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| Manitoba | 35e | 2e | Discours relatif à l’Éducation | 30 avril 1991 | Len Derkach | Ministre de l’Éducation et de la Formation professionnelle | PC |

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Education and Training): It is indeed a pleasure for me to present on behalf of my department in government the Estimates for the Department of Education and Training for this fiscal year. I think it is important that we give some due consideration to the Estimates here-

I think it is important to allow our opposition members the opportunity to ask the necessary questions and to get the kind of information that they may be seeking through their questions. To begin with, I would just like to pay a complimentary remark to the staff, my deputy minister and his staff that I have within the department, for their hard work throughout the year in ensuring that the will of government is carried out in a respectable way. I have to say that over the last year the staff in my department have worked very diligently at ensuring that the opportunities for education in Manitoba are indeed made available to each and every Manitoban who may want to partake of the educational services.

Madam Chair, we live in a very rapidly changing society and the changes in our world are creating some new pressures and demands on the education system. There is an identified need for a skilled work force in this country and this province, and indeed it is our responsibility to ensure that the opportunities for allowing that kind of skill to be developed is available within our province.

The new pressures are coming at a time when there is a requirement for some fiscal restraint, and we have to do more with less. There is a need for increased programs within our system, but there is also a need for financial and administrative accountability. Throughout the last couple of years we have attempted to make sure that there is some accountability both in the program form and in the administrative form within the department.

There is also a need to determine and to set our priorities and to control the costs that we have before us. In this last year, the Department of Education and Training has done many things to allow Manitobans to take advantage of the potential that our province has to offer.

Some of the initiatives I would like to mention at this time are simply just highlighting some of the things that have happened over the course of the last year. First of all, I might begin by mentioning the fact that in the North there have been several programs that have been embarked on to allow Northerners the opportunity to get the types of programs that are needed to allow them to participate fully within their communities and within our society of Manitoba.

The northern recreation training program is an example where we have embarked on training some 27 Natives as recreation directors for the communities in the North. Initially some $67,000 for the rural and northern literacy programs within the school system have been introduced as a part of our policy. In terms of the area of training as well, we are training mental health individuals or service people together with the federal government, and in this area we have spent something like $890,000 in 1991.

In addition, we have also embarked on a school divisions pay equity program, Madam Chair, whereby we are participating along with school divisions to allow for pay equity within the school divisions across this province. Again, this is a partnership approach where some of the responsibility is being shared by school divisions and some of the responsibility is being shared by government. Together with the Department of Labour, we are working co-operatively with the educational organizations to make sure that every opportunity is afforded school divisions to carry out the process of pay equity within their jurisdictions.

In terms of special needs programming, Madam Chair, here we have embarked on grants totalling some $36,000 to St. James-Assiniboia and Lord Selkirk school divisions allowing for support to special needs programming within these school divisions for specially handicapped or students with special needs.

Additionally, we have provided a grant of $94,000 to the universities who are offering French courses for students to be able to take courses in the French language. We have also addressed the whole area of independent college support by allowing some $500,000 to flow to our independent colleges to allow them to offer programming for students of this province.

Madam Chair, the whole area of ACCESS has been one that has been under some questioning as of late. Indeed, the whole area of ACCESS programming was embarked on at a time when Limestone Training-the Limestone Generating plant was going into production. At that time there was an identification of skill shortages throughout the province, especially northern Manitobans, and several programs were embarked on in conjunction with the federal government to allow individuals who were disadvantaged economically and socially to take part in programs.

Last year, Madam Chair, when the federal government did not come forth with this traditional support for those programs, we as a province had to put in some of our own money, and we did put something like $2.6 million into the ACCESS program, from provincial revenue, to allow for the continuation of those programs.

With the withdrawal of federal support for these programs, this year, unfortunately, we find ourselves in a position where we are going to have to discontinue some of the programs because of the fact that we cannot ourselves afford to carryon these programs without federal support.

Another important initiative that we embarked on this year was the governance of Francophone schools within the province. Indeed we are waiting for the results of the task force report which will be coming down to us by mid or the end of May, at which time we will have before us a suggested model for Francophone governance within this province. This is not a matter where we can look at whether or not we will have governance of Francophone schools, but indeed it is a matter of looking at what type of model is best suited for this province, and I am looking forward to meeting with the chair, Mr. Edgar Gallant, to go through that model and to then begin the process of implementation over the course of the next few years.

