



Second Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
(Hansard)**

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



Vol. XLVI No. 82 - 1:30 p.m., Monday, November 18, 1996

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Members, Constituencies and Political Affiliation

Name	Constituency	Party
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert, Hon.	Steinbach	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
ERNST, Jim, Hon.	Charleswood	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David	Riel	P.C.
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupert Island	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, November 18, 1996

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Clerk (William Remnant): It is my duty to inform the House that Madam Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

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

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Guaranteed Annual Income

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Maureen Morrison, Joanna Mason, Gabriela Rodrigues and others requesting that the Legislative Assembly urge the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) to consider repealing Bill 36 and replacing it with improved legislation which provides a guaranteed annual income that allows people to have adequate food, clothing, housing, child care and health care and that this annual income increases as prices increase and that this new legislation provides for the creation of real jobs with the goal of creating full employment so that individuals on social assistance can find safe, meaningful work of their own choosing that allows them to meet their needs and the needs of their families and that this new legislation provides adequate supports so that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate assistance in finding meaningful work.

Manitoba Telephone System

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Yvette Valcourt, Marie Tetrault, Huguette Sabovrin and others requesting that the Premier (Mr. Filmon) withdraw Bill 67 and not sell the Manitoba Telephone System to private interests.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Marion Spitzke,

Henry Mulhbach, Mary Sigurdson and others requesting the Premier withdraw Bill 67 and not sell the Manitoba Telephone System to private interests.

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Glen Smith, Lucille Walker, and Ann Rooks requesting that the Premier withdraw Bill 67 and not sell the Manitoba Telephone System.

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): I beg to present the petition of Annie Stewart, Jean Thomson and Byron Soak requesting that the Premier not sell the Manitoba Telephone System.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Guaranteed Annual Income

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford), and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes. The Clerk will read.

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

THAT in 1976 Canada signed the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recognized the right of everyone to make a living by work which is freely chosen, recognized the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, recognized the right of everyone to enjoy a high standard of physical and mental health, and provided for the widest possible protection and assistance to the family; and

THAT poor children and adults in Canada continue to die at a higher rate and earlier age than people with adequate incomes; and

THAT Bill 36, The Social Allowances Amendment Act, will create even greater poverty in Manitoba by eliminating government responsibility to ensure that everyone who lacks adequate food, clothing, housing and health care has these needs met; and

THAT the bill will punish people by cutting them off from social assistance or reducing their benefits if they fail to meet employment expectations; and

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Family Services to consider repealing Bill 36 and replacing it with improved legislation which provides for a guaranteed annual income that allows people to have adequate food, clothing, housing, child care and health care and that this annual income increases as prices increase and that this new legislation provides for the creation of real jobs with the goal of creating full employment so that individuals on social assistance can find safe, meaningful work of their own choosing that allows them to meet their needs and the needs of their families and that this new legislation provides adequate supports so that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate assistance in finding meaningful work.

* (1335)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes. The Clerk will read.

Madam Deputy Clerk (Bev Bosiak): The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT in 1976 Canada signed the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recognized the right of everyone to make a living by work which is freely chosen, recognized the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, recognized the right of everyone to enjoy a high standard of physical and

mental health, and provided for the widest possible protection and assistance to the family; and

THAT poor children and adults in Canada continue to die at a higher rate and earlier age than people with adequate incomes; and

THAT Bill 36, The Social Allowances Amendment Act, will create even greater poverty in Manitoba by eliminating government responsibility to ensure that everyone who lacks adequate food, clothing, housing and health care has these needs met; and

THAT the bill will punish people by cutting them off from social assistance or reducing their benefits if they fail to meet employment expectations; and

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Family Services to consider repealing Bill 36 and replacing it with improved legislation which provides for a guaranteed annual income that allows people to have adequate food, clothing, housing, child care and health care and that this annual income increases as prices increase and that this new legislation provides for the creation of real jobs with the goal of creating full employment so that individuals on social assistance can find safe, meaningful work of their own choosing that allows them to meet their needs and the needs of their families and that this new legislation also provides adequate supports so that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate assistance in finding meaningful work.

Manitoba Telephone System

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar). It complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes. The Clerk will read.

* (1340)

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

THAT the Manitoba Telephone System has served this province well for over 80 years providing province-wide service, some of the lowest local rates in North America and thousands of jobs and keeping profits in Manitoba; and

THAT MTS contributes \$150 million annually to the Manitoba economy and is a major sponsor of community events throughout the province; and

THAT MTS, with nearly 4,000 employees including more than 1,000 in rural and northern Manitoba, is one of Manitoba's largest firms, headquartered in Manitoba and is committed to Manitoba; and

THAT the provincial government has no mandate to sell MTS and said before and during the 1995 election that MTS was not for sale.

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request that the Premier (Mr. Filmon) withdraw Bill 67 not sell the Manitoba Telephone System to private interests.

Guaranteed Annual Income

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli). It complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes. The Clerk will read.

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

THAT in 1976 Canada signed the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recognized the right of everyone to make a living by work which is freely chosen, recognized the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, recognized the right of everyone to enjoy a high standard of physical and mental health, and provided for the widest possible protection and assistance to the family; and

THAT poor children and adults in Canada continue to die at a higher rate and earlier age than people with adequate incomes; and

THAT Bill 36, The Social Allowances Amendment Act, will create even greater poverty in Manitoba by eliminating government responsibility to ensure that everyone who lacks adequate food, clothing, housing and health care has these needs met; and

THAT the bill will punish people by cutting them off from social assistance or reducing their benefits if they fail to meet employment expectations; and

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) to consider repealing Bill 36 and replacing it with improved legislation which provides for a guaranteed annual income that allows people to have adequate food, clothing, housing, child care and health care and that this annual income increases as prices increase and that this new legislation also provides for the creation of real jobs with the goal of creating full employment so that individuals on social assistance can find safe, meaningful work of their own choosing that allows them to meet their needs and the needs of their families and that this new legislation also provides adequate supports so that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate assistance in finding meaningful work.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization—Conflict of Interest

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

Media reports over the weekend have indicated that the Premier has stated that members of his cabinet and caucus are free to buy shares in the Manitoba Telephone System when they go on sale. This is a very important piece of legislation before this Chamber today, and I would like to ask the Premier directly, is it his policy and the policy of his government that members of his caucus and his cabinet are free to buy shares in the Manitoba Telephone System in light of the fact that all members of this Chamber will have to vote on Bill 67?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Deputy Speaker, all of us are governed by conflict-of-interest legislation which was passed in this House in fact during the time of

the New Democratic administration of which the member opposite was a part. We take those obligations very seriously, and all of us conduct ourselves in accordance with that legislation. My information is that issues such as this in which the issuing of shares or at least the availability of shares and the decision as to whether or not to invest in shares would be treated no differently than other issues would be treated, such as the availability of agriculture support programs to those who are farmers because they are freely available to all Manitobans, and so there is no discriminatory impact on situations of that nature.

The same situation, of course, prevailed during the Pawley administration when they brought in the Manitoba Properties Inc. legislation that ultimately gave a tax benefit to those who made investments. People in upper income brackets who wanted to avoid taxes made investments. As the member knows, it was widely publicized that members of Mr. Pawley's administration did take advantage of that opportunity which they had created, I might say, by act of this Legislature, voted on and passed, and then made investments.

* (1345)

Mr. Doer: On May 7, 1996, the Minister of Telephones said, I will not be buying shares because there might be a perception of conflict. He clearly understood that it was very difficult to be on both sides of the same transaction. You cannot be a seller in the morning and a buyer in the afternoon.

I would like to ask the Premier, will he use the same kind of ethical standards that the Minister of Telephones stated on May 7 in public comments and make it very clear that, because of the fact that this government is proceeding to have a vote to privatize the Manitoba Telephone System, it is inappropriate and unethical to vote to sell the telephone system if you intend on buying the shares for your own personal investments?

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the other hand, it could be argued that, by making commentary as to whether or not one is investing in the Manitoba Telephone System, one could be attempting to influence the sale of shares in the Manitoba Telephone System. But I say to him, this is certainly very much parallel to the circumstances of the government of which he was a

part, which was that they brought in an act creating the Manitoba Properties Inc., that allowed people to buy shares in the assets of the government of Manitoba and indeed gain a significant financial benefit by way of tax reduction from doing so. It was widely publicized at that time that members of the Pawley government who voted on, who conceived the act, who passed the act, also took advantage of those investments.

Mr. Doer: I applaud the position taken by the Minister of Telephones (Mr. Findlay) in terms of dealing with the perception of conflict of interest. Obviously he has a higher ethical standard than the Premier and other members of his cabinet.

We have had a situation where the government has broken a promise, an election promise, to the people of this province. They are now proceeding, through the breaking of that promise, to sell the Manitoba Telephone System. We have had the brokers do the analysis to provide the decision to sell the company. The people that are going to make the commissions have done the independent analysis. Legislators will have to vote on this decision, and surely the Premier would want members of this Legislature to be perceived to be voting in the public interest on the Manitoba Telephone System, to be voting in the public interest in terms of the shares and everything else that deals with this corporation rather than having a perception that they could be voting on the basis of their personal interest as a future investor.

Will the Premier now prohibit all members of his caucus from being both a buyer and a seller of the Manitoba Telephone System?

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that the members on this side will only be voting in the public interest when they vote on Bill 67. There will be no other interest in their minds.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the member opposite wants to make comments about ethical conduct, then he ought to look squarely in the mirror. When he was a member of the Pawley administration that voted on, conceived and passed an act that allowed not only for investment in a corporation that owned the assets of the public administration in this province, that is the buildings of this province, not only allowed them to invest in that but in fact created a tax dodge that gave them tax benefits to

avoid taxation, I might say, by investing in that corporation.

That is the kind of ethics that he represents and that is why, when people look at him, they do not give him a great deal of credibility because they know how low they have to stoop in order to be at his level. The fact of the matter is, the people of this province will know that when Bill 67 is voted on, every member on this side will vote in accordance with the best interests of the people of Manitoba.

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization—First Nations Agreements

Mr. Oscar Lathlin (The Pas): Mr. Deputy Speaker, my questions are for the Minister responsible for MTS. The minister knows or should know that agreements made with MTS and First Nations communities with regard to the installation of MTS cable, buildings, microwave towers and other such infrastructure were based on the fact that MTS was a Crown corporation and consequently not subject to a taxation on or off the reserve.

I would like to ask the minister to tell the House now when he first raised concerns with his colleagues over the implications of the sale of MTS on this matter and table any correspondence, memos, whatsoever, that he may have on this matter.

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the member remembers from last week, the comment was that MTS as an entity continues legally on into the future and any enactment of Bill 67 will in no way affect any contracts, permits, leases or licences for easement. They are now currently held by MTS NetCom; that continues in the future, and in no way Bill 67 changes that.

* (1350)

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my second question is to the same minister.

Has this minister consulted with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs or the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanac or any other First Nation organization concerning this issue, and can he table any information

that he may have sent to those organizations outlining the government's position?

Mr. Findlay: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Manitoba Telephone System is responsible for delivering telecom services to all Manitobans. They carry out the negotiations, the contracts, the leases for acquiring property easements or rights of way for installing their equipment and that stays in effect when Bill 67 is enacted.

Privatization—Impact on Rural Manitoba

Mr. Oscar Lathlin (The Pas): Can the Minister of Telephones explain to the House why he would support a policy of full-cost recovery for rural and northern Manitoba communities when he knows or should know that the result would be monthly phone bills of more than \$40 a month for some of the poorest regions in Manitoba?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased that the member has asked that question. Many times on that side there have been statements about telephone rates rising, and we have consistently said CRTC is the regulator and they will take great care to prevent that from happening. If he will read the release from CRTC of November 15 where they talk about affordable telephone service and I quote the chairman of CRTC: Although there is currently no conclusive evidence to suggest local rates will not remain affordable, the commission wants to ensure that telephone services continue to be affordable to all Canadians.

That is why we have asked the telephone companies to implement a launching program that will help detect early on any existence of a lack of affordability and CRTC will deal with it. They are committed directly to maintaining affordable rates for all Canadians, as the regulator.

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization—Consultations

Mr. Eric Robinson (Rupert's Land): Mr. Deputy Speaker, along the lines of my colleague the member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin), since remote northern communities have the most to lose under the privatization

of MTS, can the Minister responsible for MTS explain why no First Nations communities were consulted prior to the decision being made to sell MTS?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I continue in the CRTC release of last Friday talking about service to remote communities. The commission notes that as a matter of ensuring reliable and affordable telecommunications services to high-cost serving areas, they deserve special consideration in light of the forthcoming competition to local markets.

Again, they announce a commitment to being sure that they maintain access and affordability for all Canadians in all communities regardless of the location in Canada.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my question was why no First Nations communities were consulted by this government before the decision was made to sell MTS.

Mr. Findlay: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issues that the government faces, that MTS faces, are competition, the fact that competition is going to create challenges in the marketplace, they have a debt, they have a requirement for more capital. These are real issues that must be dealt with by the government and by MTS. Again, I refer the members opposite to the comments of Bob Rae, who really thinks that things have changed rather dramatically.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe the minister has the right not to answer the question but he should not provoke debate. Indeed, I listened patiently. Twice the member for Rupertsland asked a specific question as to why First Nations people were not consulted by this government prior to the privatization, and the minister continues to read from a document that has no relevance whatsoever to the particular question raised. I ask you to call the minister to order.

* (1355)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Kildonan did have a point of order. I would ask the

minister to keep his comments relevant to the question put.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Minister of MTS, to continue his response.

Mr. Findlay: Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout the campaign we are constantly challenged to be sure that we have governed with fiscal responsibility in mind. That is what the issue is, and if you read all the editorials that are coming out these days, many are recognizing the reality that what the government is doing is right given the conditions that lie ahead.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps I will ask that question again tomorrow.

I would like to ask the minister, since Bill 67, the act selling MTS, is subject to the Indian Affairs Act, has he consulted with the federal Department of Indian Affairs or any other federal government department that has an interest in this issue?

Mr. Findlay: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Department of Indian Affairs has agreements with MTS on land under their authority, as they do with Crown land, as they do with private owners. Yes, there has been communication which led to what I said earlier, that the agreements in place are legally in place under the existing company and will continue in force after Bill 67 is passed.

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization-Postponement

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Deputy Speaker, early last week Pool delegates passed a resolution raising their concerns with the privatization of Manitoba Telephone System. At the end of the week, they passed another resolution, and that resolution said that Manitoba Pool Elevators will take steps to encourage the government to stop the process of privatizing Manitoba Telephone. These delegates are concerned that following privatization, rural communities may not benefit to the same degree as urban centres from advanced technology.

Will the Premier heed the advice of Manitoba Pool delegates and put the plan to privatize Manitoba

Telephone on hold until rural Manitobans have had an opportunity to speak on this matter?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year when I spoke at the annual meeting of Manitoba Pool, there was a disagreement on their part, and they passed a resolution to oppose dual marketing of hogs. I noted that one of the major items that came out of this year's annual meeting of the Pool was that they were going to make an investment in the processing end of the hog industry because things are booming in the hog industry in Manitoba now. As a result of the move that we have made to dual marketing of hogs, now the industry is so buoyant, now the industry has such tremendous investment going in on the production side that Manitoba Pool has been urged by their delegates to invest in the processing side because of the fact that our policies for dual marketing have done so much for the hog industry.

I would suspect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that next year, after the privatization of Manitoba Telephone System, they will be looking at even greater opportunities with respect to more telecommunications, more services that they can get in a privatized environment.

Privatization—Public Hearings

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Well, the minister may choose to chastise Manitoba Pool, but is he also going to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like to remind the honourable member that there is no need for a preamble to her question.

The honourable member for Swan River, to continue.

Ms. Wowchuk: Manitoba Pool, the Union of Manitoba Municipalities and seniors across the province all oppose the privatization of Manitoba Telephone because they fear the increased rates that will face Manitobans. Will the Premier put on hold his—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

* (1400)

Point of Order

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): On a point of order, please, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member

for Swan River was admonished by yourself, indicating that no preamble is required to a supplementary question. In spite of that admonishment, she continued with a preamble in direct defiance of your authority as the Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please call her to order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister did not have a point of order. I was listening to the honourable member. She had phrased it in the format of a question at that point after I had corrected her at that time. I would ask the honourable member to finish posing her question now, please.

* * *

Ms. Wowchuk: Will the Premier agree to go out to rural and northern Manitoba and listen to the people, listen to the seniors, listen to the northerners, listen to all people who are opposed to the sale of Manitoba Telephone?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has consulted and has implemented things to ensure that it kept in touch with people in all corners of this province, things that were never dreamed of by New Democrats when they were in office. This government, for the first time, instituted cabinet meetings held outside the city of Winnipeg.

When they were in office, New Democrats were always preaching to others about how they would revise the world so that it was in their image, the social democratic image of the members opposite. They never listened to people. I can tell the member for Swan River, time and time again, thousands of Manitobans told the New Democrats that they did not like what they were doing, whether it was with respect to the French language amendment to the Constitution, whether it was with respect to their political handling of MPIC, or many other major issues; they ignored them. I do not think that we need to take any counsel or any advice from the member for Swan River about consulting and listening. Nobody listens more than this government.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, then, will the Premier listen to the people of Carman and Killarney and other members of MAUM who have put forward a resolution saying that

they are opposed to the sale of Manitoba Telephone along with UMM, along with seniors? Maybe the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) can have a Jeopardy answer for this one.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Deputy Speaker—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like to remind all honourable members, they will have their opportunities to ask their questions or enter into debate at a later time, but this time is Question Period. There has been a question put. I would like to give the First Minister an opportunity to answer that question.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have indicated in the past that members opposite have gone forward on a mission of frightening the people in rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba based on false information. They have encouraged them to pass resolutions. All of these things may be good politics and good tactics for the New Democrats, but they do not make for good laws.

