



Third Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

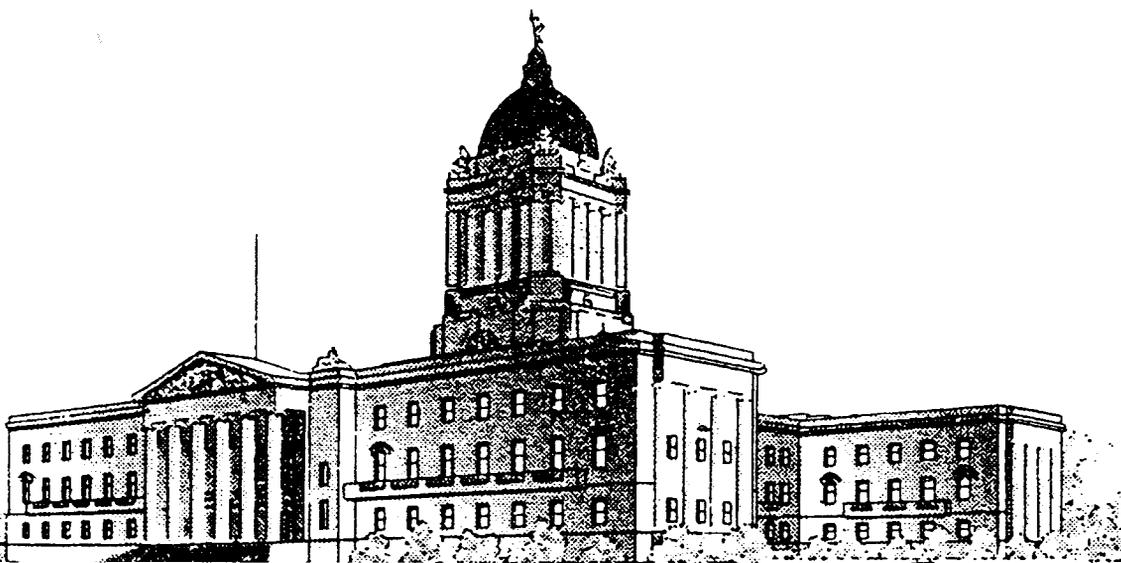
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky, Hon.	Inkster	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrma	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean, Hon.	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold	Minnedosa	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
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PENNER, Jim	Steinbach	P.C.
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REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
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ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
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, Joy	Fort Garry	P.C.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 15, 2002

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Five-Year Report on the Status of Forestry from April '96 to March 2001.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 22—The Public Schools Amendment Act (Francophone School Division Governance Structure)

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Smith), that leave be given to introduce a bill titled Bill 22, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Francophone School Division Governance Structure); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (structure de gestion de la division scolaire de langue française), and that the same now be received and read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, this bill amends part of The Public Schools Act that relates to the governance structure of the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine. It removes the regional committee structure and enables trustees to be elected directly to the Francophone school board. It enables the Francophone school board to establish advisory groups for each region in the province of Manitoba and eliminates outdated provisions specific to the initial establishment of the Francophone School Division in our province.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable

members to the loge to my left where we have with us Mr. Harold Neufeld, the former Member for Rossmere.

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

* (13:35)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Grade 3 Diagnostic Assessments Results

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Premier if he was aware of the results of the Grade 3 diagnostic tests and wondered if he could share those with the House. It was painfully obvious yesterday that neither the Premier nor the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) was aware of any of these results.

Hopefully today the Premier has had a chance to review those and will be able to answer the questions today that I posed to him yesterday, and that was simply this: Would the Premier share with the House the results of the Grade 3 assessments in reading, lecture and numeracy?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I will take the specifics under notice.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could table them for the House.

I understand these are being buried somewhere and they are not to be made public. It was only through some research that these became aware. So I hope the Premier and the Minister of Education will take the time to go through these results, because it shows the results of the Manitoba Education, Training and Youth Web site, of 10 706 Grade 3 students who were tested in their ability to recall addition and subtraction up to 10, that 6173 are not meeting expectations.

Can the Premier explain to this House, to Manitoba parents: Why is it that six out of ten

students in Grade 3 are unable to deal with addition and subtraction up to the number 10?

Mr. Doer: I believe the issue was the testing after this summer and at the start of Grade 3 the verbal testing that took place. I have asked for the Department of Education to determine the reason for those results through the Government.

The member made mention, on the one hand it took research to dig it up, and secondly it was on the Web. It was obviously on the Web for a reason.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the issue is: Why is this Premier failing our children in Manitoba? That is the issue.

I would ask the Premier if he has identified the cause to the problem of why, under his watch, under his and the Minister of Education, six out of ten Manitobans in Grade 3, those children, why they are unable to add or subtract up to 10.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, there is a verbal test and then a written test. Some of the adding is much more effective in written form.

There are a number of the tests that are in the very positive light. The member has picked out one that bears scrutiny and bears accountability. I certainly know as a parent with a child that is finishing Grade 2 shortly that I am pleased that the Government—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (13:40)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, every time the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) drives by the new Simplot plant he will come back to this House and apologize for his predictions that it would never be built. Every time the sale of hydro to the United States at 6 cents a kilowatt-hour instead of 3 cents a kilowatt-hour, he can apologize to this House. Every time hog manure does not smell like strawberry jam, he can apologize to this House.

The Manitoba Association of School Trustees who we met with last evening, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, many parent-teacher organizations, parents' advisory groups had suggested strongly rather than having tests taken at the end of Grade 3 that there be tests at the beginning of Grade 3. The Tories, or the members opposite, decided not to follow the advice of the people on the front lines of education, Mr. Speaker. The trustees they ignored, the teachers they ignored, the parents' advisory groups they ignored. We took their advice and we put in these tests at the front end of the school year.

The purpose of those tests is to ensure if there are deficiencies, if six out of ten kids are not performing adequately and up to standard at the beginning of the year, that by the end of the year they will. Under the old system we would not have caught that till the end of the school year. We have saved 10 months.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Mr. Murray: On a new question, Mr. Speaker. The rant about Simplot and hydro is cold comfort to the parents of the children in Grade 3. When asked about the results of the Grade 3 tests, the Premier said on CJOB radio this morning, and I quote: About eight or nine of the tests at the beginning of Grade 3 have had positive results. That is what the Premier said this morning.

I would like to ask the Premier: Could he please outline which of these positive tests he considers to be the ones that he referred to?

Mr. Doer: The education and early childhood development is a continuum. Members opposite who cut \$10 million out of child care for those very same children who are now being tested in Grade 3 may want to look in a mirror.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the simple fact is the results from these tests should not be acceptable to any government. This does not meet expectations, 39 percent, 58 percent do not meet expectations, 38 percent do not meet expectations, 52 percent do not meet expectations. What is he doing about it?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question has been asked. Let us have the courtesy to hear the answer, please.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The early childhood development has been a priority of ours. We are investing money every year in early childhood development. Child care is a priority for us. Child care is evaluated not only as an economic advantage and a societal advantage but also as an educational advantage. We did not cut the \$10 million out of child care in Manitoba. We are re-investing in child care. We are taking back the cuts of the Tories and building upon a future.

We are putting more money into public education at early childhood years. The last funding formula spoke to the issues of early childhood education, early years in education. Our kids, for years, have gone through funding cuts after funding cuts from the members opposite. We believe with the improved resources in public education there will be better results for the tests at the beginning of the school year and, just as importantly, there will be better results at the end of the school year.

These tests are intended to let all parents and all teachers know where a child stands coming out of Grade 2, so that teachers can teach on the basis of educational tools that will allow kids at the end of the year to have much better results than at the beginning of the year. All indications we have is kids are learning through the Grade 3 year, and they are not waiting for the end of year to get those kind of tests, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Murray: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that when asked a very simple question about the future of Manitoba, our young children, the children of Grade 3, the First Minister loves to point around and blame this and blame that and blame everything. The fact of life is that six out of ten are failing to be able to answer the question of addition and subtraction. They only have one person to blame and that is him.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of categories in the beginning of the year. This is, of course, in September, kids coming back from summer holidays, where the kids are tested, and

a number of the categories are very positive, in the 65%, 68% range.

This was always intended to evaluate where a kid is in starting Grade 3, to be a tool to have an outcome that is much more positive at the end of Grade 3. This is the advice given by trustees, ignored by the Tories. This is the advice given by teachers, ignored by the Tories. This is the advice given by parents. As a parent of a child that is, in September, going into Grade 3, I am delighted my daughter is going to be tested at the beginning of the year instead of the end of the year under the Tory system.

* (13:45)

Grade 3 Diagnostic Assessments Results

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, today in an article in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the Minister of Education admitted to Manitobans that the Grade 3 diagnostic test results, and I quote: Obviously point to a need to improve student outcomes. It does show we have work to do system-wide.

Yet the Premier (Mr. Doer), on CJOB this morning said, and I quote: We are finding that about eight or nine of the tests at the beginning of Grade 3 have had positive results.

Mr. Speaker, as a new, young mother, I am extremely concerned about this issue, that these students are below average. I want to ask this minister: Does he now agree with the Premier of Manitoba that the results of these tests are positive for the students of Manitoba?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member from Tuxedo.

Of course we are all concerned in this House about improving outcomes for learners in Manitoba, for ensuring student success for Manitoba students. That is precisely why this Government implemented an early in the year assessment so that the school year could be used to improve students' skill sets.

I am also very pleased that the quality of research of members opposite has been enhanced

to the degree that they are actually reading Web sites and getting material that was widely distributed from the department a number of weeks ago. This material is very important for informing public discussion around educational issues in our province. I think it is worthwhile and useful that Manitobans have an educated perspective on this.

Mrs. Stefanson: My question for the Minister of Education: Does he believe, as does his Premier, that it is acceptable that almost 60 percent of Grade 3 students are not meeting expectations when it comes to performing addition and subtraction facts to number 10?

Mr. Caldwell: On the whole, the results, in fact, are very positive for Manitoba students.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Could I kindly ask the cooperation of all honourable members, this is Question Period, and to have the courtesy to listen to the person that is raising the question and to listen to the person that is supplying the answer, please. It is very, very hard to hear and I have to be able to hear in order if someone breaches one of the rules. So I ask the cooperation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Caldwell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying in my response, on the whole the results are positive. The results show that students in Manitoba are doing well in most areas in the public school system. A smaller number of students face challenges in meeting all curriculum expectations, but, I guess, the important thing in the context of this debate, members opposite yesterday said we have discovered, you know, our research has shown, the Government is hiding away these results. This information was compiled, posted on the Web site, distributed to hundreds of stakeholders in the education system weeks ago for the purpose of improving student outcomes.

Point of Order

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Turtle Mountain, on a point of order.

Mr. Tweed: I find it interesting that the minister talks about all the people in Manitoba knew

about it. The only person who did not know about it was him and the Premier (Mr. Doer).

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Education, Training and Youth, on the same point of order.

* (13:50)

Mr. Caldwell: The member does not have a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The report had been posted on the Web site for a number of weeks. It is hardly a discovery.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain, he does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mrs. Stefanson: Is this minister saying that it is this Government's policy to accept the level of mediocrity for the students of Manitoba?

Mr. Caldwell: The member, I am sure, knows a lot about accepting levels of mediocrity. We have seen that repeatedly for the last two and a half years in this House. What I can say, Mr. Speaker, this Government is investing in public education. This Government is interested in improving student outcomes, and it is for this reason that we are posting such results to stimulate meaningful discussion in the public interest, enhancing student outcomes, and not broadly misrepresenting, I might add, student outcomes. The report does not show that 60 percent of Grade 3 students cannot count, as members opposite claim. It shows that 60 percent of students, as identified early in the school year, need remedial assistance through the school year, and not at an end-of-a-year standards test that was a data-gathering exercise that members opposite perpetrated on the people of Manitoba. Education System

Education System Minister's Comments

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, today's newspaper headline states the Minister of Education acknowledges the education system is failing pupils. Then a few

paragraphs later he says the education system is working well. Can the minister indicate if this is another example of symmetry?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Caldwell: Members opposite make light of the phrase "symmetry" and I appreciate that. I know there have been scrambles for dictionaries a couple of times, but the issue on symmetry can go to the cemetery, and that is a simile.

Grade 3 Guarantee Status Report

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Could the minister indicate, if he stands by the Grade 3 guarantee this Government issued in the fall of 1999, that every child will be reading and writing fluently in the Grade 3 year? How is that Grade 3 guarantee working?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, as I stated in an earlier reply to a question, the report that members opposite are waving around after finding it on the Web site, on the World Wide Web, hidden away and distributed to education stakeholders across the province, every division, hidden away in the superintendent's office in every division of the province of Manitoba, of course, the report that was distributed by the Department of Education on the early years assessment indicates that students are meeting expectations on a broad range of skills.

The old simplistic Grade 3 standards test would not have provided us with this information. It certainly would not have made any meaningful difference, being done in June when there is no opportunity for remedial action.

Indeed, these results demonstrate precisely why we instituted the Grade 3 assessment in the first place.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Could I ask the minister to focus on the Grade 3 guarantee and ask him how

that Grade 3 guarantee is working for students who are failing in this system?

Mr. Caldwell: Well, Mr. Speaker, students—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Caldwell: Students are not failing in the system. Students are being helped to improve their outcomes and their skill levels. The only failure that students suffered in the last decade were as a result of policies by members opposite.

* (13:55)

Medical Equipment Fund Status Report

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, in October of 2000 the Doer government received \$37 million from the federal government as part of the medical equipment fund to be spent strictly on medical equipment like MRIs and CT scanners.

I would like to ask this Minister of Health: Exactly how much money of that \$37 million has he spent to date on medical equipment in Manitoba, remembering that he has had that money in Manitoba since October of 2000?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I heartily thank the member for that question because it points out one of the difficulties and one of the problems we have experienced in the past. From the day that money was announced, the members said: Spend it, spend it, spend it. Right off the bat, one of her first press releases was: Spend that money.

Mr. Speaker, we have gone in a systematic fashion to deal with this funding. We have spent across the province, through the width, the breadth of a variety of services, a variety of equipment, and we have been recognized as the only province by the Canadian Association of Radiologists publicly to have done the best job on the spending of this.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has not answered the question, and I am not sure why he is so

defensive about it. I will ask him again: How much of the \$37 million that came to Manitoba for medical equipment has he spent to date on medical equipment for the crumbling equipment we have and for the long waiting lists? How much money has he put into this?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to provide the member with the numerous press releases that outline in detail the money that has been spent. I will also provide for the member the letter that I received from the federal Minister of Health congratulating us with respect to how we had dealt with the equipment fund. I would be happy to provide that to the member.

I believe, if memory serves me correctly, Mr. Speaker, we have spent in total something like \$73 million on equipment, which far exceeds anything done by the previous government during their last couple of years of office.

Mrs. Driedger: I would like to ask the Minister of Health why, and I would like to table the document right now. It is a Freedom of Information document that indicates that his department has only spent \$2.8 million of that \$37 million. *[interjection]* These are not my numbers; these are numbers that came from his department. Can he explain how he has only spent \$2.8 million of \$37 million?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, first off, the member is wrong in terms of the actual money that has been spent. Let me—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I said this many a time in this House. The members opposite said to spend the money right off the bat. We embarked on a strategy to spend the money on equipment across the province in needs. Not only have we spent more money in the last two years than the previous two years, but part of the reason for not spending the total fund, which we have not expended at this point, we have expended approximately half of it, the rest we will roll out this year, is that we wanted funding for things like the gamma knife that allows us the opportunity to be a centre of

excellence for the rest of Canada, and is an agreement that we have entered into with the other provinces to have a centre of excellence here.

Had we done what members opposite asked, we would not have been able to do that.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River Heights.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for River Heights has the floor.

Grade 3 Diagnostic Assessments Results

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has explained, the diagnostic tests were done at the beginning of the year in order to identify children who were behind so that they could be helped to catch up. I ask the Premier what specific measures his Government has undertaken to make sure that those children who were identified as behind were able to catch up by the end of the year.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): The latest OECD tests for Canada had us very well placed as a nation and for Manitoba I think it was fourth in reading and fourth in math. I think all of us in this House would want to be first in both of those categories, so as the member has indicated it is important to take steps to improve that.

