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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Manitoba | 35e  | 5e  | Discours relatif à l’Éducation | 9 mai 1994 | Clayton Manness | Ministre de l’Éducation et de la Formation professionnelle | PC |

Hon. Clayton Manness (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Deputy Chairperson, I will say a few words to start off with. I would indicate to members at the table that our government, of course, is committed to maintaining adequate funding levels despite the current financial constraints. I know members opposite will want to take issue with me particularly that the reduction in funding represents a threat to the quality of education. I do not accept that as a matter of fact, because to accept that then would sort of be equivalent to throwing your hands up and saying you have no solutions.

 The reality is, the government of Manitoba and indeed governments across the land are going to have to do reform and a lot of the changes that I think most of us around this table would agree to; they are going to have to do that in the context of restraint.

 As I pointed out to those who want to listen to the global numbers, when we came into government six years ago and subsequently upon bringing down seven budgets, we have increased funding in education. I might be corrected on this, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, but it seems to be about $750 million to $1 billion. Maybe I am out tens of millions of dollars somewhere, but this government has certainly shown that a commitment to education is, if not the highest, certainly the second highest level after the billion dollars in addition we have put into Health over seven budgets.

 Mr. Deputy Chairperson, as members know, we have increased funding to colleges by 3.3 percent and, according to much of the latest available data, Manitoba fares reasonably well in funding for schools, colleges and universities vis-à-vis the other provinces. We are ranked second in percent increase to basic operating grants for colleges. We did a telephone survey in '93 and '94 and have found out subsequently that in '94-95 several provinces are freezing and reducing their operating grants, I think in particular Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, while we have increased ours by 3.3 percent.

 Indications for '94-95 are that most other provinces are freezing and reducing the operating grant to university. There are wide ranges here, a range of zero percent in New Brunswick down to a minus 11 percent for Alberta. The only exception that we can find so far is a 2.4 percent increase in British Columbia, which probably represents no increase in the level of funding, but simply accounts for increased enrollment.

 Tuition fee increases at colleges are similar to increases in other provinces. Also, I might indicate that average tuition fees in arts and sciences at universities in Manitoba in '91-92 were the lowest among the four western provinces. That is a number that comes from Statistics Canada, for anybody who wants to challenge the number.

 Manitoba ranked in the middle in terms of elementary, secondary per-pupil expenditures in spite of the fact that this is the second year when reductions are being made on a per-pupil basis. I would like to again indicate that when we try to factor a per-pupil cost across Canada and compare Manitoba to our sister provinces and when one takes into account that the cost of living here is probably lower than-well it is lower than-the national average, I daresay that we are doing reasonably well in maintaining our commitment to funding to education.

 Mr. Deputy Chairperson, what needs to remembered, and as I remind my friends, the critics from the opposition parties, is that we still as a province are spending almost $1 billion on the education system across all facets.

 I would like to spend just a few moment on talking about reform, the department restructuring in K to Senior 4, and here I am talking about regionalization of services, integration of program design and delivery with educational technologies, emphasis on aboriginal education, emphasis on quality, emphasis on assessment and evaluation -those are the hallmarks of what we want to be part of the reform model.

 I want to ensure members that I hope we will have an opportunity to dialogue in depth about some of the matters, although it might be more opportune if Education Estimates were being considered a month or month and a half from now because hopefully, by that time, we will have the reform package out in greater clarity to the public.

 I daresay that there are some areas that I can give insight into to the members and maybe have some understanding from them as to their views, because I have reached out to a lot of Manitobans. I certainly look forward to not only members pushing me as to what my view is on some of the issues, but also they will share with me their insights as to how they believe that reform should be conducted in the realm of education over the course of the next number of years.

 Mr. Deputy Chairperson, I want the record to show that my No.1 priority, having come into the ministry, is the reform of education, not only in K to Senior 4 but also post-secondary sectors of the department to give effect to that change and to that emphasis, I should say, members are well aware that we have now appointed a second deputy minister. I will move into greater reasons for that in a time to come, but certainly one of the reasons for having to do that is the great emphasis of change. The expectations on one person, one deputy to lead this, I think, was just too much.

