

Third Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LVI No. 48 - 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 17, 2005

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Pembina Trails School Division—New High School

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Overcrowded schools throughout Whyte Ridge, Lindenwoods, Linden Ridge and Richmond West subdivisions are forcing Pembina Trails School Division to bus students outside of these areas to attend classes in the public school system.

Elementary schools in Pembina Trails School Division have run out of space to accommodate the growing population of students in the aforementioned areas.

Five-year projections for enrolment in the elementary schools in these areas indicate significant continued growth.

Existing high schools that receive students from Whyte Ridge, Lindenwoods and Linden Ridge are at capacity and cannot accommodate the growing number of students that will continue to branch out of these subdivisions.

Bussing to outlying areas is not a viable long-term solution to meeting the student population growth in the southwest portion of Winnipeg.

The development of Waverley West will increase the need for a high school in the southwest sector of Winnipeg.

The government is demonstrating a lack of respect for the students and families in Whyte Ridge, Lindenwoods, Linden Ridge and Richmond West by

refusing to provide adequate access to education within the community.

The Fort Whyte constituency is the only constituency in the province that does not have a public high school.

NDP constituencies in Winnipeg continue to receive capital funding for various school projects while critical overcrowding exists in schools in Lindenwoods, Whyte Ridge and Richmond West.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government recognize the need for a public high school in the southwest region of Winnipeg.

To request the provincial government, in conjunction with the Public Schools Finance Board, to consider adequate funding to establish a high school in the southwest sector of Winnipeg.

Signed by S. Loscerbo-Boswick, Reza Fazel, Dave Boyechko and others.

*(13:35)

Riverdale Health Centre

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Riverdale Health Centre services a population of approximately 2000, including the Town of Rivers and the R.M. of Daly, as well as the Sioux Valley First Nation and local Hutterite colonies.

The need for renovation or repair of the Riverdale Health Centre was identified in 1999 by the Marquette Regional Health Authority (RHA) and was the No. 1 priority listed in the RHA's 2002-2003 Operational Plan.

To date, the community has raised over \$460,000 towards the renovation or repair of the health centre.

On June 1, 2003, the Premier (Mr. Doer) made a commitment to the community of Rivers that he would not close or downgrade the services available at Riverdale Health Centre.

Due to physician shortages, the Riverdale Health Centre has been closed to acute care and emergency services for long periods since December 2003, forcing community members to travel to Brandon or elsewhere for health care services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier to consider ensuring that acute care and emergency services are available to the residents of Rivers and surrounding areas in their local hospital and to live up to his promise to not close the Rivers Hospital.

To request that the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) consider developing a long-term solution to the chronic shortages of front line health care professionals in rural Manitoba.

This petition has been signed by Judy McClelland, Darlene Ironside, Flora Dyer and many, many others.

Supported Living Program

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government's Supported Living Program provides a range of supports to assist adults with a mental disability to live in the community in their residential option of choice, including a family home. There is a lack of group homes available and this means special needs dependants must remain in the family home.

The provincial government's Community Living Division helps support adults living with a mental disability to live safely in the community in the residential setting of their choice.

Families with special needs dependants make lifelong commitments to their care and well-being, and many families choose to care for these individuals in their homes as long as circumstances will allow.

The cost to support families who care for their special needs dependants at home is far less than the cost of alternate care arrangements such as institutions or group and foster home situations.

The value of the quality of life experienced by special needs dependants raised at home in a loving family environment is immeasurable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) consider changes to the departmental policy that pays family members a reduced amount of money for room and board when they care for their special needs dependants at home versus the amount paid to a non-parental care provider outside the family home.

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Housing consider examining on a case-by-case basis the merits of paying family members to care for special needs dependants at home versus paying to institutionalize them.

This is signed by Brenda Barnes, Caleb Thiessen, Sherry Paskanik and many, many others.

Minimum Sitting Days for Manitoba Legislature

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba Legislature sat for only 35 days in 2003.

In 2004, there were 55 sitting days.

The number of sitting days has a direct impact on the issue of public accountability.

The Legislative Assembly provides the best forum for all MLAs to debate and ask questions of

the government, and it is critical that all MLAs be provided the time needed in order for them to cover constituent and party duties.

Establishing a minimum number of sitting days could prevent the government of the day from limiting the rights of opposition members from being able to ask questions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider recognizing the need to sit for a minimum of 80 days in any given calendar year.

Signed by B. Sharma, M. Haegeman and Chris Cassidy.

* (13:40)

Ambulance Service

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

In May 2004, 46-year-old Peter Krahn suffered a heart attack while exercising in East St. Paul and was pronounced dead just under an hour later after being transported to the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Reports show that it took nearly 18 minutes for an ambulance to arrive for Mr. Krahn.

The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency response time, whereas the City of Winnipeg uses a benchmark of 4 minutes.

Ambulance coverage for East St. Paul is provided from Selkirk, which is almost 25 kilometres away.

The municipalities of East St. Paul and West St. Paul combined have over 12 000 residents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider providing East St. Paul with local

ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul.

To request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technologies such as GPS in conjunction with a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre (MTCC) which will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time.

To request the provincial government to consider ensuring that appropriate funding is provided to maintain superior response times and sustainable services.

Signed by Elizabeth Watkins, Claudette Clement, Myrtle Foster and many, many others.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Municipal Board's Annual Report for 2004.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today His Excellency David Reddaway, the British High Commissioner to Canada and Mr. Michael Hill, the Honourary Consul of Britain in Winnipeg.

Also in the Speaker's Gallery we have with us today Desiree Lemieux, who is the daughter of the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux), and Kevin Chaves.

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you all here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Livestock Industry Slaughter Capacity

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, for two years Manitoba's cattle producers have been struggling through the BSE crisis. They struggle to pay their bills, and they provide for their families because they have little

choice but to spend thousands of dollars feeding cattle they cannot sell.

Mr. Speaker, what is desperately needed in this province is increased slaughter capacity. What is needed is for the existing plants to get the help they need from this government to get their facilities upgraded so they can be federally inspected. How does this Premier (Mr. Doer) explain after two years of this BSE crisis began that there is not one new slaughter facility or that plants have not been able to get upgrades to be federally inspected? After two years, how do they explain that?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, indeed, it has been a very challenging time for producers in this province and right across Canada because of the border closure. I want to pay tribute to the people in the industry and the people in the processing industry who have worked very hard to see increase of their slaughter capacity in this province.

If you look at where slaughter capacity was when BSE hit, we were at very low numbers. In fact, those numbers have increased from 16 000 to over 28 000 now, and that has been done in conjunction with government support and with the industry being very committed. I can tell you that we have just met with the industry, and we are working with them to move towards federally inspected slaughter capacity in this province. I will tell you the members opposite asked about how much slaughter—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (13:45)

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we understand on this side of the House why we must pay tribute to those hard workers in the cattle industry, but I can tell you they are not paying tribute to this government because of their lack of an action.

If this Premier had listened to us some eight months ago, we on this side came up with a five-point BSE recovery plan, Manitoba cattle producers would not be in the crisis situation they are today. If the NDP would have adopted our plan, there would have been increased slaughter capacity, there would be federally inspected plants. There would have been an opportunity through a cash advance program for those producers to feed their families, and we

would have had more processed beef here in the province of Manitoba. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, what our cattle producers have seen from this NDP government is nothing after two years, no cash advance, no increased slaughter capacity and no hope for a bright future.

I ask the Premier again how is it possible that this NDP government after two years has not been able to increase slaughter capacity in the province of Manitoba by building one new facility or having one federally inspected facility. After two years, how can they stand to do that, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I remember early after the BSE crisis hit us, the members opposite were saying that we did not need to increase slaughter capacity, that in fact we had enough slaughter capacity in this country. Then, in September, they came forward with their proposal that we should increase slaughter capacity when we had been working with the industry.

The members opposite ask about how much slaughter capacity we have built. I can tell you it is not government's job to build slaughter capacity. It is our job to support the industry and, Mr. Speaker, I praise the industry for what they have done in increasing the numbers in this province when they went from 16 500 to over 28 000, and more work is being done. We do have to have federal slaughter capacity. That is why we announced that we were committing another \$3 million for feasibility studies.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the fact that the NDP government tries to boast about 28 000 cows that were slaughtered when Manitoba needs to be slaughtering at least 150 000 cattle shows how little they know about the industry. Industry experts have made it very, very clear that if this NDP government does not do something to increase slaughter capacity we are going to be shut out of the abattoir business and losing jobs to other provinces. While other provinces have been able to increase their slaughter capacity and provide meaningful help to their cattle producers in other provinces, this NDP government in Manitoba have done nothing. He is sitting on his hands and ignoring the issues that are of concern to our cattle producers here in Manitoba.

Manitobans are tired of listening to the rhetoric coming from this NDP government. They want answers, Mr. Speaker. When will there be a new

slaughter facility built here in Manitoba and when will at least one of our existing plants be federally inspected so that we can sell our cattle throughout Canada? When will they start to take action? They have had two years and have done nothing.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is well aware that the producers in Manitoba have formed ranchers' co-op and they are in the process, and our government has certainly—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), we will have decorum. We need to be able to hear all the questions and all the answers.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member knows full well that the producers of Manitoba are involved in a co-op and we will see slaughter capacity increase in this province when that plant moves forward, and it will be a federally inspected plant.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are so concerned about slaughter capacity in this province. I want to tell you that in 1987 Manitoba slaughter capacity was 241 600 head. When the Filmon government left, it was 19 600 head. When they were in government they did absolutely nothing, in fact, the slaughter industry just decreased in this province.

Livestock Industry Slaughter Capacity

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): The minister seems to understand that one thing she is good at is going back, making press release after press release and talking about past history. We are talking about BSE. We are talking about current times, and she is living in the past. StatsCan tell us that Manitoba cattle herd is increased by 335 000 than it was in 2003, bringing the total herd to 1.6 million animals. Yet Manitoba has not built a single new federally inspected slaughter facility.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain how she expects Manitoba to deal with a 30% growth in cattle herds without building new slaughter facilities?

* (13:50)

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I am sure the members opposite must realize that we have been working very closely with Rancher's Choice producers. We have made money available. We said we were prepared to invest \$11.5 million. I can also tell members opposite that there are other facilities that are looking for federally inspected plants, and those other people are interested in the programs that we have put forward. We have made a commitment for another \$3 million to help with facilities' move toward federally inspected plants.

The members opposite are asking who on the list. I can tell you that I am not prepared to negotiate on the floor of the Legislature. I will work with the industry and we will put programs in place to help them increase that capacity. I wish that members opposite would be supportive of people like Rancher's Choice, rather than criticizing.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, we on this side of the House have been supporting Rancher's Choice and all the other initiatives. The minister has been misinformed once again.

Without federally inspected slaughter expansion we cannot export beef from Manitoba to other provinces. If this NDP government does not get its act together and expand our industry soon, the opportunity for expansion in our province will be lost. Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell us what Manitoba, to expand its slaughter expected capacity, or we will be exporting our cattle and our jobs to other provinces like Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, I will repeat again. This government has been committed and remains committed to increasing slaughter capacity in this province, and we are also committed to other rural economic development in this province, Mr. Speaker.

We have invested in Rancher's Choice. We have invested, we have made money available for other facilities that want to move toward federally inspected plants. Certainly we have to look at new markets, but we also have to look at how we can get more Manitoba beef consumed in Manitoba, and we continue to work on that.

I would remind the members opposite of their record, because certainly they did absolutely nothing

to increase slaughter capacity in this province. They destroyed it.

Mr. Eichler: If this minister would quit living in the past and deal with the reality that is ahead of us today, Mr. Speaker, we would have those slaughter capacities that we need in the province as we move forward. Without expanding federal slaughter capacity, what little beef is processed in Manitoba must stay in Manitoba.

Here we are today on the eve of the second anniversary of the BSE crisis. There has been no growth in our industry, thanks to feet dragging, press release inaction from this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell us what slaughter capacity targets she has set for herself? Will Manitoba grow our packing industry, or will she begin to accept sending our beef and our jobs to Saskatchewan, Alberta, Québec and all the other provinces?

Ms. Wowchuk: It is really interesting that the member opposite recognizes that we should be consuming more beef in this province that is grown in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, because when we did an ad in conjunction with the industry to promote Manitoba beef and other ruminants, the members opposite were critical of us for promoting Manitoba food in Manitoba. We will continue to promote the consumption of Manitoba products in Manitoba, and we will continue to work with the industry and the processors to increase the slaughter capacity.

Mr. Speaker, we will not be like the opposition that, when they were in government, destroyed 90 percent of the slaughter capacity in this province.

Post-Secondary Education Funding

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the provincial budget is \$2 billion larger than it was in '99, despite the fact that this Premier (Mr. Doer) is receiving an unprecedented level of new revenue, he continues his attack on students by drastically underfunding our colleges and universities. The result of their mismanagement is that college and university students' costs are going up some 15 percent. Students cannot afford a 15% increase, and

our post-secondary institutions cannot compete if they do not have revenue.

I would like to ask the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) will this government put an end to the 15% attack on students and put an end to the attack on education by providing universities and colleges with the increased funding that they deserve.

*(13:55)

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I can see the philosophy of the member opposite is do not do what I do, do what I say. One of the things he has forgotten to mention is that during the tenure of the previous government, university tuition increased by 165 percent, college tuition increased by 208 percent. If that is taking care of students, I am totally shocked. That is absolutely not taking care of students. On the other hand, I would like to point out that in the first year of this government's tenure, in 2000, the university tuition was \$2,700. In 2005, tuition will be \$2,700.

Mr. Murray: Post-secondary students' costs are going up 15 percent under this NDP government, and the quality of education is suffering because this NDP government is not funding our post-secondary institutions properly. As one example, and the minister may want to listen to this, she says she meets with them. Mr. Speaker, she may want to listen. The University of Manitoba needed a 6.5% increase in funding this year to avoid cuts to jobs, programs and services for students. What did they get? They got a 2.2% increase, with a shortfall of some \$7 million. That is what this government gave the University of Manitoba.

I would ask the Deputy Premier when will they put an end to the 15% increase in students' costs. When will they put an end to the attack on education by providing our universities the proper funding they deserve? When will they do that?

Ms. McGifford: I want to thank the member for the question. It certainly gives me the opportunity to point out that, under the tenure of this government, grants to universities have increased by 30.3 percent. Grants to colleges, because of the College Expansion Initiative, something the members opposite never took any interest in, we had the lowest enrolments in colleges in the country during their tenure. Anyway,

Mr. Speaker, under this government, grants to colleges have increased by 63.6 percent.

I have had the opportunity yesterday and last week to tell the member from Minnedosa about some of the things we have done for students, and, of course, I pointed out—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Murray: Despite all of the rhetoric we hear from members opposite, the fact of life is that they do not want to admit they are punishing students by making them increase their fees by 15 percent. Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to quote the University of Winnipeg's president, Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, who said Saskatchewan gave its university 6 percent. If we got 6 percent, there would be no debate. What do you do in the meantime? Do you let our institutions deteriorate? Do you tell students with special needs that you cannot service them?

I ask this Deputy Premier what is it that our students who are at our underfunded colleges and universities should do. Should they lay off teachers? Should they cut services for students? Should they cut programming? Should they let their buildings, their infrastructure crumble? With the underfunding that they have seen under this NDP, what is it that they should do? We see nothing from this government.

* (14:00)

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Speaker, certainly one thing that this government will not do is allow tuition to increase 165 percent.

I know members are very sensitive when their record on students is pointed out in this House so I had best choose my words very carefully. I have pointed out previously that this government, no friend to students, seems to have decided that they are friends to students now. The party opposite was against the tuition freeze. The party opposite did not support the University College of the North. The

party opposite has not been a friend to students in this province since this government.

Post-Secondary Education Funding

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, last week's Minister of Advanced Education said she was not contemplating any action on universities raising ancillary fees. This week's Minister of Advanced Education is saying we will take action and we will be looking at our options.

