



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
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MANNES, Clayton, Hon.	Morris	PC
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	NDP
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	PC
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
McINTOSH, Linda, 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

Tuesday, December 15, 1992

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Robert Desjarlais, Nelson Pruder, Sue Stirling and others, requesting the Minister responsible for MPIC to consider implementing no-fault auto insurance and bringing in other recommendations of the Kopstein report that the government has delayed acting on.

Mr. Gulzar Cheema (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of W. Goodier, J. McKinley, R. Nemy and others, requesting the government of Manitoba to consider taking the necessary steps to reform the Pharmacare system, to maintain its comprehensive and universal nature and to implement the use of the health smart card.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Dr. Christine Dearman, Frank Zamkotowich, Les Walterson and others, requesting the government of Manitoba to pass the necessary legislation/regulations which will restrict stubble burning in the province of Manitoba.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Cheema). 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?

To the Legislative Assembly of the province of Manitoba

The petition of the undersigned residents of the province of Manitoba, humbly sheweth that:

WHEREAS The principles of health care, namely the universality and comprehensiveness, should apply to the Pharmacare program; and

WHEREAS the Pharmacare program's effectiveness is being eroded; and

WHEREAS in the most recent round of delisting of pharmaceuticals, approximately 200 have been delisted by the government of Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the strict submission deadline for Pharmacare receipts does not take into consideration extenuating circumstances which may have affected some people; and

WHEREAS pharmaceutical refunds often take six weeks to reach people; and

WHEREAS a health "smart card" would provide information to reduce the risk of ordering drugs which interact or are ineffective, could eliminate "double prescribing," and could also be used to purchase pharmaceuticals on the Pharmacare program—thereby easing the cash burden on purchasers.

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Manitoba to consider taking the necessary steps to reform the Pharmacare system to maintain its comprehensive and universal nature, and to implement the use of a health "smart card."

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table the Annual Report for 1991-92 for the Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship for the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation, the Office of the Queen's Printer and the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council.

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, in the tradition of open government, I would like to table the report of the Manitoba Health Research Council and the Annual Report for the Manitoba Health Services Commission for 1991-92.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling, today, Annual Reports for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, the Manitoba Police Commission and the Victims Assistance Committee.

Hon. Clayton Manness (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table Volume 1 and Volume 2 of the Public Accounts for 1991-92. I would also like to table the Quarterly Financial Report fourth quarter for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation; also the six month report for

the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission; and under the Legislative Assembly Act, I would like to table, as required, a report of amounts paid to members of the Assembly.

* (1335)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 211—The Municipal Assessment Amendment Act

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett), that Bill 211, The Municipal Assessment Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation municipale), be introduced and read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, the people from the Swan River area have long been concerned about the operating costs of their municipal airport which is jointly owned. I have been asked by the town of Swan River, and surrounding municipalities, that this bill be brought forward to address their concerns.

The Neepawa airport enjoys the privileges of having their airport exempt from school and municipal tax, and the Swan River people are asking that the same privilege be extended to them so their airport can continue to operate and service the area.

Motion agreed to.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Immigrant Investor Fund Project List Tabling Request

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier (Mr. Filmon). We had written the Premier in 1991 dealing with the Immigrant Investor fund, raising a number of concerns to the Premier of the province.

We have seen a number of controversies arise in the province of Manitoba. We have Bob Kozminski and the car wash projects. We have dealings with one Mr. Gobuty that has come to public attention. Even the Premier's name inadvertently was in the material, I understand. [interjection] No, I mean that sincerely—We have, further, the Lakeview Development corporation that has been involved in various projects.

I have asked the government before for information on the Immigrant Investor fund's specific proposals. I would like to ask the Premier today to table all the projects that his government has approved as part of the Immigrant Investor fund in Manitoba. I would ask the Premier to table the principles of those various projects, and who approved those projects in the government of Manitoba.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, as the honourable Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer), I am sure is well aware, the Immigrant Investor Program is a federal program, a program started back in 1986, when he was part of the government of the day.

Our responsibility, as a provincial government we brought in regulations back in 1990 at the time in terms of strengthening the program in terms of the economic impact on Manitoba. We do an analysis in terms of the economic benefits to Manitoba, make certain recommendations to the federal government, who have the final approval in terms of any individual Immigrant Investor Programs, whether it is a project specific or a syndicated fund.

The information that the honourable member is requesting, certainly information that is readily available, will gladly be made available. There is certain confidential information that is provided to the two levels of government, obviously, that we cannot release, but any information that we can release without jeopardizing that confidentiality will in fact be made available.

* (1340)

Review Tabling Request

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): This charade that is going on between federal and provincial Conservatives on this project is becoming very questionable to us, Mr. Speaker. We have correspondence signed by the acting deputy minister accepting or rejecting projects, acting deputy minister being one Mike Bessey, who of course is well known to members opposite in terms of his authority and his connections with the provincial government.

So let the government not deny that they are not involved in accepting or rejecting various proposals. In March of 1991, when we asked the Premier to review this material and review these projects, the minister said he will be conducting a full review of these projects. In the fall of 1992, when again some

controversy came to light, he said he will have a full investigation of these materials.

I would ask the minister to table the two investigations that he conducted on behalf of Manitobans. Mr. Speaker, this is a federal-provincial program. The federal government has tabled their federal report. Why will this government and why will this Premier (Mr. Filmon) not table the material and the principles involved in their Immigrant Investor fund approval?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Going back to 1991, when some concerns were expressed and certainly myself being newly appointed to this portfolio, I had some concerns about certain aspects of the fund as it relates to the role that the federal government was playing, recognizing, as I have already outlined for this House, the rules and the regulations that do exist. I, at that time, wrote the federal minister responsible in terms of expressing what I saw as our role and how I saw the federal government role and requesting them to clarify that that did in fact concur with what they should be doing.

At the same time, we did an internal review of the Immigrant Investor Program, an analysis of all funds done at that particular point in time, but in light of the lack of action that I saw coming from the federal government, this year we instituted a private consulting group to come in and do an audit and a thorough review of the Immigrant Investor Program. That audit is ongoing right now. In fact, the House is fully aware of that. It has been carried through the media and so on. The recommendations from that particular audit have not been tabled with me yet.

I am told—I have had conversations with the consultants that I can expect them very shortly. As soon as I receive those recommendations, I will gladly table them, make them public, and we will deal with them, Mr. Speaker. It is because of the concerns that we have had in terms of the role that the federal government is playing in terms of compliance on this program that we have taken the initiative to retain the professional assistance necessary to deal with that very important issue.

Application Approval Process

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Well, Mr. Speaker, you will excuse us if we are a little concerned about the third review that this minister has promised us.

I would like to ask the minister a very straight question. This is a federal-provincial program. He keeps throwing the hot potato to the federal government. The federal Tories keep throwing it back to this government. Does the province approve or not approve various projects that go ahead in Manitoba, yes or no?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): I have already outlined the procedure to the honourable Leader of the Opposition. I will do so one more time.

We make a recommendation on applications to the federal government after reviewing the economic benefits, as I have already outlined, the impact to Manitoba's economy in terms of job creation, expenditures in our province. In terms of the ultimate, final authority of approval of any Immigrant Investor Program, it lies with the federal government. We make a recommendation based on our analysis in terms of economic benefits. The final approval of the project lies with the federal government.

I should again remind the Leader of the Opposition, who was a part of this program back in 1986 and I believe at that time did not even bring in any rules, regulations and guidelines, we in May of 1990 tabled Immigrant Investor Program Manitoba guidelines. We are one of the few provinces that at least have a program in place in doing an analysis of economic impact and benefits to our province, but the final authority lies with the federal government. It is because of our concern that the job is not being done adequately by the federal government in terms of compliance that we have taken the action to call in auditors to review the Immigrant Investor Program, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I have a new question to the Premier (Mr. Filmon).

Mr. Speaker, the province must approve it before it can go ahead, and the federal government must approve it. I wish the government would be straightforward with the people of Manitoba. We have correspondence saying we do not approve this project, signed by Mike Bessey, so I think the government should be honest with the people. If you read the Premier's Estimates from 1991, he acknowledges that.

Mr. Speaker, I have a new question to the Premier. The government of Manitoba is involved with a new project dealing with one of the

proponents, one of the developers at North Portage Corporation dealing with a proposed hotel utilizing the Immigration Investor fund. This same developer and this same promoter has had a number of potential bankruptcies. A number of properties have gone into receivership. A number of Manitobans, a number of Manitoba families are potentially worried about losing their security, their income, their savings.

I would like to ask the Premier, how can the government be approving one fund for the same developer where there are all these potential lawsuits and risks with the same developer in other projects in Manitoba?

* (1345)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, again, I have to remind the honourable member—and I would like to think that he would understand the rules and regulations—of the fact that this was a program that he was a part of a government at the time when it was introduced. The fact that when he refers to us approving or rejecting, we make that as a recommendation to the federal government. They make the final decision whether or not to approve any Immigrant Investor Program, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of the company that the honourable Leader is referring to, they are a part of this audit that is ongoing. I have already indicated I will table the recommendations, and we will deal with the recommendations when that is available, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of the larger concern that arose on Friday with the situation with the Sheraton, we have contacted the federal government. This week, officials will be sent in from both the federal government and the provincial government to deal with that very company and the programs that are currently in place under the Immigrant Investor Program.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the minister has not answered any one of the four questions we have asked. He has not made public the information of the project proposals. He has not made public the principles of the project. He has not told us who approves it. He has tried to throw the hot potato. The hot potato is going from the Premier to the minister to the federal government—instead of accepting any responsibility at all.

Mr. Speaker, my further question to the Premier is: The fund has approved the project at North

Portage, the minister has not advised us of that status here today, but we have the minister being quoted in the media saying that they have, quote, approved buying Lakeview Sheraton shares with the Bison Fund. Who approved that, Mr. Speaker? Was there money approved, first of all, and who approved that purchase?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the original Bison Fund, which is a syndicated fund under the Immigrant Investor Program—and I am sure the honourable Leader of the Opposition is aware there are two types of funds. There is Project Pacific, and there is a syndicated fund.

The Bison Fund would have gone through the process that I have already outlined once or twice—I will not repeat it—where it comes through our government in terms of my department in terms of the economic benefits to Manitoba and it goes onto the federal government for final approval of the syndicated fund.

In terms of individual projects within a syndicated fund, they come into my department in terms of an analysis once again of economic impact, job retention, job maintenance, whether there are any capital dollars being expended, what the dollars are in fact being utilized for, Mr. Speaker. That analysis was done on that particular investment, and at that time it met the guideline.

I should point out to the Leader of the Opposition, with any syndicated fund the ultimate responsibility lies with the fund managers. In this case, the Bison Fund would have an investment in the Sheraton. They will have a series of other investments. Those decisions are made by a fund manager in terms of which investments they feel will get the greatest return for that particular fund. We do an analysis on each individual application in terms of economic impact in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Review Tabling Request

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): I have a final question, Mr. Speaker.

We have the whole issue of the Kozminski projects and the Maple Leaf Fund, with directors of one fund being involved in decisions that are in their own companies. We have allegations in the public arena dealing with Michael Gobuty. We have all kinds of issues dealing with one proposal going forward in the Immigrant Investor fund at the North Portage site and other money being approved for

the other site by the government, admitted to in this question.

Will this government now table all the information? He has conducted two reviews allegedly; will he table those reviews with the public, Mr. Speaker, with this Chamber? Can we refer that information to one of our committees of the Legislature, the Economic Committee of the Legislature, so all members of this Legislature can ensure that the good name of Manitoba as a good place to invest for Manitobans and others will be protected and safeguarded and not be in jeopardy with the government . . .

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I wish just once that the Leader of the Opposition would listen to an answer in terms of how this program functions, that it is a federal program that applies not only to Manitoba but to every province within Canada. We are a part of the process and I have outlined very clearly what our role is and what the federal government's role is.

I have also indicated to the Leader of the Opposition that we had concerns that the federal government is not performing their function. For those very reasons we called in professional consultants to do a review of the program, to make recommendations to us that we can forward to the federal government to get some action in terms of dealing with the whole issue of compliance. That process is ongoing right now. As soon as I receive the recommendations I will make them public and we will deal with them.

* (1350)

Social Assistance Food Allowance

Mrs. Sharon Carstairs (Leader of the Second Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. Yesterday I raised questions about a recent report called An Action Plan for Food Security for Manitobans. The report very clearly indicated that the portion of social assistance received by social assistance recipients with infants was woefully inadequate. It stated that the rate of \$84 per month to feed an infant is significantly below what is required, which is \$134 per month.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's health care reform plan states, and I quote: Many of the millions of dollars that Manitobans invest each year treating illness could be used more effectively and

tremendous amounts of human suffering averted by more effective management of the key determinants of health.

Can the minister tell the House in light of this stated belief with respect to illness prevention whether or not he has contacted the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer) to push for an increase in food allowances for infants?

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my honourable friend's question, because within the ministry of Health part of the educational program that we provide to Manitobans and in this case to mothers expecting to bring into the world their families, during their term of pregnancy, we provide the kind of information that we think is very necessary to avoid certain hazards such as smoking, such as drinking, to maintain their nutrition, and then after those mothers commence care in the home for their child, we attempt to provide probably some of the best nutritional guidance that is available in Canada through my Healthy Public Policy division in the ministry of Health.

Mr. Speaker, the area that we are attempting to put increased emphasis on in terms of education is the group of young women that my honourable friend refers to, that being young single mothers and often on social assistance. The initiative and the effort is to provide guidance on how they can make significantly enhanced choices around the nutrition of themselves and their child, and I see that as a significant effort which can achieve the results within the current budget, Sir.

Mrs. Carstairs: Mr. Speaker, but you can give them all the nutritional guidance in the world. You can teach them, you can instruct them, you can aid and abet their learning, but if you do not give them enough money for food, they cannot feed their children.

Can the Minister of Health tell this House why it is acceptable to this government that infants get inadequate amounts of money to be fed in this province?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer that question because I reject the premise on which it is founded.

Mrs. Carstairs: Mr. Speaker, since the study very clearly showed that it requires \$134 a month to feed an infant, and the budget of this government for social assistance for a mother who has an infant child is \$84 a month, how does the minister suggest

she should in fact give a nutritionally sound diet to that child?

Mr. Orchard: Through exactly the process of education, working with nutritionists, through the process that we have in place that we are enhancing and reinforcing.

Now I realize that education is a laughable matter to the member from Radisson (Ms. Cerilli), but it is not in this government, and we intend to help wherever possible in providing information, counselling, guidance to individuals who need the kind of skills that allow them to within their budgets make proper and appropriate nutritional choices. That may be a laughing matter to members of the opposition, but it is not a laughing matter to this government or the citizens of Manitoba, Sir.

Freedom Of Information Interference

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

We have been advised that the Premier's staff routinely censors and controls information requests under The Freedom of Information Act from the media and others. Can the Premier indicate to this House why, contrary to the spirit and letter of the law, his political staff interfere in the freedom of information process?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): I reject categorically the allegation that was made by the member for Kildonan. We have in place a Freedom of Information Act which this government proclaimed when it was left dormant for almost three years by the New Democrats. We have obeyed and abided by that legislation to the letter of the law and I challenge him to prove otherwise.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, why would a designated information officer be writing to the Premier's press secretary, Barb Biggar, asking for her advice as to the information that was released? I will table a letter to Barb Biggar from that information official indicating that.

Mr. Filmon: A person can consult anyone a person chooses for advice on a matter. The reality is that this government is abiding by the letter of the legislation absolutely and whoever asks whom about what matters are able to be released publicly, it is challengeable to the Ombudsman. If you think something has been done wrong, challenge it to the Ombudsman.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary to the Premier is: Will the Premier now admit that this happens on a routine basis, and where does his press secretary derive the authority to be an intermediary under The Freedom of Information Act and to give advice as to information that is being released?

* (1355)

Mr. Filmon: The only thing that is relevant is whether or not the letter of the law is being maintained, and if anybody—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Filmon: The spirit of the letter—if you do not believe that it is being abided by, you have methods of redress. You simply take it to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman will arbitrate. Dozens of cases have been taken there. Unlike New Democrats, we abide by the law.

Child Tax Benefit CRISP Program Recipients

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, the Child Related Income Support Program, otherwise known as CRISP, is according to its own brochure a provincial income supplement program providing monthly benefits to low-income Manitoba families to assist them with the cost of raising children. Currently there are over 6,300 families and just under 15,000 children in the province of Manitoba taking advantage of this program. The net income ceiling to earn the maximum benefit of \$30 a month per child currently in legislation is \$12,384 a year.

My question to the Minister of Family Services is: Will he confirm that by an Order-in-Council dated December 9, the definition of income now includes the child tax benefit from the federal initiatives Brighter Futures?

Hon. Harold Gillehammer (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, the CRISP program was put in place to give additional funds to what is termed the working poor. The CRISP program takes into consideration the income that working families have through their employment and through other forms of income that are made available to them.

Ms. Barrett: Will the minister confirm that due to the change in this regulation, the definition of income will mean that upwards of half of the children of the working poor in Manitoba will get up to 50 percent less in CRISP benefits, because of the

inclusion of the child tax benefit in the definition of income?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Speaker, the regulations take into consideration the income through all sources that individuals who are accessing that program have. If there is additional income that comes to that family either through employment or other sources, that is taken into consideration in determining the level of benefit that they will receive.

Ms. Barrett: Yes, I thank the minister for confirming my second question.