Another program that was extremely successful, I believe, was the program of the first-year university education by Distance Ed. Five communities across this province received this program, and the reports, to this point in time, point to a very successful year. Indeed, we have something like 150 participants or more in the program, and each centre has reported tremendous success in the participance and in the progress of students who are participating in that program. This coming year, we will be adding the last program to make up the full 10-course complement, and that is the science program in the first-year university. Next September, we will be offering 10 full courses through this program.

There is an extreme amount of interest in this program right now from other communities as well. As a matter of fact, I am pleased to report that we are even attracting some students from out of province to this type of delivery program. Indeed, universities now have acknowledged that this is an excellent way to deliver programs for some of our disadvantaged, or people in rural and remote areas, where it is difficult for them to come in to Winnipeg here to get their first year of university, or indeed, for some, it is even too costly to do that.

In general, throughout the year, we have embarked on some fairly ambitious programs that have put this department at a leading edge in terms of the new initiatives in education. We are proud of the initiatives that we have undertaken to this point in time, but yet we have had to deal with the realities of the fiscal position of this province.

We are undergoing a recession in this province at this time, and at a time when 50 cents out of every dollar goes to pay the Interest costs on our debt, it is a time that we cannot continue to draw up large sums of money Into every program that Is available

within government. Yes, we have had to do some rationalizing; we have had to set some priorities. We have asked those of our partners, whether they are the school divisions or universities or colleges, to do the same, to set their priorities to make sure that the essential programs are maintained and delivered, but those that perhaps are of lesser importance should be put on hold or, for that matter, in some cases, may have to be deleted from the delivery so that, indeed, the most essential services can be maintained.

Within the department itself, Madam Chair, there have been some changes over the last year that I think are important to highlight. If we look at the area of the Administration and Finance, I would have to say that this is one area where there have been some very positive changes. Over the last year, we have consolidated many of our Administration and Finance functions so that there has been an overall saving to government and to the department, but more Importantly, many of the functions were brought under the Finance branch so that we do not have fragmentation and duplication In the way that we carry out our responsibilities as they relate to the Finance branch.

Essential services of the Finance and Administration branch are professional certification, schools' finance, management and information services, internal audit, research and planning and, of course, the whole function of personnel. All of the functions within that branch will be maintained this year for our 1991-92 budget. Indeed, we find that we can now better handle the Administration and Rnance aspects of the department because we have consolidated some of the responsibilities into one area.

The important issue before us this year will be the legislation which is going to be introduced this session to amend the Public Schools Finance Board so that It better reflects the mandate of the board which is responsible for capital support to school divisions. There have been some changes to the Estimates to reflect this division of responsibility. I think it should be noted that the Provincial Auditor had made mention of the necessity of these changes, and we are now moving forward with legislation to accommodate for these changes.

In terms of the Ed Finance review, Madam Chair, an initiative that was undertaken by the department a year or so ago, I am pleased to report that this year we will have, in the 1992-93 school year, a new finance model which will provide for more equitable funding, better control of funding and greater accountability of funding to school divisions. This is something that has been overdue for some time.

We have heard the opposition critics ask when this review will be in place and when we are going to move ahead with the new funding model. Well, today I am very pleased to be able to indicate that for the 1992-93 school year, all school divisions within this province will be operating under a new finance model.

At the current time, our staff are meeting with the Ed Finance committee. Their deliberations will be brought to me within the next month, at which time we will then go out to all of the interorganizational groups and we will then consult with them. I would say by mid-summer, we will have a model that we will be able to share with the school divisions throughout this province.

In the area of the Communications branch, which has been talked about lately, as has been understood, I think, by everyone, the Department of Education and Training does not have a Communications branch of its own. This branch has been dismantled, and indeed all of the Communications functions will be handled under a separate department, but the important areas that the department carried out, such as the publishing of the Ed Manitoba magazine, will still be carried out but it will be done from a central administration area. So that Is one area that we will not see in the Estimates line in the future, because this function will not be handled by the Department of Education and Training.

Madam Chair, another initiative by the department which is sort of connected to the Administration area Is the High School Review and the implementation of the strategies for high school education. Indeed, I am pleased to indicate that the deliberations are going well. The co-ordinator for the High School Review implementation process, Dr. Norm Isler, who assumed this position in February, has been meeting with school divisions throughout the province.