Mr. Speaker, will the real Minister of Advanced Education stand before the House and tell us when she will protect the students from massive increases they will be facing this coming school year?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I hear the member once again asking us to protect students, and I want to just give her a little bit of history as to what we have done, Mr. Speaker.

In the spring of 2000 we initiated a \$6-million bursary and that bursary has now gone up to \$6.7 million. Two years ago, that is in the 2004-'05 budget, we began a Manitoba Graduate Scholarship and that scholarship is now at \$700,000, greatly appreciated by graduate students and by universities in this province. Graduate scholarships are extremely important because they attract highly skilled individuals with very polished research skills who really add to the economy of this province.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, speaking to people out of the University of Manitoba, they tend to be losing their graduate students and the people that have been providing education to the universities, two to Alberta last week, so I am quite concerned about this. Today this NDP government has indicated they are looking at options. Elsewhere in western Canada, universities are being supported through stable and predictable grant funding.

In '05-'06 grant averages of western Canadian universities listed in a report that I would like to table with the House, B.C. will receive 4.7% increase, Alberta 11.8 percent, Saskatchewan 6.7 percent. Manitoba will only see 2.3% increase.

Is the Minister of Advanced Education and her government prepared to forward some of the unprecedented revenue they have received to ensure

students receive a quality education that is competitive with other universities in Canada?

Ms. McGifford: I think that the students' respect for an affordable, accessible quality education in the province of Manitoba is clear by the fact that we have a record number of students enrolled in our post-secondary education system.

Mr. Speaker, under this government enrolments in post-secondary education have gone up by thirty-three and a third percent. I would like to point out to the member because of the increases in enrolment that means that tuition revenue from 1999 to '04-05 has gone up by 40.7 percent. That is the actual revenue that goes to the institutions. So there is a considerable amount of tuition revenue going into the institution as well as—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, education enrolment has gone up across the country so this minister saying and taking credit for that, she would be having to take credit for the national numbers. It is clearly evident that this government is not prepared to fund our post-secondary institutions adequately. This NDP government has an obligation to ensure that students are not being short-changed in the quality of education they receive because of funding issues. Why is this Minister of Advanced Education and her government not protecting Manitoba students from these atrocious backdoor fee increases?

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Speaker, I think it is probably important to point out that, during the nineties, enrolment decreased by 16 percent. During the tenure of the NDP government, it has gone up by 33 percent. I put these figures out for two reasons; to show the increased tuition revenue flowing into our universities and colleges, and secondly, to demonstrate once again the point that Manitoba students want to study in their province, and we have provided a climate that is conducive to learning. They want to stay here, not disappear thither and yon as they did in the nineties. They want to stay here, be educated here, get jobs here and raise their families.

Crocus Fund Government Monitoring

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, in 2001 the Minister of Industry said in this House

that the government must monitor the operations of labour-sponsored funds. I quote from Hansard, "to ensure they are adhering to the provisions of the legislation." To accomplish this, the government gave themselves the authority to demand any and all information from the fund. They gave themselves unfettered access to all information of the fund.

Mr. Speaker, the evaluation issue with the Crocus Fund was well known on the street for at least three years, and this government was warned of the evaluation problems. I would ask the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) to explain to Manitobans how it could be that his government did not investigate the evaluations, even quietly?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I trust the member knows that the actual valuation system was set out in the legislation. So they had established an appropriate valuation system. This is what Crocus did. Under the legislation we had statements where they had to set up a valuation system.

The inquiry being conducted by the MSC and the Auditor General is investigating whether that valuation system mandated in the legislation was actually followed. Might I remind the member it is the same system that you, when the Tories were in government, established, so you established the law under which the evaluation system was set up. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite keep on saying do something about it. We are. We started to clean up the problems in 2001, and we will continue to follow the advice of the Auditor General and the Securities—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Loewen: While interesting that the ministers would talk about evaluations, because as the MSC indicated, they were not even done from the period March to September, the period when the minister was supposed to be monitoring the fund. In fact, if this minister spent as much time monitoring the fund as he does trying to deflect on questions answered in this House, Manitobans might not be out \$60 million.

Your government said they would monitor the fund. Your Premier (Mr. Doer), three years ago, said you did not need the Auditor. The Minister of Industry said in December they did not need the

Auditor. The issue here is about a lack of oversight by this government. That is what they have to be accountable for.

I would ask the Minister of Finance to stand up and explain to Manitobans why is it that his government did not do as it said it would do. Why is it that your government did not monitor this fund?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I trust the member opposite may at one time read the Crocus act. In the Crocus act it says that we are responsible to monitor the pacing and the investments as far as being located in Manitoba to apply for the tax credit. That is what the monitoring is supposed to do. It is to appropriately ensure the investment, the 15% tax credit that Manitoba provides, allows for investment in Manitoba. We do not run the fund. We do not run the management of the fund. We do not administrate the fund. We set the rules.

In the previous question you asked about the valuation. We set up the process for evaluation. We do not do the evaluation. We do not run the day-to-day management of the fund. We have an act. We follow the act. The MSC and the Auditor General are investigating to make sure the act is followed appropriately.

* (14:10)

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, if the minister had read the act, he would understand that section 15 of the act explains fully how the fund is to be valued. In fact, as a result of the lack of monitoring by this government, those valuations were not done. The MSC has said they have not been done for as long as six or eight months. That is the information.

An Honourable Member: Louder.

Mr. Loewen: Well, you want louder. You want me to get angry. I will get angry because there are 33 000 Manitobans that are angry that you did not monitor the funds. You will have to answer to that, sir.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to remind all honourable members, questions and answers through the Chair, please.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The real situation here is that this whole mess could have

been prevented had this government simply done what it said it was going to do in 2001, and that is to monitor the fund. The government had complete and unfettered access to all the information in the fund. There are too many political connections here for anyone on that side of the House to stand up and tell us that they did not have information.

The question is simple. Why did the Minister of Finance not follow up on this? Why, Sir, did you not three years ago, did you not last year, monitor this fund as you said you would? Are you satisfied, Sir, that your government has provided the necessary oversight?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, as per normal, the member opposite is confused. Number one, the only people who agreed with the valuation is the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray), who in 2002 said, "yes, we are satisfied the valuations are done correctly." The member opposite who asked the question stated that he was happy with the valuation process and agreed with that valuation process.

We on this side of the House believe that we set up the rules and the MSC and the Attorney General are finding out if the rules were followed. You are the only guys who agreed that they felt that the valuation was done properly. You on the Tory side set up the system—

Mr. Speaker: Through the Chair.

Mr. Rondeau: —you agreed with the valuation. We are conducting the independent review.

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, from time to time you do caution us about decorum in the House. It is an accepted rule. The minister has been cautioned a number of times that responses to questions are to go through the Chair. That is my point of order.

Mr. Speaker: The Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): That goes for us too, Mr. Speaker. I heard the questions and they were using the first person. They were using words like "you" and "sir." Of course, I think it is a good reminder for all members

of the House that the reason that we pose questions in the third person and direct it to the Speaker is so that we do not escalate matters, and we try and deal with the issues at hand. So I think it is a lesson for all members.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he does have a good point. All questions and all answers are to be through the Chair to make sure that we do not personalize the questions and the comments. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members. We are on question No. 6.

Mental Health Services Early Psychosis Intervention Programs

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, we have yet another example of this government's mismanagement. We have learned today that the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre's Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention service, the only one of its kind in Manitoba, has closed its doors to new patients. This occurred at 4 p.m. yesterday because it had reached its capacity.

Mr. Speaker, this closure is a direct result of this government's mismanagement. They have clearly failed to adequately fund this valuable program. I would like to ask the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) what he is going to do to ensure that no one is turned away at the time of their greatest need.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister responsible for Healthy Living): Indeed, I thank the member for the question regarding the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention service, a program, incidentally, Mr. Speaker, that we worked to start in this province. Indeed, we know this program has been very successful so far in treating people who are experiencing a psychotic episode for the first time. This particular program is an intensive one. We expect clients to remain for an estimated time of two years, and we are working hard to expand this program because of its success.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the minister that her government stated that lack of access to psychosis treatment and intervention is a crisis. This government has also promised to expand the program to all Manitobans. This lip service goes back to 2002. Clearly, this government has no plan.

Will the minister commit today to provide this valuable service to the children of Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Indeed, we do acknowledge that early intervention for people suffering from mental illness, debilitating mental illness, severe and persistent mental illness is the best way that we can combat problems in the future. That is, in fact, why we put the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention service into place in the first place. In fact, we do appreciate the member opposite's support in encouraging our expansion of this program.

We also acknowledge that our increase to mental health services in the neighbourhood of 38 percent since 1999 is a beginning. We acknowledge we have more work to do, Mr. Speaker, and that is what we are committed to do.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the minister that this facility is closed to new patients. How can we expand a program when you cannot operate the one you have now? Will the minister please commit to some kind of a plan to reopen the facility in Winnipeg and then maybe we can move on to the rest of Manitoba? Can she come up with a plan for us, please?

Ms. Oswald: In fact, this is a program that is working and is effective. Mr. Speaker, because of the success of this program, it was enhanced with additional staff in January of this year, enabling 20 more clients to access the program. We continue to see what a success the program is which is why we are working on expanding.

It sounded a little bit to me like the member opposite was criticizing that, the same member opposite, incidentally, who during the 2003 election and his party suggested that a good increase for health care broadly was 1 percent. It is cockamamie, Mr. Speaker, and Manitobans will not stand for it and they did not. We want to expand services. We are going to continue to do that. There is no 1% solution on this side of the House.

Hydra House RCMP Investigation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier (Mr. Doer) indicated he was going to give the Minister of Justice the information I provided on May 10 of major financial

irregularities at Hydra House which flowed tens of thousands of public dollars into the pockets of two owners of Hydra House. The Premier vowed last week to have the Minister of Justice and the RCMP investigate these financial irregularities.

My question today to the Minister of Justice is based on the cumulative information provided by the Auditor General in his report and on the information which I provided last week. Has the Minister of Justice now asked the RCMP to investigate the financial irregularities at Hydra House and the evidence that taxpayers' money was deliberately diverted into the pockets of two owners of Hydra House?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I think an important part of the answer is the process involved. The matter was referred by the Premier to myself, and I referred it to the deputy minister. It is then the role of the—*[interjection]* If the member opposite is suggesting there should be political involvement in a criminal investigation that is not what governments in modern society in Canada do. The matter was handed to the deputy minister as is the usual course.

I think there is one serious question for the House. Why did the member opposite not bring it to the police? Why does he bring it in here in front of the cameras?

* (14:20)

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, these are important public matters which the Minister of Justice should be looking into.

Mr. Speaker, I want to table some additional information not covered by the Auditor General's report which shows that Hydra House was receiving \$250 a day for respite care, while Hydra House paid only \$76 a day to have it delivered. The result was that the corporation pocketed a huge profit on the backs of people with disabilities. I believe this was outrageous, indeed, almost certainly illegal.

I would ask the Justice Minister to include this material in his submission to the RCMP unless, of course, the Minister of Justice thinks this was a normal profit.

Will the Minister of Justice include this additional information in the outrageous money grabbing by Hydra House in his submission or the submission of his deputy minister to the RCMP?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, the reason why the earlier documents were passed on to Manitoba Justice is so that professional prosecutors can look at the document to see a prima facie, there are grounds to have a criminal investigation pursued by the police. That has taken place. I will do so with this document too. There is no intervention, no judgment required of myself. Leave that to professionals. Leave that to the police. Too bad he did not go there himself.

Livestock Industry Slaughter Capacity

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, it is time for a reality check with this government. Today we have over 400, close to 400 000 more cattle than we did when the BSE originally started. Our farmers are paying the price for this government's incompetence in being able to address this issue, a very, very serious issue that this government has dropped the ball on.

Mr. Speaker, the need to increase slaughter facilities in Manitoba is critical, and as we see slaughter capacities increase in other provinces this minister sits on her heinie and does absolutely nothing.

My question for this minister—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are not going to resort to that in this Chamber. I ask the honourable member to withdraw that.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw those comments, and I apologize to the minister. Having said that, cattle farmers are very frustrated that this government at the end of the day is not materializing. Say what it will, send out the press releases that you want, but at the end of the day you are not materializing on increasing slaughter. Why have you failed so miserably? If you cannot do the job, step down and allow someone else to do it.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I would invite the member opposite to visit some of the farmers in rural Manitoba and check with them as to whether they support the Rancher's Choice proposal that we had put forward, whether he would check with farmers in rural Manitoba if they agree with the programs that we have put forward.

I would also encourage the member opposite to talk to his federal colleagues because we have been trying to get the federal government to be part of the solution through our Loan Loss Reserve. That has not happened. We have not been able to convince the federal government to raise the level of the Loan Loss Reserve. I would encourage the member opposite to also look at the programs put in place by this government that were not supported by the federal government.

This government has stepped up to the plate, and we will continue to work with the producers and we will continue to work to increase slaughter capacity in this province.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: On May 11, 2005, the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Mackintosh) rose on a point of order regarding comments spoken by the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach) while challenging the ruling of the Chair. The honourable Government House Leader asserted that the Official Opposition House Leader had called the honourable Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) a liar and requested that the words be withdrawn.

I took the matter under advisement in order to view Hansard and verify the language used. Page 2615 of Hansard for May 11, 2005, attributes the following words to the honourable Official Opposition House Leader: "Mr. Speaker, I am greatly disappointed given the fact that enough information was tabled in this House to prove that the minister lied. I must challenge your ruling."

It is clear from these comments that the honourable Government House Leader does have a point of order as it is unparliamentary to call another member a liar. In addition, in looking at the comments of the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he may not be aware of it but he, with

the words that he said, also reflected on the ruling of the Chair. As I have said in this House before, it is not appropriate for members to reflect on the ruling of the Chair. Members have the option of challenging the ruling if they desire if they disagree with it, but it is out of order to comment on and reflect on the ruling. If any member attempts to debate or comment on a ruling rather than challenging it, he or she will be called to order.

I, therefore, call upon the Official Opposition House Leader to unequivocally withdraw the word "lied."

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, reflecting on your advice, I will withdraw that word.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable member and that should take care of the matter.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Emergency Medical Services Week

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, this week is recognized as Emergency Medical Services Week. Yesterday I had the pleasure of attending the kick-off event at Shamrock School in my constituency.

In attendance were local civilians who had greatly contributed to life and fire safety in the community during the past few months. These honoured guests have done everything from entering burning buildings to alert and rescue people from fire, performing CPR in emergency medical situations and assisting in the rescuing of a drowning person in the Red River. The 10 individuals honoured were not all able to be in attendance but their heroic efforts were well recognized. These individuals include: Shannon Dupont, Claudia Derzko, Taras Pankiewicz, Peter Konopelny, Basil Konopelny, Phil Methot, Dave Johnson, Andy Stirling, Alaina Wood and Veronica Ross.

Mr. Speaker, this city's fire and paramedic service workers are true role models. They exude bravery and selflessness on a daily basis and work hard to keep our communities healthy and safe. Also, as we recognize Emergency Medical Service Week, we must acknowledge and commend our local citizens who have helped save lives and also have promoted safety and well being in the community.

The promotion of bicycle safety is this year's theme, and it is important for parents and children to inform themselves so that this summer can be a safe one for all.

I congratulate the Fire and Paramedic Service of Winnipeg on a successful opening event and encourage Manitobans to join with me in recognizing the efforts of these truly outstanding individuals. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:30)

Riverdale Place Workshop

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, May 18, 2005, the Riverdale Place Workshop in Arborg, a vocational training and activity centre for mentally challenged adults and people with disabilities, will be celebrating its 30th anniversary.

