



Fourth Session - Thirty-Fifth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)**

41 Elizabeth II

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Speaker*



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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
CARSTAIRS, Sharon	River Heights	Liberal
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	NDP
CHEEMA, Gulzar	The Maples	Liberal
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	NDP
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, Clif	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
GRAY, Avis	Crescentwood	Liberal
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
MANNESSE, Clayton, Hon.	Morris	PC
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	NDP
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	PC
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	PC
NEUFELD, Harold	Rossmere	PC
ORCHARD, Donald, Hon.	Pembina	PC
PALLISTER, Brian	Portage la Prairie	PC
PENNER, Jack	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, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
STORIE, Jerry	Flin Flon	NDP
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	PC
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	PC
WASYLYCIA-LEIS, Judy	St. Johns	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	NDP
<i>Vacant</i>	Rupertsland	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 22, 1993

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Bertha Flett, Rod Flett, Joseph Pangman and others requesting the Family Services minister (Mr. Gilleshammer) consider restoring funding for the friendship centres of Manitoba.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Norman R. Fleury, Dennis Johnstone, Leo Chartrand and many others requesting the Family Services minister (Mr. Gilleshammer) consider restoring funding for the friendship centres in Manitoba.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: I have been advised by the honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Cheema) that he no longer wishes to proceed with his petition, and since his petition now is a House document, is there leave of the House to remove the petition of the honourable member for The Maples?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: That is agreed. I would like to thank all honourable members.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member (Ms. Wowchuk). It complies with the privileges and the practices of the House and complies with the rules. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read? [agreed]

Mr. Clerk (William Remnant): The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth that:

WHEREAS the United Nations has declared 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People with the theme, "Indigenous People: a new partnership"; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has totally discontinued funding to all friendship centres; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has stated that these cuts mirror the federal cuts; and

WHEREAS the elimination of all funding to friendship centres will result in the loss of many jobs as well as the services and programs provided, such as: assistance to the elderly, the homeless, youth programming, the socially disadvantaged, families in crisis, education, recreation and cultural programming, housing relocation, fine options, counselling, court assistance, advocacy;

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Family Services minister to consider restoring funding for the friendship centres in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member (Mr. Martindale). It complies with the privileges and the practices of the House and complies with the rules. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read? [agreed]

Mr. Clerk: The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth that:

WHEREAS the United Nations has declared 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People with the theme, "Indigenous People: a new partnership"; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has totally discontinued funding to all friendship centres; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has stated that these cuts mirror the federal cuts; and

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WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Family Services minister to

consider restoring funding for the friendship centres in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member (Mr. Santos). It complies with the privileges and the practices of the House and complies with the rules. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read? [agreed]

Mr. Clerk: The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth that:

WHEREAS the United Nations has declared 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People with the theme, "Indigenous People: a new partnership"; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has totally discontinued funding to all friendship centres; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has stated that these cuts mirror the federal cuts; and

WHEREAS the elimination of all funding to friendship centres will result in the loss of many jobs as well as the services and programs provided, such as: assistance to the elderly, the homeless, youth programming, the socially disadvantaged, families in crisis, education, recreation and cultural programming, housing relocation, fine options, counselling, court assistance, advocacy;

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Family Services minister to consider restoring funding for the friendship centres in Manitoba.

* (1335)

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Sixth Annual Report of the Manitoba Hazardous Waste Management Corporation for the year 1992.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the second State of the Environment Report for Manitoba, 1993.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I have a ministerial statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, today I wish to announce changes to the Prescription Drugs Cost Assistance Program, commonly known as Pharmacare. Before I advise the House of the changes to the regulations, I would

like to remind the members of the reason for Pharmacare, which has been in place since 1975.

It is a program designed to assist Manitobans with financial costs resulting from prescription drug therapy to meet medical needs. It was not intended, Sir, to provide for duplicate benefits to individuals, nor to stimulate nonmedical increases in the utilization or purchase of prescription drugs or the demand for more expensive drugs solely for the purpose of attaining additional financial benefits.

Mr. Speaker, this is a program which cost the taxpayers of Manitoba \$4.3 million in 1975 and has grown to a \$50-million-a-year program. As these figures illustrate, this is a significant program for Manitobans and one that has been of increasing benefit.

Today, I wish to inform the House that Pharmacare receipts will be issued for the cash value of the prescription only. This will mean the program will continue to provide Pharmacare benefits to residents of Manitoba but will prohibit anyone from receiving duplicate reimbursement from Pharmacare. Simply put, Mr. Speaker, the change in regulation will prohibit duplicate claims for prescription drugs.

Pharmacare will curtail the current practice of providing refunds to employers who may have a negotiated benefit for 100 percent coverage of drug costs. Current provisions will be grandfathered to the end of the Pharmacare year during which the negotiated contract expires. Obviously, this change may have an impact on future contract negotiations.

Pharmacists throughout the province will be notified of the amendment which is intended to accomplish the following: to prohibit duplicate reimbursement of drug claims by Manitoba Pharmacare; to ensure that the official Manitoba Pharmacare receipt is issued only for the amount paid by the eligible person.

A key component of the changes to the regulation is the information which will be provided on the official receipt. It will no longer indicate the prescription price, but will show the amount paid by the eligible person. If the individual pays nothing, then the receipt must indicate that the amount paid was nothing.

In addition to notifying all pharmacists, private insurers will be advised of the changes. This will ensure that administrative changes can be made to

eliminate duplicate costs, particularly at a time of scarce resources to fund provincial drug, health and other programs.

The insurers will be offered two options: 1. That the official Manitoba Pharmacare receipt can be submitted to and retained by Pharmacare and will not be available to the private insurer; or 2. If the receipt is submitted to the private insurer, it is stamped to indicate it has been processed and at what level of benefit prior to its being sent to Pharmacare.

* (1340)

In conclusion, I want to reiterate there should be no opportunity for personal gain nor should money from taxpayer-supported programs be used to enhance or offset the benefits achieved through negotiations. Taxpayer-supported programs such as Pharmacare can only be maintained, Sir, if they are accessed fairly and equitably by all Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Mr. Speaker, I note that it is somewhat surprising that the minister should stand up and talk about changes in regulations in one aspect to Pharmacare. When the minister delists drugs, when the minister cuts off the accessibility of the people of Manitoba to get Pharmacare drugs and when the minister cuts people off Pharmacare, we hear not a peep from the minister and they try to slip it through.

It is a welcome change, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps the minister from now on, when he changes regulations that significantly affect the lives of Manitobans and the rights of Manitobans to health care services and access of those services, maybe he will announce it in this House and announce it to the people of Manitoba, which will provide them with an opportunity of knowing what this government is doing, how this government is introducing user fees, and how this government is cutting back over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the statement of the minister, I know it is a change in regulation, something that the minister—I understand he had the opportunity to do some changes for several years and did not do that. We, on this side of the House, look for this government to continue our Pharmacare program and not to cut it back as they have done in the last little while.

We are getting dozens of calls in our office weekly, Mr. Speaker, about the government position with respect to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the government is sensitive about their floundering in Pharmacare and about the kind of calls that they are getting on Pharmacare, from their comments that are coming across the way.

I would welcome this government—if this minister would now start issuing some public statements about what is happening in health care, because this is a first, we welcome the opportunity of the minister actually announcing a regulation in this House, something that has not been done in the past and has been avoided by this minister time and time again.

It is also ironic that this government brings in legislation dealing with contractual arrangements that have been entered into between parties, when this government is probably guilty—the first government in Canadian history to remove the rights of people in collective agreements, to remove their rights in terms of The Labour Relations Act in the form of legislation that is before this House. This government cannot negotiate so they run the laws by legislation and by regulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gulzar Cheema (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased to respond to this announcement.

Mr. Speaker, when the issue of Pharmacare problems came up about three or four weeks ago, at that time the media brought to our attention that the issue has been there for a number of years, but the issue is of fairness to all Manitobans.

We are very pleased that the government has come up with this proposal, because that will finally establish a fairness for all people. As the minister has said in his conclusion, the Pharmacare program, any socially funded program, is based on the premise that taxpayers are paying so that each one of us has equal access on an equal basis. So we are very pleased. Also, we are very pleased that the government is going to honour their commitment for the present contract. When the new contract is going to come, then the union can negotiate that part.

Mr. Speaker, this announcement really tells us that things are changing. Now we have seen by this move, plus the triplicate prescription program, the new program the services commission is going to start with the College of Physicians and Surgeons to establish a program where drug abuse can be cut, and that will also save some money. All those things will help, ultimately, to achieve what we all agreed to two weeks ago, to set up a Pharmacare resolution which was supported by all the parties.

Mr. Speaker, it is a very positive announcement. It was overdue and the minister and the government have finally come up with it. I think other provinces are having a good look at how we are dealing with health care in Manitoba, so we are very pleased, and I am sure Manitobans will be very pleased. They will be at ease to see the Pharmacare program where we are spending \$50 million. I will point out that, as of 1984 and 1985, Pharmacare is the only program which has gone higher than any other program out of \$1.8 billion.

* (1345)

Mr. Speaker, we have to make sure that we protect our program. We have to make sure that all people of Manitoba who need the medication, in the long run, we will be able to protect them. I do not think anybody should be taken for a ride or for advantage for too long and the government has done the right thing. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 207—The Environmental Bill of Rights Act

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin), that Bill 207, The Environmental Bill of Rights Act; Loi sur la déclaration des droits en matière d'environnement, be introduced and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Speaker, I have been looking forward to introducing this bill, and I have a draft with me. The purpose of this environmental rights legislation is to ensure that citizens can act on behalf of the environment. A lot of thought has gone into this bill to ensure that responsibility is placed where it belongs.

One of the provisions in the bill that is most important will be whistle blowing, strengthening the

provisions that will allow workers to have action taken when their health in the workplace and in the community generally is threatened. Mr. Speaker, many people do not realize that already our environmental legislation is reactive to complaints, and this would strengthen people's ability to act on behalf of the environment. The purpose of the bill is to shift the balance of power which is so necessary to put power into the hands of citizens who are taking leadership and setting the stage for change in our economy.

In closing, just let me say that this is an important piece of legislation. It has been introduced similarly in other provinces, and it is time that this provincial government would take steps to lead on environmental legislation and not follow. I hope all members of the House will give the bill serious consideration and support.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, may I direct the attention of honourable members to the gallery, where we have this afternoon from Kelvin Christian School thirty-two Grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. John Buikema. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship (Mrs. Mitchelson).

Also this afternoon, from the Joseph Wolinsky School, we have thirty-three Grade 11 students under the direction of Ms. Linda Connor. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylcia-Leis).

Also this afternoon, from the Red River Community College, we have 25 journalism students under the direction of Mr. Donald Benham. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett).

On behalf of all honourable members, I would like to welcome you all here this afternoon.

* (1350)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Immigrant Investor Fund Audit Release

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey).

Mr. Speaker, in March of 1991, we asked the government to investigate the situation with the Immigrant Investor Fund in the province of Manitoba. In August of 1992, the minister then commissioned a consultant to review the Immigrant Investor Fund based on allegations that had come to the attention of his department.

Mr. Speaker, the report that the minister released in early January of this year indicates that: The provincial government is charged with the responsibility of determining economic benefit and impact for the proposed investments. Our review has indicated a general lack of hard economic analysis and documentation on the specific investment proposals outside of the information provided by the promoters.

My question to the Deputy Premier is: They have asked for five more audits of five specific funds. Will the government release those audits today and let Manitobans know the status of those investigations?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): As I have responded on previous occasions in this House to a similar question, I indicated that once we receive all five audits, we will be making a public statement at that time and making appropriate information available.

To date, we do not have all five audits, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Doer: I would ask the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey) whether the scope of the audits and the scope of the information will be released to the public of Manitoba.

Will it include the disposition of funds produced by the provincial or federal government to the various projects that were co-sponsored by the Immigrant Investor Fund, for example, grants made by the provincial and federal governments through the federal-provincial tourism grants? Will it include the disposition of those public funds in those audits, and will we know how the disposition of those funds have taken place when the minister releases his five audits?

Mr. Stefanson: I believe, Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition well knows, the five audits—and I have outlined the five programs that are being audited to this House before—revolves around the distribution of the Immigrant Investor proceeds, all aspects, from the original approval

right through to the final distribution and completion of the project.

So the short answer is, the focus is clearly on the distribution of the Immigrant Investor Program funds, Mr. Speaker.

Hong Kong Securities Commission Code of Conduct

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): I am very disappointed in the minister's answer, that he would not say or give us the assurance today that the disposition of public funds in projects that were involved with the Immigrant Investor Fund, the disposition of those public funds would not be also released to the public.

I think the public has a right to know the status of the money in the various investments that the government is reviewing. I would encourage the minister to change his position and release the disposition of those funds so the public can be assured.

A final question to the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey): The Hong Kong Securities Commission, in late February of 1993, has released a new code on the immigrant investment schemes, Mr. Speaker. They have released a new code of conduct, and it deals with various aspects of Immigrant Investor Funds. It deals with the issue of promoters who are out selling citizenship through visas and investments on the one hand, and these very same promoters putting that money in their own projects, on the other hand, and at the same time taking fees at various different levels of those investment decisions.

I would like to ask the minister: Has he reviewed the new guidelines or code of conduct produced by the Hong Kong Securities Commission, and what advice can he give us on the value of these codes of conduct for investors outside of the province of Manitoba, outside of the country of Canada, who are looking at projects in Canada, looking at projects that are being promoted by the same people who are selling the investment visas?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back just very briefly to the preamble of the Leader of the Opposition, when he talks about the distribution of funds under other government programs. He well knows when that occurs, it is made public at that particular point in time, whether it is a distribution

under a manufacturing industrial opportunity program, whether it is under any other government program or whether it is under any of the federal-provincial agreements, whether it is tourism, forestry or whatever the case might be.

So those individual allocations are made public at that time, and clearly the terms and conditions are made public as well, Mr. Speaker. So if he has specific questions on any project at any point in time, we are more than pleased to answer that. I am not sure where he is heading or what suggestion or allegations he is making.

On the issue of the Hong Kong Securities, Mr. Speaker, again, I believe, as the Leader of the Opposition well knows, this review of the Immigrant Investor program has three main issues attached to it. It has the five individual audits. It has the overall audit that was tabled in January of this year done by Deloitte and Touche, which we are dealing with the federal government on in terms of building strength around the Immigrant Investor program. As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, until those issues are addressed, there will be no approval of any immigrant investor programs in Manitoba.

A part of that review is the information he referred to as it relates to the current announcements of the Hong Kong Securities Commission. A third issue that is being addressed, Mr. Speaker—it is the five audits; it is the Immigrant Investor program, and it is the issue of the freeze on the Lakeview funds, on which again, an announcement should be made shortly.

* (1355)

Children's Advocate Recommendations

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, in Family Services Estimates on April 20, earlier this week, as recorded in Hansard on pages 1871 and 1872, I asked the Minister of Family Services three times if the new Children's Advocate had made any recommendations to him about any area of concern in his department.

I would like to ask the minister again: Has the Children's Advocate made any recommendations to this minister concerning cuts in the Department of Family Services or any government policy in his department?

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, yes, I acknowledge that

the member did raise the question in Estimates the other day, and the answer is yes. The Advocate, in conversations with me on a number of occasions, has raised a number of issues.

At the present time, as the member knows, the office is just being set up, but in the meantime, the Advocate has met with many groups, foster parents, agencies and others in the community. I meet with the Advocate on a regular basis, and he has relayed the substance of those conversations to me.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Speaker, I specifically asked if he made any recommendations. The minister refuses to answer that. In fact, he answers in the negative.

Foster Family Recommendations

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Will the minister admit that he has a letter from the Children's Advocate in which the Advocate says, I have made a recommendation to the minister recommending that cuts to basic maintenance fees for foster families be reconsidered? Will the minister acknowledge that he has received a copy of that letter, and what is he going to do about this recommendation—

Mr. Speaker: Order please. The honourable member has put his question.

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, I answered in the affirmative that yes, the Advocate has made recommendations to me and brought me up-to-date on many of the conversations that he has had.

In the letter that the member is referring to, he has summarized conversations he has had with a number of foster parents over their concerns. They are the same concerns that foster parents have raised with me through their organization.

They are the same concerns that the foster parents raised with me when I met with them on the steps of the Legislature. Yes, the Advocate has indicated that it is of concern to him, the feelings that foster parents have about our new financial relationship with them. It is a subject of ongoing discussions.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Family Services what specific actions is he going to take to respond to these recommendations from the Children's Advocate, in light of the fact that he says that he is concerned that

the needs of children may not be fully met with the recent cuts and that he is concerned that if foster families do not accept children, it will do irreparable damage to the Child and Family Services system.

What action is this minister going to take to correct the current situation in response to the recommendations of the Children's Advocate?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Speaker, the issue is about rates, and I would point out to the member that the rates have been dramatically increased since the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) and some of his fellow travellers were in cabinet, dramatic increase in rates since then. Our rates are \$3 or \$4 higher than some other jurisdictions, amongst the highest in Manitoba.

Irrespective of that, there are issues in the Child and Family Services area—we have a number of initiatives on the way. We had an opportunity to talk the other day in Estimates about some of the reform issues that we are proceeding with, and I tell the member again that Manitoba has probably the most comprehensive child welfare agencies in the country, and our rates are certainly more than comparable.

* (1400)

Bill 24 Consultations

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, the manner in which this government has been treating the taxi industry and the individuals involved in the taxi industry has been nothing short of disgusting. The Minister of Highways and his department brought forward a bill yesterday, and within 24 hours, I have contacted numerous individuals who are involved in that industry and not one of them in fact has been consulted. There are over 400 driver-owners out there. There are thousands of drivers. All rely on the taxi industry for a living.

My question to the minister responsible for the Taxicab Board is, or can the minister tell this Chamber whom has he consulted before bringing in this so-called piece of legislation?

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate on this bill when we move further with the discussion on that. The Taxicab Board is a quasi-judicial board which has basically been dealing with the many complex problems in the taxicab industry, under the chairmanship of Don

Norquay, who is also the Chairman of the Motor Transport Board.

There have been all kinds of hearings and input into the whole system of the taxicab industry over the past number of years. I would like to think that under the capable chairmanship of Mr. Norquay we have had a relative calm in the taxicab industry for some time.

I have all the confidence in the chairman that the proper consultation has taken place in terms of developing the act that is before the House right now. I would ask the member to wait until I give second reading to the bill to give clarification to it and give the spreadsheets to the critics so they can look and see what it is all about.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, under other circumstances, there would have been a consultation that would have been done. This industry has been singled out time after time—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the honourable member for Inkster, this is not the time for debate.

The honourable member for Inkster, with his question, please.

Justification

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is: Why does this government, why does the board need to know what the gross net income and statements and expenses of the individual drivers are in order to give any sort of certification? Why is that necessary—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I find it sort of ironic that this member is getting so agitated and excited when he does not even know what actually is happening in the bill.

If he has a little bit of patience, I think maybe tomorrow, I can give second reading and maybe take and allay some of the fears that he is sort of drumming up in his own mind right now.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, unlike the minister, I have read—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is: Another aspect is that we are asking certified mechanics—certified mechanics are not

good enough for the Taxicab Board. They have to be approved by the Taxicab Board.

Again, are we going to see Workers Compensation—and now we are going to have Workers Compensation saying if you are a doctor, you have to be on such and such a list? Why is that necessary?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I think the member has a bit of a hearing problem. I have tried to indicate in the two previous answers that the moment we have second reading, I will clarify these things and explain this to the member.

Lest he has some kind of a health condition developing with his agitation, I suggest that he maybe wait, and I think possibly tomorrow, I will give second reading, and then I am prepared to debate it with him.

Sugar Beet Industry Federal Tariff Policy

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the sugar beet industry is an industry that has been of long-standing duration in this province, which came into existence some time in 1945. The reason it was brought into this province was because this area lends itself well to sugar production, and the country of Canada wanted to, at that time, ensure itself of some reasonable domestic supply of sugar.

As of the last number of years, the federal government has refused to abide by the same rules, Mr. Speaker, as all other 42 sugar-producing nations in the world do, and has not allowed a tariff to be applied on sugar coming into this country.

I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture today, what action he has taken and what points he has raised with our federal government, mainly the Minister of Agriculture and the Department of External Affairs, to convince them that because of their unilateral action, we need the federal government to take on the responsibility of ensuring that we will have a sugar beet industry in this province and in Alberta.

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the member raises a very valid point. This is the only country of 42 in the world that does not have a degree of sugar policy on its border. What happens is that cheap sugar gets dumped into the country, and it depresses the market price for our sugar beet producers here in Manitoba.

Going back now over two to three years, I have continually raised this with the federal minister. The federal minister had a special measures committee, which we were represented on, which the growers were represented on. Again, we advocated that a sugar policy was important to maintain and stabilize the sugar industry in Manitoba and Alberta.

To this point in time, no matter how many times I raise it in meetings, federal-provincial meetings, no matter how many times we write letters, no matter how many times the growers ask the same question, the federal position has been not to have a sugar policy—in other words, allow cheap sugar into the country and keep our market prices suppressed here in western Canada.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, the federal government and the provincial government have some responsibility to ensure that there is an ability for farmers to maintain this growth industry and a very viable industry as far as diversification is concerned.

I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture whether he has tried to convince the federal government to apply the same tariffs that the Americans apply, the 16-cent-a-pound tariff, on sugar coming into their country, and that we abide by the same rules in this country that the Americans abide by under the Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. Findlay: Yes, I have, Mr. Speaker. I have constantly said that if we are going to have a sugar policy, you should treat the country coming into here with sugar the same way as they treat us going into their country, and that, most particularly, applies to the United States.

Taxicab Industry Consultations

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Speaker, in 1991, Judge Monnin ruled that with respect to a study that was conducted by the Taxicab Board, and I will quote from the judge's ruling: That the compensation fund was clearly a significant component decision, and it would be unfair to allow the board to now sever its decision and proceed only with the increasing of quotas for taxis without having to implement at the same time its compensation recommendation.

The minister and his department and the Taxicab Board have refused to implement that recommendation, Mr. Speaker, for a significant period of time.

My question for the Minister of Highways and Transportation who is responsible for the board: Why has the minister refused to consult with the industry on any changes that they may be bringing forward? Why has this minister refused to implement the recommendation of Judge Monnin in his earlier decision?

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be totally irresponsible if I interfered with the board and started dictating and by-passing the jurisdiction of the board in terms of what its responsibilities are.

I have all the confidence that the chairman and the board that we have dealing with the taxicab industry are doing a very capable job under very difficult circumstances, and I do not intend to take and override the decisions of the Taxicab Board and start interfering from my perspective.

Taxicab Board Court Challenges

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): My question for the same minister, Mr. Speaker: Why is this government now changing its policy to restrict the taxicab industry members from going to court to challenge Taxicab Board rulings, as we see by the new legislation that this minister has brought forward to this House where the members challenging now will only be able to challenge on the question of jurisdiction or law? Why is this government changing its policy?

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that it is taxicab day in Question Period today. The same answer would apply to this member as it applied to that member, that when I bring forward second reading—it is unusual that after the first reading, we start having Question Period on a bill.

That is what second reading is about, and that is what the debate is about. When I bring in second reading, I will clarify those positions.

Bill 24 Intent

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I am surprised the minister is getting so worked up about this, Mr. Speaker. I am sure it is an important issue to him as well.

Can the minister explain, is it the intent of his new legislation to change the current Taxicab Board

legislation to give power to the Taxicab Board to permit it to have a show-cause hearing calling into question Unicity's right to exist as a business? Is that the intent of this legislation?