Will the minister now, in light of that confirmation that there is upwards of a 50 percent cutback in potential benefits, which are small enough as is, rescind the move made by himself and his government? Will he guarantee that this is just not the first step in clawing back resources from the poorest Manitoba families, which this will in effect do, and that the social allowances recipients—

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

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Speaker, the member is clearly mixing her issues here. The CRISP benefits are for people who are employed and whose income we consider in awarding those benefits. The question that her colleague raised yesterday in regard to the child tax benefit is an issue that is before the government. I have indicated very clearly in the House this week that we are analyzing the information coming from the federal government and will be making that decision in due course.

Health Care System Surgery Waiting Lists

Mr. Gulzar Cheema (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Yesterday we received the report from the Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation. The report pointed out that some hospitals are more efficient than others with respect to length of stay. From the study, the minister could draw the conclusion that more efficiency can allow more bed closures. For some procedures the waiting period is currently too long and access is not good enough.

The question is an important policy decision for this government. Will this government use this policy of greater efficiency to justify more bed closures, or will they convert the greater efficiency to decrease the waiting period for many surgical procedures in this province?

* (1400)

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my honourable friend's question because that report—and I only want to correct my honourable friend modestly on one point. It was not my recommendation that 150-200 beds could be closed or retired from service. That was the advice of the scientists who analyzed the data for the eight Manitoba hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, what I suggest to my honourable friend is, that report offers us to do both that which my honourable friend talks about, because clearly in any system, and health care is no exception, if there is an ineffective use of resources within that health care system then it only follows as day follows night that those resources are not being used to provide resolution to the kind of problems my honourable friend addresses.

That is why the progress and the process of reform and change in the health care system in Manitoba has the end goal, despite some critics who do not understand change, that the opportunity is there for Manitoba within the existing budget to provide better service and even, Sir, the opportunity to provide enhanced levels of services within the given budget, if we manage and take advice from scientists, from doctors, from nurses, from other professionals in the system who recognize where we can make better choices on use of the resource.

So I suggest to my honourable friend that both initiatives can flow from implementation of the findings of this scientific study.

Mr. Cheema: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Health tell us, in the Health Action Reform Plan on page 32 there was a promise that on the waiting list management in orthopedic surgery, cardiovascular surgery and angioplasty, oncology and cataract surgery, we would have a report by the end of this month. Can the minister tell us when we will have that report?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, I cannot provide my honourable friend with that advice this afternoon, but I will endeavour to provide that advice to him possibly in tomorrow's Question Period, because that issue has been under review and study for the better part of seven or eight months now by the professional group that is hoping to give us advice on how we can proceed in resolution of some of those issues.

Mr. Cheema: Mr. Speaker, can the minister now combine the inference from both studies, if he is going to table it tomorrow, and come up with the answer to decrease the waiting period for many surgical procedures that will enhance their policy of efficiency to cut the delay in surgical procedures?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, that may well be the initiative that we are able to undertake when we combine both studies and a number of others, but I cannot preclude the kind of advice that we may get from Dr. Naylor and the study group that is looking at the waiting list and the procedures that are mentioned by my honourable friend.

I simply give my honourable friend this kind of an assurance, that when we have received sound advice from the professionals we have tended to try, to the degree possible, implementation of that advice into the way that we deliver health care, with the end goal being something I think all of us share, the preservation and protection of our health care system.

Fishing Industry Lake Winnipegosis

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Speaker, on December 4, I raised with the Minister of Natural Resources the issue of the problem that fishermen on Lake Winnipegosis were facing. That situation has worsened, and fishermen are now pulling their nets and have no income.

The minister said on December 4 that he would meet with these people. I want to ask him if the date of that meeting is set and when he plans to be with fishermen on Lake Winnipegosis to address this serious situation.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the honourable member for Swan River that it is my intention to travel to the community of The Pas and on my way back stop in at the community of Winnipegosis and others as well on December 21 and 22.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I hope that all fishermen are notified about that meeting and that they can all have input.

The minister also said that he cannot put fish back into Lake Winnipegosis, however, there is a stocking program that is outlined in here. I want to ask the minister why, since he is well aware of the situation on Lake Winnipegosis, his department

chose not to put any stock back into Lake Winnipegosis, but chose to stock many other lakes when he knows that there is a problem on that lake?

Mr. Enns: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to take that question as notice and, certainly, in meeting with the fishermen on Lake Winnipegosis, I will have some fishery staff available or with me to answer some of these questions.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I am appalled that the minister would not know that there was no stock put into Lake Winnipegosis after the number of times this issue has been raised.

When is the minister going to take seriously the problem on Lake Winnipegosis, all of the issues that have been raised many times, and look at a way that these people can continue to make a living, or is he intending to make a welfare state of all of those people on Lake Winnipegosis?

Mr. Enns: Mr. Speaker, it is that time of the year where we are all called upon to exhibit good will towards all persons, and I do not take any credit, but my department had a restocking program in place for Lake Winnipegosis fisheries. It was stopped by her fishermen on Lake Winnipegosis.

Nutrition Counselling Services Government Commitment

Ms. Avis Gray (Crescentwood): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health stands in this House every day and attempts to lead the people of Manitoba into believing that health reform is under control. Today, he talked about his department giving the best nutritional guidance to single mothers and children. To the unknowing he sounds convincing, but if you know what is going on in his department, we would be aware that in fact he does not have the staff resources to provide this type of service within his department because since he became minister, the number of positions available to do this type of work has been cut.

Can the minister explain to the House today, how does he explain to mothers and children, how are they going to get this best nutritional guidance—and I quote him from today—if in fact he does not have the resources to carry out that important job?

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Well, Mr. Speaker, I do realize that the ability to deliver that program was diminished as of the by-election this fall.

Mr. Speaker, through reprioritization of the services we provide to meet the most urgent needs, I think it is fair to say that in today's environments, the demands exceed the ability of any government anywhere in Canada to meet the needs and, therefore, we are into prioritizing, meeting the most urgent needs. That is successfully being undertaken.

I submit, Sir, that in this province we are legions ahead of others in terms of meeting targeted needs for various groups in society that need a better degree of educational support, of counselling and other initiatives which can contribute to their wellness and avoid and delay and permanently prevent their necessity to access our health care system, as fine as it is, Sir.

* (1410)

Ms. Gray: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) tell us why he insists that this province is legions ahead, when in fact that very food security report of which people who are part of that report are actually—people in his department have suggested that Manitoba lags behind other provinces in providing nutritional services here in Manitoba, so I suggest that his information is incorrect.

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, I guess that in some areas of investigation maybe that conclusion might be reached, but I would simply like to share with my honourable friend, because I know my honourable friend wants information, that here is a December 14, 1992, Canadian Press wire service out of Victoria.

The topic is a Judith Korbin, who has been retained by the government of British Columbia to examine their health care system. One of the things she says in here is that British Columbia has the third highest rate of growth in health care spending among all provinces, behind Manitoba first, Saskatchewan second.

That is a different piece of information than the one my honourable friend has given today.

Ms. Gray: Mr. Speaker, with a supplementary to the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard): Can the Minister of Health tell us when he will actually put into place some prevention services, including nutritional guidance, for these mothers as part of his health reform plan? Because in the initial documents and committees that were established, it was an afterthought, and it took people such as—

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

Mr. Orchard: I hear ringing through my mind certain melodies. How does that go? I forget the words, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my honourable friend that I very much valued her sincere and dedicated contribution to the ministry of Health, but, Sir, to say that she was the only one that ever made a positive suggestion is absolutely wrong. I have thousands of caring professionals in my department who work diligently every day to provide guidance to this ministry, to provide progressive policies for the reform and change in the health care system, and, Sir, for her to take credit for it solely and singly is not accurate.

Hospital Boards Staff Nurse Representation

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Lels (St. Johns): Mr. Speaker, last March at the Manitoba Nurses' Union annual general meeting, the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) indicated support for staff nurse representation on hospital boards. Since then, little progress has been made; few staff nurses have been appointed or elected to hospital boards.

In fact, in one case, in Swan River Valley Hospital, staff nurses made such a request and this serious proposal was met with an anonymous letter from a board member saying: In my view putting a union nurse on the board would be as beneficial as placing a fox to watch the chicken coop. [interjection]

I hope the government members are laughing at the ridiculousness of that statement, and not because they support the attitude.

I want to ask the Minister of Health if he will indicate to this particular board that he does not condone such a position, and that in fact he clearly supports the representation of nurse staff on hospital boards.

Hon. Donald Orchard (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I am troubled by those kinds of statements being made by my honourable friend which allege certain accusations by anonymous and unsigned letters. I really do not think that I can react to an anonymous statement by some unsigned individual because one certainly does not know (a) the source of such comments, et cetera.

Let me deal directly with the issue that my honourable friend raised, as I have dealt directly

with those members of the Manitoba Nurses' Union who have chosen to write. Mr. Speaker, I have no objection to any citizen in Manitoba serving on a board of any of our health care institutions. That opportunity, that freedom, that right is open to any citizen of this province, including staff nurses who belong to the Manitoba Nurses' Union. Nothing in the policies and legislation of this government prevents that membership, Sir.

Ms. Wasylycia-Lels: Mr. Speaker, the minister should try imagining the hurt of nurses in Swan River Valley Hospital when they receive this kind of a note.

I want to ask the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) a very straightforward question. Will he clearly send out a directive to all hospital boards indicating that it is a policy of this government to have staff nurse representation on all such boards? Would he put a timetable to it and make sure that that action is followed up?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, I guess my honourable friend, in the comfort of opposition, is now creating health policy for the NDP, I might say, health policy that when my honourable friend sat in cabinet and had the ability to send that directive to the boards, did not. The question is: Why not, when she had the chance?

Ms. Wasylycia-Lels: Mr. Speaker, my question to this Minister of Health is why this minister can make rhetorical statements on one occasion and refuse to back it up with policies and directions or regulations. I will ask if he can do at least as much as the provincial government of Alberta has done by sending out a directive to all hospital boards to ensure the election of a staff nurse appointed to those boards by a certain date with appropriate follow up from the provincial government. Could he do at least that much?

Mr. Orchard: Mr. Speaker, I intend to remain consistent with the policy that was in place when I walked into this office in May 1988.

Canadian Wheat Board Barley Marketing

Mr. John Plohman (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Findlay). The Conservative government continues to implement deregulation philosophies and policies even while the world is falling down around them. The latest casualty, it seems, would be Agriculture

Canada and its agencies, including the Canadian Wheat Board.

One of the specific recommendations that is being made by the federal minister in a report that was released recently was that the Wheat Board would employ a dual marketing system for barley. Barley would no longer be under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board, and that is of deep concern to us.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture if he shares that concern with the proposals regarding the marketing of barley under the Wheat Board and what direct action he is taking to ensure that that concern is communicated and in fact that that will not be implemented by the federal government.

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about selling agricultural products out of western Canada into the United States, and we have been exceedingly successful in that in the last number of years, particularly since January 1, 1989, when articles are starting to come out like this: Free trade is good medicine. It interviews people all across Canada. In agriculture, we have been very successful in penetrating that market.

Mr. Speaker—[interjection] You have something against exports?

We have built processing plants across western Canada based on selling into the U.S. market. We have had free trade in agriculture for a long time. It has just picked up in the last few years because there is a greater sense of certainty that we cannot be stopped at the border due to the dispute-settling mechanism in the agreement.

The member talks particularly about barley, and we have increased sales of barley to the United States in the last few years. We know there are niche markets in the United States for more and more barley to be sold. My understanding is the federal government is going to have a study done, determine what those niche markets are, have everybody who has an interest in those markets be present on the board, and an analysis will be done. We will be looking forward with interest to the results of that process.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

* (1420)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Clayton Manness (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you call Bill 4, please.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 4—The Retail Businesses Sunday Shopping (Temporary Amendments) Act

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Stefanson), Bill 4, The Retail Businesses Sunday Shopping (Temporary Amendments) Act; Loi sur l'ouverture des commerces de détail les jours fériés—modifications temporaires, standing in the name of the honourable member for Flin Flon.

Mr. Jerry Storle (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, this issue has, I guess, so many different aspects that have to be dealt with in the course of debate that I am afraid that I am going to take—[interjection] As I was saying, this debate is such a controversial issue that I think it is going to require a very lengthy review of all of the issues that need to be discussed prior to implementing such a radical change for most Manitobans.

I want to begin by saying that although the government has announced this as a trial period, and perhaps the minister responsible or some other minister of the front bench can get up and deny this if they feel that it is not accurate, but I understand that legislation is either already being drafted or has been drafted to implement this on a permanent basis. In other words, this trial period is nonsense. It is a farce. It is like virtually everything else this government does. It is a farce. I want that to preface all of the remarks I have to say about what my concerns are.

So for the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), the member for Rossmore (Mr. Neufeld), the member, perhaps, for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Rose), the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey), the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger), whose constituents are very, very, very concerned about this legislation, let there be no mistake. If any of you are out there selling this as a trial measure, you are misleading your constituents. You are misleading them because this is not a trial. This is not one of those: Do not touch this button; this is a test.

The fact of the matter is that legislation is being drafted, or has already been drafted, to make this a

reality in perpetuity in Manitoba until such time as there is a change of government.

(Mrs. Louise Dacquay, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

Madam Deputy Speaker, the member for Pembina (Mr. Orchard) is here today. I promised the member for Pembina, and I intend to keep my word, that I would read into the record for him his particular comment on the importance of Sunday shopping to him and to his constituents.

In 1987—and thank goodness for Hansard, because if we did not have this in Hansard, if this was not written in black and white and published in the Legislative Library of this Assembly, the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) would deny that he said it. Let there be no doubt about that. He would deny it categorically. He would refuse it. He would stand up and belittle anyone who ever said he suggested any such thing. So I want to be very careful, and I want to read in full what the Minister of Health, the then member for Pembina—opposition member—said.

First of all, Madam Deputy Speaker, he identified the crux of the problem with this legislation. I will give him credit for that, as I did last night. He said that coming from rural Manitoba he came to it with a different perspective. He said, representing rural Manitoba, because there is no question that SuperValu—and I will name them—as one of the competitors and indeed Safeway, the major chains, would next get their market share from rural shoppers. That is what he said.

Madam Deputy Speaker, emboldened by his grasp of the obvious, he went on to say: But, Madam Speaker, I cannot support wide-open Sunday shopping because of its impact on my constituency. He was concerned about his constituency. He goes on, he is concerned about jobs in my constituency and the people I am elected to represent and protect and hear as much as possible.

It would have been a good speech if the member for Pembina had been honest, but some five years later, when little has changed in rural Manitoba, save to have the situation deteriorate further, the Minister of Health is going to—perhaps not in good conscience—but is going to stand up with his other urban colleagues and betray rural Manitoba. That is what he is going to do. He is going to stand up with the member for Arthur (Mr. Downey), the

member for Morris (Mr. Manness) and betray rural Manitoba.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to move just for a second to the member for Morris. I had mentioned earlier in my remarks last night the numerous reasons why someone might oppose the implementation of full Sunday shopping. I mentioned first of all, in my opinion, the importance of a pause day for people and for families. I mentioned the importance to the environment of slowing down our unbridled consumerism, because everything we consume, all of the activity, the economic commercial activity that we are going to see on Sunday is using up our resources, is helping to burden our environment further because of the pollution that it causes, because of the resources and the energy that it uses.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not want to neglect an issue which is important to many Manitobans, including, I would have thought, the member for Rossmore (Mr. Neufeld) and, perhaps even more particularly, the member for Morris (Mr. Manness), and that is the concern that has been expressed by numerous religious groups in this province about the impact of Sunday shopping.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just for the member for Morris' edification, I want to read something that came to us from the committee for contract with government which was published by the Council of Christian Reform Churches in Canada talking about Sunday shopping. I know that the member for Morris has deep roots and deep connections with a Christian church in his area. I want to know where his principles are going to lie, as the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), because what do they say?

I want to say that, obviously, the idea that somehow Sunday shopping should not occur strictly for religious reasons was actually thrown out by the courts. They said that may in fact violate other individual rights that are inherent in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but there is no law against a pause day. There is no law against the suspension of commercial activity as a matter of provincial will, as a matter of public policy.

So what does this group say about Sunday shopping? First of all, I want to read from one of their brochures. Now it says, provision of unrestricted shopping hours meets the economic desires of some at the expense of the human needs of others. That is neither freedom nor justice.

Freedom and justice require a legal framework which ensures opportunities for each person to be truly human and which protects the weak from the strong. Madam Deputy Speaker, I may be paraphrasing here, but "the weak from the strong" does not simply mean in emotional terms. It does not just simply mean in individual financial terms. It may mean in cultural terms and in commercial terms.

It goes on to say that opportunities for groups as well as individuals to engage in public noncommercial activities are severely diminished without a regular frequent noncommercial day. Madam Deputy Speaker, it goes on to say that even if you buy, even if you accept the economic arguments for Sunday shopping, you had better think again, because the fact of the matter is the economic arguments hold as little weight as any other argument.

* (1430)

What do they say about the economic considerations attached to Sunday shopping? Well, they say seven-day shopping weeks may be advantageous for some merchants, but studies have shown that it does not increase the total value of retail sales in the long term. The additional cost of operating the store estimated by some to be as high as 15 percent will be borne by everyone in higher prices or reduced service on other days. Unrestricted shopping hours work to the advantage of large malls and chain stores largely at the expense of family-run businesses. Those are exactly the issues that we have been raising since the government announced this foolish policy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we had a consensus and it was not perfect. Yes, it may have discriminated against large chain stores and may have discriminated against the multinationals. It may have discriminated against the strong, but it protected the weak in two respects. It protected the mom and pop operations, the small convenience stores, those stores that were originally allowed to stay open so that individuals could have their basic needs met on a noncommercial day. So they saved those people from committing themselves to seven day relentless work, work, work. It saved their families from having their parents or one of their parents away on a continuous basis for seven days a week. It also saved them from the necessity of incessant competition, because let there be no mistake about it, if you are a small business in

Manitoba, in the city of Winnipeg and all of your competitors in the malls, if the shopping centres in your community are staying open, there is an economic imperative that you stay open.