We are investing in technology for our schools to allow our children to have that capacity and improve that capacity. We are investing enough money so new textbooks can be purchased.

* (14:00)

An Honourable Member: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Doer: While the members opposite say: Oh, yeah, but when you go minus 2 as opposed to plus 2.5, there is a 4.5% swing per year. That is tens of millions of dollars that was clawed back out of the classrooms of our younger kids. Year after year we are starting to rebuild the public education system, rebuilding the capacity.

I was pleased to note in the classroom size report that only 2 percent of our kids have classrooms in K to 6 over 30 students. We have to correct that 2 percent. I think it is about 20 percent from K to 6 classroom sizes over 25. We have to work out a long-term strategy in that area. We believe there is a connection between the numbers of students in classrooms, the composition of classrooms and early childhood development.

Over time, we are very confident that some of the measures we are taking to start building respect back into public education as opposed to cuts will make a difference to take us to fourth in Canada and second in the world to, hopefully, our goal should be first.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary to the Premier. I ask the Premier simply what evaluation, assessment or testing was done at the end of Grade 3 to see if the children who were behind at the beginning had in fact caught up.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I recall the Leader of the Liberal Party supporting the position we took, as opposed to the Tories, to eliminate the standard test at the end of Grade 3. So I just do not want him to say one thing in the election campaign and another in this House.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind all honourable members that the clock is running.

Mr. Doer: The bitter howls from members opposite, they are still bitter about the 1999 election campaign, but I digress, I digress.

Mr. Speaker, I just met with a group of teachers last week. We met with MAST last evening. They were very positive about the increased investment in public education, the changes that have been made for funding at the rate of growth of the economy, compared to the minus two, minus two, zero in an election year, minus two, minus two after.

Teachers test, and I know, again, as a parent, teachers test throughout the year. I get probably test results as a parent at home at least once a week, if not four or five times a week. As a

parent I get test results for my child in Grade 2 and my child in Grade 6. I feel that some of the tests require parents to work harder and teachers to work harder in certain subjects, some of the tests, and I think this is the case for all children. At the end of the year, there is a report card based on how children do.

I think the really important issue for us is, and as the Leader of the Liberal Party stated in the election campaign, we want the tests at the beginning of the year so kids can learn throughout the year.

I also know from teachers that the first year of our change on Grade 3 tests needed some improvement. I said that yesterday in the House. I talked to some teachers who had this new system in place. They feel it has been improved, but they do feel that we are working together with learning as the goal. Learning throughout the year is the goal. You start at a certain point, Mr. Speaker, and we feel, and teachers feel, that there is a great deal of progress made with each of those children in Grade 3 as they progress through the 10 months after the initial tests at the beginning of the year.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I was not suggesting that all students should be tested at the end of the year.

What I was asking the Premier, and I ask again in my second supplementary, was: The children who are identified as being behind, were these retested to see if they had caught up? Or was there even a sample of children who were behind at the beginning, identified in the diagnostic testing, then retested at the end of the year to make sure that the overall strategy of the Government to improve the outcomes was, in fact, successful?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Of course, we are not finished the school year yet this year, I find it passing strange, although perhaps after being here for two and a half years I should not find it passing strange. But I do find it passing strange that the Tory research staff which assiduously hunted this out on the World Wide Web in every division around the province should concentrate

on one single statistic which is important. but the main point of this exercise, as the Premier (Mr. Doer) said and as this Government has stated, is to improve students' success rates, improve their outcomes.

I would refer members opposite to page 6 of the report that they so diligently dug up to show that 82 percent are meeting numeracy expectations with no help or very little help, and we will work on improving those skills throughout the school year.

Red River College Downtown Campus

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transportation and Government Services.

The international spotlight is on the new Red River College downtown campus. Because our Government has shown leadership in enhancing post-secondary facilities, the extinct bird, the building crane is back in downtown Winnipeg.

Could the minister inform this House what recognition has been bestowed upon the new Red River College downtown campus?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I think it is appropriate on a day in which we see headlines like "City's economy on brink of boom" that there is more good news in the fact that we are getting international recognition for the downtown Red River campus.

I want to say how proud we all were I think of the announcement made today by our Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Mayor of Winnipeg. This is an achievement for the provincial government. The architects are Corbett Cibinel. It is an achievement for everyone, and I say to all members of this House that when they see this building completed, it is going to be a legacy project not only for this Government, which I think day in, day out is getting a reputation for being a building government, but for a province because this is our vision of the future. It is sustainable. Mr. Speaker, we should all be proud of the work, the downtown Red River campus.

* (14:10)

Neepawa Hospital X-ray Equipment Funding

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the response of the Minister of Health, and he skillfully avoided saying what he has spent \$37 million on. Living in the shadow of Riding Mountain, up Highway 16, I think there are a lot of people out there wonder why we now have an inoperative X-ray piece of equipment where 400 bariums are performed annually. Will he explain why he has not yet funded that equipment?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I will get back to the member. There has been more funding spent in the last two years, equipment funding, in fact \$73 million, which included the \$18 million in federal funding in the year 2000-2001. The additional funding has been allocated, and there is a whole series of measures of balance between rural, urban diagnostic treatment. We went at it systematically and carefully across the province, not what the critic from Charleswood suggested that we spend it as soon as we got the money, right out of the hopper, which would not have been prudent and which would not have allowed us to make the appropriate decisions for all the citizens of Manitoba to deal with the tremendous funding shortfalls and cutbacks that occurred during the 1990s.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister doth protest too much. He denied earlier having \$2.8 million being all that he spent but, in fact, that is the number that was listed in his last third-quarter report. So I ask the minister: How long will we have to wait before he decides if he is going to fund a simple X-ray machine for the Neepawa Hospital?

Mr. Chomiak: In 2000-2001, we spent \$32 million on equipment. In 2001-2002, we spent \$40 million. On the specifics of the Neepawa Hospital, as I said in this House last year and the year before, there was such a shortfall in equipment funding, it was allowed to deteriorate so dramatically under members opposite's watch that the list was long, which is one of the reasons why Manitoba took the lead in negotiating with

the federal government for the equipment funding which we obtained and which we are rolling out beyond the additional expenditures these are already made.

I will review the specifics of the Neepawa Hospital and see where it is on the list of priorities across the province.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister earlier, and my colleague asked him: Where did he put the federal dollars that he received? He has avoided answering that. We are seeking a \$300,000 piece of equipment that he was told would be inoperative by the first of June. It broke down in March. Now do not tell me he did not know about it. When will he fund it?

Mr. Chomiak: The member might be aware that recently *The Globe and Mail* did a review of all the spending under the fund across the country. According to Normand Laberge, CEO, the Canadian Association of Radiologists, well, I will just say it because it was quoted: the only Health Minister—well, in other words, it praises Manitoba for what it had done. With respect to that specific I will take it, I will review that as I have reviewed all of the changes. The additional CAT scans, the additional pediatric CAT scan, the additional equipment at St. Boniface Hospital, all of the equipment in rural Manitoba we have put in place, the \$73 million in equipment upgrades that have occurred the past two years.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

National Aboriginal Hockey Championships

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): The Aboriginal Sports Circle held their first 2002 National Aboriginal Hockey Championships from April 21 to 27, 2002. The launch of the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships is the result of the efforts of the Aboriginal Sports Circle. Mr. Speaker, the Aboriginal Sports Circle had the goal to create a national forum in which some of the most talented young Aboriginal hockey players in Canada could participate. The

championships provide a medium in which to celebrate the distinctiveness and diversity of Aboriginal culture and in which to honour the athletic ability of Aboriginal youth across Canada.

Team Manitoba had four players from Sagkeeng First Nation, namely Cory Courchene, Jay Courchene, Henry Guimond and Julian Guimond. Team Manitoba won the championship and brought home the gold. Team Manitoba ended preliminary play with four wins and one tie. In the gold medal game, Team Manitoba beat Team Québec in an 8 to 2 victory. Julian Guimond, the goalie for Team Manitoba, had two shut-outs. The games were well attended by more than 5000 spectators.

It was an exciting time for all the players. There were scouts from the Ontario Hockey League at the games who had the opportunity to assess the players. Next year, it is hoped that the 2003 National Aboriginal Hockey Championships will be held in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Team Manitoba, its players and coaches, for a job well done and for the team's commitment to excellence.

Agriculture in the Classroom

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): I rise today to talk about a great program that exists in our province called Agriculture in the Classroom, Manitoba. In March, I was fortunate enough to attend their annual general meeting, where I brought greetings on behalf of the ministers of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk) and Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell).

Agriculture in the Classroom has six bold and important objectives: To enhance society's awareness of agriculture by educating our children to develop an appreciation of agriculture's contribution to society and the economy, to create informed consumers and policy makers in the future, to show the process of food and fibre from farm to consumer, to create an interest in careers in agriculture, and to promote an understanding of responsible management of land and water.

Their activities are numerous. In 2001 alone, the program participated in an outreach to the

public, teachers and the industry. They were present at Ag Days, the Manitoba Science Symposium and the Manitoba Livestock Expo. They held workshops, sent out mailings and participated in the media. Their work can be seen across the province in both English and French and across the country, as well as at national conferences. Mr. Speaker, their amazing grains project was a three-day outdoor event at Red River Ex that saw 1345 students and benefited from the work of over 300 volunteers. It even extended to Brandon for two days where 400 students participated a day.

At the general meeting, I was very impressed by the work that Ag in the Classroom has done and their innovative plans for the future. I was also happy to see the program's creative approaches to teaching and learning, particularly in offering those hands-on experiences that make an incredible impression on growing minds.

As a parent and a person born and raised in rural Manitoba, I am pleased that organizations such as Agriculture in the Classroom take the initiative to ensure the education system remains relevant while recognizing Manitoba's values and traditions, such as agriculture and rural living.

I would like to echo my congratulations today to chair Ray Pelletier and the rest of the board for their commitment to this worthy cause.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo some of the things that we just heard the honourable member say about Ag in the Classroom.

The importance of the agricultural industry and community and the ability to communicate that to students in our classrooms, I think, was an attempt made by the former Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Harry Enns, when he implemented the Ag in the Classroom program. I believe the Member for Lakeside has contributed more to agriculture than anybody else has in this province, and his experience in dealing with the communications process of the importance of the agricultural industry should never be underestimated.

* (14:20)

However, what I really wanted to ask today in Question Period is an issue I want to raise in members' statements. Members' statements should not be done as a critical matter. However, when I look at Statistics Canada, the 13.5% reduction in farms in this province during the last five years is something that should cause this Government a tremendous amount of concern.

This Government, this Premier, Mr. Doer, promised the people of Manitoba that he would stand by family farms. Then he said that the new American farm program would cause short-term pain. I mean that is the kind of support the farm community has become used to. What is the end result of it? These young people are picking up their families and they are moving off the farms day in and day out. I have seen, over the last three years, a migration—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all honourable members, when making a reference to other members, to do so by their constituencies or ministers by their titles, not by names, and if the Speaker stands all members are supposed to be seated and the Speaker should be heard in silence. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Lake Manitoba Narrows Lodge

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the House today to tell a tale of disaster and recovery which recently occurred in the Interlake.

Over a year ago, the Lake Manitoba Narrows Lodge in the Vogar area was destroyed by fire. Fortunately, no lives were lost. The facility was built by Peter Stasiuk and his family over a quarter of a century ago, and it served the area well. Indeed, it developed into the hub of the area and was sorely missed by the local people when it was gone.

It gives me great pleasure today to announce to those assembled here that Blair and Debbie Olafson, daughter and son-in-law of Pete and Winnie Stasiuk, recently celebrated the grand opening of the rebuilt facility on the 4th of May,

2002. The new Lake Manitoba Narrows Lodge is truly a major accomplishment. Its estimated worth is in excess of \$2 million, and it offers a wide range of services to the locals and tourists who are drawn to this strategic location.

The historical significance of the Narrows site is that it is believed to be the origin of our province's name, Manitoba. In Cree and Ojibway, the rough translation of the word is the Narrows of the Great Spirit. The Aboriginals also believed the eerie sound made by the wind and waves as they crashed on the limestone shores of nearby Manitou Island was the voice or drumbeat of the god.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Manitoba, I want to sincerely congratulate the Olafsons on the rebuilding of what can only be described as one of the crown jewels of the Interlake. Truly out of the ashes a new phoenix has arisen.

Women of Manitoba

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I would like today to pay a tribute to the women of Manitoba. Last week we had the Women of Distinction Awards providing tribute to many women who have made major contributions in a whole variety of areas to the life and the work of Manitoba.

Later this week there will be the Women Entrepreneurs of the Year Awards, and once again we see that women are doing well in making a major contribution to the work situation, to the employment situation and to the economy of our province.

From the days when Nellie McClung had to advocate very hard many years ago for the vote, and of course that was granted under a Liberal government of Tobias Norris, there has been tremendous progress. I think we should look forward and promote even more progress over the next century.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you please call

bills in the following order: debate on second reading of 5, report stage on 3, debate on second reading on 14, report stage on 8 and 7.

Mr. Speaker: We will start off with debate on second reading Bill 5, report stage Bill 3, debate on second reading Bill 14, report stage Bill 8 and then Bill 7.

* (14:30)

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 5—The Workers Compensation Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: Resumed debate on second reading on Bill 5, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for St. Norbert.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, it is not too often that we have an opportunity to rise in the House to speak on a motion that is supported wholeheartedly by both sides of the House.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the firefighters and the work they do for the community, there is no debate to our position on the fairness and equity for the men and women who put their lives on the line whenever the call is made to them. It has been a long enough and a hard enough fight for the firefighters of our community to bring this forward. I think it is time that we as legislators deal with the matter and see that the fairness is put in place, not only for the firefighters of the future but also for the firefighters who have perished in the past from exactly what is named within this bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will be moving an amendment when we get to committee stage, and I have spoken to the minister about it already. I am hoping that she will support this amendment when we get to committee stage. The purpose of this amendment is to bring dignity and equity into the system. Whilst families of the deceased firefighters can put in a claim with the WCB at this time and it is supported by the scientific proof behind this legislation, the amount of paperwork and time in which to prepare such a claim mitigates the

benefits which would flow to the family once the claim has been reviewed.

Through this amendment, all the benefits to the families would be treated the same, thereby removing the double standard. The retroactive provision will ensure that those firefighters who are currently suffering with the effects of their injuries and who benefit under this legislation are also covered. By making the legislation retroactive it removes the double standard which is being proposed in this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look forward into the future, but we have to look a little bit into the past. With the 17 firefighters who have passed since 1985, we have to see to it that if they have any family that is in need, they have to be taken care of. I think it is wrong for us as legislators not to take a look back and see that we include them in this legislative package.

We know that this Government is capable of retroactivity. I mean, they are doing it everyday. They are doing it by taking money from Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker, to cover last year's deficit. They are doing it in a number of their legislative packages. It has been done in the past, so it is not like we are setting a precedent. We did it under The Workers Compensation Act to cover the widows when we were last here in 1999, I believe it was, and the opposition of the day then spoke of the further extensions. I am only hoping that today they will stand in support of the widows of the firefighters who have perished in the past of the diseases that are listed in the bill today.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to stand and speak all day on the matter. I do believe that this is an initiative that we have to see how fast we can get through the House, so that we can get on with the business of the day. I am prepared at this time to make room for my other colleagues, who, I am sure, are all looking forward to putting their words on the record.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): It is with a great deal of pleasure that I speak on this bill, and it is not the first time I have had the honour to speak on this type of legislation. This is the culmination today of a lot of hard work. I

recall my days as the Labour critic in opposition when we were a third party, when we kept alive the whole concept of presumptive legislation. In fact, in the minority period, we brought in an amendment which would have done this in 1989, but the government of the day said no. They went so far, when we passed the amendment, to basically indicate they would pull the legislation with that amendment. So they not only did not act on it, they blocked it. We raised it time and time again.