Bill 67 Closure

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): My question is either for the Premier or the government House leader (Mr. Ernst). With the debate of Bill 67, the privatization of MTS, there is a big concern that is out there in terms of who is going to blink first: is it going to be the official opposition or is it going to be the government?

My question to the government is, even in the limited skills that the New Democratic caucus has, they do have the ability to carry this session on endlessly, well into the new year, quite frankly. The concern that we have in the Liberal caucus is that this government at no point will bring in any form of closure to see the passage of Bill 67. We would seek the assurance from the government that they will not seek any form of closure with respect to Bill 67.

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): We have a bill before the House that requires debate, Bill 67, now for the first time on the Order Paper today in report stage. We will debate report stage. We will debate third reading of the bill, and we will expect that the rules requiring passage of this bill by the end of the session will be in fact enforced.

Mr. Lamoureux: To the government House leader, then will he commit that he will not bring in the closure rule that would limit debate on this particular bill, that in fact he will allow whatever debate necessary in order for this bill to go through the normal process without any form of closure?

Mr. Ernst: The member for Inkster was a signatory to a memorandum of understanding regarding House rules and participated in the process of going through the rules committee. In fact, he and all of the other members of this House unanimously adopted a rule dealing with issues such as this: All government business will come to a vote on third reading before the end of the session.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, with his final supplementary question.

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization—Strategic Alliances

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was not the Liberal caucus that broke the agreement. Having said—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like to remind the honourable member that there is no preamble or postamble necessary after his third question. The honourable member for Inkster, to pose his question now.

Mr. Lamoureux: My question is a follow-up question that the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) asked a while back, and that is in dealing with the strategic alliances with MTS. We are told that we are going to be receiving something tabled.

My question is either to the minister responsible or the Premier (Mr. Filmon). How long are we going to have to wait? Do we have to wait until the privatization of MTS has already gone through, or will this government, in the next couple of days, table a document that demonstrates which companies MTS has a partial ownership in, in the province?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member has asked for certain information. As soon as it is available, we will be able to supply it.

Child Poverty Rate Reduction Strategy

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Campaign 2000 issued their child poverty in Canada report card for 1996 today. They point out that the number of children living in poverty in Canada has increased by 46 percent or 428,000 children since 1989, when an all-party resolution passed the House of Commons setting a target of the year 2000 of eliminating child poverty in Canada.

My question is for the Minister of Family Services. I would like to ask her, what is she saying and doing, what is she saying to the federal government? What is she doing to try and stop their cuts, given that the federal government has introduced the CHST with less leadership and less spending, stalled on child care, decreased funding for the Community Action Program for Children and failed to index the child tax benefit? What is this minister doing to stand up to the federal government to stop more children in Manitoba from going into poverty?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I thank my honourable friend for his question. Many of the issues that he raised in his preamble are very legitimate when we talk about the offloading that the federal government has done year after year and is continuing to do. There is a responsibility by the federal government also to look at the issue of child poverty in Canada and make some choices and some decisions on how we can best deal with it or how they can best deal with that issue, but it is not an issue for Manitoba only.

I know that First Ministers right across the country have had this high on their agenda over the last few years, and I know that ministers of social services across the country have discussed the issue. As a result of the Premiers' last meeting, the issue of child poverty and an integrated child benefit is an issue that is being discussed by social services ministers and ministers of Finance across the country to see whether we can come up with a proposal that would look at better support for families and children that are living in poverty.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Family Services what responsibility she feels that she has, since she likes to talk about the

responsibility of the federal government, to stop matching their actions and inactions and their cuts in the area of child poverty. What is she going to do and her government going to do to stop making the problem of child poverty worse in Manitoba, since it is already the second-highest rate in Canada?

Mrs. Mitchelson: We have said, time and time again, that the best form of social security is a job, and that is why we have implemented many programs through our welfare reform and before like Taking Charge!, like Opportunities for Employment, like the Rural Jobs Project, like the programs that we support through the City of Winnipeg that do create economic opportunity and the moving of people from social allowance to meaningful employment, and we will continue those efforts.

We have already seen some very positive results as a result of our welfare reform, and we will continue to work to ensure that there are job opportunities. I know that the economic forecast in the province of Manitoba is showing that we are doing very well, and along with increased economic activity in the province come jobs, meaningful jobs for Manitobans that will remove them from social allowances and create the opportunity for better incomes.

* (1410)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, with a final supplementary question.

Mr. Martindale: Will the Minister of Family Services, who has referred to the City of Winnipeg, whose rolls by the way have decreased by 3,000 as opposed to 800 by this provincial government, will she say to the City of Winnipeg that they should not cut their social allowances rates for children under the age of 18 next spring as they are planning to do, and what is she going to do to prevent that cut from happening so that the rate of child poverty does not become worse in Winnipeg and Manitoba? Will she cost-share their additional \$1.5 million or will she put more money into benefits for children to prevent the astonishing rate of child poverty in Winnipeg?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we applaud the City of Winnipeg's efforts in trying to bring their welfare caseloads down. I do want to indicate that one of the

differences between the provincial program and the city's program is that those who are on the city's caseload are employable, and the caseload for the province of Manitoba is single parents and the disabled. So it stands to reason that the results may be a little slower on the provincial caseload than they are on the city caseload because there are more obstacles to overcome to attain or achieve employment.

But I want to indicate again that, as a result of our government's support of business and the economic growth and the economic opportunity and the new job creation in the province of Manitoba, it will allow us to ensure that those who are employable who are on the welfare caseloads will have jobs and will be able to contribute in a very positive way to our Manitoba economy and our Manitoba community.

Health Care System Quality of Service—Rural Manitoba

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Mr. Deputy Speaker, The Pas, Ashern and most recently Stonewall are examples of rural Manitoba communities that have seen their emergency wards cut off, or Morden, or their dialysis cut off, affected by the government cutbacks. Last year, when the government tried to close all the emergency wards in Winnipeg, the people of Winnipeg rose up and said, do not do it, and forced the government to back down.

Now I would like to ask the Minister of Health whether or not the Department of Health is prepared to put resources in the form of salaried doctors, or some other form of resources, into these rural communities so programs like emergency programs or programs like dialysis can be carried out in rural and northern Manitoba.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the honourable member made reference to reductions in spending in health care. I remind him that the sum of money put toward health care during the time when his seatmate was in the government of Manitoba was pretty paltry compared with the kinds of dollars that are being put towards health care spending today; 31.4 or 31.5 percent of all spending in those gloomy NDP days were spent on health care compared

with 33.8 percent today, fully \$600 million on an annualized basis, more today than in the days of the New Democrats. Indeed, in 1995 this government spent \$60 million more on health care than it did in 1994. Those expenditures were for increased spending in areas like dialysis, in areas like hip and knee replacements and heart surgery.

So I am not sure I can agree with the preamble. In fact, I know I cannot agree with the preamble of the honourable member because spending in health care has been up very, very significantly in recent years.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Deputy Speaker, can the minister comment on a letter written from his own executive director of Winnipeg operations, and I will quote: "The most recent case, combined with many communications Manitoba Health has received from rural residents and rural health care providers, causes serious concern about the accessibility of quality care for rural Manitobans"

This is a letter from the minister's own executive director—

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

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Deputy Speaker, quality and volume of services is always a concern, not only in rural Manitoba but also in the city of Winnipeg. The statistics that I have been citing for the honourable member are meant to demonstrate that demand for health services is up each and every year, and the government of Manitoba has been responding with dollars for programs to meet that increasing demand year after year. I can share with the honourable member statistics related to heart surgeries. I have done that in the past, but this year we expect to do 1,000, a minimum of 1,000 by-pass operations compared with 523 just four years ago. I have statistics on dialysis, people receiving dialysis, and those numbers are growing year after year.

The honourable member did make a reference to alternate forms of remuneration for physicians in an attempt to attract and retain them in places where they are needed, in underserved areas, and those are options that we are looking at vigorously.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister explain why his executive director has said that rural Manitobans are concerned about serious cutbacks, the same minister who had heart surgery closed two weeks ago because there were no beds available in Winnipeg, who had heart surgery closed two weeks ago because there were no beds available at Brandon? Can the minister explain why his own executive director has absolutely no confidence in this minister and this government's ability to deliver health care in rural Manitoba?

I will table the letter from his own executive director.

Mr. McCrae: Any Minister of Health across Canada can tell you this is a difficult time in the history of the health system in all of Canada. Indeed, it was not so long ago that I was in the city of Toronto and meeting with health care providers from across the country, and at a time of great difficulty, at a time when we are facing \$200 million in cutbacks from the cousins of our friends over here in the Liberal Party, in Ottawa, at a time like that, Manitoba's record in health care looks pretty good when compared with the record of other provinces across the country.

So it is no surprise to me that anybody might be concerned. I remain concerned day in and day out, and I will tell you, the one thing that I would be more concerned about is if we followed the advice of honourable members opposite because we would have destroyed our health system several years ago if we had listened to them.

Public Housing Rent Increase

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, earlier this afternoon the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) was saying that her government is looking for better ways to support low-income families. Well, we can give them one right now and that is to stop increasing the rent for those 8,000 families in Manitoba living in public housing. Under this government, the rent has been increased by about 17 percent just since 1994.

I want to ask the Minister of Housing to confirm in the House today that his government will not increase the

rents for public housing tenants any further this year or next year.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Minister of Housing): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should point out to the member for Radisson that this government has not increased the rental formula, unlike the federal government that is advocating that the rent will go to 30 percent, which has brought on a hardship to people in the low-income area. We have not increased our formula, and in the immediate future in this budget cycle we have not looked at increasing that.

* (1420)

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will quote from a letter sent to me last September from the Minister responsible for Housing. It says: I would like to point out that the budget, the federal government did not change its—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I might not have heard the honourable member, but this is not the time for a preamble. This is your second question; you might want to pose it as a question. The honourable member for Radisson, with her supplementary question.

Ms. Cerilli: Given that the minister has just said that they did not increase the rents, the federal—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. That is not a question. At this time I would ask the honourable member to pose her question without the preamble.

Ms. Cerilli: I would ask the minister to clarify then if he is correct or the minister for the federal government is correct when they claim that their rent geared to income scale has not changed, it is still set at 25 percent. Can he clarify, as we have learned, or confirm from what we have learned that they are anticipating increasing the rent geared to income for public housing to 30 percent in Manitoba?

Mr. Reimer: The number of 25 percent that the member for Radisson is referring to is a rental formula that is used in calculation of bachelor suites. We use that formula within our own calculations, and our maximum right now on the family units is 27 percent. The member is right, the federal government has been advocating for three years now that we increase our rates to 30 percent. We

have been more responsible in our dedication and our recognition of families in need, unlike the federal government which has advocated this 30 percent for the last three years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for Oral Question Period has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Economic Growth

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): This has been a long legislative session, and members opposite have done everything they can to prolong it. Well, if we are to sit here every day until members opposite decide what it is they are attempting to accomplish, then I would prefer to concentrate on positive things. While members opposite are trying hard to—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am having great difficulty hearing the honourable member. Those who are not interested in listening could either attend out in the hall and have their conversations or do so in the loge. But I think the honourable member is attempting to put some words on the record, and we should give him that respect. The honourable member for Pembina, to continue.

Mr. Dyck: While members opposite are trying hard every day to make the front page of the Free Press, I am sure that they were disappointed last Saturday to read another glowing article about the state of our province's economy. I would like to read parts of the article to the members opposite just in case they did not get a chance to browse it themselves.

Two major economic reports say Manitoba's already expanding economy will really get cooking over the next two years. Royal Bank of Canada and the Conference Board of Canada are predicting the Manitoba economy will expand next year by as much as 4.3 percent, creating about 12,000 new jobs and increasing the take-home pay of the average family by \$854. In 1998, two forecasts call for even better times with unemployment dipping to 5.7 percent and housing starts improving to levels not seen in decades. Also, by 1998, even after inflation and income taxes, the average family's take-home pay will be \$2,093 more than today.

John McCallum, chief economist of the Royal Bank, said in an interview, and I quote: Manitoba will continue to be steady but growth will not be so slow in the future and what we will see is economic growth that the average Manitoban will feel.

Manitoba is well on its way to building a stronger economy and a stronger society. This government will continue to provide strong leadership in shaping and managing the change. We continue working to make Manitoba strong. Thank you.

Herizons Magazine

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Mr. Deputy Speaker, on Saturday, November 16, my colleague the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) and I attended a celebratory evening and fundraising dinner in support of Herizons magazine. Herizons editor, Penni Mitchell, and business manager, Yvonne Block, hosted the evening, held at the Franco-Manitobain Culturel Centre restaurant. The event included the music of harpist Erica Schultz and a draw for an Air Canada ticket. Food, company and music were excellent, and I congratulate the organizers for their ideas and hard work. As well, I want to take this opportunity to draw attention to the role Herizons plays in the women's community, both locally and nationally.

The magazine could be described as a Canadian sister of Ms magazine. Herizons is now in its second incarnation, having run aground in the late 1980s when funding sources failed. I understand that when the magazine again began publishing, the editorial collective was determined to be self-supporting, a courageous stance for any small Canadian publication and especially for a feminist magazine.

To date, several years into its second mandate, Herizons continues to offer Canadian women different perspectives, perspectives from the feminist point of view. The magazine includes regular and feature columnists and keeps Canadian women abreast of controversial issues such as, for example, alternate health care and treatments and women's spirituality. Herizons encourages letters to the editor and prints many, so that women's issues are often hotly debated through these letters. Regular readers of Herizons are soon educated as to the current debates within the feminist community.

In closing, congratulations to Herizons on its contribution to Canadian culture, its editorial integrity and its determination to survive financially. Such initiative commands our respect.

* (1430)

Economic Growth

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): I would like to expand on what my colleague for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) said earlier about the state of Manitoba's economy. I think there is even more good news to report. Manitobans have been telling us that the economy and then jobs are the most important issues facing our province today.

Well, while members opposite remain fixated on one issue, our government continues to maintain an economic climate that invites investment and growth. Just last month the economy created more than 5,000 jobs, giving Manitoba one of the fastest growing job markets in Canada. It is the second straight month the economy has created that many jobs, pushing the year's total to about 13,000, mostly full-time jobs. The Conference Board of Canada recently described the Manitoba economy as firing on all cylinders.

The Royal Bank has reported that after leading the country in retail sales last year, Manitoba consumers will continue to spend more than any other province this year and the next two years. It is also reported that 3,000 new homes will be built next year and 3,500 new homes in 1998. Industry Canada figures show that the value of shipments of manufactured goods was up 35 percent in the first quarter alone and this growth is coming from a variety of areas, including agri-food, aerospace, machinery and bus manufacturing.

Manitoba's diversified economy means that our province does not have to rely on the success of just one sector. Our government understands what matters to Manitobans most, and we will continue to foster an economic environment that promotes job creation and opportunity. Merci.

Peguis Health Centre

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to recognize the opening of the Chief

Peguis health and fitness centre. There have been a number of events recently marking the opening of this co-operative which is in the basement of the Chief Peguis Junior High School. Developing this track and making it safe and opening it up for the public to use as a health and fitness and recreation centre has been a good idea and a dream for many years. Ever since the school was built in the 1970s, and I also attended that junior high school, people have been talking about and planning to have that track opened as a fitness centre. Well, the official opening was October 1 and then their annual general meeting was November 2, 1996, where they elected an executive and passed their by-laws.

I want to pay tribute and recognize the contributions by many volunteers and members of the community, the core group that have been developing the resources and the unique partnership which involves the school division, the City of Winnipeg Parks and Rec which provide the staff and run the programs, as well as the provincial government who have supported through the Community Places grants program. This facility is also looking to be used in the Pan Am Games and hopes to leave a further devout legacy in the North Kildonan community after the Pan Am Games.

The successful fundraising banquet this past Saturday, November 16, at the Nor-Villa Hotel had more than a hundred people and also heard a great motivational speech by Michelle Sawatzky, a resident of Steinbach who was a member of the Canadian Women's National Volleyball Team that competed in the Atlanta Olympics. She gave an excellent speech about her own path as a national and international athlete where she herself came up against a number of barriers and was told a number of times that she was too short to play volleyball, to play university volleyball and to compete at the international level, as so many of the participants and volunteers developing the Chief Peguis fitness centre also came up against similar barriers where they were told a number of times that they could not accomplish their goals. I want to congratulate them.

I know that the member for Rossmere (Mr. Toews) across the way won a door prize or a silent auction prize where he has a membership to the track, and I will look forward to seeing him there where we can enjoy this community asset for our neighbourhood. Thank you.

Manitoba Investment Pool Authority

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I rise in the House to make mention of the Manitoba Investment Pool Authority. The commencement ceremony for the first short-term investment pool took place this morning at the Legislative Building in Room 254. MIPA is a pooled investment program which is open to municipalities, universities, school divisions and health facilities. Our government, through Bill 56, The Manitoba Investment Pool Authority Act has provided a tremendous opportunity for all members of the public and the public sector. The pool of money for investment will provide better returns for investors with no increase in risk due to the fact that the larger amounts of principal are accorded better rates of return by investors. What does the pool offer? Increased investment returns through professional management and economies of scale, convenience with same-day transfers, the ability to fax requests on a toll-free line, investment flexibilities through liquidity and future investment options.

I would like to congratulate the communities of Swan River and Portage la Prairie who along with the UMM, the MAUM, have placed an initial \$1.5 million to the first short-term investment fund. Through co-operation and vision, all Manitobans will receive increased benefits. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that this flows from the initiatives taken by others and also by the investment community to create jobs in this province, to invest in this community and by our municipalities and others to be able to put their money into opportunities that will in the long term create jobs, industries and indeed a better economy for this province.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now that Members' Statements are concluded, Grievances.

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am rising on this occasion to take advantage of my opportunity as an elected member of this Chamber on a personal grievance.

I know that the issue of the privatization of MTS has caused a good deal of furor both inside and outside of this Chamber, and what is surprising, perhaps not so

surprising, is the fact that members opposite seem to be caught, they seem to be surprised by the fact that Manitobans are opposed to the sale of MTS, and comment after comment indicates that members opposite are somehow surprised that Manitobans are against the decision of this government to privatize MTS.