We have a steering committee with representatives from educational organizations as well as the department Who are going to be providing leadership and co-ordination for the process. This group will be meeting within the next week to assume their responsibilities.

There have been some time lines that have been moved because of the fact that we have gone through an election process within the last year and there were some delays. Indeed, I am pleased to report that most of the deliberations that are occurring right now with school divisions are indeed of a positive nature, and school divisions are looking quite positively at the implementation of the strategies of the High School Review.

Madam Chair, when we speak about decentralization, our department was impacted, I guess, quite directly by the decentralization initiative. I am pleased to say that some decentralization has occurred. One of the branches that we have decentralized a portion of is the Native Education branch. I would like to indicate right now that there is quite an optimistic view by those who have been decentralized in the Native Ed branch.

As a matter of fact, I was talking to one of the individuals who was decentralized to Dauphin who indicated that she is very pleased to be working in Dauphin and finds that being able to deliver the service from Dauphin Is quite a benefit to her, because many of the communities that she works with are within driving distance from that community.

So the reports on decentralization are, indeed, very positive. To this point in time, we have the Student Aid branch. Part of it has been decentralized to Brandon. New Careers has been decentralized to Brandon and Dauphin, and the Native Ed branch has been decentralized to Dauphin. These are the only decentralization initiatives that have been undertaken by the department to this point in time. I would have to indicate quite strongly that each and everyone of them have been done in a very favourable fashion and, indeed, the services that are being carried out at these locations are reported being carried out in a very good way.

In the area of Post-Secondary, Adult and Continuing Education, there are certainly some things that need to be mentioned in this area, because community colleges are impacted by not only the budget but, indeed, by some of the initiatives that have been undertaken within the last year.

One of the most significant initiatives is community college governance. We have been working with community colleges, with the staff, with students, with the administration and with the community at large to ensure that this process of community colleges becoming autonomous, if you like, from government will gain their autonomy in a fairly smooth way, and the transition can occur in the most favourable way that we can do it under.

The new legislation, the colleges act, will be introduced to incorporate the community colleges under individual boards of governors to make them more responsive to the needs of their communities and to the marketplace. The effect will be to refocus and to strengthen the colleges and to make sure that the colleges are then meeting the needs of the communities that they are in. Indeed, our community colleges have different mandates because we have only three of them: one in rural Manitoba, if you like, or Brandon; one in the city of Winnipeg; and one in northern Manitoba. Indeed, each of these colleges serves a different clientele, perhaps a different need, and their focuses are different, depending on the regions that they serve.

All the regular programs at the three community colleges have been reviewed with an eye to market demands, to cost, to the graduate employment opportunities that are available, and also to look at what alternate delivery agents are available to be able to deliver some of the courses that perhaps have been offered at our community colleges in the past. Indeed, in doing this, we were able to streamline some of our programs; we were able to add sections to programs that were very popular; and, in some cases, where programs perhaps were outdated, or there was a poor graduation rate, or perhaps there was no market demand for the students once they graduated, we indeed had to take that step of eliminating those programs.

But, in terms of additions to programs, I am happy to report that three programs were added at Red River Community College, which will complement the recently announced aerospace initiative, and I would indicate that the three programs are avionics training, composite materials technology, and an expansion in the computerized numerical and control operation. In addition, six initiatives are being expanded and five more are being added.

At Asslniboine Community College we are adding one new initiative. We are expanding two other areas, and one of them is in the business administration area.

At Keewatin Community College, we are expanding one initiative, and we are adding five new initiatives. These new initiatives are basically being added in the Thompson area because indeed we find that this is an area which has a fairly large population and there is a demand for programming within the Thompson area.

It would have been nice to add more programs at this point in time to some of our community colleges to allow for greater access to community college programming, but because we are undergoing some reform, if you like, at our community college level, we cannot simply rewrite new programs that quickly. So for that reason we had to work within the capability of the department to make sure that staff were able to implement programs that could be rewritten, and then implement them from that point of view.

As a government, I have to indicate that we are committed to the provision of special programs to disadvantaged Manitobans. Because of the reductions in the federal cost-sharing of these programs, it has become necessary to eliminate three of the ACCESS programs that were delivered in this province before. These programs were engineering, electrical electronics, and civil technology. BUNTEP and New Careers will be reduced in terms of their numbers, but the programs will still continue. ACCESS programs at the universities, however, will remain untouched as they were last year. I think the amount of $790,000 that was available to them last year, that same amount

will be made available to them this year.