So, the day off, the day of pause is long gone for the vast majority of small-business people in the province of Manitoba, and yes, in rural Manitoba despite—[interjection] In 1977 that legislation was passed under the Sterling Lyon government. It was amended—[interjection] No, Madam Deputy Speaker, in 1987 it was amended in a very minor way because of a court case which said the 1977 legislation was in violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) had been here last night, he would have heard me explain that. I will send over for the member for Emerson a copy of the speeches that were made by Norma Price, who was then Minister of Labour, 1977.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not want to prolong my debate with the member for Emerson. I want to simply say that in 1987 everyone in this Chamber, including the member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs), who said yesterday it was an asinine law, supported it. Everyone, and I read back remarks from the member for Brandon West, the Justice minister (Mr. McCrae), I read back remarks from the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard), and I want to say that the law was not perfect.

The member for Emerson should have been here last night because I dealt with that. I have a lot of material to cover, but I want to answer him in one respect. Madam Deputy Speaker, shopping seven days a week, wide-open Sunday shopping is a phenomenon of North America. The member for Pembina (Mr. Orchard) has roots outside of our country, North America, along with members opposite, including members on this side of the Chamber, and we all know that Sunday shopping does not occur in most other countries of the world. The fact is that in Germany, there is no Sunday shopping. In most countries around the world there is a pause day. In Japan, our competitor, and Germany, our major competitor, there is a pause day.

There is no reason—[interjection] The member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) is going to make me go on even further here. I acknowledge to members in this Chamber that I have been converted on this issue. I at one time believed that wide-open Sunday shopping was inevitable, but I have changed my

mind. I believe that leadership can change opinion. I believe that this is one of those issues where, if we simply decide, we can change public opinion about the necessity for Sunday shopping. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is no longer the case that most people are Sunday shopping to get what they need. What most people are shopping on Sunday for now is what they want, not what they need.

In most other countries in the world, including Canada until recently, Canadians could get what they needed and what they wanted in six days. For the sake of the environment, for the sake of the families, for the sake of, I guess, our own sanity I think we can draw some limits. [interjection] I am glad the member for Assiniboia (Mrs. McIntosh) raises from her seat the question of whether this is what people want.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many, many laws on the books, and I am sure if the minister goes through her own department she will find that there are laws on the books that limit people's freedoms. That is part of social organization.

I do not want to have to launch into a long lecture to the member for Assiniboia on the obligations of governments, of societies to regulate the behaviour of its members, but that is what we do. At some point you have to assume—[interjection] Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, the minister and her government have certainly done their share of regulating, that is true. But the fact of the matter is we do regulate human behaviour.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in this province we cannot hunt on Sunday. Does that seem such a terrible imposition? I know there are people who want to hunt on Sunday, but we oppose that limit. There are many other laws that impose restrictions on people. Some people do not like travelling 100 kilometres an hour; they prefer to go 200. We impose limits on them.

I do not think the member for Assiniboia was being perhaps completely serious, perhaps used her remarks somewhat facetiously, but the fact of the matter is that we do not believe that this is necessary. There is opposition from every quarter. I have quoted from some Christian material that has been sent to us. I wanted to reiterate what I said last night about the opposition that has come from rural Manitoba. I read into the record last night a letter from the village of MacGregor, and I also referenced

the Union of Manitoba Municipalities resolution which was passed at their annual convention.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not going to reread that letter, but I am going to read further from a letter I received or a copy of a letter I received from the president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers, and I remind members opposite again, and the member for Morris is perhaps typical of some of his rural colleagues who enjoy, or whose communities enjoy the presence of an independent grocer in their community.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to read this letter for the member for Morris's (Mr. Manness) benefit. It was directed to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) dated November 30, 1992: Re Removal of restrictions on Sunday openings. The Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers views with great concern your decision to allow wide-open Sunday shopping in Manitoba. In his announcement your minister has cited the difficulties which cross-border shopping has created and used the often-heard argument that Sunday openings will contribute to an abatement in this practice.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers knew what this government should have known, what the Minister of Industry and Trade should have known months ago that Sunday shopping is not the—imposing Sunday shopping on Manitoba is no panacea to solving the problem of cross-border shopping. In fact, if they wanted to use some other jurisdiction as a control group, they could simply have looked at British Columbia. British Columbia has had wide-open Sunday shopping since 1986 and it has the highest per capita cross-border shopping of any province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the fact of the matter is that in Manitoba, Statistics Canada reported today that we had the least number of overnight visits across the border since 1990—two years. Why is that occurring? Why are we seeing the decline of cross-border shopping? The simple word is that the value of the Canadian dollar is sinking. That is the reason.

* (1440)

That begs the question, what created the interest in cross-border shopping? Was it simply financial, or was it the rhetoric that surrounded the whole debate of free trade and the perception that was created amongst many, many Canadians that somehow now it was okay, that shopping across the

border did not cost jobs in Canada? Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that was a false promise. It was a foolish promise, as was the Free Trade Agreement itself, but that is another debate.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers goes on to explain in detail, if the government would have cared to listen, what factors are determinants in cross-border shopping. They include tobacco and alcohol and gasoline prices, which we all knew.

It goes on to talk about the effect that Sunday shopping legislation has had in other provinces. It concludes, as we concluded, that in fact—

An Honourable Member: And you are concluding. Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Storie: —we concluded a long time ago. We did not have to be told, as the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) did, that in fact cross-border shopping was going to do none of the things this government believes or has predicted are going to happen—nothing. [interjection]

Madam Deputy Speaker, if the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) would read the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism's (Mr. Stefanson) introductory remarks, he would find out that cross-border shopping, yes, was an issue.

I have talked about who is opposed to this. I have talked about the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers and the Union of Manitoba Municipalities.

I have also just received a copy of the Swan River Star and Times in which there is an article about the impact of Sunday shopping on Swan River. I want to read into the record what the chamber of commerce, a Mr. Neely, said, representing the business people in Swan River, about this initiative. He said: The Swan River Chamber of Commerce directors are in total disagreement with Sunday shopping for rural communities like Swan River.

We have predicted, and the government should know, that rural economies are the ones that are going to suffer, and what is ironic is the cabinet is made up of a majority of rural members, Madam Deputy Speaker. They have lost their voice, they have lost collectively their voice for rural Manitoba.

We are not surprised. I attended a meeting in Antler River School Division in the community of Waskada not a week ago, where some 300 people came out to protest the fact that this government

was increasing its contributions to private schools 150 percent, while cutting \$800,000 out of the budget of Antler River School Division. Those 300 people wanted to know why the Tory government, who are elected by rural Manitobans, by and large, have abandoned them in education policy, abandoned them in economic policy, abandoned them in terms of their representation in this House.

I do not know who is running the show from the elite in the cabinet, but it certainly is not rural Manitobans. They have lost their moral authority somehow in this battle.

I want to continue to press the minister to undertake some base-line studies so that when this trial period, this five-month period is up we will have some objective evidence to use to determine whether in fact we should proceed to full-scale, unlimited Sunday shopping by legislation.

The fact of the matter is, this government has no intention of doing that assessment. The minister put it on record but it will not be done. It will not be done by anything more than the minister asking one staff member somewhere along the line to give him his impression of the impact. There will be no objective study. This government has relentlessly pursued a policy of ignorance when it comes to objective studies. They would rather not know, and that is a tragedy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the fact of the matter is, this government not only has no intention of doing the assessment, they have already drafted the legislation to implement Sunday shopping on a full-time basis. That is how cynical, that is how dishonest this government is. Of course, like all governments, their legislative authority and their moral authority will run out and they will be replaced.

I used the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism's (Mr. Stefanson) remarks last night as a basis for some of my comments. I have taken the opportunity to reread the minister's speech, because my first conclusion after reading it was that in fact this was an extremely weak defence of the legislation that has been introduced. In fact, as I reread it, I was struck by the fact that there are virtually no salient points that the minister tries to defend in his statement. In fact, quite the reverse is true. What this speech is about is an acceptance of a number of criticisms and the minister's defence of those criticisms rather than some sort of positive

statement about what we hope to achieve by this legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I left off I had gone through a number of points. I am not going to repeat them at this point. When I left off I was talking about the minister's suggestion that 97 percent of the respondents to a poll—and apparently we are government by poll now—had said that they would not change their shopping habits with the advent of wide-open Sunday shopping. They would not be leaving their communities. I remind people that those are statements of intention. What we are asking to do is to assess the facts. We still believe that the Rural Development Institute should be the body that does that.

They are an independent body attached to a university, with credibility and not only perceived but actual independence. The government should immediately contract with this group to begin so that they can collect base-line data in communities like Souris and communities like Steinbach and Gimli so we can find out how many jobs we are actually going to lose through this experiment.

The member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae) perhaps would support that. The Rural Development Institute is in his community. Let us see whether in fact he has any clout. He certainly spoke eloquently against wide-open Sunday shopping in 1987 and, as I said last night, was telling members involved in the business community in Brandon that wide-open Sunday shopping was not going to be a part of his agenda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I said last night not only that in '87, while I was supporting minimum Sunday shopping, at that time I believed that it was inevitable that we have wide-open Sunday shopping. It has not only changed my mind that it is not inevitable, I do not believe it is necessary or good policy. [interjection] Exactly, and so is the Minister of Justice (Mr. McCrae) obviously—from 1987. Only he is going the wrong way.

I wanted to continue—[interjection] In both cases, as it turns out. Madam Deputy Speaker, I wanted to continue with the remarks that the minister put on record. Here is another example of doublespeak from this government when it comes to the impact of this bill. The minister said on page 394 that he was not really concerned about the impact of this legislation on families, because he said, and I quote: ". . . Sunday shopping in Ontario had exerted no

negative or detrimental impact on their family, personal or religious life." That is a matter of faith, not fact. [interjection] A matter of opinion, my colleague from Dauphin says.

* (1450)

Madam Deputy Speaker, everyone in this Chamber knows that the less time you have to spend with your family, whether out of financial necessity or other personal commitments, is a sacrifice to them and to yourself in one way or another. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Stefanson) belittled family life and the importance that people attach to it by those kinds of comments.

The minister then goes on to talk about a couple of provisions which, I suppose, if you were going to accept that this legislation should be in place at all, are good provisions. One of them is the protection, nominal as it may be, from employees being fired because they refuse to work on Sundays. Madam Deputy Speaker, those provisions are unenforceable. Workers will be let go. They will have their hours diminished because they refuse to work.

The second one is the overriding of commercial leases. The legislation allows individuals with commercial leases in malls to go against the trend and to remain closed without penalty which would normally follow as a result of leases that most people in commercial facilities have. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I accept those as reasonable amendments, but I do not believe that this bill is necessary.

I want to finally move in the minister's speech to one of the most truly pathetic admissions I have heard from a minister of the government, and particularly an economic minister, in my 11 years. I want to read—[interjection] Madam Deputy Speaker, this has nothing to do with the personality of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism. I said that as a minister of the Crown this was a pathetic statement.

The strongest thing this minister says to defend this legislation, the strongest thing the minister says: "It is our hope that this move will help to stimulate Manitoba's economy and will ensure that our province maintains a competitive pace with the economic jurisdictions that surround us." It is his hope.

Despite all of the evidence to the contrary, despite all of the negative implications for rural Manitoba, despite all of the negative implications for small businesses in the city of Winnipeg, that is what the minister concludes in terms of the essence of this initiative. It is his hope.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we need an economic strategy. Is an economic strategy saying, let us shop one more day? Does that make any sense at all? Let us shop till we drop folks. I want to show you how ludicrous this is. While we are encouraging Manitobans to go out and shop for one more day, the province of Manitoba has lost 25 percent of its manufacturing capacity. Twenty-five percent of the jobs that were going to produce things that other parts of the world would buy have disappeared while this government has been in office. Twenty-five percent of those jobs have disappeared.

Twenty-five percent of the goods-producing jobs have disappeared, and this minister's solution to Manitoba's economic woes is to go and shop for another day, buy things that were produced somewhere else. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is ludicrous and pathetic. For the minister to stand up and say, it is our economic hope, it is the hope that this will get things going, is just sad.

There are so many other problems with this legislation that it is difficult to know where to begin. I have already talked to some extent about the legislative process. The government not only—I mean this is quite a pathetic attempt to begin with, but the government has chosen to implement it in a completely dishonest way. On most of the initiative the government gets up and proudly announces that it has done its consultation. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Stefanson) consults with this group and consults with that group.

I ask a very basic simple question. Who did the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism consult with when he announced this initiative? The answer is, virtually no one. He certainly did not consult with the grocers, he did not consult with small business, he did not consult with the Manitoba chamber, he did not consult with the Union of Manitoba Municipalities that represents the literally hundreds of communities outside the city of Winnipeg.

What did the government do? Introduced it retroactively, without consultation. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is not good government.

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): That is in contempt of Parliament.

Mr. Storie: It is in contempt, as my colleague from Burrows says. It is in contempt not only of Parliament, not only of this Legislature, it is in contempt of rural Manitobans.

An Honourable Member: Broadway.

Mr. Storie: The member for Broadway; I am going to have to get a map.

The fact of the matter is that the way this legislation was introduced was and is as insulting as its implications.

What agenda does this legislation play into? Let me just take one minute to talk about that. The fact of the matter is that this legislation plays into the agenda that the member for Pembina (Mr. Orchard) talked about in 1987.

This plays into the seemingly endless corporate amalgamation that is taking place around the world. This plays into the desires of chains such as Canadian Tire or SuperValu or any of the other major chains to become ever larger at the expense of small businesses and at the expense of small communities. That is what they are doing and that plays into the free trade agenda that basically gives corporate North America the right to do as they wish, where they wish, with whom they wish, at whatever cost they wish. It is an agenda that respects no provincial boundaries, no national boundaries, respects no individual rights, no collective rights, respects only the profit motive. That is the agenda that this legislation plays into.

I am going to make one other prediction, that when this legislation goes to committee sometime next summer, when I am finished and have concluded my remarks, that in fact the Chambers of Commerce, the small-business leaders in this province, the people who the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) keeps saying produce all the jobs in this province, are going to be telling him, this is killing us. That is what they are going to be saying.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is wrong. I heard the member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs) yesterday say she was prepared to see this go to committee and wanted the people to speak in between sessions. That is what she said.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to say that when this actually does get to committee that we have on the record our commitment with or without the help of the government, but preferably when the standing committee sits, to meet in the communities that are going to be affected. This is not going to be, take a list of people, ram it through in the middle of the night so that no one understands what we are doing.

This will be an opportunity for people in Morris, the church leaders in Morris, the municipal leaders in Morris, the business leaders in Morris, an opportunity for the people in Lac du Bonnet and Gimli, the people in Portage and around Portage, in Brandon, in Flin Flon and The Pas to talk about the impact of this legislation, because they also have a right to express their concerns over this legislation. I can tell you that the chamber of commerce there feels like every other chamber virtually in the province of Manitoba that this is wrong.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to say that the government has made a mistake. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) has made a mistake. They have abandoned rural Manitoba. They have abandoned small business.

With those remarks, I am prepared to let this go to committee, Madam Deputy Speaker. We want to see what the rest of Manitoba has to say.

* (1500)

Mr. Bob Rose (Turtle Mountain): Madam Deputy Speaker, I have been listening with great interest to the debate on this bill in the last few days. I guess my first response to some of the contributions made by the members on the opposition benches, it was pretty much of a knee-jerk reaction. I have been pleased the last day or so with some of the presentations that have been made, some very thoughtful ones.

I particularly would like to comment on the one that we have just heard from the honourable member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie). I will admit that perhaps my attention did drift a little bit from time to time. I look forward to that speech being printed in Hansard so I will be able to see if I can follow the kind of logic that was presented in that speech and whether or not it was actually relative to the particular bill under consideration.

It seems to me that in part of the presentation from the honourable member for Flin Flon he talked about the damage that will occur to the ozone layer by removing the requirement that no store can open

with more than four employees on Sunday. Now it seemed to me, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that would perhaps be a fairly long reach in logic, but I think that we will give him the benefit of the doubt.

(Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

I think, Mr. Acting Speaker, that what the honourable member for Flin Flon was trying to get across to the members of the House when he was expressing his concern about the danger to the ozone layer created by Sunday shopping in Manitoba was that he was really sincerely expressing concern about where our society is going and whether or not we are becoming a society that is driven by consumerism. In fact, I think one of the phrases that he used in his presentation was unbridled consumerism. So it is perhaps reasonable to look at his remarks and to consider them in that light. It could be that unbridled consumerism caused by allowing a store to open with more than four employees in Manitoba on a Sunday afternoon could very well destroy the ozone layer. I think we all need to very carefully look at his remarks as they have been recorded and be sure that we in fact are not endangering our environment by allowing this particular bill to go forward.

I believe he was suggesting to us that perhaps we should all join the suggestion, as made by the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli), that we should all go canoeing on Sunday afternoon and, like the leadership that was provided by our Premier (Mr. Filmon) in the last general election, spend Sunday afternoon in a quiet way on some of our beautiful lakes and streams.

I cannot help but think, given the experience we have all had with some of the recreation that we pursue in our spare time like skidooning or boating with power boats on our lakes, that we might very well end up causing the ozone layer more damage if we all went out and pursued these recreational activities on a Sunday afternoon rather than spending a quiet day in a shopping mall somewhere.

Another word that I picked out of that many-worded presentation made by the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie) was the word "dictate." I cannot just really remember again until I see Hansard, Mr. Acting Speaker, but I think he was suggesting that this government was dictating to our citizens and to our businesses that they must be

open on Sunday and we all must go out and shop on Sunday afternoons. Perhaps I have missed something here, but I did not notice the word "dictate" anywhere in the bill.