The group of 33 people who work at the Riverdale workshop do a variety of things, one of which includes the curbside pick-up of recyclable materials in the town of Arborg, village of Riverton and pick up at the Bar Waste Authority Co-op landfill site. Workshop participants also take recyclable items dropped off by Hecla Island and Matheson Island which are all sorted and baled before being sent off to Winnipeg.

In addition to recycling, clients of the Riverdale workshop do pallet shop repair for the Diageo plant in Gimli and work on small woodwork projects like picnic tables and lawn ornaments. Flower rentals, sewing and crafts also make up the many items they sell in their store.

While the workshop is partly funded by the Department of Family Services and Housing, the members of the workshop rely on store sales to generate revenue for themselves and the upkeep of the workshop. Currently there are five full-time staff, six part-time staff, two casual staff and an eight-member volunteer board.

Tomorrow's 30th anniversary is a momentous event to celebrate not only for the workshop and community of Arborg, but also for the four original members who will be celebrating their thirtieth year of work at Riverdale. I would like to sincerely congratulate and recognize Bill Andrieshyn, Lorne Johnston, Allice Horbaccio and Violet Olsen for their 30 years of service at the Riverdale Place

Workshop. I wish them all the best along with their colleagues, staff and supporters for many great years to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ralph Whitfield

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, small business owners are the keystone of our rural communities providing important services, employment and support. One such man is Ralph Whitfield of Souris who was awarded the Manitoba Society of Pharmacists Award of Merit.

This award recognizes Ralph as an outstanding individual, community leader and dedicated professional, an opinion all who know him share. He was also honoured with the Bowl of Hygieia Award in 1976 for outstanding initiatives on town council and many new community projects, followed by the Chamber of Commerce Appreciation Award in 1999.

Ralph opened Whitfield Drugs in 1956, and he is now in his forty-ninth year of committed services to the citizens of Souris. He has contributed to his profession as a member of the Manitoba Society of Pharmacists since its establishment serving as a board member for eight years, one year as president and three years as chairman of economics.

Ralph is well known for his love of Simmental cattle and has produced quality breed stock from Woodsong Farm since 1969. He was given the Dolphe Henuset Award for distinguished Manitoba Simmental Breeder in 1999.

Mr. Speaker, the true scope of Ralph Whitfield's contributions cannot be adequately discussed with my limited time, but I assure my fellow members they are far-reaching and numerous. I would like to congratulate Mr. Whitfield for his many achievements, but also for wonderful and quality service. It is well known in Souris that he will go the extra mile to help his customers and friends. For this and being a valued citizen, we thank him.

SMART Exercise Program

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight a program I am happy to sponsor and support in collaboration with the St. Norbert Eagles Club and Richmond Gardens Seniors Residential Complex. The program I have been active in organizing and promoting is the Victoria Order of Nurses, Seniors Maintaining Active Roles Together.

SMART is a community-based exercise program that has recently commenced operation at two new locations in St. Norbert. These include St. Norbert Eagles Club and Richmond Gardens Seniors Residential Complex. Both programs in St. Norbert are well attended with over 40 adults participating in the Thursday, May 5 session at the Eagles Club.

Mr. Speaker, the SMART exercise program is open to residents interested in improving their health and well-being. The VON has actively recruited volunteers from the community and trained them to ensure they are competent and qualified to lead exercise programs by training and certifying them as fitness instructors. The VON has ensured participant safety by providing the volunteer instructors with CPR and emergency first aid certification.

Mr. Speaker, the volunteer instructors also provide health information which can help reduce future health complications like high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. The success of this program can be attributed to the provision of a safe and friendly atmosphere that provides residents with an opportunity to socialize, meet new people and create lifelong friendships.

Mr. Speaker, SMART is free to all participants and if a participant wishes to make a donation the financial support is used for ensuring additional training and support for the volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the staff and volunteers of the Victoria Order of Nurses for undertaking this program in St. Norbert. I would like to thank in particular Mr. Des Ballantyne of the St. Norbert Eagles Club and the volunteer board members of the St. Norbert Eagles and Richmond Gardens for providing SMART program space and for supporting SMART. I would especially like to commend all the program's participants for actively pursuing an improvement to their health through an increase in their physical fitness. Thank you.

Outstanding Young Farmers Program

Mr. David Faurchou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today and inform my honourable colleagues of the 2005 Manitoba Outstanding Young Farmers Program. With a world full of possibilities and seemingly endless number of obstacles facing farmers today, it is truly an accomplishment for a young person to achieve success in leadership in the farming industry.

On April 9, 2005, in Brandon, Manitoba, we were introduced to this year's regional nominees, Albert and Michelle Rimke of Oak Lake, Reginald Gauthier of St. Claude and Stacy and Laurel Meisner of Moosehorn.

Mr. Speaker, the Meisner family will be travelling to Halifax, Nova Scotia, as Manitoba's 2005 Outstanding Young Farmers for the November 16 to 20, 2005, national competition. Stacy and Laurel are excellent examples of a successful young farming couple that remain very active within their community while parenting their three young children and managing their 2500 acre beef cattle operation.

I would also like to thank the distinguished panel of judges this year who included Ms. Loree Oakden, a chartered accountant with Farm Credit Corporation, Dr. Shannon Scott, a nutritional beef specialist from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, as well as our own honourable Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) who, along with his wife Beryl, represented Manitoba as Manitoba's Outstanding Young Farm Couple, I believe, in 1986.

I also would like to express my pleasure in seeing that the honourable Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk) included last year's Manitoba's Outstanding Young Farmers, Todd and Julie Racher, at the Legislature during Agricultural Awareness Day recently.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we encourage today's young people to see a future in rural Manitoba. I trust that all of my fellow MLAs join with me in recognizing the Meisner family's accomplishments and wish them well in representing Manitoba at Canada's Outstanding Young Farmer's Competition in Halifax later this year.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you canvass the House to see if there is agreement for the House to consider concurrence until 4 p.m., and then the House proceed to bills? It is our intention to call, for your information, Bills 25, 14, 21, 15, 27 and 9.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for the House to consider a concurrence motion in Committee of Supply until 4 p.m., and then have the House proceed to consider bills, with the bills to be called including Bills 25, 14, 21, 15, 27 and 9? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply. Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair. *[interjection]*

Okay, sorry about that. The honourable Government House Leader still has further business, so we will stay. We will not resolve into committee at this moment.

Mr. Mackintosh: Just as a mechanism, Mr. Speaker, I understand that you would just take the Chair at 4 p.m., is that our understanding? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: It has been agreed that we will meet in concurrence until 4 p.m., and then the Speaker will come in and take the Chair, and then we will go into Orders of the Day dealing with bills. Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Okay, now we will resolve into Committee of Supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Concurrence Motion

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): The Committee of Supply has before it for our consideration the motion concurring in all supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Chairman, I would just like to ask the minister. Yesterday I know we were asking a number of questions around the schools that were tendered or that were promised, awarded, I guess, in April of '03, along with the last three or four that have been tendered since he became the minister, certainly this spring. I just wondered if he could provide me with any of that material, as he indicated yesterday he would have it by today.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Yes, I can put on the record the status of the schools that were promised in '03-04. Currently, Happy Thought School in Lord Selkirk School Division is at the working drawing stage and will shortly be going to tender.

Garden Valley School Division, the school, as I mentioned I was there for the sod turning. So it is underway. South St. Vital school for the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine is currently at the sketch plan stage.

Carberry Collegiate in the Beautiful Plains School Division, phase 1 of that project is at the working drawing stage. Phase 2 of the project is at the sketch plan stage. Inwood at Lakeshore is a working drawing/tender at this point. Deloraine School in Southwest Horizon is at the tender stage.

Mr. Maguire: I know I had asked the minister for a list of all the schools that had been awarded since the election in '03, as well, and wondered if he can provide that now. I do not need them all quoted into Hansard here right now if there are any, but I was just asking if he could make that available to me.

Mr. Bjornson: I do not have a sufficient number of documents at this table, but I will request the staff to photocopy them, to take one for you.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chair, if he has them there, I wonder if his staff could just have them copied and sent in to me unless, of course, he wants to read them out now as to where we are at.

Mr. Bjornson: I will have staff photocopy them, so we have a sufficient number at the table.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Chairperson, I would like to ask the minister if schools are to have purchased their land before they get into actual expenditure of design, you know, in terms of hiring the architect and spending tens of thousands of dollars on architectural design, hiring a consultant and spending tens of thousands on consultant fees. Is it normal practice for that kind of money to be spent, tens of thousands of dollars, before a school even has land purchased?

Mr. Bjornson: The normal practice would be for school divisions, in their capital plan, to purchase property on speculation that, according to the five-

year capital plan they would be submitting to the Public Schools Finance Board, they would purchase that property, anticipating construction of the school. Of course, those five-year capital plans, they do due diligence in assessing enrolment patterns, in assessing demographic shifts and assessing need based on age-expired buildings that might currently service that school division.

So the process for acquisition is one that is on speculation that new schools will be built. There are a number of school divisions that do speculate and acquire land as a result of their long-term planning, and there are many school divisions that do own property for the purpose of the construction of schools.

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister find it strange for a lot of money to be spent if a school did not already own property?

Mr. Bjornson: I am sorry. Could the member clarify that question?

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister find it strange if a school division was spending tens of thousands of dollars, but they still did not own any property for that new school? They spent it, say, on designing the school, but they do not have the land yet. Would the minister find that strange in terms of the process that is set out for the building of new schools?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, each individual school construction is different. There are some other considerations around what realities that school division might face with respect to the property that is available for the project. There are a lot of different challenges for schools if they are renovating on-site or expanding and the current site does not necessarily have the sufficient play area as per the regulations or their recommendations. So, as far as I know, as the process unfolds, each individual school has to look at some of the challenges that they might face with respect to acquiring more property to meet their needs.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us if Seven Oaks School Division owns their new property yet for the West Kildonan Collegiate?

Mr. Bjornson: I will have to take that as notice. I cannot confirm at this time that they do indeed have legal title.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister in Estimates said at one point that, yes, they owned the land, and then turned around basically and said, no, they did not own the land. So the minister is unaware right now. Is that what he is saying as to what is actually happening with that land for that new high school?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I also have mentioned in Estimates that the offer to purchase, from what I understand, had gone through the process and agreements were signed. It was a matter of time before the title was transferred.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what due diligence his department did in monitoring the activities of the Seven Oaks School Division in purchasing that land?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, you are talking about duly elected officials who deal with an arm's-length organization of government through the Public Schools Finance Board. This is an arm's-length organization. The rules are set up as such where the duly elected officials bring forward their proposals for land acquisition and disposition, and that is dealt with by the Public Schools Finance Board. Again, once a ministerial award has been approved for the purpose of the construction of the schools, the school divisions are compensated accordingly for the expense incurred in the purchase of that land.

* (14:50)

Mrs. Driedger: Well, considering the minister has become aware only within the last few weeks of the activity of the Seven Oaks School Division in illegal land development, and since he has been questioned on what is happening in the Seven Oaks School Division in terms of the development of the new high school, would the minister not have felt some concern and wanted to know a little bit more from Seven Oaks in terms of assurances that, in fact, the development of that new piece of land on the east side of Main Street was for a high school only?

Did he not do any further questioning or have his staff? Did he not ask his staff to find out if there was anything going on in that particular area? Is he just assuming that nothing is happening because maybe Brian O'Leary, NDP campaign manager and superintendent, said, "Do not worry about it, nothing further is going on"? Would the minister not have felt he had some responsibility to, at least, ask some questions?

Mr. Bjornson: The department is engaged in that process as there are many questions that have been brought up as a result of what has transpired in Seven Oaks. That is why we are engaged in the process of the 30-day review.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister is not coming across very well in his management of this whole issue, in terms of his demonstration of leadership and the types of questions and requests he should be making to his staff. He seems to think that as a minister, all he has to do is sit back and wait for his staff maybe to read his mind and go out and do things. What leadership has he provided or demanded of his staff?

In terms of asking whether or not there is any or has been—until all of this hit the fan—has there been anything going on in terms of future land development in that new area where the high school is going to be going? Where is his leadership in asking for some information in that? I would think he would be a little bit concerned and, as the minister, made some demands of his staff. Has he not done that?

Mr. Bjornson: I immediately engaged the acting deputy minister to establish the terms of reference for the 30-day review that is going to get to the heart of the issue we have been discussing in Estimates and in the House. The school divisions were all reminded through letters about the disposition process currently outlined in The Public Schools Act, so that was the immediate action that was taken. All the specific issues raised with regard to the situation in Seven Oaks will be addressed through this review process.

Mrs. Driedger: While the minister has, I think, far more faith in that review process than probably anybody else in this province, I think that is extremely naive of him because those terms of reference were very, very political. Those terms of reference were designed to protect him and other NDP friends and supporters. Those terms of reference are not going to get anywhere near the kind of answers that we need in this review.

We have said a number of times that the only way we are going to get to the bottom of all of this, as the minister plays a significant role in this whole issue because he is the one that dropped the ball in a very serious way in terms of ministerial management and accountability, and it was this minister that

dropped the ball. It was this minister who never received information in a timely manner which should be very disconcerting to this minister where others around him have a land management review which is a forensic financial analysis of what was going on in Seven Oaks School Division.

Where a legal opinion was sought, the minister was totally out of the loop through that whole period of time where something last fall triggered all of these things to happen. Until the minister was asked, I believe it might have been May 2, he did not have a clue what was going on in his own department. Then, once the Public Schools Finance Board decided to seek these reviews back in the fall, never once, he tells us, was he told about it.

In fact, yesterday, when asked how often does he meet with the Public Schools Finance Board, his answers were absolutely loosey-goosey. It was sort of whenever they feel like it or whenever he feels like it. One of our former ministers indicated that he met with them on a monthly basis, and you have to wonder who is running the show in the Department of Education. Who is holding the reins there, or who is pulling the minister's strings? This minister does not seem to be the one that is in control of his department, and he does not seem to be the one who understands what his role is as a minister in a department, particularly of such a big department.

So, if the minister actually thinks that anybody has faith in his terms of reference, I think certainly the minister has got his head in a cloud because the terms of reference, as they have been set up, are totally unacceptable. They are absolutely politicized. They do not look at the minister's role; they do not look at the department's role. We have illegal action that has been continuing even as the minister turns a blind eye to what is going on in that school division. He was, you know, weeks ago, told and even finally received the legal opinion that what Seven Oaks School Division was doing was illegal, and yet the minister did nothing.

He did nothing a year ago when he got the complaint from a resident of the Seven Oaks School Division, who is absolutely concerned and worried about what is happening with taxpayers' money. There is language out there like "fraud." There is language out there about cover-up, and this is coming from individuals in that constituency who have been asking this minister for some information

for the last year and this minister has totally ignored it. So, if the minister thinks that people around him have any faith in this smoke and mirrors review that he is doing right now, he will be sorely disappointed because nobody has faith.

The one thing I would like to ask the minister, as they are moving forward with this review, because I have grave concern in terms of the politicization of that review, and I would like to ask the minister and have his guarantee, considering it is politicized, considering he has basically absolved himself of any responsibility and absolved his department of any responsibility, I would like his guarantee that there is no witch hunt going on in that department right now to find a scapegoat for this lack of action on the minister's part. Can he guarantee there is no witch hunt going on in the Department of Education so that somebody else can be blamed when it is this minister who should bear a lot of responsibility for what is going on?

Mr. Bjornson: The member raises a number of issues in the preamble, and I would like to address some of those.

First of all, the member mentioned that, I believe it was the member from Russell who was acting in the capacity of Minister of Education who said that he met on a monthly basis with the Public Schools Finance Board. That certainly was his prerogative as minister at the time if he wanted to meet with an arm's-length body of the government. He could meet with them on a monthly basis, and that was his prerogative.

* (15:00)

I know that I have been meeting with a lot of stakeholders and visiting a lot of schools, over 160 schools that I visited as minister, over 25 school visits in my capacity as MLA, over 60 meetings with stakeholders in my tenure. So I meet with a lot of different organization on a lot of different issues, and I will continue to do so.