I might indicate, on the ACCESS programs, that especially the BUNTEP program and most of the other programs have been extremely successful. It is regrettable that we are losing a couple of these programs, but unfortunately without the support of the federal government, we simply, as a province, cannot continue to offer the wide range of programs on our own resources. We just do not have the money to be able to do that. We are continuing our discussions with the federal government. I was encouraged by the announcement made by the Prime Minister, with regard to training programs for aboriginals and Native people in this country, and I am looking forward to Manitoba receiving its fair share of that funding so that we cannot simply reinvent the wheel, because we indeed have some programs that are successful and perhaps we can retain those programs or expand them within our province.

Madam Chair, when we get to the area of Student Financial Assistance, for those students who need the assistance to go either to our community colleges or our universities, we as a province have decided to help those who are in greatest need. We would put an extra million dollars into the bursary program and this will assist to cover such things as increased tuition costs and increased expenses for living. We have especially tried to target that money toward the single parent who has more difficulty in attending university than others may have.

Yes, more may be asked for, but indeed I would have to indicate quite clearly that Manitoba stands head and shoulders above most of the other provinces when it comes to student aid and financial assistance.

Last week, Madam Chair, I was happy to announce a $6 million jointly funded five-year aerospace training initiative in Portage, which is a partnership approach again between the provincial and federal governments and the local aerospace industries.

Again this is part of the Workforce 2000 initiative which we will expand on and announce more formally in a few weeks, but this was a first announcement.

I would have to say that this province should be very excited about this initiative, because over the next 10 years we will be requiring something like 3,000 people who will be trained in the aerospace industry. I think it is a very bright spot for Manitoba. Indeed, we must take advantage of it.

The aerospace industry in general that we have talked to are very excited about this initiative and Indeed feel that we are going in the right direction.

In reading some of the articles lately in the newspapers, it would point to the fact that this is a growth industry and one that we should be training people as quickly as we can for, because indeed jobs in this area are not only going to be permanent but long lasting for students who are going through the system and many of our young people.

Madam Chair, in terms of the Universities Grants Commission, the grants to Manitoba's universities total something like $213 million. This is about a 3.3 percent increase over last year. Operating funding increased by $5.9 million or 3 percent, for a total of $201 million. This amount, of course, includes pay equity and debenture interest and financing.

Capital funding for our universities has increased up to $11.9 million and some of the important initiatives that are going to be undertaken are such things as the replacement of a library at Brandon University, the replacement of the animal metabolism facility at the University of Manitoba, the completion of a major renovation at the College Universitaire de Saint-Boniface and the replacement of the roof of the Centennial building at the University of Winnipeg.

Although again, Madam Chair, it would have been nice to allow for a greater amount of money to be allocated, I must indicate that last year we also were able to afford $10 million to the University of Manitoba for the replacement of their collapsing steam tunnel. In the last two years, there has been a significant amount of money that has gone to our universities in terms of capital and, I would say, a respectable amount in terms of the operating as well. Although our tuition fees are increasing, Madam Chair, I would have to indicate that we still are third or fourth lowest overall In Manitoba.

I would like to spend just a moment talking about the latest initiative of the Department of Education and Training, and that is the unveiling of the five-year Strategic Plan I was happy to unveil in the last week. I think it was last Friday when this was unveiled.

We have laid out a five-year objective, one where we hope to increase the quality of education, the opportunity for education by Manitobans and indeed where we identify the need for accountability, for outcomes and the ability to expand opportunities for training and retraining.

Some of the initiatives that this Strategic Plan Includes I would like to list, because some of the criticism that we heard from the opposition parties was that although this looked all right in terms of its general overview, there was nothing specific that one could talk about.

Let me outline some of the specifics that were mentioned within the Strategic Plan. First of all, legislative reform was one initiative that was mentioned. In the next few days I will be announcing the whole concept of legislative reform and how that is going to take place.

We talked about implementation, of answering the challenge, indeed some 90 strategies within the high school system that have to be implemented over the next four years.

We talked about the review of early years and middle years of education, something that has not been done for some time and needs to be embarked on.