It seems to me, Mr. Acting Speaker, that just the opposite is true. We are not suggesting at all to our constituents or to Manitobans or to businesses in Manitoba—we are not dictating to them that they must be open on Sunday or that they must shop on Sunday. We are giving them the choice. We are not dictating to them that they must be closed on Sunday or they may not have the opportunity to do some shopping on Sunday.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): In fact, later on he accused us of letting the people do what they want.

Mr. Rose: That is right. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs mentions he later on suggested that perhaps people might want to do as they want. It seems to me, Mr. Acting Speaker, that is just exactly what the thrust behind this bill is to give people the opportunity to do what they want.

Another point he raised was, first of all, that there would be no increase in profits for business, which I think I can agree with. He went on to say that the increased cost for business by being open these extra few hours on a Sunday afternoon will, in fact, be passed on to the consumers resulting in inflation and higher interest rates and all those things that go along with it. It seems to me, if you follow that logic through to its obvious conclusion, then what we really should be doing is passing legislation that stores should be only open for one day a week.

Just think how we could lower the cost of putting our goods and services on the shelves if we only had to be open one day a week. I mean, we would not have to employ all those people for the other six days. We would not have to worry about heating and air conditioning and those sorts of things. Obviously, our business taxes would be lower because they are based on the amount of business that we do. So, if it is going to cost more to open for an extra few hours on a Sunday afternoon, then logically we should carry that argument to the other extreme and be only open for one-half day a week, thereby lowering the cost of living for all our citizens.

He also, Mr. Acting Speaker, took us on a travelogue, not only across Canada—well, he did not spend too much time in Canada actually. He spent a lot of time in other parts of the world, explaining

that in other parts of the world it was not necessary. They have a much more laid-back approach, and it is really not necessary to be opened on Sundays in many of the other countries in the world. He mentioned Germany and Japan.

In a paragraph or so later, he mentioned that we should ignore the fact that all the surrounding jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan, like North Dakota, like Minnesota, like Ontario, are all open on Sunday. In response to that, he said, dare to be different than your neighbours. So I suggest to him that his points that he was making about other countries in the world lose their significance if he is challenging us to dare to be different than our next-door neighbours.

One of the other final points that I would like to comment on in the honourable member for Flin Flon's (Mr. Storie) presentation was his attack on—[interjection] I will try and be as brief as the honourable member for Flin Flon—the notion that this will be a threat to family life and no longer will families have the opportunity to play together. On the surface, I suppose, Mr. Acting Speaker, this argument has some merit, but I think each of us, when we are adopting our own position on all the legislation that comes before this House, look back to our own experience.

One of the things that stands out in my mind, when I was a child, and most honourable members will know, particularly the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli), that was many, many years ago, one of the highlights of my association with my father was the times when we could go to Brandon together and do a bit of shopping. Part of my reward for tagging along beside Dad and Mom on the day of shopping was a vanilla milk shake, and I still remember those vanilla milk shakes. So I suggest that perhaps when we immediately assume that a shopping tour is something that is detrimental to family life, in fact it may just be the opposite. It may be one of the few times that families are brought together to do things as a group.

* (1510)

Mr. Acting Speaker, I mentioned earlier that I was a bit disappointed in the first contributions made by the members from the opposition that seemed pretty much of a knee-jerk reaction to me. I realize it is the job of the opposition to oppose any particular legislation that is before this House, but there is a little suspicion in my mind that there is a thought

there in the opposition benches, recognizing that there is some opposition to increase Sunday shopping availability in Manitoba, that they may very well be able to make some political advantage out of this. It simply cannot be a philosophical argument because we only need to look to our province to the east of us, Ontario, where the New Democratic Party is the administration, and see that they have wide-open Sunday shopping.

It seems odd to me that at the imaginary border along the pre-Cambrian shield there should change the thinking so dramatically between the party that is in power, the New Democratic Party in Ontario, and the New Democratic Party in opposition in Manitoba.

Mr. Acting Speaker, because there has been a suggestion made by some of the opposition members, I want to spend just a few moments putting before this Assembly my thoughts on this particular bill that we have before us. Unlike some of the charges that have been laid by some of the members of the opposition, this is not a thrust that comes from big business. It is not a thrust that has been rammed down the throats of the rural members. It is something that has been very carefully discussed and considered.

As a representative of a rural constituency, I, of course, have been very, very much aware of the effect that this may have on our rural businesses in rural Manitoba. Some of the reasons that have been given is that Sunday shopping may reduce cross-border shopping. My personal view on that is that the effect of that will be very, very minor. Oh, there may be some effect. There may be less cross-border shopping than we have now, but there are so many other reasons why people go, in our case, to North Dakota or to Minnesota to shop, but the fact that the stores may be open in Manitoba on Sunday on a more regular basis will not, I do not think, make that much difference.

There are many, many other factors, as has been pointed out before by other members. It is treated partially as a holiday, and it is treated partially because—and I know in our particular area, the town that attracts the most attention for cross-border shopping is Minot. We are almost equidistant from Minot and Winnipeg, but the choice is between going to Minot where hotel rooms are more reasonable, meals are more reasonable and, of course, we all know about gas, alcohol and cigarettes being less cost in North Dakota.

It is quite often that the people choose to go to Minot, first of all, for the experience of being in a different country, and secondly, with the realization that the total cost of their holiday will be considerably less than if they come to Winnipeg. So I do not personally believe that this will affect cross-border shopping to that great a degree.

One of the other reasons that we have considered for this introduction of this bill is whether or not it will enhance our tourism opportunities in Manitoba. Again, I think that it probably will not have that much effect, but again it cannot hurt.

I think part of the thing that we have to consider—and we have mentioned before that all surrounding jurisdictions have Sunday shopping—is that when we do go on a trip, and particularly into another country, even going to the United States or, in turn, Americans coming to Canada, they are immediately conscious of being in a different country, in a different society, with different habits. They are very conscious of those differences. If they live in a jurisdiction where Sunday shopping is accepted as a habit, as something that they realize is there, and they come to another jurisdiction where all of a sudden it is not, they sometimes do not have that good an impression of the trip that they have been on.

Again I will go back, to these many years and my own experience, to the time that a carload of us left from the University of Manitoba and thought we would go across the line for a night of revelry and rest and the next day, of course, to contemplate the more important things in life. We ended up in Minnesota, and, much to our surprise, Minnesota was a dry state. Now that has left a bad taste in my mouth about Minnesota ever since. It was a long time getting over that.

Mrs. McIntosh: No taste.

Mr. Rose: The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs says, no taste. It was probably better for me and better for my companions that day that Minnesota was a dry state, but that was not why we were going to Minnesota. We were not looking for a dry state. Fortunately for the Minnesota economy, it was able to survive without my contribution for the next 20 years. I think the point is still there that when you go to a different jurisdiction and find that you cannot do things that you normally do at home, then your reaction and the

story you take back to your friends and neighbours is that perhaps it is not a good place to go and visit.

So it seems to me, Mr. Acting Speaker, that the introduction of Bill 4 is going to help tourism to some degree in Manitoba. Again, I say, I do not think to the extent that warrants its support.

I want particularly, Mr. Acting Speaker, to speak from a rural community, from the Turtle Mountain constituency where the largest of our towns is no more than 2,000 people, and most of them are much smaller than that. As I said earlier, we definitely have the recognition that the introduction of Sunday shopping may have a detrimental effect on some of the businesses in our community.

I suggest to you, and I speak from experience having been in the retail business for some 25 to 30 years and granted not in the type of retail business we are talking about but in the farm supply business that was in effect retailing product to consumers, the experience we had, in our particular farm supply store, is that we were open on Sundays, and interestingly enough our major competition just down the road were not. Now, if we are to assume that opening on Sundays is going to destroy the competition, we should assume then that our major competition down the road would have been destroyed.

Well, it took us 10 or 15 years going head to head and at the end of that 10 or 15 years, Mr. Acting Speaker, the market share of both these outlets was very much the same as it had been when we started. The people adjusted, the customers adjusted to the fact that we were open, not necessarily to be able to sell more product, but simply as a service to our customers. The customers of our competition adjusted to the fact that they would not be open on Sunday, but they still recognized that as long as the competition was providing good product, good service and a reasonable price that they would support that particular business.

I suggest to you, Mr. Acting Speaker, that exactly the same situation exists now for all businesses in rural Manitoba, that if they continue to provide good service, good product at a reasonable price, people will continue to support those businesses. I will grant you that there will be a certain amount of impulse buying, if you like, if the local people take a notion to drive into, in our case it would be Brandon. That would be the closest large centre where this particular bill will have an effect. There might be a

certain amount of impulse buying if people drive into Brandon on a Sunday afternoon and go into the stores, and they might buy a few groceries or a quart of milk or a few odds and ends that they might normally buy at home.

I still believe that, put another way then, if this is the nail that makes the difference in the survival of a business in rural Manitoba, I would suggest to you that that business is already in shaky ground and that the introduction of this bill will not make that much difference. Also, in our experience as a retailer we had—the common catchword is “workers.” We called them people who worked in the business, but we were not workers. I suppose, as management we never really did any work. We were just there all the time.

* (1520)

There has been some concern expressed by the portion of this bill that protects workers from the requirement of having to work on Sunday. I suggest to you, Mr. Acting Speaker, from my experience with our workers and our business when we were open on a Sunday, those who wanted to did and those who did not said—on Saturday afternoon as they walked out the door—we will see you Monday morning. There was never any question at all of those particular people losing their position because they refused to work on Sunday. Why was there no consideration of that? Well, because the people who were there were very capable and hardworking people. We recognized that they were great contributors to our business, and we had no intention of telling them that just because they did not feel like working on Sunday that we would no longer employ them. I think that is inherent in this particular piece of legislation.

What we are trying to do here is to be sure that employers do not use the refusal to work on Sunday as an excuse to terminate an employee for some other reason. I am convinced, Mr. Acting Speaker, that any employee who is enthusiastic, hardworking, capable and competent will have no problem whatsoever holding his or her position even though they may not wish to work on Sunday.

I thought that in the many presentations that I have heard on this particular bill, one of the best was made by the member right down in front of me here, from the honourable member for Rossmere (Mr. Neufeld). One of the things that he emphasized is that this is permissive legislation, that no one is

telling a store or a group of stores that they must be open on Sunday, and no one is telling our citizens that they must shop on Sunday. What this legislation is doing is giving those people who want the opportunity to be open on Sunday, and more importantly, those people in our province who want the opportunity to shop on Sunday have that chance.

The Leader of the Second Opposition (Mrs. Carstairs) yesterday, I think, very eloquently made the point for many, many people in our society now who do not have that great an opportunity in the other six days of the week to shop. It is interesting to me, Mr. Acting Speaker, that the members of the official opposition, who so very often express great concern about little people as they like to call them, that they should not express a little concern about their opportunity to have a day when they do not have any other pressures of work, or of family, or of having children to take to various activities on a Saturday, that they might have the opportunity to do a bit of unpressured shopping on Sunday afternoon.

There are very, very few activities in our province that are prohibited by law. My view on this bill and my personal position is that I much prefer if these stores were not open on Sunday, but I have to be careful when I say that, because when I say that I am thinking, of course, about the big stores. I am not in there very often at any time. It is not a concern to me whether it is open or not.

But then I think, in honesty, I want to buy gas on Sunday. I take this for granted that I will be able to go anywhere on Sunday in Manitoba and if I need a tank of gas I will be able to buy it. I take it for granted that I can go anywhere in Manitoba on a Sunday and be able to get a restaurant meal or a milk shake or a drink. I take it for granted that I will be able to go almost anywhere in Manitoba on a Sunday and be able to buy other necessities of life like cigarettes or aspirin or newspapers. I take it for granted that I will be able to go anywhere in Manitoba on a Sunday and take part in golfing or tennis or hiking or so many other activities. Many of those activities I have to pay for. Many of those activities require that people are there working for a living, working on Sunday, taking away the Sunday from their families. I take all those things for granted because I use those things.

It seems to me, Mr. Acting Speaker, that it would be most unfair of me to say to a very large, large group that has been indicated to us, a very large

group of our citizens who have asked for, who want, who require, who need the opportunity to do a good part of their shopping on Sunday, it does not seem that it would be fair on my part to stand and vote against that opportunity, particularly on a trial basis, because we are basing this information of course on polls that indicate to us that a great number of our citizens do want that opportunity. So what better way to discover if those polls are correct than by having a trial basis so we may assess, in fact, whether people show up and shop on Sunday? We can be very, very certain that if they do not the stores will not be open.

A number of the opposition presenters have pointed out the position of the Union of Manitoba Municipalities at the recent convention and their resolution on Sunday shopping, which was passed, not unanimously, as the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) said, but I think that was probably just a slip of the tongue. It was passed, and I hope that the members of the opposition will pay equal attention to all the other resolutions that came out of the municipal convention, particularly those on Lighten Up, Little Boys, on the Environment, that perhaps we do not need to be quite so stringent.

I watched, I was present the day that the delegates to the Union of Manitoba Municipalities convention debated that resolution. I noted that it was far from unanimous, the vote, although it carried by a good majority. One of the people who came to the microphone to debate the resolution very briefly made the point that each and every one of us, when we get up and speak against Sunday shopping, if we in turn buy anything on a Sunday, whether it is any of the things I just mentioned or going into some of the larger department stores, we are hypocrites. I think that is worth noting. If we are really honestly opposed to Sunday shopping, then all that needs to happen is to have no one go shopping on Sunday, and that will very quickly bring to an end any kind of debate, because the stores simply will not be open.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I also enjoyed the presentation by the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson). As all members know, that member lives not too far outside the Perimeter Highway. In conversation afterwards, I went and pursued some of the points that he had made. In conversation afterwards, he pointed out to me that he estimates that over 50, perhaps up to 60 percent of the people who live within a 40- to 50-kilometre radius of Winnipeg work inside the Perimeter Highway, work

somewhere in Winnipeg. He made rather the obvious point that five or six days a week—and one need only watch the traffic flow in the mornings coming into the cities and the evenings going out—these people are inside the Perimeter Highway where this particular bill that we are discussing will have the most effect. The suggestion that, again, opening the stores on Sunday afternoon is going to mean that all these people are going to flock back into the city for the seventh day of the week to take advantage of Sunday shopping is ridiculous. If they are going to shop in Winnipeg, they will do that within the five or six days that they are in there and not return and make a special trip back in on Sunday as well.

* (1530)

Mr. Acting Speaker, I know that there are other members of the Legislature who would like to put their thoughts on record. I appreciate this opportunity to have had my say. I sincerely say, as a member of a rural riding, I do have concerns about wide-open Sunday shopping, if we want to call it that, but I have to recognize that we already have Sunday shopping in Manitoba. I have to recognize that the laws that we now have in place are limiting the opportunity for a good portion of our society to have the opportunity to shop on Sunday, and I have to recognize that, when all the surrounding jurisdictions are providing that kind of competition, perhaps we need to meet that competition.

So it is with great difficulty and with great reluctance that I support this resolution, but it is certainly my intention, Mr. Acting Speaker, to support this resolution and let us all examine the kind of data that comes out from the trial period. Thank you very much.

Hon. Clayton Manness (Minister of Finance): Mr. Acting Speaker, it is a privilege to rise at this point in time. This is the first opportunity I have had in the session to address all the important matters of the day.

Let me, first of all, because again this is my first opportunity, pay tribute to the new and the renewed members of our House. Let me acknowledge the presence of our new member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Pallister) and also from Crescentwood (Ms. Gray)—[interjection]

Relevance—okay, well, the House leader of the Liberal Party (Mr. Lamoureux) does not want me to acknowledge one of his colleagues. Of course, I

wonder if there is a conflict there. You see, this is what happens. These are the subtleties of a potential leadership challenge where you have the House leader of the Liberals, the aspiring leader, asking me not to give credit to his colleague who may also be an aspiring leadership candidate of the Liberal Party. So, Mr. Acting Speaker, I cannot win. It seems that in every opportunity that I rise in this House, I have members opposite heckling me. It must be because at times I heckle from time to time in Question Period.

Mr. Acting Speaker, let me, through you, also pay regards and tribute to the Speaker who, no doubt, will have to make many rulings over the course of the next number of days and weeks, some of which I will agree with, maybe a few of them I will not. Nevertheless, his role and your role, of course, are so important to the smooth working of this House.

The issue is Sunday shopping. Let me say, as I have said to anybody who has sought my opinion, this is a sensitive issue. Of course, that is the reason why the government has desired to bring in a bill that was temporary of nature. We will call it a pilot. There are no foregone conclusions around the bill particularly, so it is a sensitive issue. I acknowledge that. Furthermore, I acknowledge how it is when you are in opposition, you like to play politics with sensitive issues. We are all politicians and for that none of us need apologize. We are policy—Mr. Acting Speaker, I have never had so much reaction from that side of the House for a long period of time, I kind of enjoy it. It is certainly going to stretch out the comments around Bill 4.

Mr. John Plohman (Dauphin): How long do you have to wait?

Mr. Manness: I do not have to wait at all, in response to the member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman).

Mr. Acting Speaker, let me say very clearly and concisely that it is like a former member of our party said one time, and of course he was quoted here as recently as a week ago, yes. [interjection] Is it again today? When you are in opposition, of course, you can at times have it both ways.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): All the time.

Mr. Manness: Well, the member for Elmwood maybe even says it better, maybe all the time.