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

I say that is both surprising and not surprising because it is clear that this government is out of touch, out of step with the thinking and the feeling of Manitobans in general. It is not surprising because a government that has been in office for eight long years, eight long years that have seen year after year projections of the economy booming again, next-year country, next year the economy is going to get better, next year the Conference Board says it is happening, over and over again after eight long years of government, of cutbacks in all areas of government and of false hopes and expectations, this government has completely gone out of touch with the aspirations, the needs, the wants and the very tempo of average Manitobans.

* (1440)

The members opposite, if they would have talked to their constituents, would have heard things like I heard from my constituents. I got phone calls on MTS. I got letters on MTS, and what kind of things did I hear? Things like, the rich get richer and only rich Manitobans will be able to buy up our telephone resources. Questions like, why sell it off in the first place? Do we not own it? Questions like, who has given these people the right to sell off our phone company? If members opposite were in touch and in sync and in step with their constituents, they would not have been caught by surprise by the general reaction in Manitoba against the government policy to sell MTS.

I think the government has crossed a line. It has made a fatal mistake in terms of the governing of the province of Manitoba. I believe one of the major reasons why Manitobans are so solidly against the sale of MTS is they question the legitimacy, the very legitimacy of members opposite to conduct business on behalf of Manitobans. And why do I say that? We saw the beginnings of that early in this year, early this year when the government secretly was planning to privatize the home care system.

They were secretly planning to privatize the home care system. Fortunately we were able to find out. We got the cabinet document. We made the cabinet document public and Manitobans rose up en masse across all political lines, Liberals, Conservative, Tory, Reform, you name it, they were opposed to the government's privatization of home care. Now, the government did not campaign on the privatization of home care about a year earlier. The government was secretly planning to do it behind the backs of Manitobans. Therein lies the difficulty. Therein lies the major problem with the legitimacy of this government.

Manitobans said, why are you taking a home care program that is recognized around the world as one of the best and secretly privatizing? When Manitobans rose en masse to oppose the privatization of home care, they were rising en masse against the legitimacy of a government that was secretly, under cover, trying to privatize an entity. If otherwise, why did the government not make an announcement about the privatization of home care? Why did they not go out publicly and discuss it with Manitobans? But they did not, and Manitobans knew it. And this government received a very, very serious loss of legitimacy and loss of credibility when they attempted to behind the backs of Manitobans privatize the home care system.

Is it any surprise that the streets of Rossmere and the streets in River Heights and the streets in Tuxedo and the streets in virtually every section of Winnipeg were lined with signs against this government's plan to privatize home care. It is because this government went over the line. This government had no legitimate mandate to privatize home care. They tried to do it, and Manitobans resoundingly said no to privatization, no to secret deals and no to this government's attempt to foist their little view, their little minority view, upon the viewpoint of the majority of Manitobans.

So that leads us to the privatization of MTS. In fact, this is the second blow to the government's attempt to have legitimacy. During the election campaign members opposite were elected on a mandate not to privatize the Manitoba Telephone System. Sometime between the election and the revealing in this House that in fact they were going to privatize Manitoba Telephone System, somehow the government said things had changed. Nothing had changed fundamentally.

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

What had changed was the government's word. What had changed was the Premier's (Mr. Filmon's) promise. What has changed was the promise of all the candidates across that way, Madam Speaker. The government changed its mind and basically was dishonest with Manitobans. Therein lies the difficulty members are now experiencing with the sale of MTS, because the government, whose very legitimacy was questioned during the home care debacle, has now been legitimately again questioned by their attempt to secretly privatize MTS after promising definitively not to do so.

So members opposite ought not to be surprised that the public is questioning not just the sale of MTS but the very legitimacy of this government. The member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) knows full well that when the public begins to question the very legitimacy of a government, that is the end of the game. Is it not a surprise? Most governments generally have an electoral pattern of two terms, eight years. Eight years. It has been the conventional political course of events in Manitoba and in other Canadian provinces that a government generally gets two terms, eight years, and after that their time is up.

It is clear that this government's time is up. It is not coincidental that in fact it has now been eight years, eight long years that these members opposite have been in office. It is not a surprise that their legitimacy is questioned. The very fundamental nature of what they do is questioned.

Let us look at what the members opposite offer as arguments for why they broke their promise, as arguments for why they have lost legitimacy. You know, the only thing they can do, the only arguments that they can muster in this Chamber day after day, Question Period after Question Period, is to go back to the 1970s, to go back to the 1980s. They go back and they question decisions that were made 20 and 25 years ago. Madam Speaker, do they not have a legitimate argument for what they are doing? Is that the only reason they can come forward with political rhetoric tying back to the 1970s and the 1980s?

In this House in the Chamber today, what did the Premier (Mr. Filmon) refer to? What did the Minister for Telephones (Mr. Findlay) refer to? What did the

Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) refer to? Did they talk about their policies? Did they have the intellectual arguments available? Do they have any arguments available? No. They referred back to decision made in 1970 and 1980. They do not have arguments. They cannot justify the decision to privatize MTS.

And so, if they cannot muster up arguments in this Chamber to justify their decision to privatize MTS, is there any wonder that out there in Manitoba, out there in the suburbs of Winnipeg, out there in downtown Winnipeg, out there in northern Manitoba or out there in rural Manitoba, people are questioning and indeed are against this government's initiative? They cannot even mount an argument. Why can they not mount an argument? Because they have no legitimate justifiable arguments to support their position. They do not have any arguments.

Then the question becomes, why are they doing what they are doing? That is what my constituents have been saying. They have been phoning and saying, why are they doing what they are doing? When you look at the feeble attempt, the \$400,000 advertising campaign that crashed into the ground, if you look at the attempts to move the argument off of an argument about the merits or the not merits of privatization and move it on to the opposition, Madam Speaker, that is the oldest trick in the book. The member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) and the members opposite know that. They attack. They attack the opposition; they attack the populace; they attack everyone involved, but they do not have the intellectual integrity. They do not have the political arguments to support their position, so their position becomes one of attack. Their position becomes one of try to undermine those that are criticizing, that are formulating the arguments that in fact are destroying the very positions that they are trying to represent.

The difficulty with the government's position, I think and in fact I believe, is that the government's legitimacy is completely and totally in question. You have crossed over the line, and I dare say, Madam Speaker, from this point on almost every single government initiative that they will announce will be met with the same skepticism and will be met with the same disbelief and the same lack of legitimacy by Manitobans in general. Once you have lost the trust of Manitobans, it is virtually impossible to gain back that trust.

It is virtually impossible to go back to the good old days when the government was a government of minority and at that time attempted to legitimately listen to the needs and aspirations of Manitoba. Those days are gone. You cannot gain back the trust. You lost it on home care. You have lost it on MTS. You have now lost it. You have lost the trust of Manitobans. You know, therefore, it makes it very difficult for the members on this side to pose questions because when we ask questions on the MTS issue, the government responds with a bunker mentality: with rhetoric and with no discernible attempt to try to answer the questions, and there is no better example than the question of land rights, the question of property, questions that were raised by the member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin) and the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) today. The government—that is considered basically illegitimate by most Manitobans—the government did not even have the forthrightness to approach aboriginal people and say, by the way, these properties, these agreements entered into on your lands, do you think that our moving these rights to a private corporation that will ultimately be run outside of Canada—I would suggest, outside of the jurisdiction of Manitoba, certainly—would you perhaps give us a comment or an opinion or a viewpoint as to what we are doing? No, they did not even approach those affected.

That is again illustrative of a government that has lost its mandate, that has lost its direction, and it has lost its ability to discuss issues with those it affects. The natural tendency in a government therefore is to hunker down, to close in on themselves, to sit in the cabinet room and sit around and then to say, how do we get out of this mess? Well, first of all, we will announce another public relations campaign or we will give Barb Biggar more money to do more of a PR campaign, but it will not work. Manitobans are not listening.

* (1450)

It really is a sad day for this province. It is sad to see a government after eight years lose its credibility, lose its legitimacy in the eyes of Manitobans. It is a sad day for Manitobans. This is a tired, out-of-touch government. This is a government that Manitobans do not have faith or confidence in, and the right course of action would be either to relinquish what little control you have on this government, Madam Speaker, or—which I think is probably more realistic—to admit you made a mistake, to

go back to the drawing boards, to talk to Manitobans, to do public hearings, see what Manitobans say on MTS and then revise your policy on MTS, and I dare say, if the government had the courage, the intestinal fortitude to go out and speak with Manitobans, they would find that the bill would be withdrawn in short order and forthwith in this House. Thank you.

Point of Order

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order to seek your ruling on the implementation of Rule 102.(1) of the Provisional Rules, Orders and Forms of Proceedings of this Assembly. Rule 102.(1) states, notwithstanding Rule 73 and subject to Rules 102.(2) and 102.(3), all government bills will normally receive a vote on third reading not later than the last day of the fall sitting of that session.

The provisional rules, including 102.(1), were unanimously recommended to the Assembly by the Standing Committee on Rules of the House at its meetings on February 22, 1996, and March 12, 1996. These rules were unanimously adopted by this Assembly on April 2, 1996, for immediate implementation. These provisional rules were reached by a consensus amongst all three political parties elected to this Assembly who collectively represent all of the members of this House.

The opposition House leader summed up that consensus in a statement to the standing committee at its meeting on February 22 when he said and I quote from Hansard, I just wanted to note that this is a time that is not used very often. The rules committee of the House has not met for many years, I believe, and I am certainly glad that we are meeting to discuss the consensus that has been reached in the principles of rules reform and to try to put the substance to that consensus. I suspect it may not be as easy as it appears, so I think we have some work ahead of us, but I think it is a statement of the commitment of members of the House generally to not just change the rules but parliamentary reform. I think we are doing some very innovative things, and I hope this trial period over the next year will lead to some permanent changes in the future.

Madam Speaker, the basis for these provisional rules are contained in a memorandum of understanding dated

December 22, 1995, signed by the opposition House leader, the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) on behalf of the Liberal members, and myself as the government House leader, and I would like to table a copy of that memorandum of understanding at this time.

It is important to understand what the intent was of all three parties in this House in the creation of Rule 102.(1), and I wish to quote from the memorandum of understanding under the section entitled Legislation, Paragraph 1: "Government bills will be introduced, printed and distributed during the spring sitting. All bills so introduced will proceed to a vote on third reading and royal assent not later than the final day of the fall sitting."

The rationale for this process was to ensure that legislation was introduced and available to the public well in advance of its final consideration by the Legislature. The public and members of the opposition would have several months to consider the formal bills, consult with any persons they deemed desirable and have a full understanding of the legislation when the House resumed in the fall sitting.

Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, November 12, 1996, you ruled that the last day of the fall sitting in the current session is the last Thursday in November. The exact date then is November 28, 1996. All government bills with the exception of Bill 67 have received third reading. The prerequisite for Rule 102.(1) is Rule 100, which states and I quote: "All government bills are to be introduced, read a first time, printed, distributed and moved for Second Reading not later than the last day of the spring sittings of that Session."

The government has complied with Rule 100 with respect to Bill 67. Bill 67 was read a first time on May 27, 1996, printed and then distributed to the House on May 31, 1996, and moved for second reading on June 4, 1996, two days prior to the end of the spring sitting. Provisional Rules 102.(2) and 102.(3) govern circumstances not applicable to the status of Bill 67 and therefore do not apply. While provisional Rule 102.(1) is clear in its intent and is strongly supported by paragraph 1 of the section dealing with legislation contained in the December 22, 1995, memorandum of understanding referred to earlier and tabled at that time, it does not contain the legislative mechanism to implement that intent. As this Assembly unanimously

adopted Rule 102.(1) on April 2, 1996, the Legislature has the right to expect that Bill 67 will come to a vote in accordance with Rule 102.(1). I submit that if Rule 102.(1) is included in our rules and proceedings, it is intended to be implemented, and it is your responsibility as the Assembly's presiding officer to determine its implementation.

Beauchesne's Principles of Parliamentary Law include, and I quote: "to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner."

Therefore I propose that debate on Bill 67 be interrupted, prior to the normal adjournment hour on November 28, 1996, in order to give effect to Rule 102.(1) and that the necessary proceedings commence well enough in advance so that sufficient time is allowed to complete report stage if necessary, third reading and royal assent, even if commencement of this process is required prior to November 28, 1996, in order to be accomplished. I further propose, Madam Speaker, that in making your ruling, you set down a schedule of dates and times when the votes on each stage will be conducted. In that way, confusion will be avoided and all members of the House will be aware of the timetable well in advance of its implementation. Thank you.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, I would first of all question whether indeed this is a point of order. You are being asked to make a ruling which, in effect, would involve not just an interpretation of the rules but, by the government House leader's own words, an addition to the rules to implement the view that was just put forward by the government House leader.

I must say I am somewhat amazed that the same government that on the 7th of November said the rules were off and last week the same government that, through most of the time, accused us of hiding behind the silly rules of the House is now asking you on this Monday to essentially bring in a ruling that would bring in closure on Bill 67. That is unacceptable.

Madam Speaker, the rules that the government House leader referenced are interesting, because, throughout the rules and throughout the discussions that took place, there were qualifications that were put in place about the normal situation. I would point out there have been

numerous times in this session where bills have been brought in under mechanisms which went outside of the rules through unanimous consent because they were not normal situations. We had a number of bills that were brought in in this fall session by agreement, and that was recognized very clearly.

In fact, the sittings of the House—it is interesting the government House leader did not reference the sittings of the House because if he wanted to follow the letter of the rules, he would have gone to the first part of the rules, Rule 2.(1) which makes it very clear that the House will normally sit in spring sittings and in fall sittings, and duration of fall sittings, (3)(a): "The fall sittings of the House will normally be eight weeks"—no reference to that. In fact, when it was convenient for the government last week, they said, well, it was not really eight weeks. But now when it is convenient for the government to say, well, actually, it was not eight weeks but it was really this end part of November—let us deal with what the end part of November is, Madam Speaker, because the government House leader knows exactly what that referenced. That was the end date of the original calendar which was predicated on a normal sitting of eight weeks. That is why it is there. What happened was the actual date of sitting that was followed was decided upon after the draft rules. So let not the government House leader suggest there is some magical significance to November. Let the government House leader also explain why such mechanisms—if the government wants to use them—such as closure, are still part of the rules.

* (1500)

We never agreed to a set of rules that would allow the Speaker here, on the request of the government House leader by a point of order, to have closure attached according to her indicating when there should be a schedule for votes. Madam Speaker, closure is in place in these rules. All the government House leader has to do is rise, give notice, and then debate will continue the following day, conclude at two in the morning.

But, Madam Speaker, I think the government House leader knows why he is not doing that—because that is unprecedented in Manitoba history, and there is still a lot to debate on the sale of MTS. We are dealing with a situation where we have approximately 40 amendments.

I want to deal with this new sort of revisionist view of the rules here, because how can the government House leader explain—and I would like him to reread some of this words from last week and the government itself—how we were supposed to originally, according to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) who seemed quite exercised that we were not finished on the 7th, pass a bill which had not even gone through a committee and for which government amendments were made the following day.

Madam Speaker, this was a government that did not even bother to consult with a lot of the employees about pensions until the Thursday, the 7th.

An Honourable Member: First Nations

Mr. Ashton: They had not consulted with First Nations at all until—I do not even know if they still have. Maybe if it is taken to court, they will.

This is a government that wanted to ram through consideration of clause by clause and end public debate at 3:22 in the morning on Wednesday. Now, let them not try through this bogus point of order, because it is not a point of order—what the government House leader is attempting to do is have you, Madam Speaker, enforce their view of the rules, force sections of the rules that are not actually in there which are in their minds and their intent.

Let us look at the reality of the situation. You know, perhaps the government has taken a full week now to understand that it cannot and will not be allowed by the people of Manitoba to ram through Bill 67, whether it be at 3:22 in the morning on committee stage, whether it be on the Thursday evening, whether it be any day of the week. Maybe they have taken some time now to recognize that there are a lot of people against this. Maybe they are actually saying now, too—unlike the Premier last week who was saying, we will sit here until December and January. Does anybody remember that? The Premier was willing to sit here as long as it took. I think what they did, they sat down on the weekend and they said, a lot of people are against this. A lot of people are against this, Madam Speaker, so let us get out of this, but we are not going to bring in closure. That would be unheard of in Manitoba history. We have a better idea; let us get up on a point of order and get the Speaker to bring in closure.

Madam Speaker, I cannot think of anything that is more absurd. The rules make very clear about the normal situation. We passed through every single bill except one which was still in committee. The Premier (Mr. Filmon), the government House leader stormed out of here on November 7, said the rules are off. Now we have—they spent most of last week trying to practise government techniques of obstructing the House. I was amazed, I must admit—the first time I have heard government try and adjourn the debate.

But, Madam Speaker, they should understand one thing. This House has always operated, particularly when it comes to the rules, in a fashion that recognizes a number of things. One is that you have full debate on each and every issue. Bill 67 deals with the largest financial transaction in Manitoba history. It impacts 98 percent of the population who use phones. Even in the pension issues, which they did not want to deal with until one day after the supposed end date of the session, out of the original draft, the value of the pensions alone is in the hundreds of millions of dollars. We had the largest number of presenters, 185, that I can remember on any bill in the last two decades. By the way, 182 opposed the bill. This is the situation that was envisioned in the rules when it says that normally you deal with the 72 other bills we dealt with, but in actual fact, this was a very abnormal situation.

I say to the government, they are the ones that set the schedule for committees. I want to put this on the record. They decided not to sit Friday and Saturday evening the week before; they did not even want to sit Monday. They tried to ram it through without any agreement from the opposition at 3:22 in the morning. Mind you, I think they learned a little bit about the fact that opposition still have some rights in this House, including the right to speak. But, Madam Speaker, they are caught in a mess of their own creation. If they had taken the time to first of all consult with the people of Manitoba, they would not be in this mess, they would not have Bill 67 before us, but this is an abnormal situation.

