr. Filmon), and a third question referring to the 2.7 percent increase, which is well below inflation, to the school divisions and the \$8 million that are in the corporate tax breaks.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Government House Leader did have a point of order. The question is repeating in substance a question which was previously asked. I would, therefore, ask the Honourable Member to repeat his question.

* * *

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, will this Government and this Minister of Education review the funding for the Winnipeg school divisions and other school divisions that may be looking at this program and then fund the school divisions in such a way that they will not be required to have literacy programs developed by the private sector and corporate sector?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the record that this Government has in terms of supporting school divisions in this province. We have supported the funding to school divisions over the level of

inflation in the last three years, if the Leader of the Opposition would care to check the facts. Second, this year we gave the Winnipeg School Division, and it is in the Estimates, \$1.2 million of extra money over and above the support that other school divisions received to ensure that they could adequately address the special needs that they have in the inner city. I think that shows that we indeed are interested in showing leadership and support to school divisions where it is required.

* (1340)

MNU Report Recommendations

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Lels (St. Johns): Mr. Speaker, this Government has just thrown another wrench into the prospects for good faith, co-operative bargaining with the nurses of this province. First, we had pay equity inaction of this Government; then we had the threats of the Premier (Mr. Filmon) last week with respect to threatening nurses and health care professionals back to work; and today, we have the refusal of this Government to address the serious concerns of the Manitoba Nurses' Union in a report that the Government has had for a year entitled, *All in a Day's Work*.

My question is to the Premier. Given that we are in a very sensitive time period with respect to negotiations, I would like to ask the Premier if he will order his Minister of Health to stop engaging in such confrontational, belligerent actions and begin a co-operative approach to collective bargaining with the health care professionals of this province?

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I am genuinely at a loss to know from whence my honourable friend comes with her accusations.

If my honourable friend were to consider the little over two-year record of this Government in terms of trying to address issues that meaningfully are presented to this Government by the professional nurses across this province, I could take some substantial amount of time in this Question Period to lay them out.

When she makes reference to *All in a Day's Work*, Mr. Speaker, when we received that report some number of months ago we undertook and are currently working with the MNU, the Manitoba Nurses' Union, through the commission to address

some of the issues that are raised in All in a Day's Work.

That is a very active initiative by this Government in order to respond to some of the non-bargaining, non-monetary issues that were raised in All in a Day's Work. That is one of a number of initiatives that I hope to have the opportunity to explain to my honourable friend.

Ms. Wasylycia-Lels: Since the Minister of Health is unaware of this most recent issue, I will be happy to table a letter dated yesterday to the Minister of Health regarding the concern by the Manitoba Nurses' Union.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health why the subcommittee that he appointed to deal with this report, All in a Day's Work, has handed in its final report to the Funding Guidelines Review Committee and the board of directors of the Manitoba Health Services Commission without addressing the two key priority issues of the Manitoba Nurses' Union, the question of adequate funding based on a proper patient classification system and input by health care professionals into decision making of our health care system?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased that my honourable friend has my correspondence before I do. That is most encouraging in terms of attempting to come to a reasoned approach to policy planning, funding issues and other initiatives that this Government has taken on.

I will undertake to read the correspondence, which I would hope is in my office now. I have not had the opportunity to do that yet this morning, if it should have arrived yesterday as my honourable friend indicates her correspondence did.

Let me deal with the issue that my honourable friend raises in terms of the funding guidelines according to patient care. All in a Day's Work is not the first time that the issue of acuity of care in our hospital system and in our personal care homes, our institutional systems has been brought to Government. It has been brought to Government, Mr. Speaker, I would venture to say for at least a decade.

Unlike previous administrations, we have pro-actively attempted to put parameters around those issues to identify them so that we can, if necessary, adjust the way we fund our health care institutions to more adequately reflect the intensity of care provided in those institutions.

* (1345)

Ms. Wasylycia-Lels: I would like to finally ask the Minister of Health, since he has indicated he is prepared to look into this issue, in the interests of co-operative, good-faith bargaining and in creating an atmosphere of good will at the negotiations currently underway, will the Minister tell this House if he is prepared to direct his subcommittee dealing with the recommendations of the report referred to to ensure that the priority issues of the Manitoba Nurses' Union are considered and dealt with in the interest of good quality health care in this province and in the interest of good collective, co-operative bargaining?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, unlike my honourable friend, I do not intend to bargain on behalf of any professional group on the floor of the Legislature in the Province of Manitoba. There is a bargaining process which we are engaging in.

I appreciate my honourable friend has a letter dated yesterday, which she indicates certain things are part of it. I want to correct her in her almost thank you that she gave to me for considering the issues that are raised in the letter. She did not listen to the answer. Those issues have been and will continue to be addressed in our attempts of this Government to bring better health care to Manitobans with the co-operation, with the input, with the knowledge and with the assistance of all health professionals, including the nurses of Manitoba. That will not be a new initiative forced on us by some question during the bargaining process by Members of the Opposition. It is an ongoing process of this ministry and this Government.

Mystery Lake School Board Portable Classroom Construction

Mrs. Sharon Carstairs (Leader of the Second Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education has ordered an investigation into the construction of some portable classrooms in the City of Thompson. Can the Minister of Education tell us why he decided to initiate that study last week when the construction began in July of 1990?

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer this question.

Over the last year or so the Mystery Lake School Division Board has been requesting permission from the Public Schools Finance Board to construct four additional HQRs at Eastwood School, and as they should, Mr. Speaker.

The Public Schools Finance Board, in determining the space available in a neighbouring school, made it very clear to the Mystery Lake School Board that indeed there was adequate space in surrounding schools and that there was not a need for new construction at that point in time. This was well within the rights of the Public Schools Finance Board.

In June, I believe, the Public Schools Finance Board wrote to the Mystery Lake School Division indicating that they would not be supported in their request for funding. During the summer, Mr. Speaker, the Mystery Lake School Board did decide to proceed with construction of four high quality relocatable units without approval from the Public Schools Finance Board. This I might add is contrary to The Public Schools Act.

Under The Public Schools Act there are certain things that a Minister can do. One of those is to put in force a commission of inquiry to investigate all of the areas associated with this decision by the local school board.

Having met with the school board in early October, Mr. Speaker, they indicated to me that they were aware they had broken The Public Schools Act. They were not aware at the time when they made the decision, and they welcomed the inquiry.

Mrs. Carstairs: Mr. Speaker, the Mystery Lake School Board made it very clear to the Minister that they were going to proceed with this construction. Can the—

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mrs. Carstairs: Yes, they did, in a letter to the Minister.

Can the Minister tell us if in his letter of August 3 he specifically told the school board that they were not to construct these buildings?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the correspondence of course was between the Mystery Lake School Division and the Public Schools Finance Board. It was the Public Schools Finance Board that advised Mystery Lake School Division that their building was not authorized for support under the Public Schools

Finance Board. The correspondence was between those two levels of Government, if you like.

When I was made aware of the fact that the school board had proceeded with construction, I made it my interest to ensure that I knew the circumstances of that. I met with the school board. We have agreed that a commission of inquiry would bring out all of the details of this process, and then we would be able to act in a prudent way thereafter.

Mrs. Carstairs: Mr. Speaker, the final supplementary is to the Minister of Education.

In that the school division made it clear they were going to construct these with or without the permission of the Public Schools Finance Board, why did the Minister not inform the school division that they were in violation of The Public Schools Finance Board Act, if indeed they were? Why did he not therefore put the pressure on them at that point, if it was illegal, to not construct the buildings? They are now 90 percent finished.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I know that the MLA for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) was aware that the construction was going on during the summer. He also knew that the board was doing this contrary to The Public Schools Act. So I am surprised he did not make me aware of it.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the Minister is off on some parallel track involved in this question, but if the Minister wants to know, I know about the need for the Eastwood School, and I wish the Government would recognize that and provide the funding—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Honourable Member does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* (1350)

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Education and Training, to finish his response.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Public Schools Finance Board did not give authority for the Mystery Lake School Division to proceed with the construction. The Mystery Lake School Division then new that they were in contravention of The Public Schools Act and went ahead with the

construction. That is why we are where we are today in terms of having a commission of inquiry investigate the details of the matter.

Conawapa Dam Project Start-Up Date

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): My question is to the Premier. On Friday of last week the Minister of Energy and Mines (Mr. Neufeld) said that unless the Conawapa Generating Station was in place by the year 2001 the lights would go out in Manitoba.

Whereas the Premier has always maintained he would wait for a Public Utilities Board decision on an appropriate start-up date for Conawapa, I want to ask the Premier, considering that scenarios were presented by Manitoba Hydro at recent Public Utilities Board hearings which illustrate that Manitoba might not need additional generation until 2006 and considering that he and his Minister of Energy seem to be disagreeing these days on what exactly is Government policy, can he make it clear to this House what his Government stand is on a start-up date for Conawapa? Is it 2001, or do you wait for the Public Utilities Board?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Speaker, clearly there is no difference in policy between the Minister of Energy and Mines (Mr. Neufeld) and myself. The fact of the matter is that everybody has to have a proposed schedule of development. That proposed schedule of development is subject to meeting all of the criteria, all of the reviews, whether it be the Public Utilities Board review of capital or a Clean Environment Commission review of environmental effects—everything is subject to those reviews. That is the way this Government does business.

If the Member would like more detail so that he could understand the issue better, I would recommend that he go to the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources or Manitoba Hydro. All of its officials will be there to explain the process to him so that he has a full and complete understanding of it.

Conawapa Dam Project Employment Preference Policy

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of northern Native people were given unprecedented training and employment opportunities with the construction of Limestone.

I want to ask the Minister of Energy and Mines, considering his personal views on affirmative action, what consultation and planning is now going on to ensure Northerners get these opportunities again with Conawapa? Will it be a Manitoba Hydro priority when renegotiating the Nelson-Burntwood Collective Agreement governing work at Conawapa to ensure that employment preference for qualified northern Natives and other Northerners continues?

Hon. Harold Neufeld (Minister of Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, there is no change in this Government's policy. The policy has always been that northern Natives, Northerners will have some priority in the construction of Conawapa.

The Member suggests that I have in the past indicated that I do not agree with this sort of action. This Government has set up a ministerial committee to make certain that the construction of Conawapa proceeds in accordance with Government policy.

* (1355)

Energy Conservation Policy

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): I want to ask the Minister of Energy, considering that his Government cancelled the CHEC loan program and documentation presented by Manitoba Hydro at the Public Utilities Board, the corporation has the least ambitious conservation program of any utility in Canada involved in energy management, at a time when energy costs are skyrocketing and the Government position is that they are monitoring industry profits, what steps will he be taking to improve conservation initiatives to save Manitoba consumers money?

Hon. Harold Neufeld (Minister of Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, it is true that this Government has discontinued the CHEC loan program. Manitoba Hydro has a budget for this year of some \$4 million for energy conservation. As well, Manitoba Hydro plans for the next year to have a budget of some \$15 million for conservation.

I do not think we should enter into a program without knowing exactly which way we are going. That is precisely what we are doing. We know the direction in which we are going. We will not start with a budget that is more than we can do at this time.

Heritage Buildings Salvage Plans

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): My question is for the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation. Pierre Berton, one of the founders of Heritage Canada, has again reminded us of the wealth of historic buildings that we have in Winnipeg and Manitoba.

In view of the fact that there are currently leaks in the roof of the Rex Theater and the Bank of Commerce Building and given that we are moving into an early winter freeze-thaw cycle and there is going to be damage to the interior of these buildings to the point where it may become uneconomic to repair them, I would like to ask the Minister, what are her salvage plans for these buildings in downtown Winnipeg, or is she prepared to let them rot?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated in the past that the heritage buildings that were cut off heat this winter as a result of the City of Winnipeg closing their steam heating plant have known about this for several years.

We do block fund the City of Winnipeg. I think it is time they acted responsibly and looked at what they should do to help to preserve those heritage buildings if they feel it is a priority.

Ms. Friesen: My supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation. Has she asked her advisory council to look at these buildings with a view to provincial designation, and if so what has been their advice?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Heritage Council is looking at the buildings to see whether they are of provincial significance. They have not come back to me with a recommendation as yet. I believe they probably will be provincially significant, but we are not in the habit of forcing owners to designate buildings against their will.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary is to the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation. The Minister indicated last week to a newspaper reporter that she was prepared to meet with the city and building owners on this matter.

I would like to ask her, has she contacted them yet and, if so, what negotiations are taking place?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, my departmental officials and City of Winnipeg officials will be meeting with owners of those buildings.

Crown Corporations Council Manitoba Hydro Review

Mr. James Carr (Crescentwood): Mr. Speaker, this Government's position of Conawapa changes daily. First we have the Minister of Finance telling us that the Hydro officials will come in front of the committee. Now he says that they may or they may not come in front of the committee. First he says that the Crown Corporations Council will not have a recommendation by December 31. Now he tells us they will have a recommendation by December 31.

On Friday the Minister of Energy (Mr. Neufeld) made a \$40 million mistake.

My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Will the Minister undertake to Members of the House to make public the super Crown council recommendation as soon as it is known?

Hon. Clayton Manness (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I can never recall saying that the Crown Corporations Council would not review the capital plans for Manitoba Hydro by the 31st. As I recall, I indicated at that time that there was not a mandate for them to do so. I am led to believe, subsequently, as I have indicated to the Member in this House in committee, when it was not Question Period, at that time that indeed they could easily make the 31st deadline.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that Manitoba Hydro has appeared before Crown Corporations Council on two occasions for discussions of their preferred development plan, that council has been reviewing Hydro's mandate and the relationship of the preferred development plan with respect to their mandate and that Crown Corporations Council, as I indicated the other day in debate, has been attending the Public Utilities Board hearings and will be commenting on the process before the end of December.

That is all part of the record, Mr. Speaker. I said so last week.

Mr. Carr: Mr. Speaker, that is the Minister's second position. Now that we know what it is and it is on the record, will he ensure maximum political scrutiny of that recommendation and ask the Crown Corporations Council to appear in front of a committee of this Legislature before December 31, 1990?

Mr. Manness: Manitoba Hydro is coming before Members of this House on Thursday morning of this

week. I have also, on behalf of the Government, made provision that they will come before this House after the Public Utilities Board has brought forward a recommendation with respect to the preferred capital plan of Manitoba Hydro, whenever that may be.

With respect to the Crown Corporations Council, they are mandated to make a full report to the Members of this House.

* (1400)

Conawapa Dam Project Hydro Spending

Mr. James Carr (Crescentwood): Mr. Speaker, I have a final supplementary question to the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro. On Friday in this House in response to our questions, the Minister said that Manitoba Hydro had already spent \$100 million on the Conawapa project. In the Saturday Free Press that figure was given to be \$63 million. Can the Minister tell us how he made his \$37 million mistake?

Hon. Harold Neufeld (Minister responsible for The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, as I recall, the Opposition would not allow me to finish and I sat down.

I understood the Member for Crescentwood to ask me what Manitoba Hydro intended in their budget to spend in this current year ending March 31. I indicated at that point it might be as high—I said I did not know, but it might be as high as \$100 million.

On Thursday night the board of Manitoba Hydro met to downsize the budget for this year to \$63 million, indeed it is \$63.2 million. That includes all the monies that have been spent to date including prior years.

We are talking now about an estimated cost to March 31, 1991, and not the monies spent to date.

Agricultural Assistance GRIP Proposal

Mr. Cliff Evans (Interlake): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. As the Minister is aware, the federal Government at the provincial-federal agricultural Ministers' meeting tomorrow and Thursday will be attempting to gain this province's approval for its gross revenue insurance program and income stabilization accounts.

Can the Minister assure farmers that his Government will not agree to the averaging formula proposed in the GRIP, since under its terms one would have to go back 15 years instead of the 10 proposed in the plan before farmers could get any kind of payout this year, since grain prices have remained low for such a long period of time?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, there has been lots of discussion and anticipation about the GRIP-NISA safety net proposal that the federal Government has been working on in conjunction with producers and provincial officials across the country for the last year and a little bit.

Certainly the Member mentions averaging. This program is designed to be individualized, not for averageness, to each individual farmer so that when a hurt is witnessed by a given farmer, he gets the payout under the program, whereas previous programs were averaging. The western grain stabilization was averaging; crop insurance was averaging. This program is being designed, as probably will be proposed in the next two days, will be individualized to each individual farmer.

Mr. Cliff Evans: Will the Minister assure this House that he will not give Manitoba's approval to any provisions within the Net Income Stabilization Account plan, which would allow only the few farmers in this province who are debt free to put away their own funds and draw on federal and provincial support in poor years but does nothing for the vast majority of debt-burdened farmers in this province?

Mr. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, wherever I have been in the province in the past three or four months, farmers have been very supportive of the principle of designing this program. It is unfortunate that this Member is saying it is no good for anybody except for a few select individuals. He is totally wrong. He is misrepresenting the program. I would recommend that he get some understanding of what the program is all about so he will see how it will benefit producers both in terms of gross revenue insurance and net income stabilization.

Farmers want both those programs in order to have an adequate safety net. Neither program by itself will solve the hurt we are experiencing out there. I also remind the Member that those two programs alone cannot solve the farmers' problems. The resolution at GATT is the first step in the

equation of getting reasonable incomes for western Canadian farmers. It is unfortunate that the Member wants to start downgrading the program. He has no idea what it is all about.

Mr. Cliff Evans: The GRIP proposal assumes that Manitoba farmers themselves have contributed \$72 million to put the program in place in a year when income is forecast to drop again. When will the Minister abandon such stopgap measures and negotiate a long-term farm income support system based on the real cost of production?

Mr. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, the GRIP proposal, the safety net program, will replace crop insurance and western grain stabilization. I will let the Member know that farmers now are paying about a 6 percent premium in crop insurance and a 4 percent premium in western grain stabilization. Six plus four is 10 percent. Under the new proposal, the safety net program, the farmer, if he uses his figures of a third, a third, a third, will be paying about 6 percent. Six is a lot less than 10 percent. I do not know how the Member ever figured out it was going to cost more.

Mystery Lake School Board Portable Classroom Construction

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Education. It is in regard to Eastwood School.

As an Eastwood resident in Thompson, I am aware, and the Minister should be aware, of the problems at Eastwood School with handicapped students being educated in the hallways, psychologists having to have offices in storage rooms. Yet this Government on May 24 refused to fund the Eastwood School addition and instead said that students should be bussed elsewhere in town or should cross Highway 6 to attend other schools.

My question to the Minister is: Why did he wait until October 3 when the Eastwood School addition was 90 percent complete, nearly three months after the correspondence between the school district and the Public Schools Finance Board, to launch this completely unnecessary \$25,000 investigation of the actions of the school board, which is doing nothing more than building a needed Eastwood School addition, something that his Government would not fund?

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that there is room available in a school across the street from

Eastwood School. The reality is that students go back and forth across the highway, as the Member knows, all the time anyway. It is not a new phenomenon to cross a street or a highway.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the Member for Thompson, who is very well aware of The Public Schools Act, advised the board, the Mystery Lake School Board, that they were contravening the school Act when they in fact embarked on the building program.

Mr. Ashton: The road the Minister is talking about is Highway 6.

My supplementary question to the Minister is: Why did he wait until after the election when the Public Schools Finance Board was fully aware in June of the plans of the school district of Mystery Lake? Was it perhaps to say, in the words of the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey), whether the people in Thompson voted right before he decided whether to proceed with this investigation?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the Public Schools Finance Board indicated to Mystery Lake School Division that they were not allocating funds for the construction of four high quality relocatables at the Eastwood School in Thompson. At that point in time, the school board should have made the decision that they had to make other accommodations for their students, but instead the school board decided to go ahead with construction on their own, which is clearly against The Public Schools Act.

I met with the school board—yes, after the election when we came into Government—to advise them that they had contravened the school Act and to embark on a reasonable approach at how to resolve this matter. They welcomed that approach. The trustees were not irked. They were happy. They indicated to me that they finally realized that they had broken the school Act, that they had been given some wrong information and they welcomed the investigation. They indicated that they would co-operate fully.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Minister should talk to the representatives of the school district of Mystery Lake who were quite upset with the action of this Government.

My final question—(interjection)—Well, he has met but he has not listened. That is the problem. My final question is to the Minister. I live in Eastwood. I am concerned about the need for a school addition, and I am sick and tired of the politics—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. The Honourable Member from Thompson, kindly put his question now, please.

Mr. Ashton: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is: Will the Minister now, given the fact that the building is complete and is ready for occupancy, given the fact that if anything there has been a technical breach, if that, and given the fact that the school board did advise the Public Schools Finance Board in June of this, will he now withdraw this \$25,000 inquiry and approve the construction of those facilities and in fact provide the provincial funding that the school district of Mystery Lake deserves—

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

Mr. Derkach: The error in this situation is a half million dollars and, Mr. Speaker, I am wondering, is the Member for Thompson saying that it is all right for his community to break the law and for us to spend a half million dollars without any inquiry, without getting out the truth? I find that intolerable.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Honourable Minister of Education has already had an opportunity to put his remarks on the record.

* (1410)

Suspended Drivers Police Enforcement

Mr. Paul Edwards (St. James): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Last Thursday, at the corner of Cumberland and Isabel Street here in Winnipeg, there was a motor vehicle accident involving a suspended driver. The suspended driver caused the accident and volunteered that she was a suspended driver. The police were immediately contacted by the blameless driver and were told that he had been hit by a suspended driver. Yet they said they did not have time to attend the scene of the accident, thus allowing the suspended driver in fact to get back in her car and drive away.

Just because the law impounding vehicles has suffered an initial setback, I am sure the Minister of Justice will agree that does not mean that it is not still a very serious offence. Can he tell Members of this House whether or not to his knowledge police are, through lack of manpower or otherwise, having to put a low priority on apprehending people who are caught driving while suspended and stopping them

from getting back in the vehicles that they were in initially?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the City of Winnipeg police very diligently enforce the law respecting suspended driving and were as disappointed as I was when the suspended driving section of Bill 3 was struck down by the court, so that the specific matter raised by the Honourable Member perhaps requires looking into. My understanding is quite the contrary to what the Honourable Member's question implies.

Mr. Edwards: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister undertake to raise this issue, which the individual involved was advised is normal practice, with the chief of police at the next meeting he has with him to ensure that suspended drivers who have been stopped and are known are not allowed to get back in their cars and leave the scene of any accident, in particular when they have caused that accident?

Mr. McCrae: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

House Business

Hon. Clayton Manness (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, before I call the motion to go into Supply, I am wondering if I can request of the House that the Estimates of Finance be recessed for an hour or maybe even a part longer, and therefore we would move into the Estimates of Seniors which was to follow Finance anyway and would allow some discussions between House Leaders. I am wondering if there is a will of the House to allow for that.

* (1420)

Mr. Speaker: Would that be agreeable? Agreed.

Mr. Manness: On that understanding, then, I move that Mr. Speaker do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to, and the House resolved itself into a Committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty with the Honourable Member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) in the Chair for the Department of Seniors Directorate; and the Honourable Member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay)

in the Chair for the Department of Education and Training.

CONCURRENT COMMITTEES OF SUPPLY SUPPLY—SENIORS DIRECTORATE

Mr. Deputy Chairman (Marcel Laurendeau): Leave has been granted by the House so that we can consider the Estimates for the Seniors Directorate. We will just be touching on this for about an hour or so, then we will be going back into Finance.

Does the Minister responsible have any opening statements?

Hon. James Downey (Minister responsible for Seniors): Yes, I have, Mr. Deputy Chairman, and I thank the critics for getting the committee going in good order so we can use the time most productively. We got going so quickly that I have a couple of staff members who would have normally been here to be part of the Estimates and will probably join us as it proceeds. We have a staff complement basically of a director, Kathy Yurkowski, and Leanne Kostiuk, who is a research person and a secretary working in the Seniors Directorate.

Basically, the Seniors Directorate is to support seniors in achieving or accomplishing programs, working with the different organizations to make sure that we are keeping all the seniors of the province up to date with Government programs and activities. I plan to give you an appreciation of the direction that the Seniors Directorate is taking and also mention some of the achievements over the past year. I will try to move fairly quickly so we can get to questions.

We are committed to improve the quality of life for our Manitoba seniors. In fact, I have said on many occasions that it is my objective as Seniors Minister to try to improve the living standards of each individual senior in the province over my term as the Minister responsible, exploring ways to ensure seniors have opportunities to participate fully in decisions that affect their lives.

We have an ongoing relationship with all the leadership of all the different seniors' organizations in Manitoba, and I thank them for their active participation and involvement and direction. Good dialogue has continued on an ongoing basis. Seniors are very active and progressive and extremely valuable members of our society. I

believe strongly that they have to play an important role and will continue to play an important role in the economic and social life of the province.

To accomplish these aims, the Seniors Directorate ensures that seniors have full access to Government programs and services. We provide seniors with timely and accurate information on Government programs, introduced the Seniors Information Line in 1989 where seniors can call in to get information dealing on a daily basis with their difficulties or concerns that they may have. To date, we have received over 1,100 calls.

We have established outreach offices in Portage la Prairie and The Pas in concert with the Women's Directorate. Province-wide consultations with seniors increased public awareness and understanding of elder abuse. We had over 1,000 Manitobans take part in a series of discussions that took place over the past year.

Opening of the Elder Abuse Resource Centre through Age and Opportunity is a vital step in the fight to prevent abuse of the elderly. It was the Department of Family Services that participated with financial resources in that particular area. As a result of the consultations, more information about Government services and clarification on taking medication, what resulted from that was the development of two brochures called, Manitoba Seniors Directorate Information Guide and Questions to Ask your Doctor and Pharmacists on Taking Medication. These publications are extremely important and well received by the seniors community of Manitoba. The directorate consults regularly with other Government departments, organizations and agencies.

One of the areas that has been a major problem for a lot of seniors has been transportation. We have developed a transportation committee with the representation from Government departments, City of Winnipeg and seniors' organizations. I am looking for a report to come forward before too long on this whole area of transportation.

Another interdepartmental committee explores ways to prevent maintenance fraud. We are developing a public awareness campaign to inform seniors about fraud from door-to-door sales people. It is my understanding the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Connery) is dealing with it in the Act that he is preparing for the Legislature.

Seniors Months were held in Dauphin, The Pas, Brandon and Winnipeg last year, and I thank the Members who were here. I guess the Member for the NDP was not part of that activity, but the participation of Members or by Members of the Manitoba Legislature I am sure made the seniors of this province fully aware how interested we all are in their betterment and longevity and ease of living in our society.

We are working with the bankers association to develop an anti-financial abuse package so that the seniors can deal with confidence when it comes to dealing with their financial affairs. I have had good reports from the Seniors Directorate as it relates to the financial activities and working with the different banking organizations. The consultation process revealed financial abuse the most frequently reported form of elder abuse. Increasing expenditures by \$50,000 to counteract this form of abuse has been part of the Estimates of the Seniors Directorate this year. We will be developing a multimedia information campaign, a campaign to educate and to heighten public awareness in the whole area of elder abuse.