 Measures will be taken to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to post-secondary education, as recommended by the University Education Review Commission. A point that I would like to make is that this is why Universities Grants Commission and Colleges Secretariat are part of the same appropriation. Members will notice that there is a change in format That is one of the reasons why we have made this change. We are trying to, again, rather than set up a number of divisions and branches and appendages, more and more, we are trying to consolidate those functions. We are hoping we can work to more of a single post-secondary division or branch within the department I might point out, when I am mentioning the University Education Review Commission, I am hoping and I am expecting that this month yet, I will make a definitive response to that report.

 I might indicate, still talking about reform, that we have allocated this year, members will notice in the line, $2.25 million to ensure that the K to Senior 4 reform in areas of curriculum development, standards and evaluation, parental involvement, will begin to take shape and certainly this funding will help put into place, hopefully, the reform areas. They will involve the development of a curriculum framework which will include provincial standards and benchmarks, a review of special ed programs and ongoing consultation on forum with parents and other education partners.

 So, $2.25 million, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, to be directed towards K to Senior 4 reform.

 Also, progress on major departmental initiatives is furthered by these Estimates. These include Francophone schools governance, education legislation reform, review of university education and the creation of employment development centres in the school division district boundaries review. I know members will want to pose questions in all these areas.

 Mr. Deputy Chairperson, the last point I would like to make with respect to the reform agenda is that we will continue to dialogue as a government as widely and broadly as we possibly can. Certainly, a manifestation of that occurred just a little over a week ago with the Parents' Forum, which by all of the input that has come to me by way of individual comments from virtually everybody that was in attendance certainly rated that forum as being highly successful. I certainly will use a fair amount of the material to try and guide my thoughts with respect to the ultimate blueprint that we want to share with Manitobans.

 The third area I would like to talk about is distance education and technology, again one of our very high priorities. The government is committed to using the remarkable new capabilities of the electronic highway. This will radically improve education and training opportunities throughout the province. Through the application of telecommunication technologies, Manitobans will have vastly improved access to a wide variety of education and training programs, information sources and a high level of expertise from throughout this province and in fact from anywhere in the world.

 As well, the department will be integrating curriculum matched software with curriculum development at the K to Senior 4 level in order to improve its own capabilities and increase the resources available to our students and teachers. Specific actions in this area include application to the Canada-Manitoba infrastructure program for a comprehensive distance education system which includes local interactive television clusters, an extensive video conferencing system for delivery of post-secondary courses in adult education, province-wide local access to Internet, a technical structure for library linkages, a system for ongoing training of skilled human resources.

 Those are some of the specific actions that we hope to begin to WOIX toward, and yet there are many others, Mr. Deputy Chairperson.

 We want to develop the multimedia resource and expect to do this as an exciting, effective way of delivering curriculum to middle-year students. We want to refocus the Manitoba Satellite NetwoIX to provide research, development and course delivery for the evolving distance education system. We would like to pilot project grants to ensure that the education and training system as a whole benefits from the creativity and energy of those educators who are pioneering with the new technologies and, of course, we want to begin to integrate this into other areas of education by an active exploration of library linkages throughout the province.

 We realize that because there is such a pressure for distance education to come in a myriad of ways and yet it is very important, given that certainly in the first instance this will all have to be supported for the most part from the public purse, it is just so crucial that there be some not only integration, but that there be a gatekeeping function in place so that there is not overlap and duplication built into a delivery system that is going to plague us cost-wise for years and, I dare say, decades to come. This has been the experience in too many of the jurisdictions into which we have looked, stateside and even some of the efforts in Canada, that various microsectors of education have run off to do their own things and other partners in the community have run off to do their own things and all of a sudden you have an incredible waste of effort and indeed of cost. What we have to do in this province is try to bring it in an orderly fashion.

 I sense that now there seems to be a desire by the federal government to also be more involved, although education per se is a provincial responsibility, but as we move into the

post-secondary education and some of the other outreaches that are now more feasible through an electronic approach and a technological approach, it has to be done in a sharing of good minds and indeed of resources as between all levels of government, but beyond that thinking as to how we hold everybody back a little bit, or at least those that are let on to the system do not find themselves in the position of having to be built into a high-cost system.