I want to point specifically to the government House leader that if he wants to deal with Bill 67 and if it has not completed discussion by next week, the rules are very clear. He does not have to just bring in closure, because I do not think he will do that because it would be unprecedented in Manitoba history. He has the

opportunity—and I notice again, extraordinary circumstances. This is the section he did not read. “The House may deviate from the sessional calendar, outlined in sub-rules (2) and (3).” This is the last Thursday in November section he was referencing. While the House is adjourned the Speaker may, after consultation with government, if public interest requires the House should meet at an earlier time, the House could be brought back. That deals with the situation where we would have had to come back in before September 16. But to the government House leader, who seems to want to ignore this section of the rules, while the House is in spring or fall sittings, if a motion to exceed the concluding dates specified in subrules (2) and (3) is passed by the House.

What does that mean? It means that the government needs time to go past the eight weeks, like it did. We disagree with that. We do not think we are legitimately sitting according to this draft, that we believe they should have moved a motion at that time. They can do the same now.

So, Madam Speaker, let the government House leader recognize, when he rose on the so-called point of order, that the only way this House functions is when there is some degree of consensus. I do not know what the government expected from us on Bill 67. They expected us to hijack the committees while the pensions of 6,000 Manitobans were at risk? Did they expect us to somehow pass the bill through third reading and then have it go through committee one day later? It does not work that way.

Do they expect us to come in here and not—now that they have on the record said that the rules, the agreement has been broken by us—debate this with the due diligence it requires? I do not know of anyone who would spend less due diligence on selling a corner store than this government has in selling a \$1-billion corporation.

The government has choices under the rules. We have choices under the rules. If it is not time to complete by the end of November, the way to do it is to either extend the sitting or if they want to bring in closure, we will fight that draconian antidemocratic measure, but those two options are available without dragging you, Madam Speaker, into a situation where you would be politicized. You would be involved in enforcing interpretations of the rules that go beyond your role as the independent

arbitrator of this House, that would involve you in fact having to invent rules to live up to the government House leader's view of the world.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, I would suggest to the government House leader on this point of order, go back to the drawing board, recognize that you are in a situation collectively on that side of your own making, do not try and get the Speaker to bail you out. We have rules and they include the permission to extend the sitting. If they want to bring in closure, let them face the consequences and let us not waste the time of the House with what is, in my view, not a legitimate point of order whatsoever, and I would urge you to reject it out of hand.

* (1510)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): On the same point of order, I too would like to add the remarks from our perspective, from the Liberal Party's perspective, primarily because we were one of the three signatories, or I personally was one of the signatories representing my two other colleagues in the Legislature with respect to what I believed at the time back in December of '95 was a very positive thing for Manitobans.

For the first time, the Chamber, after a number of years of talking about changing the rules, there was an actual agreement that was achieved, and I was quite proud, quite frankly, to have been involved in the process and was pleased to be one of the signatories to this particular agreement because what it did is it brought, I believe, a little bit more sanity to the Chamber. It allowed for more of an orderly flow of government and opposition business to the whole system, and to that end we were very supportive, as every member of this Chamber was back in December of '95, when there was an agreement that was signed by, as has been mentioned by the government House leader, the official opposition House leader, myself and the government House leader.

Madam Speaker, as we look into those provisional rules, some of the things that really came to light for me and our caucus was the fact that here we are now going into a session where in the spring you are talking about a budget and in the fall you are talking about legislation with the benefits of having the bills that are going to be debated in the fall actually being tabled so the official opposition, in fact all members of this Chamber, would

have an opportunity through the summer to go out and talk about the legislation that is before the House. I know first-hand that I did get that sort of an experience to be able to talk about the legislation, and I trust all members had that opportunity. So I was quite happy in the sense that it seemed that these rule changes were in fact going to have a very positive impact for Manitobans as a whole.

I believe that there is some merit to arguing that if you sign a document, there is an obligation for you to live up to that agreement. There is no doubt about that. Now, again, there would be some argument that, look, if you sign in principle an agreement and the understanding was—because I was one of those signatories—is that we were going to be getting—and I do not know the exact date so I would have to go back to some of my notes that I had taken from those meetings—but it was this day we were going in, this day we were going out for the spring session, this day, and I believe it was September 16, we were going into the fall session with expectations that we would be out on November 7. The rules themselves state that the last Thursday of November would in fact be the ending of the session. Well, Madam Speaker, that was the impression that I had when I signed my name to the piece of paper.

But after saying that, I would look at what the government is doing with respect to the Manitoba Telephone System, and there is a valid argument that could be made and brought forward to say that it should supersede any other agreement because of the very nature in which this government or the way in which this government has dealt with the selling of Manitoba Telephone System. As I say, that is a valid argument. But if you believe that argument, then you have to ask the question, to what degree—like, if you say, look, on principle I feel that this is such a bad piece of legislation that we are going to do what we can, even though it violates an agreement which we signed as an official opposition party.

If you feel that strongly, then I would be inclined to say that on principle maybe it is a good thing in terms of what it is that they are doing, but you have to ask the question, if that is in fact the case, to what degree did the official opposition resist the sale of MTS? Did they not pass all of the other legislation? [interjection] Yes, but could not that legislation have been used as a lever to try

to get gains with respect to the Manitoba Telephone System legislation? You play a card. I was a part of a caucus where you do not—once you start giving up levers, you start losing the opportunity to be able to come up with compromises to be able to prevent things from happening.

Why did we see all the legislation pass last Thursday? Why? [interjection] It was in the agreement the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) talks about. That is the point that I am trying to say, that if in principle you believe that you have to at all costs prevent the sale of MTS, then why not prevent to all extents, use all the vehicles that were there for you to put up the roadblock to prevent this nasty government from selling Manitoba Telephone System? That is what I would ask, and there were many—[interjection] No, nasty, not Nazi.

Madam Speaker, why were all those tools put to the side and not used in order to frustrate this government in order to prevent this Bill 67 from getting as far as it has? As I asked today in Question Period, as an opposition party, the opposition can, even to this day, bring in through different procedures—they can have the Clerk of the Chamber every day—23 members of the NDP caucus could stand up and have a half-hour petition, and I make this as a suggestion which they might want to do. They can have the Clerk stand up and read each one of those. They can come up with rulings and challenge the Speaker. There are so many rules that are there that could allow this government and if they—I am more than happy to, and I will not even charge a consulting fee, sit down with the New Democratic caucus and share with them some of the ideas in terms of exactly what they can do to frustrate this government.

That is the reason why, today, I asked the Premier, would he give the assurance that they would not bring in closure? I did it for a reason, because I believe that, if the opposition party did believe what they say or want to act on what they believe, there are so many mechanisms out there that I believe that the government would then have to bring in closure. They would not have any choice. Either that or we could be in here till February, March of next year. They are the mechanisms that are there.

It is interesting, Madam Speaker, because this is not the first time that I gave a speech of this nature. My

colleague from The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) provided a clipping from Arlene Billinkoff, whom we all know, from an article on June 4, 1991, and I just want to quote what it is that she made reference to. The headline is, Ashton in Wonderland as NDP urges closure. It quotes: Gary Filmon was appalled that the NDP, which said it stands for democracy, would try to cut people's right to speak. Closure has been used by governments to cut off lengthy debate, he said, but the NDP was using it for cheap political thrills. It was the most ignorant thing he had ever seen. It is proof of the NDP irrational thinking, Filmon charged. They only wanted to play old-style politics, political games and he was glad they had been exposed for what they really are.

The Premier was correct when he made those assertions about the New Democrats back then. There is no doubt about that, and I am sure the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) recalls the incident which we are actually referring to. We have to prevent any form of closure that prevents MLAs the opportunity to debate the different issues, and that is where the Liberal Party stands on this particular issue of closure.

But having said that, one has to question the basic principle of what it is the New Democrats are doing, primarily because I would argue that if they really in principle oppose what it is that they were doing, they have squandered so many opportunities away in which they could have brought the government virtually to its knees on its legislative agenda. That could have been very clearly done. So then one has to ask the question why. Why did they not do it? Is it because they have foreseen some sort of a media circus and they were enjoying the attention that was being drawn? If in fact that is the case, the New Democrats are wrong in the violation of the signing of that agreement. Then, Madam Speaker, for the media attention that is being derived out of this particular issue, it is not worth the violation of an agreement which the parties of this Chamber actually signed. That saddens me greatly if in fact that is the case. [interjection] Well, time will tell if in fact that is the case, but I do know of a lot of tools that were squandered away. That is what offends me primarily because, as I indicated earlier, the rules of the Chamber and those provisional rules, I believe, in the long term, are in Manitobans' best interest.

* (1520)

As a result of what is going on today, we could be putting those rules in the future in jeopardy, and I do not believe that is in the best interests in the long term for Manitobans. What we need to see is more order inside this Chamber, and, to a certain degree, the provisional rules provided for at least in most part a better allowance for debates and procedures inside this Chamber than the old rules. But at some point in time, and this is where it is going to be very difficult, in order for these provisional rules to become the permanent rules, members of this Chamber have to again sit down and pass. Once you lose the trust, as has been pointed out from members of the New Democrats, it is very difficult, if possible, in order to get it back. So how do you get back the sense of that if I sign a document, that signature is worth something? That is the reason why we had taken it very seriously and why it is that we had taken the position we did last Thursday with respect to the rising of the Chamber.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I will leave the point of order. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): I will be very succinct, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: On the same point of order?

Mr. Kowalski: On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, I believe your word is as good as a bond. If people believe that the end justifies the means, that would allow people who—police officers who believe someone was guilty to fabricate evidence, to beat people to get statements. If you give your word, the end does not justify the means no matter how righteous your cause is. If you gave your word, you keep it. I think there was a word given in an agreement—[interjection] Okay. So I think people have to be very careful when they do not keep their word, when they figure their cause is right, because everybody believes strongly in something, but their word should come first. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: I thank all honourable members for their input, and I will take the matter under advisement and report back to the Chamber.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): Would you call report stage for Bill 67, Madam Speaker.

REPORT STAGE

Bill 67—The Manitoba Telephone System Reorganization and Consequential Amendments Act

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, I would like to move my first amendment on report stage. I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer),

THAT Bill 67 be amended in the first paragraph of the Preamble by adding “in order to meet the telecommunications needs of all Manitobans with the right solutions, outstanding service and superior products” after “residents of the province”.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ashton: I am very pleased to be able to speak on this particular amendment, and I want to use as my justification for this amendment a rather unusual source, and that being the report of the three investment bankers, which was released in April of this year. This was the report from those three investment bankers. There are actually two now that are now going to be involved in selling the company—I guess, according to most recent information, to selling the company to such individuals as the Conservative MLAs, which is an interesting situation. But, in addition to getting paid \$300,000 to recommend the sale and now running the sale, what is interesting is that they actually had a reference in there to the fact that even a privatized company could have some guarantees of service for rural and northern Manitobans.

So I waited anxiously when I saw the bill to see if it reflects that. It is interesting because the preamble, I think, probably gives a fairly good indication of the mindset of the government. We are going to amend some other aspects of the preamble, but what is particularly interesting is: whereas it is in the public interest of the province that the Manitoba Telephone System was to fully continue to provide access to telephone service to residents of the province. That is what is in the bill currently. You may be asking where we came up with this particular amendment. We came up with this amendment by looking at the mission statement for MTS.

According to the government, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister responsible for MTS (Mr. Findlay), nothing is going to change. Okay? Right? Remember nothing is going to change. Rates will not go up. Service will not be decreased. Do not worry. Trust us. Sure we misled you a little bit during the election about not selling off MTS, but do not worry, trust us. These new shareholders are only going to be concerned about Manitobans.

We will go through in our report stage the many holes in this bill. A lot of Manitobans are not aware that what few guarantees are in this bill will essentially last for four years. Four years is the minimum time payment the government has set up for the payment of the loan. I wonder if anybody has figured out what event might take place before that four-year period is up. Panic? How about an election? You think someone sat down and said, we do not want these new private owners to pay back the loans and tear up the guarantees in the agreement before the election. They probably sat down, figured it out. Rates will go up. We cannot argue that, but we will hang in there. Service in two, three, four years, a private company is not going to rip out the existing phone lines. It is really a question of future technology, but what about such provisions as head office? That is one of the first to go.

In fact, any of the protection in there for Manitobans is gone after four years if the company pays up at that point in time. By the way, the government has given the option to the company of a longer time period.

So what is involved with this bill? This is not only a bad bill in principle; it is a shell game; it is a sham. It provides only surface protection for Manitobans, and even then, it only applies for four years, but you know, even within that four-year period, what is interesting is that this WHEREAS commits the new owners to what? Provide access to telephone service to residents of the province. Well, I have news for the government, but 98 percent of Manitobans have phones, okay? Now, it is not that hard for a private company to do nothing more than just kind of like not rip out the phone lines from people's houses. Nothing in here about rural Manitobans or northern Manitobans. I mean, could you not put in something saying, as we have suggested here, quote the mission statement, commitment to service throughout rural and northern Manitoba?

I mean, I heard the Minister responsible for MTS (Mr. Findlay), I even heard Mr. Tom Stefanson, the CEO, or pardon me, the chairperson of the board of MTS saying, do not worry, do not worry, nothing is going to change, no job losses, things are not going to change. Why is it not in the book? Why is it not in the bill? The Minister responsible for MTS, if you are really serious about this, if you do not think there is any difference the way a private company operates—that is essentially your argument—then why do you not put it in the bill?

* (1530)

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, why they do not want to put it in the bill. It is because everybody knows that a private company has to be concerned about one thing, the bottom line, paying its shareholders. There was an article just recently about Bell Canada. What did it reference? It talked about rate increases taking place the last couple of years, talking about its commitment to its shareholders. Bell Canada is talking about this. In fact, they were pleased they have only dropped to 71 percent long distance market, Manitoba Telephone System in excess of 80 percent. But Bell Canada did not say that we are in business for the betterment of people in Ontario. They are in business for what? For their shareholders. Quite frankly, I do not blame the shareholders; if you own shares, you want to make money. That is why you invest.

That is why the Conservative caucus are lining up at the trough here. They cannot get their snouts in on this one too quickly. It does not matter if they are trustees of the public assets of the province. Has it not dawned on anyone across the way that they set the price for this? They set the price, and there are some more questions about if that is a fair price. What if they were to underprice it? What if they were to then buy shares? What if those shares were to go up? Oh, would that not be something. Would it not be something if a lot of those Conservative MLAs who have known about what has been going on with MTS, probably longer than anyone in this province—I suspect some of them knew about this before the provincial election. In fact, I know they did. [interjection]

No, exactly, and we have all the secret reports, as the member for Crescentwood points out, which only they know about. No one else can see. What if that were to

happen? Is it not an interesting view of ethics here. I heard the government say, there is no conflict [interjection] I hear the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey) speaking from his seat, and he is probably going to call me a socialist again, me and 78 percent of rural Manitobans, those socialists who do not want the MTS sold off, I mean, give me a break. I say to the Deputy Premier, he should go back to his constituents and just explain to them that he thinks they are all socialists if they support MTS. Like the Union of Manitoba Municipalities, Manitoba Association of Urban Municipalities.

But let us put this into perspective here. They do not see any problem with buying shares that they are setting the price for. You know, you do not have to be a lawyer. What if you are a trustee? If a lawyer was trustee of assets and the lawyer went and sold those assets and the lawyer set the price and the lawyer then purchased the assets, Madam Speaker, do you know what happens?

An Honourable Member: They would be disbarred.

Mr. Ashton: You get disbarred. The Conservative caucus—you make a profit. They do not see the connection. I realize that ethics and Progressive Conservative do not exactly go in the same sentence—we have certainly seen that on other dealings with the bill—but does it not strike anyone that even somebody on the street who is not any great expert on ethics can see through the situation?

But this is the point with MTS. The bill is a sham. It does not have any protection in it that would stop MLAs from buying shares. We are going to introduce that later, by the way. We want that in the bill to protect Manitobans. There is no provision in here for guaranteed service. Even the provision in there for the head office does not apply.

So the bottom line here is even if this bill was not a problem in principle—which it is—this is a bad bill. It is a bad piece of legislation. If the government wonders why we are sitting here today, why we did not complete last Thursday, they only have to look in the mirror to see why.

It is interesting—to the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey) because his incompetent government were the ones. They

scheduled committee hearings but they gave themselves Friday night off after three; Saturday night off after three. They did not sit Monday. They brought in the amendments half an hour before the committee started, and they wanted to ram it through in that night. Do you know what? This incompetent government would not even meet with the employees. They brought in amendments on Friday, the day after the bill was supposed to be in there.

To the Deputy Premier, he says I say about breaking his word. I am sure he is talking about the fraudulent election campaign that the Conservatives ran because people know about broken words from that Deputy Premier over there. That is right.

An Honourable Member: Save the Coyotes.

Mr. Ashton: That is right. You know they are going to run in the next election on, trust us; where they can run on, save the Phoenix Coyotes. They are going to run on, trust us on health care and education. We will not sell off Hydro and Autopac. [interjection] Yeah, right. If anybody is going to believe that one, it will be something else.

So if they are serious about this sale, why did they not put in any protections for rural Manitobans in this bill?

An Honourable Member: More people believe Elvis is alive than believe you guys.

Mr. Ashton: Well, that is true, I have said that too. You have got to know you are in difficulty when the number of people supporting what you are doing is around the same level of people that think that Elvis is still alive. Actually I think they have dropped a bit below that the last week. I realize in that caucus it may come to a surprise because after their protestations that MTS is not an issue, I swear that virtually all of them probably think that Elvis is alive.

I hate to break it to you. Two things: Elvis is not alive and, No. 2, you do not have public support on MTS. You know the lack of reality over there is amazing. [interjection] The member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) is probably one of the few that would do that.