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, my answer is chekay, chekay [phonetic], wait until second reading, and then I am prepared to go through the whole issue.

* (1410)

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Reduced Workweek

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister responsible-

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Mr. Speaker, the repercussions of this government's policy of arbitrarily reducing the workdays of the public service this year will soon be felt by the people of Manitoba. Provincial agencies provide valuable service that the public expects to have available throughout the workweek.

This will not be the case this year, I am afraid. As a result, there will be considerable inconveniences and additional costs to the public.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister of Autopac confirm that all Autopac claim centres will be shut down tomorrow as a means of meeting the government's directives to reduce the workweek of provincial employees?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Well, Mr. Speaker, the corporation has struck a schedule of closings. As to each individual centre, I could not apprise the member of the explicit situation that he might be referring to, but the services, yes, will be shut down on periods so that we can acquire the savings that we originally set out to achieve.

I would hope that you would be encouraging the public to work with us in acquiring that.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Reduced Workweek

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister does not realize it,

but all centres are shut down tomorrow throughout the province.

Will the minister tell us how many more days of complete shutdown of all centres will occur this year, because I find it ironical, Mr. Speaker, that the government is promoting Sunday shopping so retail stores can open seven days a week, while at the same time, it is depriving the public of basic insurance services by reducing the days of operation from five to four days, and in one case, from four to three—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Clayton Manness (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the member's contribution on Bill 22. He will have an opportunity tomorrow to debate that bill.

Mr. Speaker, Crown Corporations Council has asked all the Crowns to file with it a plan as to how it will be that they will achieve certain savings following the model introduced under Bill 22. I do not believe that the Crown Corporations Council has seen the plans of all the Crowns and specifically MPIC in this case, so members of the Treasury bench will not know that as of this point in time.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Reduced Workweek

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Well, perhaps the Minister of Finance can answer the question, if not the minister of MPIC.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister explain what is the rationale of arbitrarily imposing a reduction of 10 working days on a commercial Crown corporation which has to function in such a way as to maximize its revenues and services to the customers of Manitoba? Particularly, I use as an example the Special Risk Extension division which has to compete in the market with the private sector and usually turns in a profit of \$8 million to \$9 million to the corporation, and yet you are irrationally curtailing a viable commercial operation which could limit the revenues and profits of the corporation.

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister charged with the administration of The Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, no matter how the member across the way would like to slice it, or no matter how we would like to portray it, the public sees this as a government being the main shareholder. It is a public service; in other words, a Crown corporation. It is clearly linked in the minds

of the public, in my opinion, to the operations of government.

Yes, there will undoubtedly be some concerns or inconveniences that may be raised as a result of this action, but we are in very difficult and trying times and trying to achieve the savings that we need in order to make this province competitive, and I am talking about competitive in terms of the cost of the operations and the cost that we impose on the public as requirements of mandatory insurance, and all of the other services that government is involved in.

I really would encourage the member, rather than to be critical, to be providing us with ideas that can help us achieve those goals.

Misericordia General Hospital Community-Based Role

Mr. Guizar Cheema (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. There are some misconceptions about the future role of Misericordia Hospital. Under health care reform, we understand that the role of institutions will change. Misericordia Hospital has provided services for Manitobans and has established a reputation of a good community hospital.

Mr. Speaker, there are discussions going on between the hospital and the community at large to develop and redefine the role of this hospital.

Can the Minister of Health tell this House if his officials had any specific discussions about the new definition of the role of Misericordia Hospital with the health care reform package?

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, specifically as to whether the ministry had discussions with Misericordia as to their emerging role, no.

Mr. Speaker, in answer to the larger question of some of the program investigations like ophthalmology and some of the other major programs and how they can be delivered in the city of Winnipeg, Misericordia is very much part of those discussions.

I share my honourable friend's concern over some of the rumours which do not have substance to them that cause concern amongst employees, a concern amongst those who use Misericordia Hospital. Sir, I was certainly pleased to see some of the positive articles most recently indicating some new initiatives that Misericordia Hospital is undertaking to provide better care into the future.

Mr. Cheema: Mr. Speaker, we met with some of the hospital officials, and we were very impressed with the new role model they are proposing in terms of the community-based hospital.

Can the Minister of Health tell this House if he will now set up a meeting between his Deputy Minister of Health and the hospital officials to redefine their role and be specific, so that the hospital employees can have some comfort that their jobs and community-based care will be protected and the name of Misericordia Hospital will survive in the long run?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, those initiatives are in the planning process and are part of the process I alluded to in my first response, namely the professional investigation and actually with the hospitals involved, the associations, the physicians and even citizens involved, in terms of planning the delivery of major surgical and medical programs throughout our urban hospitals, as an offshoot of some of the Urban Hospital Council planning.

Misericordia has been very much a part of that process. We are anticipating over the next three to say four, five, six months a number of reports from these study groups on individual programs to recommend how the system can accommodate with greater meeting of client needs or consumer needs programs in ophthalmology and other areas.

Ophthalmology Program Location

Mr. Gulzar Cheema (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, both Misericordia Hospital and Seven Oaks Hospital have made their application for an ophthalmology program. Setting up an ophthalmology program in a community hospital will send a strong message for the health care reform package.

Can the Minister of Health tell this House when the final decision is going to be made on which hospital is going to get the ophthalmology program?

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly one of the program initiatives that I have referred to.

It is my understanding that the study group has examined the possibility and how to implement a shift of the adult ophthalmology program from Health Sciences Centre. The two candidate hospitals that are recipients, or considered recipients, of course, are Seven Oaks, because they have had the outpatient ophthalmology services for

about six years now, I believe, or five years, and Misericordia is also offering their hospital as a potential site, Mr. Speaker.

I have not received recommendations from the committee which involves the physicians, the hospital administrations, the MMA and others, so I cannot predict as to what the recommendations and government's decision might be. We hope to be able to undertake that within the next several months.

Waste Reduction Regulations

Ms. Marianne Cerlill (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, the larger debt that we owe as an economy is not the debt that the government owes to the banks, it is our societal debt to the environment and the pending costs of this waste.

Mr. Speaker, in our part of the world, our challenge is to reduce waste and overconsumption and unfair distribution of resources. In relation to this, my question to the Minister of Environment is: When are we going to see the regulations under The Waste Reduction and Prevention Act? We have been waiting five years for some action in this vein.

* (1420)

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest you should discuss this with the beverage container industry because they have been quite distraught about the regulations that they are asked to operate under. In fact, that is an example of the powers that are under that act in order to regulate certain areas of waste.

I should be most pleased to point out to the House and to you, Mr. Speaker, that we are engaged in discussion with the newspaper industry at this time as well, because it is one of the major contributors in volume and tonnage to household private waste and general municipal waste as a whole.

Those discussions are ongoing. I would think that while I appreciate her encouragement, the industry out there might not agree with her appraisal.

Beverage Container Deposit

Ms. Marianne Cerlill (Radisson): For the same minister: Why is this government hesitant to implement a deposit system that has been proven to work in other jurisdictions, and why is the city of Winnipeg the only major city in the country to not

have a comprehensive waste reduction and recycling initiative?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): First of all, as I stated in the House about a week ago, there has been a deadline set in this province for achievement of a certain level of return—targets that were agreed to and were stated publicly by this government. If those targets are not met by the 1st of August, we are in a position to implement deposits or other comprehensive methods of recycling.

As to the City of Winnipeg, obviously, one of the concerns the City of Winnipeg has had—to their credit, and one of the concerns that I have had on an ongoing basis—is that any recycling system that is put in place is in fact cost-conscious and cost-effective. Those are some of the additional concerns that one has to look at, rather than simply saying this is good.

Landfill Site

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, there has already been two extensions on those targets.

I would ask the minister, referring to another target which is to reach 50-percent reduction of waste to landfills by the year 2000 and 20 percent by the year 1995: What progress have we made to these targets, and how is the government measuring the progress in this area?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, we believe that we may well be in excess of those targets at this point.

Certainly we believe that using the indicators by which we established the first volume, and tracking those volumes of materials that are being retrieved from the waste stream, that certainly we will have no problem reaching the 1995 target, and the year 2000, we expect to exceed it.

Sugar Beet Industry Government Support

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture.

Now that the sugar beet industry is on the verge of collapse because farmers cannot afford to plant their crops without an agreement signed by this minister, and the 90-day layoff notice has been given for plant closure by July 10, and the reason for this problem is lack of action by this government

to sign an agreement—this is a quote by the member for Virden in 1987.

Why was it so important to have an agreement to support sugar beet growers in 1987, and why will he not sign an agreement for the sugar beet growers today?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, back in those days, the NDP government would not support sugar beet growers at all. While we have been in power, we have put in over \$2 million of premiums to help the sugar beet industry. There is a deficit in the overall plan of \$10.4 million. Some of it will be borne by citizens of Manitoba, some by the federal government, some by the Alberta government.

We have on the table an offer of up to 4 percent of stabilization money for sugar beet growers in Manitoba. The federal government has offered five in Alberta. We expect them to offer five in Manitoba, and if the sugar beet producers put in their 5 percent, that is 14 percent. That is a support price of between \$36 and \$36.5 per standard tonnes.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, when we were in government, we did negotiate a deal.

Sugar Beet Industry Government Support

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): My question is to the Premier. Has his government put in place any plans to assist the 93 permanent and 150 part-time workers and the 68 workers in the truckers' industry? What has this government done? [interjection] That is a quote from the Premier.

I want to ask the Premier now, what has his government done, when in 1987, he was concerned about the workers at the sugar plant. What has he done to help those workers now if the sugar plant—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate our commitment to sugar beet producers—and I might say that in 1987, the New Democratic government would not even put in their 3 percent of premiums. That was the issue. They were not prepared to put in 3 percent premiums.

We have not only offered 3 percent, we have increased it by a third to 4 percent premiums, which is a third better than the offer that was made by the New Democratic administration after the sugar beet producers went on strike. There was the same

process where the announcement was made on the closure of the plant and everything else.

We have topped up that offer by a third to show our commitment to the sugar beet producers. We think that is a reasonable offer, and we are suggesting that the sugar beet producers take a good look at it.

Sugar Beet Industry Government Support

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Speaker, since the sugar beet growers said they cannot plant their crop, the Alberta government has signed an agreement. Why will this government not sign an agreement so that sugar beet growers can know what is going to happen?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, in addition to offering a pretty handsome stabilization offer this year, we are stimulating the industry by giving them more if they grow 28,000 acres versus 24,000 acres. That can raise more economic activity to the plant, more trucking.

The offer is on the table. We have offered it. It is there. It is for producers to pick up. The company can get out and issue their contracts, offer the seed. We have offered it. It is on the table. It is a hard and fast offer.

Education System Mainstreaming

Ms. Avis Gray (Crescentwood): Mr. Speaker, the issue of mainstreaming in the public school system is not being managed well at all. Teachers are becoming increasingly frustrated with violent children in the classroom, and teachers are also feeling very put-upon by having to provide medical services to children with high medical needs.

I would ask the Minister of Education: Does the minister agree that there are many outstanding issues in regard to mainstreaming, and will she take some action to address these serious issues which are having a daily impact in the classrooms?

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, the issue of mainstreaming is a very broad one. It does involve students who have special needs who are in the school system, as well as students who have other needs of a social, emotional and behavioural type as well. They all need assistance. We are working actively.

This year, we also have amended our funding formula to include special support for emotionally and behaviourally disordered young people which has never been provided. That funding has never been provided in the past.

Department Co-ordination

Ms. Avis Gray (Crescentwood): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Education perhaps redefine "actively" for us? She has an interdepartmental committee which has been meeting for over five months to actually try to implement a plan so that services can be co-ordinated amongst departments.

Can the minister tell us: Is this report completed? Are the departments ready to implement—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member has put her question.

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, the work has been done between the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Family Services and the Department of Justice. Those four departments have looked to the resources which they provide for Manitobans.

We have had to look at what the needs are, the issues of accessibility, the services to be provided, and then we are looking at how we can then best integrate those services or make sure that Manitobans can access services which are available through different departments in the most efficient way.

Ms. Gray: Mr. Speaker, with a final supplementary to the minister: When can we expect to actually see the recommendations implemented so that in fact there is a positive impact on what goes on in the classroom. When?

Mrs. Vodrey: Mr. Speaker, some work has already been done in that way. We already have a 24-hour crisis team between the Department of Family Services and the Department of Education.

There is work. There is co-operative work already being offered between the four departments, among the four departments or among two departments around specific issues, I think, of young people with behavioural disorders or who are perhaps involved with services such as probation services and what their special needs are within the education system.

There is work presently ongoing, and I have also told the member that we are looking to complete that report as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley has time for one very short question.

* (1430)

Education System School Dropout Rate

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we had the unusual spectacle of a minister responsible for education either unwilling or unable to discuss school dropout rates in Manitoba. Statistics Canada's school-leaver survey of 1991, collected on a comparable basis in every province, shows that the Manitoba rate is 23.5 percent.

Would the minister tell us whether her department accepts this number or whether they have another number which they use in their planning?

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, the number for students who have been termed "dropouts" varies. The number varies from Statistics Canada reports of 30 to 33 percent, to a number of 23 percent, to a number of 27 percent, and it depends upon how the issue of dropout or the term "dropout" has been defined because in some studies, the term "dropout" does not allow for the fact that that student does reintegrate into the school system in the following year and graduates successfully.

So yesterday I did ask the member to please define exactly that group of students that she was referring to as a dropout, so that I could answer her question in the most appropriate way.

Mr. Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Clayton Manness (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment (Mr. Cummings), 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 Family Services; and the honourable

member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay) in the Chair for the Department of Highways and Transportation.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This afternoon, this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255 will resume consideration of the Estimates of Family Services.

When the committee last sat, it had been considering item 1.(c)(1) on page 54 of the Estimates book.

Hon. Harold Gillieshammer (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Deputy Chairperson, in response to the member for Crescentwood's (Ms. Gray) request on April 20 for information on the Manitoba Risk Estimation System, I am pleased to table a package of documents describing the features of this system. I have a copy for the other critic as well.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson, just a reminder that I have to leave early today. We had agreement, I think, to perhaps go until about 4:15 or so. [agreed]

* (1450)

Ms. Avis Gray (Crescentwood): Mr. Deputy Chairperson, I thank the minister for that information. As I was telling the deputy minister, it will not be read in the next week or so, but it certainly will be read. So I do appreciate receiving that information.

Just while we are on the Children's Advocate, we ran out of time the other day and I did have a question about the Lester Desjarlais inquest and the report. I am wondering if the Children's Advocate has had an opportunity to review that particular document. Is there going to be a role for the Children's Advocate in response to the recommendations that have been made for the department in terms of changes that need to be made?

Mr. Gillieshammer: The answer to the first question is yes. The member may be aware that we have, with the federal government and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, put in place a task force which is currently under Wally Fox-Decent and Marlyn Cox who are currently doing some hearings.

We have also put in place, in response to that, another group—and I am just searching for the name now—the Service Appeal Panel, whereby the question of political interference or interference of people in the work of the agency can be dealt with if there are specific cases.

There will be a role for the department and there will be a role for the advocate, as we have a chance to hear the report of the task force and stay apprised of any issues that come before the Service Appeal Panel.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: Item 1.(c)(1) Salaries \$172,800—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$111,300—pass.

1.(d) Social Services Advisory Committee, (1) Salaries \$117,700.

Ms. Gray: Mr. Deputy Chairperson, The Social Services Administration Act and the staff who sit on part of the advisory committee—could we just get some information as to how many people sit on that committee? Approximately how often do they sit and for what length of time? What is the per diem rate paid to individuals who are part of the advisory committee?

Mr. Gilleshammer: I can start by answering some of those questions. There are, I believe, 15 individuals who sit on that particular committee. They meet as a group of three when they have a hearing. The hearing is triggered by an appeal by a recipient. If they feel that they have not had fair treatment in attempting to access social allowances, either from the municipality or from the provincial office, there is an appeal process, and once they make it known that they wish to appeal that decision, that committee has to meet within 15 days.

A panel of three is put together, and they will meet in whatever centre that the appeal hails from. Many days of the week there will be an appeal hearing somewhere. The majority of the cases are heard here in the city of Winnipeg, but at times they may be heard in northern Manitoba, or in the Westman area, or in any particular town where the appeal emanates from. They will attempt to hear more than one appeal if there is, but, again, there is a requirement by law to have that appeal heard within 15 days.

The member asked about the per diems, and I am not sure what they are, but I think we have it here. It is broken down into a session because sometimes they have two sessions a day. For the chair it is \$55

for the first session and \$45 for the second session. For the membership it is \$40 for the first session of that day, and if there is a second session it is \$35.

Ms. Gray: Can the minister tell us: Are there basically standard per diem rates across a number of these boards and commissions? How are these rates arrived at?

Mr. Gilleshammer: I would say that my limited experience in looking at different boards is that there is not a hard-and-fast standard because I see different rates. I guess the genesis of that is historical. It is what they have been paid in the past. As far as I know, there has not been any change in some of these. I note that there are boards that govern Crown corporations that I think have higher per diems. There are other boards where there is no remuneration at all, mainly ones that the member sits on, ones that represent, I guess, professional organizations and then in-between there is an array of per diems that are paid.

Ms. Gray: Can the minister tell us: With the per diem rates for the advisory committee or other boards or commissions within the jurisdiction of his department, was there a corresponding decrease in per diem rates of 2 percent or 4 percent, similar to the across-the-board 2 percent decreases and the 4 percent or 3.8 percent salary decreases for civil servants?

Mr. Gilleshammer: If I recall the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) speaking to the legislation, Bill 22 does speak to the boards and commissions as well.

Ms. Gray: Can the minister tell us of the number of the appeals that were heard, I suppose, at the last fiscal year end? Out of those appeals how many of them were upheld?

Mr. Gilleshammer: The last full year I have here is '91-92, and there were 1,229 appeals heard and 65 of them were allowed. The vast majority of those are social allowances. I just wanted to point out that this appeals body also hears some daycare appeals.

Ms. Gray: Does the minister have any information about those 65 appeals that were upheld? Is there sort of a pattern as to reasons why appellants were successful? Do they fall into different categories at all?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Yes, there is a variety of reasons why they are upheld. As you know, at the

municipal level, the municipal jurisdictions all act independently and make a decision on their understanding of the legislation or their by-laws, and there are times when there may be information that they have not considered. The client may then be successful in the appeal. If there is any new information that they can bring forward, sometimes that makes a difference.

Ms. Gray: Is there one particular area of the province or municipality that has more appeals than others, and then also more appeals that are upheld?

* (1500)

Mr. Gilleshammer: There does not seem to be any pattern. As I indicated, most of the appeals, I believe, are here in the city of Winnipeg, but that is because of the volume, so there is not any pattern that would indicate that.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Mr. Deputy Chairperson, I am wondering if we could entertain questions on the Child Advocate. I was here, and of course because of the minister having to speak to the media, I had stepped out as well, and I am wondering if we could just hold this line and go back to the Child Advocate's office for questions.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Yes, I would, out of co-operation; I understand you were here. I will do that.

Mr. Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, and there may also be some questions on the line that we are currently dealing with, so I am just suggesting if we can leave it open.

What I want to ask in terms of the Child Advocate's office is in relation to the letter that was written by the Office of the Children's Advocate—pardon me—by the Children's Advocate, Wayne Govereau, which was discussed today in Question Period, which I have a copy of dated April 2, to a number of individuals in regard to the impact of the cuts to foster families that have been introduced by this government and concerns expressed about that.

In looking through the letter, I think the Office of the Children's Advocate is very clear. In fact, the concern is stated that the cuts will potentially have a negative impact on children. The letter states very clearly: I have made a recommendation to the minister in recommending that the cuts to basic maintenance fees be reconsidered.

I would just like to ask the minister, very clearly on the record, what his position is now that the Children's Advocate has called for reconsideration of those cuts in basic maintenance fees? Will the minister now follow on the recommendation of the Children's Advocate and reconsider those fee cuts?

Mr. Gilleshammer: The letter summarizes a meeting, a discussion that the advocate had with a number of foster parents, where they have reviewed the concerns that they have expressed to me and expressed to the department over the adjustment of the rates. It is a wide-ranging overview of issues that the Foster Family Association has been dealing with from time to time. The change in the rate is a budgetary decision, as the member is aware, not out of line with budgetary decisions that impact on the school system, the hospital system and other groups that are getting grants from the provincial government.

In looking at our decision, and I have had a chance to speak further with both the advocate and the department on the rates and an opportunity to review where the Manitoba rates are positioned relative to other jurisdictions, the Manitoba rate has been reduced by \$2. For 12-year-old children it is \$20.15, some \$3 higher than the rate in Saskatchewan, \$2 higher than the rate in Alberta, comparable to the rate in British Columbia. While I understand the disappointment and concern of the Foster Family Association, we are concerned with the issues of relationship between foster parents and the agencies that have been raised, and the ability to recruit and train foster parents. We feel the rate is comparable to other jurisdictions. In reviewing it, we will be staying with the rate that we have announced.

Mr. Ashton: I want to make it very clear, because I think the minister has perhaps not read the letter in its entirety, or certainly not recently, because if one reads the letter, it is clear that the Children's Advocate goes far beyond merely relaying concerns.

Indeed, the first page of the letter starts off outlining the concerns, and I can read it into the record if the minister wants. I can table the letter. Perhaps the minister can table his copy if he wishes, but there is no doubt if one looks at the statement that is in this letter, and I will quote from—I will quote the first two sentences in their entirety because I think it is important not to take things out of context. The Children's Advocate says in the letter: I

recognize the need of government to be concerned about the deficit facing this province. However, as an advocate for children, I am concerned that the needs of children may not be fully met with recent cuts.

It continues with his other statements, but, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, there is no doubt in my mind in reading that—and I read it out, the minister can read any other aspect of the letter. I am quite prepared, as I said to read the entire letter into the record. There is no doubt in my mind the Children's Advocate has gone well beyond reflecting concerns that were expressed to him by the five individuals to which this letter is addressed.

The Children's Advocate said, as an advocate for children, I am concerned that the needs for children may not be fully met with recent cuts. It then goes on further—I will make it very clear; it is not just a question of stating the concern—saying: for your information, I had made a recommendation to the minister recommending that the cuts to basic maintenance fees be reconsidered. The Children's Advocate is concerned about the impact and wants them reconsidered. That is the Children's Advocate, not the five individuals, not the Foster Family Association. This is from the Children's Advocate's office, and, quite frankly, I feel this is extremely significant.

You know, I would hope the minister would listen to the foster parents. I have talked to many foster parents. They feel the minister is making a serious mistake. I had a public meeting in Thompson, and there were some very emotional moments there from people who are really concerned about what this minister and this government are doing.

Now, I just want to relate a particular incident that I think is really indicative. It came from someone who was not a foster parent or a foster kid. She has been trying to get treatment for a condition that she has had difficulty in receiving, and I have been working along with many people with the Department of Health to try and get her the treatment. She said to me, and she said this in a number of meetings that we have had, that her condition goes right back to when she was abused as a child, and she has told me—and this is in private conversation just on Tuesday in Thompson after this public meeting—she came over and said, you know, I really support the foster families. She said, if I had had the opportunity to be in foster care when I was a kid, maybe this would not have happened to me,

the kind of psychiatric disorder that she has currently.

So it is the foster parents; it is foster kids; ex-foster kids who are concerned; it is people in the social service field because I have talked to many people in my own community who certainly have expressed to me privately, directly that they are concerned about the impact of what is happening. Now it is the Children's Advocate, not just expressing concerns, but saying, reconsider these decisions and the needs of children may not be fully met with the recent cuts.

