

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 16, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Riverdale Health Centre

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

These are the reasons for the petition:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier to consider ensuring that acute care and emergency services are available to the residents of Rivers and surrounding areas in their

local hospital and to live up to his promise to not close the Rivers Hospital.

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

This petition has been signed by Cam White, Yvonne Swayze, Carole Hodkin and others.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our Rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Coverage of Insulin Pumps

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Insulin pumps cost over \$6,500.

The cost of diabetes to the Manitoba government in 2005 will be approximately \$214.4 million. Each day 16 Manitobans are diagnosed with the disease compared to the national average of 11 new cases daily.

Good blood sugar control reduces or eliminates kidney failure by 50 percent, blindness by 76 percent, nerve damage by 60 percent, cardiac disease by 35 percent and even amputations.

Diabetes is an epidemic in our province and will become an unprecedented drain on our struggling health care system if we do not take action now.

The benefit of having an insulin pump is it allows the person living with this life-altering disease to obtain good control of their blood sugar and become much healthier, complication-free individuals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba to consider covering the cost of insulin pumps that

are prescribed by an endocrinologist or medical doctor under the Manitoba Health Insurance Plan.

This petition is signed by April Kreutz, Lisa Rempel, Guy Pambrun and many, many others.

* (13:35)

Pembina Trails School Division—New High School

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The government is demonstrating a lack of respect for the students and families in Whyte Ridge, Lindenwoods, Linden Ridge and Richmond West by refusing to provide adequate access to education within the community.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Signed by Tim Green, Kathryn Drummond, David Drummond and many, many others.

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider providing East St. Paul with local ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul.

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

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

Signed by Heidi Anders, Janis Warkentin, Sabine Gregg and many, many others.

* (13:40)

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba's provincial auditor has stated that Manitoba's 2003-2004 budget deficit was the second highest on record at \$604 million.

The provincial government is misleading the public by saying they had a surplus of \$13 million in the 2003-2004 budget.

The provincial auditor has indicated that the \$13-million surplus the government says it had cannot be justified.

The provincial auditor has also indicated that the Province is using its own made up accounting rules in order to show a surplus instead of using generally accepted accounting principles.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider adopting generally accepted accounting principles in reporting Manitoba's budgetary numbers.

Signed by Chue Mansilla, Florence Pabon and Renato Dimatulac.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Crocus Fund Government-Appointed Director

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, last Friday it was reported that Crocus had appointed five new board directors leaving this government's appointee, Mr. Ron Waugh, as the lone remaining, conflicted board member. This government's appointee knew shares were overvalued in September, he knew they were overvalued in November. Despite that this NDP government continued to use taxpayers' dollars to extensively promote Crocus as a good investment for hardworking Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, this government's political appointee is the only one left who is connected to the selling of overvalued shares. Will this Premier use his authority to replace Mr. Waugh with an experienced director who is not distracted by a threat of a lawsuit or subject to various serious allegations by the Manitoba Securities Commission? Will he do that today?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, it gives me an opportunity to clarify again the record. There has been an instance of promotion of the Crocus shares in the public service, obviously with a subsidy of the taxpayers. In the 1997 period, the government then issued promotional material in pay stubs and pay envelopes of civil servants. The Securities Commission determined that was outside of the prospectus where the body of government should be independent of individual decisions. We, when we were informed of that, stopped it.

Mr. Murray: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the Premier will attempt to try to answer the question. Since September 2004, hardworking Manitobans continued to invest in overvalued Crocus shares. During that time period, from September to December, one third of that investment was lost. In fact, overall since September, some \$60 million in retirement savings have been completely wiped out.

Mr. Speaker, Crocus investors have lost confidence in this NDP government's representative. Will the Premier use his authority to replace his conflicted political appointee with an experienced director who is not distracted by the threat of a lawsuit or subject to serious allegations by the

Manitoba Securities Commission? Will he listen to this question and answer it?

Mr. Doer: The individual is not a quote "political appointee." I do not believe he is a quote "member of any political party," nor has he donated funds to any political party. There have been some in the past that have been members of parties and donated money to political parties, but that certainly has not happened since 1999.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out some of the major issues raised by Martin Cash and other analysts on investments in Crocus, co-investments between the provincial government and the Crocus Fund: Isobord, some \$23 million lost by the provincial government and a considerable \$7-million loss by the Crocus Fund; Westsun, \$4,400,000 lost by the provincial government, some-\$21 million in a co-investment loss by Crocus Fund. That investment was made in 1997-98. The Isobord announcement was made, in fact, including by member opposite when he was in Cabinet, in 1997-88. Winnport Logistics, some \$5.9 million, losses for Crocus, \$6.7 million.

Mr. Speaker, those major problems took place before we were elected. We do trust that the Auditor and the Securities Commission will be dealing with all the facts.

* (13:45)

Public Inquiry

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that attempt to deflect the real issue does nothing to 33 000 Manitoba stakeholders and Manitoba taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier's refusal to replace his politically appointed representative on the Crocus Board shows his complete disregard for the best interest of shareholders and the taxpayers of Manitoba. The NDP government has failed in its responsibility to monitor the Crocus Fund and, in turn, has failed the 33 000 shareholders who have taken a significant loss on their hard-earned savings. This Premier should replace his government representative today and commit to full disclosure of the facts.

Mr. Speaker, will this Premier give his commitment today? We know that the Auditor

General is looking at this. We know the Manitoba Securities will also be looking at it, but if this Premier were honest with Manitobans he would stand in his place and acknowledge that those investigations are limited in scope. If he truly wants to get to the bottom of this he will do the right thing and call for an independent public inquiry so the truth will come out.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we have a body called the Securities Commission that has the authority of the Court of Queen's Bench. We have the provincial Auditor General that is dealing with this matter. Members opposite have not even seen the results of those—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: As I understand it, the Securities Commission has not completed its work, Mr. Speaker. It has not come to final conclusions. There are other organizations looking at this. There are new members of the board of directors: Miss Carol Bellringer, Miss Darlene Dziewit, Mr. Jim Husiak, Miss Gillenny, Ms. Leney Richardson, Mr. Van Hall.

Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) said the individual who we have confidence in, the government appointee, the minister's appointee to the board of directors, we will evaluate this appointment on the basis of the new board. The new board is now in. The minister will look at that but I would point out to the member opposite to make allegations of this individual's political, I think, is very unfair to that individual.

Crocus Fund Government-Appointed Director

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, the NDP government made a commitment to taxpayers to monitor the Crocus Fund and to look out for unit holders' and taxpayers' interests. Last week we saw another example of shareholder rights being trampled when the unit holders' last remaining elected director took the misguided step of appointing a director to represent the unit holders and then immediately resigning. This was a calculated move by those who control the fund to avoid allowing the unit holders to call a meeting to properly elect two directors to represent their interest.

I would ask the Minister of Finance to explain to Manitobans how the NDP government could have sat on their hands while unit holders were deprived of their right to elect independent directors to look out for them.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): The member seems to forget the history of how the fund was created by the government opposite. When the previous Minister of Finance announced that the fund was created, I am referring to Clayton Manness, he said he wanted a fund that was completely independent of government. He wanted the sponsor to have the control over how the board was governed. This independent body created by members opposite took their own actions. The member is saying he now wants us to interfere in that. That is the opposite to what they intended when they set it up.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, this minister speaks with all the arrogance and serenity of somebody that has nothing invested in this fund and has nothing to lose. We understand perfectly why Mr. Curtis acted as he did. He is dependent on the fund to provide payments to lawyers to represent him and to pay fines and judgments that may be levied against him in the future. He is compromised, he is beholden to the fund and this has obviously clouded his judgment.

The question for the government to answer is this: What is clouding your judgment, sir? What is clouding your judgment? Why are you not doing everything possible to ensure that unit holders who have been left out in the cold have proper representation on the board? You should explain to Manitobans how it could be that they are left out in the cold once again.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just wanted to let all members be aware that I have no judgment on any issues because, remember, all questions are put through the Chair not directly to a minister. So I ask the cooperation of all honourable members.

*(13:50)

Mr. Selinger: The unit holders have rights under The Crocus Investment Act, and in terms of litigation it was this government through this Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) which brought in class action lawsuit legislation which did not exist in this province before. They have the rights of class action

lawsuits which never existed under the previous government.

In addition, we gave the Auditor General new powers to investigate labour-sponsored funds without any limitations on his scope, without any limitations on the depth to which the Auditor can choose to go. We provided that right in legislation. We confirmed that right in writing. We now have in Manitoba more instruments to protect shareholders than ever existed under the previous government. We are allowing those instruments to work to their full extent.

Mr. Loewen: Once again the minister completely ignores the unit holders who have been fleeced of \$60 million. They deserve proper representation on the board. The NDP government has an obligation to the unit holders and to the taxpayers to ensure that the board has an experienced, non-conflicted investment professional sitting at the table when these decisions are made. Instead, the NDP government sits on its hands and pretends to know nothing while unit holders get fleeced and while board members continue to make decisions that will continue to see unit holders' money spent.

Who is standing up for the unit holders? Will the minister guarantee today that he will replace Ron Waugh and that he will finally stand up for the unit holders? The board will not act in the best interests of the unit holders. In fact, they manipulate the process. Will the minister stand up today and for the sake of the unit holders ensure that a non-conflicted, experienced investment professional is appointed to the board immediately?

Mr. Selinger: The member opposite likes to take swings at everybody. I note that the new board members are people with strong reputations; a former provincial Auditor General, Carol Bellringer; a chartered accountant, Jim Husiak; a former partner in a public accounts firm, Van Hall, a person who is a chartered financial analyst with several years experience in Winnipeg's brokerage community.

I say to the member opposite that the class action legislation which allows unit holders to pursue through the courts any rights or remedies they feel they are entitled to is considered the strongest legislation in Canada. The Auditor General's Act that we put in place after 20 years of neglect, 12 under members opposite, is among the strongest in Canada.

We have not fettered any of those organizations to do their job. We have said once those reports come public we will act on them expeditiously.

Gang Activity Reduction Strategy

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, last weekend about the same time that the members of the NDP government were sending out travel material trying to encourage people to come to our province, local and national newspapers told a different story: "Stolen death car driven by gangster; 16-year-old gangster busted for shooting; Beating and abduction near Windsor Park; Police search for Hells Angels; U.S. Marine survives Iraq, stabbed by suspected gang member in The Pas."

The reputation of our province is being held hostage by gang members. Will the Minister of Justice finally take the needed steps to ensure that Manitoba residents will be safe next weekend and this summer?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, over the last several days I also saw headlines that said: "Cops charge four in attack; Sex attack arrest, police charge suspect; Mounties get man, colleague busted; Trio charged in shooting, robbery; Hells pals nabbed, several held." I think that we should celebrate the hard work of our Winnipeg and RCMP police forces in making sure those who commit crimes in this province are held accountable and face justice.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we applaud the police getting these criminals off the street, but we wonder why the Minister of Justice keeps allowing them to go back on the street after they have been caught.

Yesterday, at about the same time the annual tourist information was going out across Canada to try to get people to come to the province, Yves Lavigne, an international gang expert, was on the radio saying that violence needed to be reduced in the province, and that this week and this summer somebody innocent would die in the province because of the gang violence. At the same time, the NDP government is spending a half million dollars to try to spruce up the reputation of our province.

I wonder if the Minister of Justice could not just save that half million dollars and prove our

reputation by making Manitoba gang-free. Why does he not put the money into getting these gangs off the street, Mr. Speaker?

* (13:55)

Mr. Mackintosh: I have only heard complaints from the member opposite and, indeed, I have only heard the vote nay. Mr. Speaker, opposing our commitment to public safety, the largest investment in recent memory in law enforcement, is not just about 54 new police officer positions over the next two years. It is about enhancing The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act where there have been 92 drug dens and prostitution houses shut down.

Mr. Speaker, it is also about investing in intelligence operations on organized crime by the creation now of a Corrections Organized Crime Intelligence Unit. It is also about though more hope and opportunities for youth with the addition of more Lighthouses. Those are initiatives the members opposite were opposed to.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, while the travel magazines talk about fishing season, the only catch-and-release happening today is in the justice system in Manitoba. In 1996, when there was a quarter of the known gang members that we have today, four years before the Hells Angels set up shop and eight years before the Premier (Mr. Doer) brought back the Bandidos from Texas, the now-Minister of Justice held a series of public forums to talk about gang issues. When there was only a quarter of the gang members that we have in Manitoba, the Member for St. John's (Mr. Mackintosh), the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), the Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos), the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) and the Member for Concordia, the Premier, held public forums to discuss cleaning up gang issues in the province.

With a 300% increase in gang members since this government has come into office, I wonder if the Minister of Justice can tell us what plans he has to have a public forum before the summer with police, community leaders and residents to clean up gangs in our streets.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I think one of the regrettable sagas of criminal justice history in

Manitoba was that the members opposite continued to put their heads in the sand when they were in office and refused to acknowledge that there was organized crime in Manitoba and a serious increase in street gang activity from the early 1990s on.

That is regrettable and, of course, because they were in denial they could not take action. Oh, no, I retract that, Mr. Speaker. They did take action. I recall the gang hotline. It went unanswered in some little corner, some room somewhere for five months at a time. That is how serious they were when the Hells Angels came in, when the Zig Zag Crew came in, when the Warriors came in, when the Indian Posse came in, when the Deuce came in. Oh, but to them, there were no gangs and therefore no action. There has been nothing but action under this government.

Livestock Industry U.S. Exports

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, lobby groups are on the hunt once again. Their intent is to stop boxed beef from crossing the border for 30 months and under, meat currently allowed into the United States. Will the Minister of Agriculture tell us how her government is planning on dealing with this issue should they be successful?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I am sure everyone in this House is hopeful that group will not be successful in blocking boxed beef, Mr. Speaker, because the decision to open the border to boxed beef was made on science. There is absolutely no reason why we should not be continuing to send boxed beef into the United States and into Mexico.

However, we recognize that we have to increase slaughter capacity in this province. We are working with various groups who want to increase slaughter capacity. If you look at the numbers our slaughter capacity has increased. If you look at the numbers for 2002, we were slaughtering 16 500 animals. In 2004, we have slaughtered 28 000 animals and we will continue to increase that number.

Livestock Industry Slaughter Capacity

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, while packing plants in the U.S. are closing and layoffs are

happening on a daily basis this government continues to say open the border, we have the cattle. While we agree we would like to see the border reopened to all our beef, members on this side of the House know we need a long-term solution for our ranchers. We need our own processing plants here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, when will the minister do the right thing and increase meaningful slaughter capacity and open plants in the province of Manitoba and bring jobs to the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about wanting to open the border. Indeed, we want to open the border. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture has said that he wants to open the border. We will continue to work with our industry to ensure that slaughter capacity increases. I will repeat for the member. In 2002, we were slaughtering 16 500 animals; in 2004, we are at 28 000 animals. We are going to continue to increase. Every year it will continue to increase and we will work with those people.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with those people who want to increase slaughter capacity in this province. I would hope the members opposite would also recognize the importance of increasing slaughter capacity and be there to support the producers rather than be critical of those people who are increasing slaughter capacity.

* (14:00)

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, we are not critical of our producers or those people wanting to invest in the province. We are critical of this minister. That is the key and if she is proud of growing from 16 000 and 30 000, then she needs to listen to these numbers.

Mr. Speaker, outside of Edmonton last week, a processing plant killing 500 per day, do your math, Madam Minister, was announced. Tyson Foods announced an extra 900 per day on top of their 3700; Cargill with their expansion; Saskatchewan's new and remodelled plants; Ontario with new and remodelled plants; Manitoba, nothing but announcements.

Mr. Speaker, does this minister realize, while the NDP government does nothing, other provinces are stealing our beef processing business and our jobs that belong right here in Manitoba?

Ms. Wowchuk: If the member wants to look at other provinces perhaps he should look at the history of this province and what happened while they were in government and who left this province. If the members opposite were really interested in slaughter capacity in this province when they were in government they would have saved the Burns plant, they would have saved other plants. Our producers had to find new markets because that slaughter capacity was lost. They found new markets.