You know, when you start getting the Brandon Sun saying, the Tories drop ball on MTS sales pitch, I will

quote one little section here because they have been one of the few people that have actually tended to agree at times with the government on this issue. But do you know what they say? True, the Democrats spearheaded this push which is opposed against the sale of MTS, but a lot of people who were against MTS privatization were rural folks who are not traditional Democrat supporters. I have been trying to tell the government that since February.

I remember being in Dauphin, I remember being in Swan River, I remember being in Brandon, and we have had people get up at our meetings—I will tell you who the most angry people are. Well, I was going to say Tories, but in some cases I do not think they are Tories anymore, after how they feel betrayed on this.

I remember in Swan River, somebody got up and said, they have no right to do this. They have no right to do this. You know what is interesting? He was a Conservative supporter, an active Conservative.

Our meetings have been a cross-section of rural Manitoba. You do not get 50 resolutions opposing the sale from rural municipalities, Madam Speaker, if you do not have a broad cross-section of support.

What I love the most about what the government has done is, whenever we get up and warn people about the consequences—we did a study on rates. We commissioned a study—a 9.75 percent increase because of taxes, the cost of borrowing. What did the government say? Well, that is not true. We have got our own studies, but we are not going to show you. This is the same government that did not do a single study on privatization through MTS. That is confirmed, on the record. I do not believe they have any studies. They do not want to know. They do not want to be confused by the facts.

The clear example of this was the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey). In one sentence, he says, oh, we are going to sell off MTS. Then he says, we are proud of the fact we put all this investment in rural Manitoba. Hello, there, why do we have all this investment in rural Manitoba, to the Deputy Premier through you, Madam Speaker? Because of MTS. I mean, read the UMM brief. Check what happens in B.C. and Ontario. Check their rural service against ours. You will find they have party lines.

They have got far inferior service to what we have. We have the best service. Why? Because it is a publicly owned phone company, and we have a commitment to serving rural and northern Manitobans.

I mean, what does it take? You run through that and they do not want to acknowledge it. They want to believe—and the most bizarre example of that is Tom Stefanson sort of saying, well, we are not going to lose any rural jobs. Now, just because in Ontario Bell Canada is contracting operator services with Phoenix, Arizona—Phoenix, Arizona. It is interesting, though, because now I sort of see. Maybe they did not really lie to the people in the election. Maybe what they did is, they said that there are going to be people with MTS jobs, and they are going to be watching the Phoenix Coyotes. The only problem they did not tell us is, the ~~Jets~~ would be in Phoenix and so would the jobs, the MTS jobs.

* (1540)

Who believes, other than Tom Stefanson, that the private shareholders are going to care about whether there are jobs in Morden or if there are jobs in Minnedosa or Dauphin or Brandon or Thompson, and when the bottom line calls, you can save a fraction of a cent, bang, those jobs are gone. Do not doubt me. Look at what AT&T did. When they came to Canada, they pulled the telemarketing jobs, 150 right out of Winnipeg, just like that. You can transfer jobs back and forth like you would a chess piece on a board.

Do not kid yourself. You are not going to have the same commitment to rural and northern employment. I am amazed, actually, that the government does not even think of this. Their arguments are so ridiculous. This is the government that was proud of what a few years ago, something we supported, decentralization. [interjection] We did support it, for the member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings). The Liberals at that time were critical. I supported it 1,000 percent as did each and every member of our caucus.

Now, in some cases, to the member for Ste. Rose, it was a little bit hard to swallow. I saw the sheet on Thompson. You know, there were 42 new Hydro jobs in Thompson. Well, that is what the sheet said. You know what they did? They took Kelsey, which is based out of

the Winnipeg office on paper, and you know what they did? They scratched that out and they wrote in Thompson. You know how many new jobs there were in Thompson? Zero.

To the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey), what is relevant is, they went around saying decentralization, and Hydro and MTS were two of them. Hydro and MTS, they added those numbers in. They had a push to get jobs moved to rural Manitoba

Now, if the government on the one hand in 1990 was pushing decentralization and acknowledged that you could, because you owned the company, have jobs in rural Manitoba instead of the city, now they are trying to say that under a private company it is not going to change? I mean, if you look to what happened in Alberta, 5,000 jobs cut since AGT was privatized. Guess what? Rural phone centres closed. Check what has happened in Alberta. Do not take my word for it. Just check into it.

But you know what I find interesting is any time any of us gets up and states anything, it is interesting because the Deputy Premier is the classic example in this Chamber. Do not confuse me with the facts—this is his approach on everything. As it was pointed out on the weekend, he can take a single thought and stretch it into 30 minutes. Sometimes he takes not even a thought and stretches into 30 minutes. I mean, he is the master of hyperbole. Let me make this perfectly clear. Then you sit there, and you say, what was that again? But you know what? You look at it, he has not bothered to do one minute of homework. What happens is now 78 percent of rural Manitobans are against the sale, 67 percent of Manitobans generally. What do they do? They blame the NDP. Boy, we are responsible for all that. I mean, I have been fighting this issue since February, and I wish I could take some responsibility for all 78 percent of rural Manitoba being against this sale.

I worked hard. All our caucus has worked hard. We have had meetings in Swan River, in Dauphin and Morden and Neepawa and Minnedosa and Roblin and Virden—oh yes, I must not leave out Virden—Thompson, Gillam, Flin Flon, The Pas. But what is interesting is we have gone out, and do you know what everybody says at these meetings? They ask me the question: Why is the government doing this? Now, I want to admit that I am

probably not the most objective source in giving a response to that question. They may have me there. They may have a point. I have tried my best to be really objective and try and think of why the government would do this, but, Madam Speaker, it comes to a point where you have got to look at it—why are they not there themselves? I mean, you can criticize me, criticize the NDP caucus. Who could forget the immortal words of the Minister responsible for MTS (Mr. Findlay) who said only the member for Thompson was talking about privatization on September 26, 1995—only the NDP. You might have a better argument on debate if you were part of the debate. It takes two to debate. It is kind of hard to criticize the only party, the only people that are going around the province talking to anyone, sitting on public meetings on this issue.

What I find amazing is the only meetings they have had have been set up by MTS people. June Kirby was saying that they targeted the municipalities that had motions opposed to the sale of MTS. You notice, UMM against the sale. [interjection] Well, we will get into the Dauphin Chamber of Commerce, too. That was interesting because the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce was not aware of that. I guess they did not want to know about that. But, you know, I could run through a list of communities here that is a cross section of Manitoba. Brandon has passed a resolution. Thompson has passed a resolution, Selkirk, Dauphin. You can run through the large urban centres.

An Honourable Member: Killarney.

Mr. Ashton: Killarney, you know, Morden. I mean, what does it take? When are the Tories going to wake up to the fact that when you have got 78 percent of people in rural Manitoba saying something, that they are not all New Democrats? Not yet. Not yet, but if you want to keep on believing that they are all New Democrats, after a while they probably will be. When we had our meeting in Morden, the first thing they said was, yellow dog. You know, the yellow-dog syndrome. Somebody said, well, this is the kind of area where you can run a yellow dog, and this is no offence to the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), and they will get elected. Now, they used to say that about the Conservatives federally. What happened? Government to two seats. I still think that is two seats too many, but think about it. [interjection] Gender parity, that is right, not a single M.P. in the West. Think about

it. The Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey) is one of the masterminds of their strategy. Remember he was running around saying, all right, this Kim Campbell is the next best thing since sliced bread. Now, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik) had a slightly different view, and it is interesting because—

An Honourable Member: By the way, do you have a leader now?

Mr. Ashton: Well, the Deputy Premier is now talking about something. I wonder if he is asking whether he still has a party federally. I can understand that when you are down to two seats. The Minister of Energy and Mines (Mr. Praznik) did have a different view. But, to quote one of their own M.P.s, they took the Kool-Aid, and the rest is history. Madam Speaker, right now I think Kool-Aid is definitely the drink of choice of the Conservative caucus. They are doing it again.

An Honourable Member: Just do not make it purple.

Mr. Ashton: Just do not make it purple, indeed. It is probably blue. Whatever it is, it is probably blue, Tory blue.

Think about it, Madam Speaker, this government now is sitting there—the first strategy was deny there is anything going on out there.

An Honourable Member: Deny, deny, deny.

Mr. Ashton: Deny, deny, deny. That might have worked if it was not for 50 resolutions, the UMM, MSOS, MAUM, the 185 presenters. Okay, that did not work. The second thing was, shoot the messenger. Yes. Those socialists, they are arguing to save MTS here, but how do you explain that to the UMM and the MSOS and MAUM and the Pool and the 78 percent of rural Manitobans out there? I mean, are they all socialists? This is interesting because I have heard the Deputy Premier, who, up until now, was most famous for saying northerners did not know how to vote right. Well, he is going to have to adjust that after the next election because if rural Manitobans do not know how to vote right according to his view, believe you me, if he keeps calling rural Manitobans socialists and attacking them on MTS, I do not think they will be back with too many rural seats next time. Remember Brian Mulroney.

An Honourable Member: A fine man.

Mr. Ashton: A fine man, well, indeed, yes. Keep on thinking that, think GST. That was a good one. Actually, the rhetoric on MTS reminds me of the GST. It is like we are here for the good of the country—bang. I remember the Deputy Premier used to bang his hand on the table all the time. They must have felt really good when they passed the GST through Parliament. [interjection] Yes, and where are they now? How is Brian doing? Well, Brian is doing okay. He has a few corporate appointments. Oops, it is a good thing I am in the Legislature. I could get sued for \$50 million for even mentioning his name.

Is this what the Conservatives are going to hope that they are going to be able, after their defeat in the next election, to have lawsuits to keep them going like their former Prime Minister, you know, a nice \$50 million? If his reputation, if he thinks it is worth \$50 million, good luck to him. What is their reputation going to be? I say this on this case to you, why would you buy shares knowing that you are violating a trusteeship? I want to know how many on that side are going to buy shares. How are you going to be able to look at people in the eye? Do you not understand it is an ethical conflict? Think about it. If lawyers can get disbarred for this, it is unethical. Do not do it. Anyway, that is a bit of advice.

* (1550)

So I ask the question, then, Madam Speaker, and that is why I start on this amendment because this amendment is—I will tell you that there are some very substantive amendments, and that there are some very substantive amendments that have the function of doing one thing and that is smoking the Tories out. I have said they can run if they want, but they cannot hide. They have been trying to run from this for quite some time. The most entertaining description of this was the member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) talking about running around in the hockey games saying, what do you think about MTS, what do you think about MTS? I have a suggestion for the member for Ste. Rose. He should do what we did. We set up a public meeting in Neepawa. Set up a meeting, ask people, run a survey. I mean this was pathetic, you know, this is like the hockey game pool—you know, this is a poll here.

Now I have news for the member because there is an interesting poll that the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) can reference, because the member for Point Douglas attends a lot of hockey games. I think it has got something to do with the fact his son is an excellent player, and he travels around the province. He even came to Thompson—and I will not mention which team he cheered for, but anyway it was his son's team, Winnipeg Warriors. Now, the member for Point Douglas went into Pembina constituency, it was at Morden. Right? Morden, Manitoba.

Now, you ought to listen to this because the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) and the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) and I went to a rally in Morden, Manitoba, that hotbed of socialism, to use the words of the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey). You know what? It was one of our best rallies in rural Manitoba. Do you know what they said? It is interesting because you know the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) and the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger) and others who keep going on about this not being an issue—Morden, Manitoba, it was a rally. Now, a gentleman came up to the member for Point Douglas at a hockey game and said, are you an NDP MLA?

Now, there was a time in Morden, even if you were an NDP MLA, I will tell you, if you were at a hockey game, you probably would not want to admit to it. There was a time. But, you know, the member for Point Douglas is a courageous soul, and you know what he said? He says, yes, I am an NDP MLA. And you know what the person said? The person said to him, you know, the biggest problem around here is the last election, like we did every election, we voted Conservative, we should have voted NDP. Morden, Manitoba, yes, Morden, Manitoba. Now, I know the right road to Morden and Winkler because I got to go into Winkler too, because I am advised that I should definitely get in there, there are a lot of people concerned about the MTS.

Why would Morden be concerned about it? Has anybody seen how many MTS employees there are in Morden? You know it is a big issue out there. Do not kid yourself, there is a lot of concern in Morden, Manitoba. You know I know this because I held a meeting. I have been there twice. That is two more public meetings than the Conservatives have held in their own constituency on MTS. [interjection] Oh, on any

number of issues. You know, the Minister of Labour (Mr. Toews) says, on any number of issues. It is interesting because every single one of their agendas excludes one issue. Now, you know they like to say, no one raises the MTS issue with them. Well, okay, you know what, let us deal with this because it is interesting.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) came to Thompson on Tuesday. He had one of his pre-budget consultations that has been going in Manitoba for awhile, it is a good idea. Now I know for a fact the—[interjection] Vic Schroeder started it, yes—and I know for a fact that this issue was raised with him. You know why I know? Because there is the person who works at the airport who said to the Minister of Finance, this one is going to come back to haunt you, a person I respect a lot. Now was this person an active New Democrat? [interjection] Well, I do not know if I will go that far. I am advised soon. Do you know what? He managed their campaign a number of years ago, managed the Conservative candidate's campaign.

He told me several months ago, he said, you know, I am a Conservative, I do not think we have agreed on anything, Steve, and I said, that is probably true, but he said, I am opposed to them selling off MTS. He told the Minister of Finance at the airport, he said, this one is going to come back to haunt you. Now what does it take here? You know, like, the member for Point Douglas in Morden, the person who works at the airport in Thompson, I mean, if you are honest about it enough that you go out and get the feedback, 78 percent does not surprise anyone.

I mean you just walk in any rural coffee shop, and I have been in rural coffee shops throughout Manitoba. We got public meetings, you know what, you talk to people. It is not hard to see which way things are going when 78 percent of people are opposed to that. It is particularly strong amongst seniors. Seniors are very much opposed to this. It is very much of an issue amongst women, by the way, too. I think it was interesting with the CBC poll, because it reflects that. Women are often the ones who rely on phones for their lifeline in more ways than one, and we heard that at committee but, you know, you start looking at it, you can run, but you cannot hide. In the end, two-thirds of Manitobans do not agree with what you are doing; 78 percent of rural Manitobans do not agree.

Has it not dawned on anyone over there? I mean, I talked about the Kool-Aid syndrome. I know you can sit around, and they must have Gestalt sessions, like therapy sessions in the caucus, because the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed), he is obviously into this. They have just said, you have got to get out there now, you just have to go out and you have got to give those rotten NDPers, you have got to go give them heck here, pound them in the House, and they all come in here, and it is like, he leads off, and it reminds me of the charge of the light brigade, which was one of the most incompetent displays of military leadership in history and yet goes down in history books and has been recorded in literary terms as such a—cannons to the left of them, cannons to the right, you know, the UMM to the left of them, the MSOS to the right of them, onward they rode into the valley of political death.

I say to the member for Turtle Mountain, I would suggest, this is one you do not want to be up front on. I mean, get to the back of the parade on this one. Let the people who made the real decisions, like the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) and Tom Stefanson and Jules Benson, the gang of four on MTS.

By the way, you notice I do not include the Minister responsible for MTS (Mr. Findlay), because I want to say on the record that I do not think the Minister responsible for MTS was included on the loop. I thought he had been and I thought I was being, to be kind, misled, but I am convinced now that the Minister responsible for MTS was not brought in until far later in the picture. When he said to me on September 26 that there was no talk of privatization, I thought at one time that he had not told me the truth at that point in time, but I am beginning to wonder if perhaps he honestly believed that but there were things going on behind his back including, in September, the interviewing of the seven investment brokers that led to the three to being considered afterwards. I mean, the group of four, well, Mike Bessey is sort of the book and scholarship king of North America, and what was his thesis proposed on? The costs and benefits of privatizing the Manitoba Telephone System. Mike Bessey, who cut his teeth on telephone issues; Mike Bessey, who was involved with the Faneuil deal and just coincidentally got this book and scholarship deal from who? One of the principals of Faneuil. I mean, 400,000 bucks, not a bad scholarship if you can

get it, I must admit. But is it not interesting, whether it is four or five people, what a small group it comes down to?

That is why I say to the member for Turtle Mountain, you know, when you come out of one of these therapy sessions in the caucus, and they must have changed tack a little bit because, going into the final week, they were desperate, like, they were real desperate. Like, they adjourned at three o'clock on Friday afternoon, they adjourned at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, and I am not suggesting they should have sat on Sunday, because that was the right thing.

They did not meet on Monday, and I guess when they kind of got their pajamas off and put their suits on, they said, we have got a problem here, we have got to push this thing through. They came up with the great idea on a \$1-billion-plus deal of bringing in the amendments, giving me a copy as the critic half an hour before the committee started, running the committee until 3:22, and I must admit they looked pretty happy. They thought they had it. They knew they were going to ram it through—3:22 in the morning.

Well, I thought actually they would just cut off the public. I kind of expected that. They were not happy with that. They want to ram it through. Interesting, because people have asked me since how I kept going from 3:22 to nine o'clock, and I say to the—and the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) was there, because he was part of that group that wanted to ram it through at 3:22 in the morning. You know what? I have never had so much feedback in all the years I have been in politics about doing one thing, and that was standing up for what was right and in that case making sure the government did not ram through the MTS at 3:22 in the morning.

* (1600)

But let us get into this theatre of the absurd, Madam Speaker, the theatre of the absurd. Thursday I walk into the committee, and we are dealing with clause by clause. Finally I thought there was still some hope in terms of, you know, some co-operative operation of the House. You know what? I talked to representatives from one of the unions. They had not even been involved in the discussions on pensions. Do you know what the minister

said? He was not going to deal with this, the same minister who brought in a bill that said the pensioners were deemed to have consented to the transfer of their pension from the civil service into a private plan. It was not until that afternoon, and I want to credit, by the way, the Minister of Energy and Mines (Mr. Praznik) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) for starting those negotiations at our request, but I want to give them credit, and I do not mean to be critical about the Minister responsible for MTS (Mr. Findlay). I am critical up to that point about the process that went from Thursday to Friday. I think he deserves some credit as well.

