

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, February 26, 1990.

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, may I direct Honourable Members' attention to the loge to my right, where we have with us this afternoon the former Member for Minnedosa, Mr. Dave Blake. On behalf of all Honourable Members, I welcome you here this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Arts Policy Review Committee Mismanagement

Mrs. Gwen Charles (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, the Arts Policy Review Committee was obviously set in place to review arts policy in the province. As laudable a goal as that was, this Government has fumbled again the process.

First, Mr. Speaker, this Government appointed committee members from the so-called big six cultural groups. Then, when the committee met in rural Manitoba, they were verbally berating the presentations made, and now Mr. Gordon Mackie has resigned and been replaced with a member from the Manitoba Arts Council.

Can the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation explain why this process has been so badly mismanaged?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): It is indeed a pleasure for me to stand and talk a little bit about the Arts Policy Review and, Mr. Speaker, correct some of the facts and the inaccuracies that were put on the record just a few minutes ago by the Member for Selkirk (Mrs. Charles).

Mr. Speaker, the Arts Policy Review was struck. I will table today the pamphlet that was put out by the Arts Policy Review Committee indicating its mandate. I can read into the record that the Arts Policy Review Committee was appointed by the Manitoba Government to review Government policy and make recommendations concerning the arts, not just the big six, whoever the big six might be in the Member for Selkirk's mind. I am not really quite sure who the big six are.

Mr. Speaker, the review committee's terms of reference are to inquire into the condition of the performing and creative arts in Manitoba, to identify

trends and to propose remedies where appropriate, to examine the participation of individuals, groups and regions in the arts, both as artists and as an audience. I will table it because the mandate is much broader than looking at any specific arts group.

* (1335)

Mrs. Charles: Mr. Speaker, I hope the Minister rereads the question because in no way did she answer it.

One hundred thousand dollars is being spent on the policy review that would appear to be setting its own agenda. Can the Minister explain what value Manitobans will have received from a committee staffed in Government's favour?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, for 10 years the arts community has been without a review, and I am sure the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Carr) can attest to the last Arts Policy Review that was done. He was the staff of that policy review and it certainly was not stacked in favour then, as it is not now in favour of anything to do with Government. It is stacked in favour of a community, the arts community, that deserves an Arts Policy Review after 10 years.

An inaccuracy that the Member for Selkirk put on the record in her first question was that Mr. Gordon Mackie has resigned. In fact, that is not true. He is continuing to work along with the person who has been seconded to look at the recommendations that are already in place, will not be developing the recommendations; the recommendations are there. All he is going to be doing is editing the words that go along with those recommendations.

Manitoba Arts Council

Mrs. Gwen Charles (Selkirk): Can the Minister explain why the Manitoba Arts Council is being asked to sit on this board when the Manitoba Arts Council member should be kept apart from the policy review?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): The Manitoba Arts Council has been completely independent of the review. The recommendations have been set by the Policy Review Committee and they are looking for someone who can edit the words that surround the recommendations. The contract that has been put in place with a staff person from the Manitoba Arts Council is a contract that swears him to secrecy that while he is working on the policy that information will not be shared.

I am certain that the hours, the volunteer hours, that have gone into both at the community level and at the Arts Policy Review level are hours that have been well spent. The policy that will come out as a result of this review will be one that will be very favourable for the arts community.

Agenda

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Member for Selkirk, with a new question.

Mrs. Gwen Charles (Selkirk): I have a new question, Mr. Speaker. The Arts Review, after a stalled beginning, eventually heard presentations from individuals, arts and cultural groups throughout the province. However, since December 7 at the last called meeting, the committee has not approached anyone for further input. It would have been appropriate for them to have met with representatives of the art industry at large, such as visual arts and authors and so on. Can the Minister tell this House why the committee has kept within closed doors? Does it have an agenda to hide?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): Mr. Speaker, there were 3,000 volunteer hours put in by the Arts Policy Review Committee, and I want to say, "volunteer hours." There is not anyone who would accept that responsibility unless they were committed to that committee. I believe there has been a very comprehensive review that has gone forward, a process of consultation, and obviously they have to sit down and come up with recommendations that are going to benefit the arts community in the Province of Manitoba for the next decade.

* (1340)

Rural Presentations

Mrs. Gwen Charles (Selkirk): Will the Minister explain why this group then has in rural Manitoba set the tone of being confrontational, argumentative with rural presenters to the Arts Policy Review?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the Member from Selkirk is coming from, but I believe that the recommendations that come forward from the Arts Policy Review will address issues and concerns of all Manitobans throughout the Province of Manitoba who have an interest in what direction the arts are going to take over the next decade.

Mrs. Charles: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister explain why she allowed the attitude to be confrontational and argumentative by this committee when it was outside of the Perimeter Highway reaching rural communities in that they would question them at end of why they did not just move to the City of Winnipeg where they could get culture and arts?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, there are members on that Policy Review Committee who are from both the City of Winnipeg and rural Manitoba, and those that have a specific interest in community arts and arts throughout the province. So let not the Member for

Selkirk indicate that there was no concern by the Policy Review Committee for all parts of Manitoba, whether it be north, south, east or west.

Mr. Speaker, the policy review has been completely independent of Government. We appointed the review committee with a specific mandate to look at funding of arts over the next decade. They have put their time and their effort into doing that, Mr. Speaker, and the arts community has nothing to fear from the recommendations that will come forward as a result of the review.

Arts Policy Review Committee Report Author

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (St. Johns): Mr. Speaker, I have a question to the same Minister. If one is going to go to the great lengths of reviewing an arts policy, it must be done completely and must appear to be done completely. It must be done impartially and appear to be done impartially, especially in the context of the ominous threats we face as a result of free trade. It is more important than ever to have a comprehensive, strong cultural policy that reflects our unique Canadian identity. The news over the weekend put this all in jeopardy and cast doubt over the whole process.

My question to the Minister is: If Gord Mackie was not fired and he did not resign, but has been displaced, why has Gord Mackie been displaced in terms of the final writing of this very important document?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): Mr. Speaker, let not it be left on the record that the former NDP administration had much concern for arts when in six and half years of administration they did not even look at or contemplate an arts policy review. The last one was done under a Conservative administration 10 years ago in this province.

Gordon Mackie, who has been working as the staff person for the arts policy review is still working on the process, Mr. Speaker. The person that has been hired is only there to assist him and helping him to accomplish and helping the Policy Review Committee to accomplish their goal of putting out a comprehensive policy that will lead Manitoba into the next decade for funding for the arts.

Impartiality

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (St. Johns): Mr. Speaker, the previous administration was operating on the basis of a policy that covered the whole range of artistic and cultural efforts in our province from the majors right through to community grass-roots efforts.

My question to the Minister is: Given that whole focus now appears to be in question, and given that there is an appearance of lack of impartiality, will the Minister tell this House how she plans to restore much needed confidence and impartiality in this process? If not, is she prepared to begin the review all over again?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): Mr. Speaker, from the comments by

the Member for Selkirk (Mrs. Charles) and now the comments by the Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis), it appears that they would just like to throw the \$100,000 out the window and start all over again and spend more money. There have been volunteer hours, over 3,000 volunteer hours by the Arts Policy Review Committee and numerous volunteer hours put in by community groups and organizations in making their presentations to the Policy Review Committee. Mr. Speaker, there is nothing for the arts community to fear. These people who have been working tirelessly have the best interests of the arts community at heart, whether it be grass roots up to the major arts organizations in our province. The end result of the recommendations will be what determines whether it was a good process or not.

Winnipeg Education Centre Minister's Position

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (St. Johns): I have a new question to the Minister of Education pertaining to the proposal for a new Winnipeg Education Centre. Mr. Speaker, the Minister received a letter on January 25 from representatives involved in this new proposal. To my knowledge, our knowledge, the Minister has not yet responded to the fact that these groups and individuals must have a response by February 28 in order to go ahead.

Given that the report is in, as the Minister knows, that it is a good report in terms of the proposal, can the Minister tell us what his plans are with respect to meeting the deadline of February 28?

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the deadline that the Member for St. Johns is referring to, because our information is that the February 28 deadline that the Member refers to is simply not there. We have been discussing the whole issue of the Winnipeg Education Centre with the groups that have indicated their support for it. We have been discussing the whole area of program stability at the Winnipeg Education Centre, and we have been discussing that with the universities and with the Winnipeg Education Centre themselves. The intent to proceed with the centre in due course is certainly on track. That announcement will be made in due course.

* (1345)

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, once again the needs of inner city residents have been put on hold. For two years these groups have been waiting for this Government to move on a new Winnipeg Education Centre.

My question to the Minister is, given in the past he has said he is waiting for this report on the effectiveness of the programs, he has received the report, the report says they are effective, will the Minister now respond immediately to the Core Area and to other interested players in this whole exercise and give an indication of provincial support before February 28?

Mr. Derkach: The NDP Opposition seems to be indicating that we have some magic deadline of

February 28 to make these decisions, when in fact they had rejected that proposal on several occasions. They had six years to implement that particular decision. Mr. Speaker, I have to indicate to you very clearly that we have now the report before us. We are acting on it as has been recommended. We are acting on the recommendations.

As a matter of fact, if she looks clearly or closely at the report, it goes beyond just indicating that the programs are good programs. It suggests ways in which those programs can be improved. In consultation with the Winnipeg Education Centre, with the university, we will move ahead with those recommendations and in due course we will move ahead with the construction of the facility as has been recommended.

Repap Manitoba Inc. Licence Suspension Request

Mr. Harold Taylor (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, for months the Liberal Party has been raising concerns about the environmental impacts of the Repap expansions in The Pas. We have argued that the environmental impacts were rushed and are incomplete. Concerns have been proven to be factual.

On Friday TREE issued an appeal to that licence, Mr. Speaker, to Repap and brought forward new evidence that had not been previously known. Given that Dr. Miller of the federal Environment Department and a member also of this Minister's own advisory group, the Environmental Council, has quoted, and I state: The CEC report does not reflect the current state of scientific evidence of organochlorine emissions from pulp mills. Will the Minister of Environment suspend the licence until an adequate and thorough re-examination of the impacts have been conducted?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, I suspect the Member knows the answer without having asked the question. The fact is that under the environmental licensing process in this province, as I have stated previously, the appeals, during the time of appeal to the licence, unless the Minister specifically requests for a suspension of appeal or suspension of the licence the licensee will continue to proceed to comply with the original licence during the period of time that appeals are heard. I will be hearing appeals and looking at the issues that they have raised and give it full and careful consideration.

Mr. Taylor: We are well aware that licence was issued in undue haste when the company did not even want it.

Emission Standards

Mr. Harold Taylor (Wolseley): Now can the Minister tell the House why so many of the emission standards that Repap will be required to operate under - (interjection)- if the Premier can hold his words I will complete my question—why so many emission standards that Repap will be required to operate under were not included in the licence but instead have been left up to the director to set at some future date at his discretion?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that the Member opposite would choose to make disparaging intimidations against the licences considered to be at least a couple of years ahead of its time in the pulp and paper industry. This is deemed to be a very significantly tightened-up licence compared to the majority of pulp and paper industry in this country.

I stated that I will carefully consider appeals on a factual and one-by-one basis, but I resent the fact that he implies that a full and careful hearing was held (sic). The fact that he now thinks that licence was issued prematurely simply does not give any understanding into whether or not he appreciates the process.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, it is well known that the process was rushed.

* (1350)

Licence Suspension Request

Mr. Harold Taylor (Wolseley): The federal Government's presentation, before the AI-Pac hearings in Alberta, had indicated that project should not go ahead because there were insufficient base line data available on such things as loss of fish habitat and fish reproductivity.

Mr. Speaker, given that there are also insufficient base line data on the Saskatchewan River, can the Minister justify why he will not suspend the licence until this information is finally available?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, it is now becoming abundantly clear that following on the beer-and-pizza caper that was precipitated by the Liberal Caucus last summer—last spring, as a matter of fact—on the Repap sale, that they have now clearly come out and said they do not want Repap here under any conditions. We have just finished one of the most stringent environmental impact hearing processes that has ever occurred in this province.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Member for Wolseley, on a point of order.

Mr. Taylor: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I really find it quite exceptional that a matter of privilege that is before the Committee of Elections and Privileges of this House should be treated in that cavalier fashion by the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Cummings)—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Honourable Member does not have a point of order.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, without trying to attach any hidden meaning to the fact that they are continually stating that they are opposed to this type of development that is being proposed by Repap, I have stated clearly that I am prepared to hear the appeals. I will hear them with an open mind. I am the appeal and therefore will not be stating my reaction to those appeals.

It is my feeling that there was a very clear, in-depth study of this proposal, one which would have been licensed without a hearing under the previous administration and, therefore, I will continue with these appeals in a normal manner.

West Broadway Family Centre Funding

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Member for Wolseley, with a new question.

Mr. Harold Taylor (Wolseley): My question will have to be to the Premier (Mr. Filmon).

Mr. Speaker, accessible and flexible child care has been emphasized again and again by the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Oleson), in the House, in Estimates, and in public addresses. The Family Centre at West Broadway does answer, or did answer, the very goals that Minister espoused and in so doing reduced human suffering, other social services and justice costs.

Given the success of a very innovative respite care centre consistent with the Government's goals, will the Premier state why they will not consider funding that operation?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Taylor) would read the news media reports or even the comments made by the people who operate that centre, he would know that in fact this provincial Government is considering funding it.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Member for Wolseley, with his supplementary question.

Mr. Taylor: It is interesting that now we are supposed to read the papers; other days we are not supposed to.

The expectation of—that community and that day care were led to believe there would be funding as a certainty because provincial officials participated for two years in a formal planning exercise.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain, can the Premier (Mr. Filmon) explain, why the Family Services staff raised the expectations of the community and the day care itself and wasted their time when there was not going to be any funding following through on it?

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, because of the Member for Wolseley's reputation for not sticking to facts, without accepting any of the preamble of his question, I will

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take it as notice on behalf of the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Oleson).

Mr. Taylor: We hope that others on this side can take the high road because obviously the previous speaker cannot.

We are looking forward then—and I would ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon) to put on the record that they are prepared to offer funding by the provincial Government for the West Broadway day care in itself and so that it also is eligible for federal funding and core area funding. Will he put that on the record now?

* (1355)

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, we now know why the Leader of the Liberal Party (Mrs. Carstairs) had to say that she saw no other option than to raise personal income taxes in this province in the future, because we are asked to take the position of the Liberal Party, which is to commit resources and support for something on a priority basis before you have even evaluated it, before you have had an opportunity to compare it to other priority needs in this province. You are asked to make a commitment before you even evaluate it.

The answer to his last question was, we are going to evaluate it. His response was, commit now before you evaluate it because that is the Liberal way of doing it, spend, spend, spend, drive up the taxes to everybody in this province, put everybody in difficult circumstances, but do not concern yourselves about the plight of the people of this province who are the highest taxed of any province in the country because all they want you to do is spend money. That is the Liberal Party's opposition, mindless opposition—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please.

Brandon, Manitoba Redevelopment Funding

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): I have a question for the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Penner). We were very pleased—I am sure all Members will join me in this—to see a very major private development announced for downtown Brandon last week.

Last year the Minister of Rural Development was on record as saying that he had no program money for downtown development in Brandon. This was reported in the local paper, but now that the city has endorsed a five-year funding program for downtown Brandon, contingent on equivalent funding from the provincial Government, I wonder if the Minister could indicate whether his Government is now prepared to fund the five-year Brandon business improvement area.

Hon. Jack Penner (Minister of Rural Development): The Honourable Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) of course knows full well that provincial Governments, the same as local Governments, have to do their budgeting and have to do their planning for the various programs that are established in the province. Similarly we are in the process of doing our

Estimates for next year and evaluation of the various programs. Therefore, those kinds of considerations must be made at this time of the year.

The Honourable Member should also know that under the budgetary offloading that we have seen Ottawa enter into, it will cause us to have to significantly re-evaluate some of the considerations that we were making.

Mr. Leonard Evans: I thank the Minister for the answer. Provincial Government funding is crucial, however, to help Brandon move into the '90s with vision and strength.

Can the Minister be a bit more definitive? I appreciate the budget process, I understand that, but will approval of some level be forthcoming in this next fiscal year?

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting. The Member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans), having been in Cabinet and also been in Government a substantial period of time, certainly realizes that under the Estimates program and questioning you have to present a budget to the Legislature before you can of course answer questions to what is in the budget. Therefore, I would suggest that he is going to have to wait until we table our budget and then are into the Estimates process and he can ask those kinds of questions at that time.

Mr. Leonard Evans: I know the committee is very anxious to meet with the Minister and Members of the Government on this because there has been a lot of preparatory work, including officials from his department.

Will the Minister be prepared to meet with the local officials, with the committee, at an early date to put the finishing touches on hopefully a positive agreement?

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the House here that I just did come from Brandon. I just finished almost an hour's meeting with the mayor of the City of Brandon. I heard what he had to say and the priorities that he was placing on various initiatives that they were taking. I also heard him say that they had developed a fairly long-term strategy for the City of Brandon which I was very interested in. Of course, he and his council want to at some point in time sit down and discuss that strategy. I would imagine that the program the Honourable Member is talking about would not be included in that long-term strategy. I look forward to meeting with officials from the City of Brandon, including the Downtown Business Development Association, in Brandon to discuss their priorities.

* (1400)

Biomedical Waste Disposal

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Environment. It is regarding the disposal of biomedical waste. Winnipeg incinerators cannot meet hospital demands and that leads to the question of, what about the waste produced in our dental offices and veterinary clinics? Needles and dressings from both hospitals, waste from dental offices and veterinary clinics, are being sent to landfill sites. Is this acceptable to this Government, and if not, what are they going to be doing about it?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): I wonder if the Member could repeat the first part of his question; my earpiece was not working.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the question is, there seems to be a need to address the disposal of biomedical waste. What is this Government doing to ensure that particular need is being met?

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, yes, certainly I will be pleased to respond to that question, because as a matter of fact it is an issue that we are examining. We are getting information regarding health facilities, and of course veterinary facilities would be included with that. It is an issue that needs to be dealt with in a long-term basis and one with which we would be only too pleased to work with the institutions to make sure that we reach a global conclusion to deal with any of this type of material.