Mr. Acting Speaker, we have a situation where I believe it was the Leader of the NDP, the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) stated that, well, the Whips were off. His members were free—the member for

Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) chuckles, or was that the Leader of the Liberal Party? I think it was both parties. The Liberals came first, of course, and the NDP followed that. The Whips were off, the members were free to search their consciences and their hearts, and they were free to do what they wanted on this issue. That was a very magnanimous gesture made by the Leaders of the opposition parties. I dare say, from time to time, I wish if I were in a position to talk philosophically about the democratic system, I think there need to be times when parties do not feel so reined in by whatever reasons drive them to reach consensus within their own caucus rooms. I do not have difficulty identifying with Leaders of parties in opposition when they remove the Whips.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I have to ask the question, on what basis do they remove the Whips? Do they do it on the basis of principle, or do they do it on the basis of the fact that this is good politics because I have some division within the ranks? Is it principle or is it pragmatism? Which is it?

Mr. Plohman: Do not worry about it, it does not concern you.

Mr. Manness: Well, the member for Dauphin says it does not concern me. I am one of 57 who have been elected to this House. It does concern me because I am a student of the dynamics in the House. I am a student of the dynamics within political parties, not only my own but, of course, of parties opposite. So do not shut me out from studying, I say. [interjection] That is right, never stop being a student, I think is what the Leader of the NDP is saying.

On this particular issue, there are great sensitivities and there are matters of principle, and there are matters of what members think should drive them to be on one side of the issue or the other. What I find strange—and I do not use the term any more—what I find strange, Mr. Acting Speaker, is sort of the sanctimonious approach that some members opposite are taking, particularly the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie). I have not been here to hear all the speeches to this point, and I regret that because I am sure I have missed an awful lot of interesting debate. But the sanctimonious manner in which the member for Flin Flon was pontificating with respect to how those of us who represent some larger portion of the Christian community, I think, to use his term, should take our lead in searching our own souls and our own minds with respect to this issue.

That is what drove me to my feet to speak. I had a hard time stomaching that. As a matter of fact, if I had had a full meal at lunch time, I would not have been able to stomach it. I do not think I could have kept it down.

Here we have the member for Flin Flon using these words "abandoning," "betraying," these verbs that are full of action and dripped with meaning, and he says to me and he says to others, what, in essence he was saying, do your constituents think when you are breaking with them? That is what he seems to be saying.

Mr. Acting Speaker, let me say for the record: I have had no calls to date on the issue. I have had two letters, but I have been in this business a long time. I know fully well that this is an issue on the minds of a significant portion of my constituents. The fact that I have not been inundated with letters or phone calls does not lead me to believe for one second that this is not an important, sensitive issue on the minds of many of my constituents.

Let me say furthermore, Mr. Acting Speaker, if the NDP in their approach were coming purely from the doctrine, from the Christian doctrine, from the Christian-Judaic principle found in one of the Commandments, thou shalt not work on the Sabbath, I could listen to a lot more of their arguments, but they do not. Some do. I have not been here for the whole presentation to this point in time. There may have been members—I have not read the text that comes from that, but again I make my assessment on the basis of the party, and the party has not come forward with that. If they did, I am telling you, they would make it much more difficult for me.

* (1540)

I know, for instance, on other issues, prayer in the public school system, the Lord's Prayer in the public school system, I have not heard any party, certainly any of the opposition parties, stand up to maintain the Lord's Prayer in the public school system. No, I have not. As a party, I have not. Certainly there are probably some individuals within the parties opposite who would maybe want to see that maintained. I know there are a significant number of members in this bench who want it maintained, as a matter of fact, probably pushed that issue as far as we could within the context of human rights legislation in this country to deal with that.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I sit here as a student, and I am not going to be carried away by the argument from the opposition benches, chastising me as a representative of a constituency where there are a significant number of people who subscribe to the Commandment that says, thou shalt not work on the Sunday—or on the Sabbath, not Sunday, the Sabbath—yet at the same time—[interjection]—On the Sabbath, I am to be corrected—the same group of people who would tell me to listen to my constituents on that will not collectively, at least, issue a statement with respect to school prayer.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, I am looking for consistency. I can tell you, I have not researched the record like the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie). I have not researched the record to see what I said, or what every other member longstanding in this House has said on issues like this. I understand the member for Pembina (Mr. Orchard)—

An Honourable Member: Has made wonderful speeches.

Mr. Manness: —has made wonderful speeches. Well, he does on most issues make wonderful speeches, so that does not come as a surprise to me.

I have not researched the record to determine whether the NDP has been consistent or inconsistent on these moral issues, on these issues, but I know one thing. I have not seen consistency between this—if the members want to put it in the context of being a religious or a spiritual issue—as compared to other issues, I have never seen consistency. So then, the members, when I hear the ring or the decrying by the member for Flin Flon that I am abandoning or I am somehow betraying my constituents, it rings hollow.

Does it hurt? Well, of course, it hurts. I think it does. I wonder if there is one member in this House, if we accuse them of betraying or abandoning their constituents, if it would not hurt. I do not think any of us would be human if we were accused of betraying our citizens because we all sense that we are loyal to our constituents, Mr. Acting Speaker, so I have to categorically reject almost every statement made by the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie). Of course, I have rejected everything the member for Flin Flon has said for eleven years, because he and I have been in this House that long together.

I think the NDP are saying, and I believe they are saying, and they will correct me if I am wrong, that

they are opposed to Bill 4 because they are interested in the well-being of the worker. I would have to think that that is the main plank of their argument. I am troubled with that also. I must admit I do not want to see anybody, absolutely anybody, forced to work on Sunday, and to that end, I am convinced, as I listened to the member for Rossmore (Mr. Neufeld), this is enabling legislation.

Of course, the question is, well, what subtleties can be brought to bear to force that worker to have to work on Sunday, and that in itself is possibly troubling. I think that we are going to have to ensure that if society, after the trial periods, calls upon its Legislators to support Sunday shopping on a permanent fashion, Mr. Acting Speaker, we will have to ensure legislatively that, even though this is enabling legislation, no worker is forced to work on Sunday.

I think that is very important. I mean I look around. There was a time certainly within my family. I can remember growing up on the farm. We never worked on our farm till probably into the '70s, or late '70s, actually early '80s, and that was only most occasionally. Now, because of this job I have here, I find myself working on Sunday a lot more than I would like.

I think it is terrible to expect people to work on Sunday, if indeed it is against their will, so we are going to have to make absolutely sure that there is some protection around this particular area.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I am reminded, I also acknowledge the fact, and I have had long discussions with our minister that is sponsoring this bill, I do not believe in itself it will be a panacea. It is not going to lead to great volumes of additional disposable income that are going to provide a significant increase in shopping activity.

Nevertheless, society seems to want to change. I wish, quite frankly, in many respects, it did not want to change. And members opposite can say that my constituents, my business people in Morris—they use that example—and Carman, St. Pierre, Sanford and La Salle, and I could go on and on, these business people are going to be ultimately, potentially the losers.

I sought higher views on this and by that I mean my constituents, and I also asked them to tell me what percentage of the public within these communities are purchasing outside of the community today. Mr. Acting Speaker, I was

astonished to find a significant portion are purchasing today and have been for a significant number of years in the city of Winnipeg at this present time on Sunday. Yes, they are waiting in lines. They are being served by what the present law calls for, or at least three weeks ago what the present law called for, and that was being served at either McDiarmid Lumber or Beaver Lumber or Safeway by four employees, and that by virtue of most of the commentary that has come back to me that the public has decided at this point in time, how it is and who it is they will be loyal to in a purchasing sense, and that those habits or the sharing of where they do their purchasing is not going to change significantly, if at all, under the provision of Sunday shopping.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, that, I would have to say, is the vast majority of the people that I represent. I have to take that into account. I have to take into account the fact that society seems to want to, for some reason, have greater access, much greater access to the unfettered marketplace, if only through the hours available to it. So it is on that basis then that I come forward to the House, even though this is a sensitive issue to me and support the government's bill, and I will vote accordingly.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, I thought it was pretty important that a few of these remarks be put onto the record and also though to spell out to the members opposite if they think they are going to make great inroads politically into those ridings that are represented on this side of the House because of the stance they are taking, I am here to tell you that they will not. Because on the judgment day, and not in the Christian sense, but on the judgment day which will be the next election, people will still look to see how it is that this government has managed the affairs of the province, to what extent it has increased taxes, which has been none in the last five years, and held the tax line which has been more the accomplishment.

* (1550)

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

They will also take into account the degree to which this government has been removed from scandal. It will also take into account the extent to which stability has been brought and economic development potential has been brought forward to this province, and it is on that basis that this government will be judged. In my constituency, it

will be judged on the basis to the extent the Minister of Highways (Mr. Driedger) has been able to share his capital program and in the constituency—[interjection] Mr. Acting Speaker, the members are talking about Highway 75. That is right, that is on one basis we will be judged and we know what the members opposite wanted with Highway 75.

I remember the member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman), who was, I believe, the last Minister of Highways. He shut 75 down once it hit St. Adolphe. [interjection] I needed that break, Mr. Acting Speaker, and I thank the members opposite for providing me an opportunity.

Mr. Acting Speaker, it is on that basis that my constituents ultimately will judge the performance of the government and indeed the member, presently myself. I point out to the members opposite, my constituents will not follow the NDP position. They know fully well why the NDP is trying to make this an issue and indeed why the Liberals are too.

Yet, let me think about what the Liberals have been saying. What have the Liberals been saying as a matter of fact? It is still the one-hand approach? Yes. Mr. Acting Speaker, if indeed there are some members who vote one way and some the other way, then we will know that their Leader was true to the commitment that the members were free to vote.

I know when we were in opposition one time, the Whips were not on, Mr. Acting Speaker. It was a teachers' pension bill, if I remember rightly. Of course, there were different points of view on our side and that was reflected—[interjection] Yes, and seat belts before that. That was in 1982. [interjection] Strike that from the record, Hansard. [interjection] Was it '84? I stand to be corrected. I remember that. I thought that was early in the new government, but it was '84, I am reminded by the member for Dauphin.

(Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

Mr. Acting Speaker, with those few remarks I think it is important that—[interjection] Well, if we apologized for voting the way we do, the member for Dauphin would never sit down. He would be standing most of the time. Although, I must admit we have noticed a considerable change in the member for Dauphin today in Question Period. I think it has something to do with squawking into a brick wall yesterday in Question Period. He ran into

the Orchard, quite frankly. I notice that the member for Dauphin has not been chirping up with the same gusto and certainly with the same bravado at least. I imagine after the break, when we come back in March, he will be full of energy again.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I do not think I have an awful lot more to contribute. Oh, there is one thing. I do have one more thing. There is one more point I wanted to make. It has to do with North Dakota.

I believe North Dakota put this on the ballot, this Sunday shopping issue. They put it on the ballot last fall or in the summer. It was either early fall or, no, it was in 1992, Mr. Acting Speaker. Here was a state that had, I think, acceded to Sunday shopping, I believe, three years previously. I can remember being down on a hockey tournament in Fargo, I believe, in about '89, and I know the stores were not open in Fargo, or at least West Fargo was not open.

Then for the next three years, I guess through a vote or a plebiscite, I do not know, or maybe just a Legislature like this, deciding to open for Sunday shopping—they had the experience for two years—in 1992, they voted on it. I would have to think that the northern states, certainly my experience in Minnesota and North Dakota and South Dakota and I do not know about further west, certainly those states, as compared to many others within the union, I still think, have a strong church-going public following, certainly within the Lutheran following anyway.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I personally was watching very carefully the vote of the people within that state, because I knew the issue had received a lot of notoriety, had received a lot of attention, and that people without having to publicly stand and state their views at least had an opportunity to vote on the issue. I cannot remember exactly the results. Maybe the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) can help me.

It seems to me that it was passed to maintain Sunday opening by more than just a nominal margin—[interjection]—68 percent. I was surprised. I can tell you, I was really surprised at that vote. [interjection] Well, I did take some relevancy out of that vote, I have to tell you that. I really did, because this just was not Grand Forks or Fargo speaking. This was all the business people in these communities. This was the whole state. I think there is a significant portion of that whole state that does not draw direct economic benefit from

Manitobans when the dollar was 86 cents, did not draw a strong economic benefit from Manitobans coming down to shop in the U.S. [interjection] Well, I do not know what the alternative was, and that is a fair question.

The reality is, given a more restrictive versus a complete open, two-thirds of that state, at least of the people who voted, chose for whatever reason, Mr. Acting Speaker, to support Sunday shopping. [interjection] The member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) seems to be in quite a rush on this, very anxious. The member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie) consumes about three hours and I did not hear him yawn or guffaw once. [interjection] Okay.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I can tell you that, obviously, with the changing society mores and values that there seems to be a larger number of people who today want to have access to unfettered and unrestricted Sunday shopping.

Let me then say for the record that I will be also carefully listening to those in our public who want to make representation to the bill during consideration in committee of this bill. I will be interested in watching very carefully the sales tax revenues, because I watch them very carefully for other reasons over the course of the next number of months. I will be watching very carefully and listening very carefully to those business people, of course, who lobbied the government and pushed to have this in place, to see what their viewpoint is after we have gone through, not only the months before Christmas, but those after, through those after, and ultimately bring then that greater wealth of information and knowledge to a consideration of a permanent nature, indeed, if the government decides to move forward in that fashion.

Thank you, very much, Mr. Acting Speaker.

* (1600)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Acting Speaker, I must start off by actually acknowledging that I had thought something else was going to be happening today, but I am very pleased to see that, in fact, what will be happening is what we had thought would be in the interests of Manitobans. [interjection]

I know, Mr. Acting Speaker—and some say, well, what was supposed to happen? Let me somewhat elaborate on it. Shortly after Question Period, I had taken the liberty to talk to the government House leader because I was concerned, as our caucus is,

about having this particular bill pass into the committee stage or at least allow it to have a vote so that if it succeeds, it goes on to the committee stage so that we can have some legitimate debate from the public.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) had indicated to myself that he would be more than happy to, in fact, see the vote, that he will do everything within his powers to have that vote, that, in fact, he had even implied that maybe it would have been the New Democrats. Well, I cannot blame him. I, too, had thought at the time that it was the New Democrats who were going to try to quite possibly filibuster, and in the good spirits that I was in at the time, I had suggested that we would even be willing to extend the hours to ensure that, in fact, this particular bill was voted on, because we felt that it was necessary, today or tomorrow, as the Minister of Finance—what is important is that before we recess, that we do, in fact, have the vote.

I am glad that, in fact, we will see a vote because, after all, the time frame has been set up from November 29 to April 5, and it would be most appropriate to allow the public to have some sort of input before the time frame itself expires. There are a lot of concerns about the bill itself. I know the member for The Maples (Mr. Cheema) has expressed some concerns to myself with respect to, maybe we could see some form of an amendment that would allow Sunday shopping for the Christmas holiday season.

I know that there are some concerns that I have with this particular bill. It has from 12 noon to six o'clock when, through labour legislation or regulation, we have: That no employer shall require an employee to work longer than five hours without a meal period.

There are some conflicts that we see, and I think that it is primarily because what has happened is the Minister of Labour (Mr. Praznik) did not consult with the Minister of Industry and Trade (Mr. Stefanson) before coming up with this particular bill. So if it does get to the committee stage, Mr. Acting Speaker, no doubt there will be some amendments that would be brought to it to even make it a better bill for those who want to see, in fact, Sunday shopping become a reality.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I respect what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) was trying to say about the change of opinion of the Minister of Health (Mr.

Orchard), and I can understand why it is the Minister of Health would have said one thing when he was in opposition and another thing once he has been in government, because I know—in 1990, in fact, I had a survey that went out to my constituents, and I had received just over 900 of the surveys back.

The question I asked back in 1990 was: Should all stores be allowed to be open on Sundays? I had 40 percent that said yes; 46 percent said no; and there were 14 percent that had no opinion.

Well, as luck would have it I asked the very same question this fall and again same question: Should all stores be allowed to be open on Sundays? I have not tabulated all of the numbers, but the numbers thus far have been, yes, 325; no, 220; no opinion, 38. Well, what it indicates to me no doubt and to everyone else is that there is somewhat a change of opinions in the last two to two and a half years.

What we need to do is that we cannot take public opinion or the polls as the only piece of information that we base the decision on, because we have to do a lot more than just have a poll and if the poll is right, then that is something that we have to go to. I myself, Mr. Acting Speaker, will be going back to the constituents of mine that have answered the questions, those who put in their names, to find out if in fact this is the type of a Sunday opening spree that they would like to see.

I think that there is an onus on all of us not to take at face value what might be a poll that says a majority of Manitobans want this so we should have it. The reason why I say that is because there are a number of things that have to be taken into account before you make a decision, and before we take that face value, we should ensure that that is in fact what the intentions of Manitobans are.

That is why, Mr. Acting Speaker, I feel that it is absolutely essential that we go into a public hearing process prior to us even coming back into the session, so that we know in fact what Manitobans are really thinking about this issue, not through just a telephone poll that might have been conducted or in fact a survey. Those give us an idea in terms of what the population is thinking at that time, but it does not really give them the opportunity to have the background information that might be necessary in order for us to make the decision.

We owe that thought process, that debate process, to ensure that those who are going to be

most affected by this particular piece of legislation—the employers, the employees who are going to have to work on the Sundays, the small employer now that is going to have additional operational costs and so forth—that those concerns are in fact expressed, and that those who might have said yes in a poll in fact might say no, if they knew the circumstances of that employer or of that employee.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, it is not to say that the government should not listen to polls, but rather what is most important is that in any given poll that you have to use it as a resource in terms of it as a piece of information. As we all know, statistics and polls can be read in many different ways. We have to ensure that in fact what we are bringing in is in fact what is in the best interests of all Manitobans, because some of the arguments that are being used from the government just do not hold any water to prevent cross-border shopping. I do not really believe that is going to have an impact by having stores opened in the province of Manitoba. I just do not believe that is going to happen.