* (1510)

You know, I want to continue to ask the minister to reconsider, based not on my statements but on the statements I have just read into the record, the statement made by the individual I talked to, the concerns expressed generally, because I think the minister has missed the point. The minister keeps talking about what is done in this province and what is done in that province and what is done in the other province.

We have led the way in a lot of areas, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, in this province. When I say "we" I mean collectively, I am not saying one political party or another. We can get into that debate at another time. We used to have the best child care system in the country in terms of both funding and standards. I am concerned there may be some erosion because of the moves of the government that may affect child care, but that is an example where we are well ahead.

Home care—I use that as another example. We have a system that is a model for North America, and it is, I think, very important that we maintain it. It is in the health field, but I think it is applicable here.

I think the moves that have been made in terms of foster parents are important. The agreement, throughout the 1980s, progressively went from recognizing the need for an association—yes, an advocacy group—and also recognizing the need for expansion of the rates for foster children and recognizing that this was an investment, in the sense that it would get more kids into foster homes, rather than in institutions.

I am using this because when I hear the argument made that, well, this province does this, this province does the other, I think that misses the point. We have a good system. It is effective in terms of

social policy and it is effective in terms of costs. Then, we should be leading the way.

By the way, with the implementation of the cuts, we will not have the highest rates. I know there have been negotiated agreements in other provinces that will impact over a period of time.

So I guess what I am asking the minister is to put aside the communications spin, the argument that somehow this is all a matter of relative rates and the rest of it, and deal with the social issues and deal with the economic issues.

I am asking him to deal directly, right now, with the Children's Advocate. To my mind, the Children's Advocate—and we have had debates over the reporting mechanism and various different things, significant debates over the last year or two. This is an important position; it is an important function. Here the Children's Advocate is saying very clearly, I am concerned that the needs of children may not be fully met with recent cuts; I have made recommendation to the minister recommending that the cuts to basic maintenance fees be reconsidered.

You cannot get more direct than that. The Children's Advocate is saying the government has made a mistake. That is my interpretation. Anyone who reads the letter can only come to the same interpretation.

I am asking the minister, putting aside the arguments—and we will get into that, relative this and relative that—how can the minister proceed with the cuts, proceed with the destruction of the Foster Family Association, when the evidence is so clear that he and his department and this government are making a significant mistake? How can he not review the decision, in light of the fact that the Children's Advocate's office—the Children's Advocate, period—has said, review it?

That is all we are asking for at this point in time, because I really believe if there is a review done, an objective review, it will show that the government made a mistake. So I am asking the minister, what is so unreasonable in having this ill-considered decision revisited and hopefully having those cuts reinstated?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Deputy Chairperson, the member started by talking about emotional moments that he has had in speaking with foster parents. I can say that I think all members of the Legislature who speak with foster parents and

understand the role they play in parenting children who come from dysfunctional families will hear heart-rending stories. You hear from adults who were foster children and the love and comfort that was given to them by foster families. It is not an issue, to say that people do not recognize the tremendous work and support that foster families give to children within the province of Manitoba.

At many events that we have hosted in this building for the Foster Family Association, we have spoken frequently about them being the backbone of the system of child welfare in Manitoba. Many of us are aware of friends and neighbours who have acted as foster parents and are well aware of the tremendous job that they do in fostering and looking after children whose families have gone asunder and become dysfunctional. That recognition is clear and recognized by everyone.

The member talks about other areas of social programming that government is responsible for. I say to him that governments across this land, across this continent, are reviewing social programming that takes place within their jurisdictions. We have made budget decisions in this particular budget to ask a number of the boards, organizations such as school boards, hospital boards, agencies that receive government grants to do with less in this next budget year. This applies to foster parents as well.

The member talks about the great strides that have been made in the rates for foster parents in Manitoba, and I am pleased that he brought that up, because when he was a member of the previous government and had a seat in the back bench, he was part of a caucus that had rates in 1987 and '88 that were amongst the lowest in Canada. The government of that day did not have a commitment to raising those rates. The rates in April of 1988 for infants, the rate was \$8.93, and over the course of the last few years that rate has dramatically increased. It was during the tenure of this government that that happened. Similarly, the rates for older teenagers, which were low in the previous government's tenure in office, also received quite a dramatic increase.

What has happened, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, across this country is that we have debt loads and we have rates that governments simply cannot sustain. The Leader of the official opposition (Mr. Doer) in Question Period has frequently said that there are very, very tough decisions out there to be

made. This government has made some of those tough decisions in as fair and equitable a manner as we could. Many organizations that rely on funding from government are going to be doing with a little bit less.

I know the member says, well, do not compare with other provinces. Do not be concerned with what other provinces are doing, but in establishing the value for the service, no matter what that service is—and I suspect that the member perhaps at some point in his career was doing some negotiating over salaries or rates or whatever—comparisons to other jurisdictions are one of the ways you determine whether your rate is appropriate or not. When we looked at our rates over the last year, our rate in Manitoba was \$5 higher than that in neighbouring Saskatchewan, a similar jurisdiction in terms of make-up of the province, similar in geography, similar in many ways.

* (1520)

In one of the reductions that we have had to make in this budget—and you know we have said that we do not do these reductions with any glee, but the fiscal situation of the province is such that we have to make major adjustments. I have indicated, and I know the member agrees, that the government of Saskatchewan took no glee in raising the sales tax to 9 percent. I am sure Ontario Hydro did not take any glee in laying off 4,500 workers, and that Bob Rae is contemplating taking 20,000 positions out of the Ontario civil service. Those are the realities of the 1990s that the member has to acknowledge. We simply cannot sustain a lot of the grants and a lot of the programming that has been in place in this province.

So, yes, we have had to make some difficult decisions. The member even referenced child care and says that Manitoba had the highest standards in North America. Those standards have not been changed. [interjection] You said standards and funding, and I will get to funding in a minute, but the standards have not changed. We still have the highest standards in North America in daycare, and the funding has increased dramatically. The funding, when the member sat in the back bench for the previous government, for that particular line was around \$26 million. In the past budget we spent over \$50 million, a 100 percent increase in funding, so the member is wrong when he says that the child care system no longer meets those national and

international standards. Standards have not changed; funding has increased dramatically.

The member mentions the grant to the Foster Family Association. The Foster Family Association has currently contacted our department with plans, which they are looking for support for, to have the Foster Family Association become self-sufficient. It is the subject of some meetings that are currently taking place.

I think it is important to point out to the member that the functions that were provided in terms of legal costs and in terms of insurance are still there.

We have also asked the agency, and provided funding for them, to not only look after the recruiting and licensing of foster homes, but also to be involved with the training of foster families, which is a fit that I have long felt is the appropriate thing to do. Those agencies that have daily and weekly contact with the foster families now will also be responsible for the training component.

I think it is important that the member look at the context of the decisions that we have had to make and recognize that governments across North America are facing the same dilemma, as revenues are flat or declining, as costs are escalating, and that government no longer has the access to the types of revenue that was possible in the 1970s and 1980s. The obvious choices are that you either start increasing taxes like other jurisdictions are doing, and the member is saying that is what we should be doing—

An Honourable Member: What you did, I said.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Well, we have not increased the income tax, the sales tax or the corporate tax. You know that there are other jurisdictions that have gone from 7 percent to 11 percent and 9 percent. That is an option that we looked at, that we rejected. The result is that we have to make some tough choices—choices that have some fairness to them, choices that impact on all members of society and all departments, and we have done that.

We have not come to these decisions lightly. We have reviewed the decisions that we have made, and we have made a commitment to monitor the changes that we have brought into place.

The budget which was passed on Monday, with the support of the majority of the members of the House, is the one that we have presented to the

agencies, to the public. It is the one that we are going to stay with.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Deputy Chairperson, I just have a number of comments. First of all, the minister did not answer the question. I asked very specifically in terms of the Children's Advocate's letter, and I hope the minister will answer.

I want to deal with some of the rather cryptic comments the minister put on the record, and I, quite frankly, am just amazed. The minister said, and this is a direct quote: "Many organizations . . . are going to be doing with a little bit less."

Mr. Deputy Chairperson, the Foster Family Association had its entire grant eliminated. So did 56 other groups. We are not talking about a 5 percent cut or a 10 percent cut. We are talking about a 100 percent cut. Now if the minister is going to try and defend that, that is fine, but let us not put statements like that on the record. We could continue the Budget Debate if the minister wants, but if the minister expects anyone to believe that this government has not increased taxes—I mean, if you go in and you buy a meal for under \$6 under the new tax system, you are going to pay tax on it of 7 percent, in addition to the GST, which currently you pay nothing on.

There are a whole series of items which are having the sales tax apply to them. If that is not a tax increase, I do not know what it is. The government can try and redefine what a tax increase means, but everybody I have talked to says, yes, taxes are going up. Some, by the way, agree with the government. Some agree with the opposition. There are different views, but I have not found one person yet outside of the Tory caucus that has not said, yes, taxes are going up. So let us call it for what it is and not try and deal with it in terms of these kinds of attempts to reinvent the language—you know, user fees become contributions; expanded retail sales taxes and property tax credits become less disposable income in the pocket.

I remember the minister saying that services that used to be provided—not this minister, the Minister of Education (Mrs. Vodrey)—in Dauphin are now available in Brandon, and there is a continuum of service. I am sitting there saying, I think she means "oblivion" because that is what has happened to the service in Dauphin.

With the poverty rate, the government now wants to reinvent the poverty rate. I heard the Premier (Mr.

Filmon) say that the poverty rate is not really a fair measure of what is going on in Manitoba. Well, the Premier does not know what he is talking about in terms of the low-income cutoffs that are often referenced. I have had that debate in the House.

You just cannot go on reinventing things, attaching a new label to it and trying to avoid the reality. The reality is a tax increase is a tax increase, a user fee is a user fee, a cut is a cut. That is really what the debate should boil down to. Let us strip aside the attempts to change the terminology and the rest of it.

Indeed, there are tough choices and all governments are faced with tough choices. That is what the real debate is about in this House—the priorities and the choices that were made. We have said right from the beginning that this was wrong, particularly the combined impact in terms of the rates.

By the way, if the minister will check back into what happened in negotiations starting in '87 and '88, I was the first one to say that rates were too low in 1987. I said so at the time. In fact, a lot of the process that developed in the mid-1980s was working in partnership with the Foster Family Association. The minister should know, in fact, may remember when the initial process began in terms of Maureen Hemphill, later led to agreements that have now, as in the case of collective agreements, been broken. That is one thing that does bother foster families.

The second thing is in terms of the association itself. I find that the concern over direct service and advocacy is a bit interesting, Mr. Deputy Chairperson. I am convinced that this government has two categories of organizations. If they are advisory, that is okay. If they are advocates, that is not okay. We had that debate with the Minister of Consumer Affairs (Mrs. McIntosh). We had that debate with the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer). But, I, quite frankly, think the only difference between when a group is considered advisory and when a group is considered an advocacy group is when they are advisory, the government likes the message it hears. When it does not like the message it hears, they are advocates. That is the only difference. That really, to my mind, is the only difference.

* (1530)

The principle of having, foster parents in this case, being able to have an organization that can work in the interests of foster parents and having someone to represent them I think is the principle at stake. I believe the funding cuts—and I hope there will be; in fact, I know the Foster Family Association will continue. I know they will continue in some form.

The bottom line is, as they have said—a lot of this goes down to, in the case of the organization, the question of power in the sense that the government did not want to even face the accountability which, to a certain extent, requires a greater sharing of power than has previously been there. But, you know, we can get into all the various issues, the political issues. We can re-debate the budget. We can argue what is a tax increase and what is not and the rest of it.

(Mr. Jack Reimer, Acting Deputy Chairperson, in the Chair)

The question I asked was in regard to the Children's Advocate. In fact, when I talk in the context of these other issues, I am quite prepared to debate the minister in terms of what other provinces are doing and what is happening elsewhere. What I said is, put that aside. My attempt was not to blame the government for everything that is happening or not to blame the government. That was not the point.

It was to put those items aside and deal with this letter, because this letter is very clear. The Children's Advocate's office is saying, review the decision. It says, and I will repeat it again, I am concerned that the needs of children may not be fully met with recent cuts.

That is the bottom line. That is what we have been saying, and that is what foster families have been saying, by the way, too.

I attended a meeting in Thompson of the foster families at their request. I have sat down with foster parents, and they are concerned about the kids. There are a lot of other concerns, as well, but that is their bottom-line concern. Now the Children's Advocate is saying that they are right. The foster families, the foster parents are right. I guess what makes me wonder here is, what role does the Children's Advocate's office have if the minister getting probably the clearest of feedback on an issue—I mean, you could not get any clearer. How many times do we have to read it in the record? I

am concerned the needs of children may not be fully met with recent cuts.

Does the Office of the Children's Advocate not have any influence with this government? It is an easy way out for them. When you make a decision, it is hard to admit when you have made a mistake. I will be the first one to say that. I am sure when we were in government there were lots of times when it was pretty tough to admit, yes, we made a mistake. [interjection] Indeed, the Minister of Northern Affairs is an excellent example of making mistakes. He has made enough of them, as well. So have we all. It is tough to say, yes, I made a mistake and maybe we should reconsider. The new governments do this all the time. Sometimes it requires a little bit of face saving. Sometimes it requires, not the opposition to say you made a mistake, but it requires maybe someone else to say you made a mistake.

Mr. Acting Deputy Chairperson, the Children's Advocate is saying, in other words, Mr. Minister, you made a mistake. So what is so difficult now to say—you do not even have to say you made a mistake. You can just say that we had not considered all the facts. We will not ask for an apology or that. All we are asking for is, why not take the advice of the Children's Advocate's office and, at a minimum, reinstate the cuts to the rates for foster children and reinstate at least some of the funding for the Foster Family Association because I think that is related, although the main focus here is on rates, to be fair. It is not on the Foster Family Association per se. Why not do that? Why not do what I think most reasonable people would do in the situation. I think if you asked most people on the street and they got a letter from an office that is as significant as this office is in terms of its role within legislation and with as significant a mandate as being concerned about the welfare of children in Manitoba, why not just take the advice of the Children's Advocate, and whether you admit it or not, reverse the cuts and reinstate funding for the Foster Family Association.

Mr. Gillieshammer: Mr. Acting Deputy Chairperson, I would like to respond to some of the preamble as well. I know the member will want to hear some of my comments on that. I at no time wanted to mislead him that the Foster Family Association cut was not 100 percent. I am saying that there were general cuts across all departments and acknowledge that some organizations and

associations lost a hundred percent of the funding that government provided.

The member secondly went on to talk about increases in taxes. What we have indicated is that there has not been an increase in the three major taxes: the rate of the sales tax, the rate of income tax which in fact went down in the first and second year of this administration, and the corporate tax which I know is always the handy answer for NDP governments because they say that is where the wealth is and that is where we should get the jobs. What the member does not realize is that other socialist governments like the government of Ontario actually put that tax down because they recognize the importance of maintaining jobs within their particular jurisdiction.

In addition to those things, when we came to government there was also a payroll tax which was a tax on jobs. The member says there still is, and that is because of the very high rate of that tax that the previous government was accessing in government at that time. While we have made a commitment to do away with that tax, we have not been able to do it all at once. This year an additional, I think, 900 small businesses will no longer pay that payroll tax and already people are phoning and saying, now this is an opportunity to hire more staff, to expand my business. That was the most regressive tax that any government ever brought in. We have not only maintained the levels of the major taxes, we have actually reduced them in some areas.

The member wants to talk about the poverty rate, and certainly there is lots of room for discussion there as learned people attempt to say that this is the level of income that someone needs for their basic needs. What Statistics Canada sometimes does not recognize is that the cost of living varies dramatically from a province like Manitoba to southern Ontario or British Columbia, and do not ever take that into consideration. The last statement that I read on this indicated that a family of four living in Toronto needed an income of \$30,000 or they were living below the poverty line, and they are saying that same level of income applies to every Canadian. That simply is not true. It will not hold up. People are not trying to reinvent ways of saying there is not any poverty in this country, but I think there is an honest debate going on to determine what an actual poverty line is.

Many people in my constituency live on much less money than that. They do not consider themselves living in poverty. They do not consider that they need assistance from government. It is a debatable issue. [interjection] The member says rural costs. I think we have some agreement then that you cannot just make a standard in Toronto and say that it applies to every Canadian. I think there is lots of room for debate on this issue.

The member said, yes, there are tough choices, and I would challenge him to indicate—and I have challenged his Leader, and I have challenged the critic of the NDP party who looks after this department—to offer up some choices, to tell us what some alternatives are.

There has not been one alternative that has come forward from this member or this party to say this is where Family Services could spend less; this is where Family Services could redirect some income. And that is really what we are talking about when we talk about whether rates are correct or not, that there are competing interests within government, competing interests between departments.

There are competing interests within the Department of Family Services where we determine what is the appropriate rate for foster parents; what is the appropriate rate for social allowances recipients; what is the appropriate rate for people who access day care subsidies; what is the appropriate rate for the work we do with the mentally handicapped—all of those are competing interests.

I have said in Estimates before that there are many places where we could spend our next million dollars, and certainly in many cases we have programs that need additional dollars, but because of the demand of programs that are statutory programs, it is very difficult to redirect those dollars.

* (1540)

There have been no alternatives put forward by this member or the critic from the NDP to say that there is an ability to save money within Family Services in one area so that we can redirect it to another area, [interjection] And yes, across government. You know, the member goes back to the age-old solutions of the party he represents and wants to take money from certain areas, but I am saying within the Department of Family Services, where we have a budget that is nearing \$700 million and has seen the largest increases in the last number of budgets of any department in

government. I have already indicated the dramatic increases—[interjection] Well, the easy thing is to say it is welfare.

I have already told you that we have doubled the funding for child care from when the member was in government before. We have seen a 65 percent increase in the Social Allowances line.

I am meeting with colleagues from Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. and have read some of their comments, that their systems are about to collapse because of the tremendous drain on social assistance in British Columbia. We have seen the very, very tough measures that the government of Saskatchewan, the Romanow government, has had to take in regard to health care in that province. So that we do not have to make those very draconian decisions that other governments are faced with because of the deficit and the debt, we have to do some adjustments now.

We have staff within every department who advocate for projects, who advocate for particular needs within that department, but as I have indicated, there are competing interests within the department about where we spend that next dollar.

These decisions are extremely difficult. The member references a phrase from the letter saying: we are concerned about kids. This department is extremely concerned about vulnerable Manitobans. That is whom we work with. That is where our funding goes, to vulnerable people. We are not only concerned about children; we are concerned about vulnerable adults. We are concerned particularly about vulnerable adults that are living with a mental disability, and we are bringing forward a piece of legislation in this session to deal with that.

We are concerned about the daycare budget and demand in daycare which is currently outstripping our ability to finance that. I might point out in that particular area, we have seen a dramatic increase not only in funding but in licensed spaces that are in the system that conform to those high standards we talked about a little while ago; also the tremendous emphasis now on subsidies that we have been meeting.

We are still giving an increase in that line, print over print, from last year. So these are the competing demands, and the member says: well, you should not look at other provinces, that when he was in the caucus in the days of the Pawley

government, he disagreed with his government and the rates that existed then and fought for it.

Well, all I can say is, I am sorry you were not successful, that those rates were not increased and those rates have now increased, and increased dramatically. Yes, and they have gone back.

I do not take any delight in saying that we have to offer less to those foster families and families that look after foster children. But it is one of those difficult decisions. We do not take any delight in saying to school divisions that you are going to do with 2 percent less and less funding for hospitals and less funding for a lot of things.

The member from Crescentwood (Ms. Gray) brought up the whole idea of capital projects the last day we were here. We are trying to maintain our capital budget. There are cuts in that area as well. But again you have to look at the big picture, the \$5 billion or \$6 billion of debt, and the track that we do not want to get on so that we have that \$16 billion that Saskatchewan now owes and is making those decisions that they have to make without much flexibility. Bankers in other countries are telling them what they have to do.

So this budget is one that, even though it is very difficult—and I really admire the leader of the NDP (Mr. Doer) for acknowledging that many times the difficult choices had to be made. You know, I again would ask what options there are within this department, where we could find those savings.

Even with some of the difficult decisions we have made and the reductions in funding, we are still going to show nearly a 5 percent increase in our budget line this year. I think that is remarkable given the flat revenues and the high interest payments we have to make on the debt.

So we are concerned with kids and concerned with all of the people who access the funding from this department.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (St. Johns): Mr. Acting Deputy Chairperson, the minister has said some interesting things at the start of his remarks. It seems to be a consistent theme among his colleagues, and that is to get around these difficult issues and to deflect from questions from the opposition by questioning the very statistics that we are working from and the very information that is the basis of grave concern in our society today. He has suggested that there are differences of views about what is a definition of poverty, what agreement there

is about a poverty line, and that is certainly not unlike the tenor and tone of remarks made by his Leader, the Premier (Mr. Filmon), and other colleagues about some of our questions of late with respect to the budget and particularly the budget of the Department of Family Services.

Maybe we would be able to proceed a little more quickly if we could get a sense from this minister, then, what his definition of poverty is and how many people, according to that definition, live below the poverty line in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Well, I would point out that we were moving quickly, and have passed the line on the Child Advocate and came back to it because her colleague was away and have discussed that. Are we now moving on to the next line?

Ms. Wasylycia-Lels: No, I would like to still pursue some questions on the Child Advocate line which the minister has so kindly agreed to return to.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Fine, we will talk about a definition of poverty then, and I would say to the member that I do not think there is a great consensus out there of what that definition of poverty is. We see different statistics coming from Statistics Canada. We see the low-income cutoffs. We hear definitions brought forward by what I am sure the member would characterize as right-wing forums, and I think somewhere in-between there is an answer.

But that poverty line, and the point I was trying to make, cannot be determined in downtown Toronto and be said to apply to all jurisdictions, and her colleague while he was here indicated that, yes, there is a difference in the cost of living. What often those national indicators do not take into consideration is the cost of living and the individual differences that exist within provinces. So it is a very difficult calculation to do, and all I am pointing out to the member is that I do not think there can be one figure put forward based on information in eastern Canada that applies to every jurisdiction. I am sure the member would agree to that.

* (1550)

Ms. Wasylycia-Lels: Mr. Acting Deputy Chairperson, that kind of line is a very effective tool on the part of the government for, No. 1, ignoring the questions raised by opposition, raised by community groups right across this province, but also an effective way for this government to avoid

the serious impact of its policies. All through this dialogue I have been sitting here listening and hearing the minister suggest we have to balance out the tough decisions that have to be made and we have to look at the deficit and we have to balance that in the context of the needs of our citizens, all the while refusing to address the fact that this budget and this department's Estimates have a very disproportionate impact on the poor, on the vulnerable and on the most hard-pressed members of our society today. That is the issue that has to be dealt with before we can sort through all the details of a department's budget like the Department of Family Services.

(Mr. Deputy Chairperson in the Chair)

If the minister and this government do not recognize the disproportionate impact of his budget and his decisions on a select group in our society, we are not going to be able to get very far at all. It is not just something that has come from the opposition. It is not rhetoric from a small group in society. It is now a recognized fact on the part of many in our society.

I would refer the minister to a column in the Free Press of just a couple of weeks ago, not by Frances Russell, but by Val Werier, whom I think the minister would be inclined to listen to and to hear his words. He says, and I quote: No one denies that the deficit has to be tackled, but there is a streak of unreality in the way the provincial government has gone about reducing it. It does not seem to recognize it is stepping on the poor and the vulnerable. It is acting in a shameful manner in insisting that the weakest in society bear part of the burden.