Safety Standards

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, faster action is needed in regard to biomedical wastes. I would ask the Minister, when will this Government provide a policy and infrastructure to ensure protection of the public and workers who handle the waste by setting standards for segregation, packaging, transportation and storage of biomedical waste?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): I would not want the impression to be left that no controls or regulations regarding health control are in place. It seems to me that what we have to make sure and what we are working on is developing an overall approach. Part of that is, as I already indicated, to make sure that we have the information as to what is being produced and how it is being handled presently. Leading from that, Mr. Speaker, I have already had some preliminary meetings to determine what possibilities there are for options of disposal.

Disposal

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the Government is in fact working fast enough in addressing this particular issue. What assurances can this Government give us that biomedical waste is being properly disposed of currently right now?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Disposal of biomedical waste begins with the

designation of what is biomedical waste, what needs to be disposed of in a particular manner. We have the capability right now to deal with a fair amount of this within the province. There is also custom work if you will be doing outside of the province on behalf of operations within this province.

The fact is that the development of additional regulations is a direction in which we are moving in order to deal with this issue. For the Member to imply that nothing is being done and nothing will be done is quite far from factual.

Federal Budget Impact Northern/Native People

Mr. Elijah Harper (Rupert's Land): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Northern Affairs. Can the Minister advise us as to whether he has been in touch with the federal Government in regard to the budget cutbacks and how this might affect the northern and aboriginal people? Will he advise us whether he has talked to the Secretary of State, the Department of Indian Affairs in regard to the cutbacks and the effect it is going to have for the people of northern Manitoba?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I believe I have indicated that I am having the department do a review of the impact of the federal budget on Northern and Native Affairs. As well, we will be doing a review of the previous Government's treatment and funding of our northern and Native communities as well.

Native Organizations Funding

Mr. Elijah Harper (Rupert's Land): I thank the Minister for that answer. On Friday I received some information, shocking news that MKO, First Nations Confederacy South East Resource Development Council will be totally eliminated. There will be no further funding available this year. They have been totally wiped out. Also, the Manitoba Metis Federation will be cut back by 7.5 percent. Will he sit down with those organizations and try to meet their needs and also maybe lobby with the federal Government as to the disastrous decision made by the federal Government? Will he do that on behalf of the aboriginal people?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the province has lived up to its commitment in support of our northern and Native communities. I am prepared to lay that before the House.

As well, I think it is important to note that he has to appreciate that if he is asking for us to reprioritize some of our expenditures, then it could well put in jeopardy the northeast Hydro which would in fact provide services for his communities in northern Manitoba. I think he would like to see those kinds of projects go ahead. It is that kind of assessment that has to be made if he is asking for us to take funds from different parts of our department to in fact support those organizations.

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Northern Manitoba Programs Funding

Mr. Elijah Harper (Rupert's Island): Mr. Speaker, I know we had the Northern Development Agreement which was worth over \$270 million and that is gone. Also Special ARDA that was in place is already gone. A lot of the initiatives that were carried on by the previous administration with the federal Government have been gone. Can the Minister indicate to us what other programs might be available in northern Manitoba, because the federal Government seems to be cutting us back much further? Can he indicate to us what other areas he will be looking at?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Member is well aware of the fact that there has been a \$5.5 billion Hydro project that is being worked on for the development of hydro which is extremely important to the northern communities. We have seen a billion dollars committed to the development of Repap, which has a major impact on the North, and we are currently working with the federal Government on a memorandum of understanding which will in fact do some of the things in northern Manitoba that are a priority to the northern communities.

Crime Prevention Programs Government Initiatives

Mr. Paul Edwards (St. James): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice (Mr. McCrae). Yet again Manitoba is ranked No. 1 in this country in terms of murders per 100,000 people. This is the fourth year in a row that Manitoba has ranked first and at least the fourth time that I have raised this issue, this shameful record with the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, despite grand rhetoric on a regular basis from this Government, we have yet to have an outline of any crime prevention strategy for this province. The Minister of Justice could not find the time to go or even send a delegate to Montreal a few months ago to a bilateral conference on crime prevention.

My question is, where is the real commitment to crime prevention? Manitobans want to participate. They are looking to this Government for some kind of leadership. Will the Minister table some kind of a crime prevention strategy?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I would be happy, Mr. Speaker, to hear specific ideas from the Honourable Member on how he would prevent the crime of murder in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the conference in Montreal to which the Honourable Member refers was attended by three officials of our department. Perhaps the Honourable Member will remind me of the last part of his question. It was lengthy.

Crime Prevention Council Establishment

Mr. Paul Edwards (St. James): Mr. Speaker, in terms of guidance, the Minister need look no further than Resolution No. 46 put on the Order Paper by myself, which suggests the establishment of a crime prevention council.

Mr. Speaker, for the same Minister, I had waited for a long time from this Minister before I took the initiative. I wanted to give him a chance to take some initiative and put some meat to his words with respect to crime prevention. He did not do that.

With our crime rate we have every reason to lead, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Minister is, will the Minister state today when he is going to take crime prevention seriously and lead through the establishment of a crime prevention council which I have suggested?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): There are few more initiatives that could be more important than the prevention of crime. A crime prevented is a crime that has no victim. It is a crime that we do not have to prosecute in the courts, so the Honourable Member is correct to want to talk about crime prevention, but just talking is one thing.

I would like to see him attending more meetings of Neighbourhood Watch, for instance. The Citizens for Crime Awareness are doing an excellent job in this province. I would like the Honourable Member to join us in some of our initiatives, for example, against impaired driving, instead of always bad mouthing everything that we are doing. We are achieving some real results with respect to impaired and suspended driving in this province. I would like the Honourable Member to join with the winners in this area.

* (1410)

Mr. Edwards: Mr. Speaker, the Minister obviously does not know what he is talking about. I have been very pleased to attend regularly, to be in constant contact with the Citizens for Crime Awareness in my area, and I am very pleased to have been supportive of them since Day One.

Firearms Legislation Enforcement

Mr. Paul Edwards (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister a question on December 7 last year and he took it as notice. I would like to ask again if the Minister personally, or through our Chief Provincial Firearms Officer, Mr. Duncan, has been assured by the federal Minister of Justice that effective enforcement of firearm legislation already in place will be addressed imminently by the federal Government. I asked that in early December. It has obviously not been done since then. Has he any assurances that firearm legislation is going to be dealt with soon by the federal Government? We need it right here in this province.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member, if he

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has questions for the federal Government, he can put them to the federal Government. I am in the habit of making regular contact with my federal counterpart who has now been replaced with a new federal counterpart whom I look forward very much to getting to know and working with.

Investment Canada Varta Batteries

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Second Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have just returned from a meeting with the federal Department of Investment and the employees and union -(interjection)- 190 people are losing their jobs. Perhaps we can keep the levy for another occasion. The 192 workers will be losing their jobs at Varta Batteries, and meetings with Investment Canada have given us no further answers than we had before.

I would like to ask the Minister of Industry, Trade and Technology why Manitoba provided no other alternatives to Investment Canada for the sale and closure of the Winnipeg plant. Why did they provide no other alternatives to the federal Government as communicated by Harvie Andre in the House of Commons last week?

Hon. James Ernst (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, this matter occurred just prior to Christmas when Investment Canada approached the Province of Manitoba and asked for our opinion on the question of the purchase, not the closure of anything, but the purchase of Varta Batteries by a U.S. company. We were given about 10 days or so notice in order to provide our opinion. We did so within the time frame and we opposed the sale of the company accordingly.

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Second Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the frustration of the workers in Manitoba having one Conservative Government and another Conservative Government is leaving them very, very distraught in terms of this closure.

My question to the Minister is: Investment Canada today advised us that consistent with the workers' fears, the greatest fears that batteries would be shipped into Canada from United States now under the Free Trade Agreement, confirmed that 9,600 batteries had been shipped in from United States to Canada, many of them through the plant here in Winnipeg. Can the Minister tell us why there was no condition set to protect Canadian jobs with this agreement by the federal Department of Investment Canada for the purchase of this company and the closing down of the jobs here in Winnipeg now that we see the plant being serviced by United States?

Hon. James Ernst (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, first of all, this Government does not set conditions for Investment Canada. Investment Canada does that. We were asked for an opinion, an opinion as to whether or not we thought that the sale should take place. We said, no, we did not think it should.

Mr. Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

NON-POLITICAL STATEMENTS

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, may I have leave to make a non-political statement?

Mr. Speaker: Does the Honourable Minister have leave to make a non-political statement? (Leave)

Mr. Derkach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Today I am very pleased to announce the winner in the Canada Day Poster Contest. Some 636 entrants from 65 communities participated in the contest, and the overall winner was Ryan Gilmore, a Grade 10 student from the Dauphin Regional Composite High School. Ryan was also judged to be second best in Canada. Also, there were two other students from Manitoba, one from Sifton by the name of Natasha McLavy, and Heather Hinam who were runners up to this contest.

Ryan will be receiving a \$150 gift certificate for his efforts, and he and his parents will have the opportunity to travel to Ottawa to participate in the Canada Day ceremonies on July 1. It is a pleasure to congratulate Ryan Gilmore and all of those students who participated in this competition which recognizes the importance of Canada Day.

Hon. Edward Connery (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would like leave for a non-political statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the Honourable Minister have leave? (Agreed)

Mr. Connery: Mr. Speaker, I am indeed pleased to say how pleased I am, and the people of Portage la Prairie, that the MDC, the Manitoba Developmental Centre in Portage has been given a two-year accreditation from the Canadian Council on Hospital Accreditation. The review is a very in-depth review of the care and training that goes into the development centre.

There are some 550 residents of the centre and some over 600 employees who give daily loving and very considerate care to the people who are there. I think it is a very appropriate time that the centre gets its accreditation, because this is also the 100th anniversary of the Manitoba Developmental Centre in Portage.

There is a saying, open up the door so I can throw my chest out. This is one of those days when I am so extremely proud of the facility in Portage and of those 600 people who are giving care to the residents. Part of the comments made by the group was that we also have an advisory board linking Government, the centre and the community, and also that it allows input from the community for the first time through the Minister to ensure that we have the best health care facilities and the best health care delivery for those residents.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask this House to join with me in saying to all of those employees at the Manitoba Developmental Centre, thank you for a job well done.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HOUSE BUSINESS

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you be so kind as to call the Bills in the following order: 98, 59, 60, 56, 84, 50, 51, 52, 57, 47, 48, and the remainder as listed on today's Order Paper.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

BILL NO. 98—THE MANITOBA DATA SERVICES DISPOSITION AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS ACT

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), Bill No. 98, The Manitoba Data Services Disposition and Consequential Amendments Act, Loi sur l'aliénation de la Commission des services d'informatique du Manitoba et modifications corrélatives, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer). Stand?

Is there leave that this matter remain standing? Agreed. The Honourable Member for Dauphin.

Mr. John Plohman (Dauphin): I am pleased to join in the debate on Bill 98, the Bill for the divestiture of the Manitoba Data Services. As my colleagues have indicated before or previous to my speaking, as well as my Leader when he speaks, we have some serious concerns about the direction that the Minister is moving, and the Government is moving, with regard to the divestiture of Manitoba Data Services.

We have concerns, not only from the point of view of the motive that the Government has for divestiture of this money-making corporation, Crown corporation, we have concerns from the point of view of confidentiality. We have concerns because we believe the Government is moving to divest solely because it wants to move towards privatization of Crown corporations as opposed to because it makes a great deal of sense.

(Mr. Neil Gaudry, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

We know that there are other ways to accomplish the goals that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) set out in terms of using the Manitoba Data Services as a lever to develop industrial opportunities in the high-tech field in this province. It does not have to be done through divestiture. For those reasons and of course the price as well, and the value of this corporation, we will speak forcefully against the way that the Government is proceeding with this particular Bill.

I might say first of all, Mr. Acting Speaker, that the fact is in this particular instance, despite the fact that the Minister of Finance in his speech indicated that this divestiture, if it should take place, would provide for a great deal of economic spinoff, that there are

other ways to ensure that this spinoff and economic activity could take place over a long period of time, because we are dealing with what is acknowledged as a valuable asset.

The Minister, in making his references to MDS, acknowledges that there is a valuable corporation with valuable assets, valuable staff, well-trained, highly productive staff who are in demand in the industry. That is one of the reasons why companies want to move in to take ownership of this particular—and of course the fact that they would be getting a monopoly for a five-year period on Government business in this province.

* (1420)

That is not the only way to accomplish a great deal of economic activity as a result of this valuable asset, by selling it, by divesting it, because then it can only be done once and it is gone. There is no other way in the future that this asset can be used to the advantage of taxpayers in this province, the Manitoba citizens. It is then at the mercy of the management of that private corporation -(interjection)- because they want to sell it or give it away as they have done with some other assets. I will speak about that more later. What they are doing is putting it in private hands, because they believe somehow that they are going to create more economic wealth than the Government can do through its ownership of this company.

I say that the Government would do well not to put on its philosophical blinders, that private ownership and divestiture is the only way to accomplish those goals. It should look more broadly. Rather than accusing us in the New Democratic Party, who have expressed concerns about this, of having a narrow view of the world, they should look at their own view and determine whether in fact there is not a better way to accomplish goals on behalf of the taxpayers of this province over a longer period of time.

That, I would suggest to the Government, would be through one of the suggestions that my colleague, the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie) talked about earlier, when he spoke on this Bill, and that is through joint ventures.

Through continued ownership of this very valuable corporation the Government could dictate policies and direction to ensure that over the years economic activity could be generated. At the same time, jobs could be created and the amount of jobs, the kind of jobs could be created, the amount of investment could be controlled to a certain extent. There could be input continuously by the Government through policy directions to that Crown corporation working in partnership with the private sector. The influence could continue, the creation of jobs, the further expansions, the attraction of further investment dollars into this very important field that is growing dramatically across the world at the present time, the smart industry, as it is often referred to, the high tech industry.

There are so many opportunities there. Once the Government divests itself of this particular Crown corporation it no longer has opportunities to influence

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the development to the same extent that it could if it were involved with a joint venture with MDS, working in partnership with the private sector in developing new opportunities for jobs and industrial opportunities in this province.

The economic spin-off could take place over many, many years, many generations. There will be new opportunities develop, ones that we would not even be able to describe at this present time because of the rapid move forward in this particular area. We cannot predict exactly where it is going to go. We do know, because it is a rapidly expanding field and new opportunities are always being developed, that if we continue to maintain the lever that the Government could have at its disposal to influence that development directly then MDS could be very valuable to future generations of Manitobans.

I think, and my Party believes, that the Government is taking its action that it is taking at this particular time for a philosophical reason is an end in itself to divest for the purposes of divesting, ideological reasons.

We have seen that in other areas of the country by Conservative Governments, particularly in Saskatchewan where they wanted to divest of every Crown corporation and venture regardless of how important and profitable it was for the people of Saskatchewan. During the time that Allan Blakeney was Premier of Saskatchewan, Crown corporations were used to the benefit of the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, enormous benefits.

As a matter of fact when Grant Devine, the current Conservative Premier, took office he inherited a \$1 billion heritage fund, which he has squandered over the last number of years and put the province in enormous debt. I find that quite ironic when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) talks with a great deal of pride about what good managers Conservatives are, that he likes to brag as to the kind of great managers Conservatives have been. He fails to look at other Conservative provinces. He makes his case solely on the basis of a windfall he happened to walk into in this province over the last couple of years, in which he is now finding, as a result of the federal budget, will not be there very long.

He fails to look at the reality. He continues to perpetuate the kinds of stories that he was putting forward, he and his Party, prior to the 1988 election when they tried to make the claim that the NDP Government was not managing the province well.

They look at the deficits. They point to the deficits—yes, spending, okay. Then he fails to look at Saskatchewan and the way the Crown corporations were used there to, in fact, generate wealth for the benefit of the people of Saskatchewan, wealth that has now been squandered by the Devine Government in running into huge deficits over the last number of years.

I wonder why the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) never mentions that when he talks about the good management of Conservative Governments. Why does he not point to the record of Saskatchewan, at least try and make excuses for them, at least try and explain

it away, try to put on the record the reasons why so that people looking at that would not be able to come forward with those arguments again and again as a reason for the fact that Conservatives are really not good managers at all, in fact have been responsible for the greatest mismanagement not only in Saskatchewan but in Manitoba over the years.—(interjection)—

Yes, we can look at Flyer Industries, the fact they were the first one to advance operating loans to Flyer. It was a Conservative Government that did that. It was the Conservative Governments that began the CFI fiasco in this province, the beginning of Manfor in its early days, started by a Conservative Government.

It was also the Conservative Government that started the exotic adventures in Saudi Arabia under the stewardship of the Member for Pembina (Mr. Orchard), when he was the Minister responsible for the Manitoba Telephone System, a Member of the Lyon Cabinet at that time. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) was not in Government, but he remembers that well and has probably had an opportunity to review the records to apprise himself of the fact that indeed it was the Conservatives who began that.

As a matter of fact, it was interesting, Mr. Acting Speaker, during the last election campaign the Conservative candidate in Dauphin admitted that, during the debate we had, and apologized to the people for the fact that the Conservatives did get that thing started in Saudi Arabia. It was a very great revelation. It was a wonderful revelation for all of us to see it being admitted.

I give him credit for admitting it, something other Conservatives have not done in this House or outside this House. In fact, they would do well to admit it, say, yes, they were wrong to get started there as it turns out in retrospect, but in fact they were the ones that began that process.

Getting back then to the divestiture of MDS, we look at profitable ideological reasons for being used. We look at a profitable Crown corporation being divested by the Government solely because they do not believe the Government should be involved in the operations of corporations of this nature.

I would think this is probably one of the primary areas where Government should be involved, the protection of the public's records, confidentiality being a very important criteria in terms of Government ownership. There are certain monopolies that Government ownership has worked very well, the Telephone System and the provision of hydro services in this province. Manitoba Data Services was another area that was working very well for the people of Manitoba. So it is a poor choice by this Government to choose this divestiture.

Now they say it is for economic development reasons, for opportunities. Let us look at some of the opportunities. The recognition that was developed was there by the previous Government. The Minister said, in his remarks, that when he spoke to this Bill the previous Government should have recognized the

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importance of developments in the high tech field in this province.

* (1430)

In fact, we did do that. Through Infotech that was set up. We did, in fact, bring together many of the world's leading companies in high technology so that a nucleus, a critical mass of activity, would be present in this province to attract more developments.

We did in fact recognize that with the Burroughs company in terms of the medical field in this province, because we felt that was an important development and we wanted to be at the leading edge of high tech development in this province.