People in Manitoba are now interested in increasing slaughter capacity, and I would encourage members opposite that rather than being critical of those people in this province who have in some cases doubled their slaughter capacity, they should be there to encourage them and support them, rather than criticize them for what they had—[interjection] I believe that going from the number of 16 500 to 28 000 is a significant increase.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Emerson, on a point of order?

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The minister should check her own records: Better than 500 000 cattle slaughtered in the province of Manitoba when they took office under the Pawley administration. There was 120 000—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Emerson, there is no point of order.

I would like to remind all honourable members that when rising on a point of order it is to point out to the Speaker a breach of a rule or a departure of procedure of the House. We still have lots of time in Question Period remaining. Please do not use points of orders for matters of debate.

Pediatric Dental Surgery Waiting Lists

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, children continue to wait in pain for dental surgery in our province. Eight months ago the Maples Surgical Centre submitted a proposal to this government which would deplete the wait list for pediatric dental

surgery in the province within one year. Yet, because the minister is so blinded by his ideology, he refused to even consider the proposal. We have now learned since the Minister of Health's announcement on December 1, 2004, only 50 of the 600 promised procedures have been completed at Misericordia Hospital.

Will the Minister of Health admit that he irresponsibly provided false hope to these children by promising to complete these surgeries?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as I made plain last week, I am disappointed in the progress that we made on our commitment that we will fulfil. I have received assurances from WRHA that this goal of 600 by the end of December will, in fact, be achieved. They have put steps in place to ensure that takes place.

Mr. Speaker, as for the offer of Maples, the problem in the system is anesthesiologists. It is not operating rooms, it is not equipment, it is not dentists. It is anesthesiologists, and Maples cannot manufacture them any more than anybody else can.

Maples Surgical Centre Pediatric Dental Surgery

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): The Maples centre has already said they would bring in the anesthetists to be able to fulfil their contract, Mr. Speaker. This is irresponsible for this government to not consider their proposal.

Under this minister's watch only 50 of the 600 promised surgeries have been completed at Misericordia to date. This minister was warned in March when he was informed that only two surgeries had been completed. He has again been warned today that only 50 surgeries have been completed, yet he claims to be shocked and says he did not know the WRHA would not be able to follow through with his promises. If this minister had only set aside his ideology and contracted with the Maples Surgical Centre to perform these procedures eight months ago, 380 of these surgeries would have been completed to date.

Will the Minister of Health now admit he made a mistake and agree to partner with the Maples Surgical Centre to ensure that the 600 surgeries he promised Manitoba children will, in fact, take place?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I will never admit that it is a mistake to support the publicly funded, publicly accountable, publicly administered medicare system in our country. I will never accept it is a mistake to support that system.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, what Maples offered was that they would bring in anesthesiologists from somewhere else, I do not know where, and we would pay for it. Not Maples, not within Maples procedures, we would pay for them as extra. We pay the anesthesiologists. We will continue to pay the anesthesiologists as we always have. Their bringing in more and charging on top of the rate they propose to us is not a solution.

Mrs. Stefanson: What the Minister of Health is essentially saying, and I am glad he finally put it on the record today, is that he would support his ideology over what is in the best interests of patients in this province and our children, Mr. Speaker. Shame on him.

Will the Minister of Health now agree to consider partnering with the Maples Surgical Centre to ensure that 600 pediatric dental surgeries he promised are actually completed this year, Mr. Speaker? He has a choice.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, in regard to ideology, I would like to tell the member about Dr. Alan Maynard who was brought in by Ralph Klein to their symposium in Alberta which was supposed to triumph the privatization of health care. What Dr. Alan Maynard said was that the U.S. experience and the U.K. experience show that the investor-owned component for health care is more expensive, provides less service per dollar and, in brackets, he said that it kills more people. Now I do not necessarily agree with the latter point, but the experts that came from France, Germany, the United Kingdom all said, "Do not privatize. It does not save money. It does not reduce waiting lists." Mr. Klein thought the opposite would be the case. His own symposium proved him wrong.

Post-Secondary Education Funding

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government continues to underfund our post-secondary institutions during times of unprecedented revenues. This fall it appears that students

will have to deal with drastic fee increases when they go back to school. These are backdoor taxes.

Mr. Speaker, why does the Minister of Advanced Education continue to ignore the plight of our post-secondary institutions? When will she finally provide stable and predictable funding that will ensure the quality of programming is not compromised?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I was pleased last week to provide the member with a detailed list of some of the things that we have done for students. I would be happy to provide her a hard copy or to repeat that list for her.

Certainly this government is committed to affordable and accessible education. We see education as an investment in young people in our communities and in our province. We are on the side of young people. We have been unwavering in our support for young people attending post-secondary education.

We are the ones, Mr. Speaker, who introduced what is nearly now a \$7-million government bursary. They are the ones who, in 1992-93, in the heat of July, in the dead of the night, cancelled the Manitoba Bursary making the only option available to students in this province student loans.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, a quick glance at our neighbouring western provinces shows how large the funding discrepancies in Manitoba post-secondary institutions has become. Saskatchewan, which right now does have a tuition freeze, has granted a 6.8% increase in operational grants compared to just over 2 percent for the University of Manitoba. Saskatchewan recognizes that if you impose a tuition freeze you must provide substantial operating grant funding.

Mr. Speaker, when will this Minister of Advanced Education recognize what Saskatchewan has realized and acted upon?

* (14:10)

Ms. McGifford: I would like to inform the member of information she should already have and that is, Mr. Speaker, since 1999 we have increased grants to post-secondary education by \$45 million. The best

news is yet to come. When we include the municipal property tax relief, something which the members opposite were against, that number is \$57 million.

Mr. Speaker, I could also refer the member to Stats Canada which says that we have the second highest funding per student in the country. So I think that Saskatchewan may have something to learn from us.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, I am sure they are watching with bated breath as the University of Manitoba increases their ancillary fees by 12.5 percent and Brandon University by 15 percent.

Mr. Speaker, elsewhere in western Canada universities are receiving between 5.5% to 8.1% increases in operational grants while this NDP government is continuing to short-change our universities.

Mr. Speaker, when will the universities and students of this province expect from this Minister of Advanced Education the kind of stable and predictable funding that will finally put an end to these skyrocketing ancillary fees that solely maintain current services rather than enhancing them?

Ms. McGifford: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have provided stable funding to our universities and colleges. We have provided operational increases every year. We also have provided \$100 million in capital.

I find it, well, I suppose I could say passing strange that a government that provided increases which the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) has pointed out are kind of like a spring weather forecast, minus 2, zero, minus 2, minus zero, has the audacity to come into this Legislature and talk to us about university and college funding. Our record with universities and colleges, our record with post-secondary education is exemplary.

Child Poverty Rate Reduction Strategy

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, poverty is a major contributor to poor health and a significant contributor to crime, yet the latest data which I table shows that Manitoba's child poverty rate has increased under the NDP and 22 percent of

children in Manitoba now live in poverty. This compares to only 11 percent in Prince Edward Island and 16 percent in Ontario. This is not the only index getting worse. The number of workers employed at minimum wage jobs in Manitoba has increased over the last several years.

My question to the Premier (Mr. Doer) is does the government have a target number which it aims to reduce the child poverty rate by the end of this mandate. What is the Premier's target? When, after five and a half years on the job, will the Premier table his attack, his plan to reduce child poverty?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Acting Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the Leader of the Liberal Party mentioned minimum wage in his question because since we got into government, since 1999, we have raised the minimum wage five times and we have raised it approximately 20 percent.

In our recent budget, Mr. Speaker, we also increased northern food allowance rates making healthy food in the North more affordable. I just want to remind the member opposite that is a budget he voted against.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, just a few minutes ago the Justice Minister accused the Tories of having their heads in the sand. Well, when it comes to child poverty, it is very clear that the NDP government have their heads in the sand.

Mr. Speaker, in spite of the rants and raves of the Minister of Labour and her attempts to blame everybody else, the reality is there are still far too many Manitoba children living in poverty and this is contributing to the extraordinarily high health care and justice costs under this government. Either the Premier is pursuing a conservative status quo, preserve the high poverty rate, or he has no target and no plan to reduce poverty, or he has a secret plan which has either not been implemented or he just does not care. Which is it? Which is it? Which is it?

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, two very important public policy areas that assist people living in poverty are child care and also housing. We have improved access to child care allowing more parents to go to work and to go to school. We have funded 3500 spaces and increased subsidies to parents. Spending

on child care has increased 64 percent since our government took office in 1999.

We have also committed more than \$25 million over five years to increase the supply of safe, affordable housing in Manitoba through the Affordable Housing Initiative, a partnership with the federal government; \$8 million has been committed over four years for the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative. We have also eliminated the National Child Benefit clawback putting \$13.7 million into the hands of low-income families in Manitoba.

Cellular Telephones Restrictions for use while Driving

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, all of us are very much aware that cellular telephones in their popularity have grown phenomenally across North America. Out of that growth, what we have seen is a great deal of concern in regard to vehicle traffic, in particular drivers. The issue of safety has been raised time and time again. I think Manitobans want to see a government that is going to be progressive in the sense of bringing forward ideas, that it is going to have a tangible impact on the issue of safety with regard to cellular telephones?

My question to the government is what plans does it have to ensure that the safety of Manitobans is going to be taken into consideration in dealing with driving, while at the same time talking on cellular telephones?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, we have done and taken a lot of action with regard to safety on the roads, not only the twinning of highways around the province but graduated driver's licence which we brought in a few years ago.

Specifically, to this particular question on cell phones, right now there are a number of different studies taking place and have taken place with regard to this issue. Newfoundland is one province that has looked at it. The jury is out with regard to taking a look at the benefits to what they initiated in cell phones. We, as a government, are talking to other governments and looking at the issue in a very serious manner.

Churchill River Diversion Archeological Program

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, preserving historical sights and artifacts is important

to all Manitobans, but it is especially critical and vital for Aboriginal people who have lived on this land for thousands of years. Could the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism update this House on the Churchill River diversion archeological program?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure on Manitoba Day to work with the communities of Nelson House, South Indian Lake and Split Lake in signing a memorandum of understanding that is really to preserve the integrity of historic resources in the communities affected by the Churchill River diversion. I was happy to host Chief Jerry Primrose of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, headman Chris Baker of the South Indian Lake community and Victor Spence representing the Tataskweyak Cree Nation.

The commitment our government has made, Mr. Speaker, is to work together with these communities to protect and recover heritage that otherwise might be lost. Further, it is a vision among the Cree people that we should recover, preserve and pass on to the next generations in a way that is meaningful to the Cree peoples who are the caretakers of the heritage within their lands. I want to thank the Minister responsible for Hydro (Mr. Chomiak) for joining me in hosting these communities.

Child Poverty Rate Reduction Strategy

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, this government is failing to reduce the child poverty rate. Even though the Minister of Labour stands in her place and boasts of all the programs she says she has enacted, they are simply falling short, they are not working. There are no improvements for families in Manitoba. This government simply must do better. It is failing thousands of Manitoba families and children.

Can the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) put aside her political rhetoric and simply advise this House what her plan is to reduce child poverty in our province?

* (14:20)

Hon. Nancy Allan (Acting Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, I would like to thank the member for the question. I just want to comment that child poverty we take very, very seriously, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we have enacted public

policy initiatives in many departments across this government.

I would also like to talk about the Healthy Baby program that provides parent education programs for mothers-to-be in 65 Manitoba neighbourhoods and communities. It is a nutrition income supplement that benefited over 4000 low-income women in the years 2003 and 2004. We take poverty very seriously, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to work on this in a very serious way.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ESL Programs

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate a number of special women who have successfully completed their ESL, English as a second language training. As the MLA for Fort Garry, I had the pleasure of sending my greetings to last week's graduating class who completed their training at Fort Garry Mennonite Brethren.

Mr. Speaker, learning a new language is challenging. These women, most of whom are new immigrants, have proved that it can be done. Last week's graduates completed a course for women who are transitioning into new occupations or schooling, while today's graduates have completed courses that provide a solid grounding in English.

Both programs are unique since they are community-based and support their students by providing child care and the opportunity to meet other women, to build friendships and support networks. Many graduates will be further pursuing ESL training, employment or schooling in their interest areas.

The Department of Labour and Immigration is committed to providing essential services like ESL training to new Manitobans. Our government believes that practical programs like ESL training are integral in helping new residents successfully contribute to our communities.

I especially want to thank the parishioners of Fort Garry Mennonite Brethren for supporting this group of graduates. Mr. Speaker, I congratulate all

graduates who have completed their ESL training. I especially want to thank Linda Xie and Bernadette McCann, the community co-ordinators for these programs. I wish all graduates continued success in the future, and thank all community groups for supporting local ESL programs. Thank you.

Dugald United Church

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): On Sunday, May 15, 2005, I attended the 115th anniversary of the Dugald United Church. Here is the text from the cairn that was unveiled and stands in front of the church building: Settlement of the area in and around Dugald became general in the early 1870s. Transportation at that time was by foot or by horse on mud roads as the railroad, now the CNR, was not completed until 1907. Thus Dugald village, then known as North Plympton, began to develop as a service centre. Church was very important to those early settlers. Protestant services were first held in homes, conducted alternately between Presbyterians and Methodists.

In 1887 the Presbyterians began planning a church building. A violent windstorm during construction blew down the walls and did considerable damage. The completed church was dedicated in 1889. Records show the Methodists arranged to also use the new church for their services. A basement and a large vestibule were added to the church in 1914, but water seepage into the basement was a constant problem. In 1922 the church was supplied with electric lighting from Gillespie's generating plant, but fluctuating power burned out so many bulbs they returned to gas lighting. Hydro-electricity finally came to the area in 1946.

In 1954 a new basement was constructed and a room added to the east end of the church. The following year saw many improvements to the building, both inside and out. The building as it now stands is being maintained in large part by donations which have been made to a memorial fund established in 1977.

In 1908 the Methodists constructed a church on the site where the curling now stands. Services alternated morning and evening between the two churches. In 1923, the Methodists decided to close their church and join with the Dugald Presbyterians. Their church building was moved to south

Transcona. When union between Methodists and Presbyterians was official in 1925, Dugald was already a United Church.

In 1897 the Presbyterians of South Plympton planned and built a church on what is now PR 206, three and a quarter miles south of Dugald. This church thrived until a decline in rural population made it impractical to continue services. The remaining congregation joined the Dugald congregation—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Schuler:—and their building was dismantled in 1972.

Since ministry or clergy appointments were generally not long term and transportation was slow and unreliable, churches in the rural areas required a residence for clergy, known as a manse or parsonage. The home across the street from the church was built in 1893 and served as the United Church manse until 1962 when a new manse was built east of the church. It was no longer required in 1993 and was sold.

The cairn was erected in May 2005 in recognition of the pioneers of the Dugald district, and the 80th anniversary of the United Church of Canada. Thank you.

ANCOP International

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): I rise today to highlight a very important event I will be attending on Saturday, May 21, at the Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall. This event is in support of ANCOP International Canada Incorporated.

Mr. Speaker, ANCOP International is a non-profit organization that aims to achieve global harmony. ANCOP International attempts to alleviate poverty in many communities worldwide by working with local residents to create thriving neighbourhoods. Volunteers help build new and affordable houses, new schools and recreation centres, water systems and playgrounds. ANCOP volunteers also help to establish health clinics and education programs for young kids in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, the ANCOP event in Winnipeg will help to raise funds for the work done by Gawad Kalinga, a humanitarian group established in the

Philippines. In Filipino, *gawad kalinga* means, quote, "to give care." This organization aims at improving the cultural, social, educational and health levels of Filipino residents and communities. All proceeds from this event will go towards building a new village in the Philippines. The village will provide safe and affordable housing, medical, educational and recreational facilities for residents.

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be attending this event. I want to thank Lanny Zacarias, ANCOP Manitoba area director, for co-ordinating this event. I also want to thank Ed Villamar, Vic Lopez and all the other volunteers with ANCOP for their hard work and dedication. I urge my fellow House colleagues to support the humanitarian work of groups like ANCOP. As Canadians we have a responsibility to support and help our neighbours around the world. Thank you.