The Seniors Directorate provides a valuable and constructive service to seniors in this province, as I have indicated. Increasing requests from the departments and from the community to review policies, programs and to take part on an advisory board and committees is an extremely important part of the process. The directorate is an important resource to seniors and to Government trying and working to co-ordinate all activities in the interest of seniors.

I believe the continuation of the Seniors Directorate is one which I am extremely pleased to have the responsibility for as Minister. Again, the seniors of our province are a part of the leadership of our province. It is important that we fully ensure that their lives are enhanced and their contributions can be fully realized and appreciated.

Those, Mr. Deputy Chairman, are my opening comments, and I look forward to a positive dialogue with the Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): Mr. Deputy Chairman, I would like to reply to the Minister's opening remarks by focusing on the significance of seniors in our society and raising some of the more important issues that concern them.

* (1430)

It is said that a person begins to get old as soon as he is born. Aging is of course a natural biological process that begins at birth and continues until our death. Nobody can escape being a senior; all he needs to do is stay on living and let time pass by. In our 1986 census the seniors for the first time exceeded 10 percent of the Canadian population, and by the year 2031 it has been projected that about 24 percent of the Canadian population will be seniors.

One of the oldest living Canadians who celebrated her birthday, 110th birthday, last October 1989, was a person by the name of Jeanette Thompson of Toronto. According to the Guinness Book of Records the longest longevity was accorded to one Pierre Joubert, who lived up to 113 years old. The recipe for life is not a matter of medication, it is a matter, I think, of nutrition, exercise and prevention rather than curing of our debilities and sickness.

Dychtwald, in his book, *Wellness and Health Promotion for the Elderly*, stated that the elderly of tomorrow will have travelled more places than we have ever seen, have read more books than we have read, have met more people than we have met, lived longer than any of us, and be part of a more powerful elder cultural group than any previous group in the history of our society.

I now want to focus on some of the important issues that concern our senior citizens. The first of these issues is the adequacy of their pension. When a person reaches retirement age and then suddenly finds themselves without adequate income, it is the obligation of Government to help them. The federal Government now provides a Guaranteed Income Supplement for those 65 or over. They also provide a spouse's allowance for a selected group of needy persons from the age of 60 to 64 years old, and if they are qualified they also get some meagre provincial income supplement.

In the 1989 budget the Mulroney Government proposed to tax back in phased-in stages of 5 percent of the income in excess of \$50,000 to the maximum of the old age supplement. Thereby seniors would in fact lose their old age supplement. This is supposed to increase to 10 percent in 1992, to 15 percent in 1993. This is known as the clawback by the federal Government. Therefore, even this so-called Canada Pension Plan, by which we pin our hopes in old age, is of course also threatened as more eligible people are becoming recipients of the

full Canada Pension Plan benefits. The benefits tend to exceed the contributions that are being put into the plan by the workers, unless of course the contribution made by the worker would correspondingly be increased. With the goods and services tax in addition to the personal income tax, how many of the workers would be willing to accept higher deductions in order to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan?

Pension reform has been one of the main concerns of senior citizens. It has been suggested by the National Council of Welfare, which is a citizens advisory body to the federal Minister of National Health and Welfare, that there should be some increased benefits from the Canada Pension Plan to those who are a lower income group of senior citizens, that the guaranteed income supplement and the spouse's allowance should be made available to all seniors who are in need, ages 60 to 64, regardless of their marital status, that people should be allowed to put as much money into the registered retirement savings plan subject, of course, to reasonable limits on tax deductions, that the survivor's pension system needs to be improved, and that all occupational pension plans should have some provision for spousal splitting of pensions in case of marriage breakdowns.

Another issue that concerns our senior citizens is the matter of housing. According to the psychologist, Abraham Maslow, there is a hierarchy of human needs among all people, and the most basic of this need is our physiological and biological need for food and shelter. By the 1986 census, there are more or less some 2.7 million Canadians who are senior citizens, and by the year 2031, they are projected to become 7.5 million of our population who will need some kind of housing. Housing, of course, is a very major concern of very basic needs for all people, particularly for our senior citizens.

As far as senior citizens are concerned, the literature pointed to different categories of housing that are recommended for senior citizens. These categories include the following: A system of housing they call independent living in which the senior citizen, who is in good health and needs some shelter and security, can independently live his own life in that housing unit. It could be another type, which is called independent living, with services attached to it such as, for example, on-call medical help, Meals On Wheels and other housekeeping services.

Another category of housing is what they called assisted living arrangements. This involved some 24-hour assistance in the daily activities of senior citizens who cannot help themselves in matters of personal nature, such as dressing themselves, bathing themselves, grooming, or in their hygienic needs. Finally, there is the continuation of care arrangement where they can age in place. This is designed for upper and middle income groups with residential care and nursing home care for those who can afford it.

There are many different guides and principles that could be applied to these particular needs of senior citizens' housing needs. It is essential that senior citizens be able to participate directly in the planning, the design and in the implementation of their housing programs, because if they have an input into the planning, the design and implementation of their housing arrangement, they would be most pleased indeed and would be able to feel the kind of dignity that they had wanted to maintain for themselves.

Senior citizens generally want to be independent and independently responsible for their own home arrangement for as long as they can do it, as long as possible. Therefore, affordable housing should be provided and be made available by both the Government and the private sector at the varying levels of income, giving the necessary choice to our senior citizens. Any kind of housing arrangement should more or less be physically accessible. It should be sensitive to the quality of life of senior citizens with a view to their need for companionship, their need for recreation, their need for mobility, their need for safety in person and in property. These housing arrangements should be adaptable also to the changing conditions of their lives.

There should be some kind of co-ordination between the various levels of Government and also co-ordination among the health, the support given to other kinds of social services. The advantages of giving independence and responsibility to senior citizens is that it enables our senior citizens to live a fuller life that is satisfying to them. Indeed, it can be done by Government through the alternative of extended home care programs rather than investing in capital improvements in housing construction. By extending the Home Care program to our senior citizens who are in their own home and in their own residence, they will be allowed the pleasure and freedom to stay and remain in their own home. This

will be more economical for the Government, or any level of Government for that matter, rather than provide them with institutionalized home care with all the built-in overhead and other costs and expenses involved therein.

The Home Care program, if we develop it adequately, will provide help in the daily chores of living of our senior citizens so that it probably will cost about \$2,000 approximately, rather than \$20,000 in providing this kind of help by using the Home Care program rather than by the institutionalized home arrangement.

We can also experiment in what has been called in literature the "reverse mortgage" whereby the senior citizen will sell his or her home and then the proceeds he can use, provided he or she can remain in the house, as long as he could possibly remain in the house and use it as his or her home. In the meantime, he or she is already using the proceeds of that house. If there is such a program, that would be beneficial to the senior citizens.

* (1440)

Right now there are many senior citizens who are experiencing some housing difficulties. Some of them are complaining about inadequate space. They are complaining about lack of privacy. They are complaining about poor design. They are complaining about some kind of stress-producing noise level in the place where they live. They also complain about lack of recreational and social facilities.

There is a new concept that had been developed in Australia, what they call PLUS, Portable Living Units for Seniors. This is a concept originated in Australia and otherwise known as the granny flat. It is a detached self-contained housing unit which can be placed in the yard of an existing family home to provide accommodation for the elderly parents of the owners of the family home. It is based on the idea of privacy with proximity. It can use modular construction techniques. It can be a mobile housing unit or it can be a panelized construction unit. It could be a program that the Government may want to experiment about, especially in our cold region in this part of the country.

If we have to build up and improve our Home Care program, we would require homemaking assistance. We would also require some accessible accessory services like transportation facilities and, of course, improved health services.

That brings me to the Pharmacare program. There is right now a Pharmacare program being sponsored by the provincial Government that pays 80 percent of the cost of the prescription drugs of seniors above the deductible amount. The deductible amount had consistently been increasing throughout the years. In 1986 the deductible was raised from \$50 to \$64 for people who are 65 to 75 years old. Then it was increased subsequently until lately, in 1989, it is now \$85 to \$85.50, but for the younger than 65 years old it has been raised to \$125.00 to \$150 and \$150 to \$156.50.

These increases, in the amount of the deductible, are three times more than the inflationary rate. Lately, the arrangement is to tie the increase to the cost, to the CPI, the consumer price index, for the previous 12 months. It is like a COLA in collective bargaining arrangements, where they tie it to the cost of living.

Pharmacare for Manitobans is sometimes difficult for those people who are lacking in financial resources. There are many Manitobans who are on fixed incomes, who cannot put up up front the money needed in order to pay for the drugs initially and then wait a long time in order to recover the amount, for the Government to refund them.

This Government should really be serious in implementing a system of a Pharmacare card whereby Manitobans on fixed income—(interjection)—Pardon?

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Order, please; order please.

Mr. Santos:—could be allowed to pick up the prescription medication immediately.—(interjection)—Yes, and this is going on in Alberta. They pay only the 20 percent that they are supposed to pay and then the Government collects from the drugstores themselves. This could prod the Government bureaucracy to be more efficient in issuing the cheques, and there will be fewer cheques to issue to the drugstores rather than the numerous individual cheques for individual recipients.

Another problem that concerns the senior is the lack of leisurely recreation facilities. The issue of recreation is one source of our life satisfaction. It is through leisure that we as individuals enjoy social activities. Senior citizens particularly, they enjoy social activities that contribute to their physical fitness, to their mental health, to their general well-being.

Professor Searle made a survey of senior citizens about their leisure activities in Manitoba, and he reported the following top leisurely activities that people engage in. These are the following: They visit friends and their relatives; that is a source of satisfaction to them. They listen to music, watching TV and listening to radio, a TV show like the Peter Warren show. They enjoy shopping and reading. They enjoy walking. They enjoy gardening and table games of cards, also writing sometimes, watching live events if they are able to do so, and sometimes they go to picnics.

The finding of this study is that the higher the income of senior citizens, the higher is the rate of their participation in leisurely activities. The finding is also that the higher their education is, the higher the rate of their participation in these leisurely activities. The lower the income, the greater is the preference for outdoor leisurely activities like walking and watching. These are not very expensive activities. They cannot afford to go to game shows sometimes because of lack of finances.

The reason to participate in leisurely activities: In order to relax, in order to have pleasant surroundings. It is needed for their physical health. They enjoy the change of pace, and they simply want to be with other people. It is our innate natural desire for companionship, one of the basic needs of human beings according to Abraham Maslow.

All these things will be more difficult for seniors with this prospect of the goods and services tax Act. Once in place, the rate of 7 percent could possibly escalate, and if our Government could increase that rate, it could also lead to increases in the cost of housing, the cost of personal services. Right now, if you buy a home in Toronto, you need at least \$270,000 for an average house. With the GST tacked onto it, you have to pay an extra 35 monthly mortgage payments to cover just the GST, while in a typical \$100,000 in Winnipeg you would need at least four extra monthly mortgage payments to cover the GST imposition.

Another issue that is most important to our senior citizens is their health needs.

There are many, many issues that I would like to raise later on to this Government.

Has this Tory Government any plan for updating the health promotion program of senior citizens other than distributing brochures on how to get their medication? Do they have any brochures about how

to prevent them from being in that position that they need medication? Do they provide relief and respite to the caregiver, especially those who are members of the family? Do they provide financial incentive to the family members who are taking care of their own senior citizens? Do they provide additional therapists in physical, recreational, speech learning, dentist and dental hygiene? Do they have any adequate training to these home support workers? Do they provide admission, discharge and transport procedures to senior homes in terms of their acute and long-term health care facilities?

The Government prides itself in having presented the report on elderly abuse. The next obvious step after the discussion paper of this elderly abuse is the enactment of the enabling legislation to implement whatever plan or program or policy they have to prevent elderly abuse. Do they have a program of early identification of abusers? Do they have crisis intervention services that people could go to? Do they have counselling programs for abusers? Do they have any shelter that will provide sanctuary to the victims of abuse until a remedy is found?

Do they provide training to law enforcement officers to be involved in this referral in these intervention cases? Do they provide training to the social worker, to the clergy, to the other people, like lawyers, who are involved in these kinds of cases? How many of these documentary cases are in their central registry right now? Do they have such a registry, and is it operational?

That leads me to another problem of senior citizens. This is the problem of mobility. This is the problem of transportation. The Handi-Transit service is still not geared to the special needs of senior citizens. One has to apply, for example, for services several days ahead of the expected day of need or appointment. One has to confirm the pick-up day just the day before the appointment date.

* (1450)

Does this Government have any program for the effective implementation of transportation services to senior citizens in its area and region of Winnipeg, even in rural areas? Does this Government intend to ensure that the public buildings, the parks, the entertainment, the shopping malls are fully accessible and are barrier free to senior citizens?

There might be, for example, a particular need for some grab bars or rails located in escalators and

elevators available to people who need wheelchairs. Transportation is a very important process. It is the life link of a person to his community. It is necessary in order that the senior citizen will be able to keep up with and make their medical appointments, or do their voluntary work, or do their social events.

Now, as far as the mandate of the Seniors Directorate is concerned, in what ways does this directorate have any dialogue with senior citizens or with individual seniors' organizations? Does the directorate have any advisory boards or committees where seniors' groups are adequately represented along with other experts and resource people? Is there any existing seniors' hot line by which they can get in touch with the directorate?

Is there an effective appeal mechanism to ensure objective mediation or arbitration when disputes arise concerning senior citizens? Is the Government willing to appoint some kind of a seniors' guardian other than the Public Trustee to act as sort of an ombudsman for senior citizens in matters that involve human rights issues?

These are some of the issues that I want to raise, and at this point, it is my pleasure to give the opportunity to other Members of the committee. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: We thank the Honourable Member for those remarks. Does the critic from the Second Opposition Party, the Honourable Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry), have any opening remarks?

Mr. Nell Gaudry (St. Boniface): Oui, M. Chairman. Mr. Deputy Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to be able to address the committee here this afternoon on behalf of our Party.

Firstly, maybe I would like to congratulate—maybe congratulate is a little bit of a heavy word, to say that the Government initiated this Seniors Directorate in 1988. I think it will serve a great purpose for our seniors of the province. Also, I would like to congratulate the staff of the Seniors Directorate. I am sure they are working toward helping our senior population of Manitoba and people who are very close to us.

Having been involved with the seniors for a number of years, it goes back at least 10 years in St. Boniface. We have a large population of seniors. We started a senior home for which I was involved

right from Day One and served on the board for the four years after it was erected.

From there is where I saw what the seniors meant to the younger generation. These people have so much to bring to us and to help us, but at one point I think the Government did not do enough for these people. We look at housing, for example. We have a waiting list in St. Boniface alone at one of the seniors' homes of close to 600 on the waiting list. This is an indication that housing should be top priority for our seniors.

Transportation is another one that the seniors are always discussing, talking to us about what is to be done. I am sure the Government is looking into it. It is not a problem that we will address overnight.

Looking back, seniors are retiring earlier. After having been retired for a few years, they want to be back into the work force. It is important that we look at this situation also for the seniors.

There is so much that they can bring to our communities. We can use them, if they are looked after properly too. As volunteers, we visit our personal care homes, we visit our senior homes where there are people who can help each other, but they are not trained to do so.

I go for example to Tache Nursing Centre where people are in there, they have no families, where some of these seniors who are close by could be helped out and sent out if they were trained properly to go and see these seniors in the nursing homes who need special care by volunteers.

I know for example, my mother is there. We go there practically every day, because they need that kind of support, not only her, but you see people next door to her that are waiting to be fed.

If we could find people like the younger seniors as volunteers and ask them to come and help, there are so many things that we could use our seniors for, advice, help in the community.

Like I said before, housing is one of the priorities for this Government to look at. I think my colleague has mentioned before, not only in St. Boniface but all through Manitoba it is very important that we reach out to these seniors to help them out.

I will not go on to other items. I could go on for a long time, but we will go through the questioning through the Estimates here. Therefore, I would like to say thank you for having been given the

opportunity to say a few words, and I would like to continue on with the Estimates.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: We thank the Honourable Member for those remarks.

At this time we would like to invite the Minister's staff to join us at the table. We ask that the Minister introduce the staff members present.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, I would like to introduce the director of the Seniors Directorate, Kathy Yurkowski, David Tomasson, who is my Deputy Minister, and we have Leanne Kostiuk who is sitting in back who is in charge of research.

I have just a brief comment. I thank the hard work of the staff who have delivered very appropriately programs that have been made available under the Seniors Directorate, more particularly their co-operation that has been acknowledged to me from the many seniors' organizations.

They work very well with the seniors' organizations throughout the province, and it has been demonstrated by comment from those seniors who lead those different organizations. I thank staff for their participation and hard work.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: At this time we are going to move into item 1. Seniors Directorate, (a) Salaries, \$113,400—pass; 1.(b) Other Expenditures, \$163,600.00.

* (1500)

Mr. Gaudry: In Other Expenditures you have an increase of \$43,600.00. What does that include?

Mr. Downey: The additional resources, Mr. Deputy Chairman, are to work in the area of elder abuse dealing with financial abuse and/or other areas that we have to deal with, but it is a financial commitment to deal with that responsibility.

Mr. Gaudry: Is it not salaries or anything included in the \$43,000.00?

Mr. Downey: No.

Mr. Gaudry: Beside additional resources, what are these additional resources, and can we have a breakdown of the \$43,600.00?

Mr. Downey: No.

Mr. Gaudry: I want them.

Mr. Downey: This will be targeted at financial abuse, trying to reduce and eliminate financial abuse. There will be brochure developments take place as well as other informational packages.

Mr. Gaudry: The financial abuse brochure that is going to come out, is it going to be published in French?

Mr. Downey: Yes, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Gaudry: Did you give statistics in regard to financial abuse of seniors in Manitoba as a general?

Mr. Downey: No, Mr. Deputy Chairman. What we did do was in our meetings that we have had several areas of abuse that were discussed to quantify it. Unless staff have the numbers of different problem areas, I do not think we can give you exactly the numbers of people that came forward with that specific problem, but there are over a thousand people who came forward when we had our hearings throughout the province dealing with many areas of concern.

It was a major part of the report that was brought forward or brought to the committee that dealt with abuse, both provincially and as well federally.

Mr. Gaudry: These 1,000 people that came forward, were they the people who have been abused financially by families or friends?

Mr. Downey: No, they were people who came forward with varied concerns as it relates to all aspects of seniors and abuse, of all kinds.

Mr. Gaudry: What does the Government intend to do then to try to stop this financial abuse by families or friends?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, as I have indicated in my opening remarks, we are working with the Bankers' Association. We are also putting this material together as it relates to the financial abuse information package. We have already, through the Department of Family Services, contributed to the Elder Abuse Resource Centre, which is also another organization that have taken this cause on very seriously. The Government have committed resources to assist in the fighting of abuse, so it is being attacked on many fronts. This is just one more way in which we want to proceed to assist seniors when it comes to those areas of difficulty.

Mr. Gaudry: These outreach offices that you opened at The Pas, and I did not get the name of—

Mr. Downey: Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Gaudry: Portage la Prairie. Do you have any intentions of opening one, let us say in the southern part of Manitoba, or southwest?

Mr. Downey: The reason that we actually identified The Pas and Portage la Prairie is we were able to jointly use resources that were available through the Women's Directorate, and it was a matter of better utilizing or advancing for the seniors an outreach office. At this point, we have not got any plans to advance that, although there are discussions that will be taking place with the Women's Directorate, and as well—and as the Member will recall, the throne speech referred to further work that we would be doing as far as safe housing for seniors as well. So there is an advancement in many areas as it relates to the overall elder abuse.

Further actions that came from it, and I was a little disappointed in the one critic, the Member for Broadway (Mr. Santos), in his comments about the criticisms about the brochures as it relates to helping seniors get better information as it relates to medication. I wonder if he has read them and paid attention to them. They have been very popular brochures and well received.

So he is not criticizing the Government when he makes that criticism, he is criticizing the seniors who in fact need that information and have quite willingly, on their own part, taken it for their betterment. So I would think he would want to reconsider the criticism that he levelled at the seniors of this province in criticizing them for using those brochures.

Mr. Santos: I am not criticizing the senior citizen. I am just criticizing the fact that the brochure is a remedy after they have been exposed to sickness and diseases and how to cure themselves. All I am saying is that there should be a prior brochure, how to keep themselves healthy. Informational things like nutrition, and like preventive care. This is more important than this.

May I ask this Honourable Minister on a point of order: Can we have a broad ranging discussion rather than an item by item? There are only two items in the budget anyway.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: It is not a point of order.

Mr. Santos: It is not a point of order? Then I would like to give back the matter to the Member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: In that case we should continue on to Broadway then, unless— The Honourable Member for Osborne, you are taking over for St. Boniface? -(interjection)- You are a surrogate? The Honourable Member for Osborne.

Mr. Reg Alcock (Osborne): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chairman. I apologize to the Minister for having missed his opening statement, and I suspect it would have been a good one knowing this particular Minister.

I would just like to get a sense though, of a couple of questions, first on the relationship between the directorate and some of the operating departments of Government. I mean, I know the directorate is not meant to be a program delivery function at this point, but there are a great many supports available to seniors in the community. I am just wondering what role the Minister envisions for this directorate when people are looking for assistance. I know they are focusing heavily on elder abuse, but I am wondering in a more general sense if seniors are looking for support.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, basically the directorate is working as a co-ordinating role between the seniors of the province and the different departments of Government, and it has worked very well.

Let me say that we have also established the information line which has been very well received for seniors who have daily problems as it relates to a department of Government, or just a major difficulty that they see in their daily concerns and are able to phone. That is one initiative that is carried out by the Seniors Directorate.

I think it is also important to note that, particularly as it deals with transportation—I also commented in my opening statement that we are working internally with Government with the leadership of some of the seniors' organizations on how we can better provide transportation to seniors. It is a high priority, and the mobility of our seniors is extremely important. It has been mentioned many times that the more we keep the seniors of the province involved, I think the healthier lifestyle and the more contribution that they can add to our society, so that is a major initiative. You have mentioned—what?—outside, the elder abuse.

Again, we are pretty much involved in the overall advisory capacity when it comes to assisting the Department of Health. Housing has been raised as an important concern. Again, there are direct delivery programs from different departments, but if a seniors' organization or group wanted assistance in putting together a proposal and/or making the contact with the appropriate department, then they

are more than capable of doing that, and I may say, help to weave through some of the bureaucracy of Government.

* (1510)

Mr. Alcock: Well, I appreciate the Minister giving me that overview.

There are a number of issues that were raised with me during the last campaign that I find quite troubling. Now, the Minister certainly would be aware of some of the crime prevention issues and seniors' safety issues. I mean, there is a feeling that seniors, because they are frail or less mobile, et cetera—and a lot of them are women alone—feel particularly vulnerable in the community, and I know in some areas have been active in crime prevention programs, Neighbourhood Watch being a prime example of that.

Is it anticipated that the directorate would be involved in helping seniors' groups establish such programs?

Mr. Downey: Interestingly enough, the Member brings an interesting subject up. I believe it was last night I noticed on TV where in one of the southern United States there is a seniors' organization that actually has a crime patrol where they are equipped with two-way radios. They volunteer their services and basically patrol certain communities, and when they see a crime being initiated or individuals involved in crime, they radio, by a two-way radio, the appropriate authorities. They have really taken on as a community responsibility.

Yes, if there was an organization that came forward that said they wanted to initiate some special program, then we are more than prepared to work with the seniors' organization to either work with another department of Government, whether it be the Ministry of Justice, wherever, to access a program that may in fact be there. If there is not one there, then it would be the responsibility of both the seniors, the Seniors Directorate and that department to work towards establishing or finding resources for a program, keeping in mind the overall ability of the taxpayers to support such new programming.

Mr. Alcock: Well—I never know quite how to deal with this mike—

An Honourable Member: Just talk into it.

Mr. Alcock: Thank you, Mr. Minister, I appreciate your advice.

At the risk of having the Minister launch into a spend, spend, spend diatribe, one of the things that I found particularly troubling—and it has been an issue that has been raised with me several times in the last few years—is the number of elderly persons living at home alone who are increasingly in danger of losing their homes, not because they are unable to pay for normal maintenance. I mean most often the home is paid off; they can cover the cost of heat, light, that sort of thing. What they cannot cover are the increasing maintenance costs, given the tax burden that faces them.

Some of the things that the Minister's Government has talked about doing in terms of controlling costs and keeping taxes down have been well received and have been important to that community, but it is not enough with some groups. It is a very difficult problem because I do not think anybody expects the provincial Treasury to all of a sudden start maintaining the homes of people over 65. It is kind of a Catch-22 when we see people put in the position of losing their home and having to go into public housing or some sort of supported housing for the sake of—in one case on Jubilee Avenue, a basement repair, in another case, some plumbing and heating work that is really forcing this woman into selling her home.

The Critical Home Repair Programs tend not to be of great assistance to people if they have any basic pension income, so you are caught in sort of a gray area. It is like the problem that faces the working poor in income security. You are not poor enough to qualify for support, but you are not wealthy enough to be able to deal with the issue on your own. I mean, I have had people call me in tears, just feeling that they have no option but to move out of the home that they have lived in most of their lives. We know medically they are healthier staying in their own homes.

I have seen examples of some research and proposals that have come out of some of the States who are grappling with much the same program, and I am wondering if the directorate has had an opportunity to examine this issue, and whether we will see something from the ministry on it.

Mr Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, the Member is quite accurate, there are occasions that develop where individuals feel either an inability to have their home upgraded or have problems. Life is one of decisions really, and difficult decisions.

It is my understanding there still is access to the Critical Home Repair program. It is still available to them, and he is saying this individual was disqualified because of income or—I was not clear on the reason why they were disqualified, but I would be more than prepared to take this specific case, not necessarily on the record, but take it and have it looked into to see what the specific reasons were that the person did not qualify for.

Mr. Alcock: I appreciate the Minister doing that, and in fact I will refer—there are three cases that I will bundle together for the Minister and send over to him because I think it would be important that we begin to grapple with this particular issue.

One of the ways in which it has been handled in the States has been to offer some further tax assistance to people in this and sometimes with them recovering the support once the person does sell the home. Has there been any examination of that on the part of the Government?

Mr. Downey: I do not believe that the directorate has done any of that particular work. The Department of Housing may have or for urban development, Urban Affairs. I will have the directorate take a look at the programs the Member is referring to and will question some of the other departments that may be responsible for such activities. But again it makes imminent sense, and I believe in the comfort of the seniors, that the longer they can maintain residency in their own homes, that is of course the whole basis behind the Home Care program, that that principle is applied.

I do not have any philosophical difference with the Member and will ask the directorate to take a look at the programs he is referring to in the United States to see what might in fact be able to be done on the basis of tax or whatever.

Mr. Alcock: I thank the Minister for that, and I will make the references available. There was an innovations award given for one of these programs as I recall it.

The Minister referenced transportation and I know in this House we had a number of discussions about supported transportation for seniors, specifically referencing a demonstration project that had been started in the south end of the city.