We as a Government were continuously looking at ways of broadening Manitoba's potential for development in the high tech area. MDS could have been used as one of the tools to realize that potential, but here we have a Government now giving away this company at a very low price, we believe it will be, because they have undervalued this company as they did with ManOil, for example, now worth some \$20 million, and they received \$3 million for it.

That was a terrible mistake in terms of the value that they received, but in their interest to expedite the sale they only received \$3 million, this Government, for ManOil. Why would they be wanting to move so quickly just for a pittance, a small percentage of what it was worth? Why in fact did they not wait until such time as it was an opportune time if they felt they had to divest it, an opportune time to divest it if they felt that was necessary in the interest of the Manitoba taxpayers, but ensure that they received a reasonable price for that particular company which had begun to establish itself in Manitoba and would of course be more and more valuable as the years went by? They choose to divest it at a time that they received one of the lowest possible prices for it.

I hope that will not happen with this company as well, with Manitoba Data Services, because in fact they have underwritten, or written down I should say, the book value of this particular company, it seems in preparation for sale. I find that of course very unfortunate for the people of Manitoba. In fact, it will mean that the price will be lower simply because the book value is lower and it influences the price that the Government is able to get for that particular company.

I say to the Government that before they undertake this particular sale—they say they are at the point now where there is two final draft purchase agreements in process from two companies that will be considered by Executive Council for sale. I believe that it means that not both of them will be turned down, that in fact the Government will move forward if it has the opportunity to do so, to sell this particular corporation.

Before they do that they should back off from those negotiations, they should inform these companies that they have had a second view, another change of heart perhaps insofar as the directions that they were moving and that they would like to look at the whole possibilities of joint ventures.

They should engage a consultant to review this concept for them, to review the possible opportunities in the short term and the long term with a view to determining whether in fact as a partner MDS would be able to leverage additional dollars, additional jobs, additional activity in the future, perhaps five, 10, 15, 20 years down the line in this province. That way I believe we would have all of the options reviewed by this Government, by Government, and then a decision made that is based on the best possible option for all of Manitobans and not made for ideological reasons based on the preference of the Government simply to sell because privatization is a word that they like and a viewpoint that they feel is historic perhaps.

It is historic with the Conservative Governments, and they are being consistent with their particular Party philosophy. That is not a good enough reason to divest a company that has provided excellent service for all of its clients over the last number of years, lowering of rates each year, profit making each year.

Why would that kind of a company have to be rushed for sale at fire sale prices under those circumstances? No, that is not the case. It is in a growth industry. It is an area that has growing potential with each passing year, tremendous growth potential, another reason why the Government should be taking its time on this, ensuring that all of the options are considered before moving forward simply for ideological reasons.

So I ask the Government and the Minister in all sincerity to review this carefully, to review it, to stop the process and take another look at what it is getting itself into in terms of the taxpayers of this province. What is the best for the future generations of this province? They have an opportunity here. They should not squander it, because that will become their legacy.

I know the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) said last day when one of my colleagues was speaking that he would stake his future on it. My colleague pointed out quite aptly and accurately that in fact the Minister will not have a future to stake on it. In all likelihood by the time the taxpayers of Manitoba realize that this was done in haste and was not in the best interests of Manitobans, this Minister will have long left the scene in Manitoba. He should remember that there is a legacy and that he will be the one who will be pointed to at that time wherever he is, whatever he may be doing.

Whatever walk of life at that particular time he is involved in, Mr. Acting Speaker, the fact is, he at that point will have to answer to the critics who point to the ill-conceived decision that he made at that particular time. That may not be too important to him at this time. It may be that he thinks that is far too long down the road, he does not have to consider that yet, but I think he should because there may be some short-term benefits that he sees now, but he should look past that in terms of the kind of leverage that this tremendous corporation could have for Manitobans in the future. So he has to look at not only whether he will have to pay politically in the short term on this, but whether in fact his legacy will be tarnished by this. That is something that will become more important to him as time moves along.

I say that the Minister and his Government have divested themselves of corporations in the past in a

way that has not been to the maximum benefit of all Manitobans. They have done that. Of course when we are thinking of Repap, this Minister directly involved with that particular, what he might call it, sale. I think we have paid a company to take Manfor off our hands is what this Government did in the worst-case scenario, which could very well develop.

The Minister may find himself in fact using taxpayers' money. With loan guarantees and tax write-offs that the Government has allowed Repap to gain here, with the roads that have been built and the assets that were given to that company, in fact some say to the tune of some \$342 million, that the company has actually been paid to take Manfor off our hands.

I guess the Minister may think then if he gives away MDS at a fire sale value, that in fact that will pale in comparison to the judgment that will be made of his record insofar as the giveaway of Manfor to Repap and all of those forests with it, because in fact if that situation develops in the worst-case scenario, as it may very well do in the years ahead, the Minister will long be remembered for that fiasco, perhaps moreso than the giveaway of MDS, as he is intending to do in this Bill.

I ask the Liberals to closely scrutinize the other options that are available to this Government, other options that in fact would allow for flexibility in the application of Government policy in the future to ensure maximizing benefits for Manitobans. The Liberals have an opportunity here to demonstrate that they are not going to rush into the divestiture business as this Conservative Government wishes to do as they follow the road of Grant Devine in Saskatchewan, a road that is fraught with tragedy, a road that history has shown has been the wrong road for Saskatchewan. That is why that Government will not be there after the next election in Saskatchewan.

* (1440)

Let them not use that as their shining light, their example to guide them, this Government, in divestiture of Crown corporations, of profitable Crown corporations that are benefitting the people of the province. Let them not use that example. Let the Liberals use the opportunity that they have in this Chamber, as with the New Democrats together, to in fact provide a majority in this House, to ensure that there is that second thought, that review by this Government, undertaken on this issue, that they in fact step back from those negotiations, break off those negotiations that they are involved with those two companies at this particular time, stand back and take a look at how else these objectives of industrial spinoffs in jobs, in economic activity can be maximized in this province other than by the one time use of that lever through the sale. Once it is gone, it is irrevocable. They cannot get it back again. They cannot get that leverage back again to influence this industry.

The Liberals are in a position where they can do a great deal to have that second thought undertaken by this Government. They should at this time do everything possible. They can do that simply by standing in this House when the vote comes to vote nay for this Bill,

insofar as this Bill is concerned. The Government will have a strong message sent to it, and I believe will use that opportunity to review the process that they have engaged themselves in.

It is a process, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) admits, was not initiated by them. It came, as they said, as a result of an unsolicited bid and when that unsolicited bid came forward it made them realize, the Minister's own words: It made us realize what could be accomplished by using this Crown corporation as a launch for major economic development thrust within the high-tech area. That is what the Minister of Finance said when he moved the second reading of this Bill.

The fact is, he is looking at that from a very narrow perspective, as I have outlined here today. He could use a number of other options to realize this potential. Even though he did not realize there was this potential until this unsolicited offer came forward, he did not have to develop that opportunity only through sale offers. There are many other ways. I say to the Government, the joint venture way is the most beneficial way to proceed in this particular aspect. I do not know what the price will be. The book value of \$9 million is obviously low. We do not know what the price will be. If we go by the experience of the Government in previous divestitures, as I mentioned with Repap, as I mentioned with ManOil, then in fact we are going to see a very small purchase price, one that is not even close.

As a matter of fact, if we look at the same ratio as the one used with ManOil, the ratio of purchase price to actual value of that corporation, we would be talking about one-seventh of the value. One-seventh of \$9 million is just a little over \$1 million. If the Conservative Government in this province is not able to get more than \$1 million for MDS, then we really have a travesty in this House, in this province, by this Government. They will live to regret it, if they in fact undertake it at a give-away price such as that.

We can look at their record. It is not a shining record insofar as divestiture and the ability to negotiate benefits for Manitobans. The Member for Portage (Mr. Connery), the Minister, talks about Flyer and the price there. He should remember that it was the Conservatives who started Government into the bus building business in this province through their loans. As I said earlier, they are the ones, the Conservatives, who started down that ill-fated road, and they should not blame a subsequent—and the fact is they should have divested during the Lyon years, Flyer, when they had an opportunity at that time. They fumbled and bumbled their way through for four years and left the New Democratic Government in an untenable position, in a very poor negotiating position at that particular time. We were not in a position to get a great deal of dollars for the assets of Flyer Industries at that time.

It was a different story at Manfor, because in fact they were divesting at a time when the market was moving up, when there was a profit being made at Manfor. It was a profitable company at that particular time, a result of the management and stewardship of the New Democratic Government in this province over the last six years, before the 1988 election. We had

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turned Manfor around into a position where, yes, it would in fact be a good deal for sale—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please. I would like to remind Honourable Members that they should keep their comments relevant to the Bill. I fail to see the comments on Manfor, ManOil and Flyer Industries -(inaudible)- think the Bill is quite clear.

Mr. Plohman: Mr. Acting Speaker, I respect your opinion on this matter. I just want to point out to you that in every case where I have mentioned these other Crown corporations I have drawn the parallel between the divestiture of those particular corporations with the divestiture of MDS, the potential divestiture as we are discussing at this time with this particular Bill.

It is important that when we talk about divestiture we talk about motives, we talk about track record and experience. These are all very relevant in my mind, Mr. Acting Speaker, issues surrounding the potential divestiture of MDS that is being provided for in Bill 98. I draw that to the attention of you and your staff so they can look at this issue from the broadest possible context, which is very important.

I would like to begin to wrap up my remarks on this issue, Mr. Acting Speaker. In summing up, I would like to point out to the Minister, who is not able to listen to all the speeches in this House—although I know his colleagues are trying to do their best to do so and some of the Liberals in this House as well—that we have to take a sober second look at what is happening here. We have to see the assets of the people of Manitoba being considered from all angles before decisions are made.

We cannot have the Government, if it is to be responsible, rushing in with fire sales of Crown corporations that are being profitable and providing valuable service with confidential records such as MDS in this province. We cannot have the Government rushing in if it wants to be responsible. It has to stand back and take a look at the options in the way that MDS can be utilized in the future, for future generations, to benefit Manitobans insofar as the provision of jobs and economic activity.

* (1450)

I say to the Government, I say to the Liberal Opposition, they should review this issue very carefully before they put their stamp of approval on this Bill. The Government could well do to withdraw this Bill. The Liberal Opposition could well move a six-month hoist on it. They could well stand back and say to the Conservative Government, you know, you have not shown us why this is the best way to proceed with MDS, why a sale is in the best interests of Manitobans, and we want to know that you have looked at all of the options. We want to know that you have looked at the option of a joint venture, we want to know that you have looked at the confidentiality issue from all sides, and then in fact we could have a decision that is made in the best interests of Manitobans, either to retain it as a Crown corporation, after all of those options are considered and examined in detail, or a joint venture

proceeded with in order to maximize benefits for Manitobans.

So I say, Mr. Acting Speaker, to the Liberals, they have a responsibility in dealing with such a fundamental and important corporation to Manitobans that they demand the Government look at these options. I say to the Government, the Members that are part of the decision making in caucus and in Cabinet, that they too take another look at what they are proceeding with and where they are going, and that they should not simply move in the direction that other Conservative Governments have gone in this country and in other provinces simply for ideological reasons, but in fact should look at what is best for Manitobans, as a truly pragmatic and caring Government, a Government that in fact believes in maximizing benefits for Manitobans would do. I say that is the direction they should go.

The issue of confidentiality is not a small issue, it is a major issue. The Health Records Association of Manitoba retains a great deal of concern about how records would be kept confidential under a sale, under this legislation. Of course, the other issue that is most important in the minds of everyone is the fact that one company would be getting a monopoly for a five-year period, in which time they could drive out all potential competition and then be able to jack up the rates for the Government clients to unprecedented levels. That is something we do not want to see happen, we do not see that protected in this Bill, and therefore would implore the Government and the Liberal Opposition to take another look at this issue, remove their ideological blinders to privatize. Well, why would the Liberals support this privatization of a money-making Crown corporation if it is not for ideological reasons? Have they moved that far to the right from some of their forefathers in the Liberal Party who saw the benefit of Crown corporations and the value that they could play, joint ventures and the value that they could play?

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

We only have to wonder what motivates them to move down this road with this Conservative Government. It is an ill-conceived decision based on an overture made by the private sector, by an unsolicited bid by a company. That is not a good enough reason to start making decisions about something as fundamental as this. The Government admits it came from an unsolicited bid. They had not worked out the reasoning behind it, and now they have followed through because they say that they could have economic benefits, but they did not look at the other options, they just followed that one path, which is a sale. They did not look at the joint venture option which has so much potential.

So I ask, Mr. Speaker, that the Members of the Parties, the Government and the Liberal Opposition, review the other options before they blindly support this Bill, because I believe that it will hurt Manitobans in the longer term. It will be counterproductive insofar as what is best for our children and our grandchildren in this province.

Mr. Speaker: As previously agreed, this matter will remain standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer).

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BILL NO. 59—THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AMENDMENT ACT

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Education (Mr. Derkach), Bill No. 59, The Public Schools Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton). Stand.

Is there leave that this matter remain standing? Agreed.

COMMITTEE CHANGES

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Member for Gimli with committee changes.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Industrial Relations be amended as follows—this is for the Tuesday morning and Tuesday evening session—Gilleshammer for Oleson and Burrell for Praznik.

I move, seconded by the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Private Bills be amended as follows: Pankratz for Manness, Burrell for Praznik, and Connery for Helwer. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

BILL NO. 60—THE EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT ACT

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Education (Mr. Derkach), Bill No. 60, The Education Administration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Brandon East, the Honourable Member for Brandon East.

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a few words to this debate on this particular important Bill. It is a very short Bill, but it is a Bill with an awful lot of implications. Maybe there is a lesson here or some kind of a message that when this Legislature comes up with very brief Bills we have to be very careful, because they may be dynamite pieces of legislation, who knows.

This particular Bill, innocuous as it may seem, has a couple of points in here that concern Members of our caucus. It may concern other Members of the Legislature, I am not sure. Not everyone has spoken on this, and I am not sure where other Members of the Opposition stand on this. There are some concerns of principle that are brought up when one considers Bill 60, The Education Administration Amendment Act, a Bill that is barely a page, a page and another small amount in length, a very, very short Bill but has a couple of subsections, a couple of amendments, that we have some concern with.

I guess generally speaking, Mr. Speaker, we are concerned that the implications of this Act are that the public school system could be weakened by this particular measure. We have seen a considerable increase in funding for private schools; I understand \$16 million doubling of the funding level, which may be all right in itself, but on the other hand, we have the public school system that is getting increases in the order of 3 percent to 4 percent, certainly not the same percentage amount as has been offered and has been given to private schools in the province.

I know there is a lot of concern about this out there among the public, the taxpayers out there who have to fund not only education by paying provincial taxes but who also have to fund by means of property taxes, by means of municipal taxes. There is a concern there that it certainly is a costly matter. Certainly it is an area of jurisdiction that the average person is very concerned about, because they do want to see quality education maintained in this province.

I think we have been fortunate over the years. We have seen a high standard of public education developed here. Manitoba has been unique inasmuch as it has maintained a strong public school system. It has not veered off into a separate school system as you have seen in some other provinces. That is our tradition.

What we are worried about here is that the public school system may be threatened, albeit in a rather innocuous way, albeit with a rather short Bill with a couple of phrases. Nevertheless, this taken with other measures and other statements and other actions taken by the Government add up to some kind of an erosion of the public school system in our minds.

* (1500)

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is not so much to try to attack or belittle the private schools. That is not my concern. Although we do have a lot of concerns about the implications of funding for private schools. I think if you talk to the average parent out there, and you bring this matter up with them you will find that the average citizen in Manitoba wants to ensure that we continue to have a strong public school system. If you talk to the average teacher, the average teacher is very concerned that the public school system not be allowed to erode in this province. Certainly, if you talk to the trustees, the active trustees we have—and we have a lot of good people who serve voluntarily on school boards right across this province—you discuss this issue with them and they too will express concerns as to the degree of level of funding for public schools and what is happening to those scarce dollars being funneled to the private school system.

I suppose particularly of concern is beyond the religious schools but of particular concern to the private non-religious schools—if I can use that term, the more privatized commercial schools that could stand to receive funds under this, Ravenscourt and so on. The concern is growing, because we have read and we have heard of squeezing of established programs funding by the federal Government in the recent budget speech

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of Mr. Wilson, the budget pronouncements. It was stated very clearly that we were going to be squeezed, and I think the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) has made some estimates as to the amount of money involved.

One figure that came to mind, that I am reminded of, was \$100 million within a year period. Then I have heard other numbers, but it is a lot of money. The fact is, Manitoba will have less funds available under EPF, which is usually meant to be available for health and post-secondary education. Nevertheless, it is a squeeze on the entire budget of the province and therefore could cause the Government to have fewer dollars available for school funding.

It would be a shame, Mr. Speaker, with the rapid increase in funding of the private school system that the public school system is starved for adequate funds.

In the Bill there is reference made to any matter relating to the welfare of pupils enrolled at the private school. This amendment is being included. In our view, this is a rather passive approach. The Minister, in our judgment, already has the authority and already has more responsibility to ensure that standards are maintained in the private school system and to ensure that public monies are being properly administered in the private school setup. The change in itself may be a step in the right direction, but it is very limited. The onus still remains on the Minister to inquire after information he wishes to receive.

I know that The Manitoba Teachers' Society is aware of the Bill and has made these statements. They are concerned that there is not this adequate accounting, that there is this adequate public overseeing of what goes on in the private schools using public monies. The approach here is too passive. I mentioned The Manitoba Teachers' Society. I should have also referred to the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, MAST, because it too has concerns in this area.

To that extent, Mr. Speaker, you could argue that this particular clause is rather meaningless, that it is fairly soft and meaningless. What we need is something of more substance and indeed we need more determination on the part of the Minister and the Government with regard to ensuring that public monies, precious taxpayers' dollars, are fully accounted for and are utilized in such a way that education standards are maintained at the highest level in the private school setup.

I have talked to people in private schools, including in my own area of Brandon, recently attended an opening of a private school which was of religious bent. It was not affiliated with any particular church, but they had certain concerns of promoting Christian ethics, Christian standards. While they try to maintain the regular curricula, their mandate as they saw it as a religiously oriented school, was to pay more attention to matters of Christianity. They are very good people, very well-meaning people and so on.

Whoever it is, I say there is responsibility on the part of the Minister, his department, his staff and this Government to ensure that public monies are properly spent and that standards are maintained at the highest.