But let us look at the situation. Thursday they had not met with key components of the employees. The discussion went till about 10:30, and that was I think about the time which the memorandum of understanding was put in place. I remember talking to the Premier (Mr. Filmon), and I pointed out the good spirit on the memorandum of understanding, but not resolved yet. still needs some consideration of amendments. and the Premier insisted. no. we got amendments. Who cares? I mean, it is done, whatever. What was interesting is. Thursday we called the committee for Friday. We go in on Friday, there were amendments, not drafted Thursday. but amendments that were drafted on Friday. What amazed me is, I do not know what happened that weekend, because the Chair of that committee went on at some great length. I must admit, I was not hurt too much when he did not pay any attention to the discussions that went on before the pension amendments.

I know there are some sore points over there about some of us that debated the issue extensively, but it is interesting, he went out of his way, the Chair of the committee, to congratulate the minister, the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) and the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Energy and Mines for having worked on these pension amendments.

So, Madam Speaker, I do not know what went on with this government. Thursday they thought magically, despite their incompetence, that MTS was just going to disappear, poof, up in smoke. I do not know what they thought. Maybe it was supposed to be passed through on Thursday night and then the pension issues were supposed to be dealt with at committee, but that committee was actually supposed to really be magically termed as having taken place before. You know, I do not

know what it takes over there to figure out that you go through the committee stage first and you deal with the report and the third stage afterwards.

Like, if Royal Assent had been given to that bill, nothing that happened on Friday would have been queried, but I do not understand what happened to this group on the weekend. They must have had a bad weekend. You know what I think it probably was? It was probably all the people and the Legions across the province asking why they rammed through Bill 50, which is commercializing Remembrance Day. I realize it probably was not that hard when they had to go to Remembrance Day services and explain why.

I tell you, it really hurt me a lot when the Minister of Labour (Mr. Toews) said, that rotten NDP stopped The Remembrance Day Act from being proclaimed. I had a hard time in my Legion at Remembrance Day services in Thompson having to explain why I was responsible for one more year of not having stores open at one o'clock to have a Remembrance Day sale.

I say to the government on the record too that I find it absolutely despicable that some of the major companies like Superstore, once again that great corporate citizen, went and chose to open anyway, despite the fact they had full notice. I say to the government, you better prosecute them if there is to be any sense of respect for the law in this province. I say to the Minister of Labour, because he likes to in his new Labour Relations bill talk about the conduct of employees on picket lines, how about the conduct of a major corporation on Remembrance Day, a day that was put aside to protect the memory of our veterans, the people who served, a bill that was not proclaimed in this House? So I must say they had a bad weekend, I understand it. Anyway, they came in last week, Tuesday, the ultimate, Madam Speaker, they were going to punish us. They were going to show us who was boss. So what did they do? They adjourned the House.

When I heard them say on the record over the weekend that the deal and the rules are off, I must admit part of me said, well, if we are going to be debating MTS, let us think of some things, tactics, you know, what is appropriate. And you know what? I must admit adjourning the House did cross my mind. I rejected it; I said no. We are here to debate within our Opposition

Day motion. They came in. You know it is funny, because the Premier (Mr. Filmon) called me a comedian a few weeks ago for doing what?—trying to adjourn the House. It is funny, but, no, they were going to adjourn the House Tuesday, Wednesday. Boy, they were going to show us who is boss. Well, now, Madam Speaker, we are back to square one. I guess, the damage control team over there has come out with a new strategy, and that is get the Speaker to enforce closure.

I mean this is a brilliant one here. After a day saying the rules are off, they want it now to take the rules and add a new two or three interpretations and then the debate would just magically poof, disappear again. I do not know what it is over there, but there is no Cinderella here. There is no midnight. You do not suddenly turn—your carriage does not turn back into a pumpkin. The reality is, you cannot run from this issue. Bill 67 is going to be there. I will tell you one thing, we are going to be there. Our caucus is going to be in each and every one of your constituencies. You cannot hide from it. My suggestion is that if you are too—no, I do not think this is appropriate here; well, “pigheaded” is not unparliamentary—but if you are going to be that way, I am not putting it to a vote, I am not passing this, you have to understand one thing. Now that you have said on the record that the rules as they existed before are off, your choice, I think that you ought to expect on the biggest deal in Manitoba history that we are going to stand up as we are on this amendment and all other 40—pardon me—39 other amendments, that we are going to debate it, Madam Speaker. You do not want to give it due diligence on behalf of the two-thirds of Manitobans who do not want the sale, many others, we are going to give it due diligence and we will take the time if necessary to do it. Thank you.

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, it is very helpful that in the report stage that we deal with all of the issues in sequence. Normally, in committee we would have put off the debate of the preamble till the end, but I think it is very appropriate that we start a bill like the Bill 67 report stage with an amendment. It deals with a very important issue in the preamble.

Madam Speaker, let me speak directly to this preamble. It comes as the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), my colleague with whom I had the privilege of sitting, helped the government to understand that antidemocratic

processes will not be tolerated by our side of the House. He points out in his remarks that this is straight out of the mission statement of MTS, if indeed as the current chairperson of MTS, the other Mr. Stefanson, has said that the mission and mandate will not change. He said that in committee when we were discussing the annual report in a great bluster and bravado. The mission and mandate of the company will not change.

Well, indeed, if that is the case, then I would expect all honourable members opposite to be supporting this amendment wholeheartedly, because this is the mission and mandate of the Manitoba Telephone System to meet the telecommunication needs of all Manitobans with the right solutions, not necessarily the cheapest solutions, outstanding service, not average service or ordinary service or service we can get by with on a dark Friday night when nothing else is happening and superior products, not just the products that will meet the needs of people at an ordinary kind of level, but superior products, like the product, Madam Speaker, that MTS announced it is going to be testing in the next few months that will use the newest of digital compression technology to make old copper wire perform things that even co-ax cable could not do a year or so ago.

So I would, first of all and with great seriousness, say particularly to those backbenchers opposite, you ought to be supporting this amendment. This is what your people said would be the case. The mission statement would stay. The mandate would stay. Nothing will change. Well, then, here is the amendment to give that some force.

But, Madam Speaker, it is important to start this debate on this issue, on this particular issue, for another reason, and that is that this is the ethical principle on which the whole debate hangs. If we are in a publicly owned Crown corporation, then it indeed has a mission to provide the right solution, outstanding service and superior products. It does not have, as a private corporation would have, a mandate of meeting the interests of the shareholders in producing a bottom line return on investment. That is the duty of a private corporation and properly so. When private individuals risk their capital, they have a right to expect what the law calls a fiduciary duty. That is the financial duty that the managers of that company have to those who have risked their equity in it.

* (1610)

So we can expect that in a private telco, the mission and mandate of that telco, though it may have some PR value for the public, will really be return on equity, return at the end of the day, return in the form of dividends, return in the form of the appreciation of shares, return in the form of benefits to the shareholders, Madam Speaker.

So it is very, very appropriate that we start our debate by being very clear that this is the dividing point in this particular debate. This preamble is the dividing point for those of us who believe that telecommunications are such a central and vital lever of our future economic and human and social policy in this province, a vital lever for education, Madam Speaker, for the honourable member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), who has pointed out a number of times that they have a centre in the regional high school in Swan River, which some of us were privileged to visit last year on a trip to that part of the province, that had cut the costs of having meetings for those government departments and private companies that have employees in Swan River because they could use the two-way telecommunications video studio in the high school. They did not have to travel to Winnipeg, taking a day's time for it to go and to return. They did not have to spend money on hotels. They could go to Swan River's high school and have an effective, efficient meeting, seeing those in the meeting on their screens in front of them, getting their business done in the hour or so it might take and then going about their full day's work.

So let it not be said that telecommunications is simply an issue of profit. It is also an issue of efficiency for government itself. It is an issue of access for students in the North and students in rural Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, in my former life as a consultant, I was privileged to work with the Northwest Territories government on education, and let me tell you that I was delighted and surprised to find a small community in Baffin Island that was using Manitoba's Calculus 300 program and was on line through our telecommunications system through their satellite system. There were Inuit students in northern Baffin Island on line with Manitoba Telephone System resources to study Calculus 300. They simply could not have provided Calculus in the northern reaches of Baffin, but you could not get into some of the

universities those kids wanted to go to without it. This was a lifeline for them, for their future.

Another reason why it is important that we start this debate on the issue of the preamble is that if the members opposite in fact defeat this amendment, which, I hope, they will not do, but if they do, Madam Speaker, it will be yet more evidence of another broken Tory promise, a promise not to sell the Telephone System, broken; not to sell the Telephone System without public hearings, broken; a promise that the mission and the mandate would remain the same, if they do not pass this amendment, another broken Tory promise.

Madam Speaker, when you start debate of a bill on something so central as the question of what the purpose of communication is, then I think you are on the right track, and so we are on the right track here today.

Madam Speaker, let me talk a bit about this bogus point of order that was put to you earlier by the government House leader. I had the privilege of sitting through the committee hearings, some 80 hours of which I sat on about 70-plus, perhaps my amount exceeded only by my honourable friend from Thompson who, I think, sat through almost all of the hearings, and we watched the government so careless of process, so careless of democracy—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the honourable member for Crescentwood that debate should be relevant to the amendment, and the honourable member is speaking to a point of order which has been taken under advisement.

Mr. Sale: The government was so careless of the process and of the democratic process in its committee stage that it was prepared to ride roughshod over the public, ride roughshod over due process of the committee, and move all of its amendments, some 24 or 25 of them, Madam Speaker, in the dark of night, amendments that had not been seen except by one person on the opposition benches, amendments that were very complex and which clearly made the case for splitting the session into spring and fall sittings because, suddenly, at the very last minute, it appeared that this bill was so seriously flawed that there were 24 or 25 substantive amendments that had to be moved. So, all of a sudden, at the end of the

process, these amendments arrive in the middle of the night, and the government expects us to pass it through.

Now, Madam Speaker, we made it very clear that we would debate this bill and, ultimately, if the government wishes to use its bully pulpit, its majority, to ram it through using closure, that will be its burden to carry both at present and into the future, but we made it plain that we would debate the merits of this bill. We would put forward substantive amendments of which this is the first one. We would hold them to their word that, in fact, this company would be privatized in the care and trusteeship of Manitobans, that it would not be owned by AT&T, that it would not have a board of directors not representing our province.

These are all promises that have been made in this legislation and to which our amendments will speak directly to protect and provide those kinds of assurances to this bill, which, no matter how it is amended, we will vote against, Madam Speaker. Nevertheless, we have a duty, as the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) has said, to try and improve this very bad legislation.

Now, Madam Speaker, we have heard today how in a company that is going to have the same mission and mandate of superior services, having outstanding service, superior products and the right solutions, that there will nevertheless be somehow the opportunity to make large profits. It seems to me that this is the whole point of publicly owned corporations. They do not just have the duty of making large profits. They have the duty of providing service to those whom they serve in their area as a Crown corporation.

So starting in this place with this particular amendment brings to mind the other broken promises and the shams that are in this bill. How can we provide superior service, superior products, outstanding service and the right solutions if we are not to be able to invest in this telecommunications company using the money that it generates and its internal sources of investment? If we privatize this company, there is absolutely no guarantee, as the Speaker knows, that the private owners will not be tempted to scale back the superior products, the outstanding services, the right solutions that include some of the newest in the digital compression technology. They will be very tempted to advance the interest of

shareholders against the interests of those who are served by the company.

Now, how is this company able to provide the right solutions, outstanding service and superior products, Madam Speaker? Well, it is able to do it because it internally is generating an average of \$170 million a year from its rates provided by those who use its services in the business and in the residential services sector. This little company has generated \$804-million worth of investments in these very things that are in this amendment, outstanding service, rights, solutions, superior products, over the last five years. What has Manitoba got for that? They have single-line service, an all-digital switching system and fibre optics at a level that are higher than most other telcos. They have new digital switching, asynchronous compression technology. We are now going to move into compression technology along twisted pairs, along the old copper wiring, which will make our current high-speed modems look like turtles from Turtle Mountain.

Madam Speaker, when a little company can generate, on average, \$170 million a year for investment in the superior products and outstanding services, clearly, it is a very attractive target for privatization, because all you have to do to make a profit is not depreciate your equipment quite so fast and cut back on the amount of reinvestment, cut back on those superior products and outstanding services to which the publicly owned company is committed. All of a sudden, what happens? Read a balance sheet, and you know what happens. The money flows to the bottom line, and the profits of the company miraculously increase from the level this year of about \$30 million, very easily, to \$70 million or even \$100 million a year, a very nice return on investment that will be enjoyed, not by the people of Manitoba, but by the new shareholders.

That sounds like it is going to include the cabinet and the Premier (Mr. Filmon) himself, who is going to take a nice large position, maybe on margin, probably put up \$10,000, buy \$100,000 worth of stocks on margin, get his 12 percent dividend and flip the stocks and make a nice little profit, but that is not a conflict of interest for this Premier. This is a Premier who stood out in the hall the other day, Madam Speaker, and said, oh, yes, we have studies, we have secret reports, but they were for cabinet, they were not for anybody else. Now, presumably, the

Premier read those reports. I assume, as the Premier, that he read through them. How can he then say that he has no inside information? He does not have any inside information? Well, he must not have read any of those reports then. He could not possibly have absorbed anything that was in those secret documents that are so secret that even after the decision to privatize has been made, they could not be made public. Well, maybe it is because they have information that gives the cabinet and the insiders some very significant benefits and advantages which the rest of Manitobans are not going to have.

* (1620)

I do not know how it is possible to be a seller in the morning and a buyer in the afternoon, having read all those secret reports that cannot be shared with anyone else, and not be in a serious ethical conflict of interest. Madam Speaker. I think, arguably, in more than an ethical conflict, but a very real legal conflict of interest. How you can possibly have that secret, private, confidential information and then tell Manitobans, trust us, there is nothing in there that gives us an advantage, is beyond my comprehension.

Madam Speaker. I want to move on in my support for this amendment by asking some questions about a rather curious fact. It is interesting to us how the Conservatives have managed to keep support for selling MTS so high. I mean, at 22 percent, that is still fairly high support. Only 78 percent of rural Manitobans are opposed. So how have we managed to keep it up at 22 percent? Well, one of the ways they have done that is by misleading Manitobans quite deliberately into believing that somehow the company can be maintained in Manitoba with a Manitoba board of directors, Manitoba ownership, no foreign ownership of any significant level, no one owner of more than 10 percent of the shares. They managed to mislead Manitobans quite deliberately into believing there are real protections in this act. Well, corporate counsel for MTS and for the government made it very plain that these are shams, that they have misled Manitobans, and they know they have done that.

The minister himself is now on the record agreeing that there are no protections in terms of ownership, in terms of the board of directors, in terms of the head office, in terms of the functions of marketing, of telemarketing. There are no protections in this act for Manitobans. So

that is one way they have kept support as high as it is at a paltry 22 percent, because those 22 percent, at least some of them, believe the government has been telling the truth, that there is some way of keeping this company in Manitoba, keeping its workforce all here, keeping its board of directors made up of Manitobans. Now, Madam Speaker, they are going to learn the truth over the next few weeks as we debate this bill. They will understand that those are sham protections, that they have no force or effect whatsoever the very day, four years from now, miraculously just after the next provincial election, just after the Premier (Mr. Filmon) has presided over the Pan Am Games, the protections of which he speaks and which he advertised in his ads all go poof, and there are no protections anymore, anybody can own this company, can move its services anywhere they want, can move its headquarters, if they want, to some ridge in New Jersey. What is the name of that ridge?

An Honourable Member: Basking Ridge.

Mr. Sale: Basking Ridge, New Jersey, where the headquarters of AT&T are, and the executives fly in daily on their executive helicopters from their nice homes. Madam Speaker, there is nothing in this legislation that can protect this company once it is sold. The Conservatives know that, and they have deliberately mislead Manitobans into believing otherwise. I at least am glad that the Minister responsible for the Telephone System had the courage to stand on his feet on Thursday and confirm that these are sham protections. They have no force and effect in law. The minister has at least now told Manitobans.

It is the duty of the government, I believe, to put out some of those wonderful ads that they have concocted over the last little while that tell Manitobans that—whoops, whoops—there is no protection—whoops—the head office can be somewhere else—whoops—the back office functions can be contracted out to Arizona so that they can play with the desert weasels. Madam Speaker, it is the government's duty to let Manitobans know that the shams in this act are deliberate. They were deliberately misleading, and they have to be told before that 22 percent are sucked into buying an investment that they believe will be owned and run by Manitobans down the line. They have a duty to tell Manitobans that four years from now, just after the next election, all those protections go poof, and this little telco is just like any

other private company that Manitobans have no control, no protection, that this company will not be a Manitoba company four years from now.

It will be like any other of the baby Bells owned by multinationals, controlled from, what is it? Basking Ridge. What a lovely name—controlled from Basking Ridge or Ottawa or some other corporate headquarters, where the marching orders will come down, the services will be contracted out to the cheapest buyer, and, just like with Bell in Ontario, the installers will be laid off and told to form their own company and bid for their old jobs at half their wages. That is the future of this company when it is privatized. To pretend otherwise is to perpetrate a sham on Manitobans. They ought to be putting ads out that tell the truth. There is no protection for this company. It is like being pregnant, either you are or you are not. Either you are a private sector company or you are not. The day this company is privatized is the end of any protection. It is only a question of whether that protection lasts four years, or four years and one day, or some deal is cooked so that it is even shorter, the act is amended and the debts are paid off and finally then we know the truth, this is a private company like every other. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We support this amendment. We call on the government to do likewise and live up to their word that the mission and mandate will not change.

Mr. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): Madam Speaker, I am real pleased that we now got to report stage and we can get on with dealing with the bill.