Without revisiting the debate that went on, the decision that was taken to expand the Handi-Transit system falls short of the kind of support that was offered by the previous program in the sense that

the Handi-Transit still relates to people with medical need. Often it is not a definable medical need, it is frailty, and an inability to walk on the streets in the wintertime, when it is so icy, that begins to make people prisoners in their own homes. Yet, it is not a specific medical disability so it is difficult to qualify for the kind of support that allows them to access Handi-Transit. So for a low-income senior, you become a prisoner in your own home for many months in this country.

I am well aware of the flaws and the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Ducharme) has articulated the flaws in the previous program in that it only served one area of the city and the like, but I know the directorate and I think the Minister has been involved in some discussion with seniors about a form of support of transportation that would fill this gap. I am just wondering what progress has been made on that.

Mr. Downey: Two things, and I will not revisit the debate on the old program—

Mr. Alcock: I am not interested in it.

Mr. Downey:—but I think it is important to note that I have been informed by the Seniors Directorate that apparently Handi-Van, in wintertime, will address some of the concerns that he is raising.

We do have an interdepartmental and an association group working on transportation concerns and an interesting concept has been brought forward to us with which I was quite intrigued—It was Mrs. Chown I believe that brought it forward—and that was the discussion as it related to a possible transportation co-op for seniors.

I am not so sure, in a lot of cases, that seniors are looking for a subsidized transportation program, but an organized system that will deal with their transportation problems, and it was an interesting concept which I have asked this committee to deal with and hopefully we will come up with some positive recommendations as to how it can be dealt with.

I think it is an excellent idea and as I say, I do not believe, in all cases, that there is a subsidization request that is going along with it. It is an organizational transportation program through some form of transportation co-op which makes sense to me.

Mr. Alcock: I think the Minister is quite right when he references things like that. I do not think seniors are looking, this Bill specifically said they are not

looking for a handout, but they are looking for some assistance and if it can be arrived at organizationally through building better linkages and helping people help themselves so much the better.

* (1520)

On the issue of housing, which was something else the Minister referenced, I know that in the housing units that were established originally for elderly persons, and there were a great many of them built in the early '70s, a lot of those are now at the point where they are aging. I do not know whether it was that they were poorly built, but I know we are having enormous problems with some of them on the physical side.

Also they were built for an elderly population that was impoverished and living in slum housing often and the provision of a single-room, bachelor-style of apartment was considered to be a great improvement over the kind of living conditions they had prior to that.

In today's world, however, that is simply not something that seniors are prepared to access. Pension programs and such seem to have given seniors basic maintenance levels sufficient that they can access other forms of housing, with the result that in some of the seniors' buildings—in my riding, there is 400 Stradbrook or 285 Pembina Highway or 601 Osborne—are experiencing fairly significant vacancy rates, 15 to 20 percent in some cases. I believe, 285 Smith, which is just outside my riding, is in the area of 20 to 22 percent vacancies.

I am wondering if the directorate has had any discussions with the providers of these services about alternative uses of that space or ways to reconstruct that space to make it a little more appropriate to seniors' needs in 1990.

Mr. Downey: Specifically, dealing with what the Member is referring to is reconstructing or reidentifying a particular building for an alternative use. I am not so sure that is being done with the Seniors Directorate, but the Minister of Housing (Mr. Ducharme), when his Estimates come up, may want to deal with it or may want to comment on it right now, if he so wishes.

I think the Seniors Directorate have been dealing on many fronts, and I am informed that there has been an ongoing contact with the Housing Department. It makes eminent sense, if there is space that is currently unused or underutilized and could, through redirecting resources that are

available or some other way of using resources to do that, then again it should not be objected to because of some reason. The reason would be, of course, limited resources available, but as far as the will to make a change to a building of the particular people who own them, I would think that it would make good sense to do that. That jurisdiction is under the Minister of Housing. What we do is try to work with them if there is an identified need for co-ordination and to see what their response is and to try and assist.

I am taking the comments of the Member as a suggestion -(interjection)- and the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) says it is a good one. I was trying to make that message. He is a little more direct than I am, that is all.

Mr. Alcock: The Member for St. Boniface has special observational powers that some of us do not.

I would like to pick up on the Minister's comment. I mean, I can tell the Minister, and for the record, I have no hesitation in saying that the Minister of Housing (Mr. Ducharme) has been most easy to deal with on these issues and most helpful in providing support when problems are identified. In all fairness things do get resolved when problems are identified, and I appreciate that.

There is a problem, though, that I think is a policy problem, and I believe that your director could have some influence in it. When you mention this concept of co-operating, basically what you are talking about is empowering seniors to help themselves as opposed to somebody else providing a supportive service.

I know that one of the things that I encounter frequently, and I have three buildings that are significant in size, with lots of other regional housing units, in two of them they have very strong advocacy groups that are involved in the management in the building. The seniors feel in control of those buildings, they run those buildings and the buildings run extremely well. In the third building we do not have that kind of model that you are suggesting, and the seniors feel unempowered. They feel like victims within their own apartment block, and they do not feel that they can access the kind of authority that they need to—I do not know how I would put this—"tune up" the management, shall we say. They do not feel that they have the kind of control, and as a result they are poorly served.

Now the Minister and I have spoken about some possible solutions to that, but one thing that does occur to me is that if the director was in a position to assist with the organizing of basically a co-operative form of management for that building so that the seniors could feel that they were in control of the building, it would go a long way to solving what has been a problem in that building and I suspect in others when people feel that they are faced by a bureaucracy that is not terribly responsive to their needs.

Mr. Downey: As I take it, the recommendation would be to have the Seniors Directorate work to organize the senior tenants within the block as an advocacy board or representation of the tenants to make a joint presentation to the ownership of the building to change the situation in which they are living. That is what I am getting from the intention. I would have no power in law, it would be persuasive and organizational ability that the Seniors Directorate would be able to carry out to say to the tenants, "It is happening in this particular block that the tenants have organized and they have a body which thinks for them. This is the procedure in which you should go through to establish it, and we are prepared to help with your organization meeting and objectives which you are going to lay out," that kind of a process. Am I understanding what the Member is saying correctly?

Mr. Alcock: Yes, although I think that you can go a step further, and the Minister of Housing—I do not want to go on too long about what a helpful chap he has been, because he has serious problems in some aspects of his department that we will talk about, and he has not been terribly responsive. I am sure that he will be a traditional Tory Conservative reactionary—

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Order, please. Let us get back to the subject.

Mr. Alcock: However, having said that, he has been extremely helpful in the situation with the Kiwanis Centre for the Deaf which, where we had an analogous situation where the deaf did not feel that they were in control of their living situation and through some, I think, skillful work and negotiation within that community they are now just in the process of hiring a deaf manager to run that building and to take control of it. So it is more than just the development of an advisory capacity. It is really turning over the management to a forum, in this case it was a co-operative council that has taken on the

management of the building and does have a direct relationship with the department.

There is an Ecumenical Council at 400 Stradbrook, and the same sort of thing could work at 601. I think what it will take is some mandate to do it because I think the seniors feel too powerless and they do not have anybody supporting them that they feel has direct access to decision making. So, I think the directorate could play a role in that and I would encourage you to do so.

I just have one final little thing that I would like to raise, and it is again a problem that we encountered just recently. It gets back to this question about seniors being victims. Seniors are victims. Particularly elderly women are getting mugged and physically assaulted at a rather distressing rate. One of the side effects of that is that when somebody does have her purse snatched, in addition to the trauma and the loss, it can often take her six, eight weeks to get simple ID replacement.

It can often be as long or difficult or upsetting a process just trying to deal with the Government to get back your health card, your driver's licence or whatever it is. I know of one case in particular where we finally had to intervene with the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) who did respond and we did get the situation corrected, but it took eight weeks to get a simple medical card. It would be interesting to see if a system could be developed that allowed people who were victimized not to be further victimized by the bureaucracy that we set up in order to provide simple support to people.

Mr. Downey: Just a quick comment. I would hope that individuals finding themselves in that situation would use the information line so Seniors Directorate would be informed of it and could assist to speed up the process.

Mr. Alcock: In my riding they simply use my phone number and it works better.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, going back to the Seniors Directorate. Can this Minister enlighten this committee and the members of the public what accomplishment, if any, concrete he has done in his department?

Mr. Downey: In the interest of time I would ask the Member to read my opening statements, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

* (1530)

Mr. Santos: Can the Minister point to a specific thing that his department has done?

Mr. Downey: Yes, Mr. Deputy Chairman, the whole hearing process on elder abuse and the introduction of the information line, the monies that went from Family Services to the elder abuse. Further, the work that is being done in elder abuse in Age and Opportunity. I have indicated clearly that we have a committee working on the transportation program. Again, it is listed through the outreach offices that were established in The Pas and Portage la Prairie, working again with seniors and the Women's Directorate. I can read them all over for him again, but I was trying to allow the opportunity for the Members to ask questions. It is in Hansard.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, what I meant are those kinds of activities where the recipients are substantively the senior citizens themselves, not printing of brochures where the money goes to the printer, or organizing this activity where the money goes to a consultant or the studying of this problem or that problem. Like the writing of the abuse report, the money goes to the person who prepared the report not to the senior citizens.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, I said there were over a thousand people who phoned the information line for support. There were over a thousand people who came forward with their ideas and their concerns on elder abuse. We have already put resources into Age and Opportunity for elder abuse.

Mr. Santos: Can the Minister enlighten this committee as to what plans he has for next year in terms of concrete activities that directly benefit the senior citizen?

Mr. Downey: There will be more of the same.

Mr. Santos: Specifically can the Honourable Minister tell us what he intends to do to help the senior cope with the impact of The Goods and Services Tax Act?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, as I indicated clearly before, we are not a funder of programs. We are a co-ordinator and all I can do at this particular time is tell the federal Government what our policy is, what our position on the goods and services tax is, but there is very little that we have within the capacity of the Seniors Directorate to impact on the goods and services tax.

Mr. Santos: If the Seniors Directorate is intended to be nothing more than a co-ordinator and not a

meaningful substantial department intended to service the senior citizens of this province—anybody can do the co-ordinating. Does the Minister have any plans about undertaking a specific program of activities that directly will be of interest and concern to senior citizens, the planning and formulation of which the senior citizens themselves will have a direct hand in participating?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, I think we have made tremendous progress. The NDP were in office for 16 out of the last 20 years, and they could not even establish a Seniors Directorate. We have been able to do a lot of things in the last two and a part years in the area of working with seniors, co-ordination activity which is important.

Let me tell you, the thousand and some seniors who have called the information line and those people who have come forward to bring their concerns forward on elder abuse and the work that is being done, I think is important. As I said, there will be more of the same. We will work toward the reduction and elimination of elder abuse. That is something, Mr. Deputy Chairman, we have initiated, not the previous administration of which he sits with.

His criticism I think is unfair, harsh and probably more directed at the seniors than it is at the Government because you have to work in concert with the seniors. You cannot apply to the seniors something that is not in their interests, and so we have to keep a co-ordinated effort between the Seniors Directorate and the organizations that are now leading the seniors of this province. Transportation has been identified as a major area of concern and we are working aggressively to try and resolve some of the difficulties that are there.

Mr. Santos: If the Honourable Minister really intends to serve the senior citizens of this province in a substantial way, will he be in favour of establishing an advisory board or committee where senior citizens' groups will be adequately represented to give input to this Government on what kind of activities would be of benefit to our senior citizens?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, the Member makes a recommendation which is worthy of consideration. The process by which we now get our information and work in concert with the seniors is to do it in an informal way where the Seniors Directorate talks with the leadership of all the different organizations and it is brought forward on

an annual or a regular meeting with the Ministers through the normal democratic system of their having their organization, electing their leadership, bringing concerns to the Government, co-ordinated by the Seniors Directorate.

The Member is recommending that a more formal structure be taking place as a Minister's advisory committee which it would expect the province to spend money on, which would take money from the needed programs in health and other areas. I am not sure whether he has clearly thought through what he is recommending or does he expect those individuals to come forward and freely give of their time when the Government appoints them.

Mr. Santos: All I am asking is whether the Minister would favour a structuring of the advisory function in such a manner that the senior citizens will be directly represented on the board, rather than be a passive recipient of governmental handouts and governmental information.

Mr. Downey: I have had excellent consultation with the leadership of the different organizations and it has not been a request of theirs at this point. It is a recommendation which he lays on the table, which I will consider and discuss with the different organizations. For the sake of having a new organization or a more structured organization, I cannot say that I would act. If there was a more of a demonstrated need to get information to the Minister's office then that is another point.

I am satisfied that my Seniors Directorate today is working very co-operatively with the different organizations, and I have an excellent dialogue with the leadership of the communities. For the political reason of doing it, or for the actual need of doing it, or for the cost of doing it, there are a lot of things that have to be weighed. It is a matter of making sure that the Government is fully informed as it relates to the seniors of this province.

They also have a direct contact with the Department of Health through the gerontology department; they also have other contacts with Government through community contact. When you get these exclusive contacts then, there are some people sometimes that are left out. We want to have a broad range of people contacting the Government that do not have to feel there is an absolute structured way of having to do it.

Mr. Santos: The real issue in this particular instance is whether or not senior citizens will have some

direct say as to the kind of program that the Government will be undertaking, or whether or not they will just be the passive recipient of whatever the Government plans to do for them. It is my sense, that since the senior citizens of this country are becoming a very significant part of the population of this province, and I have indicated the statistics to that effect, it is important that they will also be a formulator of policy in terms of precedents that have not been very unusual at all.

In other departments of Government we have such bodies, advisory groups, formally instituted in order that they can hear all the suggestions in a formal channel, and all the suggestions have to be considered in the high places of Government consultative bodies. We have the environmental advisory bodies that advise the Government. We have other boards and advisory groups that are formally linked with specific departments. If the Seniors Directorate intends to do more than be a co-ordinator, it is essential that there be some kind of a structure by which senior citizens can put direct input as to their concerns and problems. What does the Minister have to say in this regard?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, all I would be saying would be repetitious as to what I have said five minutes ago and my comments would be the same.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: We are ready to pass at anytime item—

Mr. Santos: No, no, about the time I am concerned. We have only one hour.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: No, we can keep going until they call us. We are not mandated to anything.

Mr. Santos: If the Honourable Minister had some problem with any kind of seniors' group, is there an effective appeal mechanism or arbitration procedure?

Mr. Downey: I am not sure what particular instances the Member may be referring to. They have the direct appeal to the Minister's office.

* (1540)

Mr. Santos: Are there specific procedural requirements and steps that are advertised which a citizens' seniors group may be able to pursue?

Mr. Downey: Directly as it relates to the Seniors Directorate, if they have a concern with the Seniors Directorate or an issue, then they can come directly to the Seniors Directorate and/or directly to me, but

it usually would be a call to the Seniors Directorate requesting a meeting of the Minister. I would establish a meeting with them as quickly as it could be done.

Mr. Santos: Does this Government intend to appoint somebody other than the Public Trustee to be the official guardian and spokesman for senior citizens?

Mr. Downey: That is all part of the discussion that will be taking place as it relates to elder abuse and the financial abuse that we talked about just a few minutes ago. To replace the Public Trustee at this point, again, I make reference to the fact that is all part of discussion that has to be carried out as it relates to elder abuse.

Mr. Santos: One of the significant forms of abuse that is happening to senior citizens is that which is perpetrated by the members of their families themselves. It is very difficult sometimes to get entangled with such a situation. For example, I have heard that it is possible for a son to insist that a grandma owe every grandchild a pair of shoes or a set of dresses, in effect forcing the elderly to spend money for their grandchildren.

In a situation like this, what kind of program would be available in order that the Government may mediate in such financial abuse of senior citizens?

Mr. Downey: Age and Opportunity Resource Centre.

Mr. Santos: The Age and Opportunity Resource Centre is funded by the Government primarily to help and provide all these kind of services, and sometimes they themselves may want to make suggestions to the Government as to what kind of program would be necessary.

It is for this reason that I was suggesting to the Honourable Minister to consider the formation of an advisory board to the directorate because without input from the recipient of services, the Government will have no idea or the vaguest idea of what the senior citizens really need. If a senior citizen is so financially disadvantaged in such a manner that if he or she, by reason of some manipulator, has lost all of his or her life savings, is there any compensation system in place in the province?

Mr. Downey: Not that I am aware of.

Mr. Santos: Does the Minister say that he will leave the matter at that and will not do anything about it?

Mr. Downey: First of all, the Member is talking in a hypothetical situation. If he knows of some specific area where people have been disadvantaged by fraud or by other activities of other people, this would call for legal action or police action. If he has any specific concern as it relates to that, then we can deal with it. If he is dealing with it totally in a hypothetical situation, then it is difficult to deal with it.

I can certainly say that anyone who has lost funds or money, being a senior or anyone else, through improper actions of another person in society, I have a tremendous amount of sympathy for. In fact, I would be terribly upset if it were a senior who had lost money because of the actions of another person. However, if it is outside the normal—if it an illegal action, then there is the police force of this country, and there are the normal legal actions that can be taken. That is one of the reasons that we have the elder abuse process of hearings, to have people come forward and put their concerns forward, so we can try to deal with it. It is a very delicate situation.

The Member made reference to the fact that it could well be family members that could be in this situation and could, through some form of pressure, cause another family member to give them resources, which they need for their own situation. You would have to have pretty solid evidence to move in a situation like that, because the individual may have a second thought and say, "Well, I really did not mind the person getting the money," because in the light of what it has caused, they do not want the problems that go with it. When it is a family member, it is an extremely delicate situation.

It is pretty tough to write legislation that covers all situations. We are dealing with it. We are trying to deal with it. As I have indicated, we have some additional resources put together to deal with the financial abuse of elders. You cannot go in and take action that sometimes may cause embarrassment of that individual senior who may have wanted in the beginning or at some point support for that individual. It is a delicate situation, and we have moved on it by supporting the Age and Opportunity Resource Centre. It is a matter of a lot of jurisdictions that have moved a little too aggressively in this particular area and have found that they have gotten into serious situations that they have had to back away from.

Mr. Santos: Of course it is a delicate situation, of course it is a serious matter, but it is not hypothetical. There are cases that you read in the papers where senior citizens lost substantial amounts of money. It can happen to a specific individual. It can happen to people who are helpless and who are not capable of protecting their own interests. If there were a compensation system for such victims of financial abuse, that would be a good program that the Government could study and perhaps implement, undertake. Would the Minister be in favour of such a system?

Mr. Downey: Again, the Government has a limited amount of money which comes from the taxpayers of this province. Is he prepared to say that there should be monies made available from the taxpayers for that over and above the health care of the senior citizens? Should the money be taken from Family Services that in a lot of cases deliver programs for senior citizens, to set up a fund? You have to have the money to set up a fund that would deal with it. He is advocating either taking resources from one already needed area within Government, whether it be Housing, social services, health care, Pharmacare or going to the taxpayers for new money. I would ask where he would advocate the money come from for such a fund.

Mr. Santos: The Honourable Minister is worrying about where the money will come from. Of course, the Government is a balancing of interests. Budgeting is simply the allocation of all the resources of society, the general taxpayers' money, into alternative uses. Is he saying that the financial victim of elderly abuse is such a low priority in the scale of values of this Government that they have no program to take care of these people who are unfortunate?

Mr. Downey: No, I am not. What I am saying to the Member is, where would he take the resources from? It is a high priority with this Government because, number one, we established a Seniors Directorate that was wanting for many years under the former NDP administration, which he is a Member of and was a member of for some two years prior to his re-election to the Legislature. Why was he not advancing these ideas and these thoughts when he was sitting on the side of the Government? Why is he now waiting until this period of time to do it? Number two, I challenged him to tell me where he would get the resources, where he would take them from.

It is a high priority with this Government. We have established that it is, and we are taking some action dealing with the financial abuse picture. What he has not come forward with is why he did not act when he was in the Government for some two years on the side of Government and has waited until now to try to make some political issue out of it. Where was he? Why has his interest all at once become a concern today when it was not a concern three years ago?

* (1550)

Mr. Santos: The Honourable Minister knows very well that I am just a backbencher, and I not even a Member of the Cabinet. Why is he asking me all these questions? It is now his obligation to defend his position as Minister responsible for Seniors. I am asking the Minister and I am pressing the Minister—is he in favour of offering in a helping hand to the unfortunate victim of financial abuse in such a grievous situation that they have lost their life savings?

Mr. Downey: I would ask that the Member bring a specific case forward with a recommendation how it should be dealt with, and then I will discuss it further with him. At this point, he is dealing with a hypothetical situation.

Mr. Santos: It is not hypothetical.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Order, please. I am going to ask the Member if he could please change onto another discussion.

Mr. Santos: Let us go to the problem of housing of senior citizens. Most senior citizens now, who find themselves in seniors' homes, have been complaining about inadequate space. Some of them are even saying that there is lack of privacy and poor design in the design of the room where they are staying. One of them asked me, why is it that in this public housing, the maximum ceiling of 25 percent of their total income is applied to the gross income rather than to the net income? It makes more sense to me to apply it to the net income, because gross income, by definition, is not yet within the control of the recipient of the money. Why should they base the 25 percent ceiling on gross rather than net income?

Mr. Downey: I think the Member does the seniors a gross disservice when he puts on the record that most seniors are unhappy with the seniors' housing that they have. I know there are some cases where seniors have some difficulties as it relates to space,

as it relates to income-related programs, but I think he does not do the seniors of this province a service when he says, most seniors. Most seniors have difficulty with their housing. I know there are some seniors that do, and some specific cases that have to be dealt with, and we are dealing with them as they are brought to our attention. I think he is certainly putting the seniors in a situation that is unfair as in their relationship to Government and to their Members that look after their programs.

He makes reference specifically to a program as it relates to housing and the gross net income. I would invite the Member to ask those questions during the Department of Housing Estimates, and we will follow up at that time with the Minister and with the Member as it relates to that.

I know that when he brings forward specific cases, specific areas of need, they will be dealt with responsibly as they have been in the past by this Government.

Mr. Santos: Does the Honourable Minister agree that it is more sensible to base the maximum ceiling of rental on net income rather than gross income?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, I am in support of the policy which the Minister now has in place. If the Minister advances a change in policy, then I am prepared to discuss it and debate it with him. I will also take your comments into consideration.

Mr. Gaudry: I guess, Mr. Deputy Chairman, you have sort of indicated that this Seniors Directorate is an advisory to get information to help other departments.

What is happening with the school taxes for property taxes, because I have had several calls during the last—I know that you are going to tell me it is a city or municipal -(interjection)- Oh, yes, he would. I know him well enough.

Have there been any discussions as to what to do with the school taxes for seniors?

Mr. Deputy Chairman: As of right now, you are right. I am going to rule you out of order on the question, because that is a municipal affair and not a provincial affair.

Mr. Gaudry: I know the province has been approached with this, because they have indicated that they have talked to the province and there has been no reply. I think it is important that we still fall under the municipal Act falls under the provincial Act.

Mr. Downey: It is my understanding that the Seniors Directorate has not had any discussions with the city, although I am sure other departments of Government may have, but the Seniors Directorate has not.

Mr. Gaudry: So with their concerns and their problems with this tax, then should we refer them to the Seniors Directorate?

Mr. Downey: Well, Mr. Deputy Chairman, I first of all would ask the Member if he has made a direct application or a request to the City of Winnipeg as his concerns relate to the city. I ask him that question. If he has done it, he has every right to do so as a Member of the Legislature representing his seniors. If he feels there should be more of a position advance by the Seniors Directorate, which would not be the normal channel that would be advanced—we are not an advocate or a lobby group with the city. We are in fact a co-ordinating activity or body within Government working with the different seniors' organizations.

Mr. Gaudry: No, I have not been in contact with the city personally, but I know they have, and they have not received any replies.

I have met with some of the people, and I have looked at other provinces, the way they treat the school taxes. For example, Alberta has a different tax schedule for the seniors. I will contact the seniors that have contacted me, and I will tell them that they should approach a Seniors Directorate for advice as to what they should do, because I think the Seniors Directorate is there to help the seniors.

Also, you have mentioned that you have met with a lot of groups throughout the province. Could you name some of the senior groups that you have met with and what was their main concern, these groups that you have met with?

Mr. Downey: Yes, the traditional, the normal organizations that all the leadership, basically, of the different seniors' organizations, I would be hesitant to name them. What I will do is I will get a list of all the organizations which I have had communication with over the past year and make sure the Member has that information.

Mr. Gaudry: Yes, one example during the campaign is 101 Marion in St. Boniface, which is under the Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation. They have had the problems where they had an internal seniors' committee which was dissolved, I guess, because of the fact that they did not have

somebody that was interested. Their concern was that before they could get help—because they did not have a resident manager or secretary, they had to go out to Manitoba Housing and Renewal to put in their grievances—with their problems, they were not getting action from Manitoba Housing and Renewal.

Is there anything that can be done with these homes where they do not have an internal seniors' group that looks after their seniors?

Mr. Downey: I would suggest, as a member for that community, that he could make a direct approach to the Minister responsible for Housing (Mr. Ducharme).

Mr. Gaudry: Thank you.

Mr. Santos: I would like to ask the Minister whether he is in favour of the policy of allowing the senior citizen to have a choice to remain in his or her own home as long as possible?

Mr. Downey: Yes.

Mr. Santos: Then why is this Government cutting on home care services?

Mr. Downey: We are not, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Santos: Would the Minister favour linking the probation of social service assistance to people who are able-bodied, out of work and in need of assistance by rendering some kind of community service, for example, during wintertime by shovelling the pathway to senior citizens' homes before they get their cheques?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, that question would be better asked in the Estimates of the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer).

Mr. Santos: Does the Honourable Minister agree with the Member for Broadway (Mr. Santos) that it is more economical for the Government to keep the senior citizen as long as they can possibly be maintained in their own home?

Mr. Downey: I think, Mr. Deputy Chairman, that is a general feeling, not only of the Member for Broadway, but all the Members of the Manitoba Legislature.

* (1600)

Mr. Santos: Would then the Government be in favour of this program called reverse mortgage where the senior citizen who wants and planned the remaining years of their life may, for example, sell their home with a proviso that they can stay in the

home while they are using the proceeds of that sale in such a manner that at the end of the period the Government will acquire a title to the home, and at the same time, the senior citizen would have stayed in the home and used all the proceeds of the home, rather than leave the home or the house to their heirs?

Mr. Downey: I would consider the comments made by the Member and ask him for more detail at some future time.

Mr. Santos: The general idea here, Mr. Deputy Chairman, is for me, let us say I am all alone, I have children and grandchildren but they are already well established, I have nothing left but my own home with the memory of my spouse, and that is my property. Year after year, of course, I will have to pay the burden of taxation on the home to be able to stay in that home. If there exists a program by which that burden of taxation becomes lighter as I proceed through old age, in the sense that the Government is sort of waiving a portion of the tax, then I can keep that home. If the Government would be willing to buy the home, then I would be able to use the proceeds of the sale, the installment payment that I am receiving, then I will have sufficient income to maintain the home. Would the Honourable Minister be in favor of such a system like that?

Mr. Downey: It is worthy of consideration, Mr. Deputy Chairman. As I indicated I would be prepared to have the Seniors Directorate with the Department of Housing take a look at it.