Mr. Werier goes on to specifically address budget decisions that relate directly to the Minister of Family Services and his department—Child and Family Services cutbacks, changes with respect to foster parents, change in terms of social assistance rates, and so on. It is that issue and that reality that has to be established at the outset of any discussion of Estimates if we are going to be able to find some way to have a dialogue and find some way to achieve what is in the best interests of those who have been hit the hardest by the general economic situation and by the decisions of this government.

I want to ask the minister if he at least recognizes a couple of things: No. 1, the statistics that have been repeated and presented over and over again by a number of organizations about the rate of

poverty in Manitoba and specifically the rate of child poverty in Manitoba. Does he accept the data showing the shocking statistics having Manitoba with the highest level of child poverty?—that is No. 1.

Number 2, does he accept the recent statistics from Winnipeg Harvest showing the number of people and specifically the number of children who use food banks on a monthly basis? Does he accept, at least as a starting point, the fact that approximately 13,000 children use food banks every month? Related to that, does he accept the Premier's (Mr. Filmon) views, as expressed two days ago, that food banks are here to stay and governments can do little about the incidence of hunger? Where does he stand on those issues, so that we can then have an understanding about the ability of the Child Advocate to be able to make recommendations to this government and have those recommendations listened to and acted upon?

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: Order, please. Before the minister answers that question, I want to inform all members that we have already dealt with the Children's Advocate. It has been passed.

We allowed the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) to come back to it when he came in, but I will not allow us to remain flowing throughout and coming back to issues on and on again. We are dealing on a line-by-line basis. I will allow the minister to answer this question and then I will revert to another line.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Deputy Chairperson, this department of course is responsible for that basic safety net that provides assistance to Manitobans through either the municipal welfare or the income security provided to provincial recipients. I find it interesting that the member who sat around the cabinet table in the previous decade for a brief period was there when government revenues were going up by double-digit figures yet the increase to social allowances did not correspond with that. We have made every effort since we formed government to have the rates reflect the cost of living and have done that on a consistent basis.

The member also does not take into consideration the many enhancements that in the last three years we have put into the system to assist those recipients who access social allowances, and I would just take the opportunity to review a few of them because I know the member is quite

interested. Two years ago we put into place a program called Income Assistance for the Disabled. Now this was an issue, I am sure, that the member was concerned with in the 1980s when she sat at the cabinet table, but that is where her work ended, with concern, and did not do anything about it. This was a group that most other provinces provided a special supplement for, and in last year's budget for the first time ever we put in a supplement of \$60 per month and in this budget.

I know that the member is interested in a number of departments and may not be aware of the fact that we increased that particular monthly assistance by \$10 to \$70 a month. I am just wondering where the member's concerns were in the 1980s when she had an opportunity to do something about that. This is an enhancement that was long overdue that this government brought in last year, and with our current budget, it has a cost of some \$9 million to the provincial treasury.

Last year we also introduced the supplementary benefit so that individuals who are on the provincial system were able to access their tax credits in a more timely way and have the benefit of using that entire tax credit rather than have it go to tax discounters. Another enhancement that was met with general acceptance and something that her colleague the critic for Family Services at one point in time was very much in favour of. We also brought in some assistance for school supplies for children in social allowance households that was not there before.

An Honourable Member: Is the 7 percent tax going to go on there?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Well, I am pleased that the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett) has joined us because we always appreciate her contribution to these things. I met the announcement with great regret when she was taken away from Family Services. I know that she has spoken many times how she was just starting to feel she knew the issues there. I know that there are weaknesses in many of the critic responsibilities over there and she can only do so much, but I am glad she is here with us today.

As well, we made a decision on the goods and services tax that the federal government flows back to social allowance recipients and exempted that and made the decision not to count that as income. As well, in June of 1991 an exemption of \$25,000 was established for children's trust fund assets.

Again, not a new issue but one that the member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis) refused to move on when she sat at the cabinet table.

* (1600)

Another long-standing issue that was brought to us by the SACOM group, the Social Allowance Coalition of Manitoba, and the WORD group, who pointed out to us that our liquid asset exemption level was far lower in Manitoba and historically had been than other jurisdictions. Effective last April, April of '92, we made some dramatic increases in that particular area. Again, the member for St. Johns and the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett) choose to ignore those things and just talk about the rates.

Earlier the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) said, well, you should not make any interprovincial comparisons. You should do what is right in your own province. Again, I think interprovincial comparisons are a reality, and the rates we have been able to increase in Manitoba allow the Manitoba rate to be quite favorable compared to other jurisdictions.

I might mention in Ontario those rates were frozen for the first three months of this last budget year, and social allowance recipients there were not allowed to access any more money in terms of those rates in the months of January, February and March. As well, there is a lot of new thinking going on in social allowances across this country where, again, I hate to use Ontario, but Premier Bob Rae is saying we cannot afford to pay people to sit at home any longer. Well, the member for Crescentwood (Ms. Gray) is probably right; he may be not be around next time.

President Bill Clinton is also saying the same thing. This is not Ronald Reagan we are talking about or George Bush. This is President Bill Clinton who is saying that we have to do something about the drain on national resources. Again, the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett) is making a contribution and pointing out that job creation—and I think the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) has been talking about workfare, and perhaps that is what the member for Wellington is talking about.

I will tell you, the thinking in this area is very fluid out there, and people are searching for solutions whereby able-bodied people who are without work and who are accessing social allowances, who want to be back to work and are not able to do so because

of the high unemployment. Some critical thinking, some new thinking has to take place, and I am looking forward to some of the thoughts that may be put forward by colleagues in other western jurisdictions.

I have only gone through about half of the enhancements that have been brought in in the last three years. I know the member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis) is interested, and maybe we will get another opportunity to go over the rest of them at another point. But I am very conscious of what the Chairperson has said, that it is time that we should move on.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: We are dealing with line 1.(d) Social Services Advisory Committee, (1) Salaries \$117,700.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Deputy Chairperson, on this general area of Social Services Advisory capacity, whether it be from the advice of the Children's Advocate or the advice of Social Services Advisory Committee or the advice of opposition members or the advice of community organizations, I would like to try to get some answers out of the minister on some very fundamental questions.

The minister just made a very interesting comment in his very long regurgitation of his opening statement about all of the supposed achievements of this government in the area of Family Services. He pointed to other governments, particularly the government of Ontario, and lauded supposed statements from that government and other governments along the lines that they cannot afford to pay people to stay at home any longer.

I want to ask, since the minister seems to support that kind of statement, why then did this government turn around and eliminate one program that did a great deal to ensure people were making use of social assistance in terms of education and job opportunities, that being, of course, the elimination of the student social allowance program?

How on the one hand can he praise other governments for saying we cannot pay people to stay at home, and then on the other hand turn around and cut off one program that is aimed to do precisely that, which is to get people who are on social assistance off the cycle of welfare to get their basic education and to get a foot in life, so that they can care for themselves and their family?

Is the minister not contradicting himself? Could he explain, if he believes in that philosophy of getting

people on welfare a head start or a push up, how can he cut one program that does precisely that?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Deputy Chairperson, if the member for St. Johns thought I was lauding the government of Ontario she must have been in conversation with her friend the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett), because I was not lauding a government that has a \$17 billion deficit, a government that is looking at laying off 20,000 civil servants, a government whose Crown corporation in Hydro has had to lay off already 4,500 people, a government that is desperately trying to find ways to reduce that staggering deficit which is approaching the magnitude of what the national government has.

I am simply saying that the Premier of Ontario is saying that there has to be some new thinking around the social allowances. From indications I have seen in the national papers it has thrown the membership into a bit of a dither there because this is foreign talk for a socialist Premier like that. Members of the unions and long-time supporters of that party cannot believe that the Premier of Ontario has flip-flopped on what has been a hallmark of NDP policy over the many, many years.

All I am pointing out to you is that the comments made by that Premier with the significant difficulties that they have, comments made by other Premiers, by a new minister in Alberta, by a new President of the United States are signalling that, because of the structural changes that have taken place not only in Canada but across North America and across the world, which have led into this recession and the fact that there is a great difficulty in accessing employment.

Now, fortunately, Manitoba's unemployment rate is very low, but we still have a significant problem here, and I am saying that if Premier Bob and others have some new thinking on how we can get people back to work and make that transition from social assistance into the workforce, if we have something to learn from him, so much the better.

It does remind me of one of our other enhancements that fits into what I am saying here. On January 1, we extended the health benefits to social assistance recipients who were sole-support parents or disabled clients to allow them to keep their health card while they make that transition from social allowances into the world of work, because it was thought that this had been somewhat of an

impediment to those people and a reason why they chose not to go into the workforce. I notice now that other provinces are starting to look at that too.

In a new paper just put out in the province of Alberta, they too are going to look at recipients being allowed to maintain their health card as they transition into the workforce and, hopefully, that will get more of these people off the social allowances.

* (1610)

The member ended by talking about the student social allowances, and I am not sure if the member was here before, but we did have an agreement that we were going to adjourn here at 4:15 today, because I have to go to an interprovincial meeting.

Maybe I can just say a few things about the student social allowances. This again was a program that was unique to Manitoba that some 1,100 recipients were accessing in recent times that government can no longer afford to maintain, although it will be in existence until the end of June, at which time it will be terminated, a program that other provinces felt that they could not offer and could not maintain and again one of the very difficult decisions that the member for St. Johns's Leader has acknowledged many times.

As a result, we have had to make that very difficult decision because of the demands on the department in many other areas. The member is correct that this was one of the areas we had to reduce, and we will try to accommodate them in the best way through other programming that exists.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee that we rise? The hour being 4:15 p.m., committee rise.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

Madam Chairperson (Louise Dacquay): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply is dealing with the Estimates for the Department of Highways and Transportation.

We are on item 2. Operations and Maintenance, (a) Maintenance Program \$48,075,000.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I ask if the minister's staff could come to the Chamber if the minister would require them to assist, please?

Madam Chairperson: Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Madam Chairperson, I have informed them. They are on the way. They should be here momentarily.

Madam Chairperson: Shall the item pass?

Mr. Reid: Madam Chairperson, under this section, under the Maintenance Program, I have many questions to ask of the minister.

(Mr. Ben Sveinson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

There has been a significant change in the staffing of this section of the minister's department. I would like to ask, because there has been a change in the way the maintenance programs and the regions have been structured, there have been 12 positions that have been changed, and there has been significant funding transferred. These 12 positions, what were the positions that were eliminated? Where were they from, and have these people been absorbed by other sections of the minister's department or transferred to other departments, or has it been through attrition?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, before I answer that, there was a question on a certain appropriation, and a sample that was wanted in terms of expenditures of \$13,400 in our Estimates under Appropriation 15.1 (e). I have a copy for each of the critics that I would like to have distributed to them which gives you an example of the amount we spent, \$9,300. This appropriation is for \$13,400, but I will give a copy to each critic.

I also undertook to get more information on the Occupational Health and Safety Branch, exactly what has happened there, and I have copies for each one of the critics as well. The member had indicated we had until summer, but we have done it already, so that is fast.

The member asked if in the section under the Maintenance Program, there has been a reduction in staff. Does he want to deal with it as a whole because there are reductions in certain categories? If the member has gone through his Supplementary pages, it shows exactly in which areas the staff reductions have taken place.

Mr. Acting Chairperson, the staff that he is referring to were seasonal staff, and those positions were vacant. I just want to maybe indicate to the members that actually in the reductions within the Department of Highways and Transportation, the

staff reductions that have taken place, in most cases we dealt with vacant positions. There were some live or filled positions that basically were affected, and we have accommodated all of those in the department, with no exception, as there was nobody that was laid off that has not been accommodated within the department.

Mr. Reid: I seem to be hearing over and over again throughout the various Estimates processes over the years that I have been the critic that we leave a fair number of jobs vacant and we do not fill those jobs over the course of the year. Then when it comes time for the budget considerations, we eliminate those positions.

Is this becoming a standard practice of the department where we leave these jobs vacant so that we can reduce staff? Is that how we are going about that now? Is that the government policy?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, no, that is not the case. The member must understand that with the amount of employees that we have, which is over 2,300 employees in my total department, you will have ongoing movement in there—people retiring. Until positions get readvertised, there is an ongoing vacancy rate. This has been going on, no matter, even after the reductions that take place. After the budgetary process that we have just gone through, we still have a vacancy rate that runs in the area of sometimes around 5 per cent.

So it is not done with malice aforethought or any planning. It is just within a big department like this, this is an ongoing thing.

Mr. Reid: In the last opportunity we had at sitting where we were talking about the summer maintenance program, the minister indicated that we were cutting back in the roadside maintenance programs. I do not believe—I am not sure if we had concluded the discussion on that with respect to the impact that it was going to have on the structures themselves—not the structures, but the infrastructure itself, the highway roadbed.

If we are going to cut back on the maintenance, are we going to have problems with water retention there, is it going to have long-term impacts and degradation of the transportation network within the province, the highways?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, within the summer maintenance the primary area of reduction will be in the roadside maintenance activities. So it is not the road itself which is going to be affected, it

is the roadside activities that we are basically addressing because these activities have the least impact on highway safety. Identifying the required reductions to accommodate the approved level of expenditure, the department avoided to the extent possible the reductions in road-surface work. So we still feel that we can maintain the road system itself.

I made reference to it the other day, that the esthetics itself are the ones that are going to basically be affected in terms of how we do our roadside mowing, how we do the maintenance of our plantings along these roads. These are the areas that are going to be visible to the eye, but the reductions should not generally affect our road system for safety reasons or otherwise.

Mr. Reid: Also, I had written to the minister some time back and he had responded. It was with concern to one of the roads in northern Manitoba. I believe it was 391, if I am not mistaken.

There was a traffic accident that was on that road. It was my understanding that the accident had occurred as a result of dust conditions on the road, where one vehicle passed another going in opposite directions, creating a dust condition of course almost like a whiteout in the wintertime. The vehicle ended up in the ditch. Not only can it be loss of life in accidents like that, it can also create significant property damage.

Are we cutting back on the dust control or the dust abatement programs on the northern roads? There are not that many of them up there that have hardtop or asphalt surfaces. Of course, we need to have significant maintenance on them, I am sure, in the summer months. Are we cutting back on that dust abatement and maintenance of the northern road systems?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, in the past year we did not cut down. We maintained our program of dust maintenance throughout the province. For this year, there will be a reduction in that. I might as well tell the member right now, where we used to do dust treatment in front of residences on our PRs, we will not be doing it to the same extent this year for obvious reasons, which are financial reasons. As far as making reference that the North is treated differently, has been cut back, that is not the case.

However, we are reviewing the whole aspect of the dust treatment within the province, and what we

have tried to do—I mean, the most desired thing would be that we could treat every gravel road that we had. This is not possible. We are very concerned every time there is a death on one of our highways because invariably somebody wants to attribute it to something that the department has or has not done. We are very conscientious about the safety end of it.

What we do for the dust treatment in the northern communities or northern roads, I should say—391, 373, some of the other gravel roads that we have, we have certain areas that we call passing areas where we basically take a stretch of a mile or two, two miles, where we then do dust applications so that there are areas where people can pass.

For financial reasons, it is just impossible for us to do the dust layer on all the roads that we have that are gravel. Much as I would like to see that done, it just is not in the cards.

Mr. Reid: Can the minister give me an indication, because he has mentioned that there is going to be some cutback in the dust abatement program, what type of reduction are we anticipating, are we going to put in place for the coming summer months which we are obviously entering now? Could he put a percentage figure on it to give me an indication on the number of applications, times of application, or an overall percentage that would be attached to the reduction?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, the amount that we are cutting back on the dust maintenance, or the dust suppression, is in the area of doing it in front of residences. That will be done by option. If they want, they will have to pay for that service to be provided. That is the area where we basically are cutting back.

Mr. Reid: If I understand the minister correctly then, it is only going to be done in front of the residence properties along the way, and they are going to be responsible for the cost?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, that is correct. Until now, we provided this service with the people living within a certain distance from the road; we provided calcium treatment in front of those residences. That is one of the areas where we will be cutting back on service, and those who would want to have it would have to pay for that service.

This is very much in keeping, Mr. Acting Chairperson, with what the municipalities, by and large, are doing, where most of them charge a

certain fee for giving dust protection in front of residences. This will create an inconvenience. Yes, it will. We realize that. This is one of the tough decisions that we had to make in this department in trying to achieve our targets.

If the member looks at the balance of the cutbacks that we have, we actually implemented some of the cutbacks. For example, in Winter Maintenance, we were always proud, right after a snowfall or a storm, to take and have our crews into towns cleaning up the snow. We are using a slow-down process where we are now taking and stockpiling the snow along the centre and doing it when, basically, our crews are available to do it. We used to go out and hire crews above what we had to do it as expeditiously as possible.

So these are the things under the Maintenance Program, the cutback that is there, that will be affecting the services to some of the people. We will still try and do it as efficiently as we can.

Mr. Reid: We have talked—the minister has given an indication here of northern roads being affected. Does this same policy apply to any of the gravel roads in the southern portion of the province where the residents would then be responsible for cost of the dust abatement program?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, I am sorry if I did not clarify that. That is a policy across the province. It is not directed at the north or south. It is a policy across the province in terms of not doing the dust treatment in front of residences.

* (1450)

Mr. Reid: Can the minister give me an indication on the type of cost savings we might expect out of this change in this program? What kind of dollar value can he attach to the savings?

Mr. Driedger: Over \$500,000, Mr. Acting Chairperson.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Sveinson): 2.(a) Maintenance Program \$48,075,000.

Mr. Reid: Sorry, I was a little bit delayed in putting my hand up there before you moved through that section, but I am sure we can ask questions under the Other Expenditures.

To go back to the Maintenance Program, the Winter Maintenance program, of course, is obviously going to be important because of the conditions we have in this province during the winter

months—[interjection] I am sure the minister will have the opportunity. If he wants to provide me with some questions, I will be pleased to ask them for him for any residents of his area who might be living maybe in the Headingley area in particular.

What type of maintenance reduction program are we expecting, and what type of services will we be providing for the Winter Maintenance program? Are we going to be seeing a reduction of that as a result of the reduction of the workweek, or is that workweek reduction only going to be affecting the staff who are employed during the Summer Maintenance program?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, that workweek reduction is not going to affect the Winter Maintenance at all but will effect a reduction in Winter Maintenance. If the member was going to look at page 35, he will see there is a reduction from \$17,188,800 to \$15,723,000, which is not a dramatic decrease, but it is a decrease, however. I made reference to the fact that we are processing—in terms of snow or winter maintenance, we might not be plowing as often as we maybe did in the past. The snow clean-up at intersections in towns and villages, snow fencing, drainage, sanding and salting—these are all that we have just tightened up a little bit, still keeping the safety aspect of it in mind, when we are going to be doing this.

Of course, it is subject to the kind of winter. If the member can guarantee me that we are going to have a soft winter, that makes a big difference in my budget. We are strictly working on percentage—

An Honourable Member: Ask me, I will do it, I will guarantee it.

Mr. Driedger: I am glad my colleague is prepared to take and give me that assurance because that would really help. These are basically averages that we are putting in here, because that will not always apply to the same thing. For example, last winter we started off having bad storms in the beginning, and my budget was in dire straits halfway through the winter, and then we started getting better weather where we did not have to spend as much money. So we are subject first of all to the winter conditions, but this is generally based on an average winter. These are the things that we would be doing.

Mr. Reid: Then if we are seeing a one and a half million dollar reduction in the expenditures, which is about an 8.5 percent reduction over the previous

year, can the minister give me an idea of what we would look for by way of the Maintenance Program? When would we be doing our snow clearing? Would we wait until we have got a foot of snow on the ground? What change of policy is there that would indicate how the department is going to react?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, I just gave the member an indication that we will still be very conscientious in terms of doing what is required of us, in terms of salting, sanding, plowing, depending on the severity of the storm and what the snow conditions are like out there. When we are looking at the reduction under the Winter Maintenance alone, if we look at that, that reduction is not that major. So there are a few areas where we just maybe do not plow as often. The department has always taken great pride in making—right after a storm, in the middle of the night the crews are out there doing it. We might just have to slow down some of those things a little bit, how fast we get out there, save on some overtime.

The cleanup in the towns and villages is a thing that is pretty costly, and we will just maybe do that a little slower as well. We have our plows out in towns and villages; we windrow it in the centre. I do not know, the member is probably not aware of what happens in rural areas, but where we used to take and windrow it and clean it up, we will just maybe—in my own community of Grunthal, for example, when the snow is lying there for a week, you know, people get a little nervous when the snow is on the street windrowed in the centre for a week, but those are basically areas where we can gradually accumulate savings.

Mr. Reid: It is obvious with this reduction, I take it then there will be a reduction in the number of people performing the services required for the Winter Maintenance program. Can the minister tell me, over the course of the past years and including last year, have we underspent the monies that were allocated for that portion of the budget for either the Summer or the Winter Maintenance programs, or have we expended up to the allotted amounts?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, both in the Summer and Winter Maintenance and our total Maintenance budget, we are pretty well bang on in terms of the monies being expended. It is with, you know, good planning but also with a little bit of luck, because if we had ended up with another couple of

severe storms at the tail end of March before the end of the fiscal year, that could have had a big bearing on it. We were fortunate that we did not get two or more major storms at the end of March. So those are the kind of things that we are subject to.

Mr. Reid: This might be more of interest to the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Ernst) than to the Minister of Highways and Transportation, but I find it curious that the minister indicates that his department is pretty well bang on in its operations in the expenditure of its funds and its mandate to provide clean, safe highways, and yet we see the City of Winnipeg, every time they get a snowstorm—well, we are going to be a million dollars over budget because of this one storm.

How is it that the minister is able to maintain his budget? I mean, we have the same climatic conditions for the rural and surrounding Winnipeg areas. How can he run such an efficient type ship there when the City of Winnipeg, you know, that falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Ernst) of course, cannot seem to maintain their snow-clearing budget? How is this minister able to maintain that?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, the member just answered himself when he started off saying that my people are very efficient. I am serious, though, because over the years I have a good idea. For example, the Summer Maintenance, when we set our budgets, the districts know how much money they basically will have to expend within that. When we cut back in certain things and tell them this is what you do, they have been at it for such a long time, it is not like a rookie politician coming into the Legislature not knowing what they are doing. These people have been here for a long time, know their business. When we have targets we can basically accomplish them with the exception of the unforeseen. When we have storms that may be at the tail end of our fiscal year, they basically create some problems for us.

Mr. Reid: I remember the minister taking in, I think it was, the last session. He was quite concerned by the uncontrollable costs which included fuel at that time. Is that still a concern of the department? Do we still have that problem? Are there many uncontrollable costs that are within the Maintenance section of his department?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, no. At the present time this is not a problem for us. We have

a pretty reasonable idea. If all of a sudden fuel costs would escalate by 10 percent, 15 percent, 20 percent, in my department that makes a dramatic difference. We do not foresee this happening, so we feel comfortable that there is nothing unforeseen at the present time that we are aware of that would affect anything we are doing.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Svelinsson): Item 2.(a) Maintenance Program \$48,075,000—pass.

2.(b) Management Services, (1) Salaries \$1,135,800.