* (14:30)

Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): With this year being designated as the Year of the Veteran, I feel it is fitting to recognize Manitoba's efforts during World War II in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Commonly known as the Plan, this massive air training program was responsible for training air crew from Canada, Australia, Britain and New Zealand. Under the Plan, 131 553 pilots, navigators, wireless air gunners, air gunners, flight engineers and bomb aimers received their training during the four and a half years of operation. By 1945, the Royal Canadian Air Force had become the world's fourth largest air force.

Manitoba's training establishments in or neighbouring my constituency were the #1 Central Navigation School in Rivers, #12 Service Flying Training School in Brandon, with satellite fields at Chater and Douglas and #17 Service Flying Training School in Souris, with satellite fields at Hartney and Elgin. Mr. Speaker, this historical plan left a substantial legacy deeply affecting many people, communities and infrastructure of Manitoba forever.

The Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum of Brandon is the only museum anywhere that is solely dedicated to the commemoration of the Plan. I would like to commend the hard work and dedication of the past and present board of directors, staff and

volunteers at the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum who have devoted their time to ensure the museum will continue to share this important and impressive Canadian legacy with generations to come.

On a personal note, I was deeply moved by a memorial book the museum published called *They Shall Not Grow Old*. It pays tribute to the 18 039 Canadians who gave their lives while in the Royal Canadian Air Force between 1939 and 1945.

Mr. Speaker, I will close with the telling words of Laurence Binyon, which I believe speak to the great significance of our veterans: "They shall not grow old, / As we that are left grow old: / Age shall not weary them, / Nor the years condemn. / At the going down of the sun / And in the morning / We will remember them."

Manitoba Day

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, on May 12, schools and communities across Manitoba celebrated the birth of our province. Today I am pleased to share with the House my experiences at Strathmillan School, which was kind enough to let me join their Manitoba Day festivities.

The ceremonies at Strathmillan School were symbolic of the diversity and rich cultural heritage of Manitoba. They opened with an intricate Kimono Dragon entering the gymnasium and filling the young crowd with excitement. This extreme of emotions was tempered by wonderful renditions of the songs "Golden Boy" and "Manitoba" performed by the Strathmillan Choir.

Words cannot express enough how pleased I was to see the enthusiasm in the students' eyes as they realized that this cultural celebration occurs each and every year. These students, who are our province's future leaders, now understand that they are part of a very special legacy upon which they will have the opportunity to build in years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Day celebrations, such as the one I attended at Strathmillan School, make a valuable contribution to our society. Not only do they provide an opportunity to educate students about Manitoba's culture and past in an entertaining setting, but they also encourage students to anticipate tomorrow and take pride in being Manitobans today.

I would like to commend the students, teachers and administration at Strathmillan School for staging such a wonderful tribute to Manitoba's culture and heritage. I would like to extend a special thanks to Arlene Billick and Jennifer Lawson who were particularly instrumental in the organization of this event. In addition, I would like to thank Living Prairie Museum, Heritage Winnipeg, Creative Retirement and the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg for their contributions. I consider it a privilege to have been allowed to attend this stirring celebration. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the loge to my right where we have with us Mr. Clif Evans who is the former Member for the Interlake.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, we will do two parts of business today, bills for the first part, and then concurrence following that.

Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bills 18, 26, 32, 25, 5 and 8, and, if there is time, 21?

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 18—Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on second reading of Bill 18, Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck).

What is the will of the House? Is the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: It has been denied.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I am rising today to speak in support of Bill 18, Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act. Despite the events that led to the Auditor General's investigation into the practices and governances of the college, it is fair to say that St. Boniface College is a valued institution that offers a great deal to the province of Manitoba and the Francophone community and especially to the students who pursue their education from this institution in the French language.

The college is one of Canada's oldest French language educational institutions west of Québec. It provides Manitoba students with the opportunity to pursue their post-secondary education in French without leaving the province, something that we as a province and people that sit in the Legislature are very keen on retaining, and provides ready access to a home-grown pool of bilingual graduates.

The official opposition also believes that the college has a bright future ahead of it and that there are many things that can be done to increase the value of the college and to increase the value of the educational experience for the college's students. The act clarifies the affiliation agreement between the college and the University of Manitoba to serve the educational needs and the cultural linguistic economic and social well-being of the Francophone community in Manitoba.

Across Canada there are a variety of post-secondary institutions that have a wide variety of courses taught in French. Many of these schools are outside of Québec, and entering into partnerships with them would be a valuable alliance for St. Boniface College and the province of Manitoba. However, this legislation is still restrictive in that schools only offer instruction primarily in the French language. This means that St. Boniface students will not be able to take advantage of programs in the Faculty of Education, Arts, or Social Sciences offered in French at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. The quality of French language education at Simon Fraser is so high that the university has alliances with Edu France that gives SFU students the opportunity to study in France and earn SFU credits.

As well, the University of Regina also has a rich and broad selection of French language instruction, headed up by the university's Institut français. The

Institut was set up in response to the important role of Francophone Canadians have played in the development of Saskatchewan. Regina's Institut français is remarkably similar to St. Boniface College, in terms of their mandates to offer French language instructions in a variety of disciplines, while also promoting French language culture and history within their province. However, despite the similarities and the obvious opportunities for partnerships alliance, St. Boniface College is not committed to explore these partnerships further.

Section 6.1(1) restricts agreements or partnerships between the college and Canadian French language institutions to include only institutions that offer instruction primarily in French. The college feels this will hamper their availability to enter into agreements with foreign universities or with Canadian schools that have French language program, but are not predominantly French speaking, like Simon Fraser University or University of Regina.

I have heard from the college, as well as from the students and members of the Francophone community. They see tremendous and untapped potential for the college, and I would encourage people today to get in touch with the government, the college, or their MLA about making this a reality. It appears to me as if there is an opportunity to establish St. Boniface College as a fully fledged university in the future. However, this requires a great deal of effort on behalf of the government in terms of funding and programming. The college as well would have to deal with a great deal of programming issues to ensure it can offer appropriate class selection to offer degrees.

*(14:40)

As well, a great deal of work needs to be done on behalf of the community to ensure that government understands the merits and demand for an actual stand-alone university serving the needs of Franco-Manitobans, as well as Francophones around Canada and the world.

Bill 18 does address some concerns that were raised about the governance of the college. The amendments are an important step to bolstering the credibility of the college as a consumer of taxpayers' dollars and a place of higher learning and development for Canadian students of all ages.

I am pleased that there will be a greater transparency in accounting measures and governance that will mirror requirements other post-secondary institutions have to follow. In discussions with St. Boniface College, they were also quite committed and were working quite strongly in addressing the issues of accountability.

Although recommendations that the college adopt GAAP were not put into legislation, the college must now provide an audited annual report to government which is consistent with other post-secondary institutions. It also complies with section 24(1) of the COPSE act. Although the Auditor General or any other auditor appointed by an Order-in-Council may audit the college documents, the college felt that it should have specified a Francophone auditor since all documents are in French.

There will now be representatives from the University of Manitoba as well as public members on the board of governors, and I am pleased to note that there will also be student representation on the board of governors. However, I would have preferred if the student representation was selected by the students themselves, rather than by the minister through an Order-in-Council.

The Auditor General made several recommendations to the college regarding practices of reporting to government, financial reporting, management control, human resources, management, board governance, board and student recruitment, multimedia centre operations and IT management, which were not dealt with through the legislation. I am going to be continuing to follow this closely either through the minister's office and also in consultation with the college.

In all, 27 recommendations are not addressed in Bill 18. According to the minister's office, the Auditor General has done a follow-up review on the college and is satisfied with its progress in dealing with these recommendations. I, as all Manitobans, am encouraged by this movement.

Before I end my comments, I would like to share with the House some of the comments I have received from educators, students and the community at large while consulting on this bill and discussing advanced education needs in general. There seems to be a growing course of people who are concerned

about the lack of support this government is providing our institutions. They point out that government announcements notwithstanding, it is impossible to ignore the many unaddressed needs at our institutions. Faculty issues, programming issues, quality issues keep coming up.

People keep telling me that we are at a critical juncture in our province when the quality of our proud institutions is at stake and where a lack of appropriate support is threatening schools for the long term. The tuition freeze makes for a nice press release. However, crumbling infrastructure, unfilled faculty vacancies, larger class sizes, declining courses and mushrooming ancillary fees are a reality that this government is choosing to ignore.

So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to close on my support of Bill 18 and move this to committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I, too, wanted to put some words on the record before this bill passes to the committee stage. It is encouraging that the government has actually brought forward Bill 18. I think it is a positive step forward. I am very much aware of the fact of the reason why we have it here. As it has been pointed out, there has been some concern in regard to following all the different recommendations that were brought forward by the Auditor, but, in general, I think this is a bill that we can support going into committee.

I notice, Mr. Speaker, it really deals with a few specific issues that I would like to be able to comment on. One is representation on the governance board. The representation is absolutely critical as we see now through the L-G that we are going to have appointments, and it is imperative that these appointments reflect the best interests of the college. I know over the years you can get all sorts of different forms of representation. We think it is positive that at the University of Manitoba you get students involved.

There is another important component when we take a look at the appointments that are being made, that one of the things that makes this college or this institution as good as it is, is there is a very strong, significant Francophone component that is giving the direction to the college.

Mr. Speaker, I can recall the days with Mr. Gaudry, the former MLA from St. Boniface, who

spoke very highly of this particular institution. I think it brings into the community of St. Boniface a great deal of pride. We all know the value of achieving different forms of post-secondary education, and this particular institution is one of those jewels within St. Boniface and the Francophone community that is well worth preserving and ensuring that we go the extra mile to ensure that the college continues to succeed well into the future.

We note there have been some issues that have been brought to our attention, and this bill does attempt to deal with, in good part, some of the bigger concerns, that of course being for example, the audits. We understand this particular bill is going to make it mandatory in the sense of an appointment through the L-G, ideally the provincial auditor, Mr. Speaker. We recognize the value of ensuring the books are kept in proper order. It is one of the appreciations I have of the provincial auditor's office.

There are some concerns we have within the Liberal Party in terms of to what degree this government is adequately supporting our provincial auditor given the increased workload the provincial auditor has received. I think there is a sense that the independence of that office and the value that office has, Mr. Speaker, is great to all Manitobans. That is why in looking at Bill 18 I would like to see the provincial auditor being used by the college as opposed to another auditor which would be appointed by the L-G. Having said that, I am very much aware of the pressures, the financial resources and pressures, that are being put on the current provincial auditor with the scarce resources and the ever-increasing workload, but I do think that it is a positive step forward.

There are other issues in terms of the corporation may now enter into agreements with a French language institution that would in essence enable students to be able to get other credentials possibly recognized which would help in that whole certification area, which again is a very strong positive. I think we have an institution that provides a very unique opportunity for our Francophone community, not only in the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, but beyond. As time goes on, as we see in the name change itself, just in incorporating the idea of university goes a long way in terms of sending a message of confidence, if you like, for this institution. I suspect and feel very confident that this

is an institution that will continue to do all Manitobans proud well into the future, in particular the Francophone community who sees this as a facility that is a real jewel and we need to do what we can.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we are quite prepared to see it go to committee. Thank you.

* (14:50)

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, just to rise and put a few words on the record on Bill 18. Having heard some of the debates on Bill 18 and having seen what is at stake here, it behooves me to rise and put a few words on the record for our Francophone communities in my area, the community of St. Joseph, the community of St. Jean-Baptiste, the community of St. Malo, the community of La Broquerie, and many other communities that are looking for an area that they can preserve identities.

I think preserving identities is important to all of us. Many of our forefathers came here, and they brought with them languages, and they brought with them other institutions such as their churches, their schools and many other things.

What I find most interesting is that when we develop our university system, such as the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg or the university of Brandon, University of the North, and the latest addition, the Mennonite University, established right here in the city of Winnipeg. I think it was important to the Mennonite community to be able to identify their total community and offer an education process that would reflect their past and their history and indeed their beliefs to a much stronger degree.

Therefore, I would make a strong presentation to the minister that the Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act be, in fact, allowed to identify clearly, instead of calling it the collège l'Universitaire de Saint-Boniface, I would suggest that it should be called the University of St. Boniface. If we would do that, I believe our whole education system could reflect on the fact that linguistics and linguistic abilities in our beliefs, from a Catholic and/or Mennonite or any other, have some reflection on the ability for them to be self-governing and not be dependent through other institutions such

as the University of Manitoba to hand out the certificates of graduation and/or the diplomas, as is done now.

So I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that the minister strongly reflect on her disfavour of allowing what this bill would allow to do.

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

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is Bill 18, Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act.

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

Bill 26—The Margarine Repeal Act

Mr. Speaker: Second reading, Bill 26, The Margarine Repeal Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan).

What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House for it to remain standing?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: It has been denied.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to be able to put a few words on the record on this substantial piece of legislation that I have before me. It can be a very slippery topic, I will confess, and come up with a conflict of interest. I do enjoy my margarine, especially with popcorn. Having said that, you know, I think it is not really a controversial piece of legislation we have before us right now. I suspect it is going to receive good, solid support. It is, in essence, complying with what is happening in today's real world.

One has got to question why it is that we might have it before us today. I understand there might have been groups that have approached the government and said that this is something we want to see repealed, and now the government is responding in kind. That is giving the government the benefit of the doubt and believing that they are responding to specific requests.

Earlier today, when I was informed that we were going to be going over Bill 26, I did pull it just to get

a sense of what it is, Mr. Speaker. As I say, even though I guess it is important in its own way, and I suspect especially when it would have been introduced back in, well, I think it was amended last in the eighties, but it was introduced even before that. I can appreciate there was a great deal of concern about margarine. I can recall, you know, the colouring of margarine and how important it was to allow that yellow dye in there to make it look a little bit more appealing so that it would be, let us say, just a little bit more consumer-friendly. There was concern in terms of advertising and so forth. So I do not think that this particular legislation is necessarily an election platform piece coming from the government, but I do recognize it as something at times that we do need to bring forward.

I thought it was interesting, having said that, Mr. Speaker, that at the end of Question Period we had other legislation that was being circulated around. It was quite interesting in the sense that I had Bill 200 actually put on my desk which is being introduced by a member of the official opposition. You do a comparison of the two, and I suspect the member from the official opposition actually has done a considerable amount of work in compiling Bill 200 and it looks to be fairly impressive. It is going to take a little longer for someone like myself to read and get a better understanding of exactly what it is they are going to be doing, but I would suggest to you that there are other opportunities for the government to be doing a little bit more, taking a little bit more of a progressive approach and attitude in bringing forward legislation to this Chamber.

It should be brought in a timely fashion so that MLAs are provided adequate time to be able to debate legislation, and then ultimately allow it to go to committee. As we get closer and closer to that June 9, I suspect we are going to be a little bit more pushed on some of the legislation we have, Mr. Speaker. Having said that, in regard to Bill 26, we look forward to seeing it go to committee. We do not anticipate it is going to have any problems in committee stage, and with that I will leave my comments. Thank you.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I just want to put a few things on the record in regard to this bill, the margarine act, and the people we have met with, in particular their association and their industry, would like to see this bill move forward. It is an act that has served its time well, and nullifying the margarine act,

and it is time we probably move on with the changes that have come about. I know, in the days when the bill was in place, in fact is still in place, the name and the address of the manufacturer, you had to make sure that it was dedicated as margarines. Restaurants were obligated to post "Margarine is served here" in a prominent place, also on the menu or the bill where margarine was served. The fines were actually quite steep if you look back in the time when the bill was actually put forward, \$500 or imprisonment for not more than six months.

Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of a tongue twister that I hope Hansard has their ears on in regard to butter. It goes something like this: "Betty Butter bought some butter. So she said this butter is bitter. So she bought a better batter of butter, put it in her bitter batter, made her bitter batter better."

Having said that, the bill itself, I see no problem with. I know the dairy products and the other products that have come about due to the changes that are in the industry itself and being consumed by the public is one we will make sure of that is safe and consumed in a healthy way by all our people within the province of Manitoba. So we would like to, with that, move it on to committee.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 26, The Margarine Repeal Act.