What might have more of an impact if the government was sincere in wanting to cut cross-border shopping, the Liberal Party has brought up ideas in which we could see some of that. There are things that can be done to ensure or to make it more attractive for Manitobans to shop within Manitoba, whether it is a more proactive tourism package, whether it is a more proactive federal government, Mr. Acting Speaker, but there are certain things that can be done. You know, one of the things that we had suggested in the peak, prior to us going into the summer, when individuals were more inclined to go and travel around, possibly go down to the States to cross-border shop, was the whole concept of a 3 percent drop in the provincial sales tax for three months.

(Mrs. Louise Dacquay, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

* (1610)

Madam Deputy Speaker, that would have much more impact on cross-border shopping than opening up on Sundays. I do not believe that it is going to help stimulate the economy in any way. In fact, I am inclined to think that it will have more negative impacts potentially with the economy. There are some areas in which I think that there

could be some benefits. I know that there are individuals that travel to Manitoba to visit relatives—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am experiencing great difficulty in hearing the honourable member for Inkster.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that there are individuals that travel to Manitoba, whether it is to visit relatives, whether it is to participate in an event, and they would like the opportunity to be able to shop on a Sunday. So there are some legitimate arguments as to why we should have Sunday shopping, but, for me, a deciding factor will be what I perceive my constituents want, and this will not be based solely on a survey or a poll. It will be based on consultation with my constituents, individuals, as I say, that have returned the surveys that answered particularly on the yes side to ensure that is in fact what they were intending to see come into reality, that there is going to be an impact on possibly brothers, sisters, family friends and so forth in the sense that they might have an individual that has to work on the Sunday. There are so many different ramifications, and those are the types of things that I will personally be pursuing before I could give a final vote as an opinion of my constituents.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I did not want to take up too much time because there might be one or two additional Conservatives—I know the NDP had indicated that they too want to see this pass into committee. In fact, I am sure that there would be will to waive private members' hour given the seriousness of this particular debate. So, whatever happens, as long as we see the debate come to an end so that we have the vote tomorrow. We have an opportunity to see what the public as a whole has to say in committee between now and the March session.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage la Prairie): Madam Deputy Speaker and colleagues, it is with some trepidation that I rise to address this topic, but at the urging of the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) yesterday I thought it was only appropriate to respond and to make some comments.

First of all, in terms of this bill, what it is about, as I see it, is a trial period, not the bill itself. The trial period is one which would allow us to ascertain the effect of the legislation as proposed. It is

permissive, as my colleague for Rossmere (Mr. Neufeld) has pointed out. At present, the legislation discriminates against some businesses. Those that would like to employ people suitable to their needs, as they see them in servicing their customers, are not allowed to. Those which would like to employ more than four are restricted currently, and those businesses would no longer be restricted during this trial period as proposed.

There is no question, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there is a fear of change. All of us have that fear of change to some degree, and members opposite nor myself are exempt from that fear. Certainly, I think in my recent weeks in this House, I have encountered more evidence of fear of change than perhaps I had prior to that time. Perhaps it is just the nature of being an elected official, I do not know, but certainly there is a fear of change in our society, and it is not one that we can ignore. [interjection]

The member opposite alludes to the U.S. election campaign, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, not being an experienced and therefore not a proficient speaker in the House, I do not have the ability to respond to heckling as quickly as I might like. Perhaps I will develop that skill as time goes on.

Certainly, through the past few days and weeks, I have taken the effort to go to my constituents to ascertain what their feelings are on this issue. I have talked to a great many of the people in my community, not just those in the business sector, but those outside the business sector who are shoppers.

I have encountered opinions across a wide spectrum. Many who are very concerned, as I am, and I think most members are, about the quality of family life, have expressed that concern, that the unlimited access to shopping on Sunday would somehow have a negative effect on family life. Certainly, also, I have had expressions of concern that the legislation, as it stands currently, is unfair and discriminatory against those larger businesses, and as a result I have had concerns expressed by shoppers saying that they are—[interjection]

I note already, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there is relative silence when a point is made which is an objective one which is supported by members opposite, but when an objective comment is made which does not fall into their partisan lines, it is responded to rather aggressively. I believe what I

will continue to do is try to be objective in this issue as best I can.

The present legislation does restrict business practices of certain businesses to the detriment of shoppers, and that has been expressed in my community, which is not a large one, but I understand is a larger problem and concern in the city of Winnipeg. My chief concern, however, has to be for my constituents, and that point having been raised, I think it is a good one.

Many people in our society today look at shopping as leisure. I do not personally, Madam Deputy Speaker, but some do. In fact, an expression recently by one of my constituents was that it was frequently a family outing for their family to go and shop. So I do not know if we can entirely separate the act of shopping itself from the act of being together and functioning as a family unit, and I think that this is an unfair and mistaken assumption.

Members opposite, it seems to me, would like to tell businesses how many employees to employ, and I think that really that decision is best left in the hands of individual businesses and individual business managers who have made the investment and have the experience in their business and are better able and qualified to make that decision.

Also, I think members opposite would like to tell Manitobans when to shop, and I do not believe that it is the responsibility of us in this House to dictate to our constituents and the people of Manitoba. I believe that they should have the right to decide, and they have that right. I believe they will express, in response to this permissive legislation, what their feelings are as far as the rightness or wrongness of the proposal.

I am a rural Manitoba member, and I have heard members opposite who are also rural Manitoba members express concern for fairness and for a level playing field. I believe that their response, the comment "a level playing field," reveals a lack of appreciation for some of the positive aspects that rural Manitoba has.

The assumption in comments from members opposite has been that people in rural Manitoba, given that Sunday shopping was available on an unlimited basis in the city of Winnipeg, would flock to the city of Winnipeg, bring their business here. I think that is a mistaken and faulty assumption, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I believe that in that mistaken assumption lies an inherent difficulty that we all face in rural Manitoba. Many communities are struggling to find an identity and to find a positive reason for being, if you like, and they face opposition from within their own ranks. They face a feeling of inferiority on many occasions, and I think that it is unfortunate to hear members who purport to represent them in this House expressing that same feeling of inferiority.

There is much to attract people to rural Manitoba. There is much to attract people to its communities, whether for tourism benefit or, in terms of retail as well. I think that there is much to offer in rural communities in terms of the level of service that is extended to them in the small businesses that are located there.

Many people, and I guess I would be guilty potentially of thinking this way at times, that bigger is better, but many people do not feel the same way when it comes to shopping. So the assumption that because a store is open and because it employs more than four people it will naturally draw business is a mistaken one. The assumption that because it is open people will come and shop there is a mistaken one. Also, the assumption that they will leave the rural community where they live is a mistaken one.

* (1620)

I think what it does show is a rather arrogant and insulting attitude toward the people of rural Manitoba and a lack of understanding of what rural Manitobans believe in and what they stand for. There are many people in rural Manitoba and, I think, increasingly large numbers who understand the value of shopping in their own community.

More and more people do continue to remain in their own community when it comes to the shopping dollar and place that dollar there, because they understand the resulting benefits that accrue to their community when that is done. In fact, in my conversations with the retailers in the Portage la Prairie area, I have found that expression consistently with them, that more and more people are spending their money in their home community.

Whether on a Sunday or any other day for that matter, more and more people in the rural part of this province recognize the value of spending their dollars in their own community. To work from the assumption that because larger stores were open

with more than four people that it would follow that rural Manitoba would suffer I think again is mistaken.

There are fine people in rural Manitoba, fine business owners who are accustomed to rising to the challenges of operating their businesses and have done so for many years successfully. Those business owners are quite ready to rise to any challenge, as opposed perhaps to some opposite who have not had the experience, fine people in rural Manitoba who understand the importance and benefits of shopping at home and will continue to do so. [interjection] A great many. The member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), arriving late in the Chamber, asked me how many have I talked to. A great many of my constituents have been spoken to. [interjection] The member for Transcona asked me how many of the retailers I have talked to. I would say in excess of 50 retailers, for the member for Transcona.

I will leave time at the end for questions, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the member can ask me after. I would be quite willing to answer your questions if you would like.

I think that part of the problem we face is that in rural Manitoba, there are a great many problems that must be faced. There are large problems, major problems, that all of us from rural Manitoba, I think, share a concern with, whether on this side of the House or opposite—increases in the prices of land, increases in average farm size, for example, coupled with a decrease in the number of farms. Rural depopulation is a major problem for us in rural Manitoba. A reduction in the farm population versus the total of the rural population is another problem for rural Manitoba, an increase in the need for off-farm work for those who live in rural Manitoba in order to maintain the family farm. These are major problems that concern all of us.

There is an increasing proportion of rural Manitoba family farms that have reduced incomes, and that concerns all of us in rural Manitoba and should concern everyone in this House. There is an increase in the proportion of seniors in the population, both due to the aging factor and also in the country as a whole, and there is an increase in the flight of younger people from rural Manitoba to the city.

I think that the most poignant expression—for my urban members who may not understand this fact, the most poignant example I can give you is from

my experience as a high school teacher, and the graduation ceremonies that were held in the high schools when I taught there. When students came to graduate after years of struggle with their studies, the parents were filled with mixed emotions, mixed emotions that may not have been apparent to those of you who have not travelled to or lived in rural Manitoba.

The mixed emotions—[interjection] Well, if they are, then the comment of course is not warranted. I make the point that in high school graduation ceremonies, it is the perfect example in rural Manitoba, at least, of mixed emotions. The joy of seeing one's child accomplish graduation from high school is a tremendously satisfying thing, but at the same time, on the faces of the parents, there is a great deal of frustration and a great deal of fear for the future, because over 70 percent—and this has gone on for many, many years, as the members opposite well know. I simply state a fact of rural life. It is an unfortunate fact that over 70 percent of rural Manitoba's high school graduates have to leave the homes of their birth and so families break up. These are major problems, as I think we would all agree, and they are major concerns that need to be addressed.

Now the problem and the reason that I raise this point is that the solutions to these problems do not lie in accepting fear but rather in facing it, and in facing it, we will deal with what causes the fear.

I am afraid, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a reluctance on the part of many in rural Manitoba in the past has been part of the problem that the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) questions me on. I think it is very important that we realize that people in rural Manitoba need to face the fears that they have about the future in order to deal with those problems that they have. [interjection]

The member for Swan River says, there is no future with this government. I would suggest that perhaps the opposite is true; there may be no future without it.

I will quote from a study that was done by Westarc Group, which is a company located in Brandon that does studies of rural Manitoba and is closely affiliated, as I understand it, with the Rural Development Institute referred to by members opposite, and I quote: The vast majority of communities have, within themselves and within their grasp, a considerable capacity to develop. It

is attitude that ultimately makes a difference. I have never seen a rural area, a cluster of rural counties, or a city in America that failed because of excessive boldness.

Excessive boldness, Madam Deputy Speaker, is something that is extremely rare in rural Manitoba and something that seems, unfortunately, extremely rare in the members opposite. I feel that willingness to accept fear and pessimism, and to naysay at every change that is faced, is something that is, unfortunately, all too common and all too prevalent in rural Manitoba.

As elected members of rural constituencies, I think it is vitally important that we show a willingness to face up to the challenges that we face, not just in a partisan sense, but in a larger sense for the benefit of our constituents and all of rural Manitoba.

The assumption seems to be on the part of members opposite, based on the comments that have been made, that rural Manitoba and its future are contingent on restricting the number of employees that businesses would be allowed to employ on a Sunday. I find that a trivial observation. It shows a real pessimism about rural Manitoba and its likelihood of success, and I do not share it.

We need to be, as leaders in this province, cognizant of the importance of assuming that rural Manitoba indeed has a future, and a good one, and that it is not going to die. It certainly will not die because people are given the freedom to shop, or businesses are given the freedom to employ. This is to trivialize a situation that is far more deserving of your attention and far more detailed and far more important. It is to trivialize some of the major problems that exist in our rural areas, and I find it unfortunate.

As a person who has just come here, just been elected, I have, I must admit, come with great hopes. I have come here with the hope that I can help my constituents and my constituency and that I can be part of a larger group that would help to do good things for all Manitobans. I have come here with a hope that there would be members here who shared my commitment to being part of that solution to the major problems that we do face. I would ask the members opposite and the members on this side to make a great effort, as opposed to looking back, to look ahead.

* (1630)

There has been recent progress made in terms of rural Manitoba in terms of Manitoba's rural progress from a political standpoint. I attended a meeting in March of 1989 in Neepawa which was a sounding board for over 300 rural Manitobans as far as what their future was. [interjection] The member for Swan River seems to miss the point that I am trying to deal with the larger issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the members have now resorted to heckling one another and I must express some relief at that.

There were two noteworthy aspects of the meeting held in Neepawa. First of all, the speaker at that meeting was Premier Gary Filmon. At that meeting, he pledged active support to rural residents. He promised to reverse the program of centralization which had been prevalent in the previous administration, and he made the commitment at that meeting to relocate provincial employees to rural Manitoba. At that meeting, he also promised to give rural residents a department of their own, the purpose of which would be to strengthen the rural economy.

Within four months of that meeting, the Premier had made good on the first promise. He renamed the Department of Municipal Affairs the Department of Rural Development. Although this agency retains its previous functions, it has other functions which I am becoming aware of and increasingly impressed with.

One year following his speech in Neepawa, the Premier also made good on his other promise, and he began the process of relocating provincial government employees to rural Manitoba, I understand, over the opposition of members opposite who now purport to be the godsend for rural Manitobans, which I find increasingly difficult to believe, unfortunately.

Observers of rural Manitoba would very likely have a special interest in the quote that follows: The vast majority of communities have within themselves or within their grasp a considerable capacity to develop. It is attitude that ultimately will make a difference.

There is a changing attitude in rural Manitoba. It is possible to cite examples of people in rural Manitoba who believe that that turnaround in attitude began with the election of this government. For years people in rural Manitoba have been praying for government to solve their problems.

Despite the efforts of this government, I believe that that is a mistaken belief, a mistaken assumption, for I believe that the solutions that will be found for the very real problems that exist in rural Manitoba do not lie in this Chamber at all. They lie within the communities where the problems exist and are most readily solved in those communities. [interjection]

The member for Wolseley or Wellington—I cannot get them right—Wellington, I am sorry. The member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett) says why am I here? I have a good understanding of why I am here. It is unfortunate that you would ask that question after your length of time in this House.

I believe very strongly, as I said before, that the solutions to the problems that my community is facing, and I believe this is very likely true of other rural Manitoba communities, lie within the communities themselves. For that reason, I will dedicate myself as a member of this Chamber to continuing to work with the people in my community and do everything in my power to assist them in their development. I hope that each of you will do the same, and I believe you will.

One of the things that I have been involved in in my own community was the establishment of a community economic development forum. This is something the Rural Development department has been putting forward as an idea for many communities, and I can tell you, from Portage la Prairie's example, it is something that we have found very beneficial. I would suggest to members from rural constituencies, it may be an idea that you would like to take forward to your communities to see if it might benefit your areas as well.

As well, I have worked very much with the chamber locally in terms of establishing committees to work on industry and agricultural issues, and we have had some success in doing that. In addition, our community has increasingly become involved in lobbying for privatized flight training. We were able to secure some jobs for our community as a result of procuring the privatized flight training contract from the Department of National Defence.

Anything positive that has come about in our community, in my constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, has come about primarily resulting from a belief in the future of our community, from a belief in the concept that we have some power and control over our destiny in our own community. So I believe that this belief and that faith in the future of our

community is the key to any success that we will encounter in the future in Portage la Prairie and area.

Because I believe very strongly in the power of optimism and work that goes with that optimism, I make the point that it is essential that members opposite share that same optimism, and because I care so much about rural Manitoba, I hope that they do. I hope they do not continue, as the member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) has done, to harp on the negative and to naysay at every opportunity. [interjection]

The intellectual member for Wolseley or Wellington, I cannot tell—Wolseley—accuses me of being a sloganeer, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps that is true, but if she is truly as intelligent as she would pretend to be, she would understand that the truth lies beneath the sloganeering, and the truth is the intent, not how it is expressed. So if I fail the member in my ability to communicate, I apologize for that, but I do not apologize for my sincerity in wanting to work for the best interests of my constituency.

In closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to comment on some recent signs of hope in rural Manitoba, some events that have happened which I think are very positive ones. There have been some active improvements in communities such as Russell. Russell, Melita and Shoal Lake, for example, are working in co-operation with one another on a project called the community improvement program. At Manitou, there is an active home-business association doing education work with other rural homemakers who need extra income but are unable to leave home for outside employment. I think these are positive developments in rural Manitoba. Although the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett) may sneer at these things, these little projects are very important to many people in the rural parts of our province and not to be pooh-poohed by anyone.

In the Minnedosa district, there is an interesting example of a rural cluster in which one town, one village and four rural municipalities co-operate for the provision of services which are jointly owned and operated. These include ambulance, planning and sports organizations and facilities.

In Deloraine and Melita, for the first time in a century, there is a public acknowledgment by community leaders that these towns will improve

their chances of survival by working together rather than by competing.

In southwestern Manitoba, a locally controlled Community Futures program has succeeded in just over three years in providing direct assistance in the formation of 53 newly incorporated firms with a combined payroll of 172.

* (1640)

These particular projects may sound small to some of my urban friends, but they are not small. They are very significant. They are significant, perhaps not just in terms of the direct benefits in the short term, but in the reflection of the change in attitude that is occurring in rural Manitoba; significant in the sense that people in rural Manitoba are coming to realize that solutions can be arrived at with effort on their part, with co-operative effort. That is something that I think I am very excited to see.