Now it was not just us in the Legislature, it was firefighters who were still reeling from the court decision by Justice Sterling Lyon that took out the presumptive recognition in our legislation. This is a little-known fact, but it has to be put on the record, that the petition that was organized at the time, spearheaded by Bill Laird, the late Bill Laird, was probably one of the largest petitions in Manitoba history. There were over 27 000 copies of those petitions, 27 000 signatures on that petition. I can tell you we did not stop there. We raised it, as critic we raised it, as a caucus we raised it, the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) as Workers Comp critic continued to raise the issue, to keep it alive. I think there must have been at least seven times that we raised it in this House.

I like the fact we are now talking about amendments and the fact this is a *fait accompli* because I can say on the record that this kind of legislation should have happened in 1989, and it did not happen in those days because the government of the day would not listen to the working people, to the firefighters on a really important issue. We cannot rewrite history, but we can sure make sure in this particular case that we do the right thing. *[interjection]*

It is interesting, the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Laurendeau) may want to heckle from his seat. I appreciate his support now. *[interjection]*

The member opposite said he supported it in 1990. His caucus blocked it, his government blocked it, and I say to members opposite that I am proud that in this case the New Democratic Party said one thing in opposition and is saying the same thing in Government. That is why we

are a party that has traditionally spoken for working people.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to be vocal now in opposition. I will tell you, 11 years of silence speaks much louder than any of the words from today, and action speaks louder than words. But I want to put on the record that this really would not have happened, it is not just the issue of us in here because I have always felt that when we fight for fair treatment of workers' compensation. It is very much because of the roots of who we are and what we are as a political party, but I want to put on the record the hard work of the firefighters who never once gave up, who kept raising this. If it was not for the firefighters this day would not be happening today.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I want to also put on the record that I take some great satisfaction that the scientific proof now is matching what we said back in 1989 and the fact that there is clear evidence with the elements that are recognized in this bill, which I think is going to be a model for Canada, a model for North America, clear scientific evidence. I also want to put on the record that I do not consider this to be the end of this particular file because I still believe that far more work has to be done when one looks at heart conditions, for example, because firefighters are in a unique situation. As Bill Laird used to say, firefighters are the ones that are going into what everybody else is getting out of in an awful hurry.

When you know the kinds of hazards that people are faced with, but there is also the working condition aspect because you talk to any firefighter, any first responder, the first thing they will tell you is that what you are dealing with are times of inactivity while you are waiting for the call and then a rush of adrenaline, a rush of activity. I believe a lot more work has to be done on the scientific evidence in terms of what has often been dubbed the healthy worker effect, because, quite frankly, you cannot just judge in isolation. You have to judge the fact that firefighters on average are in far better shape than most people, so what evidence there is in terms of heart attacks has to factor that into

place. So I want to say that I do not see this being over by any stretch of the imagination, but this is a huge victory. I want to once again put it on the record.

This is maybe one of the luxuries you have when you have been in government like I was in the 1980s, been in third-party opposition, been in second-party opposition, and back in government. I can tell you, and I want to put this on the record again, the two things I am the proudest of here is being part of a party that said in 1989 we fought for presumptive, and I said—*[interjection]* Well, I say to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) it is too bad his party in 11 years did not do this, because our action speaks a lot louder than any words.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that what I really appreciate about this as well is that that fire was kept burning in some pretty tough times when others would have given up. The dream of Bill Laird and the dream of the others who never once when this was shut down in the courts ever gave up, the dream not only of firefighters but firefighters' families, I can tell you they kept this issue alive. The fact that we are now in a position, hopefully today, of passing this on second reading, going to committee, getting this passed, it may be 13 years too late, but because of their dream and their commitment we are finally going to be doing the right thing. Thank you.

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to add some comments to Bill 5. I believe that this is a bill that unfortunately, like my previous colleague who spoke, brings the political rhetoric to it. I am sorry he has to do that, because I believe that sometimes there are bills that are brought forward that frankly are the right thing to do. It is not about politics. It is about standing up and recognizing that it has been some time, and that is something that is a fact. We understand that.

It is about today moving forward. Where do we want to go, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I can tell you that we on this side of the House believe that we are blessed in this province to have wonderful members of the firefighters association who every day risk their lives to ensure the

safety of Manitobans. It is always one of those situations that it is their lives they put at risk. I think it has to be recognized that when they put their lives at risk there is danger. Clearly we know that there are a number of types of cancer that firefighters get exposed to in the process of trying to save perhaps it is a child out of a third-storey building or it is a commercial building or it could be a barn of some magnitude in a part of Manitoba that is housing some livestock.

It matters not, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When there is an emergency and there is a fire to be dealt with, you have firefighters who think of nothing other than how they risk their lives to save perhaps other lives. We on this side of the House are very, very appreciative of what they do. I believe that members on this side will speak to that point very much.

I do want to make a comment that is in here when this bill was discussed. I wanted to quote Mr. Alex Forrest, who is the president of the United Firefighters of Winnipeg. His quote was: This is huge, not only for firefighters here in Manitoba but, I believe, for firefighters right across Canada. That was a quote from Mr. Alex Forrest, who, I believe, is a very, very capable representative in his capacity with the firefighters of Manitoba.

* (14:40)

I would like to add that we on this side very much support this initiative and support Bill 5, but we believe that perhaps it does not go far enough. That is why we are looking at amendments that we will be proposing during committee that do two things, that add, I believe, two very valuable pieces to the existing bill, and that is that we think a new section should be added to the bill which would make provisions of the legislation retroactive to January 1, 1985, in order to cover those firefighters who were excluded from this legislation. Second, a provision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would be added to ensure that, if a deceased firefighter was to have received a benefit, the benefit would flow to his or her estate.

We think that it is important that there is not a double standard in this because, as I said earlier, unlike members opposite who, and I

hope that it does not continue during this debate, time and time again try to raise the political rhetoric of something that, frankly, is the right thing to do for everybody in this House. When the firefighters were in the gallery, everyone in this Legislature stood in their seat and applauded, each and every one of them, all the members, because we believe it is the right thing to do. Not a partisan event, nothing about political rhetoric, we just think that it is something that is right for those hardworking men and women who represent the firefighters association of Manitoba. Thank you very much.

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am privileged to put a few words on the record surrounding this very important bill. I would like to begin by thanking my colleague the honourable Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) for bringing this bill forward, and most particularly I would like to thank you and pay tribute to the perseverance of firefighters in this province who have been urging legislation of this nature for decades.

I know that my good friend, a former firefighter, a former municipal official, Jack Nichol, spoke to me on this issue many, many times. My colleague in Brandon West, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Smith), who is a firefighter by profession, whom I have known all my life, has bent my ear on this issue many times, as have many other friends in the firefighting profession in Brandon and indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout the province of Manitoba. The comments that they have made to me over the decade I have been involved in public life have given me a keen appreciation of this issue. I am very, very proud that the perseverance, some of them are in the gallery today, of firefighters, the perseverance and dedication of this minister, the Minister of Labour, have brought this bill to this House.

I do not want to indulge in political rhetoric any more than my colleague the MLA from Thompson, but the political reality, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that nothing progressed on this file for 11 hard years under the Filmon Tories. It took a change in government to bring this act to the Legislature, and I, amongst all of my colleagues on this side of the House, am proud to

stand as one, as a New Democrat, with the firefighters of Manitoba.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Deputy Speaker, probably at no time in our history have we come to the realization, the awareness of what firefighters are, what they are made of, who they are, and what they do for our society, than currently and what happened with 9-11, what has come out since then.

I had the opportunity to visit ground zero, New York. I saw the Pentagon, where we saw firefighters go. With absolutely no concern about their own safety, did not even think about their families back home, they went into buildings and did what they were trained to do. They did it gallantly, and in a lot of instances, over 300 I understand, never came back. I went to Fire House No. 6 in New York. The fire truck left that morning with six individuals on board. The truck never returned and neither did five of the firefighters. They went to help citizens who were stuck on top floors. They went to do what they were trained to do, and that was to save civilians from what was obviously going to be a very severe fire, and not knowing the calamity that was going to take place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our firefighters have shown time and time again, whether it is a small fire in a kitchen or a big event like what happened with 9-11, that they step in, and when we are in difficulty, when our homes are being threatened, they step in. They are the ones that get us out of these difficult spots.

One of the things that has come out of 9-11 is the fact that a lot of these individuals who survived, a lot of the firefighters, a lot of the police officers, a lot of the individuals that came forward to help, ended up breathing in, absorbing a lot of dust, a lot of smoke that has been found to be toxic. In fact, they have no idea today what the effects of that will be in the long run.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is like the firefighters we have here in our cities and even the volunteer firefighters across this province. They go into buildings, No. 1, to make sure there are no civilians there, in case somebody has been passed out or somebody has been trapped, and

they go in really not even thinking about their own safety. First and foremost, they are looking out for us as civilians. Often, what is burning in those buildings, and from what I understand the scientists saying it is not necessarily just the fumes from what is burning. It is when those chemicals mix and then they emit fumes. That is what is very serious.

This bill that is before us has come before us, and, because this Chamber is political by nature, I know there is a real tendency and inertia, perhaps, to pull this into a political argument. Perhaps those who are observing will forgive those of us who find that this should become political.

I would like to refer to the Minister of Labour's (Ms. Barrett) briefing note that she gave us. The minister has actually done a very good job in walking this through, and she does deserve credit for it. One of the things that she talked about was she gave us a complete briefing note on various questions. The question was: you say this amendment is based on the most up-to-date, scientific and medical evidence; will you release that information to the public? The answer was, yes, the WCB commissioned an internationally known epidemiologist, Dr. T. Guidotti, to review the recent scientific and medical literature in this area. His final written report will soon be ready for public distribution. He is putting the finishing touches on it right now. In fact, the minister released it to the Opposition. We were asked to keep it confidential.

But what has happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has been of late that they have really been able to tie in that certain cancers are caused by what has been inhaled. Probably to take on the last 10, 15, 20, 50, 60, 100 years of governments and say to them that it was terrible that they did not bring it in, probably that is not the best thing to be doing during this debate.

* (14:50)

I would like to just raise a few points about the bill. This bill creates a redoubtable presumption that if a full-time firefighter employed for a minimum period gets a certain type of cancer, the dominant cause of the disease is the

employment. What is very notable in this is that five types of cancer are covered in the act: brain cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukemia. The bill presumes that the dominant cause of this disease is the individual's employment as a firefighter unless the employer can prove otherwise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I understand that there is a time restraint and I want to keep myself within that. The firefighters that will be included in this particular legislation come from Brandon, Thompson, Portage la Prairie, Dauphin, and, of course, the city of Winnipeg. I think there has been mention made already that there will be amendments coming forward, and we hope that all members have a look at those amendments, because the science that has now come out that the minister has produced—and perhaps the minister can tell us at some point in time when that will be made public because certainly we now have a copy of the report and we will honour that we will not make it public. But at some point in time, that will be made public.

The amendment that we are proposing to this legislation is that the presumption in subsection 5.1 applies to accidents that (a) happened on or after January 1, 1985, but before the coming into force of subsection 5.1; and (b) happened on or after the coming into force of subsection 5.1. That is one of the amendments we are looking at.

Another one that perhaps the minister will entertain—we hope that this does get to committee and that we can discuss other issues at committee—is perhaps we will be looking at volunteer firefighters, if you remember that the recent train derailment by Firdale should remind us that all firefighters in the province provide tremendous service to Manitobans and also have exposure to some very serious chemicals. We know that the chemicals that are transported on railways, a lot of them are dangerous and especially if they come in contact with other tank cars can become very harmful. Perhaps the minister and the rest of the members of this Chamber will look at perhaps a few other amendments.

I think this is a very good bill. It is timely, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The science is now present.

The science proves things that perhaps individuals had thought for some time. It is based on solid footing, and now is a good time to go forward with it. We have come to appreciate what the firefighters do in our society and 9-11 has really been one of those things that has brought it to the forefront.

I know now when we see a firetruck going down the street—even my children who though small knew something very terrible happened that day, and I had them watch it. Certainly I became very upset, and I think they sensed that something was not going right. Now they always point out, oh, look, Dad, there is one of those firetrucks, and they do know that something happened.

I think that awareness is appropriate, and now is an appropriate time to proceed forward with this legislation. Let us move it through this House. Let us move it into committee, perhaps a few appropriate changes to the legislation, and move it on to Royal Assent, because those individuals who stand up for all of us, who defend all of us collectively deserve this kind of protection. Thank you.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my honour to rise to speak to Bill 5, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act. As the Minister for Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton) has indicated in his comments a few moments ago, this issue has been extremely important to our caucus ever since it was struck down by Justice Lyon back in 1988 upon a challenge by the City of Winnipeg.

I know and have been a part, as has the Minister of Transportation, trying to bring back the protection for the firefighting forces for those members living in our province and working in our province to restore that protection for them and for their families. I have listened very closely to the comments that were made by members of the Opposition here, and having been in this House now for nearly 12 years I can recollect very clearly the position that their party had taken when they were in government. I had asked, as the Labour critic at that time and a critic for the Workers Compensation Board for this Government, and I begged and I pleaded with your ministers of that day to bring forward

amendments to The Workers Compensation Act that would put in place the legislation necessary to protect firefighters and their family.

I have the Hansard here that reflects the comments that were made by your minister of the day, the former Member for Lac du Bonnet, and the comments that he made saying, well, we are kind of studying this issue right now. We might get around to it some time in the future here, but you know there are lifestyles and conditions that we have to reflect upon. You know, the firefighters some of them smoke and some of them eat too much and they are not too healthy. These are the things that the minister put on record at that time.

I can remember quite clearly being very offended by the comments that that minister made at that time. He had absolutely no consideration for the firefighters and their families, and when we said to him, listen, if you have amendments to our legislation you want to bring forward and they are friendly amendments to that legislation, by all means give it to us and we will consider it. If it improves the ability of the legislation to protect firefighters and their families, let us move forward with this right now. What did the minister say? No, we have to put it out to study some more. But you know what? We never heard of any studies that went on. There was nothing that ever occurred in this regard.

I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there have been dozens of studies, and I want to thank the firefighters who are here today for working with us for the last 12 years on the studies that they have brought forward and given to us that prove right on that the firefighters, the incidence of disease, occupational disease related to their employment is higher than the average population and is higher—*[inaudible]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

* (15:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are back to functioning, so the honourable Member for Transcona.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what Hansard was able to record and not record, so I

will just reflect a few moments on some of the comments that I had made. I recollect quite clearly the efforts that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton) had made after Justice Sterling Lyon struck down this regulation that had protected firefighters for so many years. Justice Lyon struck this down in 1988. The Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), at that time recognizing that firefighters and their families were at a disadvantage, brought forward a piece of legislation, a private member's bill, and introduced amendments to the then Minister Connery's Workers Comp legislation that would restore this benefit, this protection for firefighters and their families. I can remember the members opposite saying in those days that they would rather have killed that piece of legislation, their Workers Compensation amendments, than have the firefighters' protection incorporated into that bill. That is how serious they were about disadvantaging firefighters and restoring that protection for the firefighters and their families.

I want to talk to you a minute about some of the efforts that we have made over the last 12 years. I have here in my hands a Speaker's ruling. I am not going to reflect on the ruling itself, but I just want to put in context some of the comments that were made because I can remember, at that time, when I was the critic responsible for introducing the private member's bill, that we had allowed members who were then in government, members of the Opposition now, the opportunity to debate this piece of legislation. Of course, most of the times they stood the bill and would not debate it at all, but this one particular day they decided they were going to put up a couple of speakers.

At the end of their speech, I waited a few moments, and then I stood up to close debate, was recognized by the speaker of the day. Then the House Leader for the government of that day decided he was going to challenge my ability to close debate. That was on April 16, 1992, when we were in debate on Bill 55, the Government House Leader had challenged my ability to close debate on that bill. I want to say to members of this House, had you as a government of the day not closed debate at that time, we would have moved that bill into the committee of the Legislature, and we would have let every

firefighter in this province come to the committee room and tell us how important that piece of legislation was to them and their families and the survivors of firefighters that died as a result of occupational diseases.