Mr. Santos: Would he create some kind of committee in his department or in some other unit of Government to study the implication of this idea?

Mr. Downey: That would be part of the consideration.

Mr. Santos: If the burden of taxation can somehow be alleviated gradually in the waning years of the senior citizen's life, and if the problem of selling his home can be taken care of while he or she is still alive and were able to use the money, I am positive that it will enure to the benefit of the majority of our senior citizens. It will make them happier because they can stay in the home where they have reared their children, and that will be truly satisfying years in their life. Would the Minister create anybody to seriously study all the implications of this kind of idea?

Mr. Downey: I believe, Mr. Deputy Chairman, the Member is asking the same question over again, and my answer has not changed.

Mr. Santos: I want to go to another aspect of another issue that concerns senior citizens.

This is about the inadequacy of cash at their command to pay up front for the prescription for the medication that they need. Right now, the system is that you have to pay first and then accumulate all those purchases of prescription drugs. Later on you file all the receipts and then you claim a refund from the Government.

In other jurisdictions, there is a system to avoid such an undue burden on the part of senior citizens. They have a special Pharmacare card that they can present to the drugstore and all they pay, in this particular division of burden, is the 20 percent that is not covered by the Pharmacare plan and they get the drug. Then later on, the drugstore itself will have to go after the Government for the refund, not the senior citizens, simply because the burden now is less onerous on the part of the senior citizens.

Will he implement such a system, working in other provinces like this one?

Mr. Deputy Chairman: On that question, the Honourable Member for Broadway, the question is relating to the Health Department and their finances and would be better handled under the health issue when their Estimates come forward than under the Seniors Directorate. I mean, that is where we will be dealing with the Pharmacare and such.

Mr. Santos: But this concerns senior citizens, does the Honourable Minister have nothing to say about this?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, I will make a brief comment. You were very correct in your ruling that it is within the Department of Health. The Minister of Health has a lot to do with senior citizens as he is the funder of the programs and the deliverer of the programs, and it is my understanding this whole Pharmacare question is under active review by the Minister. The Member's comments will be put forward to the Minister and he can again do that when in fact the Health Estimates come forward.

Yes, I am concerned about the seniors. Yes, I am concerned about the Pharmacare system and the maintenance of it. Yes, I am concerned about the costs of delivering all programs for all people in Manitoba, and one has to take the total picture as the Member himself referred to not too long ago. It

is up to the Government to look at areas of introducing a balance, and that is what we are trying to do. Again, this falls within the purview of the ministry of Health.

Again, we will make sure the Minister is aware of the comments and concerns brought forward by the Member for Broadway, and he will, I am sure, get a complete answer from the Minister during the Estimates of Health.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, I realize the jurisdictional issue here. They are saying, oh, it is that Minister, it is this Minister, it is not mine so I am not going to answer. What I am asking the Minister is: Will he support the senior citizens in their desire to have this kind of a system to help them so that they do not have to come up with money up front?

Mr. Downey: As I said, Mr. Deputy Chairman, the Member understands how Executive Council works, and when Ministers have their different responsibilities, and when it is advanced at the Cabinet or committee level of Government, then it will be discussed and I will be sitting as part of that discussion. I am not able at this point to intrude into another Minister's jurisdiction, and I will not. I will work in the support of senior citizens wherever physically and financially possible.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, going back to another area of concern which is housing, I have, in my reply to the Honourable Minister, indicated the concept of PLUS, what they call portable living and housing units for seniors, which have been called granny flats in Australia. Would the Minister be studying this possibility of introducing this system here in this province?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, this may be a new concept to the Member for Broadway, but it certainly is not to me as an individual. I had the privilege of having my grandparent live in my yard, or my dad's yard, at home for many years. He felt independent. He was on his own. He was able to come to the house where we lived for meals. We had the communication of grandfather and grandson and grandchildren. It was an excellent idea. It was some 25 years ago or so. That in fact took place in a lot of rural communities and towns where that kind of an association took place. It is an excellent concept where a family can stay together. The Member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger) says it is still done, and it is done.

The Member is talking about it as a new program in Australia. There may be some areas that could enhance that. If it is, it again would have to be done through the Department of Housing and/or some other Government support program if in fact the resources were not available to do it through the private direction of those individuals and those communities. It is a good concept. The point I am trying to make is, it is not anything new as far as a lot of us are concerned, but again, it is being advanced as a program from another jurisdiction which I endorse in principle and think it is the right way to go.

* (1610)

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, this province consists of many different cultural groups, and as far as I can speak for my own cultural group, it has always been our value system that we take our senior citizen, our grandmother, our grandfather. They are the most valuable part of any family or farm. We never considered them as a burden at all as far as our family life is concerned. We considered them as a responsibility and it is an honour for us children to take care of our own grandparents. Sometimes I am amazed at the North American attitude towards their own elders. They only deal with them when they want to derive some kind of benefit. That is why I admire this concept of privacy with proximity. This cubicle where they can stay and enjoy their privacy will be within the proximity of the immediate family in case of need.

If this is much more practical than staying right within the home of the children, and the children themselves providing the necessary care to their elders, would this Honourable Minister favour giving the necessary assistance, financial or otherwise, to the members of one's family in order to take care of their own elders?

Mr. Downey: Again, Mr. Deputy Chairman, the Member is asking, I think, an unfair question to commit financial resources, at a time, until we would have a lot more detail as to how the program would work and the magnitude of what the cost would be. To say to him in principle and concept I agree with him, and I think it is certainly the right thing to do.

We can learn a lot from other cultural backgrounds that can enhance the senior citizens. I appreciate his comments coming forward, in the context of which they have come forward.

I think what he again has said is worthy of consideration, but we would have to see what the financial application of such a program would be before entering into it.

Maybe there could be a co-ordination of his mortgage concept, making available of funds through a reversed mortgage concept, and an enhanced privacy with proximity program could well work in combination.

I am not taking lightly what he is saying. I am taking very seriously the comments he is putting on the record because it is helpful.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, if the care is to be provided, in any event I was just saying—all I am saying is that it is perhaps much more compassionate and much more effective that the care be provided by someone who has some blood or family affiliation with the recipient of the care. The Government will not be spending any more money than what the Government will be paying to professional homemakers.

What is wrong with the system that I was suggesting?

Mr. Downey: I was not criticizing the suggestion, I was saying it was worthy of consideration.

Mr. Santos: If it is worthy of consideration, will the Honourable Minister do something more about it than just agreeing with the idea?

Mr. Downey: Well, I have indicated there is very little more that I can do. I cannot commit resources to it at this time. There is a process of which Governments have to allocate their resources. It is an idea in concept that has to be taken forward to see what the financial implications of it are and then further decisions made on that basis.

I am prepared to consider what he has said as a concept and if there is an introduction of such a program, let us know what it would cost before we proceed on that basis.

Mr. Santos: That is why it is essential to have a thorough study of the financial implication of such a program, but if the service is to be provided at all, and the service is needed, does it matter whether it costs more or less or it costs the same when the service is needed?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, again, we have to make sure that when you introduce a new program that you are not taking away from the health care expenditures that are needed for senior

citizens, that you are in fact continuing to look after the essential services. Again, it all has to be taken into consideration in the total picture of the resources available to Government.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, all the more it comes into the picture now, the initial suggestion that I had proposed to the Honourable Minister, that there be an advisory body formally instituted to provide all this input to the Government. Otherwise the Government will be simply handing out what it wants to hand out and not know what the real needs and concerns of senior citizens are.

Going back to the original suggestions that I had, would the Minister create such an advisory body to his own directorate?

Mr. Downey: Well, Mr. Deputy Chairman, if an advisory body would be put in place, then it would take away from the need of the Member having to sit here and ask these questions and put his ideas on the record.

I am getting the ideas now from him, as a Member of the Standing Committee dealing with the Seniors Directorate, and we also have the direct input from the seniors' organizations dealing with the Seniors Directorate that have direct access to the Minister's office. So it is a part of a total process that these ideas are coming forward.

The establishment of a Minister's advisory committee I do not believe will do anything more to advance the ideas of the Member unless he will lobby that directorate or that advisory body to have his ideas advanced.

I think he is getting his ideas advanced as directly as he can do by the Standing Committee dealing with the Seniors Directorate and I have told him that I am considering what he is saying very seriously.

(Mr. Jack Reimer, Acting Chairman, in the Chair)

Mr. Santos: Mr. Acting Chairman, with respect to senior citizens' need for transportation, what, if any, specific program has the Seniors Directorate been doing to help the senior citizens in their mobility needs?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chair, the Member made reference to, again, transportation which I dealt with in both my opening comments and in my answers to the Member for Osborne (Mr. Alcock) as it relates to transportation.

There is nothing more that I can add at this particular time, other than to say that I further

compliment the leadership within the seniors' organizations that have come forward with good ideas as it relates to transportation. It is an important factor that we keep the seniors of this province mobile and involved totally in society and I have dealt with it, to some extent, previously in my answers.

Mr. James Carr (Crescentwood): Mr. Acting Chairperson, I would like to ask the Minister a question or two on the court challenge to the federal drug patent legislation, Bill C-22, which is currently in front of the Court of Queen's Bench. Has the Government changed its view that it ought not to intervene in this case?

The argument for intervening, of course, is that the federal drug law impinges on provincial jurisdiction to regulate drug prices, a matter which is of considerable interest to the seniors' population of Manitoba. Is it still the Government's position not to intervene in this case and to support Bill C-22, the federal drug patent law?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, it is not our intention to change our position and we have not taken the decision to enter into a court intervention.

Mr. Carr: Mr. Acting Chairperson, so we are to gather from that answer then that the Government of Manitoba will not be involved in any appeal or interventions of appeal in that case?

Mr. Downey: That is the position at this point, Mr. Acting Chairman.

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): If some of my questions are redundant, I apologize. However, I will spare you an opening statement or sermon and thereby save an hour of committee's time.

An Honourable Member: Feel free.

Mr. Martindale: Next year.

Does this department have a role in advocating for seniors with other departments, and if so how do they advocate, on what issues have you advocated in the past or are you currently advocating? I am thinking not of particular individuals with problems but specifically policy issues.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, yes, the Member is right. His questions are redundant, and I would ask him to read Hansard to get the answers to those questions.

Basically, we are a co-ordinating directorate within the different Government departments as it

relates to many issues dealing with seniors, so specifically I can deal with health care needs, many areas, but it has basically been covered in Hansard.

Mr. Martindale: What kinds of phone calls does the Seniors Information Line receive? What kinds of problems do seniors have that they phone in with? Well, I will leave it at that. I have more questions about the information line.

Mr. Downey: All kinds: specifically, general information, 16 percent; housing, 13 percent; home care, 12 percent; pensions, 12 percent; pamphlets and brochures that the Member for Broadway (Mr. Santos) was so critical about in criticizing the seniors, 11 percent; home repair and maintenance, 9 percent; taxes, 5 percent; transportation, 4 percent; and various breakdown from there, Mr. Acting Chairman.

Mr. Martindale: Do you have a breakdown of how many or what percentage of calls are from people living in rural areas and what percentage are from people living in Winnipeg?

* (1620)

Mr. Downey: No, Mr. Acting Chairman.

Mr. Martindale: When calls are received on the information line, are answers given to the inquiries, or does the information line staff make referrals to other Government departments?

Mr. Downey: Both, Mr. Acting Chairman.

Mr. Martindale: I have been informed that Age and Opportunity staff get calls from as far away as Pinawa. The Gwen Sector resource centre provides a lot of information and referrals. Does the department feel that they are duplicating services of other seniors' organizations or not?

Mr. Downey: No, Mr. Acting Chairman, it is not a duplicate, because if we can deal with it specifically at the Seniors Directorate, we do, but it is generally people using other services that are available to them that would be calling those other agencies.

Mr. Martindale: Is the department aware of concerns about the level and take-up for the SAFER program, or is the directorate not involved in that kind of issue?

Mr. Downey: Basically, Mr. Acting Chairman, that program falls within another department. If it were a matter of recommending change or ideas that come forward dealing with it, it would be advanced from the directorate to that department. When the Estimates of the SAFER program come forward,

then that would be the appropriate place to ask those questions.

Mr. Martindale: Has the Seniors Directorate made any presentations to Family Services or Housing about the benefit levels or take-up rate for SAFER?

Mr. Downey: No.

Mr. Martindale: How does the Seniors Directorate relate to the provincial gerontologist?

Mr. Downey: They work very co-operatively.

Mr. Martindale: Could we have more details or examples of how you co-operate?

Mr. Downey: No.

Mr. Martindale: You have no examples or illustrations of how you co-operate?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, there is an ongoing relationship with the provincial gerontologist and the Seniors Directorate on many issues dealing with seniors, whether it be housing, home care, whatever. It is just a good working relationship that goes on between the two different departments. That has to take place, because generally a lot of the concerns of seniors are health related in our society today.

I compliment the work that the gerontologist is doing in the province. It is not, as sometimes take place when you introduce a new organization of Government dealing with seniors, the turf protection could in fact take place, but in this case I say it is working very positively. Specifics I can get if the Member still would like some.

Mr. Martindale: When will the elder abuse report be released?

Mr. Downey: Basically, Mr. Acting Chairman, rather than do a complete combined compiled report, we have taken the information that was received at the informational hearings and have acted upon some of them, like the funding for the Age and Opportunity Centre, the Resource Centre, which the Government through Family Services has funded, like the development of the two brochures that have been brought forward to help inform the seniors of medication and activities, and, again, the Member for Broadway (Mr. Santos) has made a positive recommendation today as to what we may be able to further develop as to how to keep healthy, that kind of brochure with good information. I took that as a positive recommendation.

The question of financial abuse is a major concern, which we have additional resources put in

place for this time in these Estimates to work with the financial institutions, and again we talked about it some time ago in our Estimates today about the delicacy of the concern that you have when you are dealing with financial abuse, when family members are involved and how you can get into certain complications. You want to make sure that you are not treading in areas that you should not be as Government. It is a delicate area, but remembering that financial abuse is serious and a major concern. We are trying to deal with it in a positive way which will correct the problem.

The very fact that we had the hearings or the process of discussions throughout the province in making the elder abuse a matter of public concern, I think to some degree has possibly reduced it in certain cases, although I have no factual or scientific evidence of that. Generally public awareness of that kind of somebody looking at it has a positive effect.

Mr. Martindale: At some point will the report be made public?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, I do not look forward to what I would call a sophisticated bound report that is going to have a lot of clear concise comments as it relates to it. I think it will be more compilation of what was said, and remembering that a lot of this was said in confidence we have to be concerned about the actual amount that is released. So it is more of a working document to try to implement some actions that would work against elder abuse rather than a document that points it out but has no positive action method to it.

Mr. Martindale: At some point will a working document be made public?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, I am prepared to make as much of it public as is possible without in any way identifying people who brought concerns forward. I think, again, the more public information that is available, the more it will help the overall process.

Mr. Martindale: When might that be made public?

Mr. Downey: As soon as I can get the material that the Member is asking for.

Mr. Martindale: If some kind of working document or paper is released, will it be generally available to the public or will it be circulated to seniors' organizations?

Mr. Downey: Would the question be repeated, please?

Mr. Martindale: If and when some kind of document is made public, will it be generally available? Will it be circulated? Will it be sent to seniors' organizations?

Mr. Downey: Yes.

Mr. Martindale: What do you plan to do with the findings and recommendations internally within the Seniors Directorate?

Mr. Downey: Well, again, it would be repetition if I were to repeat it. We have already taken some actions and some recommendations that have come forward from the hearing process, so I believe when you hear things that can be done and corrections made that you should act upon them. We have already done some of those.

The question of legislation continues to come forward. Again, the developing of legislation is a very difficult one. Other jurisdictions are having problems to try and develop such legislation. There are a lot of interjurisdictional discussions taking place now between provinces. There have been some activities with legislation taking place in the United States which in fact have not solved the problems.

We are trying to make sure we have learned from other jurisdictions' experiences that have not been able to proceed to correct the problem, but in some cases it may have been more of a problem after the legislation has been put in place.

When we develop the legislation we want to make sure the job is done properly. We are in that process now.

Mr. Martindale: As of October 30, 1989, according to Hansard, page 2370, the policy analyst had not been chosen, but the hiring process was under way. Is that correct?

Mr. Downey: The process has gone under way and the person has been hired. It is Leanne Kostiuik.

Mr. Martindale: This was the person who was in a temporary position?

Mr. Downey: That is correct.

Mr. Martindale: What were the qualifications of this individual and previous place of employment?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, it was a competition that was gone through by the Civil Service. I would have to get the competition outline as to what it was.

Mr. Martindale: Are the staff able to answer that question today?

* (1630)

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, basically it is a question on detail which I am not able to answer from my level. I would ask that if the Member has specific questions as it relates to that hiring that he state them.

As far as I am concerned the normal process of hiring was gone through, and the person was qualified and the position filled.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you. That is all.

The Acting Chairman (Mr. Reimer): Pass? Pass.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Acting Chairman, does the Seniors Directorate have any early system of identification of abuses of seniors?

Mr. Downey: Basically that work is being done through the Age and Opportunity Resource Centre at this particular time.

Mr. Santos: Is there a central registry of documented cases of elderly abuse?

Mr. Downey: No.

Mr. Santos: Is the Honourable Minister planning to institute a central registry of senior abusers?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, at this point it is part of the overall discussions with elder abuse. There is a fairly major concern coming out of the seniors' communities as it relates to that directory. So at this point the decision has not been made to proceed with it.

Again it is because of the sensitivities that are being raised by the community itself and the leadership within the seniors' organizations.

Mr. Santos: If the directorate is not planning to establish a central registry of documented cases, how can it ever proceed to correct all these abuses?

Mr. Downey: That is part of the consideration that is taking place on an ongoing basis.

Again, he is an advocate of an advisory committee to the Minister, and I would say what is equivalent to the advisory committee to the Minister is saying at this point that they are not supportive of it and are sensitive in that area, then I am reluctant to advance and to push it upon them.

So it is a matter of, as we develop the workings on elder abuse, if a registry is in fact what comes out in the end analysis, then that decision will be made

at that time. At this point the decision has been made not to establish it.

Mr. Santos: Then what will be the system by which the directorate will acquire the knowledge of the types of abuses and kinds of abuses that they are supposed to help correct?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, that basically is again the question of, on an ongoing basis when it is identified within the Age and Opportunity Resource Centre, they deal with it one-on-one. I am sure they in their workings have knowledge of who the people are who are in that abusive situation; if it were to continue, if legal or police enforcement is needed, then that has taken place. I am sure there is documentation of each case that takes place. It is not a matter of having a registry, but to say we are having a provincial registry on elder abuse of people, at this point the decision has not been proceeded with to put that in place.

Mr. Santos: Is the Minister saying that the specific knowledge about the specific abuses are left in the hands of the Age and Opportunity Centre?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Acting Chairman, at this point they are the people who are involved in resolving some of the abuse situations. I am sure the information is available to the Seniors Directorate, but again to develop a provincial registry at this particular time, the decision has not been taken to put one in place. This is part of the discussions that will take place as we work towards the development of legislation. I am not saying today that one will not be developed, but it is an area of sensitivity as it relates to the seniors' leadership and again to develop it properly is extremely important.

Mr. Santos: If it is important to develop a system of early identification of potential or actual abuses in order to do some preventative measures, and if the Government has no systematic way of collecting this kind of information, how can the Seniors Directorate hope to be effective in trying to prevent, or in case the problem is already there, to resolve this problem?

Mr. Downey: When a problem is identified, then hopefully the corrective actions would be taken. If a repetition was to take place by the abuser, then it will be dealt with appropriately. The identification of new cases of abuse is the concern that we all have to deal with, and anyone that is aware of it or knows of it, it is important to deal with it. Having a registry I do not believe would help in any way new cases of

abuse. Perpetual or perpetuating cases of abuse, yes, I think that is important to have a record of them. I would think that record, or the knowledge of that abuse is available or would be available. We do not have a central registry.

(Mr. Deputy Chairman in the Chair)

Mr. Santos: Mr. Deputy Chairman, does the Seniors Directorate have any program of intervention in cases of actual documented situations of elderly abuse?

Mr. Downey: Again, Mr. Deputy Chairman, we are not a service agency, however, if it were identified or if we were informed of an abuse situation taking place, it would be turned over to the proper authorities.

Mr. Santos: At the earlier stages in case of some information about potential or actual initiation of abuse, does the directorate have any counselling program to help these people who are potential abusers?

Mr. Downey: Again, we are not a service provider, but it would be referred to the Age and Opportunity resource system.

Mr. Santos: Does the Seniors Directorate have any shelter by which the victims of physical or financial abuse can go to for help when immediate remedy is needed?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, if they were women in the seniors' category, or women who are in an abusive situation, then they would go to the women's shelter. For males, at this particular time, if there is an identified abuse situation then we work toward, through the Age and Opportunity and other organizations, preventative or care facilities for those individuals.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: I would like to remind the Members that we are dealing with item 1. section (b) for \$163,600, under Other Expenditures. Shall this item pass?

Mr. Santos: I would like to request again, the Honourable Deputy Chairman, that the discussion be not limited to item by item. There are only two items here more or less and that it be a wide-ranging kind of discussion.

In general, I have observed that the nature of the Seniors Directorate is simply that of a co-ordinating agency. It cannot offer any substantive or substantial program of its own. It has to rely on the

benefits and resources of the major departments of the Government.

Is this Government dedicated really to helping the senior citizens in this manner by simply establishing a co-ordinating agency?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, it is a major initiative compared to what was in place when we came into Government some two and a half years ago where there was absolutely nothing. There was not a co-ordinating agency. There was not any funding to the resource centre or the resource activities through Age and Opportunity. There were no services being provided specifically in a co-ordinated way for seniors. Our commitment is absolutely clear. There is a tremendous commitment to the seniors of this province by this Government and it will be continued.

Mr. Santos: If the commitment as described by the Honourable Minister is tremendous, is it not logical and proper that he should strive beyond merely becoming a co-ordinating agency?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, again, it is a major initiative that has been established by this Government and certainly is proven by the additional funds that are put in place this particular year. It is a matter of a developing stage. If at some point the Government decision is to make it a program funder, then that decision will be properly taken in Cabinet by the Executive Council of the Government.

Mr. Santos: Is the Honourable Minister in favour of making the Seniors Directorate a really truly major department to reflect what he considers commitment to senior citizens of this province, to be a truly funding kind of governmental agency?

* (1640)

Mr. Downey: Again, Mr. Deputy Chairman, this is a giant step to what the seniors had under the previous administration. We will continue to develop as the needs of the seniors are identified. If in fact the seniors' needs, through the Department of Health, the Department of Housing or Family Services, are not being met, and the Government were to take the decision to advance an additional program through another organization or another department of Government, the Seniors Directorate may well be that funding agency that could be developed. Until that decision is made, it will work as a co-ordinating role, working with the other

departments that have the resources to provide the needs for seniors.

Mr. Santos: I am reminding the Honourable Minister that the senior citizens of this country and this province are becoming a major potential segment of the population. Would it not be logical for him to so strive and fight within his Cabinet that his Seniors Directorate develop a substantive program that it can deliver on its own?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, as we develop the Seniors Directorate and the Government makes decisions on an ongoing basis, if there were adoption of a new program that would enhance the seniors of this province, then that decision will be taken at an appropriate time in an appropriate setting which would be Cabinet and advance from there.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Shall the item pass?

Mr. Santos: Not yet. What suggestion, if any, does the Seniors Directorate, or brochure, if any, does the Seniors Directorate have, in order to help senior citizens cope with the coming impact of the GST?

Mr. Deputy Chairman: That question has already been asked by yourself.

Mr. Santos: Yes, I am asking it again.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: That is repetitive questions.

Mr. Santos: Does the Honourable Minister want to answer it?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, I would refer the Member to Hansard.

Mr. Santos: With respect to the transportation needs of senior citizens, does this Government have any plan in order to ensure that all public buildings, parks, entertainment centres and shopping malls, will have the necessary facilities like grab bars or rails, so that they will be accessible to senior citizens, particularly those who are in wheelchairs?

Mr. Downey: The Member raises a subject which we have been dealing with in a positive manner and the business community are in contact, or our director is in contact with the business community to identify ways and means by which access to buildings or conveniences for seniors in those buildings can be enhanced to make their way of life easier as they are moving through the commerce of society.

Mr. Santos: Is the Honourable Minister saying that he is leaving this responsibility in the hands of the private business establishment?

Mr. Downey: No, I am not saying that, Mr. Deputy Chairman. We are encouraging them to improve their facilities for shopping of seniors and for accommodating seniors when they are going for the services they require.

Mr. Santos: As far as the provincial supplement is concerned, has the Government had any plan for improving or increasing the provincial income supplements for senior citizens?

Mr. Downey: Again, Mr. Deputy Chairman, that would be better asked under the Department of Family Services and does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Seniors Directorate.

Mr. Santos: Nothing falls within the jurisdiction of the Seniors Directorate; the Seniors Directorate is simply a co-ordinating agency. Will the Honourable Minister try his best within the inner sanctum of his Cabinet to make sure that they have some control of some programs and some substantive funding for some needed services and needed programs for senior citizens?

Mr. Downey: I will do everything within my power, and within the resources of the taxpayers of the Province of Manitoba to see that the variable resources which the taxpayers give us as Government are distributed in a fair and equitable manner to all, senior citizens included.

Mr. Santos: In so doing, after assuming that the Honourable Minister succeeded in his attempt to get some action in terms of substantive programs, would he be supportive of senior citizens directly participating in the planning and the design of a program of activities that will benefit senior citizens?

Mr. Downey: I do not understand the question, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Santos: —Whether or not he will establish the necessary infrastructure by which senior citizens, senior organizations can be directly represented in the planning of those activities.

Mr. Downey: It is being done now, and I have explained it several times in Hansard, and I would invite the Member to read it.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Shall the item pass?

* (1650)

Mr. Santos: Not yet, I would like to ask some questions in the area of recreational facilities. What,

if any, plan does this Seniors Directorate have in order to enhance the opportunities and facilities for recreation of senior citizens?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, the seniors have full access to all the programs and funding for recreational activities under the Community Places Program and under any normal Government funding. As well, there is support from the Government for the Manitoba Society of Seniors seniors' Games which are held on an annual basis and are a very productive and fruitful activity for all seniors to participate in. So we are very much involved in recreational activities and encourage them at every opportunity that we have.

Mr. Santos: As I say, glittering generalities. Can the Honourable Minister point to some specific program?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, the financial support that goes to the Manitoba Society of Seniors games.

Mr. Gaudry: Yes, since the Seniors Directorate is there for seniors and to communicate information, how do you guarantee that you have reached all the seniors of the Province of Manitoba?

Mr. Downey: You can never guarantee that you have reached every senior or every individual, but let me tell you, being a Minister interested in seniors and concerned about them I would like to know if there are some that I am not getting to. If the Honourable Member would help me I will communicate directly with them.