Personally, I do not think it is appropriate that I meet frequently with an arm's-length organization of government. We are dealing with an issue where we have duly elected trustees. We have an independent body, arm's-length organization in the Public Schools Finance Board, and we have to determine how this has unfolded as that is the intent of the review. I

would take exception to the suggestion that the terms of reference are politicized. I think the terms of reference will get to the heart of the issue. I am very confident that all questions that need to be asked will be asked, and the review will show us where this has transpired, where this has gone wrong.

I am the first to admit, as I admitted in Estimates and I admitted in the House and I admitted in the scrum, that I should have asked more questions. The allegations were very specific, and the response I received when we vetted the allegations through the process was quite vague. I will be the first to admit that I should have asked more questions. Right now, we are asking all those questions. The process is one that we will get all the answers, and we will do so by June 2.

Mrs. Driedger: I do not see how the minister can expect anybody to have faith in that. He turned a blind eye to the allegations that came forward a year ago. He did absolutely nothing except sort of pass the buck on to the Public Schools Finance Board. He says he understands the act. He knows The Public Schools Act. If he knew the act, then he should have immediately, when he passed that letter of allegations, or that e-mail of allegations, on to the Public Schools Finance Board, should have said, "There is illegal activity going on here. Investigate it and come back to me in one week with what you have found."

Does the minister not see where he bumbled this issue by just washing his hands of it, passing it on and then forgetting it even existed?

Mr. Bjornson: As I said, and I will say it again, the allegations were very specific. The information I received in response was very ambiguous and, in retrospect, I should have asked more questions. Having said that, we are now engaged in a process where all those questions will be asked and all those questions will be answered.

Mrs. Driedger: But not all of the questions are going to be answered because the minister is not looking at how he dropped the ball on the issue. So how can he try to allude that all of the questions to this will be answered?

And he is right. The allegations, when they came forward, were very clear. You do not have to be a brain surgeon to have figured out that illegal activity

was going on, if the minister knew the act. The minister was negligent in his handling of that particular allegation that was sent forward. He should have demanded more. By basically absolving himself of any responsibility in that issue and not including himself or his department in it, he has basically washed his hands of taking ministerial responsibility.

I will ask the minister as well, going back to a question he has not answered a few minutes ago, this new area where the high school is going in is called River Ridge. Why, during Estimates when we were bringing information forward to the minister—and part of that information also includes that real estate agents in that area were told to take bids on this property for residential development—does the minister not feel he has some responsibility and to turn around and talk to Brian O'Leary and find out were they in further land development in the beginning stages of it until they got caught? Did the minister not feel that he should direct his department to put those questions forward to Mr. O'Leary?

Mr. Bjornson: In response to this issue, all school divisions—all school divisions—were advised of the protocol and the procedures around the disposition of property. In response to this issue, we are asking all the necessary questions to address the concerns that are specific to the situation in the Seven Oaks School Division.

Mrs. Driedger: That is a very unsatisfactory answer because they got caught. If they did not get caught, more things could be happening in River Ridge, for all we know, and I think taxpayers need some assurances.

A lot of money has been spent so far on Lombard North. David Palubeskie, who, in the eighties, certainly was a very good friend of the NDP, well known to this Premier (Mr. Doer), was involved in the 1980s related to the issue of land development in that same area that the Premier of this province was sued on.

Now it is this same person, Mr. Palubeskie, in that same vicinity that is again involved in land development, whose company has actually made, what we can track so far, a couple hundred thousand dollars. It could be going on. He is intimately involved as the developer for the Seven Oaks School Division, or the person that is pulling it together. He

is the consultant for the Seven Oaks School Division. He is also marketing all of this property, and he is now involved not only with Swinford Park but now in River Ridge. This person was also very involved and a good NDP supporter in the eighties at the time there was some land development going on in that area, and then the Premier in that period of time got sued because of some of his involvement into that land development issue. So you can understand how there are some huge concerns.

The Seven Oaks School Division, since 2001 when they deliberately went into this not only to build a school but deliberately went in, according to their applications to the city, to build houses, Mr. Palubeskie was part of this right from the beginning. He has done very well by it through some very good NDP connections on the Public Schools Finance Board, Mr. O'Leary, all of whom have donated significant amounts of money to this party. They are all involved in this. So the minister has to appreciate why we have a bit of cynicism and concern about what is going on.

Do I believe that we are going to get to the bottom of this? Hardly, because of who is involved all around. So can the minister not see the need for an independent review? If he really wants to get to the bottom of this, will he not commit, and I will ask him again, will he not commit to an independent review of this Seven Oaks School Division illegal land development scheme?

Mr. Bjornson: I guess the member and I will agree to disagree because I do believe the review process that we have initiated will get to the bottom of this issue. I am satisfied with the credentials of all the people that will be engaged in this process. We have very capable staff who are going to be looking at this. Again, we are talking about a situation between an elected school board and an arm's-length organization of the government in the Public Schools Finance Board. The team that is assembled has very good credentials. We also have the opportunity to engage external supports as needed. I am very confident all the questions will be answered when this review is completed on or before June 2.

Mrs. Driedger: Has Mr. Farthing set up a committee to look at this, or is he basically asking people for their opinions? Is he the one doing the interviewing or is it Mr. Fortier? Are there others involved?

* (15:10)

Mr. Bjornson: Currently, I am aware that Mr. Fortier is part of this process and the deputy minister is leading this process as well. Again, tremendous credentials with the deputy minister, a PhD in economics, and had served on the schools finance branch from '95 to '99 under the Conservative government. He has impeccable credentials, and I am very confident the team that is being assembled to address this issue will do an excellent job in addressing this issue.

Mrs. Driedger: I do not have any problem with the credentials of the people involved because I do agree with the minister that there are some very good staff with very credible credentials. It is the political interference that could be going on behind the scenes that I am far more concerned about. This government has a track record of that, and I have been the brunt of some of that. I know what I am talking about. It would be political interference that I would have some huge concerns about, not the credentials of the people in his department because they are very credible. They are very well educated and they are very talented.

The minister just mentioned a team that is put together. As the minister, I am sure he would have asked Mr. Farthing who was on that team. Considering what this minister has had to answer to in the last few weeks, any minister, I am sure, would have wanted to be very well versed. Clayton Manness would never have walked in here without knowing exactly what was going on in every area. He would never have walked in, nor would other ministers have walked in, with such a lack of information and knowledge about what is going on in his department, as this minister has demonstrated in the last few weeks.

I will ask the minister again. He just mentioned there is a team set up and I would like to ask him who is on that team.

Mr. Bjornson: As I said, the deputy has been asked to lead this process and Mr. Fortier is one that has been engaged in that process. It is kind of interesting that the member is suggesting there is political interference and then advocating that I should be a lot more hands-on in the process. I find that a little curious that the member would be suggesting I should be right in there in the middle of things when

I am very confident in the credentials of the individuals that are leading this review, and I am confident that all the questions will be answered on or before June 2.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister is misconstruing what I am saying. I am not asking for him to interfere. I am asking for him to gather information and to demonstrate his leadership by making sure the kinds of things that need to be looked into are being looked into.

In fact, this minister seems to have the view that he will just say to his deputy, go and investigate. This minister did not even put forward the terms of reference. That is his job to dictate to his deputy what he wanted to see in that review. This minister did not even know what to ask for. He just basically washed his hands of this as he has of every issue. No wonder, Mr. Chairperson, that there are people watching this minister in action.

The minister should be aware, and I have said it to him before, people think he is a puppet. People think his strings are being pulled. He is demonstrating that time after time because he is not showing any leadership in terms of directing his department. That is his job. It is his job to say the terms of reference should be more inclusive. The terms of reference should be this or that.

Will he today commit to asking his staff to find out if there had been any initial activity by the Seven Oaks School Division in getting into further residential development in River Ridge? Would he be prepared, or brave enough, and showing enough leadership and accountability, to go out and find out why a real estate agent would be saying they were told to take bids on this property for housing development on property owned by the Seven Oaks School Division? The minister should be concerned enough about that. I am asking him would he commit today to follow up on that, find out. Was Seven Oaks School Division in the initial stages of any further residential land development in the River Ridge area?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, I am hearing that you should not politically interfere, but you should know everybody that is on the team. I am hearing that do not politically interfere, but demand that you have the terms of reference and you develop the terms of reference. So I am really confused as to what exactly

the member is asking for with respect to the minister politically interfering, but how dare the minister politically interfere. This is really a confusing line of questioning, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the process, again I am very confident in the credentials of the staff who are going to be conducting this review. I am very confident they will be seeking expertise from outside of the department as needed and they are going to get to the bottom of this issue. Yes, I am concerned that the school division has been engaged in this process. That is why we are going to have a very thorough review of how this has transpired. I am also the first to admit, and I will admit it again that I should have asked more questions a year ago. We are going to be asking all those questions now and we will get to the bottom of the issue.

Mrs. Driedger: It is interesting that the minister is asking his staff to do the review. This minister asked his staff to put together the terms of reference. Are these the same staff that withheld the legal opinion from him from the beginning of February until about March 8? Are these the same staff?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, the review is going to get to the bottom of all these issues. It is going to get to the bottom of all of these issues.

Mrs. Driedger: How can the review get to the bottom of it when the minister is not investigating those staff who withheld from him that legal opinion? Somebody had that legal opinion, and besides the Public Schools Finance Board, people in his department had the legal opinion that land development was illegal. This minister was not given that information until everything hit the fan in Question Period. Are these the same staff who are going to be investigating this situation?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, we have inconsistencies from the member opposite. Earlier, she was saying, "Is there going to be a witch hunt?" Now she is saying, "There should be a witch hunt." The member opposite does not seem to know what she wants. What we want is a review that is going to get to the bottom of this issue and we are engaged in that process.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us if illegal land development is occurring today in the Swinford Park area?

Mr. Bjornson: As I have said in Estimates, and I will repeat it in the House now, our concern is that no actions are taken, and that the school division act within the parameters of the law, no actions are taken in such a way that will adversely affect the taxpayers. That is the position we are taking on this issue right now. We are going to be reviewing how many of the decisions are made around this issue.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister did not care for the last few years that \$2 million of taxpayer money was put into building a fence, building roads and putting sewers in there. Why was he not concerned then when he got the allegations a year ago about taxpayers' money going into land development? Why did he not wake up then and address the issue? All of a sudden now he is so righteously concerned. Can he explain that?

* (15:20)

Mr. Bjornson: Again, when we were in the Estimates process, the former Minister of Education acknowledged there is a process that once allegations are brought forward, the allegations are vetted through the appropriate personnel within the department, or arm's-length organizations that would be appropriate for that purpose. That is how I responded to the allegations. That was the process the member from Russell had said, "Yes, I am aware of the process and how it works." That is what I did.

Mrs. Driedger: So the minister, by basically indicating that he has to worry about the legalities that the school division might face now if this activity was stopped, basically he is saying that illegal activity is still continuing under his watch. He is basically condoning it because he is too worried about the other legal aspects to it. Well, maybe the school division should just sell the land immediately to the developers and let them continue, which was the deal in the first place.

Mr. O'Leary said to the media at the beginning of May that he had a deal with the private contractors that he was not going to develop the land. He was acquiring it, but he had an agreement with them, so he broke the agreement with the private contractors in the area, who would be the people that could do this.

Why would the minister not have directed the Seven Oaks School Division to just sell the land?

Why are they allowed to hang onto it and continue this illegal activity?

Mr. Bjornson: We are not going to act in a way that will adversely affect the taxpayers.

Mrs. Driedger: But the minister is flagrantly breaking the law then himself, or condoning it. How can the minister of the Crown have any credibility as a minister? The Justice Minister is sitting right there. Maybe he should have a chat with his Justice Minister because the Minister of Education is sending out an awful, awful message to Manitobans because every day that goes by he is condoning the breaking of a significant law in The Public Schools Act, the whole act that directs education in this province. The minister, day by day, until when we do not know, is going to allow this to continue until phase 3 Grady Bend is fully developed?

How long is the minister going to sit there and condone law breaking?

Mr. Bjornson: As I have said before, we are going to act in the best interests of the taxpayers. Members opposite, throughout the nineties we saw their funding of schools and how that impacted the taxpayers: Neepawa, 86.1% increase in taxes; Borderland, 89.4% increase in taxes; Altona, 172% increase. We are not going to act in a way that is going to adversely affect the taxpayers when members opposite's policy and funding of education had a tremendous impact on taxpayers.

Mrs. Driedger: The Minister of Education, by ignoring this allegation that came forward a year ago, was contemptuous of taxpayers because what has been going on over the last few years in the Seven Oaks School Division is a continual raising of the education property taxes, as well as the lowest amount of funding per child in education.

Now the minister can sit here and spew forward his rhetoric about protecting taxpayers. Where has he been while the Seven Oaks School Division has been spending \$2 million of taxpayers' money already? Maybe more, how do we know? That is what is on the record. And he was not concerned when he got that letter of allegation last May, so what about the taxpayers over the last year? The minister basically thumbed his nose at them because he had an

opportunity to protect taxpayers, and he had an opportunity for the children to have better funding per child. Yet it was not important then for him to do anything. Now he says he cannot do anything: "I have to allow illegal activity to continue. I have to condone it." *[interjection]*

Well, there is a little chirping going on behind me from a little bird from Selkirk that is jumping to the defence of his colleague.

An Honourable Member: They are both drowning in the lake.

Mrs. Driedger: Yes, they are both drowning in the rhetoric that is going on here in the mishandling of this issue. The minister certainly has been contemptuous of taxpayers in this whole issue, but negligent in his handling of a very serious allegation that came forward. How is it the minister can be left out of the investigation when, in fact, a year ago it was he who did not do anything with the allegations that came forward? Now he can actually have the gall to sit in here and say, "Now I am worried about taxpayers." How does that work?

Mr. Bjornson: As a teacher in the system in the nineties, I saw a lot of contempt for the taxpayers when the funding announcements reflected the commitment of the Tory administration to the public school system. Just to remind the member opposite, Steinbach had a 184.2% increase in taxes during their tenure; 230.9 percent in the Interlake, a farming community; 129.9% increase in Lakeshore; 147.4 percent in the home of the bird from Selkirk, in the Lord Selkirk School Division; 88.5 percent in Mountain View; 81.4 percent in Pine Creek; 171.3 percent in Prairie Rose. Now, if that is not contempt for taxpayers by absolving themselves of responsibility to be the funders for the public school system, I do not know what is, Mr. Chair, and I am really quite concerned that the policy of members opposite had done incredible, almost irreparable damage to the school system.

In fact, their contempt was not just for the taxpayers. Their contempt was for the profession. Their contempt was for the children of our province when they were making funding announcements that they made. Here we are on the anniversary of 10 years ago with the funding announcement of zero and 243 teachers, a record number of teachers, given

pink slips. I do not need to take any—well, I will watch my language. I do not need lectures about contempt for taxpayers when that was nothing but contempt when you consider the policies around education funding and when you consider the platform for members opposite and their commitment to education funding, an announcement of, I believe, they planned a 1% increase in funding to education. That was part of their platform about how we could sustain the education system.

The member also talks about funding per pupil. We have one of the highest funding-per-pupil contributions of any jurisdiction in Canada, and that is because of our efforts in the last six years to increase funding to the public school system by \$129.8 million compared to \$15.2 under the previous five years prior to our election to government.

Mr. Maguire: I would just like to ask the minister if he was not the one—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Please take your seat.

Mr. Maguire: My error was that I was in the wrong chair, I guess, and now I am in my seat in the Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, I think the mistakes that have been pointed out to me by the list that the member just gave me is a bit more of a concern to Manitobans. Often in this House we chastise this government for not knowing what is going on outside the Perimeter Highway, and here are a couple of really good reasons and examples as to their lack of geography and understanding of the situations in those areas.