So you as a government stopped the progress of that piece of legislation at that time. I say to you: Shame, shame on you for the actions that you took as a result of your government.

Now, I want to say to members of the Opposition today that there were dozens of studies that had been brought forward by members of the firefighters union. I can recall quite clearly my first days as a young MLA that we had Bill Laird, Martin Johnson, Andy Burgess, Dennis Lloyd, who came to us and talked to us about the importance of this legislation to their members and to the families. There were studies that the government of the day had that said that the firefighters had a higher exposure level than any other member of society and that the incidence of occupational disease was in some cases twice as high as the general population. The Government decided to disregard those studies and to not move forward with the legislative amendments necessary. I say shame on you.

I also, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our caucus at the time talked openly, publicly about striking an occupational disease panel so that if you did not trust members of the opposition of the time, come forward with an occupational disease panel that could be comprised of firefighters, members of the medical community, other members perhaps of the business community to sit around a table and talk about occupational diseases and how we could look at the studies that had been done and incorporate the ability of firefighters to be covered under new legislation. The occupational disease panel would in my mind have in no way been able to turn away the irrefutable evidence that was there before them.

The government chose not to move forward with an occupational disease panel. I still say that that is a good idea that we can have in this province for members of the working community in this province that are exposed perhaps to other occupational diseases.

Now, I want to say that I am extremely proud of our Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) and our Government for bringing forward this legislation after waiting 12 years for the former government to move forward with this legislation. So for me and I know the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) this is an extremely proud day. We have supported firefighters and the legislation for them for over 20 years. We were very disappointed when Justice Lyon struck that down in 1998 on a technicality. He said the regulation should have been included in the body of the legislation, which the former government said no, they would not do. I think that this legislation restores that balance and provides that protection for firefighters and their families.

I want to say to the firefighters that are here with us today that if there is one regret that I have it is that this legislation did not come forward 12 years ago to provide the protection for you and the families, the widows and the children, for those firefighters who have died in the performance of their duties in this province. That is one regret I have, that this legislation did not come forward sooner in this province.

In 1991 the former government, the Filmon government, changed the legislation that came effective January 1, 1992, from presumptive legislation to dominant cause legislation, something that is still in effect. If there is something that I want to say very clearly it is that I think that we need to restore the presumptive clause in the legislation itself. I know we have given firefighters the opportunity to become part of that presumptive legislation, but I think there are others that perhaps need to have a further look at the dominant cause that is in the legislation itself.

I know that in the past we had discussions with firefighters. Many members of this House will know that firefighters do not just attend to fire scenes, they attend as first responders. They are exposed to many different hazards in our workplace. It is not just the chemicals that you find in the fire situation, but you have first responders attending to people who for one reason or another require medical attention. Firefighters require that protection and the support of the legislators of this province and this country

to make sure that they are protected while they respond on medical cases, not just for blood-borne diseases but airborne diseases as well. We need to make sure that they and their families are protected in that regard.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know I talked with my colleague the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith) here, who was a firefighter, and I have talked with Martin Johnson, who I respect and admire greatly, and many members of the fire department. I want to say that they have provided me with quite a broad education on the exposures that they have with the result of the performance of their duties.

* (15:10)

We take for granted, as many members of our society will know, firefighters are running into the fire to suppress it and to rescue people, while other members that are running are fleeing from fire situations. So there are many injuries that firefighters can sustain. Members opposite might have thought at the time, well, firefighters are wearing protective equipment, and we do not have to worry about occupational diseases because they have all this protective gear, but from my understanding this protective gear does not go anywhere close to giving and providing 100% protection for firefighters.

There are many ways that the different chemical compounds are ingested or inhaled or absorbed into the bodies of those members of the firefighting force, and we have to put in place the necessary legislative amendments to make sure that any diseases that they encounter they are protected for.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize, too, the efforts of Mr. Bill Laird, who had provided us with some background in years past, in the early 1990s. I say, as the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) has said, that Mr. Laird has provided us with immeasurable support, and we greatly value his efforts on behalf of the firefighters and the families. We were quite shocked and, of course, it was very difficult, not only for Mr. Laird's family, but for members of the firefighting force and for members on this side of the House, when Bill passed away through an untimely death as a result of a heart attack.

Now, I know the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) has indicated that perhaps we need to have a further look at heart legislation because, as we know, firefighters, while they are very active members of our community, they do have periods of time where they are waiting for calls out. As the studies have shown, when the fire bell rings in the fire hall and firefighters are called to respond, they have a significant increase in their heart rate. I think, as a result of that and the chemical exposures that they have fighting fires and tending to our public safety, that we need to look at heart protection as well. So if I would encourage any further action in addition to what we have already taken that we look at heart protection as well for those members of the firefighting force.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do know that we have debated this, I believe, seven times. I think and I hope that this will be the time where we can bring forward, with the support of members of this House, a legislation that will provide and restore the presumptive legislation for firefighters.

I would like to thank members of the firefighting force and their families and the widows for the efforts that you have provided to the public of Manitoba. We wish you every safety and health in the performance of your duties in the future. Thank you for your service on behalf of Manitobans.

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I, too, wish to speak briefly to this bill and indicate the unconditional support of myself and all members of the Opposition to this bill.

Maybe it is because I have been around this shop too long, I know that politics is part of the system that we play in, so I do not take particular offence at the fact that the members of the Government that have spoken on this bill today have really waded in on the heavy-duty politics. So, Mr. Speaker, perhaps you, and perhaps maybe even the firemen in the gallery, will understand if I remind them of a little bit of politics as well.

You see, what they do not understand and what they conveniently forget is, when the New Democratic Party government of Howard

Pawley came into office in 1981, the Workers Compensation Board was in pretty good shape. In six short years, it was \$400 million in debt. I remember the Minister of Labour for Howard Pawley's New Democrats, a fine gentleman who died far too early, Mr. Harry Harapiak, a good friend of mine, who stood up in this Chamber and acknowledged that the Workers Compensation Board had run up a \$400-million debt. The premiums to our employers, Mr. Minister of Finance, were going up 15, 20 percent every year, to the point where it was losing us businesses, and unemployment, things like that. That mess—

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Minister of Labour, on a point of order.

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister charged with the administration of The Workers Compensation Act): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if the Member for Lakeside was, in a sense, saying that the former government, when they came in and made changes to the legislation or did not make changes to the legislation as a result of Justice Lyon's ruling, was doing so because of the Workers Compensation deficit and was, in effect then, causing firefighters to bear the brunt of the WCB deficits. If that is the case, he will be held responsible at the bar of justice.

Mr. Speaker: Before making a ruling on the point of order raised by the honourable Minister of Labour, I would like to remind all honourable members that a point of order is to be used to point out to the Speaker a breach of the rules or a departure from practice of the House. If members wish to debate, members will have all kinds of opportunities for debating.

* * *

Mr. Enns: Mr. Speaker, I was merely pointing out the difference in the management style between our socialist friends, who like to spend taxpayers' money or, in this case, employers' money like drunken sailors, and our responsible Conservative Opposition.

The simple fact of the matter is that the economic situations at the Workers Compensation Board had to be put in order first. They

were by the Filmon government. Furthermore, because, in this case, it is not actually the Workers Compensation Board—

* * *

Mr. Speaker: I hate to interrupt the honourable member, but I was not clear when I made a ruling. I made a ruling that the honourable Minister of Labour did not have a point or order.

* * *

Mr. Enns: Furthermore, because the City of Winnipeg is actually the body that provides the benefit, it self-serves its firemen; they are the largest group of individuals that we are talking about, the City of Winnipeg whose economic house was not in order at that time, whose taxes were going up every year. It is only in the last few years that both the Province and the City of Winnipeg have economically brought their house in order that we can expand the program that we can all enjoy and they richly deserve. The City of Winnipeg came to the previous government and asked us not to enact this legislation because of the potential cost to the city treasurers.

If you want to cast political blame on the Conservatives, then cast it wherever you want, cast it on the City Council, but the truth of the matter is let us rejoice in the fact that we are working together on this bill, that these benefits are being extended to the firemen. Furthermore, we are going to bring amendments in to make this a better bill, and we hope they will support us. We want to make these benefits retroactive because the times are right for that. We hope the honourable members will support us. We can play this little game. I know that we are all politicians, and the firemen understand that too. They are not going to be sucked in, Mr. Speaker, by a little bit of politicking that is going on in this Chamber right now. Let us be happy that we are passing a good bill, and let us get on with the job and pass the bill.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to start off by thanking the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) for bringing forward this incredibly important bill. Second, I would like to

thank members that I have had the opportunity to work with now over the last three years, the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) and the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) and many of the others on this side.

I guess I carry a view and a background in this probably more than anybody else does. I was hired as a firefighter in 1980 and worked as a firefighter for 20 years till 1999, when I was elected into the Legislature. I full well remember the members opposite. I full well remember the efforts of Bill Laird. I remember the efforts of Rich Gregoire from the department that I came from and Brent Dane, the members from Portage, the members from Thompson, and certainly now the member Alex Forrest with the firefighters union, here the president of the union, to work toward reinstating this incredibly important legislation for not only the firefighters but the firefighters and their families.

I hear the members opposite when they are speaking, and saying: It is not going far enough or we have an amendment and you should have done this and you should have done that, but I remember very well dealing with this side of the House, the Government now, in opposition, and I remember dealing with the Opposition now that was in government.

I remember what they did through the nineties, which was nothing regarding this issue. I can bring a personal perspective and say the Member for Lakeside mentioned they listened to the City of Winnipeg and there is a lot of history to this. I can say that they listened to the City of Winnipeg, so it stands to reason to me that they did not listen to the firefighters. Obviously, that is what appeared to me. The 1000-plus professional firefighters that are in this province of Manitoba, that had to deal with this not only for themselves and the trauma that they went through but their families and what their families went through.

Ninety one went by and '92 went by and '93 and '94 and '95 and up to '99. I will tell you there was evidence brought forward by the firefighters and it was very, very good scientific evidence that was presented. I also remember no debate through '91 and '92, moving into a process where the firefighters could have appeared and brought

forth that information in an open process being shut down with this member not being able to continue to speak that day. I remember that very well.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the firefighters and what they have to deal with is not simply fires. I hear it from the side opposite, they mention fires. The effects that the firefighters and the emergency response personnel deal with is simply not fires. It is an expanded role, that when most other people, regardless of what the incident is in a community, are going in one direction when all the other people are going the other direction. Although workplace safety and health has come a long, long way in this province and across Canada over a number of years, it is virtually impossible to protect emergency response personnel from every single hazard that they have to deal with in the workplace.

* (15:20)

The member opposite from Transcona has mentioned the ingestion and the inhalation and the absorption, that even though the equipment nowadays is much better that is on-site at a lot of the incidents that firefighters respond to, and I can tell you the incidents since the deregulation of the trucking industry and many of the others and what is travelling on our roads, certainly we have a front line. We have some of the front-line folks sitting up here with us today from the fire service and the emergency service that have had to deal with the standard operating procedures in their departments, the general operating guidelines that they need to follow in their departments, but they have all been at the incidents where you are trapped in a situation where, in fact, you cannot get out of until you have recognized the potential for the danger that you are in.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, these members on this side of the House listen to firefighters. I would like to thank the First Minister of this Government, our Premier, that did listen to firefighters and did give us the time of day through the nineties to say they would move this legislation forward. They made a commitment, they made a promise. Now we have a Minister

of Labour that is fulfilling the promise for the firefighters that wasn't done for a decade.

I can tell you, from the standpoint of promises made, promises kept, the members on this side of the House have kept their word to the firefighters and the emergency response personnel in this province.

When I look at what is being proposed in this bill, it identifies the cumulative effects regarding the primary site cancer, the primary site bladder cancer. It identifies the primary site kidney cancer, the Hodgkin's lymphoma, and, obviously, the primary leukemia that is being introduced in this. It has been identified and scientifically proven that members in the service have a far higher rate than the normal people out there in the workplace.

This presumptive legislation is long overdue. It is legislation that quite frankly I have seen the emotional problems regarding this, not just the debate in this House over particulars in wording, but I have seen the families involved. I have seen the children and the wives and the husbands of the men and women in the service that are involved from this. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that quite frankly it has been an emotional issue for the professionals that we have out there working.

I just would like to finish up. I fully look forward to continued debate and bringing this forth with firefighters, having the opportunity to have their views put forward certainly at the next stage when we move through this process and allowing them to come to the table like they should have been allowed in 1991-92 to express their concerns and put forward good information that I know they have.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, just in closing, I would like to thank the emergency response personnel in our province. I would like to thank the members that are sitting up in the gallery here today on both sides. I would like to say, I can tell you, as being a former firefighter, working for 20 years, the member opposite from Lakeside (Mr. Enns) had said you are not going to notice this is political. You know this was promised for a decade, you know what was done through the nineties, and you know who is doing

it now. I am proud to be part of this Government.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): It is with pleasure I stand to put some remarks on the record. I would agree with the member from Lakeside (Mr. Enns).

We can certainly on both sides of the House rejoice, because Bill 5, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, is something that both sides of the House support. I will not be attempting to get into political rhetoric. It does not interest me this afternoon. It is too important a bill. This is a bill whose time has come. The scientific evidence is there. It is also indicative of the fact that members on both sides of the House are acknowledging the challenges that firefighters do have on a daily basis and to try to support and put into law in this province the supports that would help them in a very, very dangerous job.

Now, under Bill 5, currently it is noted that we have said on this side of the House that this is a very strong bill, it is something that we support. We have also said on this side of the House, that we were looking at amendments to increase the strength of this bill. We are looking forward to members on the other side accepting those amendments to ensure that we are all on the same page, and I will say that I think this bill is far too important to get into political rhetoric. I think what we need to do is stand together on both sides of the House. We need to stand up for the firefighters and we need to say: This is what has to come to pass as quickly as possible.

I would also invite the firefighters to come to Law Amendments, to the public debate, and as the firefighters are listening to the amendments, to put on record what their feelings are so we can be guided by the association and guided by the expertise that they have in that area as well. At the present time, Bill 5 creates a presumption that if a full-time firefighter, employed for a minimum period, gets a certain type of cancer, the dominant cause of the disease is the employment.

Mr. Speaker, if you have ever observed a house on fire or a building on fire, which I have, you know that there are many toxins that go into

the air. I recall one event where firefighters were called to a house here in the city of Winnipeg, just down the street from a friend of mine. We were concerned that her children were in the house, so we went to observe. They got everybody out, and I was very, very touched by one thing. I do not think this is the kind of thing that ever gets in the press, but there was a family pet that was caught in that house. It literally brought me to tears to see those two firefighters go back in to get this family pet because the little girl was crying about her cat, and she wanted her cat. When I looked at the fire, I looked at the smoke, I smelled the burning, I thought to myself: Well, it is a cat. These are two human beings going in, trying to rescue the cat. They have got the people out. And it was a very dangerous fire. A couple of people were injured in the fire but did recover from it.

That day I had such a respect for the kind of a job the firefighters do. As they went to their trucks, I saw the dirt and the grime and the tired faces. They did not talk very much that day. I guess they were really beat when they finished fighting that fire. It taught me an awful lot about what the job is all about.

So we have had conversations around the caucus table concerning this bill. It is not the intent of members on this side of the House to fight against this bill in any way, shape and form. We are not intending to make a political football out of it in any way, shape or form. What we want to do, members on this side of the House, is put amendments forward that would strengthen the bill, get the advice from the firefighters, what they think in terms of the amendments and carry on. We certainly intend to get this happening as quickly as possible.

Now the five types of cancer covered in the act are: brain cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukemia. The bill presumes that the dominant cause of this disease is the individual's employment as a firefighter unless the employer can prove otherwise. According to the members opposite, the proposed changes would not apply to part-time or forest fighters. Studies show that full-time firefighters are exposed to different toxins and for longer periods than other responders.

Mr. Speaker, I know there is some talk and some dialogue on the issue of volunteer firefighters, and those amendments, as we come forward, will be put on the table when they are completed as well. Bill 5 will make Manitoba the only Canadian jurisdiction to have a law presuming that certain diseases are caused by firefighting. It is noted on the record that 17 firefighters have died of the diseases specified in the bill since 1987.