Mr. Gaudry: Well, I do not know. You should have statistics in your department of who you have reached, and you have an idea of the number of senior citizens in the Province of Manitoba and with the work, as you say, the interest you have shown for the seniors—and I am sure you have, I am not denying you that—I think you should have a fair knowledge of who you have reached and a number as far as statistics are concerned.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, it is very difficult to quantify in a statistical way the numbers who have been contacted, but I can assure you that in the matter of information we have used the organization that represents the seniors, we have used the Department of Health, all the Government departments that contact on a one-on-one basis the different seniors of this province. Most of the seniors, I say most, not all, have contact through

some form of organization or Government structure and usually that is adequate.

Mr. Gaudry: Also, as the Minister of Northern Affairs, what have you done for the aboriginal people in the North as far as reaching the seniors that are living in the northern communities where communication is by radio or it is hard to reach them?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, probably that is one area, I may say very seriously, in which the seniors of this province, certainly because of transportation, distance and a lack of a lot of facilities, over the past few years of the previous administration there was a lot of shortfall. I say specifically as it relates to the north-east area of the province where we have many senior citizens in the Native communities living without the luxury, and I call it a luxury, of having electric hydro service off our main power generating stations on the Nelson River system, where they have to depend on electricity generated from diesel fuel, again, do not have the amenities that the seniors of the South have. Those are the kinds of major initiatives that we are working on to enhance the seniors in a broader way and, again, some of the more specific detailed programs of which I have talked about, the information line, some of the support systems that are available for southern Manitobans, are available to them.

As well, one area of the North in which we have enhanced opportunities for seniors is through the outreach office at The Pas, and we are looking at Cree syllabics for the brochures which are being provided. Again, I think that there are a tremendous number of seniors in the North who may not have had the same services. However, in some cases, the services have not been requested or demanded by seniors in those areas. They, by tradition, have looked after themselves through their lifestyles, and at this point have not demanded of Government the kinds of demands that some of the southern society have placed upon them.

So, again, I am not satisfied enough has been done, but I think that we will see tremendous advancements when we see hydro development and those kinds of amenities placed in their communities.

Mr. Gaudry: Again, through your department as Minister of Northern Affairs, are there any plans for

senior housing for the Native people of northern Manitoba?

Mr. Downey: Again, Mr. Deputy Chairman, the same seniors' housing programs are available for northern residents as for the South. I am pleased to have been the Minister responsible for the North and, as well, for seniors when we opened the first seniors citizens' housing in Thompson some year ago. I think that shows a commitment, and I compliment my colleague, the Minister responsible for Housing (Mr. Ducharme) who was a major part of that initiative.

Programs are available in the North as they are in the South. The application is no different there than it is in our southern communities.

Mr. Gaudry: I appreciate your comments and the fact there has been one opened in northern Manitoba. Are there any further plans for further areas outside of Thompson, for example, where the population demands, where there is a heavy population of seniors?

Mr. Downey: Yes, Mr. Deputy Chairman, I know that some of the northern flood communities that have received some funds under the—not sufficient in some cases—but they have received some funds, I know, have talked to me about advancing seniors' housing in some of their communities.

Mr. Gaudry: We have talked about several programs. Housing, of course, has been the priority here. What about transportation for those people up north?

Mr. Downey: Again, Mr. Deputy Chairman, some of these people live in remote communities and do not desire to leave those communities. The only transportation needs would basically be for health and/or other care.

Again, there are no special programs that would enhance transportation. On the other hand, if the need is there to move those individuals, for example, the devastation of the forest fires of last year, some 23,000 people, seniors included, were evacuated without incident of major magnitude. It was through the good workings of the Government people and the communities themselves in their co-ordinated effort.

Mr. Gaudry: Mr. Deputy Chairman, talking about transportation, I noticed that in the Estimates, for example, they have been reduced by \$5,000, from \$10,000 it went to \$15,000.00. That has nothing to

do with transportation of the seniors or anything. It is just the administration of—

Mr. Downey: The Member is correct. It has nothing to do with actual program delivery and/or funds that would flow directly to the seniors.

Mr. Gaudry: Mr. Deputy Chairman, previously the Deputy Chairman requested we should look at the Estimate of \$163,600, and I am referring back to this year. We have an increase of over 50 percent on communication and advertising. I know you mentioned there was an extra brochure that was going to be coming out very shortly. I believe it is on elderly abuse. Is that part of the 50 percent increase in funding?

Mr. Downey: That is correct, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Gaudry: Operating and printing in an increase of \$16,000, is that also part of just the printing and the advertising for the brochures?

Mr. Downey: Yes.

Mr. Gaudry: In other operating for an increase of \$5,000.00.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Deputy Chairman, it is postage and operation of some of the outreach office activities.

Mr. Gaudry: In talking about these outreach offices, what is the staff in those offices? The number of staff, let us say, in Portage la Prairie and in The Pas.

Mr. Downey: One in each.

Mr. Gaudry: Pass.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Item 1.(b) Other Expenditures \$163,600—pass.

Resolution 138: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$277,000 for Seniors Directorate for the financial year ending the 31st day of March, 1991—pass.

The hour being 5 p.m., I am interrupting the proceedings for private Members' hour. The Committee of Supply will resume sitting at 8 p.m.

SUPPLY—EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Madam Chairman (Louise Dacquay): Would the Committee of Supply come to order please? This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training. We are on item 1. Administration and Finance (c) Planning, Research and Policy Co-ordination: (1) Salaries \$469,700.00. Shall the item pass?

Mr. Dave Chomlak (Kildonan): No, Madam Chairman. Just for the record, since this committee has last met, I have received correspondence from the Minister indicating that a 15th report that I have asked for tabling has been refused by the Minister. My comment is simply that I assume for this particular department and this Minister, the word "internal" connotes "not released to the public". Is that correct?

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Education and Training): Yes, that is correct. It is for the department's internal use and not for public distribution.

Mr. Chomlak: I will not discuss in detail my astonishment at that particular response, because I have already expressed it in the Oral Question Period. I just want to clarify something with respect to the strategic plan. I have had the opportunity of reviewing the Minister's comments in this Chamber during his Estimates preliminary speech, and I quote page 852 (Hansard) from November 6, 1990, where the Minister says: "With respect to the strategic plan, we have just completed it now, and it is a plan that encompasses a team building process, undertakes" et cetera. In other words, the strategic plan is ready and complete, and presumably the department is embarking on it. Why did the Minister indicate that the plan was not complete and therefore not available for public review?

* (1430)

Mr. Derkach: Let me be very clear, Madam Chair. The strategic plan is now complete for my review of it. Once I have had the opportunity to review it and make the necessary amendments to it that I wish to have made, then it will go back for final writing, if you like. Following that, it will be made available for public distribution. There is nothing hidden about it. It is just a matter of it going through the process right now. As soon as it is ready, I will be happy to distribute it to the Members in the Chamber, and certainly my critics for Education and Training will be the first to get a copy of it.

Mr. Chomlak: I thank the Minister for that comment, and I hope he appreciates the reason and the rationale for our wanting to have a look at the strategic plan in order that we can determine where the Department of Education is heading. In line with that, can the Minister please table the reports of his research and planning co-ordination and policy co-ordination group that outline the strategic

midterm and operational planning that department is undertaking.

Mr. Derkach: As I have indicated in my responses to the other items that were listed on that sheet that I handed out, those are for internal use, not for public distribution. Once again this is for my benefit and for the benefit of the department, not for public distribution.

Mr. Chomlak: So we have a department that outlines strategic, mid-term and operational planning, but we do not know what that means or where it is going. My question for the Minister: What are the top five priorities of his department?

Mr. Derkach: Once again, the mid-term, short-term, long-term plans will be included in the strategic plan. They are all part of it. I will be happy to share that with the Member once that plan is ready for distribution. As with the five top priorities or goals, they are part of that plan. Once that is ready, I will be happy to table it for the Member.

Mr. Chomlak: We are having trouble. What are the top five priorities for this department in this upcoming fiscal year, so that we have some ideas as to where you are going?

Mr. Derkach: In which area?

Mr. Chomlak: The year under review—

Mr. Derkach: Through the various initiatives that we have embarked on such as the High School Review, College Governance, if you like, Education Finance Review and all of the other initiatives that we have embarked on as a department—those are all priorities as a matter of fact to implement now—we have made our position known on each of those issues now except for the Education Finance Review, which is going along quite nicely and we hope to have completed in the next few months.

In the other cases, those are priorities that have to be implemented now. We have set the action plan before the educational community, before the public of Manitoba; now it is for us to continue with the implementation of it. That indeed is a priority. I guess you could go through a list of a dozen priorities, if you like, and then we could keep going on and on, but the most important priority is to improve the quality of education and training programs in this province. Whether it is in the K-12 area or the post-secondary area or in the training and retraining areas, we have to improve the quality of education.

The other priority that I think is worthwhile mentioning, Madam Chair, is that we need to increase the participation of both youth and adults in the whole area of Education and Training. That does not mean that we want to just improve their participation in taking the programs, but indeed in contributing to the educational process in this province.

I think it is important that we retain as many students in our school system as we can. Retention is an important issue. We know that dropouts are far too great in this province. Especially given this day and age and with all of the educational supports that we have our dropout rate is far, far too high. We have to ensure that we retain our youth and our students in our school system so that indeed they can contribute positively to the society.

Literacy—we have been embarking on this initiative now for two years. We will continue to enhance the literacy programs for Manitobans. Just last week, we went through the whole raft of literacy programs that are going to be available in this coming year and in doing that we tried to ensure that we cover the province as a whole so that no part of the province is going to be left out. This has not been the case in the past and we are addressing that from that point of view.

One of the areas, I think, that has the greatest need is the whole area of aboriginal education and their participation in the education process. This has to be a priority for all of us, not just for Government, but I think indeed for anybody who has some interest in education, that we involve the participation of aboriginal peoples, aboriginal youth in the educational process so that they can indeed become meaningful participants in our society, they can contribute to society, and they can become meaningful contributors to their communities.

So, Madam Chair, those are a few—and I say, a few—of the priorities that we have in this department. I am sure that I have left out probably some, such as post-secondary university education, I have not mentioned yet, but there we have to take a look at the structure and how well we are addressing the crying needs at universities.

I met with the university student presidents this morning to make them aware of what we have done in terms of addressing some of the needs of universities, how we can embark on future issues so that instead of shouting at one another, we can work

co-operatively to address some of the challenges that are before us.

As a province, we know that we have a certain capacity and we cannot live beyond our means. Once everybody understands that and we can start addressing the needs from that perspective, I think that we will indeed progress in a positive fashion.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairperson, one gets the impression that the ship of state in this area is afloat. I have sat in this building and watched during the MTX matter when Members opposite constantly pressured the Government to say: Where is the business plan for Manitoba Telephone System? Where is the business plan? And effectively, I am asking this Minister, where is the strategic plan?

Do we know what the Department of Education is going to do with corporate sponsorships in the education system? Do we know where we are going on private funding, and what the model is, and what the rate is, and why we are going in the direction we are going? Do we know that, and why are we doing that? Where is the public discussion evolving around that?

That is why Members on this side of the House want access to that strategic plan in order to have discussion and input, and as the buzzword that is being used often from Members from that side of the House, so we can build partnerships in order to develop our education system. Is this the brand—oh pardon me—

* (1440)

Mr. Derkach: There were several questions in those comments from the Member for Kildonan. Let me address them one at a time. Let me say to you that I have indicated to you quite clearly that there is a renewed strategic plan that is about to be released in the next few months. I cannot make it any clearer than that, and you are saying, "Where is it"? I have told you where it is. I cannot make it any clearer than that. As soon as it is ready for public distribution, you will have a copy of it.

Secondly, in terms of where we are going on certain issues and where we are going with such things as corporate sponsorships, this is an issue that has just emerged in the last little while. We indeed believe that there should be partnerships in education, that corporations, businesses, communities, parents all have a stake in education and that they need to be involved, but there has to be some local decision making with regard to how

they want some of these partnerships to emerge in their own school divisions. We will be coming forth with a discussion paper, if you like, on The Public Schools Act—something that has not been done for a long time and needs to be done.

I throw the ball back into the Member's own court and his Party. When they were in Government, I do not recall ever, in all the years that I was involved in education, seeing a comprehensive approach to education and training in this province, a strategic plan, if you like, laid out by the Ministers of the day as to where the department was going. It was all done on an ad hoc, piecemeal basis. That does not say that the department did not have their own internal strategic plan that they worked from, but the Minister did not table any such plan. We have been working very hard at such a plan to ensure that we address all of the areas.

As the Member knows, this Department took on a different face in the last year and a half in that we acquired the whole area of training within this department. We changed the structure of the old Limestone Training Agency and how it reports to Government. We have done a lot of structural changes in the department, and they are all laid out in the Estimates that the Member has before him. There has indeed been a clearer direction of reporting, of accountability, in all areas.

When you look at private school funding, Madam Chair, this is when I could spend a little time because the Member is a product of an independent school. Now, I do not want to get into that issue—or I was told that you were then—but let me say this: When we came into Government, there was no accountability for independent schools in any way, shape or form. There was nothing that said they had to have qualified teachers. There was nothing that said they had to offer a specific number or required number of courses. We changed all of that.

We went through a laborious exercise with the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools to ensure that there was accountability in each and every area, that the double funding would be eliminated, and today we do not have double funding for the independent school. Yes, the levels of funding for independent schools have increased and will increase over the next several years, but this plan has all been laid out, and it is available for everyone to see. The accountability issues are very clear, and I would be very happy to share them with the Member, if he so desires.

Mr. Chomlak: Obviously the Minister and I will probably disagree on this all day long. With respect to the previous Government, that was then, this is now. You are the Minister responsible, as I have discussed in my opening statements, and we intend to pursue you and to hold you responsible to the children of Manitoba.

I could cite numerous examples with respect to the floundering of the—I think it is a good department, I think it is full of good people, but I think direction is a real problem.

There is a GST coming in. School boards are scrambling to see how they will deal with the GST in MAST. The Manitoba Association of School Trustees has to hold a seminar on the GST.

Why did the Department of Education not provide information to assist school divisions and school boards to deal with this very serious problem, a very serious funding crunch that they are going to encounter? But I will leave that question notwithstanding that I have put it in laterally.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I have to respond to a question that is posed. Although the Member may wish to leave it, I cannot let him off the hook that easily. If he asks a question, he will get the response.

Madam Chair, I have to tell you that with regard to the GST, I think he has heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) answer that question as thoroughly as we as a province can at this point in time. The GST is not our tax, and indeed, we are told that schools will be exempted from it.

Now, we are trying to make that information as available to school divisions as quickly as we get it. Madam Chair, we are not in a position to be able to say, this is what the GST is going to do right now, because we do not make those decisions.

As soon as that information is available, we provide it to the school divisions, Madam Chair. We will continue to do that and work with them as much as we can and provide all the information sessions that we can to make sure that they understand it because indeed it is an important issue. No one is declining that it is not. I am told that we have already consulted with school divisions. We have sent out some of the information at this point in time, but I am sure that more is needed and that will happen.

The Member says that there is a lack of direction from the department. I have to indicate to him that if

there is a lack of direction right now, if we go back three years, there was no direction at all.

Madam Chair, we are working at that and working very diligently. We have embarked on some very important initiatives in terms of school divisions in such things as curriculum, in such things as the implementation of the whole high school review, in such things as the Education Finance review—we finally got it on track and going in the right direction—in such things as college governance, in such things as restructuring our Department of Finance internally, in such things as restructuring our Correspondence Branch internally so that it can respond to students more accurately so that we do not have a 77 percent failure rate in all of the students who take correspondence courses. So there is some direction. There is indeed much left to do, but we cannot do it all at once. We will do it in a positive and a progressive way.

Mr. Chomlak: I would appreciate if the Minister would table the information in this House that has been sent out to the school boards with respect to the GST.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, we do not have it with us right now, but I will be pleased to table that for the Member.

Mr. Chomlak: I just have very few questions left in this particular area before I will turn the matters over to the Member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs).

I just want to clarify again so that we do not lose sight of this, we are not going to deal with the studies on the long-term retention rates or the retention rates of students in this particular aspect of the Estimates, are we? We will do that under Finance Branch?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, that is more of a program issue. It can be dealt with in another section depending on where we speak about it, whether it is the colleges, the universities or the public schools. We are prepared for that.

Mr. Chomlak: I am wondering if I could get information as cited on page 28 of the Supplementary Estimates, what data bases the department maintains and develops?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, this section refers to the student records system that we have in place and also the teacher professional records as well.

Mr. Chomlak: In light of that, did this particular database and/or student records take into account the St. James-Assiniboia School Division?

Mr. Derkach: Just a clarification, is the Member asking about the numbers of students in the division? Is that what he is referring to?

Mr. Chomlak: Correct.

Mr. Derkach: He is saying yes. That would be under the Administration and Finance division of the department, Madam Chair.

Mr. Chomlak: Last year the Minister announced a recordkeeping policy that would be in place, I believe, in 50 different schools. Is this the recordkeeping policy that is referred to in terms of these databases?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, that direction was with regard to the filing or keeping of student records with regard to their marks on programs and courses. It had nothing to do with the enrollment records.

Mrs. Sharon Carstairs (Leader of the Second Opposition): Can I just ask a question for clarification? 1(c), you say, "Develops and maintains databases and analyzes data" and 1(g) actually indicates that it maintains school records. Under which one is school records kept?

* (1450)

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, when we talk about this section, we are talking about student records. When we talk about student records, we are talking about records that pertain to students' grades, et cetera.

Now perhaps I could get some clarification from the Member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs) with regard to what student records is she requiring information on.

Mrs. Carstairs: Madam Chair, the section listed Planning, Research and Policy Co-ordination about which the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) asked a question. It says, "Develops and maintains databases and analyzes data for management information."

The response the Minister gave was student records, but it is my understanding that student records is actually subappropriation number 1(g), which is defined on page 39 as, "Maintains records of Manitoba students' high school credits and issues official statements." That is why I got confused. I mean, is it done in two different sections of this department?

Mr. Derkach: I think we can clarify that, Madam Chair. The records are not kept by Planning and Research, but Planning and Research does some work in terms of providing information on student records for the Administration and Finance department, which is 1(g). Does that clarify that? Thank you.

Mr. Chomlak: Also on page 28, at the bottom, under Expected Results, the Supplementary Estimates indicate the expected results are "Effective and efficient utilization of departmental resources." Can the Minister give one example of that, please?

Mr. Derkach: I guess the best example that we could use, one that we have been talking about, is the strategic plan. It is this department that pulls together all of the information so that we can use that information then to develop a plan, a direction, or a policy direction within the department. As I indicated, the best example that we can use or the most clear one is the strategic plan right now.

Mr. Chomlak: I have no further questions in this section.

Madam Chairman: 1.(c)(1) Planning, Research and Policy Co-ordination: Salaries—pass; 1.(c)(2) Other Expenditures \$148,900—pass; 1.(d) Personnel Services: (1) Salaries \$315,300.00.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairperson, this is the Personnel Department of the Department of Education effectively? I will repeat my question, Madam: Is this the Personnel Department effectively of the Department of Education?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair, it is except for one thing; the community colleges each have their own personnel departments as well.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairperson, I appreciate the Minister probably does not have these statistics present today, but I am wondering if he could table for this committee the list of all senior positions that have become vacant and have been filled since his tenure as Minister, and which ones were filled by competition and which ones were not and which ones are vacant?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair, we will provide that. We do not have it with us today, but I can provide all that.

Madam Chairman: 1.(d)(1) Personnel Services: Salaries \$315,300—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$25,700—pass; 1.(e) Financial Services: (1) Salaries \$1,943,900.00.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairperson, on page 33 of the Supplementary Estimates, the Estimates indicate that one of the expected results of the Schools' Finance Branch is to provide effective operation of "an equitable school finance program." Can the Minister provide the House please with his definition of "equitable"?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, when you use terms like "equitable school finance program" it is always subject to interpretation depending on who you are and what position you hold. In my opinion, an equitable school finance program is one that comes as closely as we possibly can to providing opportunities for students that are equal regardless of whether those students live in an urban centre, a rural area or a northern community. Making sure that the residents of our province get the best possible opportunities for educational enhancements that we as a province can offer.

Mr. Chomlak: Is this a section under which the pilot transportation program for contract busing is carried out?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister please table the stated objectives of this study?

Mr. Derkach: I do not have the table here, but I can read it to the Member.

"The mandate of the committee is to develop, to examine the key areas or issues such as the following: safety, control and flexibility, contracting options, the definition of service requirements, determination of current costs, rejecting of future costs, penalty costs for termination of existing agreements, costs for disposal of facilities, and comparison of owned and contracted costs."

These are some of the areas that the committee will be concerning itself with in terms of looking at the transportation system that we have today and using the pilot system as a basis to compare our present system with.

Mr. Chomlak: I assume the Minister will table that document?

Mr. Derkach: I do not have it in a form that I can table at this particular time, but I will get this done in a proper format and I will table it for the Member opposite.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister indicate what studies or what initiative prompted this particular pilot project?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair, I would be happy to.

When I came in as Minister of Education and Training, we were under a total, well not a total provincial bus run system, but the majority of our system was provincially run. The buses were donated, if you like, by the province and the school divisions who ran the system.

* (1500)

There was no data that would give us an indication of how effective, how efficient, how safety conscious the system was because we had nothing to compare it to.

When I asked for some of those comparisons, it took almost a year, and even after a year, the decision was that we did not have anything in this province to compare it to, where we could compare apples to apples. It seemed that every example we took we were comparing, if you like, apples to oranges.

On that basis, we knew that we had to assure ourselves that the system that we are running in our province is making wise use of taxpayer dollars, that indeed it is as safe as it possibly can be. Perhaps there are safety measures that we should be undertaking at this point in time, but we needed to do a thorough analysis, and for that reason we decided to embark on a pilot program with a committee that would be put in place to examine the system as run by the province, and one that is run by a contract system.

In that way it will give us some indication of perhaps what the better system is. Whether there is a way to improve, or are we as efficient and effective and as safety conscious as we possibly could be. I think it is wrong for us to continue with the system without putting it through some tests because the system that we have, no matter what it is, should always be reviewed at some point in time to make sure that we have the safety of students in mind, that we have the use of taxpayer dollars, which are scarce today, in mind as well.

After a year's pilot program and the committee going through this, I feel that we will have a report in our hands that we can hold up and say, this is what the public transportation system of students in our province is like, and these are the kinds of improvements, perhaps, that we need to make to the system to make it an effective, an efficient and a safe system.

Mr. Chomlak: Will the public have opportunity to make input into this process?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the committee is not going to go out to public hearings, if that is what the Member is indicating. The committee will be looking at the system in place today and the pilot project that is being put in place, but the committee will be consulting with school division personnel such as bus transportation supervisors, school board officials, administrative people within school divisions to make sure that everyone involved in the education system does have some opportunity to at least speak to the committee and have their views aired.

We were not thinking, Madam Chair, of going to the public at large with any kind of public consultation on this issue because indeed we are talking about somewhat of an internal administrative kind of system which really involves school board people, the administrative staff and staff from the department, along with this committee who have some expertise we hope in the field of transportation in one way, shape or form.

I could say that parents, if you like, are represented on this committee through their Home and School Federation—and trustees are also going to be represented.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister advise me whether the regulations have been recently changed with regard to school buses from a 12-year period in which they can be operated, to a 13-year period?

Mr. Derkach: No, Madam Chair, the regulation has not yet been changed. I can tell the Member that that is something we are considering, at this point in time, to allow for time through the pilot process, but if we allow—and I am not saying we will, but should we go in that direction every school bus at the age of 12 years will undergo another regular, rigorous inspection to make sure that it is roadworthy and safe before it would be allowed out on the road, but that decision has not yet been made.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairman, the Minister indicated that safety was one of the reasons for undertaking this pilot project and now he has indicated it is possible that the life span of a bus would be increased by one year. A long-standing process is being changed. Are there any studies that would justify the change to allow for them to do this?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, one of the shortcomings we are finding about the policy that is

in place right now is that there are buses in this province that perhaps should be off the road after eight years. There is no consideration given now to mileage or the condition of the road that that bus runs on.

I am told that there are buses out there that need some very major work on the bodies because—and although they are not 12 years old yet, these buses are basically shaking apart on some of the road conditions that they have to run. It is not a question of whether the bus is 12 years old, 13 years old or eight years old. It is a question of what kind of road conditions that bus runs on, perhaps whether or not that bus has been inspected thoroughly in terms of its body condition and its power train. There are some glaring inadequacies I think that need to be addressed in terms of the life span of a bus.

In terms of the safety standards on buses, now buses that are manufactured all have the same safety features on them. They are all standard therefore the safety features on a bus are no longer a concern as was the case 10 or 12 or 15 years ago.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairman, can the Minister indicate what kind of counselling advice the Schools' Finance Branch provided to the school division in Thompson, Manitoba, with respect to its recent difficulties relating to the school construction?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, this problem that developed at Mystery Lake School Division is one that the Public Schools' Finance Branch has been dealing with for a long time.

After at least two refusals by the Public Schools Finance Board and contact made by the school board to myself I sent staff from the Public Schools Finance Board to Thompson, plus the chair of the board, to make sure they were satisfied that the decision that was reached by the Public Schools Finance Board was correct.

They did go up there. After collecting all of the data, the information, on available space, taking a look at the physical structures, if you like, where they were located, the Public Schools Finance Board did make their final recommendation or decision, which was to deny the construction of the four high quality relocatable units in Thompson.

* (1510)

Now this goes back some time, Madam Chair. It was on April 25 that the chair of the Public Schools Finance Board and one of our project managers

attended Thompson to evaluate the circumstances. It was on that basis, along with all of the other data that was gathered on that particular school, that the decision was made not to add to the school at this time, that there was adequate space in Juniper School which is basically across the road or street.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister assure the House that consideration was made of the special needs students in that particular school in regard to transportation to and fro?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I can assure the Member opposite that every area and every type of student was considered when this decision was made. It was not made just on the basis of looking at the space and saying, hey, we have five empty classrooms over there that we can utilize. Special needs students were considered. All of the area demographics were considered to ensure that the Juniper School could accommodate these students. That is a decision that was made by the Public Schools Finance Board.

We have to remember, Madam Chair, that school space is very costly. These are taxpayer dollars that we are expending. To ensure that we make the best and appropriate use of taxpayer dollars we have to assure ourselves that we do the proper homework before we embark on any building projects which are indeed expensive.

We do not want to see a kind of scenario that has developed in St. James for example where we have many schools that are vacant today, and we do not want that to happen elsewhere in the province. The Public Schools Finance Board does a very thorough examination of the needs for additional school structure before they make their final decision.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister indicate to me who owns the schools in the Province of Manitoba?

Mr. Derkach: I will describe the process, Madam Chair, and that may enlighten the Member.

The Public Schools Finance Board determines where a school should be built. The province pays for a school—the taxpayers of the province pay for the school. After the school is complete the keys are turned over to the division and the division has the stewardship of that school while it is a school.