* (1500)

Mr. Reid: I will be very brief here. It shows a reduction in the Other Expenditures, under Management Services. I know the minister was giving some explanation to the member for St. James (Mr. Edwards) when we last met on Estimates. Is the expenditures under the Other section, page 37, as a result of people of the Management Services moving about the province and performing their duties, or can he give me some kind of a breakdown in the Other Operating Expenditures?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, there are no specific things that we are not doing the way we used to do. It is just part of the general reduction which we have applied through all elements within my department across the board. So we are trying to do—without getting to be more specific, we are asking staff to get out there, provide as close to the same services we did before, a little bit more efficiently. That was basically what I was trying to address in my opening remarks, that we are trying with less money provide the same kind of service.

Mr. Reid: We have eliminated one staffperson under the Managerial. It indicates here the position was eliminated due to regionalization. What service or what job or function did that individual perform? Were they transferred within the department, and, if so, where were they transferred to, and why is it that we can do without that service now that we have gone to the regionalization?

Mr. Driedger: I made reference to the regionalization before. What we have done under regionalization with the establishment of five regional offices, we feel that we are moving more of the responsibility to these regional offices, and we have combined the position of construction and maintenance. Where we used to have two

positions, we have amalgamated those two positions. We will have one individual who will be basically operating out of Winnipeg here, and the regions will have more autonomy in terms of how they do it from there.

We feel this is part of the rationalization and regionalization that is taking place.

Mr. Reid: From my own experience from the workforce, the ratio here of managerial people to technical/professional and administrative support seems to be fairly high. We have four staff years managerial and 27 in total. So the ratio there seems to be significantly below what one would expect in private industry, where I have seen a ratio somewhere in the range of one to 25 or sometimes up to one to 50. Why in this case here is the ratio so low?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, they do not only manage the positions that are shown there, they also manage the regional offices, which used to be the district offices. The managerial staff there, aside from the people that are immediately under them, also take and have the responsibility of managing the regional offices.

Mr. Reid: If I understand the minister correctly then, the regional offices themselves will not have a manager on site. All the management services will fall under the head office.

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, we will still have a regional director in each of the regions. These are support staff basically that do the supplementary work that is involved with the whole region.

We have a regional director, and he has his staffing people, his maintenance people, his construction people, his bridge people. They are all part of a component and service that we provide. These are the ones that do the, how shall I say that, administrative level, general program direction. That is the kind of service that these people provide to all our outside activities within the regions.

(Mr. Bob Rose, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Rose): 2.(b) Management Services (1) Salaries \$1,135,800—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$470,900—pass.

2.(c) Contracts (1) Salaries \$781,500.

Mr. Reid: On page 38 of the Supplementary Estimates, the Expected Results: Advertising,

awarding and payment of contracts for highway construction and maintenance projects in Manitoba.

Looking at the project lists that the minister has provided for us over the course of the years that I have been here, it has provided us with some information not only on how and who the projects are awarded to, but can the minister give me an indication if all of the contracts are tendered before they are awarded? Has the list that he provides, has provided for us in the past also indicated all of the contracts that his department would award?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, I would say that anything under a construction program by and large is tendered. We have unique circumstances in more isolated areas where possibly we need immediate work done. It would be undertaken, for example, if we have heavy rainfall, if there are culvert problems, road problems, washouts, where we move ahead without having a tendered project, but as far as the capital program is concerned, in terms of construction, these things are all tendered. They are tendered, you know, whether it is crushing of gravel, whether it is the grading job, whether it is the base and the AST, whether it is the asphalt application. Everything is tendered in that category. We do not take and arbitrarily award anything other than in emergency cases that I just mentioned before.

Mr. Reid: Quite possibly, I should have asked this under the maintenance section, but the same advice is available to the minister, I take it. In the remotes or the rural parts of our province, and I have seen this in some of the media broadcasts, where we have had difficulties with water alongside of our highways as a result of beaver population, has that created a problem in our highways throughout the province, and if so, has the minister or his department had any consultation with the Ministry of Natural Resources to deal with the problem?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, the beaver problem is actually an escalating problem that is, I think, because of the lack of value for pelts, that they are not being trapped as aggressively as in the past, and as a result, in certain parts of the province, the northern portion being one, around the national park being another, we are having more and more difficulties with the beavers setting up dams and flooding that takes place, not only adjacent to the road, but actually effecting, you know, washouts, et cetera.

What we have done, we have within the past year—well, we are in the process right now of entering into an agreement with the Manitoba Trappers Association, where we are developing a one-year trial project with them, where they will be doing the trapping. We will be paying them a certain amount of money for every pelt that is taken. It is going to be under the supervision of our people in the field so that, you know, there is not going to be any abuse taking place there. [interjection]

No, this is with the Trappers Association, and I am quite pleased. I think the Trappers Association is quite pleased with this trial project that we are going into, and we have a good understanding in our discussions with them that it can only work if both sides want to make it work. So I think that will probably help to some degree, but yes, the beavers are a problem, and it is not getting any less.

Mr. Reid: If the minister's department has entered into an agreement with the Trappers Association and they are going to pay for, I guess, the pelts that are presented, how do we control or how do we verify that indeed a certain number of pelts have been taken so that payment can be made to those who are employed in the trapping industry?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, we spent a lot of time developing how we could do this so that there would be, you know, safeguards in place. We do not pay by the pelt. In fact, we are down to the details where I think the beaver has on one of his left feet what they call a grooming claw, and that will be the identification in terms of—but just to maybe build up to that, when we do have a problem, we have the list of the trappers in the area.

We will be contacting them or the Manitoba Trappers Association if we cannot get the immediate one in the area, and they will allocate somebody for us. They will go out and do an appraisal, and these guys are pretty qualified. They can tell you if in a certain hut, you know, if we can call it that, beaver house, that there is maybe four, five, six or seven beavers involved, and then we authorize them to trap them before we remove the dam. Then this has to be done in conjunction with our people.

* (1510)

Mr. Reid: Under the area of Contracts, now, I do not know if it fits under this section or not, and the minister can advise me on that. Since VIA Rail had eliminated 50 percent of its rail service and, of

course, drastically impacted us in Manitoba's service or levels of service, there were some concerns within the residents of Manitoba that owned or rented or leased cottages in and around the Whiteshell area where those cottages were only accessible by rail. I have had some meetings over the past couple of years with those who have been affected. In fact, some of them reside in my own community.

Can the minister tell me if meetings are still ongoing or what actions are taking place, if any, to deal with that problem, the people who only have restricted access to their properties in and about the Whiteshell area? At the same time, has any discussion been taking place or are discussions taking place with the government of Ontario who, of course, is affected as well by that reduction in rail service?

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, there are ongoing discussions with the people who are affected at certain lakes. I think it is Nora Lake and Florence Lake which are affected by Manitoba residents. I have taken the case up, together with the people involved, with the federal Minister of Transport, who is basically responsible for the decision with VIA Rail. Subject to that, there have been ongoing discussions with the group. They have organized and they have had discussions with myself and my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources in terms of looking at the option of a road access into there. It has been a long, difficult process.

The long and short of it is, the group will now be making an application before the environmental commission in terms of getting a road established from the Manitoba side to give access to the two lakes that basically are affected from our people. How Ontario is dealing with their end of it, I do not know. We basically are addressing the concerns from our end of it.

Mr. Reid: I thought it would be important if the governments of Manitoba and Ontario both got together on this. The cottage properties, the summer properties—some of them are even year-round properties. Residents live there. I thought it would be important if both the Manitoba and the Ontario government got together on this, because a lot of those lakes that are in that area are adjoining one another and are separated by what one might consider to be relatively short distances

of forest, why we could not have a joint venture in there so that we could have a road network link-up.

I know from my own experience and the people I have dealt with in those areas, they have undertaken and are currently in several cases have a roads board that has been established. The property owners there have been responsible for that roads board and for the raising of funds to offset the costs of maintenance. In many of the cases, considering the amount of money that would be necessary for the new construction into there, they could not undertake that through their local residents roads boards.

Why could we not have a joint venture between the Manitoba and the Ontario government to provide—I am not talking about super class highways here. We are just talking about some means of road access into those properties. Why could we not have a joint consultation with the Ontario government on this to put pressure upon the federal government to live up to its responsibility? Those property owners were there for a long time and that service has been removed from them with respect to VIA Rail.

Mr. Driedger: Mr. Acting Chairperson, the member is not bringing up anything new, but we only have the one group that basically organized for the two lakes affected by the Manitoba portion. When they first came to us, I corresponded with the Ontario minister in terms of seeing whether we could take a joint position forward to the federal government. They did not express interest in doing it at that time.

So we pursued it federally at our own level. Then subsequent to many meetings and discussions that have taken place since that time, it is at the point where the Minister of Natural Resources has given them clearance to see whether they can get environmental clearance or licence to put a road through the wilderness, a plan that has been tentatively drawn up by my people. We are trying to assist as best we can without having financial involvement.

Ultimately, it is my understanding that they would get an environmental licence to punch a road through, you know, a portion of the wilderness to give them access that once they have that licence, then we would take again, work together with them to try and approach the federal government to participate financially in the actual construction of it.

We also looked at other options, Mr. Acting Chairperson, in terms of a rail bus. We have looked virtually at every option that we could in terms of trying to assist these people. So there has been a good working relationship between my department, the Department of Natural Resources and the association that is looking for access.

Mr. Reid: That leads me to a couple more questions then. Can the minister indicate the name of the group and, if possible, any of the representatives that have communicated with his department? Were they conducting meetings with the minister with respect to only certain lake areas, because it was my understanding that there was a larger group that had been involved, covered a much larger area from Winnipeg to Minaki or Winnipeg to Farlane, Ontario, other than just the few lakes that the minister has talked about here?

Mr. Driedger: The only group that we have been dealing with that has come forward to see us has been the group dealing with the Nora and Florence Lake. I believe that is the—maybe the Minister of Natural Resources can help me out. I think those were the two lakes that were affected that we could possibly look at economically, or not economically maybe, but what was reasonable to access from the Manitoba side.

The other lakes further up that are affected would actually have to be accessed through Ontario from a much different direction because of the layout of this thing. If the member has interest sometime after the Estimates process, I would be prepared to have him sit down and just look at the maps and some of the proposals that we have been working on, not trying to detract from the information that you want.

Mr. Reid: . . . Rennie, which is in Manitoba?

Mr. Driedger: Pardon me.

Mr. Reid: Rennie.

Mr. Driedger: Our access basically—it is hard to explain verbally here exactly where it goes. On the maps, you know, we look at which is the best access to get down there. You have to take into consideration the—what is that park called? Nopiming Park is the one that is being affected. You know, we are trying to skirt around that so as not to affect them, as minimal as possible.

The road comes from that general area where we have part of this point of access right now. From

there on, it is taking off—the Mantario area there, the hiking area, we are trying to circumvent that. To be fair without trying to delay things and talk too vaguely, I would have to actually show the member exactly on the map what we are trying to accomplish and what their application before the Clean Environment people is. I am prepared to undertake that.

Mr. Reid: I thank the minister for that. I will take him up on his offer after the Estimates are finished and come to his office and talk further about this, because there still are those concerns as I have raised here amongst the property owners in that area, and I think they would like to see some resolution of this because it is not too far down the road.

If we look at what has been happening with the train service in this country since the cutback, there is even a further deterioration of service and potentially maybe even the elimination of any of the stops in those areas. So it becomes more important if all service is eliminated. I will take the minister up on his offer.

I have no other questions under this section.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Rose): Item 2.(c)(1) Salaries \$781,500—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$149,800—pass.

2.(d) Bridges and Structures, (1) Salaries \$1,824,000—pass.

2.(d)(2) Other Expenditures \$246,900.

* (1520)

Mr. Reid: This is obviously an important section for us in this province because we spend a fair chunk of our money on bridges and structures in the province.

With the changes in the National Safety Code and the pressure upon the various governments across the country to increase the weights and dimensions of vehicles moving on our highways—and I am talking now about trucking—are we seeing or do we anticipate having an advanced maintenance program, a replacement program as a result of pressures to increase the weights and dimensions for trucking on the highways?

(Madam Chairperson in the Chair)

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I am pleased that the member has raised the issue of weights and dimensions.

What has happened in the last five years, I think we virtually tripled the RTAC routes that we have in the province from the time that I took office. One of the biggest deterrents from expanding the system even more extensively than we have is the fact that our structures are more of a problem—the weights—than the road itself. What we have done is, we have expanded the system throughout the province to try and get a more equitable type of distribution system under the RTAC loading, which is very important to the trucking industry.

As far as the rehabilitation of bridges is concerned, we have been spending more money on bridges in the province, I think, than we had earlier on in my tenure as Minister of Highways and Transportation, of course, the structures being very expensive, you know, if you take bridges across the Assiniboine or if you take bridges, the Red River, some of the major arteries, always big megabucks involved.

We are trying to do that related to our capital expenditure. We have so and so much that we try and allocate for bridges. We try and allocate so and so much for grading and so and so much for what we call base and the AST and for paving and for concrete, both. We try and do that in as fair a way as possible throughout the province so that the contractors we have in the province all have a chance to at least get to bid on work which affects their type of company.

For example, some of our contractors are what we call grading contractors; some of our contractors are paving contractors, and some of our contractors are basically involved in the bridge construction. We try and do a blend of this each year, very conscientious, so that we do not deviate too much from that. So there is an expectation out there of what they can expect and within reason that at least there is a certain amount of work out for each of the categories.

Mr. Reid: I took a phone call yesterday from a concerned Manitoba resident living in the MacGregor area. Of course, from my understanding of the announced Highways program, there is going to be some federal-provincial money expended on the Trans-Canada Highway. The individual had called and was concerned about the fact that they had a truck and they would normally provide services for your department through the course of the summer construction program. Yet the individual is not

getting that opportunity this year—and is a resident of MacGregor—because the company that is doing that contract, or that was awarded that contract, is bringing in their people from the city of Winnipeg to do that work for them.

Do we have some kind of a policy in place that would assist people living in the rural areas so that they might take part in any contracts that would be awarded, to provide them with some seasonal income during the very short construction period that we have?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, the only area where we would possibly have a hiring preference would be in the northern communities or the northern parts of the province to allow our northern people to have job opportunities.

In the balance of the province, when we do tender we do not tell the contractor who to hire or what. Though, my understanding was that most contractors are very receptive to hiring local. I get so many people that phone, young people, other people that phone at this time of year who think that actually the government is doing the building. We basically do not. We tender it. The contractors are the ones that basically do the hiring of staff, aside from the engineering staff component and the surveyors that make sure that the work is done. Other than that it is the contractor that does the hiring.

So sympathizing with the individual out there, I would suggest that if the particular project that he is not being hired for, that there are other contracts in the general area. I think if he would get in touch with the heavy construction industry, he could probably get the names of all the contractors, where they have jobs, so that he could maybe look for diversifying from this one particular project.

If the member is saying that the individual was working for government, I am not sure but I would suspect that in most cases the equipment that we have, we do not go out and hire individuals to do certain work as related to construction unless in unique cases. Like, we hire backhoes or stuff of that nature for certain specific needs, but a truck, for example, I would like to think that we will have enough work out there that a truck driver who has a truck should be able to get around and find that information. He can go to the district office and find out which contracts are available in the general area so that he can work as close to home as possible.

I know that many of the truckers that take jobs, you know some of them live a couple of hundred miles away from where they hire on with the contractors. Basically, it is the contractors that make the decision, not the government.

Mr. Reid: The reason why I raised this is I feel some sympathy, I suppose, or some empathy, I think would be a better term, for the people that are living in those areas. I mean, employment opportunities are scarce probably at the best of times. Then they see a large firm that has been awarded a contract for highway construction come into their communities bringing people from larger population centres like maybe Thompson, Brandon or Winnipeg to do this type of work and leave out, without any consideration, people living in the rural areas.

I do not mean to suggest for a minute that the minister should make any hard and firm or fast rules for these firms that are awarded these contracts, but it is in the interest of consideration for people living in the rural areas that obviously rely on some form of seasonal work that is either in the Highways capital construction program or in the Maintenance Program, where there are private contracts awarded, why we cannot indicate to the contractors that have been awarded the contracts, we would like you to give consideration to those that are living in the rural areas that might come to you seeking work to give the people in the rural areas that opportunity. I throw that out as a suggestion for the minister and leave that with him.

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I was under the impression that most of the contractors look to get the services as close to the general area as possible, like from the general area. I in my own area have many smaller truckers that continually ask for potential involvement for working for the department. It need not just be truckers, it could be backhoe operators, other machinery. What I always suggest to them is to go to the district office, now the regional office, put your name in, you know, register your name there that you are available for whatever work comes up, and invariably that has worked satisfactorily for many of the people, at least the smaller operators in my area who take a job wherever they can.

We try and do it as fairly as possible in terms of giving them provision to get involved that way. In my area it works that way. I would suggest in this case that that individual maybe register with my

department in Portage, or Brandon for that matter, and that he is available for work and then possibly if something comes up he can have advantage of that.

Mr. Reid: To go back to Bridges and Structures, the minister indicated that his department expends a fair amount of its available resources in dollars on bridges and structures.

If we are going to see, and I take it, maybe my perception is wrong, that the structures in the rural areas may be not up to the same standard levels as what you might find on your more major arteries through the province. If we are going to see changes in the method of payment for grain producers and there is a potential that we would see larger vehicles moving from the farm gate to wherever they would move their grain product over the grid road systems in the province, have we anticipated or have we done any studies to determine what impact that change in the method of payment is going to have on the bridges and structures and the grid road systems in the province?

* (1530)

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, a lot of this is anticipatory in terms of which lines might be dropped ultimately, but continually my department and myself have raised major concerns in terms of what happens when you have rail line abandonment. In my opening remarks I also made reference to the change in the method of payment and the impact that it would have. The province, from the time that I was in office, and it had actually taken place before my time, had come to an understanding in terms of addressing the process of abandonment in such a way that there should be provisions for some offset transferring when you abandon, there should be some offset in compensation for municipalities, communities and the provincial government because we transfer that transportation responsibility from rail to highways.

That has continually been our position even as late as last week when I attended the Westac [phonetic] conference and have raised it continually, together with my colleague the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Findlay), who raised it as well, that there is going to be an impact on the provincial and municipal road structures. So that has always been one of the top issues that we bring forward if there

are going to be changes taking place in terms of abandonment or method of payment.

Mr. Reid: Well, I am glad the minister and his colleague raised that at those meetings. Can the minister give me any idea of impact, dollar value-wise, that these changes might mean for the province of Manitoba? I hope the minister's department has undertaken some studies to determine what this would mean in the sense for bridges and structures and the roadbeds themselves. I mean, there must be some preliminary studies that have been done to this point.

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, my director of transportation policy is not here. We anticipate him to join us when we get to that section. He basically has more precise information, and he is my representative on the hearings that are taking place regarding the rail study that is taking place, has been very actively involved in this. When we come to that section of the Estimates, Appropriation 5, once we get to that, I would be able to have Dennis Schaefer here who can probably give you a bit more precise information at that time, prepared to do that then.

Madam Chairperson: Item 2.(d)(2) Other Expenditures \$246,900—pass; 2.(d)(3) Bridge Maintenance \$823,600—pass.

Item 2.(e) Transport Compliance.

Mr. Reid: I have raised many questions with the minister on this section in the past, when there were issues that were brought to my attention with respect to the trucking and the rail industry from a safety perspective in this province. The minister had provided some information for us in the sense of truck traffic and rail traffic in the province. Can he give me an indication on whether or not there are any vacancies that are existing within the staff of the Transport Compliance?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, we have three vacancies in that element out of 56.26 SYs. We have three vacancies at the present time and are proceeding to go through the process of filling those.

Mr. Reid: Can the minister indicate where those vacancies exist? Is it in the managerial, the technical or the administrative?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, in the technical area.

Mr. Reid: Is it common to see a turnover of staff in the technical section?—because, if my

understanding is correct, these are the people who do the actual checking for compliance. Would we normally see a large turnover of staff in that section of the department, and if so, why?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, certainly nothing out of the unusual. I know that, for example, in my specific district out there, the compliance officers out there have been there for, I think, forever. The only changes that will be taking place is through retirement or whatever specific reason. There is nothing untoward happening that would create more people to have a bigger turnover than any other position.

Mr. Reid: When I look at the changes in the dollar value, the reductions in the dollar value for the number of employees who are employed, there seems to be nearly double the amount of a decrease in the dollar value per employee percentage-wise in the administrative support versus those who are in the technical and managerial sections. Is there a reason why the administrative support staff is down 4.5 percent approximately when the managerial and technical are anywhere from less than 1 percent to 2 percent?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I tried to clarify that earlier on that in some cases you have, first of all, the overall reduction applied, which is 4 percent basically, which is reflected here, but it will vary in each category a little bit depending on increments and whether a senior individual has resigned. You sort of have a cycle taking place, so it will vary in each case. I do not know how to be much more specific, other than to go into great detail with staff and clarify that under each category.

There is nothing untoward happening. It will vary a little bit from each section that we look at, depending on the increments that individuals are qualified for, whether there has been a reclassification or whether there has been more junior staff that are on stream with a lesser wage, so to allay the concerns of the member, if that is what he is looking at, things are varied in the normal way of moving forward in terms of the wages.

Mr. Reid: Yes, I will accept that from the minister.

Can the minister indicate the number of inspections that the Transport Compliance people would have undertaken over the course of the last year? How many violations were there of the code, and can the minister indicate the type of violations

if he has that data available, a breakdown of the type of violations?

Mr. Driedger: The total number of vehicles processed in 1991-92 was 520,897. In '92-93, it was 436,901. I have it broken down here in regard to prosecution statistics based on overweight, oversized, public service vehicle, quality equipment and safety, driver vehicle licencing, dangerous goods, hours of service. I have all the categories broken down in terms of the prosecutions, other statistics that people basically are involved with the single-trip permits, the designated regulated commodity permits, motor fuel permits, revenue statistics.

If the member wants to, I can try and get information for him. Not today, but I will get it for him in terms of exactly how it is broken down. Would that be adequate?

Mr. Reid: Yes, I would appreciate that. I do not mean to say that the minister should provide it here and today, if he can provide it. He was very good about providing the last information I requested within the space of two days, so that would be acceptable.

Could the minister also indicate, because there appears to be a large number of infractions, even though the amount has decreased year over year from the previous year—are we seeing, as a result of better inspections, more reliability of equipment, more responsibility of the operators? Is that the reason why we are seeing a 90,000 decrease in the number of inspections required? Because we had technical staff that have not been available? What was the reason why there have been fewer inspections?

* (1540)

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, there are so many things that could affect this, you know, the amount of trucks that are on the road. Maybe the figures that I gave him initially—that is why I would rather take and process and give him the set of figures that show it precisely, because there is a lot of deviations in here.

For example, prosecutions are up from the year before, so less inspections maybe, but more prosecutions. So the information I have here—rather than give the false impression and have a long dialogue on it—I am prepared by Monday when we next meet on the Estimates to sort of have a summarization of exactly what has happened on the

category for both critics. It will give you a little better idea exactly what our Transport Compliance people have done.

Mr. Reid: That will be fine, if the minister can provide it then.

Can the minister give me an indication on the type of revenue that this would generate for the province by way of fines or sanctions that are imposed by those that are caught with infractions? What does it mean in terms of revenue for the province?

Mr. Driedger: Last year it was \$548,770 worth of fines and costs attributed to our Transport Compliance activities.

Mr. Reid: Is that for '92-93?

Mr. Driedger: Yes, Madam Chairperson, that was for '92-93.

Mr. Reid: Do we have the figures for the previous year?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, for the previous year it was \$473,267. In the sheet that I will provide for the members, it will also show the single-trip permits, the designated regulated commodity fees, the motor permits. I will have all that information on that sheet.