Now, full-time firefighters in Brandon, Thompson, Portage la Prairie, Dauphin and Winnipeg are covered under this legislation. I must say that we are very happy about this. We are very happy to see that the issues in this bill are addressed for those firefighters in Brandon, Thompson, Portage la Prairie, Dauphin and Winnipeg.

* (15:30)

The minister stated that they only have to name full-time firefighters because only full-time firefighters are in urban centres. The firefighters must have frequently attended fires. Administrative staff at this time are not covered.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we do acknowledge the fact that this bill is something that we happily embrace, but, as I said, I want to go back to the amendments. I want members on both sides of the House and members opposite, in particular, to not for political reasons just vote down every amendment that comes forward, because I have to say that usually the norm is, not always, but the norm is if amendments are put forward and it is from this side of the House, they are automatically voted down.

So I would appeal to members opposite, when they see that, No. 1, we have said very publicly we will be supporting this bill 100 percent, but we will also be putting amendments forward, that the members opposite would take a very close look at those amendments and, even more importantly, that the firefighters association would look at those amendments and give us input and speak out as to whether or not they are good or not good, because that is the guidance that we need as legislators from the firefighters association.

I would implore the members opposite not to politically just vote them all down, which they have every right to do because they outnumber us, but we are trying to work in very strong collaboration here in the Legislature on this very important bill. We are trying very hard to put amendments in, not for the sake of putting amendments in but to put amendments in that would indeed strengthen the bill.

The minister stated that volunteer firefighters are not covered because scientific study and proof are not available to support a presumption. Now, as you know, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of volunteer firefighters in the country areas who do attend fires. Many of those fires are toxic and I think that that is something that we have to take under advisement, and when this bill actually comes to law, amendments discussion has to be put forward on that front as well.

The volunteer firefighters, the minister has stated, will have to go to the WCB and prove that the cause of their disease was their volunteer firefighting. The minister also provided people on our side of the House or the critic on our side of the House with a copy of the American report on which the legislation was based. I must say, Mr. Speaker, we do thank the minister for that. It is very useful.

The minister was asked from this side of the House if a specific Canadian study was done on this issue, and she stated that a Ontario WCB study had been done and Ontario data was used. So this is very, very strong information, very good information and that does strengthen the argument that Bill 5 needs to be supported and that Bill 5 will do much to support and help the firefighters and their families.

Mr. Speaker, no distinction was made between the effects of residential fires versus industrial fires and what those effects have on firefighters. The minister from the opposite side of the House, when asked if this legislation opens the door to other professions, the minister on the other side of the House responded that the study is being done on miners at the current time. She stated that if the science proves the assumption, they will likely ask for legislation. So we will await that and see what happens

there. When asked what effect this will have on WCB rates, the minister has stated, none.

This is the kind of legislation that we are very proud to support. This is the type of legislation that will do much, Mr. Speaker, to assist the firefighters and their families. I think that is the focus that we have to have as we go through the process of law amendments, and the process of actually looking at the amendments that come forward. This legislation will not be retroactive at this time. As I said, as it stands now, this bill legislates that if a full-time firefighter who has been employed for a certain period of time gets one of the specific types of primary site cancer, then the dominant cause of the disease is presumed to be their employment. This bill will make Manitoba, as we said before, the only jurisdiction in Canada that has such a law. That, as I said before, only the full-time firefighters in the major urban centres, like Brandon, Thompson, Portage la Prairie and Dauphin, and of course, Winnipeg are under this legislation.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that volunteer firefighters who make up the bulk of firefighters in the province of Manitoba are not covered under this legislation, and that would be one issue that needs to be discussed, as I said, at committee level. In the unfortunate event that one of Manitoba's many volunteer firefighters is diagnosed with one of these specific types of primary site cancer, these volunteer firefighters will still have to prove to the WCB that their cancer was caused by their exposure to the carcinogens through their duties as a firefighter. Now, this would be very, very difficult for a family dealing with an issue like this, and it could be very expensive for the family in question and it could be something that takes a long period of time. This is something that needs to be under discussion as well. We would look forward, members on this side of the House, as I am assured members on the other side of the House, would look forward to the input that the firefighters association has in this area to advise us as to how things should be directed.

We should remember, however, that the dangers faced by our volunteer firefighters are not any less real than those faced by full-time

firefighters in our urban centres. I think this profession of firefighting is one that is not only dangerous, but one that at this point in time we have to make very, very sure is covered in such a way that families of firefighters and firefighters themselves do not suffer.

The recent train derailment by Firdale should remind us that all firefighters in our province provide tremendous service to Manitobans. Mr. Speaker, firefighters seem to be involved in many traumatic disasters with little or no regard to their own well-being and this bill, Bill 5 does address some of the issues that are very important to Manitobans and especially important to the firefighters.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, the minister has indicated that this legislation will not be retroactive to cover firefighters who are currently battling cancer. I would repeat, this legislation will not be retroactive at this point in time to cover firefighters who are currently battling cancer. I think that at the committee level this is an issue that will be coming under discussion, and as I said, when we do have amendments that are presented to the current members of Government, these amendments will be taken very, very seriously and the intent of all amendments that will be presented will be to support firefighters and their families. This is an issue, when we have legislation that is not retroactive, that we do have to address prior to the bill being proclaimed.

* (15:40)

We look forward, Mr. Speaker, to bringing this legislation to the committee stage, and we look forward to hearing what Manitoba's firefighters have to say about the amendments that will be introduced, to give us guidance as members on both sides of the House. As I said, I would implore the members on the other side of the House, the current Government, not to be voting down very strong amendments that will support the firefighters and the firefighters association and their families.

I would implore members on the other side of the House to keep an open mind. I think this is a bill that needs to be outside the political arena and into the sphere of being useful and very supportive of firefighters and their families.

So members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, would like to particularly thank Manitoba's firefighters for the service that they provide all our citizens. Members on this side of the House would say that they definitely have our support, and we would like to show that support by supporting Bill 5 and by supporting the amendments that we bring forward. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide comments on Bill 5, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act. This bill will provide legislation which creates a rebuttable presumption that if a full-time firefighter who is employed for a minimum period gets a certain type of cancer, the dominant cause of the disease is the employment. I am supportive of this legislation, and I will spend a few minutes to indicate why.

In the report of the review committee on improving workplace, safety and health, it is clearly indicated that there is presently an underreporting of occupationally related cancer. I will quote from the report as follows: The underreporting of occupational disease is not a marginal issue. In 1996, 4482 Manitobans between the ages of 35 and 74 were diagnosed with cancer. Current medical thinking estimates that between 4 and 10 percent of all cancers are work related. This would suggest that there were between 190 and 480 cases of occupationally related cancer in that year. However, in 1996, only two cancer cases met the Workers Compensation Board criteria as acceptable claims. In all likelihood, the vast majority of those workers who were cancer patients and whose cancer was work related were unaware of the link between work and their illness and did not apply for benefits. That is the end of the quote.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the underreporting or the underassociation of cancer cases in terms of the Workers Compensation Board criteria may be, in part, a result of a lack of clarity of when circumstances are such that there can be a significant connection between the workplace and the cancer. An example clearly is the firefighters, and many of the firefighters have argued for some time that the development of brain cancer or leukemia or non-Hodgkin's

lymphoma is tied to their exposure in the workplace but up until this point they have not been able to receive compensation.

So, clearly, one of the things that it is important to do to correct the situation when very few Manitobans who get cancer because of an occupational exposure are compensated, is to clarify the links between occupational exposure and cancer, and clarify the circumstances when Manitobans who develop cancer as a result of exposures in the workplace can make those claims and can make those claims successfully.

In my view, this is very positive legislation because, in the context of firefighters, it provides for an understanding of when such claims can be made for firefighters. I believe the guidelines in this legislation are likely to have much more general application and are likely to provide a correction to the circumstance where a very small proportion of those who develop cancers because of workplace exposures in Manitoba are able to receive compensation.

The legislation that we are dealing with today provides for a presumption when a cancer is work-related, and this, in the context of firefighters, is clear. It is very important to provide guidance to the Workers Compensation Board in respect of when it is appropriate to make a claim that a cancer is work-related and that there should be compensation. It is all too easy or it has been all too easy in the past to argue that the cancer might have developed from some other cause than the occupational exposure and therefore the individual should not be compensated. This legislation, in addressing this issue in firefighters, provides a correction to that circumstance for firefighters, but it also provides a window of understanding that can be applied much more broadly.

I think it is very positive that we are moving closer to an understanding of when and where it is appropriate for Workers Compensation to provide support and benefits for workers whose cancer may have arisen from the workplace. This is an important step in providing better access to compensation for those who develop cancers from exposures in the workplace. At the same time, it clearly begins the process of clarifying when a cancer can be considered work-related

and a framework within which employers can become much more involved in addressing factors which cause cancer and in reducing the incidence of cancer which results from the workplace.

I want, at this point, to say a few words about the use of the term "presumption," which indicates that, all other things being equal, most cases of a certain type of cancer in a particular occupational or exposure group will be associated with that particular exposure, be it occupational or otherwise. The presumption applies even though it is not possible to determine which case is actually caused by the occupation. A presumption is a way of being inclusive in the acceptance of such claims, given that it is not possible to distinguish among them. A presumption is usually based on the demonstration that the relative risk exceeds twice that of the general population because, when the relative risk is more than twice that of the general population, under these conditions, the likelihood of the origin being related to the exposure is greater than the likelihood of the origin being from other reasons.

In practice, it may be impossible to use a cut-off as precise as a relative risk of 2.001, and, indeed, a relative risk of 1.7 or 1.8 may be indistinguishable statistically from one of 2.0 with any level of confidence.

Thus, in practice, evidence which suggests a relative risk of 1.7 or 1.8 may be sufficient to provide an argument for compensation, depending on the circumstances and the nature of the evidence. The bill we discuss today places a presumption with regard to firefighters who develop brain cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, a primary non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and primary leukemia.

* (15:50)

The presumption under the law is that when a full-time firefighter who has been working at his employment for a certain number of years and has been regularly exposed to the hazards of a fire scene comes down with any of these conditions the dominant cause is his or her employment. The clear indication of a presumption in legislation is important in that it makes a

clear statement about who is eligible for compensation. The bill requires an employment history and exposure history consistent with occupational exposure being the cause of the cancer.

In my view, the bill also clearly sets standards which can be applied to other instances of cancers which may have an occupational cause and indeed that this bill should be so applied when applications for compensation are made and when judgments are made in the course of process of looking at such claims.

Let me repeat this. In my view, once this bill is passed by the Manitoba Legislature, the standard which is set can then be applicable to other forms of cancer where there is evidence that occupational exposure could be the cause of the cancer.

A legislature cannot be expected to provide a bill indicating a presumption every time that there is consideration or evidence that there may be a relation between a form of cancer, an occupational or other exposure. The nature of medical evidence is that new studies come forward on a regular basis. We should not expect that a Legislature can or should have the duty of reacting quickly, week by week, month by month, as the nature of evidence comes forward or changes, but the Legislature should not be charged with the duty of passing a bill whenever there is evidence for a relative risk of 2.0 or more that occupational exposure is a risk of cancer. To do this properly would require a huge effort to make sure that everything is current.

It is appropriate to ask whether this is the most important appropriate use of legislative time. Indeed, I suggest to members of the Legislature that the Manitoba Legislature, by passing Bill 5, is setting a standard for when a presumption should be considered by the Workers Compensation Board in Manitoba and that this standard is reflective of the nature of the medical or scientific evidence for a relative risk factor of 2.0 or more.

To view otherwise would clearly not provide for fair treatment of people in the wide variety of occupations which currently exist in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, it is in the context of setting the standard of when and where a relative risk of

2.0 or more should be considered operative that this bill is useful. It is particularly helpful that the bill concerns five different types of cancers. Each of these cancers has been analyzed separately and each analysis provides a separate framework for a decision as to when and where a presumption can and should be made. The composite of five separate analyses in relation to these five separate groupings of cancer enables a broad perspective on when a presumption can be indicated or inferred and when it is not indicated.

It is not my purpose today to indicate in any comprehensive way the occupational diseases where a presumption between disease and occupational exposure can be made based on the passage of this bill and the establishment of a relative risk of 2.0 or more. I suspect, indeed, that there will be many when the research is completed.

Let me give two examples of where Bill 5 may set a useful precedent. First, let me address the issue of second-hand smoke. It is estimated that second-hand smoke is responsible for the deaths of between 56 and 288 Manitobans each year. The proportion of such deaths which arise from occupational exposure compared to exposure elsewhere is not clear, but it is likely that occupational exposures are significant contributors. Evidence, for example, suggests that waitresses in smoking establishments have a relative risk of lung cancer which is four times the expected lung cancer mortality rate. I will not here go into the nature of the evidence or specific reference to studies, but I will indicate that a relative risk of four compared to the standard we set in passing Bill 5 of 2.0 indicates a very high risk.

Passing the present bill provides a framework under which those who work for establishments where smoking is permitted and who develop lung cancer have an improved basis for seeking eligibility for compensation from Workers Compensation.

Let me now mention briefly the relevance of this bill to an exposure which is not occupational. Mr. Speaker, the present bill may be useful in setting a standard in which compensation may be or should be provided for certain non-occupational exposures.

I will give one example of this. Last year in this Legislature there was considerable discussion about the possible relationship between childhood leukemia and high voltage power lines. There have been a multitude of studies which have looked at this relationship, and I have looked carefully at these studies. While there is variability in the results in individual studies, the most relevant overall investigations are two pooled studies which show relative risks of 1.7 and 2.0.

Should there be a child who is living in a relative risk zone of 2.0 as a result of proximity to a high voltage power line who develops leukemia in Manitoba, then Bill 5 provides a framework in which to make a legal case for compensation from a company like Manitoba Hydro. Of course, this is not workers compensation. This is compensation because of the actions of a company to influence events which are outside the workplace but which are related to the activities of the corporation, in this case, a Crown corporation. Such a legal case for compensation would have to use the cumulative medical evidence up to the time the case is assessed and could use the evidence on which Bill 5 made the association of cancer with occupation as the basis for making the case for compensation under a very different situation which does not involve workers compensation at all.

Members of the Government should not be alarmed about the potential wider ramifications of Bill 5. Indeed, these wider ramifications are helpful to citizens under quite a variety of circumstances where citizens pursue justice and fairness under Manitoba's Workers Compensation Act and under the legal system in this province. The ramifications may also be helpful in improving business practices as they apply to workplace health and safety in a broad sense and to safety practices outside of the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, I support Bill 5. I believe it provides a very helpful framework in which there can be fairer delivery of workers compensation. There is one area which I believe that the Workers Compensation Board may need to review when Bill 5 is passed, as I expect it will be. When one looks at the compensation that may result as a result of

passing Bill 5, it will be important to look at the industry-specific analysis and, I believe, not just firefighters, but other occupations where the premises in this bill could be applied.

The contribution of employers to Workers Compensation, of course, is based in part on the record of the employer. For example, Seven Oaks Hospital, I understand, has a lower record of claims than other hospitals in Winnipeg and pays a lower premium.

When we move to a situation where cancer is increasingly considered, the long time delays to the start of the development of cancer mean that there will be greater difficulty in assessing long-term liabilities under Workers Compensation. The Workers Compensation Board will need to pay some attention to this area, as will, indeed, employers in the province.

I would like at this point to talk briefly about the issue of retroactivity in the application of this bill. I will begin by saying that generally I am quite opposed to passing bills or other measures which apply retroactively. There are a whole variety of reasons for this, but I believe it is a sound principle to avoid except under very stringent circumstances and unusual circumstances, that measures should not be passed with retroactive application.