If the school is then closed for some reason or other, it becomes school surplus property. Then the division has a process that it must go through in order to determine whether that school property has a future to be used as a school, or if they do not find

use for it as spelled out in the regulations and the Act, then the school will probably either turn the school over to the province, back to the province where it came from, or the province may indeed determine that that school can be sold to a community group or to someone who may be interested, depending on what use that school may have in the future.

Mr. Chomlak: Having worked in the Government for several years I am somewhat familiar with the process. Is it not correct that the schools are owned by the Province of Manitoba in the right of Her Majesty the Queen?

Mr. Derkach: The schools are built by the taxpayers of this province so if you really want to get down to the bottom line, the taxpayers of this province built the schools then they own the schools as well. Madam Chair, we give the schools over to the local school divisions to administer and to run the schools within their divisions. They take control of those schools once they are built.

Mr. Chomlak: I had not intended to pursue this line of questioning, but given the Minister's comments in Question Period, and his explanation here, I am interested as to the answers to this question. The Minister indicated that the Mystery Lake School Division had done something illegal, and he had made reference to The Public Schools Act. Can he point out for me where the illegality is concerned in this regard, considering his comments that the taxpayers of Manitoba own the schools in question?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, if I could take this opportunity I will read a section of The Public Schools Act, Section 74 and it is simply entitled, "Approval of minister to purchase of buildings." It says: "The school board shall not purchase, erect, enlarge or remodel school buildings, teachers' residences, students' residences or any buildings on property owned or leased by the school division or school district, or any one or more of them, or enter into a contract for any of those purposes, unless (a) in the case of a building that is erected, enlarged or remodelled, the plans therefor have been approved by the minister; and (b) in the case of a building that is to be purchased, the purchase has been approved by the minister."

Mr. Chomlak: I am sorry, I missed the section of The Public Schools Act the Minister was quoting.

An Honourable Member: Section 74.

Mr. Chomlak: Will the Minister now agree that the province owns the school buildings in the right of the Queen?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I guess the taxpayers of this province are the province and so therefore it is an academic argument but, yes the schools will be owned by the taxpayers of this province, controlled and in the stewardship of the divisions around the province.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister indicate what these buildings that have been constructed, these classrooms that have been constructed in Thompson will be used for if not for classrooms?

Mr. Derkach: There are a lot of unanswered questions yet. The classrooms, the high quality relocatables are not ready for occupancy yet. I was there just a short time ago and the school division was just in the process of putting the gyproc on and doing the finishing in that way. When they are ready the Commission of Inquiry will report to me. Then a decision will be made as to what use these buildings will have, but right at the present time they are not going to be used as classroom space until such time that the Commission of Inquiry reports. I must indicate that here we have a clear case of a school board contravening the school Act, expending or venturing to expend some \$500,000 of taxpayer dollars without authorization. That is the question that we are trying to wrestle with at the present time.

Mr. Chomlak: Just for purposes of clarification again prior to moving questioning over to the Honourable Member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs), is this where the Schools' Finance Review is taking place, the education finance review? Is it under this section?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair.

Mr. Chomlak: Then I will like to come back to ask some questions in that regard, but I will pass the floor on to the Member for River Heights—reserve the right.

Mrs. Carstairs: Several questions continuing on with the couple of school boards that have been involved in the news: the question that I was trying to get at in Question Period today was that there seems to have been communication from Mystery Lake School Division to the Public Schools Finance Board in which they said, if we do not get approval, we are going to build it anyway.

Now, surely someone should have identified right there and then that they were in violation of the law

and said, well, that may be your wish, school division, but according to section 74 of the Act, you are not allowed to do that. Had that taken place, we would not be in the present predicament that we are in now with two portables nearing 90 percent completion. Where did the breakdown occur that they were not clearly informed that they did not have the authority to spend their own money or somebody else's money? They simply did not have the authority under the Act to do it.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, that is, I guess, precisely why we have the Commission of Inquiry in place. The Mystery Lake School Division was told April that they did not have authority. They were told in May, I believe, and in June that they did not have authority to go ahead with the construction. For that reason, we are somewhat in a quandary why they then proceeded to build these additions. We hope that the Commission of Inquiry will be able to provide us with the information so that this can be resolved in a respectable manner. I think that is what we are all after at this point in time.

This would set a terrible precedent if we allowed school divisions to embark on building programs without getting approval from the Public Schools Finance Board and thus the Minister, because then we would have a whole raft of buildings going on in the province, and someone in the end has to pick up the cheque, if you like, for all this construction. Under the school Act, the Minister has certain ways to go on this matter. We chose the one that would probably be least restrictive on the board by putting in a Commission of Inquiry and asking the board to give us their co-operation to find out the details of how it is that they proceeded without getting the proper advice from their officials or, for some reason, misunderstanding what The Public Schools Act really had to say, as has been alluded to by some members, not within this Chamber, but some members within the community.

* (1520)

Mrs. Carstairs: Well; thank you, but it seems to me that obviously the Public Schools Finance Board has to read its correspondence a little bit more carefully. When you have a school division threatening to build without the approval of the Public Schools Finance Board, say that they are going to do it anyway and nobody stops them and nobody tells them legally they are in complete violation of the Act, then surely there must be a way

that we can right now, without this inquiry, tighten that up so that it does not happen in the future.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the Member is right. We have to tighten it up. I guess we have to wait for the Commission of Inquiry to come back to us and perhaps give us advice on how we can tighten it up.

The board was told on several different occasions, at least three or four and following the letter that was received, that they were not to proceed with the construction. Now, what do you do with someone when you have told him that it is against the The Public Schools Act, it is against the law to proceed, and then three months down the road or two months down the road they went ahead anyway.

We do not have policemen in each of our communities throughout Manitoba to see whether or not a school division is following the law in accordance with the permissions that they received. There may be employees in Thompson right now who work for the department, but they would not necessarily be aware of the fact that this school division received or did not receive permission to go ahead with the school.

So, once I became aware of the matter, after the election—I will admit it was after the election when I found out about it personally—I immediately contacted the board to ensure that indeed we addressed it in the best way possible in trying to salvage a further bad situation.

Mrs. Carstairs: Well, the Minister is saying something slightly different. He seems to be saying now that they were told that there was a violation of the law. Can the Minister table any correspondence which would indicate that, not that they were just not going to have their funding approved, which is the way the school division seems to be interpreting it, but can actually table a letter saying that not only is this funding not approved, but you may not construct these portables using your own funds because that would be a violation of the schools Act?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, this becomes more complex as we go along but you see the way you proceed with school construction, a school board makes an inquiry as to whether they can build a school. The Public Schools Finance Board does their examination of the facts, et cetera, and then at some point in time the decision is made to proceed or not to proceed.

Now, when that is done, if the answer is negative, then the school board has the opportunity to appeal and it is left open, that they can appeal this year, they can apply for that construction next year and the following year and continue that because situations change.

Now, that is basically the response that would go out. Yes, you can build, you are given authority under The Public Schools Act to construct the school or, no, you are not allowed to construct the school and you can come back to us with an appeal. It is always an open process. So you never advise a school board in a manner which says, no, you cannot construct a school and it would be a contravention of The Public Schools Act should you go ahead with building a school.

I guess there has always been an understanding between school divisions and the Public Schools Finance Board, but when you are denied permission to build, you do not build. Obviously, one out of 54 school divisions misread it. They did know what was in the Act because when I went back to them, and I indicated to them that they had contravened the school Act, the response came back verbally that in their opinion they did not contravene the school Act because the school Act was vague.

So, at that point in time we went to our lawyers, to legal council, to make sure whether or not there was any vagueness in The Public Schools Act and not only one opinion but several legal opinions indicated to us that, no, there was no vagueness in the school Act, and indeed, they were interpreting it very incorrectly. So they were aware of the fact that they were in contravention of the school Act, but it was just an opinion that they had received from someone.

Mrs. Carstairs: I would like to move into another area of accountability. I noticed that the department shows an increase of staff and that has been related to the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools financial accountability. Will that now mean that there will be one and one-half persons looking after the private school system as there was already one half-time person? Is this now an addition of a full new person? Can the Minister tell us if there has been distributed, on the basis of last year's amendment to the Act, a series of regulations dealing with accountability for the private school system?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair, the additional staff member that we identify, or staff member and

a half if you like, was to do some financial and program accountability in accordance with the regulations that were put into place on independent schools. We did have about a half-time position before who monitored the independent schools, but as the Member would appreciate it is fairly difficult to get anything done especially when we want them to comply with the financial accountability issues that other school divisions have to comply with. So for that reason it was absolutely essential that we hire one additional person to do that part of it and then expand the other part that dealt with the program and administrative accountability as well. So in total, yes, there are two positions now that are devoted to program and financial accountability and administrative accountability for independent schools.

Mrs. Carstairs: Have the independent schools now been sent a series of new guidelines as to just what tests of accountability they must be subjected to?

Mr. Derkach: That information is going out in several different formats. First of all, they did receive The Public Schools Act guidelines, the regulations that pertain to all schools and there were a couple of letters, at least, sent to them explaining this whole process. In addition the department will be holding workshops to make sure that all of the independent schools understand clearly what their responsibilities are in terms of financial program administrative accountability under The Public Schools Act.

* (1530)

Mrs. Carstairs: Can the Minister tell us if one of those guidelines will be that they will have to present to their membership i.e., the parents of the children in the school a full accounting of how monies have been spent in fiscal years?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, it is our wish that all of the schools, whether they are independent or public schools, will be accountable not only to us but have some accountability to their own area representatives or people if you like, so that school divisions will have to report to their residents some forms of accountability on at least an annual basis.

In the case of the independent schools there are advisory boards which are going to be set up in addition to their own school boards, and these advisory boards will have to present an annual report to their clients, to their school population, to

their parents and we will have access to those annual reports as well.

If I could just elaborate on the advisory boards. These will be elected advisory boards whose composition shall include at least three persons who are parents or guardians who have children enrolled in the independent school. The advisory board shall report on a regular basis during the school year and not less often than once each school term to the parents or guardians of the students enrolled in the independent school.

Mrs. Carstairs: I raised this because I think that a number of us are concerned that some of the independent schools have continued to raise their tuition fees by quite large amounts, despite the fact that they have been getting increased Government grants. Part of the reason for, certainly our support for that funding was because we hoped that it would make it more accessible to more children and particularly in religious schools. It is not going to be if tuition fees go up 10 percent and 12 percent which is the case in some of those schools.

When does the Minister intend to have that kind of reporting network to the parents in place? I will give you a very specific example. There are schools that, because they are not reporting, have launched on major construction programs. Parents do not know about those construction programs and yet they are being asked to pay 10 percent increases in tuition fees. They know that the province is giving additional monies. They have concerns about just where this additional provincial revenue to the school is going, since it does not seem to be helping their particular child and their financial contribution.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the accountability is to their boards. They have to provide the annual statement to the people who use those schools, and that will be done this year. I have to indicate to the Member that we as a department or the province do not contribute to any capital expenditures. So, therefore, any capital facilities that they wish to construct have to be done at their own expense.

The money that we are forwarding to the independent schools is meant for operating purposes. Therefore, the contribution that we make and the financial accountability for that, has been done to the department, but also to the parents through the annual report that they have to submit each year and that will start this year.

Mrs. Carstairs: Well, as the Minister knows, some of the boards are not elected. They are an in club in which they appoint themselves. I mean, I have had experience at teaching in one of them, my husband was chair of another one of them, my daughter has attended one of them. The accountability has not been good.

Will all of those boards be elected within the next year or so?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the advisory board that I spoke of just a moment ago must be elected and must have three persons on it who are parents or guardians of children. In order for an independent school to get its support from the province this year they will have to have this mechanism in place. Hopefully, that will minimize some of the perhaps in-club, if you like, selection of board members that has gone on in some instances. So this has to be in place this year in order for them to receive their funding.

Mrs. Carstairs: I just have one final question. The Minister has indicated on a number of occasions in response to the other critic that he will table information for that critic. I am assuming that he is prepared to table it for both critics.

Mr. Derkach: Yes, of course, Madam Chairperson. I am sorry if I misled the Member. I meant that it will be tabled for the Members and the critics in both Parties.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairperson, in the throne speech of 1989, the throne speech indicated that a consultation paper and proposed education funding measures would be distributed. Can the Minister indicate whether that paper has been distributed?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I would like to indicate that, yes, there was an indication that we would table the consultation paper. However, after taking a very close look at the model that had been developed in that consultation paper, it was very obvious that there were many areas that were lacking, and indeed the direction had not been researched as adequately as it should have been. For that reason we did not proceed with that consultation paper, and as I indicated, we went back to the drawing board and started again.

I might elaborate on this a little, Madam Chair, if I might. One of the areas that was lacking was the fact that we were proceeding along with Ed. Finance review, but we did not bring along with us the program area. Therefore we found that in order to

be able to do a comprehensive Ed. Finance review, we needed to bring along with us the people on the program side because they had something to say about how we should be funding education as well.

In that first model this was largely left out. Since we have brought together the two areas, I am told that we are progressing very favourably, very positively. It has taken a different direction, of course. We have an Ed. Finance committee now that we have been consulting with. The interdepartmental groups or interorganizational groups, I should say, have been met with in June and hopefully, in the next short while, we will be in a position to meet with them again to go over the progress that has been made through the summer months.

Mr. Chomlak: I do not have to but I will remind the Minister of the fundamental importance of the course of this finance review in light of the fact that probably in the next several years the special levy on property taxes will probably be the highest in history. Can the Minister precisely outline the process that will be put in place with respect to the Education Finance review?

* (1540)

Mr. Derkach: We will be ready to go with the consultation paper on Ed. Finance review before Christmas. Our intent is then to be able to have in place the final model, if you like, or the final approach somewhere in the early spring of 1991. In that way it will allow school divisions to respond to it, to perhaps put their finances in place in accordance with the new model and to work out some of the difficulties that might arise in implementing this.

I have to indicate to the Member opposite that this is indeed a very complex issue and approach that has to be done. We cannot make errors in it because if we do, those errors impact on services that can be provided to students, so we have to be very, very careful. We have to make sure that the process is flexible enough so that if errors are identified along the process, you can still change or bend the formula, if you like, enough to make it an equitable approach. This is sort of the outline that we have for us now.

The reason that we have not put a proposal on the table at this point in time is that, as the Member knows, we went through assessment reform a year ago, and we have seen some of the responses to

assessment reform. Assessment reform is complex in itself and requires some time for people to not only absorb the information, to understand it, but also to make the adjustments that are required through assessment reform. It would have been very, very wrong for any Government to move ahead with assessment reform at the same time that it moves ahead with major education financing reform because those two are tied very closely together.

We have had this year, or year and a half now—we will have a year and a half before we put into place the Ed Finance formula and when that happens we hope that the assessment reform will be understood enough that we can start dealing with education finance reform at that point in time. Yes, we are meeting with individuals constantly. Staff from the department are working very, very continuously and very aggressively in making sure that we can go ahead with the consultation process and paper as soon as possible, hopefully before Christmas.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairman, I thank the Minister for those comments and outlining the process.

My concern, Madam Chairman, is that this is of such fundamental importance to the entire structure of education and to all the taxpayers of Manitoba, that I am having difficulty comprehending how a consultation paper could be released say, slightly before Christmas and a model would be in place following public consultation in the spring for implementation in the next school year. That strikes me as fairly ambitious and may result in a preconceived model being put in place.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, this is not sort of the beginning consultation process that is going to take place before Christmas or in that time frame.

Over the last two and a half years we have been consulting with the interdepartmental organizations. We have had input from the various educational organizations such as MAST, MTS, MASS, MASBO. Each have prepared papers and have submitted them to the department. There has been back-and-forth discussion.

We put together the Ed Finance Committee. We rejuvenated it because it was not active, and we appointed members to it who have been giving advice to the department on a continuous basis. The ADM of Admin and Finance meets with them when they have something substantive to meet about, so

that this is not the beginning process. It is sort of a semi-ending process, if you like, because we are now bringing together all of the input that has taken place, and all of the consultation, into a consultation process. There will be some fine tuning done to that between then and March. Hopefully during that period of time, or sometimes early in the summer, we will be in a position to come out with our final report.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairman, I guess my final question in this area is: Does the department—or, is this branch now complying with the recommendations of the Provincial Auditor in his last report?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair, we are now in the process of drafting legislation which will comply with the Provincial Auditor's report. We have been in consultation with the Provincial Auditor to ensure that we would have the needed time to get that legislation into place. The Provincial Auditor has agreed with us that, yes, we needed that sort of time frame to go ahead with the implementation of this. In a general sense, yes, we are going to comply with the report of the Auditor.

Madam Chairman: 1.(e) Financial Services: (1) Salaries, \$1,943,900—pass; 1.(e)(2) Financial Services: Other Expenditures, 113,500—pass; shall item 1.(f) Communications: (1) Salaries 312,400 pass?

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairman, I note that there has been an increase in staff years. Can the Minister table for this committee the job descriptions of all eight individuals involved in this particular branch?

Mr. Derkach: First of all, we have one managerial position who is the director of the branch. This individual's responsibilities are to manage the branch, develop policies and procedures and co-ordinate media relations, advise on departmental issues and co-ordinate departmental communications budget.

The professional and technical staff, there are five, a communications officer who must be bilingual and is responsible for the development and co-ordination of departmental French language communication services. This is an extremely important position. We have another communications officer who is responsible for the preparation of news releases, ministerial speeches and greetings.

We have an editor for the Education Manitoba magazine which goes out three times a year, I believe, now. We have a communications officer who is responsible for post-secondary communications and monitors departmental communications expenditures. We have a communications officer who provides communication services to training programs and ad campaigns and reviews departmental publications.

There are two administrative support personnel, one who serves as a secretary to the Director and supervises the other secretary, and the other is a secretary who performs general secretarial duties and typesets the Education Manitoba publication.

Mr. Chomlak: I thank the Minister, and I wonder if he will table job descriptions for particularly three jobs, that is, the communications person involved with speech writing for the Minister, the communications persons involved with post-secondary education, and the communications persons involved in Education and Training programming and monitoring.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, those are personnel issues. We do not table a job description for an individual person. I can table the job description of the position in terms of its responsibilities that I have just read out. That is basically what I can do if the Member would like me to table that.

Mr. Chomlak: I guess then I would like some more elaboration on these particular positions and, specifically, are all three Order-in-Council positions?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, all of these positions are Civil Service positions. They are not Order-in-Council positions.

Mr. Chomlak: I assume it was an oversight on page 36, but the activity identification does not indicate Education Manitoba publication is produced by this branch any longer.

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair, the Education Manitoba publication is produced by this branch.

Mr. Chomlak: I notice in last year's Estimates it was cited. In this year's Estimates, it is not cited. It is not on the list in this year's Estimates, as opposed to last year. Those are basically my questions in this area.

* (1550)

Madam Chairman: Item 1.(f) Communications: (1) Salaries \$312,400—pass; 1.(f)(2) Other Expenditures \$59,500—pass.

Shall item 1.(g) Administration and Professional Certification: (1) Salaries \$1,212,500 pass?

Mrs. Carstairs: I have a few questions I want to ask about records. Can the Minister tell us at the present time when the transfer of record information takes place between the high schools and the Department of Education? When is the school, in other words, no longer responsible for the information?

Mr. Derkach: I am sure it depends on whether that school is a semester school or not. That information would be tabled at the end of the semester or would follow at the end of the semester or at the end of the school year. So there are two times really when the department receives it.

Mrs. Carstairs: At some point the school must be no longer responsible for the information and the Department of Education becomes responsible, and I am thinking in terms of transcripts. When does a Grade 12 student no longer go to the high school where he or she graduated for a transcript and when does he or she go to the Department of Education?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the school is always responsible for the records. The department is the backup for those records. So, therefore, the school always maintains its responsibility for student records and those sorts of things.

Madam Chair, if I could take a moment. I had promised that I would table my speaking notes, and I have finally received them. They may be a little bit after the fact but I will table them for the Members.

Mrs. Carstairs: Madam Chair, if we have all the schools keeping all these records and if you have all the departments keeping all the records, is there not rather a duplication of service here and therefore a duplication of expenditure?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I know it may appear from the surface that it is a duplication but it is not. In actual fact the department uses a lot of this data to forecast and to do research and also to participate in programs like the National Indicators program, for example, where we need access to records of this nature to look at trends and to be able to analyze those kinds of things. The schools really cannot perform that function because of the distribution of schools around the province, so it is really the department that has those records for that purpose. As an additional service though the department

does provide a back-up system if for some reason a school has lost records or records have been destroyed or anything of that nature happens, as sometimes does.

Mrs. Carstairs: I assume that this is the department which in whole or in part will be moving to Russell, Manitoba. Is that correct?

Mr. Derkach: Yes.

Mrs. Carstairs: Can the Minister tell us if that will include all 32 professional staff, and if so how many of those 32 have now agreed that they will move to Russell, Manitoba?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, there is one managerial position that will move, and there are 14 I think in total professional technical type of positions that will move. To date I am very sad to say that no one has volunteered to rush to Russell but hopefully that will change in the next while when they realize the beauty of that part of the province.

Mrs. Carstairs: Madam Chairperson, but it is not the beauty that is preventing them from moving. The reason that they are being prevented from moving in the most cases is because of family obligations and that has been one of the difficulties that was envisaged early on with the decentralization proposal, not just for this department, but for a whole raft of departments, and the fact that many of them are women and women are not capable of picking up and moving. What is the Minister's intention with respect to moving 15, I think he identified, one managerial and 14 professional, technical and support? Will there be hirings and what is the job security of those people who have presently been on staff, many for some years?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, it is not our intent to try and put people out of work in this province, people who have been good, loyal servants to our department and to Government for a long time. That is the last thing that I, or any one of my colleagues, would want to do. So, for that reason we have made a commitment to ensure that we give every possible opportunity for employment in another area that we can. That we why we did not rush ahead and move everybody overnight or try to do that. Indeed, there is a rational approach to it. If people have to be put on redeployment, they will be given the first opportunity of jobs within the Civil Service that can be given them.

In some cases it may require a bit of retraining or training and that will happen, but I can not

re-emphasize the importance that decentralization has to many of our small rural communities, northern communities, that are suffering in these economic times where this will provide a boost to that community because it means people in the community. It means people who are going to participate in the community, make it alive, if you like. Perhaps many of these people will have families who will keep our schools functioning in those areas and make those communities viable.

You have to balance it to ensure that there is not unnecessary hurt imposed on those people who are now in positions, so that they can move to other jobs that are comparable in the smoothest way possible and I am determined that within our department, and I have to say, our department has been committed to decentralize many people to various parts of the province, but we are committed to ensuring that it is done in a respectable way where people are treated with respect and dignity and are not sort of unemployed for any unnecessary reason.

Mrs. Carstairs: The Minister has identified 14 who will be moved and 18 who will remain. Can he now indicate which functions the 14 who will be moved will be undertaking in their new location?

Mr. Derkach: The branch that is going to be relocated is the Professional Certification of Student Records Branch and the duties they will be undertaking there will be the same as they are presently and that is to certify professional personnel in the school system, administer and provide assistance to related boards and committees and verify teaching experience and prepare teacher reclassification and provide official statements, letters of authority and permits, prepare official statements of high school marks and appraise out of province credentials for Manitoba High School Program Equivalency and evaluate Level I and Level II Administrator and Principal Certificates and collect data required to maintain the teacher information system within our branch.

* (1600)

Mrs. Carstairs: I think that since the high schools themselves maintain the records of the students, then it is not going to be a disservice to a student if there are student records located in Russell, Manitoba, because they do not access those student records anyway, they access the records available from their local high school. It will be quite a different situation with regard to teachers, most of

whom are located in the City of Winnipeg, most of whom have to sometimes appear on site in order to obtain an examination of their professional documentation.

On what basis was the decision made that this particular branch of this department would be located in Russell when, and my understanding is, there are fewer than 20 teachers who actually live in Russell, and a number of thousand of teachers who live in the City of Winnipeg?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, last time I checked there were quite a few more than 20 teachers in Russell.

Let me say to the Member opposite, that I did not point to the teacher certification in student records branch and say that is the branch I want in my home town. It just so happened that in the redistribution, if you like, or in the decentralization, this is the branch that was targeted for that community. -(interjection)- Pardon me. In any decentralization exercise, you would look at whether or not there is a particular spot in the province that that branch should function from. If that particular branch or that office can function out of any community in the province then I guess you go ahead and identify growth communities where there are services available for the people who may want to choose to live there, if they have been accustomed to, recreation facilities, educational facilities, medical facilities and that sort of thing.

In terms of providing service to teachers and students, most of the teachers that come to us for information come from out of province and it is verification of either their certificates or their records and that in this day and age can be done very easily by Watts line, fax machines, computers, link ups and that sort of thing. In this particular office it does not matter where it really functions from; that information can be obtained anywhere in the province. It is just a matter of that information being kept in a computer system within a particular office in the province.

If we said most of the teachers live in Winnipeg and most of the people live in Winnipeg, that is where all the services should be, our province would dry up very quickly and indeed it would become a wasteland. No province is really healthy if you have one large centre and then the rest of the province has nothing.

It is our hope that this move will provide for a more healthy climate in our province and that it will help our province grow, because at the same time that we may be decentralizing some of these small Government services to other parts of this province we are also marketing and attracting business into the City of Winnipeg.

You know I recall when the move was made to have all provincial signs made and painted in Dauphin, there was a bit of an uproar at that point in time that we were moving something out of the city into another area, but it has functioned well. We have signs all over the province; they are painted and made in an area outside of this city and they do a good job there. It provides employment in the Town of Dauphin and when you take a look at the contribution that these people make to their community, it is indeed a positive one.

I think that is all we are looking for in this exercise as well. We are going to try to make this as easy as possible. We intend to keep the services for people as best we can and not to reduce services. If we can we will try to enhance the services to the people of this province.

Mrs. Carstairs: When the Government initiated this program, they said as one of their goals that they would be providing better service on site, closer to the people who needed the service. Those are their words, not my words.

Teacher certification is something that has to be done for every student graduating from a university who has to practice teach, then has to teach for a number of years before that permanent certificate is granted.

When I was given my certificate in the Province of Manitoba I was asked to attend at an interview. Are you now going to ask teachers to attend at interviews in Russell, Manitoba?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, we do not ask teachers to attend personally at any interviews right now. Teachers are given their certificate at time of graduation now. Therefore that is not an issue. We did examine all of the issues and all of the inconveniences that might be caused by decentralizing any particular office.

We talk about student records. It is a matter of keeping that student record somewhere. It does not have to be on Portage Avenue. It does not have to be on Main Street anywhere. That student record is kept in a computer with a back-up system. So when

someone wants that they simply phone in on a Wats line. You could fax the request in and fax the information out or simply by telephone or computer hookup. So that information is made available.

It is the same thing with student records as well. Anyone can still walk in to 1181 Portage and request that information. That information will be made available very quickly. So it is not a matter of inconveniencing anyone, I do not believe. We have looked at this time and time again to see what kind of inconvenience would be caused.

In some situations, in some decentralization, even within our department, there are going to be a few inconveniences that we have to live with. Indeed it is our hope that through time we can provide the same level or even better service to our constituents, to our population in this province.