Mr. Reid: The minister obviously anticipated my next questions because that is what I was going to ask, the number of single-trip fees and the fuel tax and permit fees that the province would receive as a result of the Transport Compliance issuing these.

Can the minister also provide the number of special permits that his department would have issued and the reasons, generally, for the special permits, weight restrictions or otherwise?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, after I have provided this sheet for the member on Monday or whenever I can get it to him, hopefully Monday, I think it will cover all the areas. I can put them all into the record, but I do not know whether the member wants to spend the time doing that. So I will provide it for both my critics for Monday in terms which will cover all areas of it, even the ones that he maybe has not thought of.

Mr. Reid: I thank the minister for that.

How many actual inspectors do we have in doing the Transport Compliance monitoring, the inspections?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, we have 46 positions in that area.

Mr. Reid: I realize that. It is listed in the book here, under Technical/Professional. Are all of those people actually doing the inspections for Transport Compliance?

Mr. Driedger: Yes.

Mr. Reid: One last question under this section. The educational seminars to the trucking industry. I had asked questions in previous Estimates about education and training for those who are employed in the trucking industry, in the sense, the drivers. The minister had indicated that it was training for the drivers. It takes place under private companies whether it be—I think it is Merv Orr's or other firms that are in and about Manitoba.

We talk about educational seminars. Are these educational seminars that are put on by the department or by private industry, and what type of seminars is it that we provide for the trucking industry?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, we have, especially in the last number of months, expanded our activities in terms of having educational seminars in Brandon and other areas working very closely with the MTA, the Manitoba Trucking Association, in conjunction with them, so that we get out there and get the kind of coverage to let the people know what is happening when we have these seminars. It is a very well received activity that the MTA encourages in working with staff.

I might say we have, along with that and other things, a good working relationship with the MTA.

Mr. Reid: I know in discussions with my colleague for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) that the MTA seems to have had a fairly good working relationship with the government over a number of years now. The minister indicates that the MTA is happy with—I guess, it is maybe not the best term—the seminars that are put on, but are these educational seminars put on—

An Honourable Member: Elated.

Mr. Reid: They may be elated, yes. I have attended some of the conferences where the minister has addressed his remarks to them, and I have noted the relationship that exists between the minister and the industry, not that that relationship was not there with previous ministers. There may be some considerations that are given to this

minister that maybe were not afforded to other ministers.

When you said the MTA, that the educational seminars are provided for members of the Manitoba Trucking Association, are these for the managers and the directors of the company? Are these for the actual people who are employed within the operations, including drivers and maintenance people?

Mr. Driedger: My staff organizes these in conjunction with the MTA, but it is an open invitation for drivers, for managers, whoever wants to basically come. It is not that it is a closed type of shop.

Jointly they work out where these seminars are going to take place and then the invitations go out through whatever means of advertising, I guess. It is a joint effort.

Mr. Reid: Are these funded by the minister's department? The Transport Compliance section, are they responsible for the costs incurred for providing these seminars, or do the funds come about as a result of some other department?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, the only cost actually is the staff people who go out there and do it; that is virtually the only costs affiliated with the seminars. I pay my staff, or staff is paid through the department.

Mr. Nell Gaudry (St. Boniface): Yes, just a short comment here to say to my honourable friend the Minister of Highways that I was rehired for the day to be critic for Highways and Transportation.

My question to the minister: In regard to the salaries in general here, there has been a reduction, but there has been no reduction to staff. Is that because of the reduction in the working days during the period?

* (1550)

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, let me first of all welcome back my previous critic from the second opposition. Unfortunately, he was not here yesterday when I clarified that this was going to be throughout the information that you have there. Any reduction where the staff is the same is the reduction in the wages. That all reflects basically the reduced workweek program that we have implemented. You will see that throughout. It will vary a little bit depending on the categories where they are in. It is consistently a 4 percent reduction for each

individual. Now there are categories, there might be increments, there might be reclassifications, but that is basically what it reflects throughout here.

Mr. Gaudry: That is fine.

Madam Chairperson: Item 2.(e) Transport Compliance, (1) Salaries \$1,832,400—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$474,900—pass.

Item 2.(f) Winter Roads.

Mr. Reid: Under Winter Roads, of course, it is very important for the many parts of the northern part of our province in the sense that they have no other means of bringing their goods and services into their communities and moving their product for sale out of their communities. It is my understanding that the winter road systems this year did not have quite the season that we would normally have expected during the winter months. We had, I think, a late start. I sense, too, and I think I saw the advertisement where the winter road systems are now closed. It puts some difficulties upon these communities trying to get their goods and services into their communities during that short shipping time.

There was some discussion that I have heard and has been related to me by the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), that the communities would like to see, where possible, an extension of that winter roads season, maybe not so much for the trucking because of the weights that are involved, but for the normal traffic that might use those roads. Is there any possibility that winter road season could be extended for those people who are just moving about as passengers and not transport of freight?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, let me first of all explain and maybe give the member a little bit of background. I do not know whether he has ever had the privilege of travelling the winter roads. Each year is a different challenge for the department and for the people who construct the winter roads depending on the type of freeze-up you have, whether you have a lot of snow where the frost does not necessarily set in as good so that more work is involved in terms of doing the packing, et cetera, whether they have snow and the lakes do not freeze properly. Each year is a new challenge, and what we try and do—most of the people, I am talking trucking now, have an idea roughly what the season is. Every once in a while we get a curve thrown at us as we did this year in February when all of a sudden the temperature shoots way up and all of a

sudden our lakes are all full of water and the trail starts going down on us and we had to close it for a week. We then negotiated our contract—I should not say negotiated, but we reconsidered our position and because of the weather conditions extended it for an extra week from what we would normally close.

The member makes reference to the expansion of the time beyond what we normally have—not for the trucking industry as much because we did get all our trucking—we had some concerns that we would not get all our supplies in but basically all the suppliers got their trucks in. I think the last 19 trucks got in and we were already sweating bullets to see whether we could get them back out in time. But, anyway, we got the stuff in.

From the residential point of view, we have always had pressure to expand it earlier and later because this is the only way that they can basically reasonably financially get out into the world—if I can put it that bluntly—other than by plane or other ways. For these communities, they wait with anticipation until we have the winter roads open. Even before we officially open them, they are already driving on them and they continue to drive after we have officially closed.

We actually have no responsibility yet, at that stage of the game. For insurance reasons, they are on their own, and they actually drive the roads—the residents drive the roads until they virtually cannot drive anymore. To extend the season, the cost for doing that would be prohibitive. They are on their own, they can still do it. They can drive as long as the roads are barely drivable. It is not quite that simple in terms of extending it.

First of all, the costs, the monetary end of it, we have such and such a budget and as you notice, the member, I think, to both members I want to say that the appropriation for winter roads has not changed and has not been reduced as pretty well everything else has been done. I just want to make one correction here. On page 45, it says: "Recoverable from Canada: \$665.0." That is not precisely accurate because we recover an extra \$1 million I believe from the Southeast tribal council because we have a separate deal with them.

This is the first year where in my opening remarks I made reference to the fact that we have cut a deal with the Southeast Resource Development Council where they, instead of us dealing with the federal

government, the federal government has given them the responsibility of allocation. So we deal with them and that one group, the Norwin group, if I could make reference to it that way, where they, out of their allocation, then deal with us on the road.

The other ones, we still deal with the federal government. I just want to make that correction so that there is at one point \$665,000 that is recoverable basically from the federal government. One directly, and one through the Southeast Resource Development corporation.

Mr. Reid: I had written to the minister earlier and asked him for some information on the contracting procedures for those who are living in the northern areas of the province and who would like to be part of the winter road construction maintenance program. I thank the minister for that information. I did pass that along.

The minister has introduced, at least for first reading, a piece of legislation dealing with winter road amendments. Can the minister give me some explanation of what the purpose is, because this legislation has not gone forward any further than the initial first reading. What is taking place with the bill and when we might expect to see that legislation come forward.

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I suppose I have to take some responsibility for having moved on the first reading of that bill without being totally prepared. So I still am not any further in terms of being prepared to give second reading. We are working with staff to see whether we will proceed with the bill or not. There are certain things that I alluded to with the member in terms of the concerns that we had in terms of what we were trying to accomplish. So whether we will continue with that or not, if we get our information together then we would proceed with second reading. If not, then I would inform my colleagues as to what we are going to do.

Mr. Reid: I take it then that the details, as the minister had related earlier, have not been worked out and that we may not be able to work them out in time before the end of this session and that we have to put aside this legislation until another opportunity.

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, yes, we are still in the consultation process on that. If we can get those things fully addressed, then we will proceed. If not, then I will inform them we will be coming forward with that at a future time.

Mr. Gaudry: Madam Chairperson, in the Expected Results: The development of local employment opportunities for northern and remote areas, can you tell me how many jobs does this create during that period of winter roads in northern Manitoba?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I do not have the precise information, because what we do, we have a deal with Norwin construction for a certain portion of the system, and they basically do that. We have our supervisory staff inspectors and they also have supervisory staff inspectors, but it is their company, Norwin construction company, that basically does a good portion of the eastern part of the lower part of the province starting at Hole River and that area and going up to Island Lake, Red Sucker Lake, Bloodvein, Poplar River, Berens River. That is one contract which we basically have with them.

* (1600)

We have approximately 11 contractors that we work with on the system as a whole. We have approximately 15 various contractors and most of those contractors are basically native communities that have their own development company that basically does the work for us. In a few isolated cases, we tender it. Where we tender it, you know, where we do not have communities that are involved, but we pay very much attention to making provision for the lack of employment opportunities for the people in northern Manitoba, whether it is with our airports, whether it is any other work that we do, very conscientious in terms of having the native unemployment factor addressed.

Mr. Gaudry: So if I understand correctly, all the government does here is give the funds to the northern communities and they employ their local people, and everything is supervised locally with the government funding the winter roads project.

Mr. Driedger: I want to clarify that. We have some of our staff involved as well, because you have to understand that from the time that we open the winter roads through the time we close them, that we have the responsibility for them, you know, the insurance. So we have our people involved as well in terms of doing the inspections to make sure that their ice conditions are proper or thick enough.

So we work very closely in conjunction with them. It is actually, at least from my perspective, and I think from theirs, a very good working relationship, but we still have certain responsibilities through my

department to make sure that certain conditions and safety elements are met. But it is mostly the native people that undertake the employment itself.

Mr. Gaudry: Why would the staff that are involved directly from the government not be identified as such whether they are technical or inspectors for that department?

Mr. Driedger: They are regional staff. Like, they come out of our regional offices. For example, our Selkirk office has been the one that has been basically responsible for, you know, the staffing going out there, and it would be shown when we get to the five regions that we have. It is shown in there.

Madam Chairperson: 2.(f) Winter Roads (1) 100 Percent Provincial \$245,000—pass; 2.(f)(2) Shareable with Canada \$3,330,000—pass.

2.(g) Other Jurisdictions (1) Gross Expenditures.

Mr. Reid: It is my understanding, looking at the explanation provided on page 46, that the department does construction work for other jurisdictions as totally cost recoverable. Can the minister give me an indication on what type of construction programs were undertaken for various jurisdictions, LGDs, municipalities over the course of the last year? What kind of dollar value would be attached to that, and do we anticipate an increase or a decrease on that for the current year?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, let me first of all indicate to the critics that there is a substantial reduction in the appropriation of Other Jurisdictions. The reason for that is that we undertook initially the figure I think a few years ago was around \$3 million, but part of that was because we undertook certain works for the Manitoba Hydro and construction of the road to Conawapa where we were doing the technical services. They have paid us for that, but that was one instance where we worked with a Crown corporation.

In the northern areas, we also undertake a fair amount of work for individuals where equipment is not available. If equipment is available—and it always gets to be a judgment call because a lot of private people, for example, have preference to have the government provide the service instead of the private sector because they feel that we probably maybe are more easily accessible. We are trying to sort of move in the direction where they would use the private sector more than ourselves. Even though we fully cost recover, it shows as an

expenditure in my area here when we started cutting back. This is one area where we do.

The type of service that we basically provide is, in remote communities, for example, snow plowing, dragging, engineering services, labour, to the tune of approximately a million. With MPIC, for example, we did repair to highway installations, structures damaged by accidents, to the tune of a hundred thousand, a variety of maintenance services in remote areas to the tune of \$10,000, Manitoba Hydro \$120,000, the federal government emergency equipment for RCMP at accident sites to the tune of \$10,000, other provinces, for example, interestingly enough, maintenance on short pieces of road accessible only from Manitoba, related to Ontario and to Saskatchewan, where we have pieces like that, native bands in remote areas, maintenance activities for the private sector, with CN, CP, asphalt repairs at railway crossings, gas utilities, sewer-water contractors, building movers. These are all the kinds of activities that we get involved in in terms of providing a service which we then charge and get fully recovered.

Mr. Reid: Is this privileged information, or is it possible to have some kind of an idea or breakdown on a list that maybe the minister could provide?

Mr. Driedger: This information, Madam Chairperson, I am prepared to take and make a copy of this available. I will have that for him on Monday as well. We will redo some of these things so that—[interjection] I am prepared to take and do that right now just so that you know that my intentions are always honourable when I say I will undertake these things.

Mr. Reid: Can the minister give me an indication, because the Conawapa project has been shelved for the time being, shall we say, what type of dollar value was expended on the road to that Conawapa site from the roads that had been in place at the time, and was the road totally completed, or are there still sections of that road to be completed to the site?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, actually the project, I think, was undertaken approximately two years ago. We at that time provided the engineering and the design from my departmental people for Manitoba Hydro which ultimately—and we did the letting of the contract on behalf of Hydro. For all those services that we provided, the cost was approximately \$1 million at the time.

If the member looks on the list in front of him, he should notice that our work with Manitoba Hydro is substantially reduced since that time. If I can recall correctly, and I would have to go back a few years now, I think it was on the Conawapa project, that we charged Manitoba Hydro, was in the vicinity of \$1 million for that total project.

Mr. Reid: I have had the opportunity to go to Gillam several times over the course of the last three years, and I enjoy the northern part of the province. I enjoy travelling in northern Manitoba. One of the things that struck me though was the condition of the road from Gillam itself to the Limestone site and beyond.

Are there any plans this current year to upgrade the condition of that road? Because I find it somewhat difficult from my times travelling it to travel over it. It is like riding a roller coaster at a major exhibition somewhere in the country to travel on that piece of highway.

* (1610)

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I share the enjoyment of travelling in the North, being an outdoors person. The member, if he travels up there, must well realize the conditions that we have out there in terms of the permafrost and the heaving that takes place. Obviously, if he has travelled the road he must have had a good chance to look at some of these things.

In terms of rebuilding, one of the challenges that I face, and my total department in terms of road construction, is that—seemingly our human services—are the departments that have prioritized more in terms of spending than the Department of Highways and Transportation. For example, in 1981, the capital program for construction was \$100 million. In the year 1992-93, just passed, my capital program was \$103 million, so if you just take the normal rate of inflation I think that the members can see that I am losing the battle.

As much as I would like to, there is nothing nicer in my view than to be able to take and complete reconstruction of highways throughout the province and have the results of a nice job then showing up. Part of the problem that I have is that we try and when we set our priorities we do this on taking many things into consideration—the amount of traffic that is on there, the kind of traffic that is on there, the condition of the road. We have a system whereby we classify the condition of a road by number, between one and 100, as to the kind of shape it is

in. If it was just a matter of saying, "well, it needs it, we will do it," I would be only too pleased to, because certainly I am still with my department. That is not quite how it works.

When, depending on the kind of pressure that comes down—for example, I would expect if the Conawapa went ahead that more pressure would be coming down to rebuild or to upgrade the road. It would not necessarily be one of my priorities at the present time based on the fact that—

An Honourable Member: I would like to know if the minister recommends canoe travel in the North?

Mr. Driedger: Not necessarily either.

Mr. Reid: Well, I am sure the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Enns) then would follow in the lead of his Premier who liked to spend some time in a canoe as well, as we noticed by previous advertisements.

My question for the minister: There has been an elimination of, as he has indicated in his Estimates here, two positions due to reduced work performed for other jurisdictions. Has the minister received any indication from the other jurisdictions whether or not they put projects on hold as a result of the economic conditions, tight resources? Is it because they have had to absorb some of the costs that the minister's department has offloaded on them in the past when they have transferred some of the PRs to them over past years? What reasons has the minister received from the LGDs, the towns, villages, municipalities for the reduction in these programs?

Mr. Driedger: I would want to ask the member to be nice. I am trying to be very accommodating in terms of information and now he is starting to get picky and that does not bode well for good dialogue here in the Estimates.

I just want to say that the approach we have taken within the department over the last number of years is that we are encouraging LGDs, towns, villages, private sector. We encourage them to go more to the private sector than have the service provided through my department. It is not just an overnight thing, this has been gradually worked towards for the last little while. Like I say, it was just two or three years ago when we had, I think, \$3 million in this appropriation.

We are doing that in such a way that we still do not try and offend. For example, let us take in the

cottage areas in the Whiteshell where at one time we were providing the snowplowing services. We say to them now—they have their various associations at each lake—go and see where you can get a private contractor to do it, and it is working well. Staff work very closely with the people so we do not leave anybody stranded without services, but we are encouraging expansion of going to the private sector instead of us providing that service.

Mr. Reid: In that sense, if the budget for this portion of his department has been reduced from the level he indicated, does he anticipate that somewhere in the near future then we will be eliminating funding from this section of his budget altogether?

Mr. Driedger: No, Madam Chairperson, most certainly not. If the member will look on the sheet that I provided him with, the various services that we provide, many of those services, it is not reasonable for the private sector to provide them. So there is always going to be a component here to provide that kind of service, because in my big department we have this equipment and we have an exposure in these areas, so that will always continue.

All we are trying to do is sort of grade it down to some degree, but it is certainly not a matter of elimination on this.

Madam Chairperson: Item 2.(g) Other Jurisdictions, (1) Gross Expenditures \$2,640,000—pass; (2) Less: Recoverable from Other Appropriations (\$1,000,000)—pass.

2.(h) Eastern Region Office.

Mr. Reid: Since there has been a changeover, I believe it was 13 districts, now you have got the five regions—and I thank the minister for providing each of us with the information and the map explaining the changes that are there. I guess time will tell whether or not this is a good move as far as service is concerned for the different parts of the province. What kind of overall savings does the minister anticipate would be realized as a result of the move away from the 13 districts down to the five regions? What type of savings, dollar value, would we anticipate?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, first of all, let me give a little bit of background to the members here. Virtually every year this department has been faced with ongoing pressure in terms of providing the same service with less people, so the rationalization has been going on. Part of that

program was a few years ago when we turned back 2,000 kilometres of PR to the municipalities. It was all part of it, and the pressure continues for us to downgrade or try and provide an efficient, same kind of service with less people. That is where this regionalization concept developed from.

If the member looks in his book, basically the next five categories deal with each of the specific regions. If the members want to, we can deal with the regionalization as a whole or you can deal with it individually. I do not really care how you do it.

The regionalization will result in a reduction of 40 SYs in head office. We have 40 of our people in our head office who, by the time we finish the regionalization, will have been moved into the regional offices to provide better service out there. Then we have an increase of 16 SYs in the five newly created regions for a net overall reduction of 24 SYs mostly at senior- and middle-management levels. So it is at the management level where basically, out of our Winnipeg offices, the effect is taking place. Like I said, the net overall reduction is 24 SYs because of regionalization, but there is an increase in the rural areas because of the 40 that we move out of Winnipeg into the regions.

Mr. Reid: So then the savings that are here are effected by reduction in the middle-management section, the middle-management staffing areas. We are going to retain basically the same number of people performing the work in the different regions now as we had prior in the districts, the actual hands-on work?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, we are trying to, through regionalization, move some of the middle-management people into the five regions to provide better, more immediate service to our contractors, municipalities, et cetera.

Mr. Reid: How do you see that? All the SYs are down.

* (1620)

Mr. Driedger: No, the SYs are not down. I thought I had explained that we have a decrease of 40 in head office this year, but we have an increase of 16 SYs in the five newly created regions.

Mr. Reid: And the managers?

Mr. Driedger: For a net overall reduction of 24 SYs which basically—the ones that we are moving out of there, basically middle management, senior middle-management levels. Twelve less SY

reductions were effected in '92-93, which was last year. We have six SY reductions taking place in this current year, and another six reductions will occur in '94-95.

Now, when the member looks at, for example, the Eastern Region Office, what we have done is convert from the three district offices that were basically involved there. We have tried to sort of relate that comparatively, you know, from the districts to the region now, just for comparison sake, so that the members get a little better feel for what has happened.

Mr. Reid: I am not sure if the minister was finished his comments there. How will this improve the delivery of services to the communities that were in the previous districts? How will this impact upon them? Will there be an improvement in the service, or was the only consideration here for the reduction of the cost?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, cost was one of the driving factors in this, but while we were doing the regionalization we also felt that we could deliver a more efficient system by giving more autonomy and authority to the regions instead of having everything come through the district office and then go through the tiers up to the top management positions. We will be providing more services out of the area in terms of, let us say, bridge maintenance, which basically was operated out of the city to quite a degree. We will be providing that. We will take and have our accounting and payment system established in each region so that it will, instead of the long process, be dealt with there, in and out much faster.

So there are all of these components that will actually expedite and move things a lot faster than the cumbersome route that we did before. We will give more authority to the local regions in terms of providing the service. So it will be much faster and more efficient.

The construction industry initially raised some concern whether—how this would work, because if you have a set pattern in the way you do things all the time and you all of a sudden change it, you have your doubts as to whether it will work. We have spent considerable time consulting with them and we feel that they have a comfort level with it as well as ourselves, and I gave the undertaking that if there are glitches as we go through this, we are prepared to be very flexible. This is not cast in stone, but we

think that we can provide a very good, capable service the way we are going to be—with the concept of regionalization that we have it set up.

Mr. Reid: I take it then that the minister, as a result of these changes, will have more or less like a working cabinet to advise him on a priority basis for any programs or projects that might need to be undertaken in the specific regions then. You will have a cabinet or a committee that will come in and work with him on these when it comes to the decision-making time? Is that how he anticipates putting together the necessary programs?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, yes, though we have had input from the districts all the time as well, like each district brings forward their priorities ultimately to my senior staff here. We then sit down and rationalize and prioritize as to which projects we can undertake. Ultimately, taking all these things into consideration, there are still political decisions ultimately made as to which roads—I mean you have a dozen roads and you know you have money for six ultimately, the minister still has fortunately some input into which ones are the ones that are going to go ahead.

Mr. Reid: Can the minister indicate to me, looking at the map that he has provided for the new regional offices now or the new regions themselves and where the offices are located, what criteria did he use for determining what would comprise a region? Because I look at the eastern region that goes a fair distance in length in comparison to the province, it goes more than halfway up the province from the 49th parallel. Looking at some of the other districts, there are regions much more compact. What criteria were used to arrive at the decision to establish these specific regions?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I am hoping I am not reading some inference into here that the office in the eastern region should not be in Steinbach. My gosh! Just the fact that I represent the Steinbach riding certainly should not have any influence in that decision. I would like to think it was based on the recommendations of staff coming forward, based on the amount of roads in the general area, and that is the reason why Steinbach was chosen. Steinbach—you know, I am being a little facetious, but in each one of the regional offices we have established, it was a district office before. So we sort of used that as the amalgamating point. For example, we have Steinbach that used to be a

district office before, and to have that one in Selkirk, for example, would have put it way to the one extreme if we used the district office in, for example, Portage, sort of the central one there, Brandon, Dauphin.