Retroactivity is a bad process in law generally, and I do not support the application of this bill retroactively. Having said this, I believe that the Government could look very specifically at the situation of the firefighters who have been diagnosed with any of the cancers covered in this legislation and that the Government could, indeed, provide a compensation package specific to these firefighters which is independent of Workers Compensation. I would suggest this avenue to the Government because it would be a way of avoiding the use of legislation with retroactive provisions but would at the same time provide some recognition of the firefighters who have been diagnosed with cancer which likely resulted from workplace exposure and who have suffered unduly because this measure was not passed previously.

I would also like to speak briefly with respect to the situation of volunteer firefighters.

This bill provides for a presumption in the case of full-time firefighters because that is the nature of the evidence to date. It is appropriate for this bill to address full-time firefighters rather than volunteer firefighters because of the nature and the scope of the present scientific evidence. However, volunteer firefighters should not be forgotten. By providing a link between firefighting and these several forms of cancer, volunteer firefighters will be in a better position to argue, based on length of service and exposure to fires, that a specific cancer is related to their occupational exposure. Thus, as a result of being in a better position to make this argument, they will, indeed, when they bring their cases forward to the Workers Compensation Board, be in a better position to have a positive result in receiving benefits as a result of the occupational exposure.

* (16:00)

At the same time, I believe there is an obligation on the part of the Province to acknowledge the deficiency in the evidence in the studies to date. I believe there is an obligation for this Government to provide support to enable studies which will clarify the extent to which volunteer firefighters are or are not at greater relative risk of these cancers compared to the general population.

It is the deficiency of such studies which produces this missing gap in being able to apply this presumption to volunteer firefighters. The Province should undertake an effort, perhaps even in support with other provinces or with other sources of financial support, perhaps, to ensure that such studies are undertaken.

I hope that this Government will undertake to support research into this area so that volunteer firefighters can be assured that their concerns are not forgotten but that in due course there will be evidence to provide a substantive basis bearing on the question of whether volunteer firefighters are at the same increased risk of these cancers as are full-time firefighters.

In closing I would like to pay a tribute to the firefighters of Manitoba, to the tremendous work that they have done over many, many years in providing a very important service to the people

of this province. I am strongly in support of Bill 5. I look forward to the presentations to be made at the committee stage and further discussion and input during deliberations on this bill.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all the constituents of Lac du Bonnet, I welcome the opportunity to speak and to debate on Bill 5. Bill 5 of course is an amendment to The Workers Compensation Act, and it is an important one to all firefighters in this province. I support Bill 5 and I also support proper amendments to Bill 5. I would encourage members opposite to do the same.

Our firefighters are called as part of their job to place themselves in situations and in circumstances which are dangerous to their personal well-being. They cannot refuse to do the work under The Workplace Safety and Health Act. It is their job to do it.

One only needs to be reminded about the events and the terrible tragedy on September 11 of last year in New York in which hundreds of firefighters lost their lives. They entered the twin towers, oblivious to their own health and to their own safety, to save the lives of others in these buildings with full knowledge of the fact that they may not leave that building alive.

It is in these circumstances, I believe, that we are reminded about the dedication and commitment of firefighters, Mr. Speaker. As a society, though, we often take them for granted until of course we need them.

The danger to firefighters on September 11 was an obvious one. There was always the possibility that the building could in fact collapse. Sometimes firefighters face dangers that are not so obvious, such as when a chemical fire occurs during a train wreck or a motor vehicle accident or during a warehouse fire. There is not only the danger of the fire but there is also the danger that the fumes from the chemicals will cause an immediate threat to firefighters. Sometimes the fumes cause a delayed reaction to the firefighters, as in the case of cancer caused by exposure to chemicals and the fumes from chemicals. That is what this bill is intended to address, Mr. Speaker.

I, however, am of the view that Bill 5 does not go far enough in this scope. Section 4(5.2) of the bill indicates that the bill only applies to full-time members of a firefighting department. Most of the full-time members of any firefighting department are located in the city of Winnipeg, the city of Brandon, Dauphin, Portage la Prairie and the city of Thompson, in urban areas.

Almost all firefighters in rural Manitoba are voluntary firefighters and are not full-time firefighters. If a voluntary firefighter contracts an injury that is outlined in section 4(5.1), being primary site brain cancer, primary site bladder cancer, primary site kidney cancer, primary non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, or primary leukemia, the injury is not presumed to be an occupational disease and benefits do not flow under The Workers Compensation Amendment Act. Does this make sense, Mr. Speaker?

I do not believe that it should depend on whether you are a full-time or a part-time firefighter in order to receive benefits under this bill, or whether in fact you are a voluntary firefighter under this bill. The benefits should not turn on this point. The benefits should flow if you are a firefighter, whether it is full time, part time, or whether you are voluntary. Whether you contract these kinds of cancer and whether it can be proven that contracting those kinds of cancer is as a result of your exposure as a firefighter, those are the issues that have to be debated. Whether you are a full-time firefighter or a part-time firefighter or a volunteer firefighter, the risk on the job is exactly the same. Whether you are exposed to dangerous chemicals does not depend on whether you are full time, part time, or whether you are a volunteer.

Full-time firefighters are at the risk of greater exposure to dangerous chemicals simply because they respond to a greater number of fire calls. Volunteer firefighters in rural areas, however, can be exposed to exactly the same risk as full-time firefighters. Because rural municipalities have limited financial resources and because volunteer firefighters are not exposed to or provided with the same level of training that full-time firefighters are provided with, the incidence of exposure to cancer-causing chemicals is probably greater than for

full-time firefighters. Full-time firefighters are located only within the cities of Winnipeg, Brandon, Dauphin, Portage la Prairie and Thompson within Manitoba. Most of the fertilizer and chemical companies which supply farmers with pesticides, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides are within rural communities serviced by volunteer firefighters. Therefore, the risk of chemical exposure to volunteer firefighters is very high.

On speaking with Jamie Kines, the fire chief of the Beausejour-Brokenhead Fire Department, he stated that he believed, along with many other volunteer firefighters across the province, that Bill 5 should include benefits for part-time members and volunteer members as well as for full-time members. He added further that often volunteer firefighters are fighting particular fires for much longer than a standard eight-hour shift.

Typically, volunteer firefighters fight rural fires until they are extinguished. City firefighting departments, with full-time firefighters, are able to relieve their colleagues during a fire that takes a great deal of time to extinguish. This method of fighting fires in rural Manitoba greatly increases the risk to volunteer firefighters and supports an amendment to include volunteer firefighters within the scope of this bill.

* (16:10)

I would like to commend the volunteer firefighters in Lac du Bonnet constituency and, indeed, throughout the province of Manitoba for pursuing the possibility of hiring full-time fire chiefs, and I support this initiative. The obstacle in terms of whether to hire a full-time fire chief is one of dollars and cents. Rural communities cannot afford to hire a full-time fire chief, yet full-time fire chiefs are necessary to provide proper support and protection to communities in rural Manitoba and proper education and training programs to rural firefighters in rural Manitoba.

I would urge the Government to provide funds by way of an equitable funding formula to rural municipalities who may wish to hire full-time fire chiefs. I would support an amendment to Bill 5 to delete the words "full-time" from section 4(5.2) of the bill to ensure that part-time

and volunteer firefighters in rural Manitoba are also included within the scope of benefits contemplated by Bill 5. I would encourage members opposite to support this amendment which is crucial to the fire departments in rural Manitoba.

I am also concerned about the limited scope of the bill as it pertains to firefighters only. I believe that paramedics and our ambulance personnel should be included within the scope of this bill. Ambulance personnel are exposed to the same kinds of hazards that firefighters are exposed to. They are called to the scenes of fires and, of course, to motor vehicle accidents in which chemical spills and chemical fires can occur. I would support an amendment to the bill to add paramedics and ambulance personnel to sections 4(5.1) and (5.2), and I would encourage all members of this House to support that amendment.

Why should only firefighters be afforded the protection that this bill provides? It should be provided to all those whose job places them at risk to contract the cancers that are contemplated in this bill. My comments with respect to firefighters as to whether they are full-time, part-time or volunteers equally apply to paramedics and ambulance personnel. I would encourage all members to examine Bill 5 carefully and to vote for the proposed amendments that we propose to make in committee. Thank you.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to this bill, Bill 5, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act. I have a few short comments to make on it. I would like to indicate that I am certainly in support of the bill, and I am in support of the efforts that have been made in order to bring this bill forward.

As a nurse who has cared for many families with cancer, I certainly recognize the profound effect that cancer can have on patients and on their families. In fact, a very good friend of mine, a firefighter, died several years ago. The family and he went through a lot of emotion and a lot of turmoil because they were not sure of what exactly he had. He died a prolonged death. He was sick for quite some time. There was a lot of difficulty in diagnosing him, and he struggled

through all of it. At home they had to set up a bed in the living room, and basically he spent weeks and weeks wasting away, and the medical system was not able to diagnose what was wrong with him. We did find out later that he certainly did have cancer.

Back then the evidence was not there to support what we now see as evidence coming forward that indicates that if a full-time firefighter is working with these toxic elements that, certainly, cancer can be very prevalent in firefighters, and cancer can be the dominant cause of the disease that is, indeed, caused through firefighting. As a friend to the family, as a friend to the firefighter who died, as a friend to the wife who was a nursing colleague of mine, I certainly am in support of what is happening with this bill and with this effort. It is the right thing to do.

I am a little bit disappointed to hear the political rhetoric that did come from the members from Transcona and Thompson. I expected a little bit better from them on a bill like this, because I think this bill really is far too important for that to be happening.

Mr. Speaker, the science that is now present to support this bill coming forward is very significant. In health care, we talk about the importance of making decisions based upon evidence, and evidence certainly now does support the presumption that if a full-time firefighter employed for a minimum period gets a certain type of cancer the dominant cause of the disease is the employment.

I would like to extend that to also probably include other firefighters as well, that it is likely not only full-time firefighters that are affected, that it is likely part-time firefighters and volunteer firefighters.

I certainly am in support of the amendments we are recommending, because with Bill 5 as it stands right now it is only going to benefit those firefighters who contract cancer after the proposed legislation becomes law. But for those firefighters who already have cancer, they will be required to first prove that their cancer was a direct result of their job before they were entitled

to the WCB benefits. While this appears to be a good law for our healthy firefighters right now, one does have to ask: Where is the justice for those firefighters already battling cancer? Without our amendment, the NDP's legislation allows a double standard to exist for those firefighters who contracted cancer prior to this law coming into effect. Hopefully, the Government will recognize how unfair this double standard is and will unanimously support that amendment.

The other amendment we are looking at is to make this bill retroactive. I think that is also something that needs to be debated in committee. That is something I truly hope the Government will support, to address those two amendments, because I think they are meaningful amendments to what the Government is trying to achieve. To have those amendments in the legislation, I think, would make this a much, much more effective piece of legislation that could come out of Manitoba. I would encourage the Government to give good thought to that. Certainly, while politics does tend to interfere oftentimes with decisions, maybe this is some piece of legislation that we could work together and try to do it for the right reasons, for the firefighters of Manitoba, and would be a model for what is available for other firefighters across the country to be looking at.

Mr. Speaker, I would also, as other members of my caucus have indicated today, like to express gratitude to our firefighters in Manitoba for the exemplary work they do, for the challenges they face, for the dangers they face, for what they do every day when they go out to work, never knowing exactly what to expect. On behalf of the members of my caucus, I would like to also state our thanks to them for the risks they take and the efforts they put forward to make all of our lives in this province better.

With those few, short words, I certainly support the bill. I would ask that the Government give serious consideration to the amendments we will be bringing forward, because, as I indicated earlier, the issue of cancer in families is one that is an extreme challenge for families. It is difficult for the families, it is difficult for the patients. I think we do need to do everything that we can do to address these challenges and try to make things a little bit better when we are able

to. In this case I certainly hope that this House will look unanimously at making these changes and move forward with making this a much, much better piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (16:20)

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I too want to stand in support of Bill 5. This weekend I was visiting with my family. My mother and I were going through some pictures. She was showing me pictures of me when I was about five or six, vaguely I remember, but she was showing me pictures of me dressed up as a fireman. Her comment to me was at that time all the kids your age wanted to grow up to be a firefighter. I suspect that probably in this Chamber at some point in time in many of our lives that was something that we wished to be when we grew up. For some of us it happened and for others for obvious reasons it did not.

I think you always have an appreciation for people that do things in your community or work in your community and provide certain services, but you never really stop to appreciate the fact until you have had to utilize that service or request the service of those people. Unfortunately in the last month I have had the experience of having to deal with the firefighting people in rural Manitoba with two specific instances, the one being the gas explosion at Brookdale and the other one being the train explosion or the train accident that created the fire at Firdale.

I think I have always had a strong appreciation for what they do, but I think something changed at that particular time when I saw these people who in this instance were people that left what they were doing as far as a job to attend to these accidents as volunteers. The management and the training and the expertise that they provided in these circumstances was, I would say, far beyond the call of duty. I just think it is very important that we acknowledge and recognize the services that they provide.

I had a chance this past weekend to speak to a couple of the local people on our firefighting team in Killamey, certainly very aware of this

legislation and certainly very interested to see if there was an opportunity that they would have the ability to be included in the plan or at least considered and if there was a way, maybe not this time, of expanding it at some point to include their organizations as volunteers to be covered in some way or some form under this plan.

I have to admit, as much as the members opposite have expressed a concern that it has been something that there has been a rallying cry for for a long time, I regret to say that, through various committees that I sat on and various parts of the Legislature that I participated in, I do not recall the earth-shattering cries that I hear from across the floor, perhaps they were there and perhaps because I have not been in the Legislature as long as some of them. I know some of them were talking 12, 15, and 20 years, and I do not have that experience. So I would suggest that not all of us, or any of us, I think, on this side acted with any intent or any malicious intent toward firefighters.

I think the bill does speak to some issues. I think it addresses some of the issues that have obviously been a concern of theirs for a long period of time. As the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) said, whether we like it or not, as governments and as politicians, no matter whether we are in the local, municipal, civic, provincial or federal, the ability to do some of these things, they do not happen overnight, for other reasons other than a will not to. The financial situation has to be put in place to deal with those issues. I respect the Government across the floor for taking this issue and making the necessary changes, not only to acknowledge, but also to address the situation that obviously has been on the table for a long period of time.

As others have said, I know there are some proposed amendments being brought forward by this side of the House. I hope the Government will listen to them. I hope they will consider them. They do, as they have before, have the power and the hammer of Government. They have the majority, and therefore they can choose to support the amendments we will be bringing forward, which I believe are friendly amendments, are not amendments that are going to put Government on one side of the issue or on the other.

As I have heard today, other than the political rhetoric from time to time that occurs, I think it is something that everybody in this House is willing to support and, hopefully, with some amendments, can make it a better bill and show more support for our firefighters. I know the talk has been or the suggestions have been that at some point we could include the volunteers or the part times. Again, my experience this past month with the volunteers I have to deal with in the firefighting communities or the communities with the volunteer firefighters, these people put themselves in extreme conditions from time to time I am not sure any one of us here would want to have to face or would have to deal with.

I compliment them on their fine training. I know that several of the communities I represent have volunteer firefighters. Once a year the communities have a day or an evening where they acknowledge the time and effort and the training that goes into it. I am continually blown away by the amount of effort and time they have to commit to become a part of this volunteer organization. I suspect that a full-time firefighter does even more and probably in more intense situations. I do compliment them for the fine work they do.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say I am certainly prepared to support Bill 5. I hope the Government listens to the amendments and will consider them, and we look forward to passing this on into committee.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): In putting comments on the record with regard to this bill, I want to assure the members of the House, as the critic who has responsibility for this area, I will be supporting this bill, but I want to indicate right at the outset that I believe we need to take a look at where this bill is not addressing the concerns of some of the firefighters across this province, and also where it is not taking into consideration some of those who perhaps are ill with disease right now as a result of their occupation.

Mr. Speaker, as I sat and listened to the debate this afternoon, one of the speakers earlier, the minister of highways specifically, put on record that in 1989 he brought this bill forward

and encouraged its amendment to the House when this side of the House was in government. That is true. He did that, Mr. Speaker, but what he failed to mention in all of his rhetoric was the fact that in 1989, there was no evidence through a scientific study that, in fact, led this government of the present day to make the recommendations that they have.