With regard to the statement about taking the services to where the people are, in many instances that is true. For example, if you wanted to decentralize Natural Resources, where would you take it? Would you leave it in Winnipeg? No, you would probably take it out to where the services are, and that one lends itself to that kind of situation.

You talk about student records though, that is a system that serves the entire province. I guess we could argue for ever and a day whether it is better to have it in Brandon, in Winnipeg, in Russell or wherever. We are confident that we can provide, as a department, the service to our Manitobans as quickly and as effectively as we can, given that they are housed on Portage Avenue.

Mrs. Carstairs: If I can just restate what the Minister said for purposes of clarity, what he is saying is that there is: 1) no walk-in traffic with respect to teacher certification; 2) there is going to be no difficulty for teachers in accessing all the certification documentation that they require by still walking into 1181 Portage as they have in the past. Is that correct?

Mr. Derkach: There is some walk-in traffic. I am not going to deny that. In today's day and age that walk-in traffic can be handled just as effectively and quickly with a fax machine.

If I walk in and I want my student records, it is not very hard for me to get that information if it needs to be faxed to me. On the other hand, as we have indicated, we are going to have a Wats line in place so that, at no charge to the individual, they can call the department and get the information.

Yes, I acknowledge that there may be a few little hurdles that we have to overcome, but I am confident that in this particular area they are not going to be large hurdles that we cannot overcome.

Mrs. Carstairs: I just cannot resist one more question. Can the Minister tell me how they will deal with teachers who get their degrees from foreign countries? That is the reason why I was invited to come and explain exactly what my degree was, since nobody seemed to understand what it was, at the time.

Maybe that is easier achieved now than when I was doing this particular program. At the same time, my university that I had got my undergraduate degree was declared to be a foreign university when, in fact, it was located in Nova Scotia. That kind of difficulty has happened to teachers over the years. I do not think I am alone in that. How are you going to deal specifically with that very personal problem?

* (1610)

Mr. Derkach: In a general sense, what happens now is a teacher will send in their credentials. Those credentials are analyzed and returned to the individual.

I think the Member for The Maples (Mr. Cheema) had a situation, right in his own family, where there was a problem in assessing the credentials and the individual had gone back and forth for a number of years and had not been recognized fully for the credits that were achieved.

We did not ask the individual to attend a personal hearing; we simply went back, reassessed the credentials, took the paperwork, reassessed the credentials and then provided the individual with a response and allowed for an appeal process. In a democracy, you must have an appeal process.

Now, if there is a situation where you have to have an interview, those have to be rare. They are not that often. I guess, I cannot even tell you how many there are per year, but there may be a handful. In those circumstances, staff from the Certification branch can come into Winnipeg, set up a meeting, or wherever that individual is, and have an interview with them. We can provide for that kind of service as well.

Mr. Chomlak: Madam Chairman, I am having some trouble understanding the logic of this particular move. While all of us in this Chamber agree with the precepts, I think, of the decentralization program—I

believe that the Honourable Member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs) does have a point with respect to teachers—what I fail to understand is that something around 14 positions are going to be relocated to Russell, Manitoba. What are these positions? What is the object of these positions? What are they doing in Russell, Manitoba?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I did read the job descriptions of those individuals out just a little while ago, but I will repeat it for the Member. These individuals would be performing the very same task that they are performing in Winnipeg.

Those tasks include: certifying professional personnel in the school system; administering and providing assistance to related boards and committees; verifying teaching experience and preparing teacher reclassifications; providing official statements, letters of authority and permits; preparing official statements of high school marks; appraising out-of-province credentials for Manitoba high school program equivalency; evaluating level 1 and level 2 administrator and principal certificates; and collecting data required to maintain a teacher information system.

So it is basically the exact same job description that is prevalent in the city right now.

Mr. Chomlak: What the Minister is saying in response to the questions from the Member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs) is that those individuals in the City of Winnipeg, who require the services or this information, are going to be at the receiving end of a WATTS line or a computer terminal to obtain that kind of information. Do I understand that correctly?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, it is not any different than every student, every individual outside of the province or outside of the city has to do now, except it is a bit in reverse. For other areas we will have to still deal with it in the same way, either through mail, through fax machine or through telephone. Now anyone outside of the area surrounding the community will have to do it in the same way that it is being done outside of Winnipeg now. Indeed, many of the people who are right in the city here, I would venture to guess would be doing it in that same way as well, by telephone, by fax or by letter.

Mr. Chomlak: My second final question in this area is: Can the Minister table the internal reports or studies or justification for this particular branch being relocated to Russell?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, there are no formal reports or studies that would lead to the determination that this particular branch should be decentralized. As in all cases, there was a comprehensive review done by staff looking at, evaluating and coming forth with their recommendations to me as Minister.

As the Member knows, there are several departments or branches that are going to be decentralized from this department. The same process was done with each and every one, but there was no formal written evaluation done to determine that this particular area should be decentralized.

Mr. Chomlak: My final question is a largely philosophical question. I am curious if the Minister and/or the department has considered the possibility of teacher certification being handled by some group or body outside of the Department of Education, like other professional bodies deal with their own certification.

Mr. Derkach: Absolutely not at this point in time.

Madam Chairman: Item 1.(g) Administration and Professional Certification: (1) Salaries \$1,212,500—pass; 1.(g)(2) Other Expenditures \$475,400—pass. 2. Statutory Boards and Commissions \$31,303,000.00.

Mrs. Carstairs: I was not ready to pass quite yet. I would like to speak to the Minister about the Certification Review Committee which falls under this particular Statutory Board and Commission.

The Minister has made a major change in policy with regard to teachers who have been charged with abuse; however, he did not make that policy retroactive. Can he tell us how many teachers there are now who have been charged but for whom no trial has yet been held, where the Minister is in possession of their certificate and is unwilling to return it to them?

Mr. Derkach: The total number of those cases, Madam Chair, is four.

Mrs. Carstairs: Can the Minister tell us why these four individuals are being treated differently than all other teachers who have been subsequently charged, and why he has not returned their certificates until such time as the charges are proven?

Mr. Derkach : No, Madam Chair, these cases are not being treated differently now. What has

happened is the court cases have been delayed upon the request of their counsel, and that is why they are still outstanding. They are not being treated any differently now than any other case before us.

Mrs. Carstairs: Madam Chair, the Minister made a change in policy last year and it was decided that teachers' certificates would not be removed until such time as the charges were proven in a court of law.

There are four teachers who have indeed had their certificates removed, no charges have been proven against these individuals, and these four do not have certificates. There are others out there who still have their certificates, so they are being treated differently. Why are they being treated differently?

* (1620)

Mr. Derkach: This is an area that has caused some difficulty not only for us but for teachers in the field. Under the Education and Administration Act it is very clear that the Minister retains the authority to suspend teaching for a School Clinician Certificate and to refer the suspension forthwith to the Certificate Review Committee for hearing, investigation or recommendation so that can be dealt with as quickly as possible.

It is true that because of the concerns expressed by teachers, concerns expressed by their legal counsels, that we did change our policy but you have to have sort of a beginning or a sunrise, to a policy when you establish it. In our judgment the most fair and equitable treatment would be to put a particular date in place for when that policy would begin.

Some of these cases were ones which had been before the Certificate Review Committee already, others were in the process, some were before the judicial system and therefore there were varying degrees of procedure or processing of each of these cases. In some of them the counsel for the individuals had requested a delay or a suspension of the case before it was heard.

There were a whole variety of reasons why we could not make it retroactive to a particular date, because you would never achieve the ultimate. For that reason we had to put in a kind of a sunrise, or beginning date, and yes there are still three who fall under that previous policy, but as soon as we can dispose of them, anyone coming to us, from here on in, is going to be treated in the way that the policy has been changed to try to be more fair to the

individual in question. It is because of the state of where these were at the time that we had to make a decision in that regard.

Mrs. Carstairs: Thank you, but we will just have to agree to disagree on that particular one, Madam Chairperson.

I would like to make a suggestion to the Minister, and I just ask him to accept it as a suggestion and nothing more.

One of the real difficulties that is facing school divisions who have a teacher within that division charged with abuse is that in a smaller division it is more difficult to put that teacher on some kind of staff salary or an alternate job experience until that case comes to trial. Our courts are moving very slowly, and in some cases, either because counsel or, quite frankly, Crown attorney has delayed the case over and over and over again.

Would the Minister consider establishing, along with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and the participation of the provincial Government, a fund that could be accessed by teachers who had been charged but not convicted if alternative employment within a school division was not possible because of the size of that school division?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I understand the problem that this creates, you know, in a small community especially and the difficulty the individuals have in continuing not only to work but to live in a community like that. For that reason we changed our policy to be a little more lenient in that regard.

Teachers are actually the employees of school divisions, and it would be inappropriate for a Government to set up a fund of that nature because the teachers do not work for the province. It is something that the Teachers' Society would have to take up with the school boards or with MAST, and then try to agree on something between them.

It is really not something that we as a province can get involved in although I appreciate that suggestion. I have had some discussion with the Manitoba Teachers' Society about their concern because, you know, today there are many, many pressures on teachers and I recognize that.

Many of these people are working under extremely difficult conditions, and these kinds of pressures need not be added to their already stressful jobs. That is something we have

discussed. Really, as a province, we really have no place in that because they are not our employees.

Mrs. Carstairs: They are not our employees either but we do have a Teachers' Retirement Fund. I mean there are funds that have been established province-wide for teachers.

My concern here is primarily with the small school division who, in collective bargaining or whatever process, is simply not going to be able to bear the cost of having a teacher on staff who cannot work, maybe being paid \$40,000, \$45,000 a year. If we had some kind of fund that could be accessed under those kinds of circumstances, then the teacher could be removed from the classroom. I think that is what we all want in cases of this. We also know that the vast majority of these cases end up without the charges proven in a court of law and the teacher declared innocent of all charges that have been laid against them.

We might have a situation in which some teacher ends up getting paid for a year and is proven guilty, but far better it seems to me that we have that kind of a support system than we have other teachers who are without pay and who are very innocent of the crime.

Mr. Derkach: You know, I acknowledge the Member's remarks and find some sympathy or empathy for them except that this is a matter for the Manitoba Teachers' Society along with MAST. It is not a matter for us. It is a suggestion that perhaps she could address with the MTS officials when she meets with them.

I am not opposed to MTS setting something up like that but it is really not something that we as a province can embark on because I think that really sets a precedent for Government as well. I think we have to be very careful and cautious when we approach something of that nature.

Mr. Chomlak: Just one comment on the Minister's last comment and that is, the Minister does have extraordinary powers to the extent of dealing with a teacher's livelihood and ability to earn a living. Therefore I suggest that it is not simply a question of standing back and saying, yes, I have these extraordinary powers to remove a right but we cannot do anything about it.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the Minister's responsibilities are spelled out in The School Act, regardless of who sits in the Minister's chair. From time to time, the Act is changed, but nevertheless

anybody who has the stewardship of a portfolio, like the Department of Education and Training, has to live within the Act and has the responsibilities as well.

* (1630)

We have responsibilities, not just to the teaching staff, but also to the taxpayers and to the people who send their children to our schools, and for that reason, the Act is quite clear. So we have to be very careful on how we administer it, and although it appears that there are wide-sweeping powers that a Minister may have, indeed it is not simply a case of power; it is a case of responsibility to the people whom that individual is responsible to.

Madam Chairman: Item 2.(a) Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund \$31,273,000—(pass); item 2.(b) Other Statutory Boards and Commissions \$30,000—(pass).

Resolution 32: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$31,303,000 for Education and Training, Statutory Boards and Commissions, for the fiscal year ending 31st day of March, 1991—(pass).

Item 3. Financial Support - Schools \$541,306,200. Provides financial support to School Boards and assistance to educational organizations. (a) School Grants and Other Assistance \$524,154,400 (Recoverable from Canada \$3,660,000).

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairman, I guess I find it somewhat surprising that this particular line item perhaps is the largest line item of any department anywhere in the Government, a half a billion dollars or more, and the information upon which it is based is relatively—I mean, that is being charitable—is quite limited.

I am curious because I know that the FRAME budgets—that is, the requirements for all of the school boards, the information required from school boards to prepare their budgets, it is fairly extensive.

I have in front of me the FRAME budgets and it requires the school grants and other assistance to be laid out for the regular program, for the exceptional program, for the vocational program, for community education and services, school division district administration, instructional and pupil support services, transportation of pupils, operations and maintenance, and fiscal services.

It is all required to be outlined on a line-by-line basis from each individual school division, and I am wondering why, in the Estimates process here, we do not have that kind of a breakdown in the aggregate for this expenditure of \$500 million plus.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I do not think that is required by the Legislature, to begin with. Secondly, if we were to go line-by-line for each school division according to the FRAME budget, I would have to submit that 20 or 30 or 40 hours would not even scratch the surface of trying to debate the expenditures of every school division in this province and every school in this province.

So, Madam Chair, these are the grants that are paid out to school divisions. There is a method of accountability for the grants that are paid out to the school divisions. Staff from the department have a responsibility to monitor those. That is why we do have the accounting staff in our department that we do. We will answer any question, of course, that the Member may have with regard to the support to schools. It would be very difficult to try and go line by line. I tell you, it would be quite a document if we had to do that.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, this is a suggestion. I would only even appreciate the highlights of such a line-by-line item. In this age of computerization, I think it would be relatively simple to provide us, as legislators, in an area of expenditure of half a billion dollars with some specific breakdowns to allow us to ascertain where this money is being spent.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the FRAME accounting system is the accountability of how school divisions expend their money. The way that we provide grants to school divisions is done on the basis of the GSE or an amended formula.

That is where we can reply to questions that the individual may have with regard to funding to school divisions based on the GSE. The GSE is laid down in regulation. Therefore, there is a standard approach to it. It does not vary from one school division to another except in cases where there is an identified need for special support. That kind of information we can provide and we can answer questions on.

Mr. Chomiak: Just to start then, I wonder if the Minister might provide our side of the House with a breakdown dividing up the funding between publicly

supported schools and privately supported schools for fiscal year '89-90 and '90-91, please.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, for the 1990-91 school year, there is \$492,697.5 million going to the public school system, \$16,194.3 million to the private school system, and we have \$15,262.6 million in terms of other support.

The '89-90, Madam Chair, I can get for you, but I do not have that here at the present time.

Mr. Chomlak: Does the Minister have an estimate for the fiscal year '91-92 perhaps at this time?

Mr. Derkach: No, Madam Chair, I do not have the breakdown of the figures for the Member, but I can tell him that we are going to be moving from 54.5 percent this year to 59 percent next year, of what the public school system gets.

Mr. Chomlak: The Minister is saying that the private school system is going to obtain 59 percent of total public expenditure funding that the public school system gets?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, this is grants payable to independent schools based on operating expenditures, but we do not include in that capital grants that go to the public school system.

Mr. Chomlak: The Minister will undertake to provide me with the figures for '89-90?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Madam Chair.

Mr. Chomlak: I am sorry, the 54.5 and the 59, what were those two figures? What were they?

* (1640)

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, this year we are supporting independent schools at a level of 54.5 percent of the amount that goes to the public school system on a per pupil basis.

In 1991-92 we will be moving to 59 percent of the amount that is provided on a per pupil basis to the public school system.

The support in 1989-90, I have that figure before me now, the total to public schools was \$458,923,000 the support to private schools was \$16,552,000 and the other support was \$13,143,000.00.

Mr. Chomlak: What is the proportionate value of support at present 1990-91 to the public school system? To what extent of expenditures made by the public school system does the provincial Government fund those expenditures, what percentage?

Mr. Derkach: The province supplies to the public school system supportable expenditures of 80.1 percent.

Mr. Chomlak: Could the Minister please outline how he arrived at that figure for me, please?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, supportable expenditures are outlined in the GSE. In other words, it is those expenditures which the divisions can claim that are supportable by the province. 80.1 percent of those supportable expenditures are supported by the province.

Mr. Chomlak: Could the Minister indicate what that supportable expenditure figure is, please?

Mr. Derkach: The total for that is \$835,765,087.00.

Mr. Chomlak: Did the Minister indicate \$835 million?

Mr. Derkach: I will read it again: \$835,765,087.00.

Mr. Chomlak: Since the Minister has the sheet in front of him, and I do not have a calculator in front of me, can he indicate what 80 percent of that figure is?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, the total for that would be \$669,159,157.00.

Mr. Chomlak: I thought the Minister gave me a figure of \$492 million as support to public schools.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Madam Chair, now it gets a little complex, because now we go from the calendar year to the fiscal year. That is why you have the variance here.

Mr. Chomlak: Do I understand the Minister correctly that the \$200 million variance is calendar to fiscal year?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, that was an incorrect statement that I made just a minute ago. I would like to correct for the record that the \$492 million is the Government's share. The difference between \$669 million and \$492 million comes from ESL.

Mr. Chomlak: So for my own understanding, Madam Chairperson, the difference between the \$669 million and \$490 million is ESL, and based on the ESL provision of approximately \$200 million and the \$490 million direct grants, the Minister is saying that he provides funding of 80 percent to the public school system in Manitoba.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, if I could just give the Member some figures to clarify the entire program.

First of all, for the fiscal year 1990-91, the program itself would have a total of \$733 million. Of that, the

ESL is \$210 million, \$8.4 million would be the surplus of the Public Schools Finance Board, which leaves something like \$515 million for operating and capital. The capital was \$22.5 million, which brings it down to \$492 million, as I had read out.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister indicate what the total budgetary operating expenditure of the public school system is for '90-91?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the total operating expenditure is \$1,009,549,958.00.

* (1650)

Mr. Chomlak: I am sorry. Can the Minister repeat that? I missed the numbers.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, \$1,009,549,958.00.

Mr. Chomlak: Will the Minister break that down for me into major components, please?

Mr. Derkach: I am really not sure what the Member is asking for, because what I just gave him was the total operating budgets of all the school divisions in the province.

If the Member is asking for me to table the expenditures of each school division, that is certainly something that is going to take some time and some documentation. If he could clarify his request it might be made more simple.

Mr. Chomlak: I guess I am having some problem with the arithmetic in this. I have never seen the figure of \$1.9 billion, if I can round it off.

If we say the total operating expenditures of the public school system is \$1.9 billion—

An Honourable Member: It was zero, zero, nine.

Mr. Chomlak: —\$1.009 billion, okay. I am sorry. It is \$1.009 billion. Now it is clarified. Of that, the province provides something like \$733 million including the Education Support Levy. That does not equate to 80 percent funding to me.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, if you take the \$1.009 billion and you subtract from it such things as revenues from other provincial Government sources, the federal Government, municipal Governments, other school divisions, Indian bands, private organizations and individuals, and other sources, you will have something like net operating expenditures of \$948,760,000 which is 80.1 percent.

Mr. Chomlak: Of those \$733 million, are those actual monies that are transferred from the

provincial treasury to the public school system in Manitoba?

Mr. Derkach: The three components, Madam Chair, transfers from the Government, ESL and other revenues.

Mr. Chomlak: On this point, my figures indicate that less than 70 percent or perhaps 70 percent or less is actual direct operating support from the Government of Manitoba to the public school system.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, if we take all of the calculations in accordance to how we have calculated the supportable expenditures—we are talking about supportable expenditures according to the GST—over years and you apply it in the same fashion—in other words, you do not change the criteria or the formula—so that there is a consistency in the approach, the calculations that the department comes up with for 1990-91 in supportable expenditures is 80.1 percent. Now that is assuming that you are using the same criteria, you are applying the same criteria, as you did in 1988-89, 1987-88, and so forth.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister please give me those breakdowns going back the last five years, please?

Mr. Derkach: In 1986, it was 78.7 percent. In 1987, it was 78.3 percent. In 1988, it was 77.8 percent. In 1989, it was 80.7 percent, and in 1990, it was 80.1 percent.

Mr. Chomlak: Can the Minister give me the figures as to what percentage of the 1990-91 Winnipeg School Division No. 1 budget the province will be funding?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the amount of money that Winnipeg No. 1 received last year over and above the previous year, in percentage terms, amounted to a 4.7 percent increase. The amount of support that we provide Winnipeg School Division of their total expenditure is 66.5 percent. However, that is the formal expenditures, but remember that these are supportable expenditures, and we have to keep in mind the fact that school divisions then set their priorities.

Mr. Chomlak: So the Minister is saying Winnipeg School Division No. 1 got a 4.7 percent increase, last year budget over this year's budget. Is that correct? -(interjection)- This year over last year. Does the Minister know what the rate of inflation was this year over last year?

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the time the announcement was made to the school divisions—and that is when you establish what the level of inflation is—at that point in time, the level of inflation, I believe, if my memory serves me correctly, was 4.5 or 4.55 percent, somewhere in that area—or 4.6 percent, somewhere in that area.

* (1700)

Madam Chair: Order, please. The hour is now 5 p.m. I am interrupting the proceedings for private Members' hour. The committee will return at 8 p.m. this evening.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., it is time for Private Members' Business.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

BILL 9—THE MANITOBA INTERCULTURAL

COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), Bill 9, The Manitoba Intercultural Council Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Conseil interculturel du Manitoba, standing in the name of the Honourable Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard). Stand? Is there leave that this matter remain standing? (Agreed)

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

RES. 4—ONE TIER SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis),

WHEREAS seven out of 10 provinces have established a one-tier social assistance system; and

WHEREAS Manitoba's present two-tier system allows for inadequate and inequitable levels of social assistance for unemployed employable people; and

WHEREAS the present system forces this category of eligible social assistance recipients to migrate to Winnipeg and some regional centres; and

WHEREAS many social service agencies and churches, along with concerned individual citizens, have urged the establishment of a one-tier system to remove a serious social injustice that exists presently; and

WHEREAS a one-tier system can lead to an integrated provincial program of training and employment for social assistance recipients; and

WHEREAS the majority of municipal Governments do not have the required staff to properly deal with social assistance applications or to initiate employment and training opportunities; and

WHEREAS in recent years, the federal and provincial Governments have reduced spending on a number of social programs; and

WHEREAS women are being forced to stay in abusive domestic situations because of a lack of adequate social assistance; and

WHEREAS the problem of unemployment is exacerbated by inadequate unemployment insurance rates; and

WHEREAS the use of private charitable institutions such as food banks has greatly increased, indicating a population whose needs are not being met by the deteriorating social welfare system; and

WHEREAS social services, including social assistance payments, should not be a burden on municipal property taxpayers.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Government to consider implementing a one-tier system of social assistance outside the City of Winnipeg.

Motion presented.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak on this resolution today. It is a topic that I have been working on for a number of years in my previous capacity as a United Church minister working on social justice issues. I had occasion to lobby the current and previous Governments to implement this resolution and also other recommendations from the Task Force on Social Assistance, chaired by Professor Joseph Ryant.

Only three provinces do not have a one-tier social assistance system. The others are Nova Scotia and Ontario. In Ontario, there was a similar social assistance review resulting in a report, a summary

of which was published in 1988, and recommendation No. 257 says Ontario should support the development of national standards for social assistance, especially in the area of rates and needs testing through the conditions established for federal cost sharing, so Ontario as well has looked at, and there has been a recommendation for a major change in the structure of social assistance in the Province of Ontario. The levels are very inadequate in many municipalities in Manitoba, and from time to time examples of this come forward in the media.

There was an example of a rent rate in the rural community that had not been increased for something like 15 years, and the person on assistance was finding it very difficult to find a place to rent at that level. Benefits in other municipalities similarly have not been increased for many, many years causing inequities and great hardship on individuals.

Usually there are higher rates for people on provincial rather than municipal assistance. However, you could be living in the same municipality and be living at a different rate because you are in a different category. You could be living in a small town or rural municipality and be on provincial assistance. You could be living in the same jurisdiction and be on municipal assistance. However, living in the same community, your cost of living could be identical, the cost of rent, the cost of food, the cost of clothing could be very, very similar. So what we need is a uniform system that would provide the same benefits to people living in the same communities.

* (1710)

When the task force on social assistance held hearings publicly, they received many briefs and submissions. I dug up some of those submissions that I had, and I would like to refer and quote very briefly from one of them. It was presented by the St. Boniface Diocesan Pastoral Council. This is what they said about our attitudes, which I think is appropriate in this discussion. They refer to Mother Teresa being in Winnipeg and then went on to say: Among our attitudes, a stubborn strain has been known to resist conversion. Grudgingly we provide assistance to needy people and never let them forget it afterwards, as if to say, persons on social assistance must not be allowed to rise to a normal level of self-worth and thereby enjoy what people generally take for granted. Everything has a price

tag. They pay dearly for the assistance they receive. We need conversion of the heart, a change from that bankrupt attitude to one which is genuinely human, a change which will allow us to grow accordingly to a loftier ideal of service.

Well, the problem we have with the two-tier system is that is not always possible with the levels of assistance that we have, and its societal attitudes and individual attitudes which keep people at inadequate levels.

One of the problems resulting from this is that it forces people to migrate to Winnipeg. Some municipal officials brag that they have no one on assistance in their municipality, but rates are so low that no one could support themselves and that is why there is no one on assistance. There have also been allegations that social assistance in some municipalities consists of a one-way bus ticket to Winnipeg. I see that as a sloughing off of responsibility from rural municipalities and small towns and cities outside of Winnipeg to the jurisdiction of Winnipeg when it is not necessary to force these people from their home communities.

The task force on social assistance received a brief from myself representing north end community ministry and the Church and Society Committee of Winnipeg Presbytery of the United Church. We went further than recommending a one-tier system. We recommended a national comprehensive income support program which would integrate and consolidate all existing programs. This has often been referred to as a guaranteed annual income or guaranteed adequate annual income.

There was also a brief by St. Matthew's-Maryland Community Ministry who recommended one integrated social services department. Amongst the reasons for these recommendations were research that was found by ourselves and others, including the task force, that there were gross inequities in the levels of assistance between municipalities. Therefore, a one-tier system is needed to remove these gross inequities.

Many towns and municipalities, as referred to in the resolution, have no training programs. The provincial Government, however, does have an excellent facility, the Human Resources Opportunity Centre. I have had occasion to have a tour of the Opportunity Centre. We asked the people giving us the tour what percentage of their graduates attained employment after going through that, what

appeared to be an excellent program. We were told that something like 62 percent of their graduates were gainfully employed six months after they graduated from the program. Well, people on provincial assistance are deemed unemployable, but many of them apply for the Human Resources Opportunity Centre and are accepted and enrolled there. If you are in a rural municipality or small town, you do not have this opportunity.

Surely the goal of training and employment programs is to get people off social assistance, but how can you get off social assistance if you are not eligible for these programs? So there is a need for a one-tier system in order to allow everyone who is a recipient access to employment and training programs. That is becoming more and more important as people change jobs and careers. As technological change makes certain occupations and careers obsolete, people must be retrained in order to get new employment.