What we need are tighter regulations, Mr. Speaker, and we need more accounting of public monies.

This is a thorny issue. The whole question of private school funding is a very thorny issue. It is one that divides Parties from time to time. It is one that is a growing concern in the public, particularly when you sit down with people who have children in school and who are most anxious to ensure that there is adequate funding of the public system.

I would like to refer to a rather ideal setup. I do not know all the detail of it, but in the Brandon School Division, in the City of Brandon, the private schools, the Catholic schools at least, are very well accommodated in the public system. It is a very good system and it is satisfactory. It has been in effect for some time. We know that highest standards are maintained and the schools are adequately financed.

It seems to be something that could be copied, I would say, Mr. Speaker, by other parts of the province. Maybe this is the way to go, where you have a working compromise so that the Catholic schools are able to survive, are able to carry on, are able to maintain standards, and yet they are fitting into the umbrella of the public system, so that you are avoiding the conflict; you are avoiding the aggravation that we see elsewhere whenever we get into this topic. It is something that perhaps the Minister and his staff should be studying to see whether this could be brought in, perhaps in a limited way, within the other school divisions where there was a willingness on the part of the local authorities to do so.

There you have I guess as close to an ideal setup that one might have to accommodate one particular group at any rate. I do not know whether other religious organizations would fit into that. I do not know whether a private, commercial school would fit into that. I would not think so, but certainly people in the City of Brandon seem to be quite satisfied with that arrangement.

* (1510)

So, Mr. Speaker, we say that the way we have the setup now, we have private schools that are receiving more and more monies, considerable amount of monies. It is not a small amount now; it has grown and it is growing more quickly under this administration that there has to be this rendering of account, there has to be this greater accountability. There has to be more complete auditing, not only of specific monies spent, but on the programs. If we do not, we may be headed into a dual system.

I rather detect a bias on some Members on the Government side, and necessarily in their remarks as speakers, but more or less as comments made from their seats that there is some bias in favour of the private school system. Well, I would caution those individuals to listen to the people of Manitoba, to listen to their own constituents, because this can be a very dynamite issue. They may not know of what they speak when they start urging more private schools. I say that you take on the public school system at your peril. We have a good public school system. Surely what we want to do is to ensure that it survives, ensure that it grows, ensure that we have better standards in the future.

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Someone yelled from their seat on the Government side, well, they are paying twice, those parents who send their children to the private schools. Yes, they do pay twice, but they are paying twice by virtue of their own choice. A school is available to them under the setup of the public school system that their children could very well be educated in. I would dare say that most of us here have had our children educated in the Manitoba school system, and they have come out of it fairly well, Mr. Speaker. We have good teachers; they are dedicated teachers. We have dedicated school board members. We have curriculum that meets good standards, guidance provided by the Department of Education—a good system by and large, could be improved, but very professional. It has grown and has developed over the years.

Certainly there are a lot more facilities today in our public school system than when I was a child, or many of us here were children and went to school. We certainly did not have the equipment that public schools have today. In fact, even some schools are blessed with swimming pools and so on. It may sound like a luxury, but nevertheless in this day and age, your Participation and the need to have adequate health, fitness, concerns about adequate physical activity, it is not untoward to have swimming pools.

Beyond that, even more important in my view, a lot of the public schools today have adequate libraries that they did not have two, three, four, five decades ago. Books were very hard to come by and they usually were old, tattered and torn and not even accessible to the students. Today we have bright libraries, bright resource centres, we have programs in the public school system whereby those children can have access to a large range of books and are encouraged to read. To that extent they are far better off.

Again in terms of other kinds of equipment, certainly we have moved into the computer age. One would not have thought of introducing that type of technology, because it really did not exist 20, 30, 40 years ago, but now that we do have it we see our schools adequately equipped with computers and other kinds of machines so that our young people can learn this technology if they so wish.

This is true of other areas of instruction. We have some very good music teachers, a far greater percentage of teachers who can specialize in music than ever before, similarly with other specific skills. We have people specialized in the industrial arts, specialized in human ecology and so on, so our children do have the privilege of receiving instruction from very well qualified people.

I say without question, without hesitation, that the quality of teaching has improved substantially over the past several decades. Certainly since World War II there has been a significant improvement in my judgement at least in the ability and the standards of teaching, in the professionalism that exists. Higher standards are required of the teachers. They have to take longer training and generally come to their schools and do a very adequate, a very significant, a very professional job. There are more opportunities for teachers to upgrade themselves as well, through various conferences and so on.

Generally speaking, we have seen improvements and we are all to the better on that account. I think our school system has produced a standard second to none in this province and probably in the United States as well.

Mr. Speaker, this bias there seems to be on the other side that I have detected, that we have to put more and more money into the private system, may end up eroding the public system. When someone asked why should I have to pay twice for my child to go to a private school of my choice, because I am already paying taxes, the answer is of course that is your choice, but you do not have to make that additional expenditure.

You choose to do so. That is your choice, but those who would argue, well, that is not fair that I should therefore receive, if I want to put my child into a particular religious school or some other kind of private school, then I should have that right, I should not have to pay school taxes and simply pay directly into that school institution, then I say you are setting up a dual system, you are setting up a separate system, and if you take it to its logical end we would indeed have a separate school system in Manitoba. That is not in keeping with the historical tradition of this province. We have a proud tradition in public education, accessible to all regardless of race, religion or creed and one, as I described a few minutes ago, that has improved over the years and does cause our young people to come out of the system as better citizens therefore.

As I said, we have a rather innocuous looking piece of legislation here. There are implications for dual funding, there are implications for a separate system, and I say, we cannot afford a separate system purely for financial reasons, but also we should not afford a separate system because there are other disadvantages with it.

Mr. Speaker, there are some other specifics. I have talked to some teachers about this matter and they mention too that often when they are compared to private schools sometimes people forget that the public schools do have to be available to all children of school age and the public school system must take these children on by legislation, by the right of the child, by the right of the family.

Yet that is not true of the private schools. Private schools as I understand can deny admission to handicapped children for example, and therefore this puts—if you just look at it in this respect because this is much more expensive of course, accommodating handicapped children. I agree that they should be accommodated. We should do more as a matter of fact to help handicapped children in the public system, but there is a cost, and that cost has to be borne by the taxpayers, by the provincial taxpayers and by the property ratepayers. The private schools, as I am advised—if I am wrong I would like to be told I am wrong—but I understand that private schools can simply deny handicapped children admission, and that does therefore in that respect put the public schools at a disadvantage, certainly when you are trying to account or prepare them on the cost-per-pupil basis or cost-per-student-day basis.

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Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees is concerned about this Bill. No doubt they will be making representation at the committee stage. Also The Manitoba Teachers' Society has concerns about this Bill and probably some specific parents groups, maybe parent-teacher societies or associations or whatever may be interested in coming before the committee dealing with this to voice their concerns.

The last thing we want to see, Mr. Speaker, is our schools being squeezed of adequate funding. I am worried that by trying to accommodate the needs, the growing demands of those in the private system, that we may not be able to adequately fund our public system, particularly in rural and Northern Manitoba, where it is certainly more expensive to provide standards of education simply because of the distance factor, because of the remoteness factor. Of course, we are into a day and age of the larger school division, whereby children are bussed into centres of learning, unlike the old one-room little red school house that others of us may have attended.

I might add, I am reminded, Mr. Speaker, of the action of a former Premier of this province, namely, Duff Roblin, who had the foresight and courage to bring in the larger school division. I know it was very unpopular in rural Manitoba, but I am convinced that the large school division has contributed to a significant increase in the standards of education in rural and northern Manitoba. It has contributed significantly to improved quality of education.

* (1520)

I just shudder to think how we managed to provide adequate standards without the larger school division, where you bring students to centres, where you can have enough students so that you can have teachers specialized in different disciplines so that they can have the benefits, let us say, of a science teacher or music teacher or industrial arts teacher, whatever, unlike the one-room school house, where you had maybe one or two teachers and they taught many, many subjects. As dedicated as those people were and maybe are in some other places of the world, and I do not criticize them, some of them were excellent and some of them were very inspirational to their students.

I know some people in Manitoba who have had the experience of going through the one-room schoolhouse and have had the pleasure in some instances of having a most inspiring teacher in the one-room schoolhouse, but that poor teacher, he or she had to be prepared to teach on many subjects, particularly when you get into junior high school and you get into sciences, you get into music, you get into other areas of learning. It is very demanding for one person to be knowledgeable, adequately knowledgeable, in all these areas.

With the larger school division, with the specialization, with the larger schools that are possible because of the large school division, you are able to have teachers with specialization in science, not only in science but in specific areas, the biological sciences, let us say, or the physical sciences, or yet teachers who can specialize

in mathematics or teachers who can specialize in music. Our young people are therefore in my judgement better off on that account, but this costs a lot of money.

I am worried, Mr. Speaker, with the EPF squeezing by the federal Government, with other costs rising, and now with more and more funding of the private system, that the public school system is going to be hurt. It seems to me that maybe those who will be hurt the worst will be those outside of Winnipeg, especially in the country, especially in the rural areas, and most especially in some of the northern areas.

Mr. Speaker, I am trying to take this opportunity to stress the importance of a strong, accessible, quality education system in Manitoba. To do this we have to have adequate funding, we have to have the facilities, but we also have to have teachers of good quality. I recently noted in the media that there is concern about losing teachers in Manitoba, that we are not going to have enough teachers, lo and behold, in the next few years. Indeed there was one conference in Brandon addressing this subject of the trend of inadequate numbers of teachers in the Province of Manitoba.

I do not know what is happening. A few years back we seemed to have a surplus of teachers. Certainly our population is not growing. If anything, population is shrinking, regrettably. We do not like to see this, because in my judgement the population of Manitoba is below the optimum level. There is some optimum level for our population, but I know it is greater than 1.1 million which is roughly the number of people we have in the province now.

As a matter of fact, the latest figures I have seen from Statistics Canada are, in the last year there has been an absolute shrinkage of the number of people outside of Winnipeg. Winnipeg, because of its size, can manage to maintain some population growth. It may have slowed down, but it is maintaining some semblance of growth. This is not true outside of Winnipeg. We do not have the breakdown. I do not think it probably applies to places like Brandon or Thompson, but when you get into the small towns, the small villages, when you get into the rural municipalities, there the population is vanishing, it is just going out of sight, so you would think that we would not have the need for teachers in some parts of the province.

Maybe that will happen in the future. Maybe there will be need for fewer teachers, but in the meantime we are being advised that there is this shortage of teachers looming on the horizon. I do not know what is happening, whether it is because we are not paying sufficient salaries, that is, maybe our salaries are not competitive. I do not have that information. There are people in the profession who are now spending time setting up committees. There has been one conference in Brandon dealing with this subject, and it is something that we have to concern ourselves with.

Unfortunately we live in a day and age of insufficient funding for all the needs of Government, although I must say our Government did leave this particular administration rather flush with money because we did realize that there was a need for greater funds. We did increase taxes. We paid the penalty for it, but

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nevertheless this Government has reaped the benefit of those increased revenues.

Admittedly there has been some reduction in income tax that has been relatively minor in terms of the total spending of the Government or the total revenues collected by the Government. Of course there has been some reduction of the payroll tax, or the health and education levy as it is called. However, I would say that really is tokenism, if I could just have an aside on that.

At the rate the Government is reducing the payroll tax, I have calculated it is going to take over a decade for that tax to vanish. I say, Mr. Speaker, we will not hold our breath about the disappearance of the payroll tax. I would venture to guess it is going to be around an awful long time. Even though we took the bull by the horns and increased income taxes, the fact is the Government needs that money. I dare say that while we will get a lot of talk about eliminating it, that will not happen.

You may see we have had minor reductions in totality. You may see a few other minor token-like reductions in the tax but the tax as such will stay. Of course there is a good reason for that, if I can just have an aside, and that is because that tax brings revenue into the Province of Manitoba from the federal Government and other national corporations that we would not receive otherwise, particularly the federal Government and its agencies.

I note just recently, Mr. Speaker, that the Ontario Government has now brought in a payroll tax, and that the federal Government indeed has now formally agreed to pay these monies to the Liberal Government of Ontario which in their last budget introduced the payroll tax. Now you have a payroll tax in Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba, and I would not be surprised if you will see it in other jurisdictions because there is a need for additional revenues to fund the growing demands made on Government.

Regardless, the fact is that as we heard today in answers from the Question Period, the Government does not feel itself to be flush with money, and it wants to be very careful where it is spending. I can appreciate that because of the EPF squeeze, because of other increasing costs just simply resulting from inflation. When inflation occurs you need a bundle more money to fund the MDC.

The Minister for Consumer Affairs (Mr. Connery) for Portage was referring to the Manitoba Developmental Centre earlier in a non-political statement which is very nice to hear incidentally, but apart from that the MDC has a cost that just rises without any control over it because the cost of food goes up. You have to feed people. The food prices go up; the utility prices go up and whatever else it takes to operate a centre such as that. I am just using that as one example. We could look at dozens of examples of increasing cost that you almost have no control over, so there is that fact.

There is the fact of Government squeezing, and therefore, Mr. Speaker, I agree. Money is precious. Funds are precious. Governments have to be very careful in where they spend the money because there

is a limit to how much can be brought in. Having said that, I go on to say I, therefore, regret that this Government has seen fit to double the funding of the private schools in our province when we already have these excellent school facilities that I mentioned before.

As I said earlier, the public school system has served the province well. It goes back to the 19th century when it was established, and it has adapted over the years. There are some fundamental changes that have occurred in our society, but the public school system has indeed adapted to those changes. It is adapting very well to some of the changes resulting from the influx of new Canadians, the influx of immigrants, who have many languages, and they are doing an excellent job in teaching languages in the school and helping instruct English as a Second Language.

* (1530)

We have—I understand 33 different languages are being taught somewhere in the system, so what we have is we have integrated a multicultural philosophy into the educational system, and yet at the same time we have this unique public school system that carries on, but it is the public school system that has met these challenges.

So we do not want to support a system of funding that is going to create enclaves or groups of religious, or cultural, or language, or national entities, we want ideally for people of all religious backgrounds, of all cultural backgrounds, language backgrounds, or whatever nationality backgrounds to be welcome into one fine system that they can together live and prosper and enjoy life as Manitobans.

So we do not want to see this fine system dismantled. We do not think that we have some attack on this institution as we understand it, but that institution, Mr. Speaker, is critical in fostering understanding, in fostering tolerance, in fostering harmony, among the various ethnic groups, among the various religious groups in our communities. I would dare say, Mr. Speaker, there is probably going to be more challenges in that respect as the years go by, as the world gets smaller, and as more people come to Canada from many distant lands.

Mr. Speaker, I know the remarks that I have put on the record today are by and large I would believe supported by the major organizations concerned with education in the province today. I believe that without question these matters are debated at the various conventions, have been debated I think almost every year at the conventions of the school teachers, The Manitoba Teachers' Society, and also certainly at the various meetings of the school trustees. There are various resolutions passed.

I note one submission referred to the Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Derkach) by The Manitoba Teachers' Society, which they do every year, a major submission based on the resolutions from their 1989 annual general meeting. This was tabled or provided to the Minister. It is dated September 1989, and specific reference is made to the question of private schools. They have various critical comments to make about this. They have had news conferences on this matter.

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Mr. Speaker, I am confident that my remarks and the position of our Party support the position of the majority of teachers in Manitoba and indeed in The Manitoba Teachers' Society therefore. I am sure we are supported in our views by the school trustees because indeed they have, more eloquently than I, put their concerns on the record.

Mr. Speaker, we are opposed to the direction that this Bill is taking us. We do not agree with the two-tier system of elitist education, particularly funding of private schools in the province, the non-religious private schools. We believe that there is an accommodation that could be made such as has been made in the City of Brandon where the Catholic schools have fitted very nicely, very well, in harmony into the public school system. This has been in existence for at least, I would say, between 15 and 20 years, and it seems to have worked very well.

There is a lesson to be learned there, and maybe that is some workable compromise that enables certain schools, as in this example, Catholic schools, to survive and maintain a good quality, but at the same time does not undermine the public school system as we know it. The last thing we need is to allow the public school system to be eroded into a dual setup, into a separate school setup.

Mr. Speaker, I put a few remarks on the record that we have with this Bill. One other comment I wanted to make was, I was mainly talking about section—

An Honourable Member: You cannot refer to sections.

Mr. Evans: I cannot refer to sections. I am reminded of another point in the Bill and that is where now the Minister may make a grant to just about any organization, because we have struck out the reference to school division or school district. That is a pretty sweeping revision. There is no mention of a private school here, but I am sure what this does is give the Minister authority now to do that without being illegal in the process, not that he wanted to break the Act or anything like that, or was not well meaning and so on, but nevertheless it must have been in contravention of the legislation or else this particular subsection would not be presented to us.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there is reference elsewhere in the Bill to the welfare of pupils enrolled at the private school. It seems to me that the Government has a responsibility here to be more concerned than it has been in the past about the welfare of pupils enrolled in private schools. Indeed there is a role here, not only for the Minister of Education (Mr. Derkach) but also the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Oleson), to have them intervene if necessary, where necessary. This is what I was talking about earlier, the need to have adequate standards and the need to have adequate auditing to ensure that the rights of the students are not being violated.

In effect, Mr. Speaker, this subsection—I guess I am not supposed to read Subsection 4(3)—but there is this reference that gives the Minister the right to provide grants to just about anybody he so chooses. We are

going to oppose this legislation. I look forward to the presentations that will be made in committee. I am convinced that the bulk of the briefs will support the position that has been taken by myself today and other Members of the New Democratic Party. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move, seconded by the Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman), that debate be adjourned.

MOTION presented and carried.

BILL NO. 56—THE WORKERS COMPENSATION AMENDMENT ACT (2)

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Consumer and Co-operative Affairs (Mr. Connery), Bill No. 56, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act (2); Loi no 2 modifiant la Loi sur les accidents du travail, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), who has 20 minutes remaining. Stand.

Is there leave that this matter remaining standing? Agreed.

BILL NO. 84—THE WASTE REDUCTION AND PREVENTION AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS ACT

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Environment (Mr. Cummings), Bill No. 84, The Waste Reduction and Prevention and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi sur la réduction du volume et de la production des déchets et modifications corrélatives, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Dauphin, the Honourable Member for Dauphin.