* (15:30)

I have to, first of all, thank the minister for the list of schools he provided me with that I asked for, new schools, replacement schools, additions, renovations, that sort of thing. I just want to draw to the minister's attention the replacement school he announced here in '04-05 for Carberry Collegiate that he talked about yesterday. Beautiful Plains School Division is not in the constituency. It was just a correction. I am sure it is just an oversight on behalf of the government, but it is kind of a big issue for the people that live in those areas. Carberry Collegiate is not in the Carman constituency, as reported in this listing. It is part of Turtle Mountain now and that constituency.

There are other mistakes. I just have to defend Virden in regard to my home town now. I know the members from Brandon like to take a lot of credit for things that are going, but this is another prime example of how they have lost control completely. They have actually got Virden Collegiate listed under Brandon right now. They did not even put Brandon East or West. So I want to correct the record and advise the minister that Virden Collegiate is in the constituency of Arthur-Virden and always will be. The people in those areas understand they rank way down the list of responsibilities that this government wants to look after.

I think there are others on here as well that I see that have errors, but I am only going to point out those two as the major ones, particularly because I was the one that pointed out the need to the minister at the time for the Carberry Collegiate and called for its construction to get going in those areas.

Just two quick questions, Mr. Chairman, in regard to the Deloraine Collegiate. Now that the minister has given me the sheet that looks at the fact that in 2002-2003 that school was awarded and it is in a tender position, can he indicate to me when that tender is expected to be accepted? What is the termination date of the tender?

Mr. Bjornson: It is the school division that brings the tender forward. You could contact the school division for that information.

Mr. Maguire: I notice that others announced, subsequent to that area, have sketch plans, working drawings, a number of other areas. This school is now in tender so I am assuming those working drawings, sketch plans and everything had been done in that area. Can the minister confirm that?

Mr. Bjornson: What I can confirm is what stage the project is at. When it says sketch plans, I cannot confirm if indeed the sketch plans are complete. When it says working drawings, I cannot confirm whether or not those working drawings are complete. That is the stage the project is currently at.

Mr. Maguire: I just want to ask another question in regard to the Seven Oaks situation. The member from Charleswood has been doing a commendable job in trying to bring the minister to some form of credibility in this issue, or accountability, I should

say, his complete lack of credibility. I want to ask him if it had not been for her hard work in regard to this issue, if he would have ever brought it forward.

Mr. Bjornson: When the issue was raised for the first time in the House, I was advised that the PSFB had indeed sought a legal opinion and received a legal opinion. They were in the process of going through a process where they were looking at the legal opinion and the land management document. They were looking at them together. They were going to advise me accordingly of what the outcomes of that process were.

Mr. Maguire: Did he determine then that an internal review should be done?

Mr. Bjornson: I determined on that Monday that we should engage in the 30-day review process to see how this particular situation has unfolded.

Mr. Maguire: Who did he put in charge of it, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Bjornson: As I have said, I asked my deputy minister to take the lead on this review process.

Mr. Maguire: Did he instruct his deputy minister to deal with a certain number of individuals, or did he advise them on any other persons that should be a part of that process?

Mr. Bjornson: I asked the deputy minister to establish the terms of reference and to assign the appropriate personnel to conduct the review.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what is happening with teachers' pensions? They had the card campaign, and there was a pension task force thrown together very quickly right around that time. I would like to ask the minister what progress there is on looking at teachers' pensions from all aspects of the pension. Where is this at?

Mr. Bjornson: The teacher Pension Task Force was not thrown together. The teacher Pension Task Force has been around for quite some time. The teacher Pension Task Force has been responsible for a number of recommendations that have been brought forward that we have enacted in legislation around teacher pension.

The teacher pension issue remains an active file where what we have done in the three times

that we have opened up the act, of course, we have allowed a window of opportunity to purchase past periods of maternity leave as pensionable service. We have recognized part-time service as continuous for the purpose of qualifying for the pension. We have enabled teachers to purchase future periods of adoptive leave on a cost-shared basis with government. We have allowed retired teachers to purchase past periods of maternity leave on a cost-shared basis with government and eliminated pension premiums for teachers on disability.

As well, of course, as the members are aware, in 2000-2001, we introduced a plan to address the unfunded pension liability in the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund. These are the things that we have done. Yes, there has been a very good advocacy campaign by the teachers. The teachers' Pension Task Force is the body that does make the recommendations, and the file remains active.

Mrs. Driedger: The teachers were telling me this task force—perhaps, it did not meet very often before, but what I was led to believe was that they were brought together fairly quickly. Right around the time we brought the issue up in the House, the card campaign started. I guess what they are telling us is that, at the time this card campaign came about, they only had about one or two meetings. I do not know if any further meetings have been held, but certainly they were looking at legislative changes because that was the only avenue open to them. I was going to ask the minister is he going down the road of looking at legislative change. If he is, when is he going to do that?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, the file remains active.

Mrs. Driedger: I do not know why the minister feels he has to skate around a pretty straightforward question. Is he looking at legislative change?

Mr. Bjornson: No. As the member knows, because of the legislation, if there were any changes to be made to The Teachers' Pensions Act, then there would have to be legislative change. But the file remains active at this time.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister perhaps could tell us. Is he planning on bringing in legislative changes to address the concerns of the teachers?

* (15:40)

Mr. Bjornson: I believe the member knows the process, and we are engaged in the process. As I said, the file remains active. The teachers' Pension Task Force makes recommendations, and that is the process we are engaged in.

Mrs. Driedger: What recommendations have they made to the minister after this card campaign?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, we are engaged in the process. With respect to the specifics, that has not been finalized.

Mrs. Driedger: Can I ask the minister why he is afraid to answer the question?

Mr. Bjornson: I am not afraid to answer the question. As the member knows, if there are going to be changes made to the teachers' pension, we have to do it by active legislation. There have been meetings and we are continuing to consult. We do have a teachers' Pension Task Force, that is the process. When the recommendations are brought forward, then we act on the recommendations that are appropriate to act on. That is the process.

Mrs. Driedger: The operating funds that the government provides for education in 1999-2000 was 61 percent, and they have now dropped to 56 percent. With all of the money flowing into this government, can I ask the minister why he has decreased operating support to schools?

Mr. Bjornson: As I have said, we have increased funding to the tune of \$129.8 million. With respect to the per person support, that is a significant increase of over 16 percent to the per person support. With respect to the true cost of the delivery of education in Manitoba, we actually fund over 70 percent of that true cost when you take into consideration all the other factors such as capital, such as pension liability and the operating grant. By increasing the property tax credit, there needs to be more transparency as we have indicated on the property tax credit.

People recognize that is, indeed, a provincial property tax credit that goes against the cost of education taxes to the homeowner and that property tax credit will be forwarded directly to the school divisions as opposed to going through the process where it is forwarded to the municipalities and then to the school divisions. So that actually reflects more than 60 percent, I believe 64 percent of operating

costs when you factor in the property tax credit which we have increased.

Again, the real issue is the affordable, predictable and sustainable funding we have been providing as a government, \$129.8 million more in the base funding compared to the 15.2 million that was provided over the same period by the previous government.

We stand by our record that we have provided affordable, predictable funding for school divisions and we have provided meaningful tax relief. Again, where property taxes went up significantly during the nineties and property values were flat, we now see a reverse in the trend where property taxes are relatively flat and values have gone up significantly. I think our commitment to education is very clear.

Mrs. Driedger: I would like to say to the minister that the real issue is the serious offloading by this government onto the school divisions over the past six years, and this government forcing the school divisions to do their dirty work for them by continuing to have to increase property taxes, and then they look like the bad guys out there rather than this government. They are taking all the flak from the public.

The minister talked about wanting to see transparency, and yet he is the first one out the door talking about, "Well, we fund 70 percent." I do not know if he thinks Manitobans do not know what is going on and are not intelligent, but I mean if he wants transparency, then he should be talking about operating costs when he is being asked about operating costs, and not try to throw in the capital and the pensions and the kitchen sink to make it look better than it is.

If the minister really wants to look ministerial and talk about accountability, then he really needs to be much more straight up with his responses that yes, they have dropped funding in terms of the percentage of operating. Yes, they continue to put money into education, but it is now only 56 percent of operating.

I would like to ask the minister how he determines—they gave 2.8 percent this year—does he determine that number by the rate of economic growth or the rate of inflation. He is on record as saying both.

Mr. Bjornson: No, we determined it on the rate of economic growth and our increase in funding based

on rate of economic growth has exceeded inflation. But the member also talks about operating costs, and we can look at a couple of examples of where operating costs have gone up significantly. School divisions are large consumers of communications equipment such as the Manitoba Telephone System, and I know their costs have gone up about 68 percent in the last few years. That is one example.

School divisions are also large consumers of gas as they transport students, a number of students, in rural areas. Certainly, we are all concerned about the price of gasoline and diesel prices have gone up significantly as well, so that has had a tremendous impact. These are a couple of issues that are obviously going to impact the budgets for school divisions. We have taken some measures in our adjustments for funding around transportation to help address the increased costs in gasoline.

There is certainly another factor, I must point out, and I will repeat that is the support per pupil has increased over 16 percent. That, in itself, is a very significant contribution to support our children. We have also increased funding to special needs by over 24 percent in our tenure.

The member talks about offloading responsibility and making school boards do dirty work. I have had a déjà vu here as someone who was in the classroom in the 1990s. The members of the former Tory government actually introduced a piece of legislation that said, "School divisions, if you want to save money, you can lock teachers out for as many as 10 days." Talk about doing dirty work.

They did not put a value on the professional development and the need for administration days. Yes, I see the member from Portage la Prairie saying, "Oh, we never did that," and I commend him for that. I am glad they did not do that in Portage la Prairie, but there were several school divisions that opted to do that and that was at the expense of much needed professional development. I myself was in my third year teaching. We were trying to deal with issues around safety in the schools which were largely ignored by the members opposite, when we as teachers were lobbying the government to have the government of the day address the issues of bullying and school safety, but nothing happened. We were denied professional development to deal with those issues, so talk about dirty work.

The dirty work that was done in Evergreen School Division where I taught involved me personally being locked out for 15 days. Myself, along with 108 colleagues, in 1993 and 1994. Oh, pardon me, by 1994, we were down to 106 colleagues because two teachers ended up getting laid off, even though the enrolment had not gone down.

So, if you want to talk about dirty work, the offloading of the responsibility in funding education back in the 1990s had school divisions giving unprecedented raises and taxes and engaged in a process where teachers were being punished because the government was not providing sufficient funding. There is a double-edged sword there.

Again, we have made our commitment to fund at the rate of economic growth. Our costs are certainly beyond our control, but we are working with our partners when we have the funding of schools committee meet to decide other areas where we can help make improvements in how we fund schools including the enrolment change support, including class-size grants, including a variety of different initiatives we are working toward making our schools more effective in dealing with a lot of the challenges our schools face.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, if the NDP did not raid Hydro and force Hydro to have to increase rates by 10 percent, does the minister think they could have held back or held down some of those school costs?

Mr. Bjornson: We equalized the Hydro rates for all Manitobans. We still have the lowest Hydro rates, I believe, in North America. We are faced, as I said, as big consumers of technology and communications in the public school system, a 68% increase in bills for school divisions. Of course, they operate during peak hours where there are not too many plans where you get free calling after six, unfortunately.

* (15:50)

School divisions have faced huge increases in their communications costs. School divisions are huge consumers of communications costs. We will continue to own Hydro as long as we are in government, and it benefits all Manitobans. We know that those 68% increases in costs for MTS have only benefited a few.

Mrs. Driedger: Looking at per-pupil funding, K to S4, in 1998-99 it was about \$7,800, well, \$7,865 a pupil. Then, in the NDP's first year, in 2000-01 it went down a thousand dollars per pupil to \$6,800. Then, in '02-03, it went back up a little bit to \$7,200.

I would ask the minister what it is now. I do not have any further numbers in terms of where it ended up in '03-04 and '04-05. In 1998-1999, was the minister aware we were funding students to the tune of \$7,800 per student?

Mr. Bjornson: I am sorry, I will have to make sure, per pupil funding. Oh, I am sorry. This is not the number I am looking for right now. Just bear with me for a moment. The cost per pupil, '04-05, was \$8,117, cumulative from '02-03 to '04-05, a 14.7% increase.

Mrs. Driedger: Of the 38 school divisions, can the minister tell us how many raised their special levies this year?

Mr. Bjornson: I am sorry, I do not have that number in front of me. But I do know that many school divisions' taxes were flat as a result of the decrease in the ESL for \$30 million that were reduced from the provincially levied ESL.

I will find out exactly how many school divisions did raise their taxes. Again, some divisions, even though they did raise their taxes, the taxes are relatively flat because of our initiative in the \$30-million reduction in the ESL.

Mrs. Driedger: According to the numbers we were able to pull up, either through reading the papers or making some phone calls, it was showing that only two school divisions did not increase property taxes and all the rest did. I would appreciate, if the minister does have an actual document that his department has put together on what their taxes were for this past year, if the minister would table that at the next round of Estimates.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, I will table that information. It is public information. I would hope the member from Charleswood also considers the impact that the \$30-million reduction in the ESL would have on the bottom line for taxes, as it is a significant reduction to the bottom line. As I said, taxes are essentially flat as a result of that initiative.

Mrs. Driedger: I will commend the government for moving in the direction of bringing down property

taxes. That was an election promise that we made in the last election, very popular. It is the right way to go, to move away from the archaic funding system that we have in place now. Manitoba could be a leader in this country to take that issue on. With the unprecedented amount of money that has flowed into this province in the last few years, it is too bad the NDP did not have that as more of a priority because they really lost probably their only golden opportunity to really do something with that, which would have been an incredible kick-start for this province. I think we have a government that has a hard time managing money and very questionable priority setting. What we see now is a real lost opportunity to have made a difference in Manitoba's economy.

I am glad the NDP recognized what is probably a simmering revolt out there in terms of taxpayers' annoyance at property taxes, and the fact that we have the highest property taxes west of, what is it, New Brunswick now. It is a serious deterrent in many ways in terms of moving this province forward. I am glad the NDP followed up on where we were going and the push that we have given them in that direction. I hope they will continue. I am looking forward to hearing more from this minister in terms of his plan and his vision for that, but I will come back to that another time.

I would like to ask the minister did all the amalgamated budgets still need his approval this year.

Mr. Bjornson: The plan was to review them for three years, and after three years, they no longer needed to submit.

Mrs. Driedger: Was this the final year for the ministerial approval of those budgets?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe so.

Mrs. Driedger: As one of the school divisions that were forced to amalgamate, and it has had a tremendous tax impact on my area by forcing the Pembina, well, the Assiniboine South School Division to amalgamate with Fort Garry. Taxpayers took a huge hit in my area.

For the minister to have to turn to a former, former Minister of Education to get the answer as to is this the last year of me having to approve

amalgamated budgets, I think shame on the minister. That just shows you his lack of understanding about what forced amalgamation has done to a lot of these school divisions, or even his lack of understanding about the whole issue. I am amazed the minister would not have had a better handle on that. He has been in the department long enough that those should have been some of the questions he should readily be able to answer.

With all of the school divisions that were forced to amalgamate and then had to increase taxes this year, the minister would have had to give his approval for that. Did he then give them approval this year in those school divisions that were forced to amalgamate? Did he give them approval to increase taxes this year?

* (16:00)

Mr. Bjornson: First of all, with respect to the amalgamation process, as the member knows, in 1994, I believe, the Boundaries Review Commission was established to look at how we could move toward modernization of our schools. That sat on the shelf for a number of years until we, as a government, took a serious look at it and how we could move forward and modernize our schools. That was a process we were engaged in, and I have to tip my hat to my predecessors for the work they have done in this regard.