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

Bill 32—The Rural Municipality of Kelsey By-law No. 5/02 Validation Act

Mr. Speaker: Second reading, Bill 32, The Rural Municipality of Kelsey By-law No. 5/02 Validation Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen).

What is the will of the House? Is the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. It has been denied.

* (15:00)

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I look forward to putting just a few brief remarks on the record with respect to Bill 32. We would support Bill 32. Mr. Speaker, the bill relates to an agreement between the Rural Municipality of Kelsey, The Pas Farmers' Association and Manitoba Hydro with respect to mitigating the adverse effects of the flooding due to the Grand Rapids Generating Station. With respect to the damage that was created, an agreement was entered into between those three parties to ensure that the effects were mitigated. Manitoba Hydro, under the agreement, has to put up a \$3.6 million bond, and the interest itself would go toward the Mitigation Reserve Fund to be used to mitigate the effects of the flooding relating to the Grand Rapids Generating Station flooding.

As part of that, though, I note that this is now the year 2005, and in the year 2002 I noted that the R.M. of Kelsey established a by-law, by-law No. 5/02, to establish the fund and to determine what that fund was to be used for to mitigate the effects of the flooding.

My concern in this bill is that the minister has been dawdling for the last three years with respect to this bill. There are people who are waiting for the funds to begin the mitigation process. I think his dawdling in that effect really means that he has been disregarding the people who have been affected by the flooding and their need and their urgency to have this matter dealt with.

When the R.M. of Kelsey passed a by-law in 2002, exactly outlining what the fund was going to be used for in terms of mitigation purposes, and then the minister takes three years to introduce a bill to confirm the effects of that by-law, I have some concern. That concern is not only shared by myself but by my colleagues, and of course, by those that are most affected by the flooding that occurred due to the Grand Rapids Generating Station. To take three years to introduce this bill, I think is uncalled for, particularly when all it is is five sections to the bill, a page and a half to this bill.

This bill could have been introduced three years ago, and that mitigation fund could have been established three years ago. The benefits to that by-

law and the benefits of that Mitigation Reserve Fund could have been used three years ago. Instead of acting in the best interests of those who have suffered as a result of the flooding, certainly the minister has shown, I think, a total disregard to the urgent requests of those who have been affected. I think that goes without saying, though, that this is not the first time we have seen the minister take his time to deal with different issues.

I know the minister is concerned about the effects of food prices in the North. I have talked to him during the Estimates process. I have suggested to him that he ought to move very quickly to control milk prices in the North. His answer is less than satisfactory. He gave me an answer that he thought people are not wanting to do that right now. That really astounded me when I heard that answer, that he would not actually take steps, reasonable steps, to control milk prices in the North. He talks about food prices, that they are high and so on, but he does not acknowledge that milk prices are in some places \$8 a litre. Some people in the North, certainly, cannot afford those prices. It is easily done through supply and management. He says that they are not willing to do that right now, that they do not want that done right now. That really astounds me when the minister says that and does not regard those kinds of issues seriously and does not represent the people of the North and has not been listening obviously to the people of the North.

I will give you another example, Mr. Speaker, when I note during the Estimates process when he was asked if Métis rights were going to be looked after with respect to South Indian Lake issues and when the South Indian Lake people are, in fact, granted reserve status, he stated very clearly that he does not see himself protecting Métis people who are going to be living at South Indian Lake. Again, I find that very astounding. He represents the North as a minister; he represents Aboriginal people as the minister. Yet he does not seem to have any concern about the Métis people who will be affected by the reserve status that is going to be granted to the people at South Indian Lake.

I also see the lack of concern by this minister in other issues respecting Métis people, particularly in regard to the Métis hunting and fishing rights that the Manitoba Métis Federation is fighting for in this province.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are on Bill 32, The Rural Municipality of Kelsey By-law No. 5/02 Validation Act. So I ask the honourable member to be somewhat relevant.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is relevant. It is relevant in the sense that I am telling you that the by-law that was passed to which this bill relates was passed in 2002. Three years later, he comes across with this bill, and I am talking about the delay in other areas that this minister has become known for. Certainly, that is definitely relevant to the discussion on the bill.

I am saying that the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin) has a role to play when we are talking about Métis hunting and fishing rights. He has delayed. In the same way he has delayed in dealing with those kinds of issues on behalf of Métis people, he has delayed in this bill. It has changed, you know, he has really done very little in terms of dealing with Métis hunting and fishing rights as he has done in this bill. It has taken him three years within which to enact this legislation to present the bill to this Legislature to deal with a by-law that occurred three years ago. That has a great deal to do with this bill in terms of how he has dealt with Aboriginal and Northern Affairs issues in the province. Aboriginal people cannot afford to wait three years for this minister to act to introduce a bill that has a total of five sections within it. That is my concern, Mr. Speaker.

Nonetheless, we are prepared, because people are waiting for the bill to be introduced and to be passed in this Legislature, to confirm the Mitigation Reserve Fund that they are waiting to ensure that there is proper funding for mitigating those lands that are affected by the flooding. We are prepared to move this bill forward and to support it in spite of the fact that the minister has waited three years, three long years before introducing this bill. Thank you.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I just want to put a few comments on the record regarding Bill 32 before we move it to committee and want to indicate that we, at the outset, believe that this bill will receive support as we go through the public hearing process. We are prepared to listen intently before, of course, it comes back for third reading.

But, you know, from time to time I have to disagree with some of my colleagues. When the

critic for northern and native affairs says that this bill took three long years to get through this process, I do agree that that is an inordinate length of time. I also would say that this government has been in power for close to six years now, and many of the promises that they made six years ago still have not been followed through on. So, Mr. Speaker, this government has a history of making announcements and not following through.

I want to indicate that the intent of this bill is good and that all three partners in the process, that being Manitoba Hydro, the R.M. of Kelsey and the Farmers' Association in The Pas have all agreed that they want this by-law enshrined in law so that future councils cannot change the intent of the by-law and the intent of this settlement for the devastation that happened as a result of the Grand Rapids Generating Station, Mr. Speaker, have been compensated. Three years ago, that money was made available and the community has decided that they want a reserve fund established and that the interest on that reserve fund should go into the mitigation fund that will allow that money to be used and only used to mitigate for the adverse effects on the Grand Rapids project.

*(15:10)

Mr. Speaker, we agree that that is the right way to go, but we see time and time again from our discussions with members of other Aboriginal communities that they are not afforded the same protection. There have been significant agreements made under the Northern Flood Agreement with other Aboriginal communities and there have been Hydro Bonds, and the intent of the interest on those bonds was to go to support and programming for those communities. We are hearing time and time again from members of those communities there is not the openness, the accountability, and the transparency there should be around those funds. There have even been allegations that new councils and new administrations on reserve have taken those monies and used them for purposes other than which they were intended at the outset of the agreement.

Mr. Speaker, they have no law to protect them. We think what is fair is fair and if, in fact, the Minister of Northern Affairs can work with Manitoba Hydro and the community to try to ensure the intent and the purpose of the funds, that were initially intended when the agreements were made and signed, are followed through on. Maybe we

should look at that kind of fairness right across the board, and maybe members of this government should take very seriously some of the allegations that have been presented to them. I would encourage the Minister of Northern Affairs to get together with his colleague the minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro and ensure the millions of dollars that have been provided under the Northern Flood Agreement in other communities are adhered to and that the intent of those dollars would be there to support the community. When I am talking about the community, I mean the whole community.

There have been allegations that the Hydro Bonds have been sold, Mr. Speaker, and the communities are not seeing any benefits of the interest that was to be paid out on an annual basis to those communities, for those communities, for those families. We have heard those allegations. I know the Premier (Mr. Doer) has received copies of allegations, letters of allegations of misappropriation of millions of dollars. I think it is incumbent that the government show some leadership, look into these issues and ensure that the same fairness that is provided under this piece of legislation is afforded to all communities, not to just a select few.

I would encourage this government very strongly to look at support across the board and encourage the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin), especially, not to be selective in which communities he supports and which individuals he supports. We have heard allegations from the Métis community at South Indian Lake, and we have heard the minister on record answering my colleague, when he asked the questions, that he did not feel it was his role to deal with the Métis issues at South Indian Lake. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would believe that, under his sworn responsibility as the Minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, the Métis at South Indian Lake are part of his responsibility, and he should take that responsibility seriously and not only selectively decide who he is going to support and who he is going to represent.

With those comments, we are prepared to pass this legislation, but we would also encourage this government to make sure they are treating all Aboriginal people, all northern communities, in a fair and appropriate way and that the protection of the interests of those that feel they are being disenfranchised by the lack of oversight by this

government, those issues are addressed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 32, The Rural Municipality of Kelsey By-law No. 5/02 Validation Act.

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

**Bill 25—The Workers Compensation
Amendment Act**

Mr. Speaker: We will move on to Bill 25, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen).

What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House for it to stand? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 5—The Manitoba Public Insurance
Corporation Amendment Act (Injury
Compensation Appeal Commission)**

Mr. Speaker: Bill 5, The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (Injury Compensation Appeal Commission), standing in the name of the honourable Member for Fort Whyte.

What is the will of the House?

Some Honourable Members: Stand.

Mr. Speaker: Stand? Agreed?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? The honourable Member for Fort Whyte will now speak.

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, Bill 5 is a bill that amends the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, automobile injury compensation and appeal commission part of the act. I want to indicate right off the bat here that I am definitely opposed to this legislation which has been brought forward by the government.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

It is a piece of legislation which does nothing for the individuals who have to deal with unpleasant situations that arise from time to time with the Public Insurance Corporation. It is a bill that obviously to me looks like it has been lobbied for by the administration and is clearly set out to look after their interests and not to look after the interests of the individuals who are involved in appealing decisions that are made by MPIC. It seems that for some reason the government of the day, the NDP government, has decided to go along with the proposals that are in the legislation in order to—I cannot really speculate as to why. I mean maybe they just did not understand it or did not think about it, or maybe they are just trying to appease MPIC. It is hard to say.

Certainly, when we look back and understand that it was this government that, with a stroke of a pen, tried to take \$30 million out of MPIC, out of ratepayers' reserve funds, and transfer them over as one means to fund universities, we have seen examples in the House today where the government has no explanation as to why it is underfunding our universities. So it is understandable they would look to outside agencies to do that on their behalf, but we remember the uprising about that.

In particular, there are a number of provisions in this legislation that I find disturbing, particularly the effort that is going forward to force those that are appealing decisions to appeal only in writing. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are individuals who from time to time find themselves in a situation where they have to appeal a ruling from MPIC, and some of these people do not have the wherewithal to pay a lawyer, to pay somebody to write their appeal. They may be people who have not got the skills with the English language that they feel comfortable. They may be new immigrants. They may be people who are just not comfortable yet in terms of writing their appeal in English to the board. I believe those individuals should have the opportunity and should retain the opportunity, as it exists now, to be able to give notice that they want to appeal a decision and to go before the commission and state their case.

I can just see it unfolding in that people will be forced to put their appeal in writing, the reasons for their appeal in writing, and they may not lay out a clear case because they do not have a thorough

understanding of the English language. They may have other reasons for not being able to lay out a clear case, and it may come down to a simple matter of, you know, forgetting to put something in their written appeal and realizing later, after they have filed it, that there is more information that needs to be heard by the commission. One wonders if, at that point, when they try to raise this information, somebody might just say, "Well, it is not in the written appeal. It is too late. We are not interested in hearing anything other than what you have written in this notice of appeal."

* (15:20)

So I find that particularly disturbing. This, Mr. Deputy Speaker, particularly applies in this situation where we have a large monopoly that can, if it so chooses, act in a very heavy-handed way, that has the resources of internal legal counsel, as well as external lawyers to draw on, that because of their privileged position as a monopoly in this province they have the wherewithal, they have the financial resources, much thousands and millions times greater than many of the appellants might have. Basically, from the outset, they have everything in their favour, particularly when it comes to their resources that they can bring to the table when dealing with an individual who has a decision they do not agree with and would like to appeal it.

The appeals commission really should be a body where the little guy, the individual can go and state his or her case, and can make it in whatever manner they are most comfortable with and whatever manner they feel will bring them the most reasonable chance at justice being served in their eyes. It will give them the opportunity to take the steps they feel necessary. So there is no reason for the government to come down with a heavy hand on these people. In fact, just the opposite. The government should be there, standing behind the individuals and making sure they have all the resources necessary in order to make as good an appeal as possible.

In particular, the government in the past has mentioned they were going to establish a Claimant Adviser Office, and they told us that over a year ago, to assist claimants. Lo and behold, here we are one day before the government decides to call this bill in the House again, we see an announcement in the paper from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)

that this Claimant Adviser Office is finally opened, one year later.

Is it any wonder that we take umbrage to some of the actions that come out of this government, particularly as it relates to their press releases that we seem to get at a regular occurrence late on a Friday afternoon? This is just another example; the week before on Friday, it was the Minister of Finance who was issuing a press release indicating he was raising fees and raising taxes. Then he comes to the House and indicates that he is doing it publicly by putting out a press release on a Friday afternoon and he does not have any obligation to include it in the budget. Then, one week later, he is out saying, "Well, hey, we have opened this office we promised a year ago, and by the way, next week, we will be debating a bill which appellants might be interested in hearing about."

So it all seems just very, very staged and far too contrived to be just an accident of timing. Again, I think the minister needs to take responsibility for his inability to establish this Claimant Adviser Office in a timely fashion and to ensure that it is up and running, working, and the kinks are worked out. People would have an opportunity to give the government some feedback as to whether the adviser office is working properly or whether it needs to be changed in any way in order to meet the needs of the appellants.

In particular, when it comes to assisting claimants with these appeals, even at this advisor office, there are no trained legal staff, what I understand from the press release that came out late Friday. There are people there who are familiar with the process at MPIC, but, once again, claimants are at a distinct disadvantage because MPIC has the resources. They have lawyers at their beck and call. They have internal lawyers that can respond to these issues very, very quickly, whereas the individuals that are filing the claim, those people feel they have been treated unfairly or unjustly by MPIC, and merely have to be satisfied with going to laypeople who are not as skilled in terms of the legal advice that MPIC will be able to draw on.

I would add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in many cases these people are there as a result of being victims. You know, they have been involved in an accident that was not their fault, that they had no control over. Something has happened to them

beyond their control, and they are suffering for it. Yet, when they are looking for redress, when they are looking for justice from this government, what they see is a monopoly they have to deal with that has tremendous resources. They also see a government that seems more interested in propping up the monopoly and ensuring that it has the upper hand, or the heavy hand, whatever you may refer to it as, instead of doing what government should do, and that is standing up for individual Manitobans and giving them all the support and all the resources that they possibly can.

One other area of this bill that I take exception to, and in most cases I would not take exception to this, but the issue of allowing the appeals commission to be heard by only one commissioner as opposed to a panel of three. I am all for cutting down on the bureaucracy. I am all for reducing expenses whenever possible, whenever it makes sense, but in this case we have, again, another situation where individuals are up against MPIC and its many, many resources, and in that case, I think it is important that they get, and I think they will get, a more fair hearing from a panel of three where at least there can be some divergence of opinion.

This panel is appointed by the commissioner. It just opens the door for possible abuse and possible misuse of this system. Over a period of time, one could quite likely look at rulings given by various commissioners and maybe establish a bit of a pattern in terms of their decisions and how they feel on particular issues and items. This piece of legislation will leave it wide open to the chief commissioner to appoint the commissioner of their choice to oversee particular appeals, so we could, again, have a further stacking of the deck against individuals who are bringing forward their case for appeal.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I think again in this case, citizens of the province of Manitoba deserve all the protection that they can get against the heavy hand of this monopoly. I think they would be better served by having a commissioner of three where there could be possible argument put forward by one commissioner that may sway the view of other commissioners on the tribunal. I think it is important that the government live up to its responsibility to protect Manitobans against these monopolies. When we look at the monopolies that government has set up in Manitoba,

there have always been very strict processes for them to go through to ensure that their customers' rights are, in fact, stood up for.