Lest the member feel that there was some political influence in these decisions, I mean, would I have put a regional office in Dauphin? God forbid that we would ever have looked at it in that light. So I just want to clarify that because, most certainly, I feel very comfortable the way they have been established. If politics had entered into this thing, I doubt whether there would have been one in Dauphin.

Mr. Reid: No, I was just listening to the comments by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Praznik) who, I believe, represents the Lac du Bonnet-Beausejour area. He might have liked to have had the district office in his area. I am sure there was some internal cabinet debate that took place about where the office is, but I would not for a moment think that there was any political considerations made where the offices were located. It is my understanding that the—

Madam Chairperson: Order, please.

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, maybe a little further clarification for the critics, seriously, in the process of regionalization, the one thing we did not do, we did not close the existing maintenance yards, things of that nature. Beausejour basically is our garage and maintenance operation, so those components are still there throughout the province, realizing the importance to the community. So the fact that it is called regional office does not mean that we are shrinking to any degree the components that are out there as our maintenance yards, our garages, et cetera.

Mr. Reid: Well, on that note then, does the minister anticipate, because I am sure there is some forethought or planning that goes on within the department, that you may have to look at downgrading the number of satellite yards that you have throughout the province? Is there some plan underway to take that consideration?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, that is not the intention, but I have to maybe—and there has been some confusion from the time that I had the unpleasant responsibility of turning back 2,000 kilometers of road. That rationale was for saving some money for the province, and because of that

itself, there has been rationalization in terms of how many maintenance beats we have in the province. That has had an impact much more so than anything else, and we did that with planned knowledge that there would be reduction of certain services in certain areas.

* (1630)

There has always been a little bit of confusion, because the regionalization is actually putting more people into the rural area instead of reduction, and I am very cognizant. People tell me that from all communities, even one employee in a community, a reduction already makes a big difference to them. So we are very sensitive to that, and that is not anticipated that we will take and shut these areas down.

Mr. Reid: I am sure these communities will be glad to hear that.

To get back to my first point, the criteria that was used to determine what portions of the province would be included in specific regions, was it based on the number of kilometers of road systems within that specific area? Is that one of the criteria that is used, or how do you determine, how did you arrive at the map that has been provided, which includes specific areas? What considerations were used? Was it the staffing, the number of communities, the population base, number of kilometers of road? I mean there are many criteria that could be used. Could you indicate what criteria were used?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, there were a variety of things that influenced the decision. First of all, the amalgamation of reducing from 13 districts to five regionals. For example, let us talk of the Eastern region. There were three district offices involved, the one that basically dealt with the surrounding Winnipeg area—then we had the amount of roads to some degree. But when you consider, for example, the Thompson regional office, you do not have anywhere close to the amount of roads that we have in some of these others. So you could not use that alone.

It was sort of geographic, service-oriented types of decisions that we made, based on roads, based on where the district offices were, because we have to tie that into the maintenance offices as well. So all these factors combined and basically helped make the decision.

Madam Chairperson: Item 2.(h) Eastern Region Office, (1) Salaries \$1,753,100—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$489,400—pass.

2.(j) South Central Region Office, (1) Salaries \$1,745,500—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$500,900—pass.

2.(k) South Western Region Office, (1) Salaries \$1,641,200—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$408,100—pass.

2.(m) West Central Region Office, (1) Salaries \$1,237,500.

Mr. Reid: In our haste here I guess I should have asked the question in the South Western Region, but I am sure the minister will be able to answer.

There was a position that was eliminated in the district office under the South Western Region, was that individual redeployed elsewhere within the regions?

Mr. Driedger: The member is asking why there is a reduction in that region? Well, I thought I had explained, Madam Chairperson, that this is a three-year process where ultimately, in stages, we are doing the movement of the 40 positions out of Winnipeg into this area.

Just because it reflects here at this time, that figure might be changed for next year depending on the kind of people we have out there now, in terms of the category of engineer, the category of our technical people. So the process is not completed as you see it here today. I mean, we have another two years of process to finally get the end result here.

He is picking on one position and he has got me at a disadvantage because I would have to go back and find out exactly where, out of all the hundreds of positions, this one would be.

Mr. Reid: Not that I want to put the minister at a disadvantage. If this is going to take place over a period of time then, is there some way that the minister can provide some information in the near future or even in steps or increments over a period of time as he implements his program here, so that we know where the staff was, what levels we are at in what areas, in comparison to the regions we are in now so that we can see what is happening as the people transfer into those. Is there any way to have that communication back and forth so we can have an understanding of what is taking place? Because if it is going to take place over two or three years as

the minister indicates, three years, then obviously he is at a disadvantage now trying to indicate. People are being lost now and they may be gaining later, but if we are kept aware of what is taking place, then maybe that would answer our questions.

Mr. Driedger: I am prepared—if it would be of any assistance to the members—to give you the final anticipated outcome once we are finished with the regionalization. I hope the member does not want me to start going back and finding out exactly which secretary or which engineer or which surveyor because then I am getting into horrendous problems with that. But I am prepared to give an outline of what basically will happen in the regions at the conclusion of our regionalization. [interjection] Yes. Sorry, Madam Chairperson, I am sort of getting in here once in a while.

I am prepared to take and give that information but not today. I will get that ready and I will have that—not tomorrow either.

Mr. Reid: I thank the minister for that. It is just so that I have an idea of—and I am sure the other critic would be interested as well—where we started with the staffing and where we will end up and the type of staffing component make-up for those different areas. I do not need to know the individuals who are in those jobs, just the numbers and the types of people who are in that by profession whether it be technical, managerial or support.

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I am going to try and provide, you know, the best information I can in terms of exactly where we started from and where we end up. If there are further questions after that, then I am prepared to deal with that even at a later time. It does not have to necessarily be dealt with here, but I will give you an outline exactly as to what is going to be happening.

Mr. Gaudry: Madam Chairperson, just going back here, in South Western Region there was one position eliminated due to regionalization, I understand that. But then we look to the Western Central Region where a position was transferred to Winnipeg due to regionalization. Why did this happen? Was there not anybody qualified from those areas or what kind of a position was transferred from Winnipeg?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I am trying to be very reasonable in trying to explain this. There was a position transfer from Winnipeg due to regionalization of district offices. It does not mean

there was a body transferred. The position was transferred. As we go into regionalization we have moved certain positions from Winnipeg into the regional area. That does not always mean there is a warm body in there, because the process that we have gone through, as we posted these positions, people were bidding on it. So as we restructured this whole thing, there has been movement of people.

Just because a position is transferred does not mean that a warm body had to go with it. We have allowed the competitive bidding to take place in the process throughout as we went through the various levels. That is why this is not that cut and dry a process. That is why we are looking at three years to ultimately accomplish what we are trying to do.

Mr. Gaudry: In the cutting back of regional offices to five from 13, I believe you said—

Mr. Driedger: Thirteen districts to—

Mr. Gaudry: —13 districts to five regional, and you have maintained some yards or buildings in the other regions. You still maintain staff in those areas?

* (1640)

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I have mentioned before that we still have all our subdistricts, areas where we had our maintenance yards. Those will all remain. We are not shutting down any of that. There is going to be some adjustment of staff, but that could probably be attributed to the changing of our maintenance beats which we have. Some movement within, but by and large, the communities that have facilities will now retain them.

Mr. Gaudry: So if I understand very clearly, we will be able to see this in the information that the minister will provide us over the period that this transition is going to occur.

Mr. Driedger: Yes. I think possibly, by the time I get that information to members, that they will probably have a better feel for it in terms of what is happening.

Madam Chairperson: Item 2.(m) West Central Region Office, (1) Salaries \$1,237,500—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$254,700—pass.

Item 2.(n) Northern Region Office, (1) Salaries \$1,002,100—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$304,500—(pass).

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$70,366,800 for Highways and Transportation, Operations and Maintenance, \$70,366,800 for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1994—pass.

3. Planning and Design and Land Surveys, (a) Planning and Design.

Mr. Reid: I have several questions here, Madam Chairperson. It is obvious that the Planning and Design plays an important function in the minister's overall department, and I know that I had the opportunity last year to go and talk with some of his staff there. I found them very co-operative, very helpful.

It appears, at least, that with the revenues, for the province having some difficulties right now, as well as the LGDs in municipalities having some difficulties with their revenues, what type of planning is taking place at this time with projects that may be anticipated? Are we looking at any major projects, planning taking place at this time, or are we seeing a significant reduction in overall planning?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, let me first of all introduce a newcomer who has just joined us here, Andy Horosko, who is my director of Planning and Design. Andy joins us from Saskatchewan, one of the people who is moving back, thinking this is a beautiful province. We are very excited. I think this is just the start of a trend that is going to take place. Seriously though, I am very pleased to have Andy join our staff. It just goes to show that we have ongoing changes from time to time in the department. It is a big department. I am pleased to welcome Andy aboard.

If members at any time have concerns about what is going on, Andy is the one who basically has a good idea exactly what stage his projects, what level they are at and what stage they are at.

The member asked whether we have any major planning going on. All the time, virtually 24 hours a day, under the program that we have signed with the federal government, we have major structures part of it. We can probably deal with it better under capital, but the northeast Perimeter, for example, which involves major structures, underpass, overpass, et cetera—we have major bridges that are in the design stage at the present time, major projects in terms of twinning. In fact, this department is challenged to the maximum in terms

of their planning and designing capabilities for the simple reason that all the people in rural areas invariably always want their roads upgraded. With strong encouragement from my colleagues in my benches and some from the other side—you know, we always have people saying, well, when are you going to upgrade our road? As we can, we prioritize them in terms of the stages that they have to go through. Once we have prioritized, let us say, a road or a project, then the first thing is the survey and design aspect of it and the environmental licence, after which, once we have that, then we go to the acquisition of right-of-way and then ultimately the letting of a contract. So this is the first and most important stage in terms of getting projects into the system and completed.

We have a whole variety of projects. In fact, I think we are looking at something—I think projecting as far as a three-year program, you know, that we have projects that we then pull down and proceed with. I do not know how to explain it any differently. There is an awful lot of this going on at any given time.

Mr. Reid: I thank the minister for raising the northeast Perimeter project, because I know the minister had made a commitment to that. The MLA for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) had made that commitment, as well, that that project would be completed or at least underway prior to the next provincial election. I hope to see that take place. Of course, that would relieve some of the traffic congestion—I am talking truck traffic—from my own community that would border on that project.

Can the minister give me an indication, since his department has signed an agreement with the federal government for that project—and it impacts upon the MLA for Springfield (Mr. Findlay) as well—when we could anticipate seeing the start-up of that project? At what point are we at now with the planning of that project?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, actually I do not know where—I am very flexible in terms of where I deal with this, whether I deal with this under Capital or whether I deal with this under Planning and Design.

The agreement that we signed with the federal government, called Strategic Highway Improvement Program, SHIP, is what we make reference to. I want to emphasize this, S-H-I-P, not T. I want to clarify that, because from the time that we made the

announcement, there has been all kinds of interest and speculation from throughout the province that this program would allow us to build wherever we wanted to.

In fact, we have cut a two-year deal with the federal government, where the other provinces to the west of us have basically cut a five-year deal for the same amount of money. In fact, Alberta gets \$30 million over five years, where we get \$35 million over two years. I think we probably have a very good deal.

Now, the way this process evolved at the time when the economic statement was made by Mazankowski on December 2, we had awaited the National Highways Program to be announced; this did not happen. We were rather agitated and disappointed. Subsequent to that, discussions started with the federal government, because actually in the economic statement they had not mentioned Manitoba nor Saskatchewan, and I was much more concerned about Manitoba.

Starting from that evening, negotiations started. Ultimately, Mr. Corbeil, the federal minister, authorized Jake Epp, the M.P., to do negotiations on behalf of the federal government with Manitoba. He outlined basically the things that they were looking for, which was something along the national highways system that we had promoted.

We submitted, I believe, something like \$250 million worth of projects to Mr. Epp to pick from in terms of the \$70 million which was a joint agreement ultimately. By and large, he prioritized the projects that he felt they would support from the federal perspective and that is how ultimately we arrived at the program that I have approval for, a \$70-million program which deals with, as I said in my comments before, the continued twinning of Highway No. 1, the continued twinning of Highway 75, the continued upgrading of 16, although I would have liked to have seen more money spent on that one and, also, specific projects—the upgrading of the bridge or the overpass, Portage west and the Perimeter, which is restricted.

* (1650)

We were fortunate enough to tie in the northeast Perimeter, which we consider part of the eventual National Highways Program. This is a two-year program, so we really have to escalate some of the activities. We had done preliminary work in terms of design work on the northeast Perimeter because

we have Highway 15 and we have two major rail networks that are involved. In the case of Highway 15 and the railway which is right adjacent we have an underpass and at CP we have an overpass.

I can indicate to the member that we will be tendering the first of these series this summer because we have to get that all in within the time parameters that the federal government has allowed. Part of the project is the underpass; that is the first stage.

Mr. Reid: To give the minister the opportunity to confer with his staff a bit there, I will ask another question.

If we are tendering the contract, the portion of the contract that he is going to let I imagine will be in stages. The portion that the minister is talking about dealing with the underpass at Highway 15 and the CNR main line, is that going to be undertaken and started construction this summer and then continue until completion and then other portions of the contract let at a further point in time along including the overpass at the CPR and the roadbed itself, or when can we anticipate seeing the other portions of the project go ahead?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, both those projects—there are two specific projects with 15 and the railway—will be undertaken this summer and started this summer. Now once we have started a project of that nature it is very much like Highway 75, it is a matter of how much you want to prioritize it and the continuation of doing it. Once we have made this kind of investment commitment then I would anticipate based on funding of course, there will be ongoing activities in terms of completing that whole northeast Perimeter.

Mr. Reid: I am at a loss here, because I do not understand the complete process. I thought that when money was committed to the project, that was enough to cover the whole project. Is money only committed in stages for portions of the project as we go along and that as we progress each stage has to be approved before monies for the next portion of the project are allocated. Is that how the process works?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, out of the \$70 million with the projects that we have identified, we have not identified the whole total northeast Perimeter under this program. We had to look at projects that we could move within the first two years which is why we actually had a jump on other

provinces because we were basically more advanced under our National Highways Program concept, in terms of projects that we could bring forward, than most of the other provinces.

So there are only two elements of the northeast Perimeter that are under the SHIP program. One is the twinning from No. 1 to 15, the dualing of it, which will be graded, I believe, next year. We will be paving it next year which is part of the SHIP program, and then the two structures on 15. That is basically the three components that are involved in the northeast Perimeter under the SHIP program.

Mr. Reid: Maybe it would be better, in the sake of saving time here, if I was to contact the minister's department, if that is all right, and sit down with some of his staff to get a better understanding from the planning people on what steps they anticipate taking, if that is all right with the minister.

Mr. Driedger: I have always tried to be very accommodating with the member. I want to be a little cautious how much I would like to have him meet with my planning people because the next thing you know he is starting to influence them and they start giving me recommendations that I would find hard to accept. So I want to be a little cautious.

However, once we have the Estimates finished and depending on the kind of abuse I have had to take, we could probably take and maybe make the office available and have him look at the long-range plans, exactly what we are doing there.

Mr. Reid: I would appreciate that opportunity to meet with the minister and any of his staff that may be available at that time. I know I have received some phone calls and letters from residents of my own community, as maybe the other members have in the surrounding area as well, and it would be nice if I had some more background and a time frame attached to it so that I might be able to answer the correspondence that comes to my office. So I will look forward to that meeting with the minister.

Can the minister indicate under Planning and Design whether or not we utilize the University of Manitoba Transport Institute for any of our planning and design functions? Do we go to that department to provide us with some assistance?

Mr. Driedger: We do not use UMTI at all for any of our planning and design. We use them for doing some research, and I am prepared to deal with what we have done with UMTI when we get to the grant

portion of it in here, because then I have my qualified people here at that time.

Mr. Reid: Under the activity identification it indicates traffic studies and statistics. Can the minister indicate: Are these just localized traffic studies that are done or are there major traffic distribution patterns and studies that may be done throughout the course of the major population centre areas?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, this would involve all traffic activities throughout the province, whether it is Brandon, Winnipeg, Thompson. Part of the information that is required by my planning and design people is to be able to have the traffic counts, the type of traffic that is on there. This is all very important information that we require in terms of making decisions as to the type of structure we build or highway that we build.

So when we talk of traffic patterns, depending upon the terrain, whether we have rolling terrain and the type of gradient we make, our curves to comply with, let us say, a PTH standard is of a higher quality standard than a PR standard. If it is a paved road compared to a gravel road, different standards are used depending on the speed limit that we anticipate on our PTHs. For example, we have 100 clicks per hour speed limit, so our gradients and curves, our approaches on dips, all these things have a bearing on it, and these are all the things that are all compiled in terms of making the decision as to the type of work that we undertake.

Mr. Reid: I take it then that there are no specific projects or studies that are ongoing with overall traffic then. It is localized issues for specific areas then. I will not belabour that point.

Can the minister indicate the number of permits that would have been issued for access development of properties that are adjacent to provincial roads or highways? Do we receive payment for those permits? If so, what type of dollar value does that represent? Can the minister also indicate the number of permits that might have been issued, if that information is available?

Mr. Driedger: Madam Chairperson, I should maybe explain that where an application for access onto a PTH is made, that is basically dealt with by the Highway Traffic Board, where an application then is made and they have a hearing and make a decision. Our Chairperson here is well aware how that process works. They also deal with the speed

limits, et cetera. On the PR roads, basically, it is my department that deals with it, and we have certain criteria that we use for that.

I am just looking to see whether I can get more specific information.

* (1700)

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mrs. Louise Dacquay (Chairperson of Committees): The Committee of Supply has adopted a certain resolution, directs me to report the same and asks leave to sit again.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 200—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett), Bill 200, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfant et à la famille, standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer). Stand?

An Honourable Member: Stand.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave that that matter remain standing? [agreed]

Also standing in the name of the honourable member for Swan River, who has seven minutes remaining.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to stand today to finish my comments on The Child and Family Services Amendment Act dealing with the Child Advocate. This amendment was proposed to change the direction of the reporting of the advocate's office, so that the Child Advocate would report directly to the Legislature instead of to the

Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer). After extensive meetings and public hearings, we found that this was what the public wanted. The public was very concerned about the implications of having the advocate report to the Minister of Family Services.

There was unanimous support from both opposition parties but, unfortunately, the government would not listen to the voice of the people and to all groups who were advocating that the Child Advocate would report to the Legislature. For that reason, our side of the House has brought in this private members' bill that will hopefully address the concerns that we have with the way this government is dealing with it. Particularly, it is very important that this happen right now and the Child Advocate report to the Legislature in light of what is happening in this province, in light of the high poverty rates we have and the problems the children in this province are facing and lack of avenues to go through to raise their concern.

Mr. Speaker, in Estimates, in the last couple of days, the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) asked the Minister of Family Services several times about the Child Advocate and what role they would play and whether they were making recommendations to the minister since he had made changes and made reductions to the budget. The minister continued to say that they had just been talking and there were no recommendations made on the proposed budget cuts. It is a shame that the minister would not tell people what was going on, that there were real concerns. In fact, we had to get a leaked document to indicate what is really going on and to tell us that the Child Advocate is very concerned and has made recommendations to the minister regarding the cuts, particularly the cuts to the basic maintenance fee of foster parents.

Part of the letter says, you have also made a number of comments regarding the process of how children are often placed and ignored by the agency. Foster parents are expected to give 100 percent or more to these children, many of whom have received little or no information regarding their specific needs or problems.

Oftentimes, foster parents feel that they are nothing but a dumping ground and warehouse for children, and the agencies are not fulfilling their legislative responsibility to assure that these children are getting the assistance that they require in addressing their needs.

As a consequence of the current practice and attitudes of agencies, foster parents are feeling children are left in a vulnerable situation. Agencies are described as ignoring pleas for assistance by foster parents to meet the needs of these children. In one instance, one of you stated that she had had no contact from a child care worker in over two years.

Mr. Speaker, foster parents play a very important role in this province, across the country. Unfortunately, there are many, many children who cannot live in their own homes. It is just human nature, many families cannot get along. Children end up out on the streets. Without foster parents to support these children, without putting the proper funds in place to support foster parents, we are going to lose that very important service.

What will happen to the children? The children are going to end up staying in hotels, in the Place Louis Riel or other hotels that are going to cost much, much more than what this government is presently paying to foster parents. What is the quality of care that we get when we put children in hotels? Is there any contact? Is there any support? Is there any family building there? No, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing for these children.

It is disappointing that this is one of the areas the government should choose to cut back on its funding in the supports for foster parents and in its supports for our young people. As I said, Mr. Speaker, we have a very high poverty rate in this province, a very high drop-out rate of children in schools. We have to have the supports in place. We have to have the place for children to go when they can—they have to have access to the Child's Advocate. They have to also know that is a safe place for them to go and that they can get the guidance they need when they get into these difficult situations.

What this government is doing with the cutbacks they have made just shows that there is a lack of compassion, a lack of support, a lack of caring for our young people in this province. These are the people who are our future. If we are not prepared to invest in them and if we are not prepared to invest in those people who offer the caring and support for them, there is something wrong in this province.

I would hope that the government would realize the errors they have made in their legislation. It would be much better to have the Child's Advocate

report to the Legislature rather than to the minister. I hope they will consider the merits of this private member's bill and that they will very seriously consider this as an amendment that will help improve the quality of life but also improve the accesses that are available to our young children.

* (1710)

If the government would say that they support this legislation, I think they would regain some of their standing in the community amongst those workers who work on behalf of children but are very frustrated at the present time with the way this government is dealing with our young people and with the supports that they are putting in place.

We have not seen that this government is willing to make these changes, but it is our hope they will realize that what they have done is wrong. We have to have this legislation changed so that we can have a fairer system put in place.

Mr. Speaker, again I want to mention the fact that it is regrettable that the government has chosen to take such advantage of foster parents, who have given of their time, who give of their time over the years and want to be considered much more than warehouses for young children. They offer the supports, but they also have to be rewarded. I have talked to many foster parents who have done an excellent job, and in reality, they basically many times give of their time for virtually nothing. They are on 24-hour call. They spend all their time—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time has expired.

Bill 202—The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), Bill 202, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation, standing in the name of the honourable member for Portage La Prairie (Mr. Pallister).

An Honourable Member: Stand.

Mr. Speaker: Stand. Is there—[interjection] Which one?

Bill 200—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: On Bill 200? Okay.

Order, please. I did not recognize the honourable member for Wolseley, so we are going to revert to Bill 200. As previously agreed, this matter will remain standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer), but at this time, I will recognize the honourable member for Wolseley.

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity to speak on this bill. It is a bill, I think, which is very timely, given the exchange in Estimates yesterday with the Minister of Family Services and indeed in Question Period today, a very striking example of the direct need for an independent Child Advocate who will have the opportunity to report to all of the Legislature and indeed to the public in that way rather than to be essentially a part of the ministerial staff of the Department of Family Services.

It is this principle of independence and of open public reporting to a broader public and to the Legislature that is at the heart of this bill. Though it has significance for today and for the actions of the Child Advocate, who is currently in the process of assuming his position and, I hope, indeed defining for himself an independent path in that particular position, it does have significance for that. But indeed, Mr. Speaker, this bill was proposed some time before, and it is a bill which adopts the principles which were supported by a number of reports to this government.