There are incredible testimonials from educational partners on the positive effect that amalgamation has had. Certainly, there have been a lot of benefits where students are able to access programs that were not sustainable under the previous format with the number of school divisions that were not able to sustain or afford programs because they were not viable in smaller divisions. So amalgamation achieved a number of the desirable outcomes with respect to how we could make our schools better places for our students.

There has been a tremendous amount of feedback after we have engaged in that process in how school divisions reinvented themselves and how school divisions moved forward to provide better services and better opportunities for our students. Amalgamation certainly moved us in the right direction in that regard.

There are a number of issues around amalgamation that have provided—oh, I am sorry, I am getting a signal that my time is up.

Mr. Chairperson: By previous agreement of the House, the hour being 4 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Mr. Speaker: As previously agreed, we will now go on to second reading of bills.

Bill 25—The Workers Compensation Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: The first bill that will be called is Bill 25, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen).

What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Any speakers? Okay.

Bill 14—The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: The next bill is Bill 14, The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Springfield.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I wish to put a few comments on the record in regard to Bill 14, The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act.

This bill has been in front of this Chamber for some time now, and I have had opportunity not just to read through the bill but also have a briefing with the minister. In fact, that was on April 14. I had an opportunity to go through the spreadsheet with the minister and her department.

I also took the opportunity to send the bill out to various groups and get feedback from them in regard to where they stand on this legislation and have received comments back, most of them indicating they see this as being a bill that should move forward and that should move on to committee.

From the last notification I have, there are three individuals that are looking to come to committee and speak to this legislation. Certainly, we are looking forward to hearing what they have to say. Insofar as the legislation itself, by and large, it focusses on the category of helper. I think that is where most of the focus and attention has been, of course coming out of the most unfortunate incident with Michael Skanderberg, a 19-year-old Manitoban. He was killed in 1999 while working for contractors, an electrical helper at a Beausejour school. I know we all mourn with the family.

I have always felt that, in a situation like this, you actually cannot understand what the family is going through in their grief, but out of that grief has come an understanding that changes have to take place. In fact, Cindy Skanderberg, Michael's mother, has worked diligently. She has worked very hard, with a lot of credibility and integrity, to see that some changes take place.

Certainly, we as the opposition believe this legislation does make the kind of changes that are necessary. Had the category of helper only been used as helper, for instance, if it would have only been used to pull wire and do those kinds of tasks, and not do the job of an electrician, we probably would not be here today. But, as in most areas with human nature, what takes place is individuals take advantage of a situation and helper went from being an individual who carried stuff to perhaps pulling wire and soon, making connections, and led all the way down to where Michael was changing ballasts on 220 current, something that he was not qualified to do, something he did not have training to do, and it ended with a tragedy with his untimely end.

We would like to see this bill move forward, and we agree that the category of helper now it is time for it to become a thing of the past. It also makes it very clear on areas of responsibility which is laid out in the bill. The bill also deals with other areas, and we would like to see the groups affected come forward to committee.

We certainly want to hear what the public has to say and look forward to going through committee and then moving on to third reading, where, of course, we will have one more opportunity to report back to this House what was discussed at committee. After my colleagues have had an opportunity to

speak to this legislation, we then would like to see it move on to committee and hear what Manitobans have to say.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, want to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 14. I listened to the minister and had opportunity to read an article that was published in the *Free Press*. I would like to express the Liberal Party's condolences and sincere wishes to see bills of this nature pass in order to, in essence, give some justice to a system that at times causes someone to lose a life. We are always saddened when someone dies in the workplace. Listening to what the minister is saying is that we have this legislation, and the Province of Manitoba is one, if not possibly the last jurisdiction to move in this direction.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

In principle, it is a bill which we can support, at the very least, in terms of going to committee. I did have an e-mail that was forwarded to me through the Leader of the Liberal Party. I just want to share with you the contents of that particular e-mail, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not have the permission to release the name, so I am not prepared to do that, but I am prepared to table, if need be, the content of the e-mail for all members to appreciate. I say this because I am hoping the minister, whether it is in committee or third reading, will at least just comment on the e-mail.

* (16:10)

This is coming from an individual which, and I quote: "I recently attended a meeting at Bristol Aerospace that was attended by representatives of the CTTAM and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information about proposed changes to The Electricians' Licence Act in Manitoba. This is part of an ongoing thrust of compulsory certification of trades, but could have very negative effects on Manitoba workers and the industry. Apparently, the changes to The Electricians' Licence Act will be proposed as a minor wording issue. The term 'helper' will be removed from the three sections of the act.

"Once this has been done, it appears to be the intent of Manitoba Labour, in apprenticeship and training, to restrict the electrical work of any nature

to only journeyman electricians and registered apprentices.

"I expect this will be represented as a public safety issue. There are very deep, underlying issues here. There are many persons working in Manitoba who have received a lot of training to work on electrical systems. Fire alarm systems, televisions and industrial automation systems are good examples. The list would be very long. Electricians, through their apprenticeship training, are really trained to install wiring, not to understand complex electronic systems. That type of specialized knowledge comes from other types of training that are completely unrelated to the electrical apprenticeship program.

"If the issue was one of public safety it would be reasonable to state that the electrical systems operating above a certain voltage would require a licensed person. However, we were advised that one of our public servants has already made the statement that there will be no limits on the voltage. The regulations will be enforced on all systems all the way down to zero volts.

"One person present at a meeting appeared to own a company that manufactures electrical controls. It was suggested to him that the persons working on his assembly line will have to be electricians or registered apprentices after the legislation changes because the assembly personnel can be deemed to be working on electrical equipment. Think of the impact on his labour costs. It was further suggested at the meeting that a government agency"—in brackets—"it was not really clear if it was Manitoba Labour, apprenticeship and training, or the electrical board) had provided notification of the proposed compulsory certification and proposed changes to the act to industry. However, it seems that they only notified electrical contractors whose employees are members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and members of the Electrical Contractors Association of Manitoba. These groups cannot be seen as representative of the industry as a whole on these issues.

"This is the best example I can think of to describe how these changes will affect industry in Manitoba. Let us consider a piece of highly complex medical or industrial equipment. It is not uncommon to bring in highly trained technical specialists from the manufacturer to assist with the set up, calibration,

troubleshooting and repair of such equipment. With the proposed changes to the act and the compulsory certification that will follow, a highly trained technical specialist sent by a manufacturer of equipment will not be allowed to work on the equipment in Manitoba because he is neither an electrician nor an apprentice.

"It was suggested that Manitoba Labour will get around this issue by setting up a system by which specialists from outside the province can, for a fee, apply for a limited electrical licence to be able to work in Manitoba on service calls. This is the height of nonsense. It will further restrict industry in Manitoba, would drive up labour costs for industry in Manitoba, thereby further eroding our competitive position in the global marketplace and will be yet another factor to work against Manitoba's ability to attract manufacturing and service companies to our province.

"I came away from this meeting with the distinct impression that these changes have been planned and are going to happen during 2004. They are being done with very little industry knowledge and no public knowledge."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say that because on the surface the minister brings in the legislation, and I commend her in terms of the thought she had given it and how she has dedicated this piece of legislation.

There are some very serious concerns this individual has that I believe other Manitobans have. I believe the minister should address those concerns, as opposed to me. I thought it would be most appropriate to actually read the letter, which did have impact in terms of how I was viewing this legislation. I, for one, as a member of this Legislature, want to do what I can to ensure that we have a workplace, a work environment that is safe for all of our workers. We do not want to see the exploitation of individuals in any form or in any way.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we do have some concerns in regard to the consequence of passing this legislation. I believe the minister has a responsibility to be very clear in terms of the impact that this is going to have on the industries, in particular our manufacturing industries. It has been of great benefit because of the diversification of our economy where our manufacturing per capita is just as large as any other province in Canada based on a per capita. We

appreciate the diversification that our economy has, and I think the minister needs to be cautious and address the issues that have been raised here. We, as I say, in principle—[*interjection*]

The minister asks if I would send her the letter. I will have a page provide it. The content, as I say, I am not prepared to share the name of the individual that I read off. We are bringing it to the minister's attention, and we look forward to a response to it.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, as I say, we do not have a problem with this bill passing and going to committee.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to take a few minutes to put some positive comments on the record in regard to Bill 14, The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act. Obviously, when it comes to saving the lives and protecting Manitobans, that is certainly a valid concern of ours on this side of the House. We believe Bill 14 will help out in that regard.

This, certainly, is a bill that hits home with me. I do have certainly some personal contacts with people who have been affected directly by injuries in the workplace, specifically in regard to electrical activity. I guess I go back to our National Day of Mourning we held back on April 28 of this year when we joined in the walk down Broadway.

After that walk, we had the opportunity to look at a video. It was put forward by the Skanderberg family who reside in Glenboro, and the video was called "A Senseless Loss." This video really chronicled the life of Michael Skanderberg, whose life was cut short at the age of 19 in a workplace accident in Manitoba, and again specifically when he was working on some high-voltage electrical equipment that he really did not have the proper knowledge of. So we certainly hope this Bill 14 will move in the direction to save young Manitobans down the road.

I know Bill and Cindy Skanderberg, Michael's parents, have really tirelessly promoted safety in the workplace since his fateful accident back in December of 1999. I think they should be commended for helping the government bring forward this important piece of legislation. I know Cindy, in particular, has travelled through Manitoba and visited numerous schools and made many, many

presentations to school kids trying to promote the idea of safety in the workplace.

I certainly think this video that has been released will serve as another valuable tool in the promotion of safety in the workplace, and again I want to thank them for their commitment in bringing this forward.

The other thing is I had a chance to visit with Cindy just last week to learn a little more about the video. The video was put forward by Gearhead Visual Productions. A fellow by the name of Shaun Roemich was instrumental in putting that video together. When he initially was contracted to do the work, it was going to be a fairly minor piece of work. Once he got to know the family and the history of the accident and learned about Michael's life, it became an all-encompassing and a very worthwhile project. He spent a lot of volunteer time on that effort, and it is really a quality video that I think will serve well for all Manitobans.

* (16:20)

In fact, in speaking with Cindy last week, there seems to be quite a need. There is a requirement for this video. They are looking at how they are going to put some more of these videos together, and how they are going to get them expanded across Manitoba, so many people can see them and understand the implications of workplace health and safety.

I think, as Manitoba goes, we are in a bit of a catch-up mood here again. In terms of Bill 14, we are probably one of the last provinces to be onside with this particular piece of legislation. I am glad we are finally moving that ahead. I am sure it will prevent serious accidents in the workplace. Along with my colleagues, I look forward to moving this bill through to committee, and hearing what people will say in committee. Then we can report back at that time. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to put those few words on the record.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is the second reading of Bill 25, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act.

An Honourable Member: No, 14.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Correction, Bill 14, The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le permis d'électricien.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Bill 21—The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The order is now 25, 14, 21, so we are on Bill 21.

Bill 21, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Carman.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): I adjourned debate on Bill 21, The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le pétrole et le gaz naturel et la Loi de la taxe sur la production de pétrole et de gaz.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I actually adjourned that debate to give our critic an opportunity to research this particular piece of legislation. I am more than prepared to move this one along.

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): I do want to indicate that on this side of the House we do not have any great concerns with regard to Bill 21, The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, as it has been presented to the House. It has been a bill that has been a long time coming. It has taken over two years of consultations with the industry and in discussions with industry leaders on this particular bill and its amendments. I think most are satisfied that it does take some steps to modernize the way we search for oil and gas in the province of Manitoba and use that resource.

I would just note for the record that the bill does give the minister and the director considerable authority to act in their capacities with this bill, which I do not particularly object to other than just to again issue the standard caution on bills of this nature. When you do put such significant amounts of power into the hands of a few individuals, there is always the possibility that power may be not be wielded in a fair way in all circumstances. Therefore, it is important to give ample opportunity for those that may be under the weight of a minister's or

director's decision to have the right, the time and the opportunity to appeal those decisions to ensure that justice is carried out. With regard to that, I think most of the provisions in this bill are acceptable.

We will be asking the minister some questions during committee, for example, clause 25(3), the notice of hearing which only requires that a 14-day notice period be given before the date that a hearing is called. That, in some cases, may not be ample time by the time it is received by the individual or a corporation to whom it is directed to, to prepare themselves for a hearing. It just may be that particular part of the act needs to be amended to give a little more time to those who are under the call for a hearing from the panel of inquiry to prepare themselves adequately to present their case.

Certainly, the panels themselves are, we believe, a good way of resolving some of these issues well known. There can be circumstances where the panel is simply comprised of one person. I think it does give the minister the authority to appoint one or more, but the fact that it is stated in the act that the inquiry panel itself can consist of only one individual, I think, is of some concern to me in that, again, it can be used in a negative way for a minister to appoint somebody who is sympathetic to the minister's opinion as opposed to perhaps getting a more balanced panel in place to hear particular issues that are directed toward the inquiry panel.

I think it is important to note that the industry itself is becoming a more important industry within Manitoba. Certainly, the discoveries that have been made in the last year in the Tilston area and other regions indicate there is more potential. As we see, over the course of time and in the future, reserves in other parts of Canada and other parts of the world start to deplete, no doubt we will continue to see an increase in the price of gas which should translate into more and more exploration being done in the province of Manitoba.

* (16:30)

I would note the Province of Saskatchewan this fall made a very, very significant announcement with regard to their ability to pay down their debt, to provide rebates to hydro customers and other tax reductions to pay down debt, to replenish their version of the rainy day fund, primarily as a result of extra revenue they were receiving from oil and gas

exploration within the province of Saskatchewan. I think we all hope that one day the province of Manitoba will be the beneficiary of such a windfall as well. We certainly hope that, when that happens, we have a Conservative government in Manitoba that will handle those funds in a responsible manner.

Of course, we have not seen that from this government when they have been the unexpected beneficiary of extra funds, particularly as we have seen in the last year in terms of the extra transfer payments. As a result, the debt in this province continues to climb. We are spending beyond our means, and, unfortunately, for Manitobans, this particular NDP government is choosing to spend all of this money as quickly as it can, as opposed to preparing itself for the inevitable downturn in the economic cycle which will happen. We all know it will happen; we are just not able to predict accurately when. We always need to be prepared for that cycle.

So, having said those few words, I would indicate that on this side of the House, we are certainly in agreement with this bill going to committee. I will note, though, that when we get to committee, we will be hearing from some individuals who I believe will once again be raising the issue of odour arising from wells near their property. I think it is very unfortunate that this government, in its two years of consultation, has not taken the time and effort to work toward a better resolution of this issue that is affecting individuals in this province, I think in particular individuals who have battery operations near their residences. Although the industry, and certainly from my discussions with the industry, has indicated they are working hard to try and minimize the problems that are being caused as a result of these emissions and odours, it still is a problem that the government should have had the courtesy to try and negotiate a better solution with the individuals involved.

We are always in favour of encouraging the development of business in this province, and particularly it is good to see that this bill does provide some encouragement for the development of the oil and gas resources in the province of Manitoba. It also frees up some of the areas in the province that are now more open to exploration than would have been without this bill.

Certainly, the other area that is of some concern is with regard to the wording around the inspector's

ability to seize wells. Again, this is a part of the act that is necessary but puts a lot of authority into the inspector's and into the minister's hands. That must be used judiciously in order to provide a fair operating environment.

Having said that, I know there are some colleagues and others in this House that do want to put a few words on the record regarding this bill, but we will be looking forward to it going to committee. We will be looking forward to the presenters giving us the information they feel is relevant and possibly looking at what we would consider friendly amendments to this bill to make it even more effective.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to put a few words on the record on Bill 21.

First of all, I want to indicate that this year has been a good year for the oil industry, and that the goal here should be to encourage the development of environmentally beneficial industries in this province.

We know it is in that context that the limits to growth, the limits to industrial development are all too often the environmental limits, and that those environmental limits are something we need to be more and more cognizant of.