The resolution also refers to municipalities not having the proper staff to deal with applications. In fact, some applications go to town councils or municipal councils. I see a major problem with that, mainly that people then no longer have confidentiality of their income information and their assets and their liabilities, and this contributes to the stigma of social assistance. I think it suggests that social assistance in these small communities is a privilege rather than a right, whereas under the Canada Assistance Plan, social assistance is a right. It is something that is guaranteed under the Canada Assistance Plan which says that Canadians shall have their basic needs for food, shelter and clothing supplied to them.

We know, and we have even heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) refer to the federal Government offloading programs to the provincial Government, cutting back on spending and expecting the province to pick it up. I guess an example of this is the cap on the Canada Assistance Plan. This is going to have an adverse effect on the poor. In general, social programs, especially by the federal Government, are under attack, but the provincial Government, if they had the political will, could play a leadership role in making up for the inadequacies of their federal counterparts.

There is a problem with the existing two-tier system for abused women. If women who are suffering from abuse leave their husbands, frequently they leave their major source of income.

What do they have to replace that income? Well, they have another source of income temporarily when they are in a shelter, but after that, social assistance. If the social assistance is totally inadequate then we are condemning women to stay in abusive situations.

Increasing numbers of people are finding that their unemployment insurance is running out, and therefore they are forced to go on social assistance. When people lose their jobs they need an adequate source of income to replace unemployment insurance and a job.

Some people have philosophical difficulty with people going on social assistance at all, and they would claim—and this is one of the myths regarding people on welfare—that once they start to collect benefits most people never leave the welfare roles. This myth was attacked and rebutted in the report of the Social Assistance Review Committee, and the statistics that they found were quite interesting.

I quote from page 14: Social assistance recipients leave the system more frequently and more quickly than people realize. Employable recipients remain dependent upon assistance for an average of seven months. Forty percent leave the system after three months. Single parents average between three and four years on assistance. The average stay for recipients with disabilities is slightly more than five years. So contrary to the popular mythology, people do not go on social assistance once and forever. The turnover rate is quite good in terms of people going on assistance and then going off again, and getting gainful employment or another source of income.

The resolution refers to the increasing use of food banks as proof of an inadequate social assistance system. In 1984 in the City of Winnipeg there were no food banks until Winnipeg Harvest Incorporated began. I had thought that they had approximately 150 outlets for their food in the City of Winnipeg, and I phoned them to verify this information and discovered that there are 175 places in Winnipeg, churches and social service agencies, which are handing out food on behalf of Winnipeg Harvest food bank. Surveys have been done to survey the users and see what their income is, and the results, which I have referred to before, are very interesting and quite conclusive. That is that a very large number of people whose income is less than \$7,000 a year are forced to rely on food bank outlets to supplement their income, and that when you go over

\$21,000 a year in income, almost no one is making use of food banks.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, there is a great need for a one-tier social assistance system. It is something that was recommended by the Task Force on Social Assistance in their report. I believe it was made public in 1983 or maybe 1984, something which the previous Government was committed to doing for people outside the City of Winnipeg.

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Member would submit to a question.

Mr. Martindale: Yes, I would.

Mr. Downey: Does the Member have support of the Union of Municipalities and all the municipal corporations on the proposal which he is advancing to the Legislature?

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of what the policy is of rural municipalities and urban municipalities outside the City of Winnipeg. However, I have started to read the report of the Social Assistance Review Committee of the Government, of the Members opposite, and it does recommend that there be changes to make uniform rates of assistance and uniform rates or criteria for applying for social assistance. I do not think this report goes nearly far enough, but at least they have made a small step of recognizing the problem.

* (1720)

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is something which is long overdue. It is something that has been recommended. The previous Government announced that they were going to move in this direction, but I doubt very much if this Government is going to move in this direction, because philosophically I do not think they see a problem in having a two-tier system. They are quite happy to maintain the status quo which is having gross inequities between municipalities and levels of benefit.

If they were to move on this report, there might be some small progress and I would give them credit for any progress that they would make, but I would still recommend that this resolution pass today and that we implement a one-tier system of social assistance in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Reg Alcock (Osborne): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to be able to rise today and speak on this issue, because it is an issue that I have had some interest in for some time. I wish to speak in modified—shall I say a qualified?—support of the resolution put forward by the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale).

I would like to start maybe by responding to the question raised by the Member for Arthur (Mr. Downey) who asked whether or not there was universal support for this resolution.

I guess my first approach to answering that question would be to say that sometimes Governments have to provide leadership and sometimes we have to set an example for the community and educate the community, and in those municipalities where there is not support for such a move, I think they should examine the reasons behind their current income-support policy.

I would like to share with the House two experiences, one which the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) will recall, but let me preface it first by talking about an experience I had at Harvest food bank some time ago where I met a woman who is a volunteer there, who is close in age to myself, has a couple of young children and who volunteers regularly at the food bank because it was not that long time ago that she was a recipient of food from that food bank.

She grew up in a professional family, was well-educated, got married, had two kids, lived in a nice middle-class house in a well-to-do suburb of this city. She was not what one thinks of when one thinks of an income security recipient, but she found herself in need of financial support after a divorce, after things began to fall apart for her, and after the pressure of trying to cope with life after the divorce. With all the pressures that she had to face just putting together some basic income for her to live on and to support her kids, she had to go on assistance for a while. She needed, because of the inadequacy of the support that was provided at that time, assistance from Harvest Food Bank just to get by.

I say that in part to preface the remarks I made about the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans). Back in the early '80s, as we were looking at changes in Child and Family Services, there was some surveying done on public attitudes towards these services. One of the things that the Member

may remember we discovered was an enormous amount of support in the community for these services, not because of the traditional sense of noblesse oblige, or let us help those poor folks over there some place, but in fact a sense now that families and particularly women have that they no longer can rely on traditional solutions to support. In fact, a great many people who have traditionally viewed themselves as not needing to access those supports now find themselves as having to access those supports.

The question is, when we look at providing support to people in need, what kind of community do we want to build? What kind of future do we want to create for ourselves should we be in need of these services, and if for ourselves, why not for everybody? Why should we be building a system that says, if you live in one area of the province, you somehow are entitled to a different level of support or different level of consideration by the public representative, by the Government of this province, than if you live somewhere else?

I think it is really important to keep in mind a couple of things when we consider income support programs. One is that despite all sorts of rhetoric about abuse and those people who misuse these services, when the current Government went in and studied the income support program, they discovered that abuse in this program was less than 1 percent. They could not find more than—in fact, it was less than a full percentage point in the cases that they reviewed. I think any business that functioned with only a 1 percent error factor would think that it was doing a pretty fine job, and I think our income support system is doing a pretty fine job delivering support to those people that are most in need.

(Mrs. Rosemary Vodrey, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

There are a couple of ways to deal with problems if you are in a small community. We have two examples that exist right now in small communities in this province. We have the example set by the home community of the Minister for Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer), Minnedosa, and that set by Flin Flon and Thompson, apparently. Both communities are experiencing high rates of vandalism. One community, Minnedosa, passes a curfew and excludes those people that are causing problems in the community from the community. Flin Flon and Thompson, on the other hand, identifying the same

problem, excessive levels of vandalism by youth in the community, immediately reach out to the Boys and Girls Club of Winnipeg and invite them up there to see if they cannot find solutions in their community to those problems that are putting pressure on that community.

I think that there is an interesting example, there is an interesting bit of learning in that. You can reach out, and you can include people in your community. You can support all people in your community, and you can develop a more caring, more supportive community, or you can push people out. You can say, we do not want them here, we do not want those kind of folks with us. I think, frankly, when the Minister of Arthur references the attitudes of some of the small municipalities, what he is referencing is an attitude that wants to hide a problem, that wants to exclude it, that wants not to share in solving that problem. I think that is wrong. I think, as a Legislature and as a Government, we should stand against that.

There are some principles that were stated in the Ryant Report, and the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) spoke about making a presentation to that report. I also made a presentation. Unfortunately, at that time, I was a new provincial civil servant and was not aware of the fact that civil servants did not make public presentations to a task force. I got my knuckles and other parts of my body rapped. What I was concerned about and what I spoke on was how our system tended to disregard people and tended to drop people off, as I described it, a cliff when you turned a certain age, or how it was full of cracks that people were able to fall between. I was pleased by the work done by Professor Ryant and the committee, and I would like just to review, for the record, the principles that they put forward because I think they are important.

One of the things that they spoke about was the principle of normalization. A principle that said, if you are accessing these services, you are going to access them in as normalized a fashion as possible, that you should be provided support in a way that allows you to function as a normal member of the community. What we want is integration and growth; we do not want separation.

I suspect the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Vodrey) will have some understanding of that in the work that she has done, that if you are going to help people develop strengths and become contributing members of a community, you must help them find

the means to function within that community. The principle of normalization is an important one.

There is an interesting project taking place right now in Ramsey County, Minnesota, just south of us, where they are now delivering income support through the banking system. People are issued bank cards in much the same way that anybody else is who takes advantage of an electronic access code. So, instead of having to draw food stamps or go down to the welfare office to receive their support, they are able to access it in the same way anybody else accesses their financial support. They are able "not" to be stigmatized because they are on some kind of community support.

* (1730)

The other principle that the Ryant Report identified was that of adequacy. It said that you have got to provide people adequate levels of support so they can meet the nutritional needs, so that they can live in some sort of dignified manner within the community. If you want them to go to school, if you want them to learn a new trade, if you want them to raise their kids in an appropriate manner, if you want to relieve from them the sort of tensions that lead to excessive abuse of alcohol or child abuse or any of the other ills that are directly associated with low income—and there is no other factor in our community that associates so directly with social problems as low income—if you want to ease those burdens, you have to provide people with an adequate level of support. These are the poorest and the most vulnerable people in our society, and we must not burden them further.

Simplification—we have a need, it seems, when we build systems to make them excessively complicated and excessively detailed almost in a—I do not think it is in any intention to provide more work for civil service, but that seems to be what results—that we build systems that are so horrendously complex to take into consideration every possible flaw in this system, that we build a system that is so complex that the needs of people get excluded and the needs of the system become paramount. So there is another principle that Dr. Ryant put forward, that of simplification. Make the rules of the system clear, make them easy to understand and allow people ease of access to the programs.

Equity is one issue that gets raised when you talk about a two-tier system. Why is it that a person in

one area of the province receives different treatment from social support services than a person in another area of the province?

I was interested to note though, in the resolution, that the Member says, in the THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Manitoba Government consider implementing a one-tier system of social assistance outside the City of Winnipeg. Now, I am not certain whether that was intended or whether that was just a mistake in the drafting of it. I would presume we would have a one-tier system throughout the province, that we would not maintain—(interjection)—what is that? The Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans), who has some considerable experience in this matter, says it is a matter of \$25 million—(interjection)—and now the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) made a gratuitous statement about the qualities of the stewardship of the Member for Brandon East.

I can tell the Member for Arthur-Virden, having worked for two Ministers in Community Services, that the Member for Brandon East was indeed a fine Minister and, I thought, worked very hard to make some very positive changes in a very difficult system.

Now, the principle that we are talking about is one of equity, and if we are talking about equity, if we are talking about the right to equal treatment, then surely we have to talk about a single delivery system. Yes, we can tailor it because there are some differences in costs, but there should be a clearly stated province-wide—frankly, I would support a call on the part of anyone for a national system, because I do not think Canadians should be treated—in the same way, I do not think I should be treated any differently in Toronto than I am here. I do not think I should be treated any differently if I live in Minnedosa or if I live here.

Another principle that was cited in the Ryant Report was one of independence, that as much as possible, they said, income support programs should promote independence; they should allow people to develop their own source of support; they should allow people to become free of the supports that the community provides for them, that we should build in the training programs and the other opportunities for one to gain skills and abilities that allow one to become truly independent and self-supporting.

Another principle that they talked about was that of comprehensiveness. Anybody who has worked in social services knows how badly this set of services is splintered, how many children, women and dependent adults fall between program cracks.

The Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer) and I had a discussion about one such case just a little while ago where a young man, who was brought out of his home when he was a child because he needed certain health and education services, was supported by the health system, ended up with nobody really having responsibility for him. Was it going to be Education; was it going to be Community Services? Is it going to be Health; is it going to be Family Services? That situation arises all the time. Because of the poor definition of jurisdictional boundaries, a certain number of people get missed regularly. I think that is an indictment of our system and one that should be corrected.

A social support and income support program should be comprehensive. It should provide a level of support to all people who require it, and we should stop playing the kind of silly games that are played right now between the Department of Health, the Department of Education, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Community Services. I think it is to the detriment of all staff and, frankly, to the budget of this province, because it consumes time unnecessarily and escalates costs in a way that is completely unnecessary to the task at hand. If there is anything that this Government can do in its term, if it can break down those barriers between departments and provide a broader base of support for people who require it, it will have accomplished a great deal.

The final principle—and it is related to the last one I just spoke on of comprehensiveness—is one of program linkage, and it speaks to exactly that. There are support services that are provided by the Department of Education, by probation, by Health, as well as by Community Services, and we need to have better co-ordination among those various services if we are to serve people in the best manner possible. I think that there is a much broader issue here than simply the funding of income security. I think a fundamental issue here is sending a message to the community about what we believe—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Vodrey): The Honourable Member's time has expired.

Mr. Alcock: Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker.

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Family Services): Madam Acting Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the resolution for the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) and to bring him up to date on our Government's response to this matter of the division of responsibility for social assistance in Manitoba.

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

As Members will recall, the historical origins of social assistance in our province have resulted in our present-day system in which the provincial Government is responsible for the delivery of social allowances to persons throughout the province who are likely to be in the long-term need. These are largely disabled persons and sole-support parents. The municipal level of Government—and there are about 200 of these municipal Governments—are responsible for assistance to persons more likely to be in short-term need, unemployed employable persons living within the jurisdiction of that municipality. The province, of course, provides cost sharing for municipal assistance programs.

In this system in our province, the provincial Government and each municipality establishes its own policies, including eligibility criteria and benefit levels. This has allowed the municipal Governments to establish assistance programs which respond to what we call "local conditions" and to develop expertise in handling the employable caseload in their particular area. Of course, it has raised the concern that the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) has enunciated regarding the adequacy and the equity of benefit levels and the availability of assistance under the current municipal assistance program.

Despite the fact that municipal assistance rates have generally improved in recent years, our Government has also expressed concerns about inconsistencies, and on taking office in 1988, we have made a commitment to undertake to correct this problem. Further to that commitment, our Government has undertaken and will continue a consultative review process with the municipalities, and this consultation has already started and is ongoing. We anticipate that this process will result in the provision of adequate and equitable assistance to all Manitobans in need through a solution acceptable to both levels of Government.

I would emphasize that I think it is important that our Government and the municipal Government have a dialogue and reach an understanding on this issue instead of simply trying to establish it from this level.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the establishment of a one-tier system in which the province would be responsible for the administration of all assistance, which is essentially what the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) is calling for in his resolution, is only one alternative for addressing these inconsistencies. I would remind the Member for Burrows that when the previous administration proposed the imposition of a one-tier system it was strongly resisted by the municipalities which had not been consulted about the Government's plans for their assistance program.

Instead of imposing a one-tier system on the municipalities, our Government has been committed from the start to resolve the issue of inconsistencies in the two-tier system through consultation with the municipal level of Government.

Because it is acknowledged that uniform standards can also be achieved through regulation, we propose to focus on the effective provision of service through continued delivery by the municipalities and the development of uniform regulations governing the provision of assistance. To that end, we established a Social Assistance Review Committee in April of 1989. This committee was created to provide municipal Governments with a means of presenting the Government of Manitoba with their perspective on social allowance.

Representatives from the UMM, the Association of Urban Municipalities, the Manitoba Municipal Administrators Association and the City of Winnipeg comprise this committee. Staff from my department, from Rural Development and from Urban Affairs were made available to the committee to facilitate the support of this consultation.

* (1740)

The committee's consultations involved three aspects of Social Assistance reform, and this is essentially what we are talking about, reforming assistance. The three aspects that were discussed were: The extent of municipal assistance regulation; the level at which benefits should be set for the municipal programs; and the manner in which the costs of municipal assistance should be shared

between the municipality and the Province of Manitoba.

The Social Assistance Review Committee has completed its consultations and presented its report to Government at the end of 1989. Government has since distributed this report to Members of Cabinet, to MLAs, to municipalities and other interest groups for information and for comment. Our Government is now in the process of reviewing the report. It is my expectation that our Government's consultation and review process will soon result in some of the changes that the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) is indicating and allow us to achieve equity and fairness for all who are accessing this social allowance system.

I would like to also address a number of other concerns that were raised in the resolution, first of all, the Member's contention that a one-tier system could lead to an integrated provincial program of training and employment for social assistance recipients. In that respect, I would note that the province has maintained a close collaboration in the development and implementation of employability options for municipal recipients. The province also provides support to community-based employment and training initiatives which are targeted to a cross-section of social assistance recipients, both provincial and municipal.

I would also strongly counter the Member's false contention that under the two-tier system women are forced to stay in abusive domestic situations because of a lack of adequate social assistance. Our Government has already taken action to resolve the problems, ones present in the sole-support parent component of the municipal assistance program. In response to a recommendation of our Women's Initiative which conducted the public consultation process, on January 1, 1990, the province assumed responsibility for providing assistance to all sole-support parents in need irrespective of the length of separation from their spouses. This new policy also streamlined the process of obtaining social assistance for single-parent families during the early weeks of separation, a time which is already very stressful for them.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I particularly want to address the Member's erroneous premise in his resolution that this Government has reduced spending on social programs. Speaking for my Department of Family Services, which delivers and funds social

services, with the exception of health services in our province, I would point out to the Member that our Government's funding for social service through this department has consistently increased by substantial amounts since we took office in 1988.

Our commitment to increased funding support for services such as social assistance, child and family services, wife abuse prevention and services to the disabled is evident. The budget increases received by this particular department in the last three years are among the highest, a clear indication of the priority that we place on this department and on Manitoba families.

We would certainly like to see more help in this area from the federal Government, but our own commitment in this area of responsibility is quite clear. Our Government will continue to do everything in its power to obtain the required assistance from the federal Government to keep our province's excellent social programming strong and effective.

I would assure the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), that our Government places a high priority on supporting measures that protect the social security of Manitobans and Manitoba families. Our record of action in this regard is one that we are proud of. We will continue to act when necessary to enhance the systems of support for Manitobans.

I would encourage the Member for Burrows and his colleagues to possibly attend the UMM convention next week and talk to many of the councillors and reeves that are responsible for the program in their various jurisdictions. As I indicated earlier, there are some 200 municipal Governments that certainly are players in the game and need to be consulted. I think, simply by this level of Government passing a resolution and taking action on it will not go down well with that level of Government. I reflect again back to the previous Government when, very unilaterally, they determined that they were going to do away with the present system and put in a one-tier system.

So I would urge him to attend that convention to talk to reeves and municipal councillors to get feedback from people who are in the front line, people who have been dealing with this issue.
-(interjection)-

Well, the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) is reflecting on the judgment of municipal

councillors and does not feel that they have any input into this. I can tell you that Members on this side have a good deal of respect for municipal councillors and reeves, and their judgment, and I think by simply by-passing them, not giving them the opportunity to participate, is a mistake.

I think probably if the Member for Brandon East would reflect on that he would recall just the outcry that came from the municipalities when that decision was made.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, while some of the issues that the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) has raised are legitimate, I think the process is where we differ. Instead of ramming through a centrally-decided policy on social assistance, we are prepared to consult with the municipalities, work with them to try and bring forward a resolution that is satisfactory to them, as well as to us, and our consultation is ongoing with them.

We hope, in due course, in the near future, we will be able to bring about some of the changes that he envisages in this particular resolution. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

House Business

Hon. Clayton Manness (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I rise and wonder whether or not I may have the consent of the House to revert to House Business?

Mr. Speaker: Does the Honourable Government House Leader have leave for House Business? Agreed.

Mr. Manness: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the statements of the Chairpersons of both sections of the Committee of Supply, I would like to ask if there is unanimous consent of the House to reconvene at 8 p.m. with Mr. Speaker in the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: Would there be leave? Agreed? Agreed at 8 p.m. with Mr. Speaker in the Chair.

* * *

Mr. Martindale : Mr. Speaker, would the Minister entertain a question or two?

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Minister had two minutes remaining. Yes.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister what evidence he could suggest for the fact that consultation with the municipalities will lead to adequacy and equitability. It seems to me that if you

consult someone that they can always say, no we see it differently, and refuse to bring in rates that are adequate or equitable. What would the Minister say to that line of reasoning?

Mr. Gilleshammer : Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that consultation involves a two-way process. Perhaps the Member's view of consultation is simply to run something past them and then pass legislation and do away with the two-tier system. Our concept of consultation is not simply to have our way, but to listen to these people.

As I indicated a few minutes ago, these are people who are on the front lines in the municipalities, they are at the grass-roots level of Government, and who interact with citizens of this province and also provide citizens who live in those municipalities with the opportunity to consult with their Government. Consultation is a two-way street.

We meet regularly with the UMM people to hear the results of the UMM convention and to meet with their executive director and councillors from across the province and the consultation is ongoing.

I have heard Members of the UMM speak on many occasions, as well as the Urban Association, that they appreciate the access they have to Government, to meet with Cabinet Ministers and to put forward items that are passed at their meetings.

So I think the Member is taking a pretty narrow view of consultation if you simply hold a meeting and then you pass whatever legislation you want.

You know, Members on this side are pretty proud of the rapport and the manner in which we have been able to deal with members of the UMM and MAUM, and again I would invite him to meet with UMM members next week when they have their convention here in Winnipeg.

I think you will see that there is a very good working relationship that exists between the two levels of Government and that consultation is not only important from our perspective, where we are able to hear what this grass-roots level of Government has to say, it is also one of mutual respect and that the fears the Member has, that the consultation process is all one way, are ill-founded.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this matter which—

An Honourable Member: It is very important.

* (1750)

Mr. Downey: It is important. I think it is important that the Member bring forward resolutions that he is serious about and that the Opposition Members are serious about, but what I am extremely disappointed in is that the Member and the ones who should take the responsibility for coming forward without having consulted with the major organization in the province are the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) and the so-called experienced Member sitting on the side of the NDP.

He knew how controversial this issue was and the subject was and all he has done is try to undermine one of his back-bench Members by allowing this kind of resolution to come forward without a proper consultation with the communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) is about to learn a lesson in municipal activities and politics dealing with municipal people. Why would he ignore the largest representative of grass-roots people when it comes to bringing a resolution to this Legislature, and not having their support or at least—I do not say he should have to have their support—consulted with them in a meaningful way? Is that the way he would operate as a Government?

The heavy hand of the NDP is being demonstrated here today by the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) who brought this resolution forward without having full consultation with one of the major players, the major givers or providers, of a program.

It is a clear demonstration of the kind of Government that we have had over the past number of years. Again, demonstrated by the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) and the former Attorney General when they removed the RCMP from rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

That head-in-the-sand approach, make the decision in Winnipeg, do not consult with the people, just use the heavy hand of the NDP and strip them of the services there provided in the essential services area.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) should be real proud of himself and the manner in which he handled rural Manitoba and the removal of the RCMP.

I cannot believe that the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) would not have had direction or more accurate direction from the Member for Brandon

East (Mr. Leonard Evans). He walked into this particular political problem three or four years ago—

An Honourable Member: Decades ago!

Mr. Downey: Decades ago, and yet he did not have the courtesy to warn his back bench as to where he was headed with this resolution.

I can see that the NDP Caucus is blowing apart because they have not been able to internally co-ordinate an activity that would consult with the most important municipal body that this province has. That is the Union of Manitoba Municipalities, or the urban association, Mr. Speaker.

Is that the way this Member would proceed to continue to govern this Province of Manitoba? The heavy-handed administration of the New Democratic Party, central planning of the Politburo, that would advance policies onto the backs of the people of Manitoba without giving one care or concern as to the impact on those individuals.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let me deal for a minute with the progressive move that was made a year ago by our Government when it came to the delivery of social services and the advancing of funds for, particularly single people, single family members who needed up-front money to deal with the situation that was there on their doorsteps.

My former colleague, the Member for Gladstone, advanced legislation or regulation that would in fact deal with those who were in need within the system. It was done after full consultation was done with those people who are the grass-roots representatives in rural and urban Manitoba.

Again, it was done in a positive light, dealing with those recipients of social services, social payments, that had to be done and done immediately.

We are not insensitive to the needs of those recipients of social programs—in fact, very much the opposite. We do not do it without totally disregarding the people who are out there at another level of Government. No, we do not do it.

I can tell you there is clear evidence how this Member would operate as a Member of Government. How heavy-handed would he be given the rules or responsibility of being in Government? I think it is very, very scary, as demonstrated by this resolution, as to how this person from Burrows, who should be sensitive to the human needs of people and the fact that they should —(interjection)—Particularly this Member.

One would have to question what his motives really are, and how he would establish his direction as a Government Member.

With the whole question of being sincere, I have no difficulty. I am sure the individual was sincere, but to move unilaterally without having the community, who is part of it, fully informed is—

An Honourable Member: It is the influence of big-bad Len.

Mr. Downey: That is correct. It is the influence, and he was taken in by the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) who got burnt politically so badly on this that he considered not even running again in the last election. That is how badly he got burnt with this political issue.

It was certainly a sympathetic vote that he got that brought him back in, and being the Minister Responsible for Seniors I can appreciate the fact that he did get the sympathy vote in Brandon East. They wanted him to continue on in his capacity. —(interjection)—

I respect the Member for Brandon East and his constituents, who certainly have stood behind him—why, I do not know—over these past many years. It certainly is the fact as to what has happened.

Again, I want all the new Members to be aware of the fact that when a resolution is brought forward to the Legislature, it is in fact a clear indication not only as to what the content of the resolution is but as to how it is proceeded with.

I could refer to one of last year's legislative packages that came in from the former Member for Assiniboia, which was dealing with—well, the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux).

I am sorry if it brought memories back to him of the tremendous numbers that they achieved overnight in the Legislature. I am not criticizing the individual, but the content of one of the resolutions lacked sincerity.

It is a demonstration as to when you come to this Legislature, it is an important thing to do when you bring it forward to have the support of a broad base of people, broad constituency, and that the subject matter is sincere.

I do not question his sincerity, and I say that very seriously, as I do not question the sincerity of my colleague, who is the current Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer), who is doing an

excellent job in a very tough portfolio, and I think handling each daily issue with the kind of responsible attitude that the Government expects him to, and that the public expect him to. I think it is pretty key. It is pretty key.

The reason I say this, particularly as a new Minister, what he has done is he has gone into the communities, he has met with the caregivers, he has met with the organizational people in the communities one on one, asking them what they would believe in, and what they feel.

As he would indicate to you that before moving on such a resolution, he would have at least had the courtesy to go to the union and municipalities and

talk to them about the resolution that is being proposed.

For the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) to totally ignore that grass-roots body is an unforgivable act on his part, and he will have a lot of hard work to do at the union and municipalities meeting next week to go and to say to them—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the Honourable Minister will have six minutes remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is now recessed until 8 p.m. at which time Mr. Speaker will be in the Chair.

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

Tuesday, November 13, 1990 - 1:30 p.m.

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