* (1540)

Mr. John Plohman (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I take great pleasure in participating in the debate on Bill 84, a waste reduction Bill, The Waste Reduction and Prevention and Consequential Amendments Act. It has a fancy title, but as we shall see, and as many people have pointed out before me, many of my colleagues, this Bill really has very little substance in terms of action that the Government will in fact take. It is, therefore, a lot of fluff, on a very important issue that we all should be more aware of as days and months pass. We see the impact of the tremendous amount of waste and garbage that is affecting people all over the world.

In other countries, as well as in Canada, you point to some glaring examples where mismanagement of waste has caused environmental catastrophes. The one in Ontario with the 12 million burning tires is just one example where we see the consequences of not handling waste in a prudent way, in a way that is consistent with placing the environment as a primary concern.

We do have an epidemic of garbage. I hesitate to speak on this Bill for fear that it may be called a garbage

speech. In fact, that is what it will be. I know Members will resist making comments on that because it does leave it open to comments.

However, I think that the Bill starts off well in dealing with this subject. It identifies, in a whereas section, and in purposes and definitions, it identifies the problem, and of course that is good because then there is some recognition that we do have a serious problem. It talks about the fact that waste is a threat to our environment, varying of course in different jurisdictions, it certainly is a threat, that action is required to reduce this threat, that all Governments and Government agencies and individuals are responsible for this potential action, for taking action to reduce the impact of waste. Of course all people are responsible for sharing in the cost of reducing waste in our society. Those are all very good things.

Under the Powers of the Minister, the Bill starts to become a bit more ambiguous. We go to the powers of the Minister. He simply is going to consult, he is going to encourage, he is going to monitor, he is going to undertake by means of grants, he is going to cause the preparation, he is going to enter into agreements.

There is nothing too substantive in terms of specifics that he is actually going to undertake to reduce waste in our society. I think this has been well acknowledged by my colleagues when we looked at this Bill in caucus and reviewed it. The principles of it no one can disagree with. We certainly therefore do not speak against the principles in this Bill at all. What we do speak against is the lack of action in this Bill, the fact that the Government has chosen to do some window dressing essentially with this Bill, because it sets out all its action in regulation.

It goes through to give powers to the Minister in terms of, as I mentioned, ambiguous terms, and then it says that all of the action statements would be carried out in regulation. For example in one section they are talking about deposits and assessment. Assessments, it states that as their contribution towards the cost of waste reduction, prevention consumers shall pay deposits and handling fees to producers on such products and materials in such amounts, at such times and in such a manner as may be prescribed in regulation. It sets no rates. It sets no targets, even initial rates that could be identified or the kinds of products that would in fact have a fee levied on them. They are not identified whatsoever.

Then it even goes further in its ambiguity by enshrining in the legislation the principle that all of us can agree with. It says that the Minister shall consult, undertake public consultation and seek advice and recommendations from the public regarding the proposed regulation. That is just to make sure that it takes an awful long time to get them in place. Naturally the consultation should have taken place before the Bill was even introduced. The consultation should have taken place in developing the Bill.

Just as The Environment Act that was developed by the previous Government, and my colleague the Member for Radisson spent a great deal of time on the issues of the environment, as he led that Bill he

undertook a great deal of consultation in developing that Bill throughout the province. When it was brought in it was a consensus Bill. Basically it was not what the environmentalists wanted, to the extent that they wanted it, and it was not as lenient as perhaps some others would have liked it to be, but it was a consensus of moderate, although leading, breaking new ground, moderately progressive in terms of breaking new ground, legislation for this province. It came about as a result of all the consultations. The regulations and action statements were developed as a result of that consultation.

What this Bill does, it simply says that the regulations are going to be developed by consultation some time in the future. It does not spell out what kind of action will be undertaken, so really we have nothing concrete, nothing of substance in this Bill that all of us could take out, or even the Government, though they will be able to make a great deal of, well, certainly some moderate I would think political hay out of this Bill, saying that they are so concerned about waste reduction they brought in a Bill in the House.

They are not going to be able to define what they want to do because they do not know what they want to do or if they want to do anything. Therefore, there is going to be as little substance as possible that the public, as they become informed, will become aware that this Government is not undertaking any action of substance on this issue.

What I see in this Bill then is a long drawn-out process perhaps to undertake some method of reducing reduction at some time in the future through some methods that are not defined, and therefore we would chastise the Government on this point. I think it is a legitimate critique of the Bill, and in fact it then becomes debatable whether in fact bringing in a Bill of this type is serving any useful purpose other than public relations and window-dressing. I think that is something that the Government has to wrestle with insofar as whether they should be taking this back and developing more specific steps before they bring a Bill into the House to ask the Legislature to pass. I put that forward for the Members of the Government.

At the same time I said earlier, and I would say again, that we find no difficulty with the principles of this Bill. Of course, everyone I think can agree that waste is becoming a greater and greater global problem. It is threatening the environment in many different aspects throughout the world and in fact could lead to the overall destruction of humankind on this world if it is not controlled and if it is not dealt with over a period of time.

In the past, we always thought that, well, yes, there is a problem with waste. There is a problem in the world but it is not really a big problem. It is not that pressing. It is not something that is going to really hurt us; it is not really going to really affect us for a long time. I mean, there is a lot of place to bury plastic diapers out there, is there not, a lot of landfill sites. It can go on forever. Then we start to find out in some highly populated areas that in fact they cannot find a place to put them any more. They have used all the available landfill sites, and they cannot find any others. They are

starting to look at proper incineration that is not going to result in polluting the atmosphere in getting rid of these types of products, which are not biodegradable and which do not deteriorate for many, many hundreds of years. So it takes an enormously long time for the Earth to clean itself of the wastes, or the plastic wastes particularly, that human civilization is placing upon this Earth.

So then we have to ask: Is the Minister of Environment (Mr. Cummings) serious about this? Is his Government serious about it to the extent that they will in fact put a charge on disposable diapers? Are they going to do that? Is that the action or are they going to consult first, or are they going to actually take some action on disposable diapers, for example? Are they going to put a charge on them so that people are encouraged to turn them into recycled depots or discouraged from purchasing them, going to reusable diapers such as cloth diapers, for example? Are they going to encourage people to go back to reusable diapers as opposed to the throw-away disposable diapers which are polluting our environment?

There is no mention of the action that the Government is intending to take on specific matters. I do not say that they should identify every product in the Bill, but they could have identified some of the major offenders and some of the types of actions, specific actions, that they will take to address them in this Bill.

Now another one that they might look at because of the serious problem that we have just become aware of in Ontario is the matter of used tires. Now should there not be a charge on tires so that they would be returned and there would in fact be commercial operations recycling tires to the extent that they are being discarded in our society? They obviously are not doing that to that extent or else we would not have vast caches of them, some 12 million in one location in Ontario.

* (1550)

They are laying there in that field waiting for an accident to happen, which did happen. Perhaps maybe it was not even an accident. I do not know, but in fact a major, major fire, not only a fire, but the impact of the pollutants resulting from that fire are not even known at this time in terms of the acid rain that they may cause and the other impacts on the people who live in the vicinity, and ultimately all of the atmosphere of the earth which is affected through cumulative amounts as these things take place throughout the world. So it is very difficult at this particular time to actually quantify how much an individual disaster like that affects the health of our environment globally, but it does take its toll. It does affect the ozone layer as more and more of us are becoming aware through scientific work that is being undertaken. So we are risking this beautiful planet.

You know, I happened to watch a story, the "Challenger" last night, a movie. Some of the astronauts talked about the beauty of the earth when seen from space and how vulnerable it looks, no borders on that beautiful earth. The fact is that it is perhaps one of a

kind in the universe. We have been blessed with the opportunity of living on this earth, and we should be protecting it. We lose sight of that in our own miniature worlds on this earth.

Yet if we could see it globally, we could see how vulnerable that world is that we all share. I think each of us would be committed environmentalists, working with all of our energy towards ensuring that environment is protected for future generations so our children and grandchildren will in fact inherit a cleaner environment than we inherited from our parents and grandparents, cleaner, not just as clean, but cleaner. In other words, begin to reverse the process of pollution of our environment. That is what we have to set as our goal, as legislators, as Governments, and as just members of the public. We have to set those kinds of goals for ourselves and work actively to do our part to ensure that we reverse that trend of growing amounts of waste and the kinds of disasters that occurred in Ontario with the 12 million tires and the effect that is having on our environment.

Even though we cannot measure it on a day-to-day basis, we know that it is gradually having its impact on the air that we breathe, and it will impact on our health through disease that will be growing upon us as the environment is being more polluted by people and by the actions of people.

So I see some comments from the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) and some snickers on the faces of some of the Members across the way. I think that they may find some parts of this issue humorous, but I hope that they are taking a very serious look at what happens and that is reflected in more than what we see in Bill 84, The Waste Reduction and Prevention and Consequential Amendment Act. It is a nice term, nice title, a nice name, but no substance in it, and that -(interjection)- well, the Minister of Co-operative, Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Connery), talks about, what did we do.

Now the fact is that there becomes a time and place for everything. The Environment Act was a major initiative that we undertook. It took years to do the consultation and to enact that legislation because it was very far-reaching and complicated, but we did that, and that gave this Government something to build on. We move step by step. Every issue has its day and the awareness of the public becomes greater on certain issues as the years go by, and then Governments decide action is necessary.

So every kind of action dealing with important areas of our environment, for example, has its time. I hazard to say that this issue of waste reduction of the pollution of our environment through disposal of things, such as, diapers, tires, cans, bottles and all kinds of litter, is one that is growing in importance to the public at this particular time, even as I speak.

I think it is one that the Government realizes is growing in importance, and that is why they bring in this kind of Act, but in their haste to bring forward this Act, in order to ride the crest of public opinion, and to get some accolades, they have neglected to spell out any specific action that they are going to take. They

do not even ensure that the Minister, within the powers that he has, has to undertake that action. Everything is set by regulation.

Even though the Government does realize this is an important issue, they are not in this Act demonstrating their primary commitment to reducing the hazards of waste in our society. They are simply saying in this Bill—and it is better than nothing, and I have to acknowledge that—we recognize that the public recognizes that there is a problem out there. We want to ensure that we are in a position to tell the public that we are concerned about it too. The fact is, actions are what count, and their actions are not spelled out in the Bill, so we do not know if in fact the Government has actions to undertake pursuant to this Bill.

* (1600)

Will it in fact put deposits on disposable diapers? Will it undertake a public education campaign to education and increase awareness of the public as to the importance of reducing the wastes from their daily living, from their households or from their places of work? Will they undertake that kind of action? I do not believe that this Government has any plans to do that kind of thing at this time. I think what they want to do is talk about this issue a little bit. It says that right on the Bill. They are going to consult in developing regulations with the public, so that they can keep the issue at the forefront of public discussion. It looks like they are concerned, so it is good politically for them, but there is no action spelled out. In the short term, they do not need action because they are gearing for the short term here, for a few months to a year, so they can get themselves by an election hopefully and perhaps be looked on favourably by the public, so that they can go and have another shot at it.

I have to say to them that these things have a way of catching up with them. If indeed they are fortunate enough to be re-elected, to have a minority again or a majority Government, before that time is up they would in fact have to ensure that there is action here, because the Opposition would very easily be able to tear them apart with only words but no action on something as important as waste reduction.

It might not happen. It may not have its effect within the next year or so. It would be very difficult for opposition Parties and individuals to make a strong case that the Government does not have a commitment just based on this Bill. I think over a period of time that will become evident, unless the Government truly does take action pursuant to the passage of this Bill and in fact brings in a Bill with more teeth and more evidence of the actions that they intend to take.

Our Party has undertaken an effort on this issue as well with the environment task force that was co-chaired by Brian Pannell and by Harry Harapiak, my colleague. We undertook an environmental task force that travelled throughout the province, consulted on the issues of the environment, broad, wide-ranging, from parks to forestry to the air to hydro development to energy and recycling and so on, many different areas covered by that. Of course all of those reports are being developed

and written at this particular time and will form the basis for New Democratic policy at some time in the future. I believe that it will be the most encompassing policy, the most far-reaching and advanced policy that any Party or Government has ever developed. I am very proud with the steps that we have taken in that regard.

This Government is far behind. They are going to find themselves, as with all good progressive legislation, reacting to the suggestions of the New Democrats in this House and in this country, just as Governments in the past have reacted to the CCF and members of the social democratic movement who have had the foresight to push forward with ideas on Unemployment Insurance, pensions, Medicare, and things like that, in the past, and Liberal and Conservative Governments then have enacted some of those principles and programs.

I believe they will respond to the kinds of suggestions that we bring forward. Unfortunately, it will not be in the form that is required, with the teeth that are required, to in fact have the kind of impact of society that it should have, unless a New Democratic Government in fact brings it forward themselves and is in a position to do so by being in Government.

It will be a watered-down version that gets them by, so to speak, as they jump on the bandwagon of a good idea. Since they are not committed principally to the concepts they then will not undertake them to the extent that they should, mainly because a lot of the corporations—well, it goes back even to the FOS issue, because the corporations and big business are pulling the Conservative and Liberal strings, and they are doing that on the environment too.

They make it difficult for a Conservative or Liberal Government to bring in meaningful action to reduce waste and pollution, because it costs money. Those corporations do not like measures and regulations put in by Government that cost them money. Conservative and Liberal politicians tend to shy away from those kinds of actions, because they do not want to offend those who pay the tune, pay the money, who fill the purses for the election. That is why we do not see the kind of meaningful action by Conservative and Liberal Governments in this country that is required to, in fact, make a difference and fundamentally change the way people do things, and polluting is one of those.

So I do not expect that we are going to see an awful lot of action from a Conservative Government, because they will not want to undertake action that will cost their corporate friends a lot of money. So they will tend to study things and to talk about them a lot but not undertake any meaningful action, just as the delay in implementing The Environment Act insofar as its relevance to the City of Winnipeg. They do not do it, because they know it is going to cost money for some of their friends.

I think that is a fundamental problem with achieving meaningful action. It is that kind of a problem that puts money ahead of the environment, that puts profits ahead of the environment, that is going to in fact lead to the destruction, in a lot of ways, of our environment and the beauty of our earth.

It is commercial exploitation that is put before the environment and the health of the people who live and work in that environment. We see that with the destruction of the rain forests and the industrial development, the agricultural development in South America. We see that with the exploitation even in eastern European countries now as the Iron Curtain comes down. We see the mess that some of those communist Governments, not social democratic Governments, communist Governments, have left in Romania, in Czechoslovakia where many of the forests have been destroyed through pollution. We see that happening.

In real social democratic areas of the world, countries like Finland, countries like Sweden, we see the environment being paramount. The primary concern is the protection of the environment. I think that the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) could well do to do a little bit of reading to understand the difference between social democratic Governments in this world and communist Governments.—(interjection)—The Member for Interlake (Mr. Uruski) has a good point, perhaps, and he is probably right. The Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) does not know how to read. Therefore if he can read the words, he cannot understand them anyway. That is his primary problem. He makes statements that reflect such ignorance of the issues, when he talks about those communist countries who have contributed to the destruction of the environment, not only in their own country through the use of coal burning generations for example, which have lead to acid rain, destruction of wide areas of the environment, of the forests in those areas.

I have to say that it is about time that those regimes have been put to an end. I am pleased to see, and I am hopeful, that the social democratic movement will replace the communists in those countries and that they will put the environment as their primary concern such as we see evidenced in a Bill that would reduce waste in Manitoba.

I think it would be saying too much that this Government, as I have said in my speech today, is putting the environment as the primary concern. What they are doing here is window dressing with a Bill that has no strong actions attached to it. It is simply nice words on paper with no actions undertaken. That is unfortunate, because again I think it is evident of the Conservative Government's rhetoric and desire to get ahead and be ahead of the issues insofar as the public is concerned, because they know the public is becoming more and more aware of environmental concerns. They want to get on that bandwagon, but they do not want to undertake concrete action, so they have stayed away from it in this Bill. What we have is some window dressing.

* (1610)

Our job will be either to replace them or to ensure that they take action, meaningful action, as a result of this first step on their part. I have to say that I give them some degree of credit for at least recognizing—(interjection)—about 5 percent—that there is an issue out there. That is the first step toward concrete action

in the future. They could have done it. They have not done it with this Bill, but they could have done it. It is one small step forward for human kind in this province, and hopefully with meaningful action we will see larger steps being taken in the future and that we will be at the forefront of waste reduction not only in this country, but in the world.

If we are not, and if we do not take our responsibilities as legislators in this province seriously with regard to the environment, we are soon going to lose what we were given, what we inherited and we are going to leave a terrible legacy for our children and grandchildren. We are going to put them in a spot that they cannot get out of, because it will be too late. We have to all recognize that responsibility and ensure that meaningful action results from this particular Bill, that we all do our part to clean up the mess that is out there.

The only way that is going to happen in a meaningful way is if there is a deposit legislation in place in this province that ensures every individual pays at the outset and can get a deposit back when they turn in their used article. Only then—and I hate to say that because it is based on money, but human nature being what it is there are going to be a lot of people who will attempt to do, on a volunteer basis, what they can to clean up the mess, but it is not going to do the job until there is some financial benefit to doing it.

That is a sad statement insofar as human nature is concerned. It would be nice that everyone would feel so committed to our environment and to the future of our world that they would want to do this without getting any financial benefit from it. Only if they can receive money back for returning those used articles, those tires, those bottles, those cans, will they in fact endeavour to do that.

I was looking along some of our main highways last summer with my son, Robbie, just stopping along with a garbage bag. We walked for a little while just to pick up a few cans and bottles, and there is an enormous amount along our highways. It is just amazing within a mile how you can get a great big garbage bag. All you get for that is a couple of bucks, because they are just about worthless, aluminum cans. They are just about worthless right now unless we put a deposit on them so that people will do it.

An Honourable Member: John, that could be your future job.

Mr. Plohman: I think—well, I was good at it. The Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) says that might be my future job. I want to tell him I had lots of practice. I grew up on a farm where we had to pick our stones. I had a lot of practice doing that. I do not mind doing any kind of thing for a living, so I know I will never be starving. I want to tell the Minister of Northern Affairs that.

A couple of years ago we started the 4-H program for cleaning up the highways—

An Honourable Member: It was a good program.

Mr. Plozman: Yes, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Findlay) says it is a good program. I think it is a good program and it should be expanded.