I know this government and this Finance Minister in particular have a penchant for ignoring those bodies that are set up to control monopolies. I, in particular, point to the heavy hand of government as it comes to dealing with Hydro; their refusal to involve the Public Utilities Board in their decision to take over \$200 million out of the corporation, their decision not to refer certain construction projects to the Public Utilities Board, and finally out of total frustration with the Public Utilities Board, they simply replaced some outstanding members who had served that board for a long period of time and served it very well, with, basically, some political appointments. Some might refer to them as political hacks, but will do the bidding for this government. We have seen that time and time again, and we see it from the member from Brandon West, particularly when it comes to the Municipal Board and his refusal to refer the Waverley West Development proposal to the Municipal Board.

* (15:30)

So it is not just the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger); it is not just the minister responsible for MPIC; it virtually seems to be every minister in this government and, quite likely, with encouragement even from every backseat member, backbencher in this government. I think it is unfortunate for the people of Manitoba.

I would also say, again, this act, in my view, takes a heavy hand when it indicates that notices and orders given to the appellants may just be mailed by regular mail, and it is deemed that the appellant has then received the decision. This is not necessarily in the best interest because it also goes on to state, and I quote, "a notice, a copy of a decision, or a copy of reasons sent by regular letter mail under clause 1(b) is deemed to be received on the fifth day after the day of mailing."

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is very heavy-handed on behalf of government. Knowing them, they will stand up and try and twist it and turn it and say I have something against the people that work at the post office in our mail delivery system. Well, that is not it at all. Our mail delivery system, for the most part, works very efficiently, but, as a result of

changes, the people receiving mail do not always get it quickly because we have what have been coined super boxes in neighbourhoods.

I know from time to time I will only go around and pick up mail maybe once a week because these days, with the advent of the Internet and e-mail, there is not much good news waiting in your mailbox I find. Most of the time it is either a bill of some kind or a piece of junk mail or some decision from the government if they ever get around to doing it. I guess what I am indicating, Mr. Speaker, is that there are very many people who do not pick up their mail on a regular basis, not only in rural Manitoba where it is a long trip sometimes to pick up the post, the mail that is received, but also in the city of Winnipeg where people have simply become accustomed to picking it up once a week because we do not get home delivery.

What if you are on vacation? It used to be if you were on vacation and the mail came to your house, you had a neighbour look at your mail. They could tell if there was something urgent in there and there is usually a way to track you down. Now people just let it sit; I know for myself, I just let it sit in the mail box. Sometimes it can sit there for a couple of weeks. Although I know members of the House do not take many vacations but when we do once in a while, we can be away for two weeks at a time, so you know it is easy to miss it.

I guess just in wrapping up, Mr. Speaker, I do want to indicate to the government that this is a bill I do not think serves the general populace of the province of Manitoba at all. It may serve government. It may serve MPIC and maybe this government is trying to get on the good side of MPIC because maybe next week we will find out they are going to come along and demand \$20 or \$30 or \$40 million out of MPIC to fund their kind of event of the day that they need money for, despite the fact that they have had their coffers replenished to the top by the federal government in their rush by the Liberals to get re-elected.

Mr. Speaker, for those reasons I will be voting against this piece of legislation. In fact, I would ask the minister responsible for this particular bill to take it back and rethink whether this bill should not just be withdrawn. It serves no useful purpose other than to once again lay the foundation for the heavy hand of government to basically disenfranchise the people

in Manitoba, I just want to reiterate, many of whom are in this situation through no fault of their own, many of them who have been seriously injured or risking the possibility of loss of employment income. It is just in everyone's best interest that these individuals and even those involved in minor situations, get all the support they can possibly get in moving forward with their appeal process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a pleasure to echo some of the sentiments of my colleague from Fort Whyte in regard to Bill 5, their proposed amendment to Manitoba Public Insurance, and in particular how it deals with the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission.

I think the government here has basically missed the fundamental reason for making changes to this bill. I believe they have taken a bit of a reactive approach instead of a proactive approach. They are approaching this bill for the wrong reasons. I think they have neglected the real issue here and the fundamental reasons for bringing forward this bill.

I think my colleague from Fort Whyte certainly hit the nail on the head in a few areas. I also have a little different perspective that I would like to add to this discussion. I think, first of all, maybe the reason the government of the day brought forward Bill 5 is in response to some of the increases in the number of claims and, in particular, to the number of appeals that are being put forward to the commission. I just look at some of the numbers. From 2001, the number of appeals put forward to the commission was 135. In the year 2003-2004, just two years later, the number of appeals to the commission rose to 189. So we are certainly seeing a fundamental increase in the number of appeals to the commission. I think what we should be looking at is the reason for that increase in the number of appeals to the commission, and I think that is where we should go. Obviously, the government is just reacting to those numbers in a little bit of a short-sighted vision. They are trying to reduce some of their costs, which I do not think provides a fair settlement to some of the people that will be going through the appeal commission.

Just to reinforce the claim issue, I look at the number of claims being filed that are open with the Office of the Ombudsman, as well, in regard to MPIC. Back in 2001, again, we had 58 new

complaints open. In 2003, the number had increased to 67; 2002, we had 78, just obviously an increasing number there. Again, when we look at the number of phone calls being received by the Office of the Ombudsman, in 2000, we had 264. Three years later, that number increased to 361, so a fairly substantial increase in the number of calls received by the Ombudsman.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental issue here with the claim process when we talk about Manitoba Public Insurance. I think what happens is this Bill 5 does not really address the fundamental issue of the claims handling process. I think we, as most Manitobans, believe in the no-fault process. We believe that this certainly is a manner and a way for premiums to be reasonable in the province of Manitoba, but the underlying factor is Manitoba Public Insurance has to address these claims in a reasonable manner. I think that is the important part. The claims process, the way I see it, has become a very heavy-handed approach by Manitoba Public Insurance at the will of the Manitoba government. I do not think that this should be carried out on the backs of the ratepayers in Manitoba Public Insurance. There is a reason we want to keep the rates down, but on the other side the claims process has to be handled in a fair and equitable fashion. We do not think that the premiums should be kept low based on not paying claims. That is a fundamental problem.

My background as an insurance broker, when we actually sold this product to Manitobans, this was, of course, the only product they could purchase. When selling the product, we wanted them to be aware that they were going to be getting a very good product. That is important and the fundamental to the whole premise behind Manitoba Public Insurance. They felt that they would be getting a really good product where when they did have a claim and went through the process, they would be respected in a reasonable manner. I think that, as Manitobans, we should have that respect. We should have the trust from our government that whatever product we are buying through their agency is going to be a fair and equitable product and that when we do have a situation arise and a claim, that we are going to have it handled in a fair manner.

* (15:40)

Quite frankly, dealing as an insurance broker, we quite often get involved in the claims process as

well, and I know in the last few years those processes do not always go very well, not only in the handling of the vehicle claims, the damage to vehicles, but also when it falls into the Personal Injury Protection Program, which this particular piece of legislation deals with. So it is very important, as a person selling the product, that they have a trust, they believe in the product, that they can sell that product to Manitobans and respect that Manitobans when called upon when they do have a claim, that they be handled in a diligent and respectful manner.

One other point that was brought out in discussions here is the claimant advisory, which we think is a good practice for Manitobans who encounter injuries through the Personal Injury Protection Program. They do need some assistance. It is unfortunate we passed that legislation a year ago, that particular office is just being opened up in the last few days. We are not even sure what they have there for staff at this point in time, but at least the office is open. We certainly hope that will be a benefit to Manitobans who go through this appeal process, and we think it is very important.

In essence, we are speaking against the intent of the bill. We feel that, when Manitobans have a claim, they deserve the right to be heard by an appeal body that will provide a reasonable outcome for their grievance. We just do not feel that one commissioner would give justice to the system. We strongly urge that the legislation be turned down and the legislation as it is now, with three commissioners hearing the appeal process, be left in place. We strongly believe this would be the proper and fair representation for Manitobans going through the appeal process.

In closing, I just wanted to put those words on the record. Certainly, there are some issues that have to be addressed. We think the current legislation can handle that process. Again, this Bill 5 with the amendments to the changes to the appeal commission, we do not think are in the interest of Manitobans at large.

So, Mr. Speaker, in final words, we certainly speak against the intention of Bill 5. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that, coming into debate on Bill 5, I did have some reservations in regard to the reduction

of the panel going from three to one in terms of an appeal. Just in listening in terms of some of the comments from the official opposition, it has kind of heightened that reservation I have in regard to the bill itself. There are a few things that it deals with, but, before I go into the bill, I want to very quickly comment in terms of Manitoba Public Insurance and the vital role it plays in terms of providing insurance for Manitobans for their automobiles.

Unfortunately, at times incidents occur, accidents happen, and when it does happen we like to ensure we have a just system in place so a victim has the ultimate ability to be able to go through a process, and at the end of the day, feel that justice has, indeed, been served. I know MPI gives its best effort in terms of trying to achieve that justice, but one of the other things I note is that if you check with the Ombudsman's office, as an example, you will find that the caseload of the Ombudsman dealing with MPI appeals and Workers Compensation appeals, I think, at one time it was well over 60 percent. All I know is it is an abnormally high percentage of the cases going to the Ombudsman's office that are generated from MPI and Workers Compensation. I do not actually have the exact breakdown, but I do know it is significant. The reason I say that is a good percentage of the constituency work I get deals with the whole appeal process, and there are a couple of expectations when you get into those types of discussions.

Number one is timing. Timing is really important for a lot of these people to be able to get on with their lives and ultimately accept the decision. You want to make sure that due diligence is done, and it is done in a timely fashion so that an answer or response to the incident in question is, in fact, done in a fashion in which is reasonable.

Quite often, Mr. Speaker, one questions the amount of time, at times, it takes in order to get some of these appeals through. On first brush, when you see the government initiative in terms of reducing it down, or having providing the option to have it reduced down from three to one, you would think, well, that might help out. I think there is a valid argument to that.

I can say that it does make a difference as a final appeal, and that is really what we are talking about in terms of this review process, that final appeal.

Having one person as opposed to three people does make a significant difference.

I happen to sit on a quasi-judicial justice committee, if I can put it that way, Mr. Speaker, and I have noticed during interviews and so forth, it does make a difference if it is one versus three people that are conducting the interview and the dialogue that occurs afterwards.

I am not convinced of the argument that the option of having it reduced from three to one is a positive thing. I believe the minister has taken the position that it would help the MPI appeal panel. I am not sure in terms of how the consumer or the insurance claimant is really going to benefit by it. If the argument is just strictly that of a timely nature, that is the only and real benefit for the client. I would ultimately argue that that might not necessarily be the way to go then.

I look forward to hearing from the government as to why it is that he believes that the victim in this, the individual, and maybe "victim" is too strong a word, the individual that has had the unfortunate mishap to be involved in an accident that has ultimately led to the appeal process, if the government can adequately explain as to why that change will ultimately benefit that individual. I would very much welcome and appreciate those comments.

One of the speakers before me made reference to the fact that this is something which maybe the administration is kind of pushing and the government has just adopted it blindly. I hope and trust that that is not the case. I know I did get a chance to read the minister's comments on it, and his comments were, in fact, indeed very brief on Bill 5, and in particular, on this reduction from a three to a one. I think that the minister needs to be providing us a bit more detailed explanation, and I appreciate the fact that he is listening to what it is that I am suggesting.

The other is in regard to the notice of appeal needs to be done in writing. I guess it is important that we be very clear on things of this nature. I have always made the assumption that it was supposed to be done in writing, Mr. Speaker, at least whenever I have had the opportunity to sit down with a constituent and talk about the appeal process. To the best of my knowledge, I believe I have always advised that you should be putting it in writing,

believing that that was, in fact, a requirement. Having said that, I am not too sure in terms of why it would be in legislation as opposed to regulation. Is that a part of the normal process? I am not 100 percent sure. I would like to hear the minister give comment on that. If, in fact, that is normal procedure that it be incorporated and it is going to make the system work better, I would suggest to you then that it is something that we would in fact support because we do notice the importance of maintaining good and accurate records, and if this helps facilitate, well, that is an amendment that, indeed, we could support.

*(15:50)

The principle of seeing Bill 5 pass so that it goes into committee is something where we do not have a problem in terms of getting it to the committee stage. We hope the minister, whether it is in committee or the Chamber, will take the opportunity to explain to myself or to the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party as to why the three to one and how the victim or the automobile driver is really benefiting by this.

The time one, as I say, should be the secondary issue, Mr. Speaker, because you could, in essence, apply that principle to virtually any sort of an appeal that you have out there by saying, "Well, we will reduce time by only having one because it is a whole lot easier to make arrangements." I am not convinced of that being in the best interest of the consumer because, ultimately, I think that it behoves us to ensure that the process remains as consumer-friendly as possible.

I truly believe that we need to do what we can, whether it is MPI or Workers Compensation, to enable or to empower Joe Citizen the opportunity to go through the process from the beginning to the end without having to feel that, "Oh, if I do not get a lawyer, I could be missing out on something here." You want to feel confident that the system allows a sense of fairness to the degree in which consumers feel they are not obligated to have a lawyer. You know, we have a wonderful group of lawyers throughout the province, and it is not to be a reflection on them in any way. Rather, what it is supposed to be, again, is to protect the consumer in the sense, whether it is language problems, educational problems, whatever it might be. There has to be a process that allows at the end of the day to feel that all individuals are going to be able to take it through and feel they have had a good opportunity to have their case heard.

That is one of the reasons why I think that we should revisit this, the size of the appeal commission. Unless the government is able to convince us otherwise, I would suggest that it might be in the best interests of the consumer to leave it at three. But we will approach it with an open mind, pending in terms of what it is the minister might have to say in committee stage or off the record to myself or the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party.

With having said those few words, Mr. Speaker, we are quite content at this point to see the bill go to committee.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that we adjourn debate.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 8—The Manitoba Council on Aging Act

Mr. Speaker: Bill 8, The Manitoba Council on Aging Act, standing the name of the honourable Member for Carman.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 8, The Manitoba Council on Aging Act.

The Manitoba Council on Aging serves a very important role as it acts as an adviser to the Minister responsible for Seniors (Ms. Oswald). While I support this bill on the foundation that it ensures enhanced input from the seniors in our province, I would like to take this opportunity to put some of my concerns on the record in regard to this government's policy when it comes to the seniors of this province.

Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government, our seniors have seen an increase of 20 percent on their Pharmacare deductibles over the last four years. To many seniors on a fixed income, this presents a financial strain and forces them often to choose between groceries or medicine. As the number of Manitobans over the age of 65 is expected to increase by 43 percent over the next few years, this government must put in place strategies and initiatives that help our seniors lead the quality life that they deserve through affordable means.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue to witness the problems in our health care system and this

government's failure to deal with long waiting lists, our seniors are the ones that are suffering. Orthopedic surgery wait-times have dramatically increased under this government, not only the number of patients waiting but also in the time that they are forced to wait. With some cases, seniors have waited up to three years. Three years is an unacceptable length of time to wait in pain as it obviously diminishes the ability to have an active and quality life. It is unfortunate that this NDP government's ideology is preventing them from properly assessing their options and dealing with the problems in our health system.

Mr. Speaker, the Council on Aging's mandate provides that they review legislation and make recommendations to government on behalf of our seniors. One overwhelming request that seniors continue to make is the ability to access their pension funds. As the opposition, we have encouraged the government to unlock retirement benefits and give our seniors the ability to access these funds. However, this government has shown little regard for what our seniors want by refusing to move Bill 212 to the committee stage.

Mr. Speaker, while this government has shown a lack of commitment to our seniors through many aspects of their policy, I sincerely hope that Bill 8 will be a step forward to ensuring that future government policy reflects the interests of our Manitoba seniors and their well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me time to put those few remarks on the record.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I rise to put some comments on the record regarding Bill 8, The Manitoba Council on Aging Act, that has been introduced by this government. Mr. Speaker, we do know there has been a Manitoba Council on Aging that has been an organization that has over the past 25 years provided some advice to government on issues around seniors and the aging process.