Madam Speaker, the members opposite proposed the first amendment to add in after—in the first clause of the preamble “after residents of the province to meet the telecommunications needs of all Manitobans with the right solutions, outstanding service and superior products”. That is the mission statement MTS has in their annual report. Therefore, that particular amendment is acceptable.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): This is a good beginning that the government is showing here by agreeing to pass—perhaps this is a new face on this government. Perhaps they are going to listen to what should be the mission statement for the Manitoba Telephone System.

Madam Speaker, it is obviously quite a bit of difference that this Minister responsible for the Manitoba Telephone System is showing when you juxtapose that position with his Premier. I mean this minister here showed that there was a conflict of interest, and he said he was not going to be buying shares in the Manitoba Telephone System or at least that is what we understand him to be saying, and we hope that he will hold true to the word that he has shown here. That is obviously different than what his Premier has shown here, where the Premier is giving free rein to any member of his caucus to go out and buy any shares. I find it is interesting to note that these are the same people that are going to set the share value for the Manitoba Telephone System.

I do not understand how you, even through your board at the Manitoba Telephone System, because you provide the directive as the government to that board, and you have the interaction that takes place, the consultation that takes place back and forth, you set the share value for the shares that are going to be offered and that you say through your government, excluding the Minister responsible for the Manitoba Telephone System, at least to this point, saying that everybody on your government who is setting those share values has the right to go out and purchase those shares, so how can you say that that is not a conflict of interest?

I have listened to the comments here over a number of months now when we have been talking about the Manitoba Telephone System, and the Premier said, quite clearly, before, during and after the 1995 general election, that his government was not going to sell the Manitoba Telephone System. Read my lips, he says, at the Glenwood Community Club, we are not going to sell the Manitoba Telephone System.

We have members of the public that are coming here and telling us that they were at those meetings. They listened to the Premier of this province say that he was not going to—

* (1630)

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Transcona will have 17 minutes remaining.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Deputy Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, given that the member for

Transcona (Mr. Reid) is speaking on this matter, it is an important matter before the House, I would wonder if the opposition would be prepared to give leave to waive private members' hour to continue.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to waive private members' hour?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: No? Leave has been denied.

The hour being 4:30, and time for Private Members' Business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Res. 23—Privatization of Manitoba's Health Care System

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), that

WHEREAS there are currently a number of semi-private or private for-profit clinics in operation in the Province of Manitoba; and

WHEREAS in January 1995 the federal Minister of Health wrote to the provinces giving them until October 15 to end the practice of allowing private for-profit clinics to charge "facility fees" before she would impose a penalty in the form of a direct reduction in transfer payments equalling the amount people are paying in user fees; and

WHEREAS Manitoba will lose up to \$400,000 as a result of the Minister of Health's failure to stop for-profit clinics from billing Manitobans; and

WHEREAS the Minister of Health has considered and approved proposals to limit health care services, such as physical exams, unless patients can pay out of pocket for them; and

WHEREAS, despite recommendations for action, the minister has not moved to control the growing number of

private labs or develop conflict-of-interest guidelines in this area; and

WHEREAS more and more services, like eye examinations, are being deinsured and more user fees, like the \$50 Northern Patient Transportation fee and the \$300 ostomy fee, are being imposed; and

WHEREAS the five principles of medicare as outlined in the Canada Health Act are portability, accessibility, public administration, universality and comprehensiveness, principles which are violated by the proliferation of private for-profit health services and user fees; and

WHEREAS these charges are leading to the Americanization of our health care system.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Health to review all decision to move to private for-profit health services in Manitoba; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Assembly urge the minister to go on record as opposing the development of a two-tier health system and the further privatization of health care services.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, I think it is appropriate that, as we move into Private Members' Business, we should have left the government's business, which is another privatization scheme. We are moving now into the area of health care where the government is going in spades to privatize everything that moves in health care. I think it is appropriate that members of this Assembly and that the citizens of Manitoba have an opportunity to discuss not creeping privatization—in fact, this is galloping privatization that is occurring under this regime.

Do you know that the truth was revealed to Manitobans this February when we revealed and we provided to Manitobans what the government intentions were in terms of health care? The government cabinet document, the Treasury Board document signed off by the Minister

of Health (Mr. McCrae) and endorsed by the entire cabinet, said that it was Manitoba Health policy to deliver health care privately, that it was Manitoba Health policy to move to private delivery of health care. This was not just home care. It was Manitoba Health policy to deliver health care privately.

Without endorsement from the public, without any mention in the election campaign except vague assurances that health care would be protected—just as we had vague assurances that MTS would not be privatized—the Minister of Health and members of this cabinet went around the province saying that health care would be protected. And what do we see, Madam Speaker? We see the biggest move towards privatization in Manitoba history and probably in Canadian health history. There is no province that is moving to privatize as members opposite are moving to privatize. Even Ralph Klein, who has been sent on his heels in Alberta, has not privatized to the extent that this minister is privatizing health care.

Madam Speaker, what is most deplorable about this policy, it is being done without input from the public. It is being done without any kind of input from the public. The Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) likes to stand up and make pronouncements that he consults. I ask you, who was consulted in the public when the minister decided to deinsure eye examinations? Who was consulted in the public when the minister decided that he would remove from medicare the eye examinations? Who in the public was consulted when the minister this year decided to reduce the number of visits an individual could have to a chiropractor? Who consulted? Who did the minister consult? Who was the minister consulting when he decided to conditionally approve the elimination of physical examinations, the elimination from medicare of physical examinations? Nobody in the public.

It continues, Madam Speaker. Who did the minister consult when they decided to privatize the home care equipment program? Who did the minister consult when they decided to privatize the home I.V. program? Who did the minister consult when they forced VON to set up a private for-profit subsidiary to the nonprofit corporation in order to bid on the government's privatization contracts in home care? Who did the minister consult with when he decided to privatize and charge fees for these services?

Madam Speaker, who has the minister consulted with as he now is in the final stages of determining how he will downsize, rationalize the lab system, both inside the city of Winnipeg and outside the city of Winnipeg? Are we going to see a move towards a nonprofit system or are we going to see a move towards a privatized system, a privatized system run by the privates?

The minister has report after report after report on his desk about the lab system. The minister has his own reports from his own groups, his own secret groups studying the report that says that private labs are creaming off the best services in terms of the lab system. What is the minister doing? The minister is now meeting with private lab interests to have private lab interests take over the lab system in the city of Winnipeg and outside of the city of Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker, what we are seeing in this galloping privatization is something fundamentally dishonest. At least if the government would stand up and say, this is what our policy is, this is where we are going, then the Manitobans would have an opportunity to debate it but they are not doing it because what is the essence of privatization? The essence of privatization is taking a publicly operated service and putting it right on the backs of the citizens of Manitoba and making them pay, because they have to pay for all of these services. That is where the user fees come in. That is where the move towards a two-tier system comes in, and that is where this government and this Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) is taking us over and over again throughout this system.

Madam Speaker, a case in point is the eye examinations. If you want your eyes examined, now you have to pay. I was at a public debate with the minister when I talked about user fees, and the minister said, these are not taxes. Now what are you going to call these fees? You call them contributions; you call them co-payments. They call them everything but what they are, user fees and a tax on the sick. User fees and a tax on the sick.

Madam Speaker, the minister will get his opportunity to speak and he will get his opportunity to debate, but what this amounts to is taking a service that is offered to the public, privatizing it and making the users pay, making the public pay. These amount to taxes, taxes on the sick, a two-tier system, and we have seen it in spades in Manitoba. We have seen it in home-care equipment.

We have seen it in home care. We have seen it in the provision and the charge of facility fees. We have seen it in the, you know, now if an individual wants an eye examination or a hip or knee replacement, they can get it done in the public system that has the longest waiting list in the country, or they can now get it privately at a fee, and this is being encouraged by the government.

The minister suggested, the minister has said on many occasions, this is great. It reduces the waiting list, and that just betrays the basic lack of understanding of how the system works. By suggesting that somehow if you pay for the service and reduce the waiting list you are doing a service in Manitoba, is in fact totally contrary. What you are doing is charging user fees on the backs of those that require the service, on the backs of the sick, and we have seen a greater proliferation of user fees under this jurisdiction than we have seen in any other time in Manitoba history. We have seen a privatization like no other privatization.

Madam Speaker, what is the end game? What is the government's goal? It is very clear. It was in the Treasury Board submission signed by the Minister of Health, endorsed by cabinet, and it said that they are moving towards user fees in the future in home care and that, as the government privatizes the service and as individuals get charged for the service, they are going to have no choice but to pay this user fee.

So we are going to have a core of services, a small core of services being offered by the government and the rest will be subject to if you can afford to or not afford to, and this frankly fits in with the Conservative philosophy towards health care, which is fundamentally that it should be there for catastrophic purposes and that is the extent of it. The Conservative philosophy is that medicare is there for catastrophic and after that you are on your own and after that you pay.

* (1640)

I know that was said by the Prime Minister, and I was shocked to hear that by the Prime Minister to this day, but what the Minister of Health does not recognize is that every one of his policies in this area is taking us exactly to that conclusion by narrowing the core services offered in Manitoba and you have already this year narrowed the core services dramatically. You are doing precisely that

and, by privatizing services, you are forcing individuals to pay for a cost that was formerly paid for out of general revenues and was formerly paid for universally under our health care system.

So in its drive towards privatization, the government is not only costing us additional funds in terms of penalty payments from the federal government, but what they are doing in addition is putting in place a two-tier system that will see Manitobans have to pay for health care services that were formerly offered universally and within the system.

No better place or recognition of government policy exists for us to confirm this government's policy initiative than to look in Bill 49, where over and over again in Bill 49, the government has provided regional health authorities with the ability and the need and in fact has directed regional health boards to charge user fees, to charge fees for services that were formerly offered. We are going to see with the move towards regional health authorities, particularly in light of the fact that the minister has already indicated that \$100 million is going to be removed from the budgets of rural and northern Manitoba over the next three years, we are going to see the imposition, unlike any other time in Manitoba history, of user fees within our health care system outside of Winnipeg. I dare say something that is already occurring in the city of Winnipeg in the form of user fees for so many health care services is going to now expand outside of Winnipeg under the regionalization model. I suggest and I think that we will stand corrected that when we see the shakedown and the ultimate resolution of how the government is going to deal with its superboard system in Manitoba, we are going to see more and more services deinsured.

Just this year, one year after an election campaign, a year and a half after—well, in fact, the budget came out a year after the election campaign—we see the deinsuring of services for chiropractors, we see the deinsuring of eye examinations, we see the deinsuring soon of physical examinations, we see the deinsuring of lab tests, we see the attempted privatization of 100 percent of home care and a cabinet document that indicates that only core services would be paid for by the government but the rest would be paid for as a user fee—and it says so in the document—by the public.

So, Madam Speaker, I do not know what it takes to try to persuade the government that its course of action is fundamentally wrong. It took a major strike and it took a public awareness campaign unlike anything ever before hereto seen in Manitoba with respect to home care to convince the government that Manitobans were against the privatization of home care. Notwithstanding that, the government continues to privatize—home care equipment program, home I.V. program, the VON service that had to set up a subsidiary at government direction. The minister in his comment indicates a misunderstanding, precisely indicates the problem. The minister says that VON has always been privatized.

Does the minister not realize there is a difference between nonprofit and for profit? Does the minister not realize that the We Care's of the world are for profit and VON is not for profit? Does the minister not realize that the We Care and all of the minister's friends in the personal care home sector and all of the government's privatization in that sector are for profit and that the money goes into the pockets of shareholders rather than back to patient care? Does the minister not recognize that fundamental difference? I am afraid not and probably that accounts for the fact that the government has so clumsily embarked on this scheme.

Before it is too late, the minister—I will give the government credit. They backed off in terms of the home care strike at least in terms of a small proportion of what they privatized. They are still privatizing 100 percent of the nursing service. Will the government take a step back, look at what they are doing to the health care system in Manitoba, look to a system that now has the longest waiting list in the country, look to a system where the government through its cuts and its mismanagement has caused grave difficulties and look to themselves, not to the nurses and the doctors and patients as the problem, and the way they put the system together and give assurances that user fees are not part of this government's plan?

Privatization is the wrong way to go. It has been demonstrated over and over again in major studies and it is not the way to go. Stop following the New Zealand model in terms of the regionalization. If the government were to do that, I would think that perhaps the public and we in the opposition might be prepared to look with more favour upon any attempts to try to change a system, but

as the government moves on its fundamental privatization model with its move towards user fees and its association with private companies and its directives, then I think that Manitobans will continue to be suspicious of all of the government's attempts and all of the government's health care reforms.

I urge members of this House to support this resolution against privatization, against a two-tiered health system and in favour of a universal health care system that meets with the needs and the requirements of all Manitobans. Thank you.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to participate in discussion of the resolution brought forward today by the honourable member for Kildonan, who for a number of years now has been the official Health critic for the New Democratic Party. He puts a lot of energy into his work and I appreciate that in a person. He puts so much energy though that he sometimes does not always get the approval or approbation of his colleagues on his side of the House before speaking for the party he represents. He tends in his presentations and his participation in the public debate on health issues to engage in words and phrases that have become somewhat hackneyed. Words like "privatization" and "two-tier" and "on the backs of the sick" and "user fees," those kinds of hackneyed expressions that have nothing to do with any logic. There is absolutely no scholarship in any of the contributions the honourable member makes, and he simply does not do his homework.

For my three years as Minister of Health, I have been listening to the hackneyed bleatings and ejaculations of the honourable member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) and, frankly, I find that simple repetition does not work anymore. It might have worked for Stanley Knowles or Tommy Douglas in those halcyon days of the CCF and the New Democratic Party, but those days are over. We are in the '90s now and the people of the '90s are frankly tired of hearing the bleatings and ejaculations that come from 50 years ago that have absolutely no relevance to what is going on in the real world today, but I still listen in the hope that as the honourable member for Kildonan practises his skill as an orator, there will be actually something that is relevant to the '90s and beyond because Manitobans are desperately looking for leadership from all of the participants in this Chamber and that includes

leadership from the Health critic for the New Democratic Party.

* (1650)

But he has gone on, Madam Speaker, ad infinitum, ad nauseam and indeed ad absurdum from time to time in his contributions to debate on health in this country and he really does no service to those forward thinkers like Tommy Douglas, a forward thinker as it turns out like Bob Rae who had to learn the hard way to become a forward thinker. He did not start out that way but circumstances have now conspired such that Bob Rae is now rewriting the way it should have been. His book is a good example of that, I commend it to the reading of all honourable members opposite in the New Democratic Party. Indeed, members of the Liberal Party might be interested as well since Bob Rae replaced the Liberal government in Ontario and it may be that having been replaced by a Conservative government in Ontario, Bob Rae's writings of today might be of interest to honourable members opposite. They might get a hint as to just what it is that is wrong with their approach to their style of leadership in the '90s.

As I say, the honourable member for Kildonan displays no evidence whatever of utilizing any logic in his contribution. There is no scholarship, there is no homework evident in any of his comments today.

Madam Speaker, all of which is to say that the honourable member and his colleagues, they pay no heed whatever to the concept that as a nation and as a province we should learn to live within our means. This is a strange, new concept to New Democrats, but the thing that is interesting about this is that it is not a strange new concept to virtually every other Canadian living in this country today. We all have to live within our means and in doing so make adjustments to the way we live so that there will be something left over to pass on to future generations.

Sometimes I am tempted to think that the messages put out by honourable members opposite have a flavour of something that is desirable. There is no doubt that the honourable member for Kildonan and his colleagues are actuated by honourable sentiments; I do not quarrel with that. What I do quarrel with is that reality is a total stranger to honourable members opposite. It is as if they

are working in some world outside this planet that does not exist except in the imagination of people like the honourable members for Concordia (Mr. Doer), Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) and one or two others over there who pretend to leadership aspirations.

It was Tommy Douglas, Madam Speaker, who honourable members opposite like to credit with the fact that we have a health care system in our country. Well, we had a health care system before Tommy Douglas came along, a gentleman I knew and was honoured to have made acquaintance with and to report faithfully his utterances in the House of Commons for some eight years. Mr. Douglas was a gentleman I think all Canadians came to respect and, in some cases, revere because he helped bring to us something that is very important to all of us and that is a government participation in a health system.

But the system that Tommy Douglas helped bring into being was based on a private-sector philosophy which called for a fee-for-service system for the payment of medical services. That is something that clearly requires review today. I am sure that Tommy Douglas, if he were with us today, would be urging us to do that, and he would be chiding the honourable member for Kildonan not to be so silly and foolish in trotting out a diatribe that is clearly of a 50-year-old vintage.

If you understand, Madam Speaker, that in the last 50 years our world has changed more than all of the changes during the whole of civilization. It does not take very long to figure out that the New Democrats have some catching up to do. They are so hidebound in their philosophy and ideology that there is no room for doing the right thing any more in the minds of members of the New Democratic Party here in Manitoba.

Well, is it not strange that when New Democrats elsewhere are charged with the responsibility of actually doing something instead of just talking about it all the time, you will find that in provinces which are led by New Democratic administrations you will see a number of similarities to what is going on in those provinces to what you see here. Although I must say, under Bob Rae and under Roy Romanow, the changes that we are seeing in health care are somewhat more significant. If there are cuts, there are deeper cuts; if there are changes, those

changes are more sudden than what we see here in the province of Manitoba. So it is almost like those provinces do not exist, those administrations do not exist, Bob Rae never walked on this earth, and Roy Romanow is someone who has just gone astray, I guess. While we do not know much about Mr. Clark yet, because he has not really had much of a chance to show anybody what he can do, what we have seen so far we are a little nervous about.

But clearly honourable members opposite must come to grips with the fact that we are late into the 20th Century and nearly in the next millennium. If they do not come to grips with that, their message will continue to be irrelevant and will become more and more irrelevant as we go forward into the next century.