First of all, when we are talking about the gas production, we need to be cognizant of the greenhouse gas production. My colleague from Carman is sitting beside me, and he is a strong advocate of wind power, knowing that wind will be there long after all the oil is gone from under the ground. I support the Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) and the efforts that are being made to develop wind power, but, at the same time, it is important to look carefully at the oil industry and do what we can to set the right sort of framework for the development of the oil industry in Manitoba now and in the years ahead.

It is in this context that I want to talk for a few minutes about concerns that have been raised with me from residents in the Tilston area with regard to environmental concerns over what is called sour gas, a gas which has hydrogen sulphide and which has been associated in the Tilston area with problems in livestock and health problems in humans. The problems in livestock are cattle, for example, going

off their feed and cattle aborting a fetus early on, a significant and a severe problem for livestock owners and problems in humans.

A variety of health concerns have arisen. People who live near and are associated with the sour gas, sour gas wells and particularly sour gas batteries, in fact, are most important in this context. It would appear that from time to time, there are plumes coming off these batteries, and there have been instances where people have been exposed to hydrogen sulphide and knocked unconscious. There have been instances where people have had a whole variety of health ailments. Clearly, this is something we all need to be concerned about because the rural quality of life, in general, is a very good quality of life.

The last thing we want to do is create a situation where people who are living in rural parts of Manitoba are exposed to levels of environmental contaminants like hydrogen sulphide and have their health and the health of their animals affected in a severe way. There have been some improvements in the situation over the years, but clearly, because these health problems have been as recent as last December and since, it is not something which has been completely solved.

I raise this because in looking at this legislation, it addresses new oil wells, but it does not address old wells which may be producing sour gas. That is an indication there was an opportunity by the government to address in this legislation to provide a framework for dealing with sour gas issues, and they did not adequately do it. The same thing applies to the batteries, and the old batteries are not covered. There may be some coverage of the new batteries.

There are concerns about the environmental review process, that it is to be conducted primarily by people within the Department of Industry. There is a concern that there will be a level of independence which will guarantee this an adequate review, that there are strong enough recommendations to make sure the environmental concerns are dealt with, and indeed, in dealing with the environmental concerns, as a result, the industry can do well. The last thing the oil industry needs in this province is uncertain and unknown liabilities because of the health effects to individuals.

*(16:40)

One of the problems here is that there is no framework for compensating individuals so, as a result, the industry can be exposed to health claims and others and liabilities which are of an undetermined nature. That clearly is not good for the industries, and it would have been far better to have been dealt with up front so that people who are living in the area, as well as those who want to develop the industry, can know exactly where they stand going in, rather than having to deal with uncertainties over what might happen with the development of the oil and the putting up of new batteries, as well as the existing batteries and their potential for liabilities.

I would put on the record today that I hope in the committee stage there will be an opportunity to have a closer look at this. I hope we have some representation from people from the Tilston area, and we can look seriously at how this legislation can be improved so it really provides the kind of framework. In contrast to the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen), who suggested this is a problem of just kind of negotiating this between a few individuals and the government, the real problem is setting the framework so that you can resolve this question for people in the Tilston area now so that we do not run into such health problems and environmental problems in the future. Hopefully, the government will pay attention because clearly this legislation, as it is put forward, is not good enough. It needs significant improvement.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): As the critic for the official opposition has already spoken on Bill 21, The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, and has indicated that we would like to see this move on to committee, and has certainly indicated that we are in support of growing the industry, I, however, as one legislator, do have concerns with this government when it comes to natural resources. I would like to see Manitoba try to create the same kind of vision for our natural resources that we have seen in other jurisdictions across North America. I would reference Alaska to a degree, Alberta, other jurisdictions who view natural resources as something that you develop over a long period of time for the benefit of the jurisdiction in the future and not just the here and now.

I just point out the way this government has managed one of our biggest natural resource assets and that is Manitoba Hydro. On a lot of

occasions I have referenced Manitoba Hydro as being Manitoba's oil patch. We can see where the government has gone with that heritage, that legacy, and has basically bankrupted it. With the debt of Manitoba Hydro now exceeding that of the provincial government's debt, we can see that debt load is being transferred off on Crown corporations, being transferred off on our natural resource sector. It is of grave concern when I see this government keeping an eye, or eyeballing the oil and natural gas industry because I sense that New Democrats, being who they are, are probably the most astute, are probably the best—spend money with flair. They are so good at spending money. I can see that they are going to look at this as being just another cash cow, rather than being something that we should build and foster for the future.

We can see that Saskatchewan, which traditionally has been a have-not province, is using its natural resources to make itself into a have province. What we have is a provincial government under the NDP that is taking our natural resources and driving us further into have-not status so clearly an individual who would like to see us benefit today, tomorrow and in the future, from our natural resources. Certainly, we want to see what the industry and what citizens have to say about this legislation. Again, it is a concern, I think, for all members of this side of the House when an NDP government starts eyeballing natural resources. What they are viewing is not a legacy and a heritage or a vision for this province; rather, what they are viewing is just another cash grab. We certainly want to protect our natural resources and ensure that it is a legacy that is there for our children, grandchildren and for the future. Thank you very much.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I am going to just put a few words in regard to Bill 21, The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, the bill before the Legislature today.

I just would like to, as well, reiterate that this bill is, I think, one of the concerns that I have had is that this bill has taken two years of consultations to get to this point. I guess with the expansion of our oil and gas industry in Manitoba, I would have hoped that we could have come to these kinds of agreements somewhat sooner than the government has, but nevertheless, I want to just say that I am pleased to see that as we have moved forward the government

has put in place some issues that the industry has been looking for for some time. I would hope, also, that it takes into concern the rights of the land owners and the people that are farming the land and have the mineral rights to the locations that are being proposed to be drilled on in Manitoba.

As has been mentioned, we have an expansion of a sort of a third field, if you will. In the fifties, the oil industry was founded in the Virden area in the Daly field and some of that area. In the eighties, there was oil struck in the Waskada area. That has been expanded greatly and a third field has been found in the Sinclair area just this past winter.

I commend the industry for working as diligently as it has to expand the drilling opportunities in Manitoba. Of course, the price of oil has played a good deal of a role in that whole area. I know that there was a small field just east of Hartney where I grew up as well that has, I guess, in our farming operation over the years, we had five concrete holes to testify to the fact that there has been oil there and, of course, it was always we would expand this industry if the price of oil was right. It is certainly high enough now that the exploration is going on diligently in western Canada.

There is a great expansion of the exports of this product offshore and we need to make sure that governments of the day realize that the potential for jobs in Manitoba and western Canada, particularly in western Manitoba on this issue, but here in the city of Winnipeg as well, in relation to the jobs that do back up this industry, that the whole area of job creation and the wealth and ongoing of the industry are protected and not abused.

I only raise that, Mr. Speaker, because of the circumstances around the former NDP governments trying to get into the oil business in Manitoba. An issue like ManOil, I think, it comes to mind. where the government abused the opportunity there to do some of the things that, technically, could have been done by individuals, companies, and I have to say there was great concern in Manitoba throughout the period of time that this former government was dealing with these issues, the government of the day's predecessors.

Mr. Speaker, the issue here is that the government can deal with seizure of wells under some circumstances of non-compliance with the act.

Companies must apply within 15 days now of the seizure instead of 30 to make an appeal to an oil and gas inspector that may close these wells down, and I think that as long as proper notification is given those dates are probably not prohibitive in regard to the future. I guess it is a concern that, in regard to an appeal process—just the reason that I raise this issue is because, of course, if they are a day over or something is wrong with the notification process, the department may cancel the previous lease and transfer the well to another operator. I would hope that there was no abuse of this power by the minister in regard to this kind of a seizure. That is always a concern.

It does give the minister considerable powers in regard to creating new bodies to review the industry issues, to facilitating exploration and development of these resources, and it clarifies the taxation responsibilities between facility operators and rights owners.

* (16:50)

I want to say part of this bill is to put inquiry panels in place which are appointed on an as-needed basis to review these issues like an appeal board, but the government, the bills that were there already, The Oil and Gas Act, allowed for conservation boards to already be in place and to solicit expert industry input. Any time you have got an appeal board, you would hope that the people that are appointed to those boards are based on science, that the issues that they are dealing with, that they have the background to deal with it, and they are not, quote, "political appointments," that they are in fact persons with the knowledge and background of the industry to make the required assessments.

Therefore, I guess we have to question, there are some questions that some members in the industry have raised in regard to these areas. I also want to say that I, too, have had presentations from the Campbells, the Andersons and others in the Tilston area in regard to the sulphur dioxide gas situations that have impacted their personal lives, as well as that of their livestock that they make their living with in that area.

I would assume that our appeal processes, you never assume anything, I guess, but we should hope that this government has recognized the need for being able to deal with these kinds of circumstances

through the appeal processes that are here, and that companies who have more technology today, certainly they are doing a better job. There has been a lot of effort put into the whole area of gas emissions from the oil industry.

I just want to say that I would hope that the circumstances around these individuals, who have been dealing with this for eight or ten years, would be able to be dealt with expeditiously under this act, and notwithstanding the fact that the companies have made steps, well, albeit not enough to maybe take care of the situation in this particular instance, but to look at the opportunities that are there to improve that part of the industry in the future.

Of course, that goes with the kinds of oil that are found and the gases and emissions that come off of those properties in other areas, and I want to commend, though, the companies in Manitoba who participate in expansion of this industry, who have continuously looked for more research to drill more wells in Manitoba, who are doing the horizontal drilling that is taking place in many areas today in Manitoba.

I commend the people who are investing in the high costs of equipment and facilities to carry on with the drilling that is going on in western Manitoba right now, and I would also just like to say how fortunate it is for some individuals who live in those areas to be able to participate in some of the, if you will, rewards of the royalties that come from the 15 percent that they may hold from having the oil and gas rights to the particular land that they are located on, or the land that they have, even if they are not farming it anymore, maintained.

It certainly is a help to the local economy. It is a help to those individuals, wherever they live in Manitoba or Canada, but I want to say that finds of this nature are very important to the economy of Manitoba. They certainly lead to many jobs, particularly in the area that I represent. Many young people, not only local individuals, working on these rigs, but also coming in from other areas of Manitoba, particularly Manitoba and Saskatchewan, because we are located so close to the border in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I just want to take this opportunity to commend them for helping out with the employment in the tough agricultural times that most of that region has been faced with.

In closing, I would just like to say as well that this industry is one that is very mobile and needs the support of government, in regard to things like road restrictions and ability to move this heavy equipment, particularly in the spring that we are faced with in road restriction time. I have certainly been glad to work with the owners of the equipment in the Virden area and others to make sure that we can keep them in Manitoba as much as we possibly can for the work that is going on here, rather than going to Saskatchewan and being forced out by this government as they were a few years ago. I am glad to see now that we have some rules in place that keep them here in Manitoba.

With that, I would like to move that we move this bill on to committee.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Yes, I would just like to put a few comments on record. I had the opportunity today to open two centres, but the most important part of this was human resources. The relevance of this is talking about the most important part within the province of Manitoba, which is our human resource, but I want to now move into the area of our natural resources.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I agree we have many natural resources within our province, and we need to open up and give opportunities to businesses who are prepared to invest and, in fact, prepared to put dollars into the establishment of our natural resources and to draw them out of our country.

We see this in the western part of the area that I represent, the area of Pembina, where we see windmills coming up. It is a natural resource that we have. We are harnessing wind, and who knows? The area that I represent, we may ultimately and some day possibly be able to find oil wells. So any time that we have private industry come and invest dollars, I think that is something that we need to continue to encourage, and I am pleased to see that we are opening opportunities.

On the other hand, though, I do have one concern, and that is that the resources we have right now, once we have them, it seems that we have a government in place who likes to continue to take and take and take more from them. So we have to be careful that we do not take too much that they will, in fact, withdraw from the province. So it is a

concern that I have because we have seen in the last five years that this is what has taken place.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I would like to move this on. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 21, The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le pétrole et le gaz naturel et la Loi de la taxe sur la production de pétrole et de gaz.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

The motion is declared carried.

Bill 15—The Emergency Measures Amendment Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The next bill to be considered is the second reading of Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mesures d'urgence, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Carman.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): I guess I start out my comments this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, saying something to the effect that I feel a little bit somewhat like Belinda Stronach supporting a provisional government, and I say that, of course, in jest. I find myself having to support this particular piece of legislation, Bill 15. I am sure that Belinda Stronach, albeit in her mind, believed, I am certain, that she was doing what was extremely beneficial to Canadians, and I am supporting this particular piece of legislation because I believe it is extremely beneficial to Manitobans.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I take a few moments, Sir, to congratulate the honourable minister responsible for bringing forward this particular piece of legislation because, Sir, it will signal to other jurisdictions, be it North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, our neighbours to the south, as well as other provinces east and west, that Manitoba is always willing to work together with our friends and

present a united front in times of crisis because this is what I believe this particular piece of legislation does at this time.

* (17:00)

The reality is that because Manitoba is so closely connected with other provinces and other states that an emergency in one jurisdiction has an impact either directly or indirectly on us all. The benefits of these amendments are far-reaching. This legislation will help foster an understanding between regions that facilitates the ability of our emergency personnel to become familiar with the standards, procedures and process of other jurisdictions. By learning from one another, we will not only be better prepared to face emergencies together, but we will be more confident in our ability to overcome any obstacle.

I lend my support and that of my party as it facilitates a co-operation between jurisdictions during times of emergency and other crisis situations. Moreover, it provides our emergency personnel, be it fire, paramedic, police or otherwise, with the peace of mind that they will not be held responsible or liable for their actions that they commit in good faith in the face of dire emergencies in jurisdictions other than in Manitoba. By the same token, emergency personnel from regions outside of Manitoba can rest assured that under this particular piece of legislation they will receive the same high quality care that our emergency personnel receive.

This bill fills a necessary void. While in the past many emergency personnel, volunteers with valuable expertise, may have been hesitant to lend their services to other jurisdictions in time of need due to unanswered questions of liability, this amendment will remove any doubt and permit them to concentrate on helping our neighbours in the face of any emergency. It is time that a well-intentioned mutual understanding between our governments be replaced with a robust stance that removes any doubt about our commitment and the commitment of other governments to help those from outside of their jurisdiction who risk so much in times of dire need. This legislation does just that, I believe. Furthermore, this legislation is enabling, and we can only hope that we have started the ball rolling and other regions will be able to enter into an agreement that will better prepare us for any emergency.

This legislation will have its greatest impact for the front line emergency personnel. There is no

doubt that we owe a tremendous gratitude to the men and women of Manitoba and other provinces and states that are more than willing to put themselves at great risk even if it means being away from their homes.

While we support this particular piece of legislation, we are ever so mindful of the memorandum of understanding that has yet to be signed by other governments. I wish this minister well in his endeavours to convince other legislators of the benefits of applying this particular piece of legislation because currently, I believe, the provinces have no ability to sign a memorandum of understanding or mutual aid agreement, which they want to call the Great Plains Compact, which would take into account North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota.

This is the type of legislation that we are pleased to support because it will protect those who give so much to help those in need. I thank the minister and indeed his staff for taking time to, and I will use the terminology, educate me on the aspects of this particular piece of legislation, this amendment to Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act.

I would hope that my interpretation of that bill or, indeed, the amendments to it, are factual and I would hope that the minister in committee, now whether he takes umbrage with some of my remarks that I have put on the record here today, will go to whatever lengths need be in order to correct and assist me to better understand it. But, as I see it here today, here and now I believe that we, on this side of the House, have no other option but to support this particular piece of legislation and I will leave it at that. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Deputy Chair, following on the remarks of the official critic for the opposition, who has indicated that we would like to see this move on to committee, I want to keep my comments brief and just say that over the years I have watched with great interest on those communities who live close to the border and what happens in the instance of an emergency or joint services.