Mr. Speaker, I think that has worked very well in an informal way, but when we see the Council on Aging being enshrined in legislation, it presents a whole new dynamic to Manitoba, to Manitobans and to this Legislature. I would suggest very strongly that along with legislation comes the responsibility by this government to actually consult with seniors

when they make significant decisions that impact the lives of seniors. We certainly have not seen that happen under this government.

I just want to indicate what has happened over the last four short years, four of the five years this government has been in power. We have seen Pharmacare deductibles increase by 20 percent, 5 percent per year under this government and this administration. Now who is impacted most significantly by this increase in Pharmacare deductibles? It is none other than the seniors in our province that are on fixed incomes, the majority of whom spend significant amounts of money on their prescription drugs.

Mr. Speaker, how could this government in good conscience stand in its place and pass four successive budgets that have increased our Pharmacare deductibles and penalize through the back door the seniors in our province? I would hope that once this council is enshrined in legislation, this government would seriously consult and ask the advice of their legislated advisory body whether it is good policy to increase Pharmacare deductible. Are they going to do the research into how many seniors are impacted in a negative way? How many seniors on fixed incomes are going to have to shell out more to this government as a result of their wrong-headed policies? There becomes a responsibility on government when they enshrine an advisory body or a council in legislation to ask the questions and to get the answers.

*(16:00)

Mr. Speaker, that is not the only place where we have seen seniors penalized as a result of this government's decisions, budgetary decisions and policy decisions. We have seen orthopedic wait-lists increase under this government. There are many seniors in my community and throughout the province of Manitoba that are having to wait years to get much-needed hip and knee replacement surgery.

Mr. Speaker, when we have a council that is enshrined in legislation, I would expect that this government would listen, would ask the questions and try to find some of the solutions or the answers to our very vulnerable individuals whose quality of life is suffering considerably by the lack of inaction by this government in dealing with the long wait-lists that seniors are experiencing.

Mr. Speaker, it is their ideology as a government that says that we cannot develop public-private partnerships where the private sector can provide the bricks and mortar and the public sector can fund the much needed surgeries that need to be done. It only makes sense, and we see all kinds of public-private partnerships right across government programming. Why would ideology get in the way and penalize seniors, put them in the very vulnerable positions that they have been put in by this government as a result of an ideology that says the private sector cannot participate in any way in our health care system?

Mr. Speaker, we need some answers from this government. We need some direction that would look at reducing the wait-lists, and I know that seniors would like that input. When we have a council enshrined in law, it should be government's responsibility to ask them and to seek their input and get the kind of advice, that would give them more timely access to the very needed orthopedic surgery that they are not receiving today.

Mr. Speaker, we know that many, many seniors have lined the hallways in our hospitals under this government. Though the numbers are fudged today so that it looks like there are less people in the hallways, I have been in hospital emergency rooms, and I have seen seniors lying in the hallways, with no respect and no dignity. Those are the kinds of issues I would hope and I would expect this minister and this government to ask a council that is enshrined in legislation to give advice and to help this government fix.

Mr. Speaker, another area where this government has very rudely put aside seniors is in the area of our Hydro process, where we have looked at the Manitoba Society of Seniors making significant intervention to the Public Utilities Board indicating that they did not want to see Hydro rates go up. They feared that the \$200 million this government raided from the coffers of Manitoba Hydro would have an impact on their Hydro rates.

Well, Mr. Speaker, guess what happened. We have seen over the last year a 10% increase in Hydro rates. Who is impacted most significantly? Those people on fixed incomes, the majority of those individuals being seniors who are going to have to make some choices between being able to stay in their own home or go without maybe food or

necessities or maybe even prescription medications because they cannot afford them because of the Pharmacare, cannot afford the deductible because of the Pharmacare increase. So they may have to make choices and decisions to give up their homes as a result.

What has this government done? They have turned their backs on seniors when it comes to listening to what they have had to say. They have turned their backs. They have made a sham of the whole Public Utilities Board process where they have put their political friends on the Public Utilities Board. As a matter of fact, there was a legal challenge to the process at the Public Utilities Board, and the Manitoba Society of Seniors was one of the interveners in that process.

So this government has shown time and time again how they have turned their backs on seniors in this province. Now they have got a bill before the Legislature that tries to impress on Manitobans and seniors how important they believe seniors are to our society. Well, actions speak louder than words, and they can put anything they want into legislation and put out wonderful news releases that talk about how they are going to be consulting with and talking to seniors and asking them about policy and legislation when they have not listened to seniors for the last five years since they have been in government. They have turned their backs on seniors and have said to them, "Do not worry. We know best what is best for you."

Mr. Speaker, I find it unconscionable to think now that we have a piece of legislation in front of us that is going to enshrine a council for seniors into legislation when we have a government that has not listened to Manitobans. It has not listened to the seniors in our province when they have told this government, "We do not want to see our Pharmacare deductibles increased. We want to be able to get our hip surgery and our knee surgery when we need it."

Mr. Speaker, some seniors have to wait so long, they do not even get to surgery before the end of their life. They suffer in pain until the end. We have seniors that are having to move out of their homes because of the decisions that this government has made around increasing Hydro rates by 10 percent, forcing people to move out of their homes because they cannot afford to pay the bills. We have seen many seniors on fixed incomes who have had to pay

driver licence fees that are doubled what they were before this government came into power. We have seen time and time and time again the nickel-and-diming and the underhanded user fees that have been put in place by this government that have a significant impact on seniors in our society, those people that are on fixed incomes and are having to make choices: being able to stay in their own home, or making choices between whether they get their prescription medication, or they buy milk or a loaf of bread.

Mr. Speaker, now we have a piece of legislation that this government holds out as a solution to all of the problems for seniors. Well, I believe that they can talk the talk, but this government cannot walk the walk.

Mr. Speaker, I would expect and anticipate, because we have legislation now, that seniors will actually be consulted, that they will be involved in setting policy. They will be involved in reviewing budgetary decisions that impact seniors, that they will be involved in legislation that might impact seniors, and I do not believe that seniors were asked whether, in fact, they supported Bill 212 by this government. This government arbitrarily decided that it was a bill that they were not going to support.

Right across the board, we have seen, time and time again, this government turn their backs on seniors and indicate to them that they know best, that we, as government, know best how you should live your lives, and what kinds of programming we should put in place.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think seniors should take any great comfort in the fact that we have a piece of legislation in front of us today, and they should not think for a moment that they are going to have any more input or any more say into what this government chooses to do to take away from them their ability to make choices to get timely access to service.

*(16:10)

Another area that I would like to touch on, too, is the area of crime. I know right in my own community, seniors in their apartment blocks have been vandalized. Their cars have been stolen. Their cars have been vandalized, Mr. Speaker, and they do not feel safe in their own communities today.

Again, we have a government that puts out press releases and talks about all the wonderful things they are doing to protect individuals, especially seniors, when seniors in my community do not believe this government has done anything to protect them. They are seeing increased incidences of violence. They do not feel safe in their own apartments, in their own homes.

Mr. Speaker, let not the government hold this piece of legislation up as the be-all and the end-all and let them not indicate to seniors that this bill is going to solve the problems and is going to stop the attack this government has perpetrated on seniors in our community by their ill-thought-out policies, their ill-thought-out budgetary decisions that have not improved the life of seniors in any way. We will await comments and representation at the committee process on this bill, but I do want to send the message loudly and clearly to seniors across this province that this bill is not going to make their lives any better.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Pembina, that Bill 8, The Manitoba Council on Aging Act, be now adjourned.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for Morris, seconded by the honourable Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), that debate be adjourned. Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Would you please call Supply, Mr. Speaker? Just Capital has to be dealt with and then concurrence.

Mr. Speaker: Okay the House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Capital Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Committee of Supply will come to order, please. We have before us for our consideration first the resolution respecting Capital Supply. The resolution reads as follows:

RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$823,342,000 for

Capital Supply for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Conrad Santos (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted the Capital Supply resolution.

I move, seconded by the honourable Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Supply on concurrence, please.

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Continued)

Concurrence Motion

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Committee to order, please.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I move that the Committee of Supply concur in all supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, which have been adopted at this session by a section of the Committee of Supply or by the full committee.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Committee of Supply concur in all supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, which have been adopted at this session by a section of the Committee of Supply itself or by the full committee.

This is a debatable motion. The floor is open now for questions.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Chairperson, I would like to ask the Minister of Education a constituency issue as emanating from last week's Portage la Prairie school board vote to merge the two existing high schools into one. This is a move that I believe is necessitated by the reduced student population at the high school. Also, too, it is to provide for the accommodation of Senior 1 within the high school setting, which currently is not available in the Portage la Prairie School Division.

I want to ask the minister first off is he aware of the vote that took place a week ago Thursday by the board to see this merger take place.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Thank you for the question. I was aware that the school board was looking at that possible merger. I was not aware actually that the vote had taken place, but I suspect they had apprised me of all the developments as they were occurring. I suspect they were going to advise me that the vote had taken place.

Mr. Faurshou: The motion was passed by the Portage la Prairie school board of trustees unanimously to merge the two schools with a commencement of merged operations for September 2006. It is something that I believe is going to be a positive move. However, this type of merger is unique, not truly seen on a large scale like this, moving 1000-plus students to a central location, than has been previously seen, whether it be in Swan River or Dauphin, with the regionalization of high schools in one location.

I want to ask the minister whether he will consider, through the Public Schools Finance Board, the uniqueness of the situation and to potentially allow for a special meeting so that concerns can be addressed and potential programming can be aired, and ultimately supported by Public Schools Finance Board to accommodate and modernize as a regional school example that took place in Swan River and Dauphin.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you for the question. First of all, it would not be mine to consider as the Public Schools Finance Board is an independent organization, an arm's-length organization. So that issue would not be mine to consider. It would be for the consideration of the Public Schools Finance Board.

I respect this is a very unique situation. I applaud the vision and the foresight of the board to move forward in such a responsible manner in consolidating the campuses per se. I appreciate that has not been without challenges, but as a matter of process, any time there is any consideration for capital changes, that would have to come as part of the priorities that each school division is allowed to set on an annual basis as part of their five-year capital plan. They would vet that through the Public Schools Finance Board, and, certainly, that would be a dialogue that would be taking place at the PSFB table.

* (16:20)

Mr. Faurshou: Mr. Chairperson, I do appreciate the minister recognizing the Public Schools Finance Board does operate at arm's length from the minister's office. However, the policy and guidelines that the Public Schools Finance Board operate within are dictated and provided for by the minister's office.

Being that this situation is unique, and I do not believe that we have seen this type of merger occur in the province since the middle seventies when Swan River and Dauphin and South Winnipeg Technical Centre came into being, I would like to ask the minister his guidance in regard to potentially garnering capital monies either by way of provincial or through federal government funding, the resources to make this merger happen in the fashion to which we all envision.

Mr. Bjornson: The capital announcement that we brought forward this year can address a number of issues, first of all, by having predictable funding every year for the next three years. That allows for a lot of prudent planning on the part of the Public Schools Finance Board. It can take advantage of market conditions and allow for early tendering and tendering during favourable market conditions. As such, we will be doing more than \$45-million worth of work, comparatively speaking when projects were tendered at such a time where they could not take advantage of that. So, in terms of providing capital resources for the Public Schools Finance Board to address this particular issue, we have provided them with a significant amount of funds to address a number of different issues and challenges.

Yes, this is an unique situation, but, again, it would be dealt with according to the policies and

procedures of all school capital requests. It would go through the same process that would include, as I said, the five-year capital plan and priorities as identified by the school board. So that is the process, and I am sure the PSFB will be acting appropriately.

Mr. Faurshou: Mr. Chairperson, I recognize there is a process in place that provides capital resources to schools all over the province, but I want to impress upon the minister that the Portage la Prairie School Division board of trustees is doing pretty much any and everything they can to run a cost-effective delivery of education within the division in Portage la Prairie. We have had a number of school closures. In fact, they will be now closing another school, High Bluff School, which was originally a K-to-8 and then a K-to-6 school, and looking at other options as well to try and provide for the mandate they are responsible for.

What the minister has just outlined for me this afternoon is troubling because the times are changing. We are looking at rural school divisions and even some city divisions reduce student populations, where we have to totally restructure and rationalize where and how schools operate. I do not believe that the minister today, by saying to just apply to the Public Schools Finance Board and include it in your five-year capital plan—these are extraordinary circumstances that the five-year proposed capitalization plan, which is provided to the Public Schools Finance Board on an annual basis by school boards, this is not something that can be capably and thoroughly addressed in that process.

What I am asking the minister today is is he willing to consider an alternative protocol that the Portage la Prairie School Division can follow that would potentially see his department in concert with possibly the federal government, which in the examples I earlier cited could be brought on board to make this merger happen and to see that the 1000-plus students housed in one location in the Portage la Prairie School Division be given and provided for the capital investment that ultimately would see the programming that is so vitally needed to address the employment opportunities in and about Portage la Prairie and the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I would have to speak to the process that we do have and how the process has served us in the past. With respect to the federal government, I cannot speak for that process. But

certainly the school board, I would encourage them to engage in pursuing some federal assistance as far as trying to address interests around vocational education is concerned.

With respect to the times changing and restructuring, I concur. There are a lot of changes that have been made in the last 10 years that we are facing. As a rural member, I know certainly in rural Manitoba there are a number of challenges that schools face, and we address these in a number of different ways, small school funding, declining enrolment grants to mitigate the impact of declining enrolment and a variety of other issues. We are also looking at a variety of other methods of delivering distance education initiatives as well.

When you are referring to technical-vocational initiatives, there is an effort, under my department and the partnership with Advanced Education and Training ministry, to try to profile vocational education and provide an easier transition for students, both rural and urban, in terms of acquiring certification at the college level around vocational education.

Though I appreciate that this is a very unique situation, when the move was made to the early, middle and senior philosophy, there had not been significant changes at the time that was made to accommodate schools in a physical capacity. A lot of the efforts that have been made accommodate schools in the pedagogical sense, but certainly not in the physical capacity as far as the programming being all under one roof. That is a challenge, but, when the decision was made to shift to early, middle and senior years, there was not sufficient support in the capital program to accommodate the students in the physical setting as such.

Mr. Faurschou: With the minister's resources, though, can the minister at least assist the board of trustees through the Portage la Prairie School Division with guidance within his own department to follow the proper course to make the best of this unique situation and, potentially, also assist them in making federal contacts through your department, sir, something that you have the resources that the individual school divisions do not? I would like to ask the minister, very specifically, is the minister willing to assist the Portage la Prairie School Division in making the contacts and having the opportunity to liaison with not only his department

staff but those making connections with federal counterparts to address this unique situation.

Mr. Bjornson: What we can do is look at what has happened in the seventies when these regional centres were established, see how that model worked in the seventies and see if there is an appropriate application of that model in the year 2005.

Around the process for schools capital, it does go through the process of the Public Schools Finance Board. Notwithstanding how unique the situation is, it is something that, as I said, we will see what did happen in the seventies when those vocational schools were established, and I will look into if there is an appropriate model that can be applied to this circumstance. I will do that for you.

Certainly, the Portage School Division has been a tremendous advocate. They have raised this issue with me the first time I met with them probably about a year ago and continue to keep me updated in terms of the progress. Not being aware of the vote, I suspect they would have forwarded the correspondence on that vote shortly.

* (16:30)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I would just like to ask the minister a few questions around some of the capital projects that have been announced in the past. I know, in the summer, or mid-May, or mid-April I guess it would be, of 2003, there were five schools announced by his predecessor, pardon me, by this minister. No, it would have been his predecessor, the member from La Verendrye, in regard to schools that were to be built in the province of Manitoba. I wonder if he could just outline to us where each of those is at today.

Mr. Bjornson: I am sorry, I thought I had the information available, but I will take that as notice. I can advise you of the status of all projects that have been announced in terms of whether they are at the working drawings, the sketch plans, or where it is at the tender stage.

Mr. Maguire: I guess, for the minister, I was wondering if he would know just when the Deloraine School, as one of those five that was to be announced, whether he could give me a date, or just an approximate date even, as to when Deloraine School went to tender, or if it has gone to tender.