Again, it was a money-making venture for the 4-H Clubs. It enabled them to make a few dollars and at the same time clean up our roads and appreciate our environment, the importance of keeping it clean. I think that program can continue to grow in the years ahead. I hope that the Government, the Ministers of Highways (Mr. Albert Driedger), Agriculture (Mr. Findlay) and perhaps Education (Mr. Derkach), who are working on that program, will in the future expand it. They advertised it enough. I am sure through the 4-H movement it has been well advertised so that in fact it would continue to grow in the years ahead so that some of the mess along our highways will in fact be cleaned up.

As I said, in the few examples that I have where we actually took a walk down the ditches on some of our main highways, I was truly appalled by the amount of plastic and aluminum waste along those highways in those ditches. I would hope that through a deposit system that would be cleaned up almost instantly as various groups, organizations sought to raise some money for example—individuals who went after a few extra spending dollars, children who wanted to make a few dollars to buy themselves a new Nintendo game or something like that. We would find that would be cleaned up in no time at all because there would be a deposit on those cans and those plastic bottles. They would be able to get some meaningful money back or some return for the efforts that it takes to undertake the picking up and cleaning of that waste before it is turned in for recycling. We have to make those efforts.

We have to get this Government to move forward from the Bill with lots of words to a Bill with action. We will in this Opposition Party be endeavouring to pursue this issue and to persuade the Government to move forward. As long as we are in Opposition we certainly will make this a priority upon getting into Government, and I can make that campaign promise today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say a few words with respect to this legislation that we are prepared to let go to committee. I want to indicate and echo some of the comments made by my colleague the Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plozman) in terms of the intent.

I note that there is a fair bit of what I would consider nervousness within the Executive Council of Government about putting forward what I would consider the mechanisms for the enforcement and the workings of this legislation. There is a fair bit of work going on, Mr. Speaker, in the whole area of waste management. I give the Government credit in proceeding with some of the work that had been undertaken while we were in office.

I want to say, I had the privilege of attending a conference in Arborg two weeks ago dealing with sustainable development, our relationships around the world as to what our responsibilities are as inhabitants

of this planet Earth. What our responsibilities are to one another as citizens around the world and especially to those nations in what is considered the Third World, the Africas in particular, the Asias, the countries of what I would say western Asia in India, that we do have a major role to play in assisting those people in making, I guess, what could sensibly be put into laymen's terms a decent life for themselves, but there appears to be, Mr. Speaker, a very great reluctance of citizens on this side of the ocean to allow their Governments to make the necessary kinds of financial commitments to those citizens. This was extensively discussed at the conference that I attended and was addressed at great length by our former ambassador to the United Nations, the Honourable Stephen Lewis, who spoke on our responsibility and our relationships to peoples of the Third World.

* (1620)

(Mr. Gilleshammer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

As well, Mr. Acting Speaker, there were workshops at that conference that dealt with the very practical issues that face us more locally in our own areas as to the management of garbage, in particular in the way we view our role as consumers, in the way we are able to or not able to make the necessary, not only judgments, but take the necessary actions as consumers in recycling or not recycling, because there is very little—and I say this in the sense that we are in the unfortunate position in one respect I think in western Canada of not having the industry base to be able to handle some of the recycling that many people wish to undertake. Industry has not yet responded really to the challenge, and it will be a challenge to all of us to move this along.

For example, Mr. Acting Speaker, there was considerable discussion on the new process of, I think the new group is called ACRE, that is being set up by Environment and the Department of Agriculture, putting together the \$1 per container fee for agricultural chemical containers. It was viewed as a good plan, but comments that came from farmers who attended the conference said that the likelihood of that surcharge or that amount of money will not be enough. There seemed to be a thinking at the conference that if you are going to make it worthwhile, if you want those containers to be moved, slap on a \$10 fee on a container or \$5 or \$10.00. In fact at that conference, the comments that came from farmers who attended - (interjection)- Refundable. Slap on a \$10 refundable fee of those containers and then you will get rid of those containers.- (interjection)-

Mr. Acting Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Findlay) from his chair says, why not reusable containers? In my mind, Sir, there is no rationale for not reusing those containers. In fact the plastic ones, although they recommend that they not be reused, are really the type that if you rinse them three or four times, pack them away and give them back, but quite frankly what is occurring now, and I think it is a good move, is those drum containers that are there. The technology and the amount of equipment that farmers will have to now start purchasing, in order to make the necessary

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transfer from large containers to the other, will be a cost there, but clearly, from an environmental point of view, I think it is the right direction.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I just go back to one area that I recall as a young lad when there were weddings in the rural areas. The beer that was served at those weddings did not come in bottles, it came in kegs. It was compressed, and we served it in pitchers. The kegs were returned and there was a lot less in terms of environmental handling—you had all the plastic glasses that you are now throwing away, the handling of all those bottles. Those containers themselves were such that it did make sense, and it was environmentally sound, Sir.

I was indicating earlier that our industries within our own province have not really taken up what I would say the slack or the challenge in terms of making sure that the products that can be recycled are being taken in. I know a number of years ago I attempted to sell glass. Glass was being taken. I think one or two cents a pound was the amount that was being paid at the time. Fortunately, or unfortunately, we were making trips into Winnipeg and we would gather a half-ton load. We were picking some other goods up with our truck in the city so it was a matter of convenience, but in terms of making it worthwhile, in terms of the recycling of material, it really was not for the majority of people.

Mr. Acting Speaker, in terms of paper, in terms of glass, although there are products now being taken, there is still a lot of work to be done on the consumer packaging side. There are many tins or many containers now that are made of a paper-metal mixture, very difficult to recycle those kinds of containers. You have the frozen juice cans, the body of the can is paper and the top and the bottom is metal on those containers. That is a difficult product to recycle.

The worst one, or at least probably the greatest hazard, or at least the greatest product that families are faced with, is this whole question of the diapers; young families with the disposable diapers. I am certain that they just add to mountains and mountains on the compost—they cannot even compost—but on the garbage heap. You get into situations after awhile, for example, that we have been faced with right here in the City of Winnipeg, off Lagimodiere and Panet Road, where the dump that was there 20 years ago was covered over, became an industrial site, and lo and behold what occurred? Methane gas. A number of commercial establishments basically had to close their doors, pack up and move because it was just too dangerous to build and maintain any kind of an industry in those areas.

That is the kind of situations that we will be faced with more and more as the pressure on land increases and really quite naturally so, Mr. Acting Speaker. Can you imagine taking out of production Class 1 or Class 2 land and turning it into a garbage dump? I mean of all the really in the long term insane situations that we as a society do is to take some of our most productive land that we have on the Prairies and turn it into a garbage dump.

So while the legislation is the framework for action, I am somewhat skeptical as to the intent of the

Government as to how they intend to proceed and with what haste. I am not sure of the commitment of this Government in this whole area.—(interjection)—I am not at all enamoured with the commitment of the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) and his colleagues in this whole area, but only time will tell as to what actions they are prepared to undertake into this area.

Mr. Acting Speaker, no one argues against the principle and the intent of the legislation. It is what comes after in terms of the regulations is really the proof of the pudding, sir. We will allow this Bill to go to committee.

QUESTION put, MOTION carried.

BILL NO. 50—THE WILLS AMENDMENT ACT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Harold Gilleshammer): On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. McCrae), The Wills Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les testaments, standing in the name of the Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis), who has three minutes.

* (1630)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (St. Johns): Mr. Acting Speaker, I am pleased to be able to conclude my remarks on Bill No. 50, The Wills Amendment Act. As I said in my previous remarks, it is impossible to look at this Bill and discuss its merits and consider amendments in isolation of the total family law legislative package that we have before us. As I said earlier, there must be in all pieces of legislation pertaining to family law before us a commitment to the basic principles as enunciated by many groups in our society, particularly by women's organizations in Manitoba. It is our belief that each and every one of the Bills before us in this family law package must be consistent with those principles, the principles that marriage is a partnership of equals and by implication, that a surviving spouse has the right to at least one-half of the estate at time of a spouse's death.

The legislation must also achieve a very basic objective and that is to ensure that these new laws and the amendments to these laws will bring us in line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which guarantee equality between men and women. Our legislation must be amended to ensure that all laws in this area are free from discrimination based on sex. As I have said on many occasions, this includes blatant discrimination, and it includes laws which have an unequal or disparate impact on one sex.

It is clear that our succession laws presently have a disparate impact on one sex, that they discriminate against women on the basis of sex, and our legislation must correct that problem. There are problems currently in all of these Bills with respect to those objectives. We will be working very actively to ensure that they are amended to live up to those basic principles. That includes The Wills Act. It includes The Dower Act, as we have already mentioned and we will be discussing

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those amendments further in committee. Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Mr. Acting Speaker, I will be speaking to this Bill. The Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) in whose name the Bill stands has indicated—I think it is adjourned in his name, Bill No. 50? I am sorry. It was the following Bill that I was referring to.

I wish to address a few remarks to Bill 50, The Wills Act, Sir, and indicate that while in general the few amendments that are being proposed by the Attorney General are acceptable, some amendments that have been proposed are not acceptable in fact because, Mr. Acting Speaker, it is clear that Bill 50 is a companion Bill to Bill 49, The Dower Amendment Act. Changes that really should have taken place in The Dower Act have not so been done, and therefore the discrimination that my colleague, the Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis), speaks about is continuing.

It is a discrimination against women in our society, Sir. The language in the legislation still maintains that systemic discrimination of hers, his, his wife, her husband and the like. It does not treat men and women equally, Sir. These amendments that are being proposed in Bill No. 50, Mr. Acting Speaker, draw and raise some concerns for myself. Specifically there is a particular section and that is Section 5 in the Bill, Sir, that talks about the leaving of an estate to a living child that was conceived before the testator's death.

Mr. Acting Speaker, a definition of this issue is not clear in the legislation. It says in the legislation, Sir, that if the child was born living thereafter shall be considered alive at the testator's death. It is a very unclear amendment to a situation that the Attorney General is trying to correct, but one of the major deficiencies of this legislation is that it has not yet been brought up to date to recognize The Marital Property Act in which property is to be shared equally as between spouses. That change has not been made in this area in The Wills Amendment Act. Without that, those changes, Mr. Acting Speaker, this legislation is in fact deficient.

I would urge that Members of the Government, if they are bringing forward—and especially the Attorney General. Either he has not questioned his officials in this whole area or what the difficulty is to: do the necessary corrections of gender parity within the legislation to make gender parity a major commitment of the Government to have this legislation updated; and secondly, to make sure that the provisions of The Marital Property Act are in fact reflected in these Bills, The Wills Act and The Dower Amendment Act.

So, while we will allow this Bill to go to committee, we raise these concerns, because clearly the issues that are still outstanding as a result of the deficiencies in this legislation are not going to be dealt with by these amendments, and we will be looking for the Attorney General to bring forward some further amendments to these Bills as we discuss them in committee.

QUESTION put, MOTION carried.

BILL NO. 51—THE MARITAL PROPERTY AMENDMENT ACT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gilleshammer): On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. McCrae), The Marital Property Amendment Act, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton). The Honourable Member for St. Johns.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (St. Johns): If I could speak and leave the Bill standing in the Member for Thompson's name?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gilleshammer): Is there leave to do so? Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Acting Speaker, I am pleased to be able to begin the debate on Bill 51, The Marital Property Amendment Act. It is also a part of this package introduced by the Minister of Justice, the family law legislative package for 1989.

As I said at the outset of my remarks for both Bill 49 and Bill 50, we are certainly supportive of changes to our succession legislation and family property legislation here in Manitoba. We are supportive of any efforts to update these laws to bring them in line with the equality provisions of the Charter, and we are anxious to see these matters addressed fully by the Legislature and provision made for ample community input at the committee stage.

It is our view that if one is going to open up this entire area through the introduction of six Bills amending our family law legislation in Manitoba then one must do it in the most complete way possible, that it makes no sense to do it on a disjointed ad hoc basis. We are very concerned that the process leading up to the drafting of these Bills and the presentation of this legislative package to the Chamber did not include a thorough community consultation process.

* (1640)

As I mentioned earlier we were very concerned that this Government did not decide to move with the plan, to act on the plan as established by the previous administration to have a full and open public consultation process prior to the drafting of legislation and the introduction of Bills so that we would ensure that legislation reflected the most current and up-to-date expression of needs and interest from our community.

Unfortunately this Government did not decide to move with the White Paper on Family Law as we had planned and as a result the legislation before us has many weaknesses, is not up to date with the needs of our community, does not reflect the equality provisions as outlined both in the Charter and on a broader basis as well, Mr. Acting Speaker.

This legislation that we are now dealing with, The Marital Property Amendment Act certainly fits into this category of incomplete legislation and in our view it is a shame that we have opened up this whole area of

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marital property without dealing with some of the bigger outstanding matters with respect to the division of property.

Bill 51, the preamble of Bill 51, The Marital Property Act, states that marriage is an institution of shared responsibilities and obligations between parties recognized as enjoying equal rights and further that it is advisable to provide for a presumption in the event of the breakdown of the marriage of equal sharing of the family and commercial assets of the parties to the marriage acquired by them during the marriage.

As the Charter of Rights Coalition has said, it is clear therefore that the Act provides for equal sharing of assets after, but not during the marriage. It provides for the equal sharing of assets after the breakdown of marriage, but does not at all recognize the concept of community of property throughout a relationship. The Act further sets out how and under what circumstances property will be divided upon marriage breakdown.

Insofar as it goes, this Bill certainly makes an important step in the right direction. It is a short Bill. It makes only one amendment to the Act and this is a clarification of the right of the court to make an interim order under the Act pending disposition of the application for equalization of assets. This is an important amendment because it does afford protection to spouses in situations where there is lengthy and complicated accounting.

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

However, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity of addressing major concerns in this area has been overlooked. As I have mentioned in previous remarks, if this package of legislation had been framed in terms of a new and up-to-date and progressive model with respect to family law and succession matters, then we would have been looking at legislation framed around the concept of community of property. I will certainly be happy to review that whole notion of community property, as I touched on very briefly in previous discussion around this legislative package.

As I have mentioned to Members, there are certainly different approaches that can be taken. What is being presented in this piece of legislation, or upheld by lack of amendment to The Marital Property Act, is in effect deferred community of property. It is a concept that looks at the equal sharing of property when the marriage partnership is dissolved. It does not address the concept of community of property throughout the relationship. That concept, Mr. Speaker, of community of property, where matrimonial assets are shared immediately upon marriage, would be a more accurate reflection of the will of the people today, certainly an accurate response and a sensitive response to the requests and the work being presented by the women's movement in this province.

It is time that we, as legislators, listen to those voices and listen to the cries from women in our community to ensure that everything we do and everything we legislate reflects true equality during marriage, upon the breakdown of that marriage or upon death of one of the partners in that marriage relationship.

So I am advocating very strongly that we use the opportunity, since we have opened up this package, this major area, to not do it in a halfhearted way but to do it completely and comprehensively and progressively. I would urge Members on the Government side to seriously look at providing, through this legislative package, for a community of property regime in terms of it being the ideal way to go.

I see some of the Members on the Conservative benches nodding their heads. I hope that is a good sign that they are prepared to look seriously at the notion of community of property and to come forward when we get to committee stage with serious and major amendments to this package of Bills, which will actually put in place and entrench that notion of community of property.

I hope the Members realize that it will change things in this province in a very dramatic way. It will be a very significant move on the part of the Manitoba Legislature to, for once, fully entrench in law the wishes of many people in our community, certainly the wishes of women in our community and respect the need to embark in the direction of the ideal property regime, that of course being the full and immediate community of property regime.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the position of community of property has been enunciated very clearly, documented very clearly, elaborated upon very comprehensively by many in our society, but particularly the Charter of Rights Coalition, who as Members well know has put together, have basically analyzed the major pieces of legislation in our province and done an audit in effect on legislation and statutes in the Province of Manitoba and come up with two very sizable documents entitled The Charter Compliance, Selected Provincial Statutes, Part 1 and Part 2, with a very detailed summary of legislation and what changes need to be made in order to bring that legislation in line with the Charter.

I refer Members to many parts of that document, but specifically in Part 1, page 2.34, where the Charter of Rights Coalition states that when property legislation seeks largely to protect and balance the rights of spouses to share in property upon marriage breakdown, succession legislation seeks to protect and preserve the rights of survivors. The competing claims may be quite different in the event of the death of one spouse and in the event of a marital breakdown. CORC goes on to say, the major criticism of present succession legislation in Manitoba is that in many instances the legislation affords a widowed spouse rights which are inferior to the rights of spouses upon marriage breakdown. The situation is illogical and discriminatory and may lead to a number of challenges under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms unless steps are taken immediately to amend the relevant statutes.

* (1650)

Furthermore, CORC goes on to say, the proposals for reform which we make in the following discussion of succession legislation are based on the existing deferred sharing of property regime under The Marital Property Act. Listen carefully, Mr. Speaker. CORC also

says, in the event that The Marital Property Act is amended to provide for community of property regime as we have proposed, CORC states, further study of the succession legislation will be required.

I maintain, Mr. Speaker, that since it is only—one does not open up legislation on a regular basis to deal with it in a piecemeal way. One opens up legislation with a view to addressing the majority of concerns in society with respect to those areas of concern. It is on that basis that I would argue we need to seriously look at the question of community of property and ensure that regime is the framework for this entire package, which certainly would make for a much different set of legislative proposals before us. It certainly would have resulted in a much different package of family law Bills than the ones we are dealing with today. It is not too late however to consider that notion, to consider the community of property regime as the appropriate framework for all of these Bills and particularly The Marital Property Amendment Act.

It seems to me rather a waste of time and resources to be opening up The Marital Property Act to make one amendment. As it is a very brief Bill, as I have mentioned, and if I refer to the Minister of Justice's (Mr. McCrae) package, the description is equally brief. On page 43 of the Minister's package it states very briefly, the one amendment to The Marital Property Act would permit a judge to make an interim equalization payment or other interim orders under The Marital Property Act pending the disposition of the application for equalization.

It has one further paragraph, Mr. Speaker: This is necessary because of the lengthy delay involved in the more complicated applications for accounting and equalization. Some members of the Bench have pronounced interim orders pursuant to the existing Marital Property Act, but this amendment will clarify the jurisdiction to do so. As I have said, it is certainly a welcome change to this whole area. It is a much needed amendment, but in our view it is a shame that it stops there, that much more is required. Let us not let this opportunity pass by. As the Charter of Rights Coalition has stated in its analysis of this package, there are many areas not addressed in the proposed Marital Property Act.