This government has assisted in some of these initiatives, and I applaud this government for that, but I think again that the positive efforts in the rural community are essential if these communities are to succeed in future. A belief in their own future is essential, and if the belief in the future of a rural community is not something that is shared by its member of the Legislative Assembly because of an overt affinity with pessimism, negativism, then I think that is a shame.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to express my feelings. It has been a real pleasure, and I look forward to doing it again real soon.

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister of Urban Affairs): Madam Deputy Speaker, when I listened to the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) yesterday afternoon speak on this bill, I took great exception to a number of the things that he had said. There were very serious allegations and imputing of motives that I think is something that should not be left unchallenged, that somebody should say something about the allegations made by the member for Thompson because I think he is entirely incorrect or somehow has some kind of a warped sense of understanding of how government works.

If I can take a moment, I would like to quote a few passages from Hansard related to the member's discussion of yesterday regarding the question of the bill before the House, and I will use for my quotation just a part of the first part. Referring to the

government, he says: they "... have listened to the lobbying from some of the major stores in Winnipeg." "Well, was it from all the businesses in Winnipeg?" he went on. "Are all the businesses in Winnipeg supportive of what has happened?" And he answers his own question, Madam Deputy Speaker, and he says, "No."

Now I am assuming that the member for Thompson has some kind of empirical evidence or a major study that says all of the businesses are not in favour of this, or some of the businesses are not in favour, or part of the businesses are not in favour or are in favour. But, no, the member for Thompson, having conducted his own survey in the two or three minutes before he stood up to speak in this House, says, no, they are not in favour of this particular bill.

He then goes on. He says: "Once again, the pressure is primarily from the large businesses that were not able to open on Sunday, so I say, department stores and large grocery stores. So here we have a lobby."

Those, Madam Deputy Speaker, are the words of the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton). But what does he base that on? Is this his view of how government works? Is that how the NDP worked? Only when they have a lobby do they do something? Only when some specific groups come forward do they do something? Does it require a particular group to come forward in order to lobby that particular caucus in order to have something that may be, it just may be that people might want. You know, those people who are the taxpayers out there, just maybe they want something like that. Maybe they would like that, but I do not think the member for Thompson could understand that.

I would like to go on, Madam Deputy Speaker, with a few more quotes from his speech. I go on and it says: "It is about the cynical way in which this bill has been introduced." Now, he talked about cynicism in his speech.

He goes on: "I cannot think of anything more cynical than introducing a bill in what is a limited three-week session, and this is something we have moved increasingly to is a fall and a winter sitting, but we had an agreement that said this sitting will go no longer than four weeks, and the government chose to have a sitting of three weeks. So they introduce a bill which is a dramatic change from the past, breaks not only from the kind of legislation we have that may have been of support or opposed by

different sides, but breaks from a consensus from all parties in the House.

"They introduce it," he goes on, "knowing full well that the throne speech takes eight days worth of debate. The end result is, how many days of debate do we end up having in this House on this bill? Maximum in this sitting, let alone the fact that we have other bills that are before us? Seven days." is his response.

Now, "Seven days," he goes on and says, "is that not interesting? Now, what is likely to happen? Well, we are adjourning on the 16th. That is by the government's decision but based on an original agreement. We are going to be back sometime in March. The final date has not been finalized" as of the date of the speech. "So given the limited amount of time available, surprise, surprise, Mr. Acting Speaker, it might appear that this bill was introduced with the full knowledge that it certainly was not going to pass through second reading in this part of the sitting."

Madam Deputy Speaker, he talked about cynicism and he talked about the cynical way in which he thought the government introduced this bill.

He went on and he said: "Talk about cynical politics.

"Introduce a bill that has been brought in unilaterally, no support from other sides of the House, and then have it come in retroactive no matter when it is passed. Mr. Acting Speaker, it sounds awfully Machiavellian to me, and I would say when I look across the way, no one is going to be fooled about the strategy of this government on this bill. They knew this right from the start."

Madam Deputy Speaker, in those words that the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) put on the record yesterday during his debate on this matter, I wondered, sitting here listening to that debate, whether the cynicism is not vested on this side of the House but perhaps it is vested over there in the caucus of the official opposition. I wondered about that because in sitting and listening to the member for Thompson I thought, it is very strange that all of the members—[interjection] I sat here and I wondered about that, because each time one of the members popped up from the other side of the House they were all on the same theme. They all talked about being opposed to this bill, opposed to the principles of Sunday shopping, opposed to

having people work on Sunday, and they quoted all kinds of statistical information and thoughts and so on, as is their right to do in this House. They are perfectly entitled to their opinion, but it seemed awfully strange to me when the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) talked about alleged cynicism on this side of the House, but just maybe it was resident over there, not here. Just maybe Bernie Christophe made a phone call to the caucus of the NDP. Just maybe Susan Hart-Kulbaba came down and had a little visit with the members of the NDP.

Maybe their chain was yanked by the labour movement in this province. Maybe the cynicism is the fact that they kowtow to the labour movement in this province on a regular basis. Well, Hudson, when he was with the Federation of Labour, used to sit in on their caucus meetings, Madam Deputy Speaker, to provide his counsel to the members of the NDP because that is their primary source of support, is the labour movement. They provide the funding, they provide the workers, they provide the background, they provide the facilitation for their election campaigns and a wide variety of other activities that the NDP carry out.

So maybe the cynicism is not on this side of the House, as the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) alleges, but maybe it is over there. Maybe they did get that phone call from the president of the United Food and Commercial Workers union who has long opposed this issue, has been opposed to Sunday shopping and having people work on Sunday for many, many years, and just maybe that little phone call occurred or that visit occurred, and maybe the members across the way had a heart-to-heart chat with their supporters from the Federation of Labour—no pun intended with respect to the heart-to-heart chat at all. But the fact of the matter is, maybe they have the cynicism as it relates to this particular issue and not this government.

* (1650)

The Leader of the Liberal Party (Mrs. Carstairs) said it extremely well yesterday in her speech, which I also had the opportunity to listen to yesterday afternoon. She said it quite right. This is not about Sunday shopping. We have had Sunday shopping for a long, long time in Manitoba.

We have had Sunday shopping before this bill was ever even thought about. We had Canadian Tire stores open. We had Beaver Lumber stores

open. We have had Safeway stores open. Every fast food restaurant, in the city certainly, and in most places in rural Manitoba, is open. We have had a wide variety of activities open in Manitoba on Sunday for a long, long time, so people have had an opportunity to do whatever they wished on a Sunday afternoon.

I go back to a few years ago—a few more years than I might like to admit to—but nonetheless, when I was growing up in the 1950s, I well remember exactly what kind of activity was available on Sunday afternoon. Nothing. In the 1950s, we would go to church on Sunday morning with my family.

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

Mr. Acting Speaker, I would ask you to call the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) to order. I am trying to make a speech, put my points of view across, having been spurred on by the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), and because the member was not here, I should perhaps repeat some of that for his edification.

Point of Order

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Acting Speaker, I believe the member for Charleswood, the minister, is filibustering his own bill. I cannot understand this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Reimer): I believe there is not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Acting Speaker, perhaps I should read just a morsel of the member for Thompson's (Mr. Ashton) speech for the edification of his Leader, because he talked about cynicism and accused this side of the House of being cynical in introducing this bill. I suggested that perhaps it was not this side of the House that was cynical, but it was that side. It was that side because the Leader of the Opposition got the phone call from perhaps Bernie Christophe, who said: We have got to fight this bill. You will do what I say. I think that is the cynical side, the fact that the UFCW decided to yank the chain of the New Democrats and to say, you will now not support this bill. You will fight it tooth and nail because, as your principal supporters, you will have to do that.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to, as I was saying before I was rudely interrupted by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer), that when I was growing up

as a young boy in the 1950s, what was open on Sunday? Nothing. Church was open on Sunday and the Parkview drugstore, because that was the one that we used to go to after church as a treat. My mom and dad would take our family to that drugstore as a treat, and there were very few places open or any kinds of activities open on Sunday at any time. As the years progressed, we had—all of a sudden you could go to movies on Sunday afternoon. That was a major, major issue to allow movies on Sunday afternoon. It was terrible. The member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) is quickly turning around his collar, because it was his dad that fought having movies on Sunday afternoon. Again, things progressed.

Then we had football games on Sunday afternoon, Mr. Acting Speaker, and then it was hockey games. Then restaurants were open. We have had all kinds of changes that have taken place over the last 20 or 30 years where society has moved from a structure of the 1950s where nothing was open and no activities were permitted to where a wide variety of activities—in 1982, I believe it was—sorry, 1977, I believe it was—was when they first brought in this question of grocery stores and other kinds of stores being open on Sunday afternoon to provide a convenience to people for shopping on Sunday. That was further refined in '84, '85, somewhere in that vicinity, and I stand to be corrected on the date, but it was somewhere in the mid-'80s to restrict the number of employees available to be working in any particular store to four.

An Honourable Member: It was 1987.

Mr. Ernst: '87, I am sorry. I said, Mr. Acting Speaker, that I would stand to be corrected on the exact date, and I accept the Leader of the Opposition's (Mr. Doer) statement that 1987 was the date.

Since 1987 we have had the ability to have stores open with four employees, and I have gone on a Sunday afternoon to a Safeway store at the end of my street. I have gone there because my wife has decided that she needs a few extra things for the Sunday dinner that she is making and had not remembered them or whatever, and so I have gone there and I have stood in that store with a handful of items for up to 45 minutes. Now, those people standing in line with me for that 45-minute wait are my constituents, and I had a very interesting time talking to them, because almost to a one of them they have talked about the fact that they wanted the store open on a reasonable basis so that they could

do reasonable shopping on Sunday afternoon. I took all kinds of flak from my own constituents for the fact that they had to wait in line for 45 minutes.

(Mrs. Louise Dacquay, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

Madam Deputy Speaker, I happened to drive some weeks ago—before the bill was introduced and before the question of Sunday shopping in this forum as outlined in Bill 4 was being brought forward—by the Canadian Tire store and right next to that on west Portage Avenue is the Beaver Lumber store, and interestingly enough those stores were open. If we are talking about the corner grocery store or the drug store, or maybe the movie theatre, or the McDonald's restaurant is one matter, but when you start having stores like Beaver Lumber, and that is the biggest Beaver Lumber store in Winnipeg, I believe, and the Canadian Tire store next to it open on Sunday providing full services to their clientele, then who are we really kidding in terms of Sunday shopping?

Who are we really kidding and who are we penalizing? The fact of the matter is, who are we really kidding when you have stores like Safeway, Beaver Lumber, Canadian Tire and a number of others open on a Sunday regardless of whether Bill 4 is introduced into the House or not? Are we really kidding anyone when we say we do not have Sunday shopping? I, Madam Deputy Speaker, think not. The fact of the matter is we have had it for some considerable period of time.

The bill that is introduced here is introduced as a trial period. This is not a compulsory bill. This does not force the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) to go Sunday shopping. It does not force him to take his family out to Sunday shop. It does not force any citizen in Winnipeg to go shopping on a Sunday afternoon. It does not force anyone. The market forces in play in this province will determine over the next four or five months whether or not Sunday shopping will be viable. It will determine not just for the consuming public, but it will also decide for the businesses that operate in this city and in this province as to whether or not they are going to find Sunday an attractive day to do business. Nobody is forcing any business to open on a Sunday by virtue of this bill.

I happened to be, on Saturday evening, at an event, Madam Deputy Speaker, where the owner of a particular store was sitting at the same table as I

was at a banquet and he indicated to me at that time he was not opening on Sunday, that Sunday to him was his day with his family and he was not going to open. That is his choice. This bill allows him that choice. It allows him to say, I do not have to open on Sunday if I do not want to.

I spoke today at noon to the Professional Property Managers Association and they raised the—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Ernst) will have 21 minutes remaining.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

* (1700)

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., it is time for Private Members' Business.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 200—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Madam Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), that Bill 200, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfant et à la famille, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Barrett: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to be able to get up and support this Child and Family Services Amendment Act. I am also very pleased that the luck of the draw, as it were, when private members' bills were chosen prior to the opening of this session, allowed this bill to come before the House early in this session. As a matter of fact, it may very well be that the bill comes before this House prior to the hiring of the Children's Advocate under the government's legislation as it was passed last June.

I would hope it does, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I would hope that the government very seriously considers supporting this private member's bill and implementing the changes to The Child and Family Services Act that it recommends.

Basically, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act that I am speaking to and proposing this afternoon does nothing more than have the new

office of the Children's Advocate report directly to the Legislative Assembly instead of to the Minister of Family Services, as is currently the case.

We had extensive public hearings in the spring on this issue. We had extensive debate and discussion in the House on this issue. Unfortunately, the government chose not to listen to virtually unanimous support for the Children's Advocate reporting to the Legislative Assembly instead of the Minister of Family Services.

Not only was there unanimous support from both opposition parties, there was unanimous support on behalf of a range of children's organizations and children's service providers who appeared before the public hearings, Madam Deputy Speaker. They included individuals who work with agencies that are under The Family Services Act, who are required to provide services under that act and who are saying the best interest of not only the children of Manitoba but the service providers for the children of Manitoba would be served by having the office of the Children's Advocate report directly to the Legislative Assembly instead of to the Minister of Family Services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as the House well knows, it is not just current service providers and current members of the Legislature who are supporting this Children's Advocate reporting mechanism, it is at least four major reports that have been handed to governments over the last decade, that for a variety of reasons unanimously recommend an independent Children's Advocate reporting to the Legislative Assembly.

Judge Kimelman's report, the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry report, the Suche report, and also the Reid-Sigurdson Report on child abuse, and most recently Judge Giesbrecht's report on the unfortunate happenings involving one of the native child and family service agencies in our province—from a variety of perspectives, these reports all recommended an independent Children's Advocate. It is a very simple mechanism to implement. There is nothing complicated about it. The legislation to put this into place is already in force when it comes to the Ombudsman for the Province of Manitoba.

The legislation that I have introduced today is very simple and will require virtually no implementation other than passage by the government. The government talks extensively about its consulting

process, how it consults various groups about virtually everything that comes before the government for action. Again, as we have said so often in this House, it appears that the consultation process is a form of avoidance. It allows the government to avoid taking action. However, in this particular case, we on this side of the House wish that the government had consulted, had listened to all of the people and the individuals and the agencies and the groups that for a decade have been calling for an independent Children's Advocate.

In this one case, it would have been really a very positive thing for them to have actually listened to the consultation that was provided to them. But, no, they chose not to. They chose not to take a leadership in this role in this activity. They chose instead to follow the Children's Advocate mechanisms that are in place in the other two provinces of this country, Ontario and Alberta. That is virtually the only justification that this government has been able to put forward in support of its proposal, its legislation, having the Children's Advocate report to the minister, not to the House as a whole.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is also important at this point that we are discussing this issue, because since the time that the bill establishing the Children's Advocate was before this House last June, both Children's Advocates in Alberta and Ontario have publicly stated that they wished their job was outside the political arena and that their reporting mechanism was not to the minister, but to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

We have an opportunity today for the government to say, we do listen, we have consulted, we now agree with every one in this province and throughout the country that an office of the Children's Advocate, which is an incredibly important position, be as independent and to be perceived as independent as possible. The only way that this can take place is for that advocate to report directly to the Legislative Assembly as opposed to the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Gilleshammer).

One example of a commission that reports directly to the Legislature that has had a very positive effect on the ability of governments in Manitoba to govern fairly and effectively and has had a positive impact on the citizens of Manitoba being able to vote in a fair and open and proportional

manner, is the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I believe Manitoba is the only province in Canada which has an electoral boundaries commission that reports to the Legislative Assembly as a whole, that does not report through the political process.

* (1710)

Where other provinces have constituency boundaries that are arguably open to the charge of gerrymandering, in Manitoba we have been very fortunate in having a system such as the Electoral Boundaries Commission, which is separate from the political arena, thereby allowing it to listen to the citizens of Manitoba, to listen to the various political perspectives on how people and parties would like to have the boundaries drawn. Then, in its own independent fashion, it draws those boundaries in a very fair and equitable manner.

The people of Manitoba can be very proud of that process. Madam Deputy Speaker, we have used this as an example of how we feel the Children's Advocate process should operate in this province. If our electoral boundaries are important enough to justify a nonpartisan, extra-political process to implement them, are not the children of this province equally or even more important? The services, their safety, their security, their ability to live safe, quality lives is at least as important as it is to have nonpartisan electoral boundaries drawn.

The only possible argument that we on this side of the House can see for the government's intransigence in this regard, their total lack of willingness to listen to every voice that has been raised for the last 10 years on this issue, is that it is a way that this government perceives of protecting the political process. We have asked the minister this, and he has denied it. He has not come up with a single positive, constructive argument for the Children's Advocate reporting to him or whoever the minister is, rather than to the Legislative Assembly as a whole.

We can only infer from that lack of any positive, constructive argument that the minister and the government that he represents are concerned more for their own political health than they are for the health and well-being of the children of Manitoba.

However, it would be a very simple thing for this government to change that perspective that is pervasive throughout this province among people who provide services to children, among people who care about children, among people who are

concerned that the programs and services that children access, whether it is through the Department of Family Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice, are as high a quality as possible.

If the government would say, we support this legislation, we will hire a Children's Advocate on the basis that they will report to the Legislature and not to the Minister of Family Services, then I would be more than happy to stand in my place and congratulate the government on their leadership, on their forward thinking, on their willingness to make a change.

We have not seen this government's ability or willingness to change anything that they do, anyway of looking at things for the past four and a half years.

I am urging the government in this context to please reconsider their ill-conceived, ill-thought-out legislation on the Children's Advocate to support the legislation that I have tabled this afternoon and vote with us, so that the children of Manitoba can truly have the best quality care that the people of Manitoba can provide. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Harold Gillehammer (Minister of Family Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 203—The Health Care Records Act

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Lels (St. Johns): I move, seconded by the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 203, The Health Care Records Act; Loi sur les dossiers médicaux, be now read a second time and referred to the committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Wasylycia-Lels: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity before this session comes to an end to put on record, once again, the rationale, the reasons behind this bill ensuring health care consumer access to medical records.