I think this is a good move. Certainly, we would like to hear from the communities, but often the stretches of highways are very long. They go through very remote areas. Thus, I think it is important that

the nearest ambulance, the nearest fire department, be able to respond, especially in the time of a great crisis. Fog on a highway, all of a sudden you have a substantial collision taking place, and the local services are overwhelmed. I think it is important to protect our first responders, those medical personnel who arrive first on location.

Until now, from what I understand, it was more done on a wink, wink, nudge, nudge, but they actually were going across the border without proper protection. I think we want to make sure that when individuals, (a) on their own time, and (b) because they do believe that as human beings we should come to the aid of each other, do so because they believe in this, that they should be covered, that, through no fault of their own, something happens at a site, an explosion could take place and individuals are injured, that they should be covered. We know that, unless you have proper Blue Cross, you may not be covered in the United States. Whereas here they would be covered by our insurance company. I think that is only rightfully so.

I remember years ago I was travelling in Europe, and this would have been at least 15, 16 years ago that these kinds of things were debated. In fact, between Germany and Holland, they were now allowing local communities to make these kinds of arrangements where a bus before would have to stop at the border, everybody would get off, they would step across the border, and then the next bus would pick them up and move them further.

This really does speak to those kinds of things where our population along the U.S.-Canada border is able to extend a hand across the border and help out. I have mentioned at caucus that I, with great interest, would be intrigued to see how these vehicles get across the border. I guess you would almost have to pack your passport when you rush to a fire so that you can get across the border. But I understand there is also an understanding that these individuals be allowed to cross over because clearly they are marked as being emergency personnel.

So, as per where our critic had indicated that this should go on to committee, we would like to see this move forward and see this as a positive between our two nations and certainly our region in the smaller Midwest region that we reside in, that we work together, especially when it comes to issues of safety

and protecting human life. So, certainly, I look forward to this going on to committee.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I would just like to rise and put a few words on the record regarding this bill. I believe that The Emergency Measures Amendment Act is a step in the right direction for the communities bordering the United States. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I represent the eastern half of the southern part of the province, which borders a lot of the communities in the U.S., communities such as Pembina and Neche, North Dakota, and Roseau, Minnesota, and a number of other smaller communities a bit farther in. But these communities certainly understand what it means to share with each other, to assist each other during disasters, such as the Red River flood which happens periodically in the Red River Valley. We all know that, and how they interact and support each other.

The U.S.-Canada border really becomes almost non-existent in times of emergency, and for years now the ambulance services or the fire services that are being provided and, indeed, emergency measures organizations and others that have from time to time, whether always in the correct fashion or not is immaterial, but just when the need was there, they met it. On which side of the border they performed, either the Americans coming this way to Canada or the Canadians going to the Americans, it really made very little difference.

* (17:10)

I will always remember when the mayor of Pembina, North Dakota, and I—she and I got to know each other fairly well—sat there, and she said, "You know, Jack, it is almost ironic, isn't it, that we live so close together and yet in many ways we are so far apart, but when it comes to providing that either one of us gets into trouble, either from Mother Nature or from an accident, we wipe all that away and we assist each other. I think that is what true neighbours are really all about." I think this bill will go some way in allowing those kinds of actions to take place.

I also should put on the record, Mr. Speaker, that I have had the pleasure of serving with the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), serving on a steering committee that has seen the establishment, I think, of some excellent friendships in North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota dealing with the Legislators' Forum, setting up

programs that would allow us to, again, interact with each other, but gain a better understanding of each other's method, methodologies of each other's laws, and each other's problems.

I know when the methamphetamine issue came up first of all, it was raised by Senator Tom Fischer, from North Dakota. He was really concerned about the effects of methamphetamines on his young people in his state of North Dakota. When we visited North Dakota last May or June, I believe it was, during their forum over there, he was one of the people that said, "You know, what we are doing in North Dakota is we are getting rid of a lot of the abandoned farm homes because," he said, "we believe this is where much of the methamphetamine is being manufactured and made. People move in, in the evening, set up operation overnight, and are gone in the morning." He was very concerned about, No. 1, the simplicity of the process of manufacturing these illicit drugs and the effects they were having on their young population.

He told the story of one young offender who is not very old, 25 years old, and he said, "You should go meet her, she looks as if she could be 80 years old." That is how the drug affected her and he said that is the kind of thing he had witnessed time and time again from other young offenders that virtually destroyed their total life, sometimes, he said, within six or eight months of using this material. He was very concerned about that, as many of the others were. I am glad to see that this province now is finally recognizing that methamphetamines are a real problem in our province as well, and are taking some action to curb the use of that and the manufacture of it.

I also want to express my deep appreciation to the organizers of the special agencies, the fire departments on both sides of the borders, the ambulance services on both sides of the borders. They serve us, we serve them. I want to personally stand here and put on the public record that we owe them all a deep sense of thank you and gratitude. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I just want to put a few words on the record prior to passing this bill. Bill 15 is a positive bill. We suspect it will receive support all the way through.

When a province faces a crisis situation, what we have very clearly seen from the past is Manitobans come to the fold and participate and help resolve issues that, at times, can be seen as being very overcoming. I remember the efforts, as an example, when they did the Z-dike during the flood, the forest fires that we had in the late nineties, and was always impressed with the way in which people will mobilize in recognition of the importance of everyone working together in order to get the job that needs to be done, done as best as can be.

Mr. Speaker, I see this particular bill as a positive bill that will move and facilitate a better process for us. In essence, it gives that legislative authority, if you like, to enter into agreements with other jurisdictions, and that is a positive thing.

I think that most, if not all, Manitobans recognize that those agreements are very quickly entered into today in an informal way in some senses and, in a formal way, in other senses. But, to put it in terms of legislation, I think is a prudent thing to be doing, and for that reason we support that.

You know, it deals with the issues that are critically important, such as the issue of liabilities. Not only when we have crisis situations in our province do we get Manitobans coming to the table, we also get people that live outside of our province that come, and the issue of liability is one of those things that come up all of the time when we get people from outside the province coming inside.

So, again, we recognize the benefits of Bill 15 and look forward to it going to committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I, too, would just like to put a few comments on record regarding Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Organization.

Mr. Speaker, I have two ports of entry within my constituency, the one at Windy Gates and also the one at Valhalla, so I know that with living close to the border and with getting together with our friends from the southern, well, south to us, it is important that we continue to have good rapport and good communication with them. So I feel that this is a good step in encouraging that, and certainly as there are emergencies that do arise, whether they be of a nature of fighting fires or just simply ambulance personnel, the fact that they would have some form

of insurance and protection when they do cross the border is very important.

So, on behalf of the constituency that I represent and the people that are within that area, certainly this is a good step, and I want to certainly encourage us to move on with this.

The other thing is that on the weekend I had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Todd Schwartz, who is the ambassador from the U.S. and is actually residing in Manitoba. We met and we talked about the friendliness and the way that we can encourage that sort of communication between the two countries. We certainly want to do that.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I just want to confer with my colleagues in regard to comments around The Emergency Measures Amendment Act, Bill 15, that is before the House now. The member from Carman has spoken about the importance of this bill to Manitobans and the opportunities that we have in working together across our international boundary and the types of co-operation that can be seen in times of crisis. I just want to reiterate, on behalf of the people of Arthur-Virden, that the crossings of Antler, Goodlands, Coulter and, of course, the International Peace Gardens, the major highway on No. 10, the opportunities to support each other at those border crossings in Manitoba, as my colleagues from Emerson and Pembina have spoken in regard to those areas. I am sure the member from Turtle Mountain would confer the same in regard to the border crossings along all of southern Manitoba.

I just wanted to say that I certainly do support moving this bill on to committee to hear from the individuals in Manitoba that might want to come forward and give us their thoughts on this bill, Mr. Speaker. I will just close with those comments. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? [*Agreed*]

**Bill 27—The Horse Racing Commission
Amendment and Horse Racing
Regulation Repeal Act**

Mr. Speaker: Now we will move on to Bill 27, The Horse Racing Commission Amendment and Horse Racing Regulation Repeal Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Carman.

* (17:20)

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Mr. Speaker, just a few remarks on this particular piece of legislation, and the reason I am putting remarks on the record is because the Harness Racing Association, very prominent in the Carman constituency, towns of Miami, Holland, the breeders in St. Claude. I guess I am trying to find very quickly, in this particular piece of legislation, whether or not this will be affecting my harness racing circuit.

I take note of a particular amendment going back to 1975 which gave the Manitoba Horse Racing Commission an authority to make regulations representing the number of days of the year in which thoroughbred and standard horse racing could be held and fixed the number of meets that could be held in the area of the province. I do know that there have been several years now that this government has worked extremely closely with the Harness Racing Association in order to help them better, not only their purses, but, indeed, to help them regulate their events. I understand, in my discussions with the minister, that this particular piece of legislation basically is to help clean up this act, using some of that terminology, to help with the liability.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I will gladly step down and allow our official critic to put the party's position on the line. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I welcome the opportunity to put a few comments on the record in regard to this very important industry in Manitoba. It looks like this bill will just actually do some clean-up in terms of some of the regulations and whatnot we have in the province now.

Clearly, some of the industry, the horse industry in particular in Manitoba, and I am thinking of the

PMU industry, has certainly had a very negative and significant impact here in the last couple years in Manitoba. Clearly, we want to do what we can to protect and enhance the racing industry in Manitoba, in particular, both the standard-bred and thoroughbred, which will now be covered under this particular piece of legislation.

I think, when we look at this whole area of racing, it is certainly a very important entertainment issue, and also from a tourism issue, where we have people throughout Manitoba partaking in the events. We also have people from other jurisdictions coming into the province to take part in some of the gaming activities, and I think that is a good thing for Manitoba. I do echo the sentiments from my colleague from Carman. It has been good that the government of the day has come forward and, certainly, assisted some of the purses in the standard-bred industry.

We hope that there will be some long-term commitment there from this government in terms of supporting both the standard-bred and the thoroughbred industry in Manitoba. We know there are some individuals looking at a new facility in Brandon. We think that should work very well for the citizens of Brandon and, indeed, all of the people throughout Manitoba who do partake of that particular industry. There are a lot of people involved in the horse racing industry throughout Manitoba, and we certainly want to have the facilities and have the potential to go and race and earn some money. Some of these people are doing it on a full-time basis. Some are doing it as off-farm income so, certainly, it is a very significant industry throughout Manitoba.

We hope the government will closely monitor the development of the industry in Manitoba, and in particular, the facility that may go up near Brandon. Hopefully, the government, their regulators and the gaming industry will certainly be there to help facilitate the development of that industry in and around Brandon.

I just wanted to make those comments now. I know my colleagues also want to put a few comments on the record, so I will pass it on. We certainly want to take this particular bill to committee and hear if there are any outstanding issues from anyone around Manitoba. Thank you.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to put a few words on the record today in

regard to Bill 27, The Horse Racing Commission Amendment and Horse Racing Regulation Appeal Act. This act repeals The Horse Racing Regulation Act, which was enacted in 1925. The bill amends The Horse Racing Commission Act, which was enacted in '65 and actually amended in '75. It gave the Manitoba Horse Racing Commission the authority to make regulations representing the number of days in the year in which thoroughbred and standard-bred horse racing could be held and a fixed number of meets that could be held in the areas of the province.

Under current legislation, the Horse Racing Commission has to supervise all types of horse racing, but, with the amendments, chuck wagon races and chariot races and non-betting flat races do not have to be supervised by the commission. So I think that many rural communities will see this as a loosening of restrictions and welcome it.

I just wanted to say a few words about my constituency of Morris, the Manitoba Stampede, in which there are both chuck wagon races and chariot races. The Manitoba Stampede has been held in Morris for 42 years. July 21 to 24 are this year's dates, so you should all come down to Morris for the stampede. I want to say as well that the Manitoba Stampede is the only professional rodeo in the province of Manitoba and was recognized with a tourism award this year at the Rural Forum in Brandon, and well-justified after being there as a great tourist destination in the province for now going into its forty-second year.

An Honourable Member: Who nominated them?

Mrs. Taillieu: The Manitoba Stampede was nominated by the Chamber of Commerce and Ms. Patti Groening, and also with help from myself.

I just want to also make a few comments about the Threshermen's Reunion and Stampede in Austin, Manitoba, because Austin was my home town. Austin also has chariot races and chuck wagon races, not in the early days, the stampede was, this was a secondary portion added on to the Threshermen's Reunion, as it was called, and it is now celebrating its fifty-first year.

I would like to support this bill as I think that these loosening of restrictions will be very good for the community of Morris and for Austin and for

other communities that have non-betting races. I look forward to moving this on to committee and would like to support this bill. With that, I would like to pass it on to the critic.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, yes, we on this side of the House would like to support the bill. In fact, we would like to thank the minister and her staff for the briefing and the spreadsheets on this particular bill as we know that some changes need to be made on it. We know from particularly the Lakeside area, the towns of Stonewall, Teulon, Lundar and Oak Point was a large number of where the chariot and flat races and the chuck wagons were actually started. They are one of the larger supporters of the Morris Stampede.

In fact, in the year of 1972, the only people that registered at that time in the chariot races for the Manitoba Stampede were from Teulon and area. So having said that, we also have to keep in mind that there are a number of meets that go on around the province, in particular those of the harness racing. They will not be affected by this bill but we would like to see it move on to committee. Having said that, we will look forward to the presentations at committee stage. Based on the information that has been provided to us, we would like to see this bill move forward.

A few other things I wanted to put on the record, I just remembered, Mr. Speaker, through the notes here that I had passed on to me by some of the other members that never had a chance to get on the record, we talked about the areas of Morris, also Swan River was another large area that we wanted to

make sure that got mentioned along with Ashern. That is another area just outside the great constituency of Lakeside that has brought in a number of chariot races, flat races and, beyond that, a large number of tough cowboys.

The town of Selkirk is another area where I actually participated in a number of rodeos, and Deloraine, Killarney. In fact, to be honest, I actually took a few races myself. Anyway, having said that, I want to congratulate the people on bringing the new harness racing track to Brandon.

With that, we will leave it to move on to committee.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is Bill 27, The Horse Racing Commission Amendment and Horse Racing Regulation Repeal Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 5:30? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Petitions		Riverdale Place Workshop Nevakshonoff	2749
Pembina Trails School Division—New High School		Ralph Whitfield Rowat	2749
Loewen	2737	SMART Exercise Program Brick	2749
Riverdale Health Centre		Outstanding Young Farmers Program	
Rowat	2737	Faurschou	2750
Supported Living Program			
Goertzen	2738		
Minimum Sitting Days for Manitoba Legislature			
Lamoureux	2738		
Ambulance Service			
Schuler	2739		
Tabling of Reports			
Annual Report of The Municipal Board for the year ending December 31, 2004			
Smith	2739		
Oral Questions			
Livestock Industry			
Murray; Wowchuk	2739		
Eichler; Wowchuk	2741		
Lamoureux; Wowchuk	2747		
Post-Secondary Education			
Murray; McGifford	2742		
Rowat; McGifford	2743		
Crocus Funding			
Loewen; Rondeau	2744		
Mental Health Services			
Cullen; Oswald	2746		
Hydra House			
Gerrard; Mackintosh	2746		
Speaker's Ruling			
Hickes	2748		
Members' Statements			
Emergency Medical Services Week			
Reimer	2748		
		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
		Committee of Supply	
		Concurrence Motion	2751
		Debate on Second Readings	
		Bill 14—The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act	
		Schuler	2764
		Lamoureux	2765
		Cullen	2767
		Bill 21—The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act	
		Rocan	2768
		Loewen	2768
		Gerrard	2769
		Schuler	2770
		Maguire	2771
		Dyck	2773
		Bill 15—The Emergency Measures Amendment Act	
		Rocan	2773
		Schuler	2774
		Penner	2775
		Lamoureux	2776
		Dyck	2776
		Maguire	2777
		Bill 27—The Horse Racing Commission Amendment and Horse Racing Regulation Repeal Act	
		Rocan	2777
		Cullen	2777
		Taillieu	2778
		Eichler	2779