Let me refer to those briefly, Mr. Speaker. The first point by the Charter of Rights Coalition is that under current legislation separated spouses have an equal share in assets owned by the spouses, but married spouses do not. Well, the Act, The Marital Property Act accords to spouses equal rights to the use and enjoyment of their marital home and family assets (an asset owned by two spouses or either of them and used for shelter, transportation, or for household, educational, recreational, social, or esthetic purposes). There is no right to share in ownership or management of assets until separation or divorce. That is one of the key points in terms of this debate. As I have said, it makes little sense to open up this whole area unless we are going to consider moving in the direction of community property so that assets are shared equally during marriage, not just upon marriage breakdown.

The Charter of Rights Coalition has elaborated on this point by saying a separating spouse is entitled to

an equal division of family assets and an equal sharing of commercial assets. Well, the Act appears to apply equally to married men and married women. When the economic realities of marriage are examined, the impact of the legislation on men and women is neither equal or neutral. The deferred sharing regime of The Marital Property Act impacts adversely on the non-owning spouse, usually the female spouse. The Act should be amended, as CORC states, to remedy this inequity by providing for automatic joint ownership by spouses during marriage of all family and commercial assets subject to a right to contract out by spousal agreement upon receiving independent legal advice. This would apply only to assets acquired during the marriage. Assets owned prior to marriage or gifts and inheritance would not be subject to joint ownership. Any appreciation in the value of such assets during the marriage would be jointly shared. If the Act were amended in this way, it would have an effect on all areas of succession legislation covered in this package of amendments.

That point, Mr. Speaker, is one that we certainly would like to hear, receive the comments from the Government benches on. It is a major suggestion being presented by the Charter of Rights Coalition and other women's groups in our society. It deserves serious consideration. I am sure all my colleagues, as well as those in the Liberal Opposition, would also want to have this debate take place. It is unfortunate that we could not have had this debate prior to the legislative package being presented through a community consultation process, a process which would have been enlightening for all of us and would have helped to frame this legislation and ensure that they were truly reflective of the community sentiment and spirit.

However, in the absence of that process I think it is imperative upon the Government of the Day to listen to these presentations being made, to call for a thorough discussion of these suggestions and to see whether or not it is possible to make the required amendments to this package, to make them consistent with the community of property regime, to bring them in line with the concept of equal division of assets in a marriage, not only upon the breakup of that marriage but right through the relationship.

Mr. Speaker, other significant areas have not been addressed in the proposed Marital Property Act. The Charter of Rights Coalition also points out that Section 9—when one looks at Section 9 of the Bill it provides that it does not apply to any asset that has already been shared equally between the spouses.

Now, as CORC points out, the courts have interpreted this to mean that any jointly owned real property may not be considered in an accounting under the Act. This necessitates an application for partition and/or sale under The Law of Property Act. It is recommended by CORC.

I think it deserves serious consideration by the Government that Section 9 be amended to state that the Act applies to all property jointly owned by spouses. In an accounting under the Act the court ought to be able to deal with all the assets, whether jointly owned or owned by one's spouse.

Another point raised by the community with respect to The Marital Property Act is the six-month limitation period for the commencement of an action upon the death of one's spouse. The recommendation coming from many in our community is that this should be extended to a minimum of one year to provide for a more reasonable period of time within which a widowed spouse may either settle her or his entitlement or commence an action.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the recommendation in terms of what is missing from this Bill but which needs to be addressed by the Members on the Conservative benches, who are listening intently, pertains to the comments I made at the outset of my remarks, and that is that The Married Women's Property Act should be abolished and amendments made to The Equality of Status Act, The Family Maintenance Act and The Marital Property Act.

Now, this was a point that has also then appeared in that discussion paper that was intended for circulation for input and feedback from the community. It never made it out to the community, because the Government of the Day decided to sit on it, let it gather dust and let it not see the light of day, a dreadful shame, Mr. Speaker. Considerable time and resources went into this discussion paper. In it there is a significant amendment made with respect to The Marital Property Act. I think it is regrettable that could not have been circulated for comment.

However, in the absence of that, let me suggest that the Government give serious consideration to the suggestions being made by the Charter of Rights Coalition and others that the Acts I have just referred to, The Equality of Status Act, The Family Maintenance Act and The Marital Property Act, be changed to cover provisions to The Equality of Status Act stating that a married person has a legal personality that is independent, separate and distinct from that of his or her spouse as if unmarried, that any differences between married men and women resulting from common-law rules or doctrines are abolished, and all laws in Manitoba shall apply equally to married men and married women; furthermore, that there be provision in The Family Maintenance Act so that either spouse may pledge credit of the other for necessities, and that there be provision in The Marital Property Act to enable spouses who separated prior to May 6, 1977, to bring an application for division of property.

These are some of the suggestions, Mr. Speaker, being made by groups like the Charter of Rights Coalition. They point to a clear area of neglect on the part of this Government when it opened up The Marital Property Amendment Act, when it chose to introduce this package of changes to our family law legislation in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am interrupting the proceedings according to the Rules. When this matter is again before the House, the Honourable Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis) will have 18 minutes remaining.

* (1700)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

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

COMMITTEE CHANGES

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, I have some committee changes. I move, seconded by the Member for Swan River (Mr. Burrell), that the Public Utilities and Natural Resources Committee be amended as follows: Downey for Helwer; and Ernst for Findlay.

Also I move, seconded by the Member for Swan River (Mr. Burrell), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Industrial Relations for the Tuesday, 8 p.m. sitting be amended as follows: Mitchelson for Gilleshammer.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed? (Agreed)

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

RES. NO. 36—VIA RAIL

Mr. Speaker: The resolution of the Honourable for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak), No. 36, VIA Rail. The Honourable Member for The Pas.

Mr. Harry Harapiak (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Interlake (Mr. Uruski), that

WHEREAS an effective and efficient national passenger rail system in Canada is a desirable form of transportation for many Canadians; and

WHEREAS a viable, modern, publicly supported transportation company is necessary to develop such a system; and

WHEREAS Manitoba historically has been a centre of the rail industry in Canada; and

WHEREAS over 600 VIA Rail employees live and work in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada said, in its report on passenger rail services, ". . . the federal Government has the responsibility to ensure that rail passenger services in Canada be retained, modernized and expanded as an important part of our national transportation system. To that end, it is recommended that the federal transportation spending priorities be reordered to put a greater emphasis on rail passenger services . . ."; and

WHEREAS the Mulroney Government, like its Liberal predecessor, has refused to provide VIA the necessary support to fully realize its potential to develop the kind of national passenger rail network that Canadians want and deserve.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba affirm its support for VIA Rail; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Assembly call upon the federal Government to live up to its original

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pledge to support VIA Rail, to abandon plans for further cuts to VIA's budget, and to provide the necessary resources to allow VIA to operate as a modern, effective transportation company, rather than a museum; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the federal Minister of Transport.

MOTION presented.

Mr. Harapiak: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and speak on this very important issue. I guess it is a little late, some of the decisions that have been made by the federal Government since this resolution was submitted last March. There have been many more cuts to VIA Rail since that time. So the transportation industry has taken much more of a beating than it did during the time this resolution was presented.

One of the Members spoke when I was first up and reading the resolution and said that we have a conflict of interest. I have to admit that I have a great love for VIA Rail, and I was also an employee of VIA Rail. I am on leave of absence from the CNR where I could possibly be an employee of VIA Rail again.

I think this is a very important issue to the whole transportation industry in Canada. I think when you look back at how our country was developed, the Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific played a very big part in bringing this country together as one. I think if some of the people would look back at some of that history they would have a greater appreciation as to why we need a strong transportation system at this time.

I think it is important that our trade was developed in the east, west directions. Not only our highways played a very important role in it, but our railroads played an extremely important role in not only transportation of goods but also the transportations of passengers. I know that during the depression years there were many people who were unable to pay for their transportation. They rode the rods and got to eastern Canada where there were employment opportunities. My father was one of those people. He rode the rods and went to Hamilton, Ontario, because he had heard from a friend of his that there was employment opportunity up there. He rode the rods to get to Hamilton and he did work there for many years. I guess because of that experience he also got to enjoy the railway, and he moved back to the West and went to work for the Canadian National and spent 47 years working with the Canadian National Railways. So it is history, transportation with the railroad has been a very big part of our family.

In later years, when I went to my first job in Sudbury, Ontario, I also travelled by the Canadian National to get to that work site in Sudbury, Ontario, and worked for International Nickel for many years. I still utilize VIA Rail at every opportunity I have to use the system. I think it is an extremely important transportation link.

I spent many years working in northern Manitoba with the passenger service. It was not VIA Rail in those days, but I enjoyed working in northern Manitoba with

the aboriginal peoples. The lines I worked on were on the Hudson Bay railway to Churchill. I also worked on a line to Sherridon, the Pukatawagan line. I enjoyed that immensely, and I think it would be a shame that those people lost that very important transportation link.

I think in some instances it is a matter of choice. If people have a choice of flying in or driving to wherever they require the service, whatever services they require, be they medical or educational or putting food on the table, they have the option of going by road. In many of those isolated communities they do not have that option, and the rail transportation is the only ground transportation those people have. The air transportation is extremely expensive, so if these people were to lose that very important link then I think it would be a shame for Canadians to lose that.

I guess it takes people from outside the country to have an appreciation of the beauty we have in this country. Whenever you talk to people who are travelling by rail, you talk to the American people, and they are always amazed at the wonder of our remoteness and our wilderness, I guess especially during the times of when the northern lights are out there, Americans are in great awe by what they see in Canada. They feel it is a very important way to travel across the country. I think we could learn from some of these people who utilize that rail to a much greater degree than we do.

Mr. Speaker, during the last little while there have been many more cuts that have made it necessary for people to be moving out of the Province of Manitoba to other areas to hold on to a job in the transportation field. In that last cut that happened when the southern Canadian line was lost, there are many people who were cut that had up to 11 years seniority in the transportation industry, and they were out of a job. I think in a country like Canada it is a shame that people would have contributed 11 years of their life to an industry and then be cut off. I think it was a great loss to us as a country to be losing that service.

* (1710)

I think there are commitments that were made by previous federal Governments on the importance of rail transportation to us as a country. I would hope that the federal Government would look into some of those commitments that were made and the tracts of land they were given in exchange for providing transportation links. I think people should be looking at that very seriously when they are making cuts.

Mr. Speaker, there were several demonstrations during the time in the last little while that VIA Rail was making its cuts. There were several demonstrations where the people came out and showed their displeasure at the VIA Rail being cut back. I took part in some of those demonstrations where the people were expressing their dissatisfaction with the cuts that had been brought forward by the federal Government. It was pretty evident when you got an opportunity to speak to some of the people who were involved in the transportation that they felt that they had been abandoned by the federal Government. Many of the jobs were being transferred to other cities.

One thing that I am reminded of is that task force that the Liberal Party had up in northern Manitoba. They did not speak to too many people. Two of them went up and I guess they spoke to two people. At that time they were really blasting the federal Conservative Government. They did not realize that their own Government when they were in power had started the process of cutting back on VIA Rail and that process was started by themselves. They met in Thompson and they condemned northern Members for not speaking up for VIA Rail.

I guess they had not been reading the press releases or the newspapers in the last couple of years because the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) and the Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan) along with the Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) and myself had been making several presentations. We had been making several submissions to the federal Government to try and carry on with the transportation link that was there.

The Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Mandrake) went up to Thompson, and he said nobody here is making any noise about it. So it is unfortunate that he did not inform himself of the previous work that had been done to try and retain the passenger service. Rather than condemning us, they should have been praising us because our Members have done an awful lot of work.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that we look at the role that VIA plays in the transportation of passengers in this country of ours. There are many school groups now taking the opportunity when they are planning their trips.

I know that in the Kelsey School Division, every spring they have an opportunity for young people to travel to other parts of the country to learn about other geographic locations and how other cultures live. This year they are having great emphasis on travelling by VIA Rail because they recognize that more than likely their days as a form of transportation, even in northern Manitoba, are probably numbered as they cut our transportation industry in half in the east-west connection.

Last summer there were people who could not get on that train. It was booked at all times, and where were the people that were making the—Mr. Speaker, it is true, where was our Member for Transportation? Was he speaking up for us as loudly as he could to continue to make sure that we were provided with the necessary transportation? -(interjection)-

I know that the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Connery), who is now paying attention—he was not for the last half hour, but now he is paying attention to what is going on in this House, and he is still in a little bit of a daze. He is not quite sure of what he is saying, because he was out of it for a little while.

Mr. Speaker, I think that -(interjection)- The Highways Minister in Manitoba (Mr. Albert Driedger) said that there was a five-year guarantee. He had it as a personal commitment from the federal Minister responsible for Transportation, Mr. Bouchard. Well, Mr. Bouchard is no longer in that position of where he is the Transportation Minister, so I am wondering where that commitment is now.

That is unfortunate, they should have gotten some commitment in writing, instead of having it in a personal word that he was going to continue to -(interjection)- ah, they say that personal negotiations are good, but I know that in previous years when we were in Government, the Member who is responsible for Highways now said that the reason we were not having any success in our negotiations was because we were a socialist Government and we antagonized those Conservatives.

They said if he put a Conservative Government here in the province then they would show us how to negotiate. Well, they certainly have shown us how to negotiate. No matter what programs we had negotiated, be it the Northern Development Agreement, transportation agreements or whatever agreements that were in place for developing this province, for providing the services we had in this province, they have been lost.

I know that there was some diking required in southern Manitoba and the Minister of Highways (Mr. Albert Driedger) said, wait until I get in Government, I will bring that forward and provide the transportation. Well, Mr. Speaker, has he had any success in bringing that money in? Not one cent has he brought into Manitoba.

So I think that was just cheap talk, and they certainly were not able to deliver. While they were in Opposition, they were able to make a lot of accusations, but since that time they have not been able to deliver so I think that their talk of being superior negotiators has certainly been washed down the drain. They have not even looked after the services that were in place prior to us being defeated as a Government.

I think they should look very carefully at some of the things that we had going when the Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) was responsible for the Highways and Transportation. He had a railbus in there which was going to provide quick, efficient service to northern Manitoba. Did they carry through with that? No, the federal Conservatives would not come up with the money to even complete the research they were doing on that subject so, therefore, we do not have that type of transportation now.

* (1720)

I think it was an important transportation link that could have been providing a very needed service, but it has not been done.- (interjection)- The Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Connery) says, he is going to go call Mulroney right now. Maybe he should call him about the Portage base because he has greater things to worry about than VIA Rail because he has not had much luck in keeping the base in Portage la Prairie open. I think that he will not have much luck in keeping VIA Rail.

I hope that all Members of the House would support this, because it is important for Canada as a country to have a strong viable transportation industry. I hope that all Members of the House can support this resolution and we can pass it very quickly. We will send a message to the federal Government that we require

this transportation industry to make it as efficient as it always was in Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ed Mandrake (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to place a few words regarding the proposed resolution on VIA Rail. Unfortunately the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak) could not have raised this resolution probably higher on the agenda so we could have been able to discuss it a little bit earlier, prior to the cuts in VIA Rail.- (interjection)- The Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) is again chirping from his seat, like usual it does not disappoint me one little bit.- (interjection)- There he goes again.

Before I go into VIA Rail, I would just like to put a few comments on the record, and that is I have never seen in my life a Minister who has been so incapable of performing his duties as this Minister has. He promised us—he said he has an agreement, a five-year agreement, with VIA Rail, or pardon me, the Minister of Transport, Mr. Bouchard, has a five-year agreement for the rail line from Winnipeg to Churchill. When questioned in this House to table that agreement, he said it is a verbal agreement.

I heard this afternoon the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) chirping from his seat, the Conservatives' word is gold. I guarantee you that gold is starting to tarnish, it is starting to get tarnished a bit. This Minister, all he could ever do is send communiques to Ottawa, saying, please do something about VIA Rail. Where did that go? It arrived at the Minister's office and one of his aides looked at it, oh yes, that is from our Minister of Transport in Manitoba, just throw it in the garbage can. I am simply appalled. I am appalled at this Minister of how inept he is. He has never had the guts to go there. Pardon me, I retract those words. He does not have the fortitude to go there and say to the Minister, enough is enough.- (interjection)-

No, no, no, he goes there and he had an opportunity to take the two critics along with him to Ottawa and show support on behalf of VIA Rail. What did he do? He put his tail in between his legs and went off by himself. Just what did he come back with, cuts in VIA Rail, a big fat goose egg. At least he would have had a front, a solidified front from all the Parties here in Manitoba, and this is what we call a caring Government, a caring Government.

Mr. Speaker, it has been proven conclusively by numerous people that have studied transportation systems that the rail transportation system is the least environmentally damaging of all of transportation systems. What has this Minister done? Did he make that presentation to the federal Minister in the environmental impact? No, he did not, obviously not, because the federal Minister from Brandon East, I think it is, who is the environment—no, pardon me I am going to get this right—he is the Secretary of State for Environment. What did he do? He condemns VIA Rail too. Here is a guy that is a Secretary of State for Environment.

Now it goes to show you what this Tory Government is like. Now we have a minority Government in Manitoba, and look what they have done. It keeps them honest,

that is all, but they sure as heck do not have anything or any power with their federal Tory cousins. Mr. Mulroney will say to the First Premier here, get back into your little corner and speak to Dorothy Dobbie. What happens? She will tell him what to do, and the First Minister says, I am sorry. I am not going to talk to you like that.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to -(interjection)- There he goes again getting mouthy. If he only knew what the First Airborne was all about, he would not speak like that.- (interjection)- Your dad was in the Airborne? Malarkey he was. Do not give me that. I know who was in the First Airborne.- (interjection)- Well, that is a far cry from the Airborne. If you do not know what Airborne is, Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer), please put a zipper on it. You can do some research into military history and you will soon find out in a hurry what it is all about. The Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) says I am off on a tangent.- (interjection)- Yes, Commando Ed.

Mr. Speaker, the federal Government sees fit to spend \$800 million in Thailand to develop a 36 kilometre railroad system. Yet, they go around and spend \$100 million or give a loan of \$100 million to Amtrak to upgrade their system, and yet our own system, our own rail line system is deteriorating. What does this Minister do? What does this Minister do? Nothing, just absolutely—I agree with the Honourable Member for Steinbach, as he says again. Now he is starting to recognize the true colours of the Member for Emerson (Mr. Albert Driedger), the Minister of Transport.

An Honourable Member: Well, they took his seat away.

Mr. Mandrake: Yes, that is true.