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I am sorry, I do not have that information with me, but I will gladly provide that to the member. You have asked about all schools that have been announced, and I will certainly provide that information, at what stage they are in the process.

Mr. Maguire: I guess one of the things we needed to know as well was the dollars that were to be allocated to some of those facilities. I know there were commitments made, but I wonder if the minister could give us an update on whether the commitments that were there will be honoured in regard to the dollar commitments that were made at this time.

Mr. Bjornson: When we had our capital funding announcement this year, part of that announcement included additional funds that would be earmarked for cost overruns on previously announced projects. That was part of our commitment when we made that funding announcement. We are moving forward on all of the schools that we promised to build will be built. Again, I can provide the information at what stage these schools are. I would gladly do that for the member tomorrow.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate to me just how many more schools have been announced for construction since the election in 2003?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I am sorry, I do not have that specific information with me, but I will gladly provide that to the member tomorrow.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the minister could indicate to me what the process is in regard to him becoming aware of when tenders go out, that sort of thing. I wonder if, you know, there must be some process of his interaction with the Public Schools Finance Board, and I wonder if he would likely become aware if a tender had gone out just recently, what process would be used for a normal announcement of a tender or that sort of thing from the Public Schools Finance Board.

Mr. Bjornson: Again, as a matter of process, you have the sketch plans, the working drawings, some public input on the design of the building as a rule. Then it goes to tender. Now that can vary for a number of different reasons, depending on community input, things of that nature.

I, occasionally, am updated on the status and, regrettably, I do not have the information here on the status of the various schools. As a rule, it can take up to nine months before we go from the original award to the ministerial award to the tender process. Pardon me, between five and nine months, I believe, is what has happened in the past, but, again, there are a lot of different dynamics that impact different projects. Again, I can get the status of all schools announced and where they are in the process.

Mr. Maguire: So the minister is indicating, and I just want to clarify this, that he is the one that would make the award for the announcement of a school. I mean, the minister announces the school, and it is five to nine months before a tender would normally go out?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I would be reluctant to have a specific time frame because each school is a unique project, and there are some different issues around that time line. Having said that, though, with the new funding announcement, we expect that it will speed up the process because, having a set capital budget every year for the next three years, we anticipate that that could speed up the process and, again, take advantage of favourable market conditions.

The other thing that we have done with this latest capital announcement is we are going to engage the community more in the design, if there is the will within the community to explore other facilities that could be incorporated into the school. So that is another part of the process, moving towards more community schools.

Mr. Maguire: I guess the process, then, from the time that a school would be announced, as it was in the pre-election period in 2003—I know that certainly there was an announcement that five schools would move forward. I would not expect them all to be announced for construction on the same day or that the tenders all go at the same time, but can the minister indicate to me then the normal amount of time between when a tender is actually let and when construction would begin?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I cannot speak to that specific, what the normal time frame would be, but again, I would gladly provide all the updated information for the member on the various stages at which the schools that have been previously announced are.

Mr. Maguire: Then I am assuming that it would depend on the size, of course, of the tender, but if you were building a school from scratch, so to speak, building a K-to-12 school today, what would be the time frame on construction?

Mr. Bjornson: Those time frames can vary, depending on the size of the project, as well. I know we have had a situation where property needed extensive clean-up which delayed the project quite significantly, so there is a variety of factors that might impact that construction. As a rule, it can take approximately nine months to a full year, depending on the size and the scope of the project.

* (16:40)

Mr. Maguire: Does the minister have some say in regard to the order in which schools are built through the Public Schools Finance Board?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I do not. The process involves, as I said, the five-year capital plans being submitted and the Public Schools Finance Board going through all five-year capital plans and looking at the priorities identified, whether it is health-related issues such as the school where we have had serious mould issues, as the member is aware, whether it is rapidly growing population, as we have seen in some cases when I have been out to Winkler just the other day turning the sod for the new school that is going there.

There are a number of different factors that could be attributed to the priority for that particular school. Those are the factors that weigh into the decisions that are made at the table with the Public Schools Finance Board. So I do not tell the PSFB in which order the schools are built.

Mr. Maguire: But your predecessor did tell them which five schools would be built prior to the '03 election.

Mr. Bjornson: The minister made ministerial awards and announcements that the schools would be built.

Mr. Maguire: Do you know if there had been requests from all of those schools in regard to the construction programs that were announced, the awards that were given at that particular time?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, that is part of the process of the submission for the five-year capital plan. Occasionally, there are situations, as I said, for health-related issues with buildings that are full of mould where we have to put the project ahead of other projects. It is all part of the process.

The divisions identify their priorities. They bring the priorities to the table. The PSFB determines the priorities based on the criteria of need, demographic shifts and issues, as I said before, such as health. So that is the process, and sometimes schools are given priority specifically with the issue of the mould. That was an example where that issue had to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, I think the minister is well aware that there are some facilities that suffered from mould damage. His predecessor announced that was certainly a prime example of why Deloraine was moved forward as quickly as it was, and one since the election was the Carberry school as well. Can he name others that were impacted by mould?

Mr. Bjornson: I cannot speak specifically on that, but I will certainly find out how many schools have been identified for that reason as being priority.

Mr. Maguire: I would not maybe expect him to know the tenders that went out under his predecessor, but could he indicate to me sort of the last three or four tenders that might have been stated from his department?

Mr. Bjornson: Certainly, I am aware of two recently, of course, with the project underway in Winkler. I also had attended the unveiling of the plans for the new school in East Selkirk, which, I understand, will be going to tender shortly.

Mr. Maguire: Those two schools that have not quite gone to tender. East Selkirk, you are saying has not gone to tender yet.

Mr. Bjornson: Winkler, the school there certainly has. It is under construction, but I would have to check to verify the stage with East Selkirk right now.

Mr. Maguire: Maybe he does not have it right now, but I just thought since Christmas he must have had some schools that have gone to tender or something to that effect. I just wondered if he could indicate to me where they were.

Mr. Bjornson: I am sorry. I cannot specifically speak to which have or have not gone to tender, but I will provide that for the member tomorrow.

Mr. Maguire: Can he just indicate how many schools, then, might have been announced since—you know, I asked earlier a question in '03. June of '03 was the election where you are almost into two full years, certainly two years since the announcement was made. How many more schools have been awarded since that time, since those five?

Mr. Bjornson: I am sorry. I do not have the complete list. I do have some schools identified on the list as new and replacement schools and additions and renovations, but I do not have the complete list here.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate what he has before him? How many?

Mr. Bjornson: I have new schools that were announced, a few new schools that were announced, Christine Lespérance, Mitchell School, Island Lakes, Garden Valley, Carberry Collegiate; replacement schools in Deloraine, Gillis, Beausejour, Jours de Plaine and Kleefeld. Those are the only ones that I have on the list, but certainly there are a number of others that we have announced and built since we have been in office, but these are the only ones that I have on the list in front of me right now.

Mr. Maguire: Well, I would certainly just want to emphasize to the minister the importance of moving forward with Deloraine School. It has been six years since it was condemned, regarding the mould that was put in the facility in 1999 in regard to the flooding that took place there. I know there certainly have not been any spades go in the ground there. I just know that there is some activity, but I wanted to know if the minister could, I guess that is why I am asking what prioritization, you know, with these kinds of projects come up. It seems to me that this certainly should have been a greater priority than it has been. I would just encourage the minister to move it forward as quickly as he can and continue to work in that area.

I guess I am wondering what kinds of discussions the minister is having with some of these school divisions and schools in the province of Manitoba. I have petitions in one particular case from a teaching position that is being cut out of the

Pearson School for the coming year, a decision made by the local school board in Southwest Horizon, and I have petitions that have been sent to me in regard to the change in teaching staff there for the coming year, and I wonder what kinds of discussions the minister might have in regard to these kinds of small school developments, and what his plan is for schools of this size for the future.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I am very much aware of some of the challenges that small rural communities are facing with regard to the sustainability of the school. On an ongoing basis, there is discussion around how we fund such schools and, as I have said, to mitigate declining enrolment and the challenge that that presents to many of these smaller communities.

We have introduced a declining enrolment grant to mitigate that where, knowing full well that the enrolment is going down, we continue to provide additional resources. Certainly, one of the areas we are exploring more options in is in the delivery of distance-education initiatives, whether that is through interactive television, and I understand there is an ITV program in the southwest area of the province that provides courses through interactive television to a number of different schools. Some of the other distance-education initiatives, Web-based learning and things of that nature, are all areas that we are exploring to help provide as many opportunities for the students as possible in areas of declining enrolment.

* (16:50)

I know that this is a big challenge for rural Manitoba. It is certainly something that we are aware of. We do have to look at how we can continue to sustain and maintain the schools that are seeing such rapid decline in student enrolment. It is something that is always on the table when we talk about the funding of schools and how we can provide services to areas where the enrolment has consistently and steadily declined.

So it is an ongoing dialogue that we have with our various partners. It is one that I hear repeatedly when I am in smaller divisions in rural Manitoba. There has been a lot of innovative thinking brought forward by many divisions on how they can address the issue as well, so we will continue to work with them and provide them with the resources that they need to support areas where we are seeing the rapid decline in enrolment.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate to me just how the declining enrolment grants are distributed?

Mr. Bjornson: I would have to take that as notice and, just for clarification, there are some questions that are, just to clarify, the criteria change with the discussion every year, from what I understand, in terms of what concerns are brought forward. So I will take that as notice.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, I am just asking the minister in regard to how it is delivered, I am assuming that there is a set format that determines how the declining enrolment grants are distributed.

Mr. Bjornson: There would be and I will provide that for the member tomorrow.

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate the fact that the minister has indicated that he will table that information for me tomorrow. I can assure him that there is also a distance education program in southwest Manitoba, because it was developed for Manitoba by a teacher from Wawanesa.

I must add here, as well, that I had the opportunity of attending a retirement for the superintendent who was in Souris Valley at that particular time, a week ago Friday night in Swan River, one Bill Schaeffer, who was the superintendent up there and for the last 14 years in Swan Valley. He acknowledged in his presentation that evening about the fine work done by Mr. Paulson in regard to Wawanesa and the keen ideas that have come forward from that area some almost 15, 16, 17, 18 years ago now. So it is a model and an example of what can be used for distance education in the province.

I wonder if the minister has any further guidance as to how that program of distance education could be expanded into all over Manitoba, not just in some of our rural schools. What is his thinking in regard to the use of IT education?

Mr. Bjornson: Actually, as a teacher I had the opportunity to use interactive television as an educational tool, teaching an adult course in psychology to four different sites. So I am very familiar with the technology of interactive television. I was also involved with staff looking at the delivery of Web-based learning.

One of the challenges, of course, is connectivity. For Web-based learning to be effective, we have to provide the appropriate infrastructure. Many school divisions are working on those challenges. So connectivity is an issue. The variety of technologies that are available, there are certainly more technologies that are coming now that pose a bit of a challenge in terms of keeping up with that technology and our ability to deliver that technology. We had a very favourable report here in Manitoba that put us as one of the highest per capita in terms of numbers of computers available per student.

So that component of the infrastructure is in place, but certainly the department is looking at a variety of different means of delivery. As we see more challenges in rural areas, we will continue to explore those options and how we can best provide as many opportunities for our students. So IT is a very critical part of what we do.

Mr. Maguire: Just a couple more questions, Mr. Chairman, in regard to the kinds of equipment. I am assuming that the government has made all of these pieces of equipment available for schools in Manitoba. In regard to what the minister has just said in regard to the high number of computers per students in Manitoba, I cannot vouch for that at the present time. I take the minister's word at it right now.

It would be part of his capital budget, I assume, to make all that equipment available.

Mr. Bjornson: Actually, it is the school boards that make those decisions around IT and equipment that they acquire. There are other partners, such as Computers for Schools, that make the technology more affordable.

As somebody who has been in the classroom, I have seen school divisions make decisions around interactive television and around SMART Boards and every other type of technology that has come forward in the last 20 years. School divisions explore a variety of different technologies and see how it best suits their needs and how it best meets the needs of their students. So those decisions are best made locally, applying their funding toward the purchase of technology and how to best apply that technology to meet the needs of their students.

Mr. Maguire: Well, I appreciate the minister has just indicated that the local people, the school boards are the ones to best determine what the needs of their students are.

Would he then allow or has he allowed them to make capital purchases of this type of equipment, or to have other fundraisers or whatever in local communities to help them with the purchase of the kinds of equipment that would be needed for distance education?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, most of those decisions are made locally around what equipment is purchased and where. Within the capacity of the division they find the funds to do that. Some school divisions will earmark portions of their surplus for that purpose. They will carry over funds in their surplus with the intent of upgrading technical systems.

So there are a variety of different strategies that school divisions employ. Some will use it as an ordinary budget process for that calendar year, and that is certainly their prerogative. They are engaged in that process with their community, in talking to the community through the budget process, and then also trying to address the needs of the individual schools within the divisions.

Mr. Maguire: So if, perchance, a local business had used equipment, or wished to purchase new, to present to a school, they could do so?

Mr. Bjornson: There have been occasions where equipment has been gifted to schools. People who would see fit to do so have done so.

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate the fact that that needs to occur in Manitoba.

I have asked the minister earlier, in regard to his consultations with small schools and those issues in Manitoba, on a number of these issues, I have a number of schools in southwest Manitoba, as I am sure all rural members do, where there are not just declining enrolments but perhaps even some larger schools that may be impacted by the changes in demographics over the next several years, if the present trend continues within Manitoba with persons leaving the province. I just wanted to know what the minister's stance is in regard to the formation of private classrooms, private schools, in regard to some of these smaller units, because I

know of a number that are considering it and would like to know more information on it today and, as well, some that have already done it.

I wonder if he can indicate to me whether it is his philosophy or ideology that these kinds of private classrooms should not be allowed in the province of Manitoba, or what he is doing to encourage them.

* (17:00)

Mr. Bjornson: Well, as minister, obviously, responsible for the public school system, and within my purview for the private schools, there is certainly a limited role that the department plays with respect to the private schools. So we are seeing that enrolment patterns are quite consistent throughout the last few years with respect to both private and public schools. But, if there is a group that wishes to set up a private school, there is a process, and I am advised accordingly of their intent, and the private schools have to meet certain criteria around the course content that is delivered and writing exams and things of that nature. As the member knows, there is a certain amount of public funding that does go to private schools, but that is the process, if groups are so inclined, to engage and establish a private school.

Mr. Maguire: Just to finish with a few quick questions in regard to one that I would like some clarification on is the declining enrollment grants. Are they tied specifically to the school that the decline has occurred in?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I can get the specifics, but I believe that is the case. I will get the specifics on that for the member tomorrow.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I understand that the Pine Falls amalgamation issue has been sent to a Board of Reference. Can the minister confirm that that is the case?

Mr. Bjornson: I understand that it has gone to the Board of Reference. Yes.

Mr. Schuler: And has the minister been given any indication when the report is supposed to be coming back from the Board of Reference?

Mr. Bjornson: I understand that the board has made a decision, but I have yet to see the report.

Mr. Schuler: Although the board has made a decision, it is not public. Is that accurate?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe that is the case, that the board has made a decision. They are finalizing the report, and I will see it shortly.

Mr. Schuler: There was a meeting held at the Edward Schreyer School by CUPE Local 1618 on Saturday, May 14, and what is so interesting about it, in the minutes it is documented that Pine Falls has been amalgamated into the Sunrise School Division, that members will enter into the system bringing their seniority with them and will be dovetailed into their respective categories, this at a time when the Board of Reference has not even reported back. How come there seems to be this contradiction between the minister saying the Board of Reference has not been made public and the fact that the union already knows that amalgamation is going to be between Pine Falls and the Sunrise School Division?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, I understood that a decision was made. I have not received the report, but I will have to find out why that was the case.