 So to that end, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, we are contemplating and probably will establish a Provincial Distance Education Technology Council to explore the administrative and management structures for distance education in our province.

 Fourthly, the fourth broad area, skills training initiatives, of course, are to receive special attention also. This is becoming such a certainly not new and it is. certainly not significantly different, but it is taking on new twists and it is what is making the whole area of training, and I know this is very important to the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), but it is what is taking on its own special initiative.

 I point out to members at this table that the former federal government took all human resource activity and put it under one ministry, and of course that government now has been replaced and the new government has chosen not to change that structure tremendously. And all of a sudden one minister is finding, in this case himself, grappling not only with training per se, but how it sort of fits in with all the social reform on the social side.

 We, not only we in Manitoba, but our provincial governments across the land are trying to come up with something to begin to match this structure, because departments traditionally in a provincial setting are very much caught in the older ways, and I am not going to use the word turf protection. They are trying to work together, but the reality is, we have had a social safety net in place for 30 to 40 years, which is sort of purely based on social programming in and around unemployment insurance, welfare costs and then a little bit of crossing into training.

 Yet, here now we have the federal government with a structure in place where training is trying to become tied so closely and involved with social reform, and that is another dimension of the reason why we moved to a second deputy within Education, because training and education is going to become more than training and education. It is going to be a little wider. It is going to have to come into fully understanding and complementing the changes in the social safety reform that the federal government is leading.

 I only point that out as a starting point, but certainly training will receive and has received special attention. In order to equip our citizens with the skills necessary in today's world, we are revitalizing the Apprenticeship Program, increased resources allocated by almost $300,000. Yet we will continue with what we deem to be successful programs such as the Workforce 2000, and I know members across the way would disagree. We will continue with these programs, and also CareerStart, Partners with Youth and the literacy programs.

 Youth Career Development Programs continue to be strengthened. For example, new businesses will participate in the Young Entrepreneurs component of the Partners with Youth program which was introduced in '93-94. Responsibility for the provincial co-ordination of co-operative education was incorporated within youth programs to strengthen partnerships among programs that promote the transition of students from school to work. A new component of the new CareerStart program, Tradefocus, will be implemented in pilot form in '94-95 in order to enhance the profile of the trades as a career choice for Manitoba students.

 The last point I would like to make, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, with respect to training is that a movement toward a fully integrated, co-ordinated approach to skills training programs was begun with the consolidation of skills training in Manitoba Education and Training. This will be enhanced further by the creation of a one-stop, single-window employment and training service called Employment Development Centres, which will include the federal and municipal governments as partners. Again, this refers back to some of the general statements I made just a few minutes ago when we today have to remove overlap and duplication in all of our efforts to try and make more successful the limited dollars that we have to direct toward the needs in these areas.

 The final point I would like to cover, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, again is a focus area within the department, the new initiatives that are being developed in collaboration with our federal government. We have included $1 million for our new initiative, welfare to work, in co-operation with the Department of Family Services and the federal government.

 Under this new initiative, pilot projects will be undertaken to assist social assistance recipients to obtain employment Assisting single parents will be a particular focus. We will participate with the federal government on a review which will lead to significant social security reform. Clearly, education and training will be important components of social security reform. Again, I am just reinforcing the point I made a few minutes ago.

 In addition to social security reform, opportunities exist with the federal-provincial infrastructure program and the Winnipeg Development initiative. Consultations with the federal government will result in a number of joint projects with benefits for Manitoba.

 Just to finish on this point, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, our department, and indeed this government, is trying to work as closely as possible with the federal government in its efforts to restructure social security reform, because having been actively involved in the planning and the management of this province over the last, as I say, seven budgets, it is clearly obvious to us that if we do not try and evaluate our programs, reduce those that are not performing and taking those savings to those that will perform better, ultimately, we will lose the whole system we have. So governments across the land have absolutely no choice but to make those efforts. To the extent that the federal government is sincere and is genuine in its approach, and we are convinced that they are at this point, we will continue to work closely with them.

 Mr. Deputy Chairperson, with those few opening remarks, I look forward to the comments of my colleagues and, furthermore, spending a productive period of time reviewing the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training. Thank you.