Mr. Speaker, it is appalling, it is truly appalling that this Minister, this Government, did not see the wisdom to put on a frontal attack with regard to VIA Rail. We have lost jobs and the spinoff jobs. Everything else is being impacted upon rural Manitoba and every other sector of our society.

This Government has done nothing for Manitoba and will continue on doing nothing for Manitoba. VIA Rail is and could be a very viable transportation system, no question in anybody's mind, if only the federal Conservative Government had seen the wisdom to invest part of that money that they put into Thailand, that they loaned to the United States for Amtrak, put some of it into Canada. We would have had a transportation system that would have just been marvelous for us. When the transportation system was put in place we had 2.5 million people in this country. Today we have 10 times that many, and yet we cannot afford a transportation system.

Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously their spending priorities are a little bit off base. They are off base. This Minister of Transport certainly has had no ability to show the federal Minister of Transport that we need a transportation system in this country that is going to stand the test of time.- (interjection)- The Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman) says he is going to get us all-Party support and I completely agree with him. I completely agree with him. I would hope that we would

have the support of this Government, whether or not they will support this resolution and show the federal Minister that his actions that he took on January 15 were wrong. Again we say he was wrong.

We said back last year he was wrong, we will say it again today. It is simply outrageous when you go to these little towns, you go to northern Manitoba, people need this transportation system. It is very, very important to them because that is the only means of transportation they have. That is the only means of transportation they have. You take the line from Thompson to Churchill, a lot of people just do not have any other means of transportation other than VIA Rail, and yet we have this Minister saying that we have a five-year guarantee.

Now, I ask this Minister to table that guarantee in this House. I am sure he is going to say again to us that it is a verbal guarantee. He knows full well that the Minister of Transport in Ottawa's word has about as much credibility to it as I do not even want to mention.

We would support this Bill with one minor alteration. That is on the sixth "whereas," it says: "the Mulroney Government, like its Liberal predecessor, has refused to provide VIA the necessary support to fully realize its potential to develop" We would support it, Mr. Minister, if the Member would strike out "like its Liberal predecessor".

* (1730)

Mr. Speaker, if you are going to vote on this on a non-partisan issue, let us go. That is the only way to solve problems in this Legislature is on a non-partisan—but, no, this Government does not want to have anybody have any good ideas given to them because they say we want to be the initiators of all of these good ideas. We will be more than happy to work with them any time of day, any time. Any time we will be more than willing to work with them, but we have such arrogance that is displayed during Question Period, during committee meetings, anywhere. I think that only shows one thing, this Government does not care. They could care less about the Opposition.

Again, I say, we will support it with that minor modification to it, other than that, we will support this resolution, and hope that this Government will also give the support so we could show the federal Government that we are very much concerned about VIA Rail. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Well, Mr. Speaker—very interested to have an opportunity to speak to this Bill. I hear some of the comments coming from across the way. I am rather surprised. I guess it is a bit like the degrading comments that are made about politicians from time to time and as much as they see a crowd gathering, and they want to run to get out in front once they know which direction it is going to move, we have just seen an example of that from both Opposition Parties, Mr. Speaker.—(interjection)—

Let me deal with that. First of all, we see the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak) went out of his way to point out some facts that are correct about the fact that

some of the employees felt that they had been abandoned by the downsizing of VIA services. If he thinks the employees felt abandoned, I wonder how he thinks the passengers felt. The fact is that the people who would normally use rail services in this province have felt abandoned year after year in the manner in which the national dream has begun to be reduced.

Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that I have to save my greatest disdain for the Liberal Opposition when they bring forward their comments and their support for this resolution. You look at what happened to that fellow who taught western Canada to have the single-fingered salute—him and Mr. Taxworthy, was it? They started the removal of the Crow rate from the benefit to western Canada. These are the guys who oversaw the growth of deficit in this country to the point where we have seen tremendous cutbacks in areas which are detrimental to western Canada and certainly need to be pointed out. I cannot in any way appreciate or condone the remarks that have been made about the Minister of Transport and whether or not he has done an adequate job of making sure the people of Manitoba and the interests of Manitoba are being protected in this debate. The fact is that he has worked very hard to make sure that the mandarins of Ottawa, anyone else who cared to listen, that he was not going quietly into the night on these types of reductions.

When the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Mandrake) talks about the fact that in his opinion he put his tail between his legs and went down east, I would say more likely, knowing the Minister of Transport, he put his tail over his shoulder and said, let us go get him.

The fact is that going down to eastern Canada with the Opposition Liberal Critic in tow and representatives from the third Party would very likely result in the fact that we would have those who oversaw for the last number—No. 1, those who supported the Lloyd Taxworthy movement and those who oversaw the quiet way in which rail services have been removed from Manitoba over the last decade, those who were in authority in this Government and failed to do anything and reduce the credibility of the Minister when he goes to put the Manitoba position forward.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Transport appeared before the committee in Ottawa, he put forward our case and put forward very strongly. He talked about the fact that the provinces were not consulted on this type of an issue. He talked about the fact that he was urging them to place a moratorium against the cuts until the committee and until the Royal Commission had an opportunity to review and provide new perspectives on what the Government was preparing to do.

Unfortunately, that did not happen. You cannot say that this was not put forward to the most aspect of the committee, because in their recommendations the committee made a number of recommendations to the Government, most of which were in the end not accepted, but in fact the Transportation Committee did recommend that a moratorium be put forward, which was exactly the position that our Minister of Transportation (Mr. Albert Driedger) had recommended.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that every one of us in this Chamber and anyone who has been in the

unfortunate position to lose a good paying job after a number of years has a great deal of support for the employees who lost their positions, particularly those after 11 years or more of seniority. It is almost reminiscent of what we saw happen in the '30s, where we saw people with 13, 14, 15, up to 20 years seniority hitting layoffs, that at a time when the railways were the most important part of transportation.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we have to now react to these significant numbers of cuts. About 2,000 Manitobans owe their livelihood to rail passenger service, or did. If our services are cut we are looking at a considerable loss to this province annually.

The VIA report advises that the majority of displaced passengers will probably shift to some other type of private transportation. In these days of environmental concerns, in the days of efficiency of travel, in the days of CO2 concerns, I think we have to be increasingly aware that these types of reduction of public rail transportation, public modes of transportation, simply run contrary to what needs to be done in terms of environmental concerns across the province.- (interjection)- I thought somebody said something intelligent, but I guess I must have misunderstood what it was.

Mr. Speaker, we look at cities like Brandon, Manitoba. This was part of the presentation the Minister made to the committee when he talked about the effects this would have on a city like Brandon. He had been attempting to put together and enhance the social and economic opportunities for that community, as we all in this House know, for the last number of years. They have been frustrated by the decline of the presence of the railways in Brandon.

It seems to be that Brandon is receiving a double whammy, having just lost the jet service that was provided there for about four years and now losing the rail link as well, certainly, something that we are all going to have to work to counter, because obviously Brandon and other southwestern Manitoba communities need that kind of support for public transportation. The announcement that we are going to see—the southern rail line disappearing, as we have just seen, leaves them again at a disadvantage.

* (1740)

I think there are a number of things that we have forgotten about in this debate, not the least of which is the economic impact within the communities. The cumulative effect of these impacts becomes rather insidious after awhile, because we have long debated the effect of abandonment of rail services for freight purposes within a country that is sparsely populated, such as the western and northern parts of this province and through Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The conclusions are obvious. Every time you take away another major service you start to reduce the viability or cause people to look to alternatives. Nobody is predicting that areas such as Brandon are going to disappear from the map, Mr. Speaker. What it means is that there is one more alternative they are going to have to deal with in terms of promoting industry within

their community. They have to be able to promote themselves not only for industrial growth but for business attraction through public travel.

One thing we have known for years is that the Asian tourists, as they come to Canada, prefer to travel by train. It is something that they are accustomed to. It is something they look for when they come to Canada as a tourist, to have the experience of travelling the rails across one of the greatest vast prairies in the world as something that is now going to be less accessible to them. That type of thing was never promoted to the extent in my opinion that it should have been to provide underpinning and strength for the VIA Rail system and how it served the people of western Canada because VIA Rail, clearly in my estimation, partly precipitated what happened to them.

Their marketing, their service, the quality of equipment that they had all led to the fact that it was not being used in the manner that it was anticipated, nor in the manner that I think it should have been in relationship to the other modes of travel across this country. Whether they were true or not, Mr. Speaker, and I would not want to take the time now to substantiate them one way or another, there were just far too many stories about how VIA provided inadequate service in certain areas, where they had problems that they could not deal with because of inadequate equipment or because of scheduling difficulties. They were shortchanged from the start. It almost seemed as if they were designed to fail. That leads us to question the real desire of having a transcontinental link across this country.

When we look about and try to determine what some of the obstacles were to rail passenger service, it became very apparent, Mr. Speaker, that these were caused by obsolete, unattractive and slow equipment. That was recognized by the House of Commons committee and to add even to that would be to add insult to injury, but the fact is that the service and the equipment they provided was prone to delay and breakdown. That is not the type of travel that a large percentage of people in this country want to have to deal with. There was a desire, there was a need, there was a niche to be filled. It was not adequately filled, and some very substantial and some very unfortunate decisions have resulted from that.

If the \$5 billion or more that has been spent on VIA Rail over the last number of years had been spent to provide efficient equipment to upgrade the equipment so that it was a very efficient means in transportation, if we had seen the money put towards scheduling that was more conducive to the travelling public, I think we would have perhaps seen a different result than what we have seen in the last short while regarding the rail transportation across this country.

Given that 80 percent of travel today, Mr. Speaker, is by private automobile on inter-city business means that we rely very heavily on petroleum fuels. Some energy experts would predict that we will have shortages of these fuels by the mid '90s. I cannot express judgment whether or not that will come true, but there is no question in my mind that the day will come when we will rue the day that we do not have rail transportation

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in this country that is efficient, that is attractive and that can be used to transport people across this country in a very energy-efficient manner. When we have a rapidly deteriorating situation across the country in terms of pollution as you get closer and closer to heavily populated areas, trains will become much more attractive. The use of rail transportation will become more attractive to everyone, particularly those in the commuter sheds around our large centres.

In making his presentation, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation asked for a number of things. He asked for a moratorium. He asked that the commission provide information up to the year 2020 on transportation across this country. He asked that there be federal-provincial co-operation on the development of rail links and the use of those. He asks that major changes not be introduced without the prior approval of the First Ministers, something which our First Minister (Mr. Filmon) has subsequently reinforced and certainly had indicated prior to that. We have seen a lack of funding and a lack of commitment, which I referred to a little while ago, and something that needed to be revised and corrected. Unfortunately I think we have almost passed that landmark, if you will, in terms of how VIA will be managed across this country.

We need more rapid rail transport. That is the direction that we are going to have to move. We need a clear mandate for VIA. We need to make sure that the remote, isolated communities continue to receive services. We need VIA to operate in an independent mode from the other two major rail companies. We make sure that today we have a long-term plan for the development of our rail transport across this country.

While there are Members opposite who see that may have long-term implications and may be difficult to accomplish in the long term, Governments across this country have to co-operate to bring together that common goal of putting in place practical and competent rail passenger service because, Mr. Speaker, no matter what we do, short of putting up roadblocks on our highways and grounding our jets, we cannot force people to ride on the rails unless they are given adequate service when they get there. That has been the shortfall and one that needs to be continued to be addressed.

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): For some reason, the Leader of the third Party (Mr. Doer) in this Legislature is anxious to get this passed without hearing full debate. I mean, I cannot understand the New Democratic who took a week's time in the Legislature to debate one of the Bills that they feel so extremely important to delay, and now trying to force closure on this resolution.

One has to really look at how serious a Member of the Legislature is when in fact they are introducing a resolution, and one really has to question the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak) on the introduction of this resolution, whether he is really serious about the VIA Rail service, whether he is really serious about the job opportunities. One has to really question it, and I guess the Members are upset when one asks a question. I mean, every day at 1:30 we have Question Period. We never question the motives of the questions.

Mr. Speaker, let us take a look at the resolution as introduced by the Member for the Pas. Let us take a look at it and see what he is really after in this resolution. You know, one has to again look at what the country has been driven to, the national death of the nation. One has to look at now prioritizing whether we should be subsidizing people across Canada—and I will speak separately about northern—conditions in the North and the need for a VIA Rail transportation system, because I believe we do need transportation for people in northern Manitoba.

* (1750)

I support that fully, but to provide a national-wide, subsidized transportation system when we are faced with health care needs, we are faced with education needs, we are faced with essential service needs of the public, then I think we really have to question the whole resolution as it relates to the national VIA Rail question.

I guess the other thing is that everyone in this Legislature wants to make sure that people have job security. We have come to a time in our society where a job is extremely important. At one time in the history of Canada, in its younger years, and in my younger years, there seemed to be a lot of employment opportunities, but as we have come to the specialized world, we have come to a mechanized world, we have in fact seen the reduction of employment opportunities, so that job security is a major factor.

Now I understand, as I have heard the reports made, that long-term employees of VIA Rail have been relatively well treated. The general public perception I believe is that the settlement that has been made with the employees, the long-term employees, of VIA Rail has been substantive, the settlements.

An Honourable Member: It costs as much as it would have to operate it.

Mr. Downey: The Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak) says, it costs as much as it would have to operate it. I do not believe that is correct, but the point is that the people who were long-term employees of VIA Rail are in fact and have been in the general public's mind I think supported. I think that is—we are not hearing outcries.

An Honourable Member: Let us be honest, because it is true.

Mr. Downey: The Member for Transcona (Mr. Kozak) said, it is true, and I take him at his word because he is an Honourable Member of the Legislature, and I am pleased that he spoke out in that way. Like a lot of his colleagues who do not speak out over on the other side and speak their minds, he has and I appreciate him for doing that.

One has to really question what motivates the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak) to do this. I know that he, as a member of the railroad system, probably understands better than anyone else the need for rail service into the North.

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One thing that I have never been able to figure out though is the failure of his Government under the former Minister of Transport, the Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman), and I guess the failure of the nation, the engineers and whoever, why we have not been able to see the development of a form of individual rail car bus or railbus that would in fact cut the costs of transportation into the remote and northern communities by rail.- (interjection)- The Member for The Pas says, it has been looked at.

How seriously was it looked at? They were in Government for how many years, 15 out of the last 20, the New Democrats were in Government 15 out of the last 20, and he said it was being looked at. I think that he has to come clean. I think he was not very serious about dealing with the needs of northern Manitobans in a very serious way.

I think that other countries have developed a railbus system where you do not have to have a million dollars or a million and a half dollars worth of locomotive and several cars that were trailing behind it. I for some reason cannot understand why there has not been a more serious look taken at the provision of a railbus system that would have I think cut the cost considerably of transportation services to our northern and remote communities.- (interjection)-

My colleague, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), maybe makes the point very clearly that the union said, no. I would like, if the Member wants support for this, to answer some of those questions. Is it true that the union said, no, to the development of a railbus system which would reduce the number of employees, which in fact would do a more efficient job of serving those northern communities?

An Honourable Member: On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Honourable Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak), on a point of order.

Mr. Harry Harapiak (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the comments from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) that the unions would not allow railbus cars to operate in northern Manitoba. I would like the Finance Minister (Mr. Manness) and the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) to know that there were railbuses operating under agreement that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. The Honourable Member does not have a point of order, it is a dispute over the facts.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Minister to continue his remarks.

Mr. Downey: The Member for The Pas has in fact confirmed the reason why there is no longer a railbus system.

Mr. Speaker, one has to further question where the New Democratic Party was, and where the Liberal Party

was, when we saw the demise of not only a transportation system in rural Manitoba, in our grain producing areas of Manitoba, it was really initiated—and we have communities that have been totally devastated because of the loss of the rail system. That was spearheaded by the Liberal Party, which, by the way, if we remember our history, were pretty much supported by the New Democratic Party in Ottawa to keep them in power. The biggest loss of our rail system in this country took place during the rule, or the administration of the New Democratic Party in this province—

An Honourable Member: And the Liberals federally.

Mr. Downey: And the Liberals federally, that is correct.

So, to repeat the history of this country it was the Conservatives that built the nation. John A. Macdonald built the nation with the tying together of this country with a railroad system -(interjection)- yes, it was the Conservative Government that built the nation with the building of a railroad system.- (interjection)-

No, let me say very much to the contrary it is not the Conservative Party that have torn it down, it was the debt that was incurred on the nation by the Liberals and the New Democratic Party, the Liberals federally and the New Democratic Party provincially, that have forced the current Government to look at the efficiencies of operating the system in this nation, and that is the rail system.

The bottom line is, Mr. Speaker, do the New Democratic Party and the Liberals want to have a national health care system, do they want to have a national education system, do they want to have a nation, or the essential services, or the day-to-day livelihood needs of the people, or do they want to subsidize a national transportation system for passenger service that in fact should pay for itself. That is the question. Where are the priorities of the Liberals and the New Democratic Party?

There are certain regions, and I say this again, there are certain regions, particularly in northern Manitoba, that need the services of VIA Rail and a subsidized system, because of the low volumes and the inavailability of additional transportation mechanisms. From coast to coast—in fact I take exception.

If I were going to have a resolution here, Mr. Speaker, the resolution should have been that the federal Government of Canada has an obligation to give us a national road system, a national highway system. Whatever Government was in place, whether it was a New Democratic Party or a Conservative or whatever, when the federal Government backed out of supporting a national highway system that was the day that there should have been a resolution in this Legislature continuing the need for a national road system.

If you are going to bind the nation together with a transportation system, for the transporting and the movement of people, it is a highway system that we need today not a subsidized national transportation system. I say that seriously.

I think it is time that we have the New Democratic Party seriously address the needs of the people of this

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country. They continue to play politics. They played politics when they were in Government when it came to dealing with essential services. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the people of this nation do deserve and expect essential services to be provided, but I do not believe it is the responsibility of the national taxpayers to subsidize a national transportation system.—
(interjection)—

Well, the Member says so much for the national dream. I have a national dream. I do not believe our national dream today is one of maintaining an inefficient transportation system for people across this country by rail. I believe that the people who want to use that should pay for it. I believe that in remote and northern

communities where you do not have the volume to carry the people and to make money, then it is the nation's responsibility to subsidize that system. I do believe that it is the responsibility to provide a national road system of what—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. I am interrupting the proceedings according to the Rules. When this motion is again before the House, the Honourable Minister will have three minutes remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., I am leaving the Chair with the understanding that the House will reconvene at 8 p.m.