We talked about the implementation of special education guidelines. Last year we issued the whole concept guideline for special needs education in this province. It was the first time ever that this province has had a guideline or guidelines or policies with regard to special needs education. Yes, there needs to be some revision done to that document, but indeed that will be done in consultation with all of the players in education.

The initiative of governance of Francophone schools in this province is one that is part of the Strategic Plan, and indeed that model will be important to all of those Manitobans who will be affected by the governance of Francophone schools.

The reform of education finance, although this initiative has been ongoing, indeed by the 1992-93 school year we will have a new finance model for education.

Mentioned in the throne speech was the whole concept of review of school division and school district boundaries. Again that initiative was mentioned in the overall five-year Strategic Plan, a very special and a very important initiative, not undertaken now for some 30 years, but indeed I think it is time that we embarked on this initiative.

The development of a labour market strategy where we identify where our skill shortages are and we develop a strategy to ensure that we have a training culture in this province where we train and retrain individuals so they can best realize their potential.

A rural development strategy, one where we can deliver programming to rural and northern Manitobans, whether we use Distance Education to do that or whether we use other ways by creating regional centres for education throughout the province, so that rural and northern Manitobans can take part in training opportunities and in education opportunities.

Another initiative is the Implementation of Workforce 2000, something we have talked about now for some time, and indeed we are getting very close to the time where we can make the specific announcement. I think that that is a very, very important initiative for this province.

We talked about such initiatives as adult literacy, basic education for adults and a northern education strategy. We talked about the improved articulation among our high schools, our colleges and our universities, and the linkages between our universities and other partners such as business, industry, labour and the Department of Education and Training, and the review of university education, something that has not been done, again, for some time and indeed is overdue.

We talked about the importance of aboriginal education, distance education, addressing the whole issue of students at risk; sustainable development, incorporating that concept into our educational materials, whether it is at the elementary, high school, college or university level and, indeed, addressing the whole area of multiculturalism. I might Indicate that I am very proud that now we have within the department a policy on multicultural education.

So Madam Chair, all of these initiatives are part of the five-year Strategic Plan. As was indicated by many who attended the morning briefing, this is an ambitious agenda, but it does not mean that this agenda is going to be carried out in the first year. The agenda is one that spans over a period of five years. It does point the direction that this department is going, and I think indeed outlines some major reforms in the whole area of education.

Madam Chair, over the last year, our education system has seen some significant steps in terms of reforming the way that we are pointing in education. We are seeing now that parents, other groups such as business people, are becoming excited about what is happening in education and are becoming more, if you like, concerned and perhaps more Interested in participating in the whole process of reforming our education system, so that it not only meets the needs of the business community, if you like, but meets the needs of society.

What we need to do is bring in, broaden that family, if you like, of partners in education and bring in the people who perhaps have not had an opportunity to participate and see what is going on in the education system. Although we have seen criticism from people in the business community, it is now time to bring them in and to show them some of the challenges that the educators are faced with because there is not enough knowledge about what the classroom teacher has to face on a daily basis by many who are not Involved in the education community.

Indeed, we have to enhance that knowledge. We have to enhance that availability of inviting people, or those communities, into the school system so that they have a better understanding of what it is our educators have to put up with on a daily basis and the challenges that they have before them.

Madam Chair, I have been criticized somewhat at introducing a Strategic Plan for the five years at the same time that we are going through an overall downsizing in government, however, I strongly believe that we can be successful, that this is not a time when we should sit back and say, oh well, because we are downsizing we do not have any vision for the future.

Indeed, I think that it is evident that we do have a vision for the future, that there are things that we can do at a time when there is a recession going on, that it does not mean that improved education quality is simply dumping great sums of money into the process. We can do many things without great sums of money because there is reform that can take place without considering large sums of money being invested. As time goes on, Madam Chair, there will be money invested into the initiatives. There is money set aside for the High School Review to ensure that it is successful and the implementation is successful.

Our concern has to be for the students of our province, for the youth of our province, and for people who are involved in the training and retraining of people within our province. I have been pleased to be part of some of the initiatives that have taken place under this department since I have been minister. Indeed, I look forward to the Estimates debate and I look forward to the questions that my colleagues in the opposition will be putting forward, and I hope that we will indeed be able to clarify some of the issues that they may have on their minds. I thank you very much for the opportunity.