Mr. Schuler: Well, maybe I could just advise the minister that perhaps he just contact CUPE Local 1618 and ask them for the information they have, seeing as they seem to be ahead of the minister on the curve, because clearly by May 14, they already knew the answer, and the minister is still waiting for the report. I guess the concern here is, and I do not expect the minister to get into the fray, but it seems to be a little disingenuous to indicate that the report has not been made when the minutiae has already being decided at the ground level that Pine Falls will be amalgamated to the Sunrise School Division.

Mr. Bjornson: And your question would be, then?

Mr. Schuler: The question, then, is what is the value of a Board of Reference if the decision has already been made.

Mr. Bjornson: Again, when I receive the report, I can speak to the report, but I have yet to receive that report. I was advised that a decision had been made, but I still have not seen the report.

Mr. Schuler: I, of course, would not wish to make the comment that perhaps the minister is not just out of the loop when it comes to his own department. He

seems to be completely out of the loop when it comes to the employee associations who are far ahead of the minister. The minister does not know that the decision has already been made, because the unions are already, and I quote from the business arising from minutes, "(1) Pine Falls has been amalgamated into the Sunrise School Division."

I guess it is one of those "You heard it here first." The minister reminds me of one of those famous quotes, "Why am I the last to hear?" Everybody else seems to know that the amalgamation has taken place. In fact, they have already decided that members will enter into the system bringing their seniority with them and will be dovetailed into their respective categories. This was at an open meeting that this was reported to me, already, I believe, last week, and just with all the excitement I have not had the opportunity because we have not had concurrence to bring it to the minister's attention.

Whether it is the Public Schools Finance Board whitewashing report, whether it is an issue coming up and the minister not knowing even though he signed the letter, whether it is his department asking for a legal opinion and him not knowing about it, whether his department gets a legal opinion saying something is illegal and he knows nothing about it, and now the unions knowing that amalgamation has taken place and the minister is still waiting, he is still waiting for the Board of Reference to report to him. By what I read from what happened at the meeting on May 14 of CUPE 1618, the decision has been made. I do not know what report the minister still needs to wait for. The amalgamation has taken place. The unions are already negotiating how things are going to take place. It is done.

Why are we waiting for a Board of Reference? What parents want to know, and without picking a side, because that is what the Board of Reference is for, why are we jerking parents' chains? Parents are wondering what in heaven's name did they even go to the Board of Reference for when it has already been decided, but the minister is still waiting for a report. Basically that is what people want to know. One way or another, the decision will come down, but the minister indicates that it is still forthcoming and the decision has already been made, already announced May 14. I guess that is what is so frustrating as a parent, people who do not have the time necessarily to get into all the little details, but I

do not think parents appreciate the fact that their chain has been jerked, and they are being told that it is coming in six weeks. The minister says it is coming imminently, and yet the decision has already been made as per the May 14 minutes from the local union. I think parents are just being bought and sold. I do not blame them for being unhappy. I will leave it at that. Thank you.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I am sure the member is aware that there is only one proposal at the table with the Board of Reference and that proposal had been developed by the Sunrise School Division and Pine Falls. That proposal was that the two would merge. That proposal also goes back to the amalgamation process that we entered into under the schools modernization act and, accordingly, there should not be any surprises that this merger was imminent and it had gone through the Board of Reference as is part of the process.

The Board of Reference looked at the recommendations that were made by both Sunrise and Pine Falls to enter into a merger and, as such, the decision has been made. I am awaiting the final report, but again, given the fact that Pine Falls is no longer a special revenue area, it was fair to anticipate that this merger would take place. As a matter of process, when it did go to the Board of Reference, the Board of Reference looked at the proposal that had been brought forward by two school divisions to merge. There were sound reasons for that merger, and the merger accordingly, from what I understand, that decision has been approved, and the report was forthcoming.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Can the minister tell us if there will be any further new school announcements made this year, or has his one capital announcement of \$45 million been the only capital announcement that there will be?

* (17:10)

Mr. Bjornson: The capital announcement included \$25 million for infrastructure, as in new buildings and in replacement buildings. The decision-making process is still one that the Public Schools Finance Board is engaged in with respect to which schools would be getting the priority for that. So you can expect new schools and replacement schools announced every year under the capital announcement.

Mrs. Driedger: So is the minister indicating that there will be a further announcement that will list or identify new schools?

Mr. Bjornson: We are awaiting the decisions by the Public Schools Finance Board around that.

Mrs. Driedger: What time of year is that normally announced?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, we are engaged in a new process with respect to how we are funding the Public Schools Finance Board, so I cannot speak to a specific date or time of year that those announcements will be made. Again, the PSFB has to look at all the capital plans that all 38 school divisions submit. Once they have determined the priorities, those announcements will be made at the appropriate time.

Mrs. Driedger: In reading the Selkirk paper, it had indicated in there that, because of the delay in building their new school, it was going to cost them half a million dollars more. Is that accurate?

Mr. Bjornson: I would have to verify that, but, again, with our capital announcement this year, there is recognition that there would be some overages and costs for previously announced projects. We recognized that in our capital announcement. They have been addressed accordingly in that announcement.

Mrs. Driedger: Were a number of these schools delayed because of the glitch, the minister's glitch?

Mr. Bjornson: There are a number of different reasons why different projects would be delayed, whether it is unanticipated costs, and, certainly, the members are aware, as was reported in the paper with respect to the debenture issue and the Auditor General's suggestion, so there are a number of different factors which might have contributed to that. With having an ambitious capital program and building as many schools and making many major renovations and building replacement schools, one of the problems we have is that things like the cost of steel having gone up significantly are certainly an issue beyond our control, but that has had quite an impact on cost overruns in schools. So there are a number of different variables that might have contributed to delays in different projects.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, it seems to me that, in reviewing some of the information, whether from Hansard or from the media over the last year, in looking at the delay of some of the new schools, one of the reasons the minister gave was because of the glitch, which he refused to talk about publicly. It had to do with the NDP's bungling of capital financing and not funding capital the way they were supposed to according to GAAP. So, because of the government's bungling in handling that issue, is it not accurate to say that was the reason for some of the delays in these new schools going forward?

Mr. Bjornson: As I said, the Auditor General had made some recommendations. The way that this government has handled the financing of capital for schools is the same way that previous governments have been handling the financing of capital for schools. In fact, this system goes back to 1967 from what I understand. So the recent suggestion by the Auditor that this system change—as I said, this is a system that has served Manitobans well since 1967. Only recently was the suggestion made that the system had to be revisited.

Having said that, indeed, there were a number of different variables, that being one of them, perhaps, that did delay construction on some schools. Again, there are a number of different issues for each project. The cost of steel, as I said, and the increase in demand for steel globally have had quite an impact on cost overruns in schools as well. So there are a number of variables that contribute to delays in projects, but, having said that, having predictable funding at \$45 million a year, this is going to expedite how we do things.

The PSFB knows in advance what capital will be available to them. Accordingly, they will be able to fast-track the process and have schools built faster and go through the process faster on an annual basis because of this prudent planning and the \$45-million announcement every year for the next three years. So it is going to change the way we do things with the PSFB. They are energized by this announcement and the fact that they can take advantage of different market conditions, more favourable market conditions, and that they are not second-guessing what their capital announcement will be. They know every year for the next three years what it will be, and they will be able to plan prudently and plan for the next three years.

Mrs. Driedger: Did the Auditor General not make that recommendation four to five years ago, and that the NDP government, basically the Education Department, did not follow through with it and got caught recently? That was why the minister came forward with a glitch and was too embarrassed to actually publicly state what the problem was in the delay of these new schools.

Mr. Bjornson: I would have to check the history of that recommendation. I know that the Auditor had looked at this recommendation, brought this recommendation forward recently, and that we are looking at those recommendations and taking them very seriously.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, with all due deference to the minister, that recommendation from the Auditor General came four to five years ago. It was not that recent, and the minister has obviously bungled in ignoring that recommendation. Then, when they got caught on it, they ended up having to come forward and, rather than be truthful with the media, come out and talk about a glitch, and then refuse to define what that glitch is. But I would ask the minister, because that glitch is going to cost taxpayers money—according to the Selkirk area, the school division there, they are saying that, because of the delay in their school being built, it is going to cost them half a million dollars more. Well, that is taxpayers' money that is going to end up having to bear the cost for this government's mistakes then.

Will the new schools then in Deloraine and in Winkler and other places that have been delayed because of this glitch, because of the government's ineptness in putting forward and following the Auditor's recommendation four to five years ago, is that not going to be costing school divisions, you know, anywhere in the vicinity of half a million dollars more, according to what the superintendent for Selkirk has said?

That is taxpayers' money. Now it seems to me, if we are looking at three schools and maybe they could all be half a million dollars, which would be \$1.5 million, how can the minister sit there with such arrogance and not have more respect for taxpayers' money, and, instead of trying to skate around the issue, be a little bit more forthcoming, although I can certainly understand why he might not want to be considering what this is going to cost taxpayers

because it is, again, mismanagement of his department that is leading to this.

For the minister to also say that his funding for capital is more predictable, I looked back year over year over year, and there may have been a few years under the NDP that it was not very—you know, it dropped, but in a lot of cases most of the year's funding is around \$45 million. So I am sure the school divisions and the trustees and everybody else that deals with it know that generally that is the kind of funding they get on an annual basis. That is not new. That is historic in the province.

* (17:20)

So, for the minister to be going out and saying, well, it is much more predictable, easier planning, it probably is because he has put himself in the position of having to live by that. If there was a year where there might not be as good a revenue stream which this government has had, unprecedented revenue stream, it is pretty easy to go out and make statements that talk about predictable funding because they have had unprecedented funds coming into this province, either own-source revenues from good planning in the past by a previous government, or by increased federal dollars flowing into Manitoba. It certainly does give some predictability in how money is going to be spent, but generally, in looking back over the past years, that seems to be the amount that traditionally has been spent.

It will be interesting to see what this government is going to do if they, not if, when they run into the fiscal wall, as they are going to do with all of their spending, what it will end up costing Manitoba taxpayers and what the minister is going to end up having to do with his announcements because he has not had to make a whole lot of tough decisions like other governments have had to do because they are flowing in the dough.

There certainly are a lot of schools out there that do need more work. There are a lot of older schools that are wearing down and do need a lot of upkeep. Some of them, certainly, more than upkeep, there need to be replacements. But imagine if this government would have kept their election promises on all these schools from 2003. It might not have cost so much now. He is talking, "Well, yes, steel costs more." Everything costs more. Had the government perhaps been a little more diligent in

terms of their financial management and following the Auditor's recommendation to incorporate GAAP, perhaps there would have been more money to flow toward all of these schools, you know, areas that need new schools and that need repairs. I hope the minister takes some responsibility for dropping the ball on this issue. The buck does stop with the minister, and I hope he does take some responsibility that their 2003 election promises are broken promises and, again, we are going to see taxpayers bearing the cost of that.

When a colleague of mine from Virden was asking about, you know, how many schools are out there, how many have been delayed, it will be interesting to find out how many have been delayed because of this glitch, and how much more it is going to cost taxpayers because of this mismanagement of not incorporating the Auditor's recommendation. I know the minister did not have the answers in terms of how many schools are delayed and how many are coming down the pike, but I certainly hope that we are not going to see an increase in taxpayers' dollars having to bail this minister out of his mismanagement of his department.

I would like to ask the minister how the West Kildonan Collegiate avoided the glitch. The high schools in the Tory ridings were cancelled and the West Kildonan Collegiate, which was not asked for in a capital plan, was not hit by the glitch. Can the minister please explain why that one school, in an NDP riding, was able to avoid the glitch?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, where do we start?

The member talks about \$45 million as being historically the average, but I suspect the member only looked at the last six years or so, because my analysis of capital announcements under the previous administration, under the Tory government, we had consecutive announcements of \$18.6 million, \$23.7 million, and it is not to suggest that schools were not faced with serious infrastructure challenges back in the 1990s. We had a lot of schools that were already over 50 years of age by that point in time that needed a lot of repairs. The capital announcements under the previous administration were quite, well, disappointing. I know as a teacher, when I was in the classroom looking at some of the capital needs that we had in our own community.

Yes, there are lots of schools that need work, and \$45 million a year is going to go a long way to make

that. This is an unprecedented announcement, to have committed \$45 million every year for the next three years. The member surely must know that the capital announcement was a separate announcement from the funding of schools.

As such, when you have seen in the past, as I said, announcements under the Conservatives of \$18.6 million or \$23.7 million, and really no consistent pattern during the 1990s with respect to how much capital funding schools could expect, it makes a lot more sense to provide predictable funding. It makes a lot more sense to provide it on an annual basis, whereas the Public Schools Finance Board can plan more prudently.

Again, taking advantage of better market conditions, and taking advantage of a variety of other issues around timing, will allow us to get more for our money. In fact, last year was the first time the Public Schools Finance Board had an opportunity to early tender, and was given \$6 million to do so. In that \$6 million, they converted it to what, according to their analysis, would have been \$7.5 million worth of projects. But having the opportunity to go to early tender enabled them to do that.

So, you know, I am not going to apologize for what we are doing in school capital. Certainly, \$161 million more invested by our government, compared to the previous six years, speaks to our commitment to capital.

In fact, if you are a teacher, a student teacher graduating this year, and you get a job in Manitoba, your chances of working in a brand-new school are 1 in 35. Your chances of working in a school that has had a major capital renovation is 1 in 20. Your chances of working in a school that has had some recognizable impact because of our capital plan by the end of this year, statistically, would be 1 to 1 because we will have completed almost 700 projects by the end of this year, in terms of our capital plan.

Now, the member also asks about West Kildonan, and the member has repeatedly said it was not part of their capital plan. Well, that is not accurate. In the Seven Oaks School Division capital plan, it was identified as a priority to build a new school back, I believe, in the late nineties, early 2000. I will check the date for that for the member.

But it was part of the capital plan. When they were denied the request to build a new school, they resubmitted a capital plan that would look at the renovation of West Kildonan Collegiate.

I have also explained to the member that, as a matter of process, when a school is identified for major repairs, when the analysis is done, and when it is recognized that the cost of the repair exceeds 50 percent of the cost if new construction, the matter is referred back to the Public Schools Finance Board for consideration of a new building. That is the process. That process has worked in this case, where the costs were certainly in excess of 50 percent of new construction, and it was identified that a brand new school would better serve the taxpayers of Manitoba as a better investment, rather than renovating a school that had been built in three phases and was age-expired in some portion of the school.

So that was a process that has worked in the past. It is a process that will continue to work in the future. This particular school, like every school when it is identified as a capital priority for a school division, is brought to our attention.

The member also talks about schools in Tory ridings. I would take exception to those comments because I was out in Winkler the other day turning sod with the member from Pembina (Mr. Dyck) and building a school that will accommodate 500 students. I was in Mitchell, just outside of Steinbach, as minister, in my first duty, cutting the ribbon there. In fact, I will be in the Arthur-Virden constituency. I have been invited to be there to open the new library that has been built in one of the schools there. If you go through the list of schools that we have built, I really, really must take exception to the comments that have been made by the members opposite with respect to any type of favouritism for capital in Manitoba.

Again, you know, talking about promises, we have promised to build schools, and we will build every school that we have promised to build. That is what we do as a government, and we will continue to do that. I often look at the example from members opposite with respect to the Brandon hospital, promising, I believe, five times to build the hospital. That was a hospital that was not delivered by members opposite. That was a hospital that we built.

So I am not going to apologize for our ambitious capital plans that we have in this province. We build for the future and will continue to do so.

Mrs. Driedger: Just to point out to the minister that during the nineties, and I know he was not around, but the federal government withheld almost a billion dollars from Manitoba. That forced the former government to make some of the decisions that he was criticizing today. The member should be fully aware that they did that unilaterally, and the Province had no say in what was happening. So some tough, tough decisions did have to be made at that time.

Can the minister tell us how often he meets with the Public Schools Finance Board?

Mr. Bjornson: We do not have a regular meeting schedule. Occasionally, I am invited to meet with them, and occasionally I ask to meet with them. So there is no regular meeting schedule, but, like the PSFB, I meet with a number of different organizations and stakeholders. I cannot recall when I last met with them, but I meet with them on an as-needed basis.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5:30 p.m., call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 16, 2005

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