The second thing that he did, Mr. Speaker, or did not do was the fact that he did not indicate in his remarks that at that time there was a fairly strong and consistent lobby from the councillors at the City of Winnipeg who said do not put this amendment in. Times were somewhat different then.

* (16:30)

The other thing that the minister did not mention was the fact that in 1986 or 1988, when his party left government, they left the Workers Compensation Board in such a mess that there was no way possible for the Workers Compensation Board to be able to afford, to be able to respond to the needs in the way that they can today. Now the member from Lakeside corrected the record, and he put on the record that indeed the Workers Compensation Board, in 1988, was in debt to the tune of something like \$400 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, how can the Workers Compensation Board possibly respond to a call like that when they have that kind of a debt facing them?

I recall very vividly workers in this province who could not get access to Workers Compensation benefits because of the attitude that government of the day had taken on, poor people or people who were being made poor by the fact that they could not access Workers Compensation benefits. It was our Government who worked very hard to make sure that the Workers Compensation Board and also the fund at the City of Winnipeg could be built up to the levels that they are today. So, when the minister of highways wants to stand in this House and point fingers, he had better remember that, when he is pointing one finger at us, there are three that are pointing back at him.

Mr. Speaker, I say that, yes, we support this legislation. This Government has a responsibility

to respond to a study that was done very recently that pointed out very clearly that the presumption here should be taken into consideration when in fact these people are exposed to that kind of hazard, if you like, from day to day in their workplace.

The full-time firefighters are being covered as a result of the study, and that is why the minister has not extended the coverage to part-time firefighters. That is why she has not extended the coverage to people who perhaps were injured in this way previous to this legislation coming into force, but we on this side of the House feel that it is a practical and worthwhile amendment to make sure that the bill covers those people who are suffering from an ailment today as a result of their occupation.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to calling on the Government, calling on the minister responsible for this bill to bring speedy passage to an amendment that I am prepared to table at committee stage which is going to also include in coverage those people who are suffering as a result of their workplace hazard.

The other amendment that I think needs to be considered is an amendment that covers—*[interjection]* Well, the Minister of Housing (Mr. Sale) should be careful in what he puts across the hall here, Mr. Speaker, because he may get caught in his own trap.

I say to this House that maybe we should extend the presumption to volunteer and part-time firefighters as well. The study has not been done. I acknowledge that whole-heartedly. The science, they say, is not there, but let us take a look at the practical aspects of living in a hazardous situation and working in a hazardous situation, such as our firefighters do.

I know volunteer firefighters who probably expose themselves to the same levels of danger that full-time firefighters do. When I look at a toxic spill and then when I look at some of the conditions that firefighters have to access, I really feel for them because I know that it cannot help matters in terms of their own health when they have to go into some of these situations.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are asking the Government to extend this in a practical way to people

who find themselves in these conditions, whether they are full-time or part-time or volunteer firefighters, and who have contracted the forms of cancer that have been noted in the minister's press release and in her bill, that it would then encompass those people who are working on a part-time or full-time basis.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have taken some criticism as an opposition from the Government, and it is almost strange that a government that is promoting its bill is speaking about an opposition that used to be in government and what they did back in 1989. That does not do this bill any good. It does not do the firefighters any good. It does not do the people who are anxious to see this legislation pass any good.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are individuals who are suffering from a disease right now as a result of them being in the workplace as a firefighter. I think that it is important that we look very carefully but very quickly at the legislation and make sure that these people are covered. They are living; they are fighting a disease, and they deserve to have this coverage extended to their benefit.

I looked at it in a very practical way. Members opposite may think that this is just a political move, but it is not. These are real people. These are people who are suffering as a result of their occupation, and they are seeing before their eyes that we are prepared to extend coverage because it is presumed that they contracted that ailment in the workplace, but they are going to be exempted because the bill has not come into force and their disease was not detected after the bill came into force.

That is wrong, Mr. Speaker. That is wrong. There are not thousands of people living with this condition in the province of Manitoba right now. We can count them on the fingers of our hands. I think as a compassionate group of legislators we have a responsibility to respond. If we are responding to full-time firefighters who are not yet ill but may be in the future, we had better respond to the ones who are currently ill, and, more than anybody, those families need that support and that coverage now. That is why we are debating the bill today because we want this bill passed as quickly as possible, so that those

people who are suffering can also receive the level of compensation that they deserve.

The minister may say, yes, but the science does not include them. I am saying to the minister and to the Government common sense, practicality dictates that we should, in fact, encompass them in this legislation. So, Mr. Speaker, I am going to be putting forward an amendment that is going to address that issue, and I am asking members of government to support that amendment, so that we can all go forward together. We have indicated that we will support the government bill. Now we are asking, on behalf of firefighters, on behalf of those who are ill, to accept our amendment.

The minister of highways stood up in his place and put on the record the fact that he was fully supportive back in 1989. I am asking him today as a minister of the Crown, as a minister responsible for making decisions in Government, to support the amendment that we are going to put forward, not for political reasons, but indeed for practical reasons, for common-sense reasons, to support the people who are suffering from an ailment today where this bill is going to be covering it. *[interjection]* The minister says, well, we cannot do it because the scientific evidence is not there for the person who has the ailment today. I say that is foolish. I say that is foolish. Let us use our common sense. Let us use our heads.

We know it is a type of cancer that is mentioned right here in the minister's bill. Those people are suffering from that kind of cancer. Now, if they are suffering from that kind of cancer, they have been a firefighter for their career, does it make sense not to cover them? How many are there like that? How many firefighters are there? Are there 10? Are there 5? Are there 2? Is there 1? I think the numbers are small, Mr. Speaker, in an overall sense. If we have any compassion for their families and for them and if we have any view to really do something positive with this bill, we will include that amendment in the bill.

I am giving the Government fair warning that in committee we will be bringing that amendment in. They can prepare themselves to accept that amendment. If in fact they can

improve on it, they can talk to me about it right away. I asked the minister to talk to me right away and we will try to work together. That is what she wanted to do. She brought me into her office. She said, Len, I am sitting you down to explain the bill to you so that you can support it. I said to her, yes, but I think that we have an added responsibility here. We have an added responsibility to those people who perhaps are ill because of their workplace and who today are seeing a bill pass that could have impacted on them had perhaps their disease not been detected until after the bill passed or perhaps if they had not gone to their doctor to have that disease detected until after the bill passed. Let us not be so narrow minded.

Mr. Speaker, I say one more thing. How many firefighters' families are there in the province today who, perhaps, have deceased because of this kind of hazard in the workplace? Let us go back to 1985. I think the numbers will show that there are a total of about 17 people in the province of Manitoba whose families today are suffering because there was no coverage for them, because they did not have access to coverage and their loved ones have died as a result of a disease that they contracted in the workplace.

* (16:40)

I have to ask the question, Mr. Speaker, how much money would that involve if we went back, put a retroactive clause into the bill, and said let us go back to 1985 and let us cover everybody, every firefighter who died as a result of this kind of disease that he or she contracted in the workplace? I think that the numbers show there are about 17. Now should that be considered? I say it should. I say it should for the families, for those 17 families that today are probably suffering economically. Lord knows, they have suffered enough emotionally and personally because they have lost a loved one, but they also suffer financially because that person who was employed gainfully as a firefighter is not with them today.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at September 11, you know, September 11 should have taught us all a lesson, because September 11 brought very vividly to our eyes the fact that firefighters are willing to risk everything, are willing to risk

their lives to save the life of a another human being. When you have that kind of commitment, that kind of dedication, that kind of personal sacrifice, you have to acknowledge that these are some of the bravest people we have in our society. They are the true heroes in many incidents, and indeed the number of lives that they save in all of our communities must be acknowledged and applauded.

So the time has come for us to recognize this. It would be unconscionable for the United States not to acknowledge the value of those firefighters that died, to acknowledge the worth that they had in their community and to acknowledge the hurt and the pain and the suffering that their families were going to endure, not for one year, not for a months, but for years after the incident and that they should be reimbursed in a financial way for that.

As I stand here today, I look this Government in the face, and I say to them: Take your responsibilities seriously here; look at this bill and accept the amendment that is coming forward because it is an amendment that addresses the pain of people that we all respect, I think, on either side of the House. I will not ever say that members over there do not respect the firefighters in our province. As a matter of fact, there is one among them. So the amendment is a practical one. I do not make light of it, and there may be difficulties with it. But I say to the minister to come forward and tell me what those difficulties are because, to date, that has not happened.

If there is a difficulty in accepting the retroactive aspect of this to 1985, then I ask the Government to come forward and tell us what those difficulties are, because we need to work our way through this. I know that we do not have the numbers in the House to allow our amendments to stand and to pass, but I say to the members opposite that these are practical amendments, and I say to the Premier (Mr. Doer) that he has a responsibility, a real responsibility here in ensuring that his Cabinet members understand the impact of this, perhaps, on those 17 families that I speak about, perhaps, on those who are suffering today as a result of being afflicted with a disease because of what the workplace has offered.

As we move towards the final hours in the debate of this bill, I am prepared to move this bill to committee, and I am asking the Government to deal with it expeditiously. I am asking the Government to deal with it with an open mind, to accept indeed an amendment that is practical, an amendment that impacts, not on us, but on one or two cases. At the end of the day, it is not going to cost a great deal of money to make sure that that individual is looked after and also to make sure that the families of those 17 or so are looked after as well, but that will come in two separate amendments.

I ask the Government to look at the volunteer issue, and if they have a difficulty with that, then express that with us. Come and talk to me and tell me why it is that we should not be able to extend that coverage, that presumption to volunteer firefighters, who are also as dedicated and committed in this province as our full-time firefighters are.

Mr. Speaker, I come from a part of the province where our firefighters are part-time. Many of them are volunteer. I know the kinds of hazards they are exposed to. They do that because they are committed, because they are dedicated to saving lives, they are dedicated to saving property, they are dedicated to that way of life. They leave their ordinary jobs, in the middle of the night they go out to fight fires, and the next day they are back on the job. That is a level of commitment that should be acknowledged. They are also exposed to those same levels of danger. Whether it is a spill, a toxic spill, whether it is a fire in a chemical shed, a house fire, or indeed an industrial fire, they are exposed to the same kinds of dangers, maybe not as consistently, because full-time firefighters do that as part of their regular work on a day-to-day basis.

So our side of the House sees this bill as a positive one. It sees this bill as one that needs to have some improvements. It sees this bill as having perhaps neglected a few people who should be included. I ask the Government, I ask the Premier, I ask the minister to consider our amendments in a positive light, to consider them in a way which will improve the bill, and we can leave this House, this Assembly knowing that we have done the right thing for the people who

are on a daily basis risking their lives, risking their health for the good of society, for the good of the people of this province.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate to you that we will be supporting this bill, that we will be bringing forward amendments. I am at this point in time recommending that this bill be moved to committee for its deliberation. Thank you very much.

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 No. 5, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act.

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

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might attempt to make this unanimous.

Mr. Speaker: On the vote on Bill 5, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, I did not hear one nay. So this is passed unanimously.

House Business

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Before we proceed to the report stages that were outlined earlier, I would like to seek a change of Estimates sequence. Mr. Speaker, I wish to obtain the unanimous consent of the House to vary the sequence for consideration of Estimates as outlined in the Sessional Paper No. 124 tabled on April 30, 2002, by switching in the Chamber the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs with the Department of Justice. This change is to apply permanently.

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

For the information of the House, unanimous consent has been given to vary the sequence for the consideration of Estimates as

outlined in Sessional Paper 124 tabled on April 30, 2002, by switching in the Chamber the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs with the Department of Justice. This change is to apply permanently.

* (16:50)

Mr. Ashton: I would also seek leave, wish to obtain unanimous consent of the House to vary the sequence for the consideration of Estimates as outlined in Sessional Paper 124 tabled on April 30, 2002, by switching in committee room 254 the Department of Labour and Immigration with the Department of Conservation.

Mr. Speaker, this change is to take effect for Tuesday, May 21, and is to be in effect for the balance of the week of May 21 to 23.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave to vary next week's sequence for the consideration of Estimates as outlined in Sessional Paper 124 tabled on April 30, 2002, by switching in committee room 254 the Department of Labour and Immigration with the Department of Conservation? This change is to take effect on Tuesday, May 21, and is to be in effect for the balance of the week of May 21 to May 23.

Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Laurendeau: Mr. Speaker, we might want to move that change tomorrow because we were supposed to have received the books for Labour, and I still do not think we have received them and until such time as the books are tabled for Labour, I cannot agree to have that committee changed. They were supposed to be tabled today.

Mr. Ashton: Given the fact that the day is not over yet, perhaps we will withdraw this, and we can revisit it either later today or early tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Will the honourable Deputy Government House Leader please repeat what he said? I never caught it.

Mr. Ashton: Given the comments of the Opposition House Leader, I was going to withdraw that request now, and we could perhaps revisit that either later on today or else tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The request for unanimous consent of the House to vary the sequence has been withdrawn. *[interjection]*

The unanimous consent that was asked for had been denied by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader. So it is too late to withdraw because it has already been denied.

REPORT STAGE

Bill 3—The Highway Traffic Amendment and Summary Convictions Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: Report stage on Bill 3, The Highway Traffic Amendment and Summary Convictions Amendment Act.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Sale), that Bill 3, The Highway Traffic Amendment and Summary Convictions Amendment Act, as amended and reported from the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, be concurred in.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

Order. There was kind of a little bit of confusion here. Everybody was talking kind of loud. I would like to move this again because apparently there was a no that I did not hear.

Moved by the honourable Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton), seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Sale), that Bill 3, The Highway Traffic Amendment and Summary Convictions Amendment Act, as amended and reported from the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, be concurred in.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in support of the motion, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In my opinion, the Yeas have it. The motion is carried.

* * *

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, can you please call Bill 14 for debate on second readings?

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

**Bill 14—The Public Schools
Modernization Act
(Public Schools Act Amended)**

Mr. Speaker: Resumed debate on second reading Bill 14, The Public—

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker. I had agreed with the House Leader that we would get bills 7, 8 and 10 through on report stage today before Bill 14.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): The list I had from the Government House Leader, it did not include that. I suggest we just stand it, and then we can move straight through report stage. It is no problem.

Mr. Speaker: My understanding is that we would deal with resumed debate on second reading of Bill 14, and then we would move on to report stage of Bill 8 and Bill 7. Is that correct? *[Agreed]*

Resumed debate on second reading of Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act (Public Schools Act Amended), standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa.

Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer)? *[Agreed]*

The bill will remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa. Is there any member who wishes to speak on the bill? No? Okay.

REPORT STAGE

**Bill 8—The Limitation of Actions
Amendment Act**

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), that Bill 8, The Limitation of Actions Amendment Act, as amended and reported from the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

* (17:00)

**Bill 7—The Local Authorities Election
Amendment Act**

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Smith), that Bill 7, The Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, as reported from the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 10—The Environment
Amendment Act**

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Sale), that Bill 10, The Environment Amendment Act, as reported from the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The time being five o'clock, it is time for private members' business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Res. 6—Moratorium on Gambling

Mr. Speaker: Resolution 6, the Moratorium on Gambling, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Russell.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns),

WHEREAS the provincial government is in the process of establishing four Aboriginal casinos and has revealed plans for even more casinos in the future; and

WHEREAS the hours of operation of video lottery terminals were expanded in August 2001, with VLT operators now permitted to turn on the machines at 9 a.m. rather than 11 a.m.; and

WHEREAS in Canada in 1992 casinos and VLTs accounted respectively for only 1 percent and 9 percent of gross gambling profits, but by 2000 those figures had grown to 29 percent and 27 percent; and

WHEREAS a report released by the University of Manitoba found that 85 percent of problem gamblers use VLTs; and

WHEREAS the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba has stated that the extended VLT hours may be cause for concern with regard to the problem gamblers in the province; and

WHEREAS a report on gambling in Canada by the Canadian West Foundation released in August 2001 estimated that in the mid-1990s approximately 3 percent to 5 percent of Canada's adult population were experiencing multiple problems with their level of gambling and that Manitoba was ranked among the provinces with the highest percentage of problem gamblers; and

WHEREAS the report concluded that gambling has expanded at a rate that surpasses the ability of government regulators to assess its consequences; and

WHEREAS according to the Manitoba Gaming Control Commission, reliable information as to the social impact of gambling is at least five years away.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government, upon completion of the four new Aboriginal casinos, to consider placing a moratorium on the expansion of gambling in the province for five years in order for the social impact of these new casinos and increased VLT hours to be accurately assessed.