The concept of living within your means, though, is not a new concept, it is a concept that has been around ever since the New Democrats came along. In those early days, Madam Speaker, I think that was a concept they embraced, but here in the province of Manitoba they have clearly given up that part of their legacy and decided to go for the political brownie points rather than bring forward constructive, realistic and relevant alternative solutions to the problems we face as a province. For example, when facts and reality escape them or do not work for their particular very base, I suggest, objectives, then make something up.

We saw an example of that today in the Legislature during Question Period. The honourable member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), thinking that he could perhaps bring some attention to the pressures that have been placed on the dialysis program over the years, decided that he would introduce a letter into this Legislature. He brings forward a letter written by an official in the Health department to the leadership of the dialysis program. Well, he decides that out of a four- or five-paragraph letter, a couple of paragraphs in that letter ought to be removed because, you know, here in the Legislature we cannot make a distinction. We need to be spoon-fed our information by the honourable member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak).

Well, it was a piece of chicanery that the honourable member for Kildonan did not get away with, I am happy to say. The document that the honourable member produced when looked at in its entirety tells quite a

different story than the story being portrayed by the honourable member for Kildonan. Now, I do not need to go, I do not think, chapter and verse again into the commitment of this government to the health care needs of Manitobans, but I guess since the New Democrats feel that repetition is the only way to get a point across I have to engage in that sort of thing myself.

There is another train of thought that says if you tell a lie often enough, after awhile that lie becomes the truth. There are shades of that here on a daily basis. Somehow we have got the attention of honourable members opposite when we raise issues like this. [interjection]

Me thinks the New Democrats doth protest a little too much. They are a little too cute by half, especially today when they blank out half a letter that they have tabled in this House, they kind of betray their own intentions and the game that they are playing. The fact is that dialysis services are an important service to be provided, and if you look at the growth of that program in Manitoba, there is ample evidence that this government is certainly committed to the people who require dialysis services, and nothing, no gamesmanship the honourable member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) might play, is going to change that.

Now, maybe he was urged on by his friend the honourable member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) today in playing that type of a game. It is not usual for the member for Kildonan to carry on like that. Maybe he spent some time on the weekend with the member for Crescentwood and learned a few parliamentary tricks from him, and maybe the honourable member for Kildonan can be forgiven for that little game that he tried to play today.

But as I say, Tommy Douglas, one of those architects of the health system that now needs restructuring and change—and he would be one of the first to suggest that needs to be done—brought in a system that required government to be responsible for those things that the member referred to, and the Prime Minister also referred to it, as services required in catastrophic circumstances relating to doctors and hospitals.

What is totally lost on honourable members opposite—or maybe it is not, Madam Speaker—is that the Canada Health Act does refer to services that are of a medically

necessary nature. A few moments ago the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) was pointing out the five principles of the Canada Health Act: universality, portability, accessibility, public administration and comprehensiveness, and applying that to the total of all aspects of the health care system when he knows, or ought to know—and if he does not, he belongs where he is, in the opposition—that those concepts apply to those medically necessary services talked about in the Canada Health Act.

* (1700)

Well, where has he been the last 25 years? The health system has changed already, and we are into a lot more things than simply hospitals and doctors and it is right that we are. It is quite a challenge for every jurisdiction to apply those principles to every service. Yet all provinces in this country of ours maintain that we ought to do everything we can to achieve the ideals that I just recited from the Canada Health Act in all aspects of our system. It is a very hard thing to do, and provinces are grappling with that issue. Manitoba takes a back seat to none. In fact, we lead this country in terms of our commitment to health care, 33.8 percent of all our spending being on health care. We lead this nation, and no province can surpass us in that regard.

So all of the hackneyed bleatings and ejaculations of the honourable member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) aside, I think we can go forward with some confidence that we have a government that is totally committed to the health care concerns of all Manitobans. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Madam Speaker, I also wish to put some comments on the record regarding the resolution that the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) had introduced into the House. I agree as well that there needs to be openness of the government to debate issues that are relative and pertinent to Manitobans. As I was listening to the member for Kildonan go on almost endlessly with some of the issues that he felt were of great concern to him, I was reminded of a letter that I received today from one of my constituents, and this letter certainly applauded our Minister of Health and our government for the approach that we were taking in health care and applauded the government in the fact that the health care that they had received had certainly met their needs. They were speaking specifically of a very

grave situation, where a member of their family had been subjected to cancer, and so they were appreciative of the assistance, of the good health care that we have and the opportunity that they had to participate in this. So I want to, with that, commend our Minister of Health for the good work that he is doing.

Madam Speaker, the member opposite also indicated, he mentioned the whole area of the optometric society, the fact that now there were fees that had to be paid by those who wished to have eye examinations. I would just like to relate an instance from my own constituency, in discussion with some of the doctors and physicians there in indicating that it is interesting how, when there is something that is free, people have a tendency to take advantage of it, and it was indicated there there are people who come in as often as eight to 10 times a year in order to have eye examinations when they know full well that their eyes have not changed, that there is nothing special that had taken place, but they enjoy the interaction and the contact that they have with the doctors.

It reminds me of another instance, and the honourable member for Portage (Mr. Pallister) made me aware of it, that within the last while, there was—I am not sure if it was a constituent, but someone within the Portage area who had visited the optometrist 55 times in one year.

An Honourable Member: A medical doctor.

Mr. Dyck: Visited a medical doctor 55 times. Certainly this is an abuse of a privilege that we enjoy within the province of Manitoba.

I also am a great supporter of supplying medical care, the best medical care for each one of the residents within our province. I believe that we need to do that. However, I believe that the word “sustainability” needs to come into play.

An Honourable Member: Living within our means.

Mr. Dyck: Living within our means, exactly right, I agree that we need to live within our means. As the minister indicated during Question Period today, in fact, we had spent \$60 million more in '95 than we did in '94, that is, 33.8 percent of our total budget within the province is being spent on health care. So I agree with

the minister when he says that we need to live within our means. We need to have a system, a program within our province that is sustainable. If we are going to do this, we need to take that responsibility to heart right now, and I believe, and I know for a fact, that since 1988 we have been working with this in mind, that we can, in all honesty and with great pride, give a province to our children that is going to be one that we are proud of, one that they can afford to live in. But we need to take our responsibility very seriously right now.

So coming back to the other comment I wanted to make regarding the optometrist, and his comments to me were that it was a good idea, in fact, that we had made some changes. We are not saying that people cannot come for eye examinations. In fact, we are saying that if they are below the age of 19 or beyond the age of 65, that the examinations will be free. If, on the other hand, between the ages of 19 and 65, they do come for eye examinations, if the change in their eyes is a point five—now to me, I am not an optometrist, but that is a very small change, and if that has been recommended by the doctor, then, in fact, the examination will be paid for.

So, Madam Speaker, I see this as a step in accountability. I believe that each one of us, you and I, all our constituents, need to take this seriously and need to respond in a way that is appropriate. So if I want to go for examinations more often than that in one year, then certainly I have some responsibility myself to look after that.

Another example that I would like to bring to this House is in discussion with a medical doctor within Winnipeg. He, in fact, indicated to me that he had a real dilemma where some of his patients and clients were coming on an ongoing basis because, again, they like visitations. Now, we know that this is costly. You and I pay for that, so there is abuse of the system. Now, I am not advocating that we need to have a user fee here. What I am saying, is there any way that we can encourage those who are abusing the system to take their responsibility seriously, as well, and not cost the taxpayer the extra dollars that they are costing him today?

Certainly, we need a health care system that is open and that is available to all, but, specifically, to those who need it. That is why we have the health care system and a good health care system that we have today. When a

government spends 33.8 percent of its total budget on health care, I believe that is a tremendous commitment that we have shown towards our constituents, towards those who live within the province.

* (1710)

Madam Speaker, the other area that I think we also need to really look at very seriously is the fact that the federal government has for the past several years been cutting back on their transfer payments. Now, I agree that they need to get their own house in order. However, this does impact specifically on us as a province and on us as a government and our ability to be able to spend the dollars where they are needed the most. In fact, the dollars that we have been cut back are specific to health care, to education and to family services, so there has been very specific criteria put on those dollars, so we must in some way look at how we can fund health care, education and family services with dollars that are being taken away from us.

So, Madam Speaker, as a government, we have a tremendous responsibility to look after the needs of those within our province who need to be serviced with medical needs. Again, I say we do not want to have a system and as a government we certainly do not want to proceed in the direction of saddling our youth with a tremendous debt. In fact, the process and the route that we are taking right now is one of elimination of that debt. I want to at the end of the day be able to be proud of what we have done for our youth, for our province, when we hand over the government to them.

The other area of responsibility that I believe we have taken very seriously is the whole area of the specialty services or procedures such as heart by-pass surgery or hip surgery, knee surgery. These are specialty areas that certainly have increased dramatically within the past few years. In fact, I believe the Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) today in QP suggested or made the comment that a thousand by-pass surgeries had been done in the past year. This is dramatically up from what took place several years ago, and I applaud the health care system for being able to do this. Certainly, with the advances in technology, with the ability of the doctors to be able to go in this direction, it has been a tremendous benefit to those who need it. On this, too, I can refer back to several of my constituents who have been able to utilize this

procedure within the past several years, specifically to hip surgery or hip replacement.

I have a constituent of mine who is in the hospital right today as we speak who had surgery on Thursday and is having his hip replaced. He is a fairly young gentleman and so certainly we want to be able to have a health care system within our province that is going to be sustainable, one that we can be proud of and one that we can, with pride, hand over to our children and our grandchildren. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to say a few words about this resolution. I think, when we talk about health care and we talk about health care in this province that historically goes back a number of years people in this province know that health care is very important for them in their personal lives. It really does not matter whether you are in the urban centre of Winnipeg or in rural Manitoba, people have come to expect to have health care available to them. Many of the communities, when they were first established and started to grow, the first thing that communities did was try to attract a doctor into their community to establish a practice there too so that health care could be administered to anybody who needed it in the community. As time went on a lot of communities in rural Manitoba were successful in building local hospitals. In fact, even in the city of Winnipeg, there were two or three major hospitals that were built by the various religious groups.

In the event that time went by and medicare was introduced, and if memory serves me correctly, I think that medicare was introduced in this province by a Conservative government. So medicare, everybody who was in it, insured for medical services within the province of Manitoba no matter where you lived. However, there were fees attached to that service at that time, and when the NDP government came in after that, I would have to say that they eliminated the fee structure so that medicare became free to all those who participated in the program.

But as we come into today's world, Madam Speaker, we are looking at some what we would have called fantastic changes occurring in the way we have to view health care, in the way we expect health care to be delivered. Today we are looking at a severe reduction in federal transfer payments to the provinces, such that it is

very difficult to cope with those reductions and trying to maintain the services. There are also fantastic advances in medical technology, technology that today or 10 years ago we would never have dreamed that that kind of technology would be with us today.

In fact, I was just looking at the news the other day where in Irvine, California, a drug has been developed for use for people who have a problem with memory loss, and I thought that they are going to be doing some tests with that drug on human beings in the next two or three months. I thought that it would be just perfect because sometimes I forget a lot of things, Madam Speaker, and I thought it might be useful for me to have that available. But there are so many advances taking place in medical technology and they are expensive. They cost a lot of dollars for this technology. So we are faced with federal reductions in transfer payments, advances in medical technology that are expensive and also, at the same time, since medicare came into Manitoba, it has been possible for accurate statistical information to be gathered to find out how the health care system is operating within the province and to be able to track it, track the entire system, and the possibility to even track individuals going through the system. So this whole area then provides a basis for making some of the changes that we are looking at in health care and the delivery of health care in Manitoba today.

We talk about the legislation that has come through on RHAs, establishment of RHAs and there may be a lot of reasons and a lot of good reasons given why there might be some problems with RHAs but, Madam Speaker, we have to have a difference, a change in the way health care is delivered in Manitoba. Just looking at the way health care is delivered today in terms of being piecemeal, you have acute care, you have personal home care, you have the public health nurse, you have the home care all going in their own directions, and in order to make fully efficient use of health care in Manitoba it is important that all these services become integrated. How they become integrated may be up for debate, but in terms of the direction this government is going, we believe strongly that the RHA system of having these local boards established to integrate the entire health care delivery throughout Manitoba is an important and the right step to go, because the ultimate goal of health care in this province has to be patient care. If you have that as your objective at all times and everything else that you do

with respect to health care delivery works in to meet the needs of that patient, then ultimately you will end up achieving the best possible service to those patients.

Another thing that we are also faced with as we go into the 21st Century is that in Manitoba as in respect to all provinces in Canada is that we do have an aging population, a graying population where the largest majority of our people will be in the graying area, and I am probably one of those, Madam Speaker, who are entering that era. So health care is going to be that much more important that it will still be in place, it will still be available to everybody who needs it now and into the future, and one of the ways that it can be done is by integrating the entire delivery system.

* (1720)

So what do we do to provide health care? Well, if you take a look at some of the areas, if we just take a look at the home care situation as an example, and I say that given the right circumstances that there is always room in whatever we do for having some competition. We take a look at home care—and I think previously in the House we had great discussions on home care—that with home care and home care delivery in this province that the costs for home care have gone up dramatically over the last nine years or so starting at I believe—and I am guessing now at the numbers—it was \$34 million in 1988 and now sitting at in excess of \$90 million for the delivery of the program.

So if you take a look at the costs, the increased costs of medical technology, and if you take a look at the way the Home Care program is operating, you can also identify that although it is a very good program and it is well liked by all people who use it, there are certain difficulties with the program as well. One has to ask—if you are going up some \$60 million over a nine-year period and then the number of patients going onto the system for receiving home care are not going up proportionately to the dollars that are going into the program, you can explain it somewhat by the increased costs of medical technology.

On the other hand, Madam Speaker, there are also some inherent inefficiencies in the program that have to be addressed. I have had constituents approach me and ask why the home care worker that comes to their

place—there is a different home care worker that goes to the neighbour's house basically within an hour of each other in terms of appointments. So there are things like that that are evolving out of the system in terms of inefficiencies that have to be addressed. Putting some of that system into competition will ultimately result in more efficiencies coming through the public part of the program so that both programs are delivered more efficiently to home care patients. If the whole system, of course, is integrated as a result of the entire—with the RHAs being put into place, then ultimately everybody will be a winner in terms of receiving health care in Manitoba.

Another example I would like to share with you, Madam Speaker, is the fact that in terms of the changes that are occurring within health care and health care delivery is that with the situation in Morris with the personal care home being not that old of a facility and the hospital being an older facility within the community was that the kitchen facilities of one are now being used to distribute food to both within the community. That is not a major change, but why should there be kitchen facilities in a personal care home which is approximately a block and a half away from the hospital and the acute care? So the hospital facilities were not that modern anymore. They needed a lot of dollars to upgrade them, so it was decided that the food services that were available in the personal care home would be utilized to supply food to both of the agencies.

Another area, Madam Speaker, that shows up is that today heart transplants are sort of a given, that if you have some difficulties with your heart being able to continue to work properly that the possibility of a heart transplant is there, and that it is almost understood that if you do require a new heart that you would be placed on a waiting list. Unfortunately, heart transplants are not done in Manitoba; they are done down in eastern Canada. But that is the type of thing that we have come to expect out of the health care system that that type of an operation and service should be available.

Just spending a little bit of time to some of the things that were brought out in regard to the issue called the Health News when my honourable colleague the Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) announced Pathways to a Healthy Manitoba, some of the key areas in there that were addressed was the fact that we had the structure for

the RHAs which are going to take the integration of health care delivery in rural Manitoba and that there were also going to be two boards established within the Winnipeg area to integrate the delivery of health care within the city of Winnipeg. I believe very strongly that is one avenue that has to be followed so that all the services for health care are delivered on an integrated basis

There is also the other area where, because of the fact that now all hospitals will be brought into a partnership-type venture, they will be able to benefit from such things as the bulk buying of their supplies. In fact, some of the things that they were talking about was pursuing consolidation of laundry, food services, purchasing and warehousing, as well as other support services, among Winnipeg hospitals.

A lot of this, Madam Speaker, because of the fact that all hospitals require food, all hospitals require laundry, all hospitals require warehousing for storage of products, it makes sense that this integration and partnership amongst the hospitals be done so that they could become more efficient in terms of delivering patient care, which is always the ultimate objective. There is also the other area of labs in terms of consolidating lab services. It shows, it is written in here that most of the laboratory work that is conducted in Winnipeg is done by eight labs; however, there are 500 labs available in Winnipeg to do these services. So the question is, should there continue to be 500 labs, or should the services be consolidated into one laboratory?

Madam Speaker, under some of the advantages of consolidated lab services is that they would maintain access to a wide range of rapid-response services, instant, almost very quickly having a tissue test done. They have a higher level of co-ordination between all the labs. There would be standardizing for training, procedures and equipment, which is so important and critical in today's high technology that all the techniques for testing have standardization. Also, it will allow the labs volume purchasing so that they can purchase their basic necessities for operating the lab at a cheap as possible price. Then they would have an efficient, integrated system.

One of the major points is that not only is patient care No. 1 in terms of Manitoba health and this government,

but this government is always focusing on preserving the medicare system, preserving the health care system in Manitoba. The things that we do today to this health care system in Manitoba are going to ensure that in the future we will have a health care system, that people who are of my age and younger who are going into the graying area of the population will be able to have the health care system there when they need it and have what they need to have done within the system there available to them.

So, Madam Speaker, the health care system is very important to this government to maintain. It is very important for people in this province to be able to have that confidence that they would have health care there when they need it. So there are many things within the health care system. It takes a long time. Thank you.

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Sturgeon Creek): I am sorry that I am not going to have more time to speak on this important topic, but when we talk about the privatization

of the health care, I think really what we are talking about here or what we should be talking about in terms of health care is responsibility.

As far as the responsibility, when you get into the health care aspect—because I think this is a very serious issue in terms of the amount of money that we as a government and we as a society are having to deal with when we are talking about the sustainability of our health care system. Even back in the '40s, when Tommy Douglas brought in the health care—and he is noted for that. I mean, he goes down in history as being that person that brought in health care.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Sturgeon Creek will have 14 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, November 18, 1996

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