I want to begin by reminding members in this House that this Bill 203 is an exact replication of Bill 36, which I introduced on behalf of our caucus in the last legislative session. That bill was on our agenda

for a number of months. It was addressed by members of the official opposition on a number of occasions. It failed to receive any attention from the Liberal caucus or the government members.

I want to begin my remarks by reminding members also about the origins of this bill since there seems to have been some confusion about this bill, particularly, coming from the Liberal members in this Chamber. I want to, again, tell members that this bill before us is the result of several years of consultation that began in 1988, under a former NDP Health critic, an honourable member of this House, Jay Cowan, who served this province well through many years in his role as member of the Legislative Assembly, as a minister of the Crown, and most recently, as critic for the New Democratic Party on matters pertaining to health.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in 1988, that member began a process that has been very valuable for this Chamber and has served the people of Manitoba well. Jay Cowan spent months and months and months discussing the whole issue of access to health care records, confidentiality of health care records with members of the entire health care community, including health care consumers, health care professionals, facilities, doctors, unions, ordinary Manitobans. It was a result of that consultation process that this bill is here today, once again, in exactly the same form as it was before this Chamber in the last session.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know from the introduction at first reading that the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) was under some illusion that, in fact, this bill was a copycat version of the Liberal bill. Well, I want the record to clearly show that although the Liberals did put on the Order Paper the name of a similar type of legislation, at no time did we see any detailed matter, any detailed copy on this bill. At no time was a bill tabled. At no time did any member of the Liberal Party choose to stand and put their comments on the record when Bill 36 was before this Chamber.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will give credit to the Liberals for listening to the voices of health care consumers and professionals who have called for this kind of legislation and putting at least the title on our legislative agenda, but let the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and others know where the origins of this bill come from and who deserves the credit.

I am not standing here to take credit, and my colleagues in the New Democratic Party are not standing here to take credit. The people who deserve credit for this pioneering legislation begin with Jay Cowan who had the foresight to work on this matter, but more importantly, the credit for this legislation goes to the individuals in the health care consumer organizations and the professional associations who took the time and the energy and the resources to put their suggestions forward, to make their constructive suggestions and to provide the framework for this legislation.

* (1720)

Most importantly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to single out the Health Care Consumer Rights Committee of the Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties who did an enormous amount of work and study and research on this particular matter. They worked with us very carefully, particularly with Jay Cowan over a two-year period, and it resulted in a draft bill that then became finalized and takes the form today of No. 203.

Madam Deputy Speaker, because it was the wishes of that particular organization to give government an opportunity to first act to try to find some agreement between all three parties, we heard their wishes and accepted their wishes that this matter first be presented to the government of the day and to the two opposition parties.

I want to tell members in this House that for several months leading up to November 4, 1991, for several months, that organization tried repeatedly to get a meeting with the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard). Calls were placed, letters were written, constant communication efforts were made to no avail. Not a single call was returned, not even a single letter of acknowledgment was sent back to this association. At no time did the Minister of Health have time, even for a few minutes, to meet with this association to discuss what is fast becoming a major policy issue in the health care field across this country, that being confidentiality of records and consumer access to health care records.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that being the case, after several months of well-intentioned efforts to no avail, the Health Care Consumer Rights Committee of the Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties then took this matter to the public by way of a press conference, by way of meetings with the two

opposition parties, and presented their brief, presented their request, presented their concerns in November of 1991. Since it became clear at that moment that this government was not prepared to even consider these initiatives, these proposals, it was at that point that they requested the New Democratic Party to carry forward this legislation as a private member's bill into this Chamber. Having respected their wishes to wait for a chance to give government a chance to respond and then to proceed, we have done just that.

It is very interesting that this government is now beginning to wake up to the fact that this is a major issue that has to be addressed through legislation. The alarm clock was the Supreme Court decision of June 11, 1992. That Supreme Court decision ruled that medical records belong to physicians but that doctors must give patients full access to their files. The decision included the following comments: The patient is entitled upon request to inspect and copy all information in the patient's medical file which the physician considered in administering advice or treatment.

I could quote further, Madam Deputy Speaker, however, I would choose to quote what that court decision said in detail from a letter of communication from the Minister of Health's (Mr. Orchard) own department, dated September 1, 1992, a letter that was signed by a legislative analyst in the Department of Health, particularly in the Evaluation and Audit Secretariat, and went to all executive directors, administrators, Manitoba hospitals, personal care homes and other health facilities.

I quote from that letter: On June 11, 1992, the Supreme Court of Canada released its decision in a case regarding access by patients to their medical records. The court held:

1) That ownership of a medical record of a patient belongs to the facility or health care provider, and the patient is not entitled to the records themselves.

2) That the patient is entitled upon request to inspect and copy all information in his or her medical file which was considered in administering advice or treatment.

3) That the patient be charged a legitimate fee for the preparation and reproduction of the information.

4) That the right of access is limited to the information obtained and providing diagnosis, advice and/or treatment and does not extend to the

information arising outside the doctor-patient relationship.

5) That if a doctor or other health care provider reasonably believes that it is not in the patient's best interest to inspect the medical records, the patient may be denied access to the information.

6) That if a request is refused, the patient has the right to apply to the courts to determine if the refusal is reasonable.

Madam Deputy Speaker, from the Minister of Health's (Mr. Orchard) own words, or his department's own words, is the summary of the Supreme Court decision of June 1992, and in essence is the basis, is the nuts and bolts of the legislation before members today, No. 203, entitled The Health Care Records Act. Interestingly, because of that Supreme Court decision, the government felt it was absolutely necessary to start rethinking their plans and strategies in this area.

In that same letter that went to all health care facilities in Manitoba, the minister through his staff requests that these individuals provide their feedback to the ministry on whether or not legislation is necessary. I quote from that letter again, Madam Deputy Speaker: There is no legislation in Manitoba requiring hospitals, personal care homes, other health facilities or health care providers to provide patients access to their medical records. In order to assess whether such legislation is necessary, I would appreciate your responding to the questions on the enclosed survey sheet and returning it to me on or before September 30, 1992.

So it is clear, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Supreme Court decision of June 1991, has clearly been an alarm clock for this government and the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard), and they realize now that something has to be done.

I would ask the government to seriously consider a couple of suggestions today. Number one, rather than reinvent the wheel, rather than go through a major consultative process that has already been completed, would the Minister of Health consider as a framework the legislation before the Chamber today?

I am not suggesting this legislation is perfect. I know that there are some concerns with it because I have talked to people about it. I have talked to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Manitoba Association for Health Care Records, and some of the professional associations and other

individuals, and I know there are concerns, and I know that this bill probably needs amendment, but I am suggesting that this matter is something that has to be treated urgently, and here is a basis for the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) to handle this very urgent and serious matter.

I would also make the request today that since this is such a major public policy issue, that the Minister of Health stand up in the House today and finally put on record his comments, his government's policies regarding this issue. This issue is too important for us to go through now two sessions that this bill has been before this Chamber without hearing from the government and from the third party opposition.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not think it is too unreasonable to request that finally we hear from the government of the day about their plans regarding this policy area and about how they intend to move in this regard and what problems they have with the legislation that we have proposed.

* (1730)

Thirdly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would ask the minister to provide to this Chamber the results of his survey to all hospitals and facilities in this province regarding their feelings about the necessity of legislation which had to have been turned over to him and to his department before September 30 of this year. Several months have passed since that deadline, and I think it is only fair, in the spirit of open government that the minister earlier today in Question Period referred to, that he table the results of that survey so we could also have the benefit of that knowledge and information.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is clear that as we move into big changes in health care, as we consider very seriously health care reform, that we cannot waste a moment in dealing with the question of consumer involvement in health care, of self-help models, of consumers taking more responsibility for their health care.

The one way to encourage that, to ensure it, to move forward in that direction, is to give consumers the right, the absolute fundamental right of access to their own health care records. Nothing is more degrading, more humiliating than for an individual to be told their own records, records about their own health, their physical and mental well-being, are not open to them, are not available to them, but are the property of the physician or the facility involved.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we urge members today to begin with that fundamental human right, address that matter through legislation guaranteeing the right of access, guaranteeing confidentiality of records, and move constructively and seriously on a health care reform agenda that includes self-help and self-empowerment. Thank you.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I move, Madam Deputy Speaker, seconded by the honourable member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 205—The Ombudsman Amendment Act

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): I move, seconded by the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), that Bill 205, The Ombudsman Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: I rise, I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, not only with the support of members on this side of the House but all members of the House to introduce, to discuss again this significant amendment that could go a long way toward reforming the education system, something the members opposite talk about incessantly and have talked about incessantly every since my time in this Chamber, but failed to do.

This amendment, the amendment to The Ombudsman Amendment Act, this simple amendment could go a long way toward addressing some of the concerns that had been expressed by literally thousands of people throughout the province and could go a long way toward reforming our education system—again, something that members opposite talk about but fail to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I suppose that most people in this province would probably be very surprised to find out that in fact the office of the Ombudsman does not have the jurisdiction to investigate matters of concern raised by the public at the school board level.

School trustees are elected officials, and they are not subject to The Ombudsman Act. Hence, we have situations arising constantly whereby difficulties arise in the education system. The

parent generally or the person responsible for the child in the system approaches the minister. The minister, whoever that minister may be, attempts to resolve the issue, cannot resolve it because of jurisdictional questions or some other reason and says, it is the school board's responsibility. The parent approaches the school board, the school board cannot resolve it or will not resolve it, and the matter goes into limbo.

I have had dozens of queries, dozens of requests from individuals who have asked us to intercede and who have asked the minister to intercede. The minister has written back almost a form letter indicating, that is the jurisdiction of the school board, and I will not do anything. Uncharitably, one could say, the minister is hiding behind that, notwithstanding the fact, and I have made this point very clear on constant occasions in this Chamber, that the minister is responsible constitutionally for the provision of education in this province and that the power that it has given to the elected school trustees is delegated power, delegated by the responsible person, that is, the Minister of Education (Mrs. Vodrey) but, notwithstanding that, for better or for worse, the matter remains in limbo and not resolved.

This simple amendment, Madam Deputy Speaker, would go a long way toward giving parents a voice, something members opposite talked about in the throne speech but as usual failed to do anything about. They talk about providing parents with an input into the education system, and this simple amendment would do something about it, but they fail to do it.

We hear, unfortunately, rhetoric, expressions of concern from members opposite concerning education but no action and no resolve to accomplish anything. That is in fact what would happen. That is why I am hopeful that members opposite will see the light, will be prepared to pass this amendment. I know it is unusual for members opposite, for the government members, to agree to pass bills of this kind, but it is a very simple way of allowing parents and children to have input into the education system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am glad that the Minister of Education (Mrs. Vodrey) is listening attentively to these comments, because I can correct some of the minister's statements regarding this particular amendment that she made publicly when I initially had the occasion to announce this

particular amendment. When we announced the fact that we would be bringing forward this amendment, the minister said, oh, all of the people, special needs and the like, have the right of access of appeal, they have a right to question decisions. You know what, that is in fact correct but only to a point.

At the point where the school board cannot resolve the problem, the minister throws up her hands, and the previous minister threw up his hands and said, oh, it is not my jurisdiction even though we have the constitutional right to do it. It is not my jurisdiction; and therefore, I am not going to do anything about it.

I asked in Estimates, about three sets of Estimates ago, of the previous minister how the appeal mechanism for example was working for special needs children. He said, it is working well. And I said, well, why is it working well? He said, well, because no one has appealed. Well, I have news for the minister, not many people may appeal because they are unaware that the appeal mechanism is in place.

At least the new minister, the minister who has been in place for a year, acknowledged that there was an appeal mechanism in place, but she missed the boat in not recognizing the fact that if the school board cannot resolve it there is no recourse left to the parent or the child. Consequently, we have situations where parents are in limbo, where students are in limbo and matters are not resolved.

I think members of this Chamber would be surprised to find out that of the approximately 700 or so complaints made to the Office of the Ombudsman last year, literally only three or four were the Department of Education and Training. Now some might assume, well, this is because things are going so well in Education and Training.

That may be part of the reason, but the other part of the reason is the fact that so much of what happens in Education and Training, the Ombudsman has no jurisdiction over and cannot enter into. The Ombudsman does an investigation and says back to the recipient, I cannot do anything because I have no jurisdiction to extend my investigation to school boards, and consequently, the public does not have recourse to it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I corresponded with many individuals I had talked to, who have had trouble with the education system and who have had

trouble with the minister's office in resolving these issues, and I can say almost to a person, they came back and said, yes, if we had a recourse to the Office of the Ombudsman, we would be pleased. It would be an effective means. It would effectively allow us a third-party arbitrator or a third-party adjudicator who could review the decisions that were made. It seemed to me that, without exception, the individuals that I had occasion to discuss this with, all of whom have had difficulty with the system, were in favour of such an amendment. In fact, I even got a letter back in front of me from one of them indicating that, quote, this would be good idea as would anything that would require accountability, end of quote.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is very frustrating in this process to hear the latest initiatives of the government. Their latest initiatives now that they hear the public is calling for reform of the school system. It is very hard not to be cynical, because we have heard those statements before but we see very little by way of action. The minister in her Speech from the Throne gave us a description of all of the people she had talked to, but she did not give us any scintilla, any single indication of any kind of direction or initiative taken by the government, not a single suggestion for anything positive.

* (1740)

We are saying, by virtue of this amendment, Madam Deputy Speaker, in a very simple amendment, you could very effectively introduce a voice for parents and a voice for children and a voice for all of those affected in the education system. It is a simple and effective way of introducing some reform and some change in our education system.

We are very conscious, Madam Deputy Speaker, in all of our suggestions, in all of our recommendations, that matters of finance be addressed. In this regard, there is no question that the office of the Ombudsman would probably require additional assistance because of the requirement to investigate these matters, but frankly, for some of the money that has gone into the deputy minister's office or some of the money that has gone to some of the appointments in the department, I think that this money could be better spent in the office of the Ombudsman investigating real complaints and dealing with real concerns.

So the net effect on the province's fiscal situation would be, in fact, positive. We would have more

resolution of problems, rather than having to hire consultants or rather than having to utilize the time or the staff in the deputy minister's office to chase down all of these problems in the aftermath of the problem occurring, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would be quite surprised and quite interested to hear any comments from members opposite as to why they would not be interested in this very progressive, I believe, and very simple amendment which would go a long way toward assisting in education reform in the province of Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There are a variety of problems that have come to the fore recently that could be addressed by the Ombudsman, not only in a direct sense of dealing with specific problems, such as the inability or unwillingness of a school to accommodate an individual or individuals or the inflexibility of programs, or matters of that kind, but would also afford us an opportunity for the Ombudsman to, on occasion, initiate and do investigations at that level of particular problems.

That would provide the Minister of Education (Mrs. Vodrey) and the whole community with another resource, an independent third party that could assess some of the difficulties that are occurring in our education system. That is another reason why this amendment would make not only good sense, but would help improve the quality of education in our society and in the province.

Again, I just reiterate the fact that we always hear the word accountability, and we hear the word reform. We hear all of these catch words, these well-spun, public-relations words that are somehow designed to take our minds off the real issues. We hear these constantly.

So I listened with great attentiveness to the comments of the minister on the throne speech, and I listened with great attentiveness to the throne speech as to what those words meant. No definition, Madam Deputy Speaker, no initiatives.

This amendment would allow us to introduce very effectively, with very little difficulty, some positive change in the education system. It would allow for a voice for parents, something members opposite have talked about but have done very little about. I am still waiting.

I mean, I would be pleased if, in these days that we sat in this Chamber, we would have heard a positive initiative in terms of education reform, in

terms of input for parents and children that the members talked about in the throne speech, but we have had nothing, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we are going to be adjourning this portion of the session tomorrow, and we have heard nothing from members opposite, be it from the public education system or be it in post-secondary education and training. The labour market training is in disarray in this province. The public school system is requiring some significant leadership from the department. We do not have it. So we are offering this to members opposite as an opportunity. It is not a question of getting credit for this. They could very effectively—I would be happy, let them co-opt us on this. Let them announce it. Let them initiate it.

They have had now for 14 months a study of The Public Schools Act, and they are going to go public again, I am sure, with a press conference some time in January or perhaps later in this month to announce their new public forum for education reform, being the second of the two public forums for education reform, Madam Deputy Speaker. But this would afford them an opportunity to do something effectively, quickly, at virtually a relatively low cost, virtually no cost, and would provide a voice to children and provide a voice to parents, and do a little bit about improving the quality of education in the province of Manitoba.

It would do something about the equitable situation, something members opposite do not talk about enough, I am afraid, and that is the lack of access and equity that is becoming an increasing problem in our education system. It is something

the member for Arthur (Mr. Downey) is now aware of since the public meeting that occurred last week, and that equity and access for all students across the province, whether they live in Winnipeg, whether they live in rural Manitoba, whether they live in northern Manitoba—the words we do not hear the minister talking about.

We do not hear the minister talking about that. We do hear the buzzwords about accountability and about reform, but with no flesh and no substance to it. I would like to see—this would be a quick and effective means of providing that kind of reform to the system, and I urge all members of the House to speedily pass this particular bill. Thank you.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Niakwa): Madam Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Rose), that debate be now adjourned.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Niakwa, seconded by the honourable member for Turtle Mountain, that debate be now adjourned.

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister of Urban Affairs): I think if you canvassed the House you might find the will to call it six o'clock.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it six o'clock? Agreed.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

Tuesday, December 15, 1992

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