This is not a bill which comes entirely from one particular party. It comes from a number of political angles and from institutions in our community. The Children's Advocate reporting mechanism has been supported by the Kimelman Report, by the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, although I hesitate to bring the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry to the attention of this government. They certainly have buried it somewhere deep in the archeological files of the government, a major inquiry which they have no intention of paying any attention to any further, but that particular report did recommend and support the idea of an independent Children's Advocate. The Suche report and also the Reid Sigurdson Report on child abuse, reports which go back a considerable way in the history of this province, also supported this mechanism of an independent reporting line to the Legislature. This is not proposed to be an independent Child Advocate in the judicial sense, but it is that sense of open public reporting which we believe would be an important

part of any progressive child social system in Manitoba.

We have a great deal of experience with legislative committees and open public reporting in Manitoba, and, indeed, I think it is something which all parties have taken some responsibility for and some pride in when they speak of the activities of the Manitoba Legislature to other groups. Every bill in the Manitoba Legislature goes to a second reading where there is the opportunity for any person, anywhere in Manitoba and indeed sometimes from outside of Manitoba, to make representations on matters which concern them and their families and the future of this province.

It is a very important principle and one which I think every member of this House would defend. It is certainly one which I have seen over my very short time in the Legislature—I have seen an increasing number of people becoming aware of this particular process and eager to take advantage of it. Indeed, I was at a meeting of senior citizens about a month ago and it had come to their attention. Although most of them had lived all of their lives in Manitoba, they had not really become aware of the opportunity of making presentations to public committees, and of the opportunity for them to sit in on public committees at the Legislature until very recently. They were in fact asking me for information and asking me to keep in touch with them on the kinds of bills that they might be interested in and the opportunities for them to make presentations.

So I think in the history of Manitoba this is an opportunity which the public will be ready to respond to and would certainly welcome. In recent years, we have seen the use of public committees in a very broad sense by many different groups in the Manitoba society. I remember particularly ones where many people came to speak on the attempt by this government to change the peaceful labour system which had been in place in this province for so many years, the final offer selection process.

Many people were very concerned about the implications that that had for labour management relations in Manitoba. It is not something which I know this government gives a great deal of attention to. It certainly has taken every opportunity it has had in the last few years to attack labour, whether it is in a small program like the \$2,500 that they give to the Labour Certificate Program or whether it is in the larger sense of destroying the FOS system, but

people felt that there were public opportunities for themselves to make that presentation.

I know that the larger community, not just the interested professionals such as social workers, but the foster families, the lawyers who deal with child welfare issues, the families themselves who are concerned and have been affected by the child welfare system certainly would welcome this opportunity to have an independent advocate report to the Legislature and to have that open public opportunity to question and to listen to the work of that advocate in Manitoba.

There are times when those open public committees have had the opportunity to make genuine amendments to legislation. I remember a number of times in the Municipal Affairs committee when Urban Affairs has been dealing with a number of issues in The City of Winnipeg Act. I remember that there were in fact one or two occasions in which constructive solutions came from presenters and where amendments were made on the spot and were accepted by both government and opposition.

It was a very fast, immediate, direct connection between people and their political representatives. I can think of no more important step that this government could take in the process of government than opening up public committees, making people aware that they do have the opportunity simply to listen or, indeed, to make presentations. The Child Advocacy bill gives them an opportunity to do this in an area which is important to every Manitoba family.

It is particularly important, Mr. Speaker, when I listen to particularly federal politicians, particularly those of the deep blue Tory stripe who are spending so much time now after they have had 10, 15 years to run this country into the ground and to change the relationships between communities and, indeed, within families. If we are going to look at the needs of children in this province, one of the very first places we should look is at the way in which the federal government's withdrawal from social programs, the federal government's attack on the tax system and the federal government's attack on transfer payments to the provinces, the way in which all of these activities have, in fact, contributed to the growing poverty amongst Manitoba families and Manitoba children.

* (1720)

However, I do listen to these people, the retreat from the Socred Party, Ms. Kim Campbell, and Jean Charest, the young cabinet minister, who seem to be spending a great deal of their time talking about the process of government and how we have to, quote, and I have to quote, because it churns my stomach even to listen to it, how we have to change the process of government so that we make contact again with the people and we restore the confidence of people in government.

I can think of no greater hypocrisy on the part of those Conservatives who have spent the last 10 years destroying this country and destroying the dreams of families and working people right across this country, and they now have the audacity and the disgusting political gall, in fact, to talk about restoring the confidence of the people in government. It is not the way that government has been conducted in this country. It is what the Tories have done to this country and what they have done to the people of Manitoba in particular.

Let us think of what the image of Manitoba is now. Well, the Tories like to dream. They like to dream in technicolor about pandas at the Winnipeg Zoo. They like to dream about building towers and downtown Winnipeg with arenas and all these sorts of accoutrements of what they like to propose is a growing commercial city.

The reality is very different, because the one thing that Winnipeg is the capital of is child poverty. The real image of Winnipeg across this country should be that young child who spends every week at a food bank, who goes to school hungry, who towards the end of the month goes to bed hungry, who has no money for a bus pass let alone a bus fare even to get to medical appointments, who as a result of the actions of this government will no longer have dental care, who as a result of the actions of this government will not be able to place their young children in daycare so that they might even have the opportunity themselves.

Many of them are indeed what I would still consider children, young mothers of 16, 17 years old who are now faced with increasing poverty as a result of this budget and this government, another set of Tories whose main argument seems to me the absolute opposite of the truth, the idea that all people are sharing the pain equally. I have never been so appalled at an argument in my life as I have by this particular Tory argument of the day.

What is happening in Manitoba is, in fact, increasing child poverty, increasing ill health of children, and those are the things which a Child Advocate over the next decade is going to have to be concerned with. We need an advocate who will in fact be independent of this particular government, because if, God help us, they are still with us 10 years from now, the rate of child poverty will indeed have increased because their road leads us that way inevitably.

What happens as the result of the child poverty that we are seeing in Winnipeg? The implications are very clear. You do not have to reinvent the wheel on this one. The implications for poor children in the school system are very clear. They are much less likely to succeed well in school. In fact, that is probably one of the understatement of the year. When you go to school hungry, when your attention span is very small, your opportunity to even benefit from what is available in school is very, very limited. In fact, your chances of staying in school, despite all the cosmetic advertising of Tory governments, is far less likely than those of children from even middle-class homes, let alone the upper-class homes that this particular government seems to believe are the ones to be dealt with.

In the grades that they are in, we know that children who are poor and who are hungry are much more likely to be working at a level below their grade. They are much more likely, more frequently kept back in elementary school, and after a series of these kinds of setbacks, the self-esteem of such children becomes much lower and lower. Gradually, as a result of initial poverty and initial hunger, in some cases with what might have been temporary, you are in fact set into a cycle of increasing poverty and increasing amount of work and activity for the person who will take on the burdens of a Child Advocate.

The burden of special education classes, of feeding of poor children, is going to fall upon the school system of Winnipeg, particularly the inner-city school system. That is an area, Mr. Speaker, that I think deserves a great deal more attention, but we should also be looking at the health of children. I know that I only have a couple of minutes left, but I want to draw the attention of the Legislature to the role of a Child Advocate in looking at both the education and health conditions of children in poverty, because I hope a Child Advocate who has the independence from

government will in fact be able to stand back and to deal not just with individual cases, of which I know he or she will have many, but also with some of the systemic causes of the kinds of conditions which lead to the cases which that ombudsman will have to deal with.

Amongst those of course, amongst the burdens of poverty which we see in the inner city of Winnipeg every day, are the burdens of health. Children from poorer neighbourhoods are at higher risk of accidental injury, of respiratory infections, and they experience a much greater danger in fact in their later life. It is not something which simply stays with them through their youth but their later life. The indication of earlier deaths, of lung cancer, of respiratory problems, do continue through a much longer period. I hope that a Child Advocate with independence would be able to look at those long-term conditions.

I would hope, too, that a Child Advocate would be able to look at the image of Winnipeg, the face of Winnipeg, the face of poverty, the face of child poverty that we are presenting to the rest of Canada, that they will be able to look at that and give advice to the public to open the issue generally and to bring to the attention of all parties the very, very serious nature of a condition that Manitoba is facing.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to speak to this bill and talk a little bit about how this government is woefully inadequate in meeting the needs of children in our province.

It just goes to show, today we are finding out just how important it is to have this Child Advocate's office report to the Legislature. Not only because of the fact that there are so many children and youth in this province who are not having, especially as wards of the state, their right to security, food, clothing and shelter being met, but that the lack of funding to government departments responsible for protecting and ensuring rights of children are not being able to do that.

We need some kind of a mechanism to make that public. We see here today that we found out, in an indirect way already, that the Advocate is doing his job and is making recommendations on behalf of children in this province, and in fact the minister is choosing to not make that information public.

Now this is very serious. A little while ago, I was asking questions related to the number of young

people in Winnipeg and Manitoba that are forced to live on the street. I asked the question if the Minister responsible for Child and Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer) was putting the livelihood of children secondary to their fixation with the debt and the bottom line of finances. The minister said no.

* (1730)

What we are hearing every other chance they get, that is in fact what they are doing. We are living, they say, in economic times that are tough—tough economic times. Well, what that means, Mr. Speaker, to so many children is that they go hungry. They live in fear continually because economic hard times so often mean that more children are living in violent situations, living in poverty and living with neglect.

Those are the kinds of things that this government has the legal mandate to ensure does not happen in Canada, in Manitoba, and that takes money. It takes money. Democracy is not cheap. Caring for children is not cheap.

There are a lot of us on this side of the House that have a vision for an economy and a democracy that puts children at the centre. So the reason that we have an economy, the reason that we have a democracy is to ensure that the rights and the needs of children are met first. Not after you have maximized profits, not after you have balanced your budget, but first.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we have a Child's Advocate, to make sure that government agencies are doing that very thing, that they are doing what they are set up to do, to make sure that children are having their rights protected.

This government, I would ask, what are they afraid of? Why are they not choosing to have this advocate for children report directly to the Legislature? Could it be that they know the caseloads for Child and Family Services are so high that there is not a possible chance? That those social workers and counsellors and advocates who are there to advocate on behalf of youth are struggling day after day on the front line to do that. This government provides no services, Mr. Speaker, for children who fall through the system. There is no direct funding from this provincial government for the thousands of children in this city who are living on the streets, who reap their living off the streets. In a country and a province as

affluent and as developed as Manitoba and Canada, that is reprehensible.

Children have historically been at the mercy of adults, their parents, teachers, government officials. And the rights of children are something that we should all be able to identify with because all of us have come from being children. All of us should be able to remember times in our life when we felt the powerlessness that children are faced with who are neglected and who are in situations that are dangerous to them.

This advocate is so important, and it is so important that we have it reporting to the Legislature, because we do not live in a perfect world and there are a number of people who enter the professions of teaching, or child care worker, or social worker, recreation worker, youth worker, who often do not have the best interests of children at heart. These are the people in positions of power over children. They are also in the courts. They are in a number of other places. They may be lawyers, they may be psychologists, and we hear horror story after horror story when it is those people who are in positions of power, who are given responsibility to advocate for children and do not do that, that have the most tremendous disastrous effects when they misrepresent and abuse children. That is what this office is designed to do.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I still have a lot of colleagues, because I worked so much in the youth field, who talk to me regularly about the disastrous stories of children who are facing horrible situations and are considered expendable. I know for a fact there have been allegations and I know that they are fact, that Child and Family Services does not have the capability to deal specifically with children who are 16 and 17 years old and there is the attitude, hey, they are going to be 18 soon, let us worry about the younger ones that we do have a chance to do something for, because we are not going to have the responsibility for those children who are turning 18 soon.

It is a pretty sad day in our society when certain-aged young people are considered to be write-offs or ones that we might as well not waste our time with. Those are the kinds of words that get used. It is because people working in professions there to benefit children are so overburdened, teachers are so overburdened with the kind of demands that are being placed on them in our public school system.

It is a very complex situation, Mr. Speaker, but we are not even beginning to deal with the things that we know are solutions. We know, and it is amazing to see, even after a child is horribly abused, how quickly they can respond when you respect them, when you give them some responsibility and show them some appreciation and tell them what their rights are.

It is amazing and it is very gratifying to work with young people and see the change happen to them when they are finally in an environment where they are shown respect. We know that that can be taught, and the earlier that intervention occurs, the better. We know that.

I have with me a number of curricula that I still have in my office. This is one from—it is called Skills for Violence-Free Relationships. It is a curriculum for young people between 13 and 18 years old. I used this in the schools when I was working there, and it is amazing to see how quickly kids can learn skills so that they do not have to resort to the behaviours that have been done to them. They quickly change the patterns and break the chains of violence and victimization.

We know that peer-helping programs work. I have a manual for teaching kids how to use their often natural leadership skills to not focus on becoming the leader of a gang that is going to do B&Es and perpetrate violence, but how they can learn to become more positive leaders.

But this government does not seem to make the connections that there are serious, serious human costs to the kind of economic policy that they practice, and that in the long run—as I asked the Minister for Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer)—it is much more expensive to treat young people, especially for illnesses like AIDS and HIV, than to fund things like Planned Parenthood so that they do not have unsafe sex, or to fund organizations like the Street Kids and Youth program so there are going to be that many fewer kids who are not on the streets swapping needles and having unprotected sex.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to be that the members opposite do not like to face those realities. [interjection] The Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) seems to have woken up.

* (1740)

An Honourable Member: I think you are stupid. I think you are out of touch.

Point of Order

* * *

Ms. CerIII: The Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) just called me stupid. I would ask that you call him to his feet and ask him to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair did not hear the remark of the honourable member—for Radisson. Therefore, I cannot rule on the honourable member's point of order.

* * *

Ms. CerIII: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very serious situation—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. CerIII: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I think that comments like that only encourage the same thinking that is becoming more common in the public mind with regard to the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard).

Mr. Speaker, I was commenting, when the Minister for Health starting making comments, about the fact that prevention of problems in the long run is far less expensive both in economic costs and in human costs, that it is shown in study after study, if you put the money into youth intervention programs, into recreation, arts and sport programs for young people, so that you are telling them we do not want you to become involved in destructive behaviour, that we are giving you some other option.

But the Minister of Health does not seem to understand that funding programs like StreetLinks, like the Street Kids and Youth project, funding programs like the Planned Parenthood program which are preventative in—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my honourable friend might permit a question so she does not continue to spread falsehoods.

Mr. Speaker: That would be up to the honourable member for Radisson.

Ms. CerIII: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health will have a chance to ask me questions after I have finished my remarks.

Mr. Orchard: Okay, fair enough.

Ms. CerIII: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that preventative programs are cost-effective. All those programs that I listed are cheaper than treating people with sexually transmitted diseases, particularly AIDS and HIV. This government does not seem to want to face up to the fact that their economic policy not only creates more poverty, which puts more people at risk, particularly children, but also in the long run is very costly in terms of our justice system, in terms of our health system, in terms of our social welfare needs and costs. It is very simple to understand that, but we also know that threatens the traditional balance of power that their party and government support.

I just want to ask you how much more time I have, Mr. Speaker, because I want to spend some time talking about the rights of the child. [interjection] Thank you.

The convention of the rights of the child for the U.N. was passed, and this country supported it. This government has the responsibility for figuring out how each department is going to ensure that all children have the right to learn to be useful members of society, to develop individual abilities. They have the right to a name and a nationality. They have the right to adequate nutrition, housing and health care. They have the right to love, affection and understanding, the right to free education and a full opportunity for play and recreation.

I would emphasize that just those rights are not subject to economics. They are not subject to the fact that this child or that child may have the good fortune or the misfortune to be born into a family of lesser means or more affluent means.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would like this government to be mindful of the rights of the child under the U.N. convention that this country has signed. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to allow the honourable Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) to ask a question of the honourable member for Radisson, who has agreed to answer a question?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

An Honourable Member: No.

An Honourable Member: Are you denying leave? The NDP is denying leave.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Let us ascertain whether or not there is leave. Is there leave of the House?

An Honourable Member: Is he going to speak on this?

Mr. Speaker: No.

Is there leave of the House, because the honourable member for Radisson has indicated that she would allow the honourable Minister of Health to ask a question, but that can only be done if there is leave of the House. Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. The honourable Minister of Health has leave for one question.

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my honourable friend the member for Radisson if she will not acknowledge that the Street LINKS program is now being operated by Mount Carmel Clinic with expanded hours, delivering more services to more of those at-risk children in terms of education, prevention and counselling than ever before in its two-year trial period. Will my honourable friend acknowledge that instead of spreading the falsehoods that it does not exist anymore?

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Speaker, I referred to that program as an example of a preventative program. Part of being a preventative program is dealing at the grassroots on the front lines with people. There is a different approach to programs also like the Street Kids and Youth program which manage to be right there on the ground. I would say that there is a difference in the delivery of this program, and there is going to be a difference in the results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Evans (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments on Bill 200 and speak to the amendment that my honourable colleague has put forth, and that is the Children's Advocate report to the Legislative Assembly as a whole.

I would think that from the reports and the studies that we have had—I personally and we as a party, and the communities and the people out in the organizations, cannot see reasons why this government would not allow the Children's Advocate to report directly to the Legislative Assembly and not just to one minister or one body or one director or what.

I have been out in the constituency in the last couple of weeks since the budget was presented and debated. We talk about the councillors—the people whom I talked to talk about the cuts. They talk about the deficit, but primarily what they talk about, that I hear a lot out there, is the fact that the children and the poor are being affected the most within this province with the cuts that we have seen imposed upon us and our children and the people of Manitoba.

I am a father of two children. I do my best to provide support for my children. I do my best to make sure they are taken of. I do my best, with the situation that we are in, as members of the House, to provide a need for the children, for our own children and for the children out in our communities.

I know, in my own community, I see and have seen in the last six years—how could I word this?—a sense of poorness of support in the communities since I have had the opportunity of moving to the Interlake. Within my own community, I see the children everywhere running around. I see children in the school system and children of my daughter's age who are going to kindergarten and going to school not being taken care of. They are not clean. They are hungry.

We have no basis to be able to provide a service for these children and to provide for their needs. We have no one really who can stand up and speak for the children, speak for the needs, speak to the government at the time to be able to provide the services that are so essential.

An example of how the children of this province are being deserted, if I may, and really almost forgotten.

The fact was brought up today in the LGD of Grahamdale, speaking again to councillors, and their concern was the effect of the cut to the dental program, for example, that was imposed on the children of Manitoba. Approximately 60,000 young people are being affected by this cut. Positions, people who took care of the children's needs as far as the dental program goes are gone. We talked about it today. We talked about it today, how it is going to affect the whole community in and around the Moosehorn area, the Ashern area.

These children, a primary amount of them that are being treated and are being helped and assisted, come from the four or five reserves that are within the Moosehorn, Ashern area. Where are they going

to go now, Mr. Speaker? To whom can they turn to help with the program or with the dental problems that they may have?

* (1750)

Anyone knows prevention is probably the greatest cure for down-the-road high costs and bigger problems. The concern is there, concern for the fact that we need to have someone, a body, someone that will have the advantage to take a child's problem, whatever it may be, whether it may be through the judicial system, whether it be in health, whether it be in Child and Family Services, whether it be a child in my community, a child in the community of the member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer) or anywhere, that he can take this child's problem and issue a need to all of us here.

I think it should be very, very important, very important that we should all be aware of the problems that are out there for the needs of our children, not just one individual, Mr. Speaker, who keeps it within himself and basically uses his authority to either squash it or go ahead with it or deal with it or stop it altogether. Do we all need to know the answers? Do we all need to know the problems out there? Yes we do.

I think we should all be aware of the problems that our children are facing in today's society, the abuse, the lack of care, the lack of food, the lack of shelter. Now, and with the growing concerns that we have, and I have seen in the last four or five years the growing problems that we have with the children's needs in the communities in rural Manitoba. They have grown.

In my own community the situation has increased. The problems have increased. The kids have nowhere to go. The kids have nowhere to get service, to get any type of medical attention, any type of attention if they are being abused. It is not there anymore, Mr. Speaker. What has happened, and what I have seen and what I have learned, and which, I must say—I am very proud to say this in the House—I have seen situations where children are not being able to be taken care of within their own family situation, poverty, too many children in the family. What I have seen is something that I feel we should all take notice of. That is the fact that people take upon themselves to offer their homes, to offer their services on a personal basis, to come to you or to someone in the community who is having problems and they take them in.

They do not have to be family. It is not a family matter. Because my cousin's son is not being fed properly, taken care of properly because they cannot, I should take him in because it is my responsibility as a family. Well, unfortunately that does not occur all the time. There is not family to take care of them, just like we are not being taken care of by the government of the day. So what they do is they take these young children in and they keep them. They take care of them, and they provide them with whatever is possible. That is what I have learned in the past few years, and what I have seen that occurs. Really where the first indication was, Mr. Speaker, was on some of the reserves that are in my constituency that I visited.

When we talked about child care and the problems facing the aboriginal communities and the rural communities where the children are suffering, where financially they are unable to be looked after, they say, well, we are taking them in. We will take them in. We will not let the 4-, 5-, 6-year-old go days without food, without getting clean, because it is our basic responsibility, human responsibility.

I think that we should allow the Children's Advocate, and I am using an example, to be able to come to the Assembly and say here is a problem with the situation with the children, whether it be with the foster parent side of it, whether it be with the dental issue, whether it be just with abuse, whether it be the fact that there is no one to take care of them, for abuse of alcohol or abuse of any substance. Where is that? How is a Children's Advocate really going to be able to do the job, that I feel and we here feel, a proper job, to have our children taken care of?

Under this legislation that the government has seen fit to put through, it is not going to happen. Members on the other side and members here may say, well, we do not want to know. We do not want to know about the problems. We do not want to know if there is a problem. I do not want to know if there is a children's problem within the Department of Justice that cannot be resolved, that cannot be taken care of. Why not? Because perhaps the minister of Child and Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer) will decide that it is not an important issue enough. Perhaps it is too political. Perhaps there may be something there that he is not aware of or wants to be aware of, so he says no. What happens then, Mr. Speaker?

Then we have a situation where a child or children are going to end up suffering. Should that be? Should we just say, as representatives or anyone, that is okay that those children—we are not concerned about them. It is not our concern. I do not want to worry about it.

I think it is a concern. It is a tremendous concern. Mr. Speaker, I would like to just also make a comment with this that, as a result of some of the cuts and that that this government has imposed on us, especially with the Foster Family Association, I use this and the cuts that have been imposed with the fact, as I had mentioned earlier to this House, about how other people take it upon themselves to take care. But, there are people, there are families out there who are willing and able, with some due support from government, to provide and take these children in no matter what age they may be, a lesson from our aboriginal communities that help and support their own.

I feel that the opportunity right here, with the Foster Family Association being cut as it has, is going to devastate the problems that we have within our communities, with our foster children. Who is going to be the biggest sufferer? The children. Who is going to suffer the most, you or I? Not likely, but the children, the hundreds of children out there,

the thousands of children out there who are not being taken care of with the dental program, the thousands of children who are going to be left without a foster home or be left in a hotel room for days, not knowing where they are going to be.

Mr. Speaker, if there is a situation that has to be responded to, is it going to be responded to? [interjection] That is right. A reduced workweek is going to affect that more.

I cannot, for the life of me, understand how a government, any striped government, cannot respond to the needs of our children in this province, in this city, in this country by deciding that we want the authority and we want the role personally and only one to take care of it. I would not want to be solely responsible on my own for the life and the well-being of children in our communities. So I would strongly suggest that this government listen to the people, listen to us and say—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for the Interlake (Mr. Cliff Evans) will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Friday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 22, 1993

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