Motion presented.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, this resolution is placed before the House today so that the Government can take a look at where it is headed, so that the Government can pause from its insatiable appetite for gambling revenues and can take a practical view of where Manitoba is at today.

The facts speak for themselves. This Government, who were so critical of us when we were in government about such things, such little things as placing a billboard outside the city or placing a billboard somewhere down the highway in another province, and who, when we had a billboard in the city of Winnipeg, raised all kinds of Cain about it to the point where we said, okay, if that is the view of Manitobans, we will remove advertising in the city of Winnipeg, especially in the vicinity of the casinos so that we are not encouraging the vulnerable people of this province to go and drop their money into these worthless machines.

We conceded to the then-opposition, who had so relentlessly put forward the position of not advertising gambling in the province of Manitoba. How quickly the attitude changed. I do not know whether it is because of the Minister of Advanced Education assuming responsibility for this, whether she has such an insatiable appetite for the revenues from gambling, or whether she loves gambling so much, but all of a sudden the advertising for gambling just went through the roof, a hundred thousand dollars a month being spent on promoting gambling in Manitoba. When is it done? On television it is done in prime time viewing.

Then you take a look at that underlying tone of the advertising when they talk about people never having so much fun in their lives after they had experienced the casino experience. I say to you, what is casino advertising all about? It is

encouraging Manitobans to take those precious dollars that they earn from their daily lives and drop them into the worthless machines and drop them at the tables at the casinos.

When I questioned the minister on this issue, she said, oh, no, no, no, no, all I am doing is advertising the amenities. If she is really interested in tourism, and her seatmate is supposed to be the Minister of Tourism, if they are really interested in tourism, why are they not advertising The Forks in that nature? Why are they not advertising the amenities at The Forks or the amenities in some of our rural areas that are truly tourism experiences? Why are they not advertising those? Why have they chosen to advertise for the amenities at the casinos? Are there no other restaurants that are worthwhile advertising except those in the casinos? No. I will tell you why they are advertising them at the casinos. That is one way to attract the vulnerable to those gambling joints, if you like, to drop their precious dollars and to go home broke.

The most vulnerable in our society are our youth. If you look at the studies, they point very clearly to the fact that the addiction levels are highest among our youth. So who is the minister advertising to? She is advertising: Go for the fun of it. Do it for the fun. And who are the most susceptible? Our youth.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not care. Then the minister said: Well, I am not advertising gambling. Well, I wish I had a copy of the magazine here, the *Travel Manitoba* magazine which says the jackpots are this big. Come to the casinos of Manitoba. The jackpots are this big. What hypocrisy. What hypocrisy we have here.

What is the resolution saying? It is saying pause. Take a pause. Take a pause and look at what you have done. Take a look at where you have been and take a look at where you are going because you are bound for disaster. This resolution is supposed to avert this appetite for gambling of this Government and to make it check its priorities in terms of where it is leading our youth and our vulnerable people in this province.

You know, recently I walked through the casinos. When I walked through the casinos,

what did I find? I found the place filled—are they the rich and famous of Manitoba? No, I do not think they are the rich and famous of Manitoba. Are they the wealthy of this province? I do not think so. But you know what I found? A lot of ordinary, hardworking Manitobans have become addicted to this form of entertainment, sad to say. Sad to say, Mr. Speaker.

So what I am saying to the government of the day is do not advertise. Do not advertise. Do not play to the heartstrings of the vulnerable. Look at what you are doing. I say to this minister, she should be ashamed. She should be ashamed of where she is going with all of this.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I remember running an ad when we were in government. I remember our government running an ad for health care. It was under Minister Jim McCrae at the time, and we had spent \$400,000 on some advertising on how Manitobans could better access health care. The opposition of the day made a big issue of it. They said look at the dollars that are being spent on advertising when they could be going to help real Manitobans with health problems.

Well, \$100,000 a month could help a few Manitobans with their health problems instead of it being blown on enticing Manitobans, young Manitobans, vulnerable Manitobans to come into the casinos and drop their monies into VLTs—for what? So that the Government can boast that its revenues are up, \$5 million, \$10 million a year.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has a problem with spending, so they need these revenues. So, you see, one addiction leads to another. The government of the day is addicted to spending money. They do not know how to spend wisely. They just spend. In two years, the revenues of this Province grew by almost a billion dollars. They spent it all, and now they are asking the casinos to cough up more money to satisfy their appetite for spending. That is what is really tragic, is the attitude that this Government has taken with respect to an addiction, and it is their own addiction to spending money.

Now they are asking poor Manitobans, they are taxing poor Manitobans to open VLTs for longer periods of time, keeping them open. What is next, Mr. Speaker? We are going to see the

casinos, the VLTs in our hotels open on Sundays because that is the direction they are headed.

* (17:10)

What we are saying in this resolution is stop and think what you are doing. Stop and think what you are doing and who you are doing it to. Take a pause.

Mr. Speaker, not only have they bungled the entire issue, but they committed to four casinos, four Aboriginal casinos. Now, this is a government—and I could read back their quotes here, including the First Minister's quotes who said that gambling is probably the biggest, the most difficult addiction to treat. Here is the Member for Minto, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines (Ms. Mihychuk) who said, and I quote: "Are Manitobans aware that gambling is the most difficult addiction to treat, that people are highly susceptible to gambling? Gambling is a much more difficult addiction to treat than smoking, drugs or alcohol."

What is this Government doing? They are saying: Come on, folks, spend your money. Come and do it for the fun of it. That is the minister's attitude. She says: Come on, vulnerable Manitobans; spend your dollars, because I cannot control my spending.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say to you that we have come to a sad day, and I ask the member from Rossmere, who represents a sector of our society which is probably more opposed to gambling than anybody I know, do his constituents tell him that he should be opening gambling on Sundays? Do they tell him that he should be opening gambling at 9 a.m. in the morning? It used to open at 11. Now the VLTs are open at 9 a.m. We are becoming the Las Vegas of Canada.

Our casinos are going to be open 24 hours a day, and I ask the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg) to ask his constituents if in fact that is the direction that they want us to go. I ask, if the Government vote on this resolution, pass it, and quit this unthinkable form of advertising

and their appetite for gambling that they have demonstrated in the province of Manitoba.

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and to join with the member opposite in debate. I might say in passing that it seems to me the member has been talking about the wrong resolution because most of the comments he made have to do with advertising, but in fact if I read the resolution it talks about a moratorium on gambling. There seemed to be a bit of confusion as to the topic, but that is fine.

You know, before I was a member of this House, I was a literary critic, and as a literary critic, one of the things I was very interested in was the art of what we call deconstruction. Deconstruction, of course, advises us to read a text, not only for what the text might say, but also for what the text does not say. I think there is a whole lot here that is not said that needs to be said. Of course, I am going to put some of that on the record.

Just before beginning that, I really want to compliment the member opposite on his creativity and suggest that he might try his hand himself at the art of fiction writing. If he does so, I would be very happy to act as an editor or to offer proofreading services or indeed literary criticism, any of those things. Anyway, he and I could talk about that on another occasion perhaps. I could give him some advice, and maybe he could write a book.

However, one of the things I found interesting about the member's resolution was that it does urge the provincial government upon completion of the four new Aboriginal casinos to consider placing a moratorium. I took this as a sign that it appears that members opposite were finally indicating that they did support the Aboriginal casinos because their request is after this completion, and so I took this as a positive sign because I know that previously they did not appear to be in favour of the economic development in Aboriginal casinos. So I am very pleased that perhaps the member has changed his tune and is on-side with members of the Government caucus.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Also, I note that the member is not in favour of extending gambling at all and I am totally, I think, on-side with him here, but I do find it interesting that I am regularly lobbied by the Hotel Association who wish to increase the numbers of VLTs in our province and also wish to operate on Sundays, so I am glad that the member opposite has registered in the House today that he is not in favour of increasing the number of VLTs and he is not in favour of VLT operations on Sunday. I can do him the favour of sharing his remarks with the Manitoba Hotel Association and the Russell Inn, indeed, if he would like that to happen.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I do want to now take a look at the resolution, because, as I said, one of the things that I wanted to do was to deconstruct some of the things that I see here. It begins by talking that the Government has revealed plans for more casinos in the future. I do not know what the member is referring to. I do not think that this is accurate information. I want to draw this to his attention. It goes on, and I want to read the third WHEREAS: WHEREAS in Canada in 1992 casinos and VLTs accounted respectively for only 1 percent and 9 percent of gambling profits, et cetera, but by 2000 those figures had grown to 29 and to 27.

Well, indeed, Mr. Speaker, why had those figures grown? I think the numbers of VLTs had clearly grown because it was the members opposite when they were in government that introduced VLTs into this province at unprecedented numbers. For example, I can point out that in 1992 there were 1200 VLTs, but in March 1996 there were a total of 5603 VLTs introduced by members opposite.

At that point, Mr. Speaker, I think 600 were withdrawn from the system. As the member opposite says, there was some sort of a slow-down. Of this, 308 machines were reintroduced on the eve of the election in 1999, and they were approved for First Nations.

So, really, for this member to talk about gambling and this Government's dependence on gambling is quite ludicrous in view of the fact that it was the government of the members

opposite that increased our holdings of VLTs by unprecedented numbers. So I would like to bring that to the attention of the member opposite.

I think I should also bring to the attention of the member opposite the expansion of the Regent Street Casino and the McPhillips Street Station. I know that the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Sale) was very interested in knowing exactly what the costs of the expansion were. I can tell him, and I think it is important to put it on the record, although the original cost was supposed to be \$50 million for these casinos, by the time all the bills came in that \$50 million had grown to \$145 million. These were expenses undertaken by members opposite. Now, my Government has to pay the bills.

* (17:20)

So we have been left with this legacy. We have been left with the difficulty of running these casinos. We have been left with the difficulty of paying back the loan. It is a tough job, but fortunately we have a very competent group of people over at Manitoba Lotteries, and they are working at it.

Allow me a little segue here, Mr. Speaker, and this is where the member opposite talked a lot about advertising.

I do want to make the point that when you have a \$145-million debt to pay back, when you have more than 30 casinos within a day's drive, within eight hours drive of Winnipeg, when you pick up the weekend newspaper and count 40 advertisements from casinos outside the province and you have these expenses and you have billboards all over the city put up by casinos from the U.S., by casinos from, in some cases, I believe, from Saskatchewan, you have the inserts in your newspaper, colourful inserts, advertising the casinos in Regina and other places in Saskatchewan, well, then, Mr. Speaker, the market demands that we do some advertising too.

Some of the work that was done by Manitoba Lotteries Commission suggested that a great percentage, and I do not have the numbers in my head, so I do not want to put them on the record, but a great percentage of people in the

province did not realize that we had restaurants, that we had entertainment, and that we had other amenities in our casinos. So the Manitoba Lotteries Commission undertook to advertise these parts of their operations, amenities, restaurants, and entertainment, in order to apprise Manitobans of what they could get here in Manitoba so that they would not go to the U.S. or to other areas and spend their money that they earned here in Manitoba.

I know the member opposite was very concerned about those hard-earned Manitoba dollars, as we are. We too would like to keep them in Manitoba. What the member did not address and something of which I am very proud is the fact that our advertising has also included responsible use advertising. That has been in the electronic media as well as in the print. I want to point out that in 2000-2001 we spent half a million dollars on responsible use advertising.

The next year, because a lot of the advertising had been developed, Mr. Speaker, the Budget was 2500, but this year, that is 2002-2003, we have budgeted \$500,000 for responsible use. So I think this is evidence that we are extremely concerned about addictions. I know that the member talked about Manitobans and addictions. I did want to apprise him of some of the work we are doing.

Let me begin by saying that Manitoba Lotteries provides the AFM every year with \$1.75 million to be used in treatment. We have a number of responsible gaming programs in Manitoba at Manitoba Lotteries. They include programs like the Casino Voluntary Exclusion Program. There are no cheque cashing services or credit card use in the casinos. I think that is pretty obvious why that is a safeguard. There is no cheque cashing, credit card, or debit card use to play VLTs. There are responsible gaming posters, brochures that are displayed in our casinos and at all VLT sites. Minors are restricted from playing MLC games. VLTs are located in age-controlled facilities. The Addictions Foundation of Manitoba Problem Gambling Help Line number is printed on every lottery ticket and VLT pay slip and most MLC promotional material. As well, and this is the last program I will mention, the responsible gaming information on the MLC Web site has a link to AFM.

What I am extremely proud of as well, Mr. Speaker, is that under the current board and under the current administration, the MLC has recently developed a responsible gaming policy. This is, I believe, the first responsible gaming policy developed in Canada, so I think it is something that our corporation can be very proud of. Some of the features are: There is a maximum betting limit on table games; there is a maximum betting limit on casino slot machines; MLC casinos now have clocks in gaming areas. Again, this is a first in Canada. Previously, they did not, under the former administration. We think it is a good reminder to people to look up and see the time so that they are aware of exactly how long they have been sitting at a machine.

MLC casino employees are undertaking new problem gambling training developed by the AFM, similar to the kind of work that I know has been undertaken by the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission. Lastly, the Manitoba Lotteries Commission will be increasing its awareness of the AFM problem gambling help line through the continuation of Keep It a Game responsible gaming ads.

Again, as I was telling you, Mr. Speaker, I think this is something that we should commend the administration at Lotteries for initiating along with our very fine board members.

In his material, in his resolution, the member brought a great deal of attention to various studies, at least one study that has been done. I would like to point out to him that there are very many studies done on gambling and addiction, and that they often reach very different conclusions. One of them that has reached a different conclusion is a study released by AFM in February 2002. According to that study, the AFM indicated that there is no compelling evidence that the rate of problem gambling has increased in Manitoba during the nineties.

I know my time is running out, so I will just make one point, Mr. Speaker. If we compare the prevalence of problem gaming in Manitoba to that of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, our prevalence is the lowest. It is the lowest out of those four provinces. So it seems to me that the member needs to do some more reading, needs to reconsider, and perhaps he will be in a

position to have a fuller understanding of the situation if he does that.

I do want to, just in closing, reiterate our commitment to responsible gaming. I want to reiterate, actually, I have not said this before.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. McGifford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will make my points another time.

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): I do want to, and appreciate the opportunity to, speak to this resolution. Before I get started on the resolution itself, though, I would like to just correct one fact that the minister put on the record, and I am sure she will appreciate that.

I believe she did mention that the governance initiative for five Aboriginal casinos that they set forth on almost immediately after taking office, she indicated that five would be the limit. I would just take her back to June 15, 2000, in a quote from the Minister responsible for Northern and Aboriginal Affairs, who in response to a question identified that this is only a start to the casino initiatives. So, obviously, this Government, her colleagues believe that there will be soon far more than five Aboriginal casinos. I will speak more thoroughly to that because I think that is a very, very misguided policy and just one of the many misguided policies.

Mr. Speaker, I do think it is extremely unfortunate that, when we stand up in this House and debate issues as serious as this issue, and today we have had two very, very serious issues in front of us, one dealing with firefighters and diseases that affect them and their lives and this resolution which deals directly with the lives of many, many Manitobans. Unfortunately, we tend to fall into partisan politics; we tend to spend more time looking back and describing who did what to whom, and who said what, when years and years ago, when really we should be spending our time looking into the future. We should be spending our time as politicians determining where this society is going to go, because that is our primary role in this House: to determine policies that are going to see a better society, a better place to live for our children. I

think when we talk about this resolution, that is the issue we should be focussing on.

* (17:30)

I think, partisan politics aside—certainly VLTs and casinos were in place long before I entered this House—it is not a policy that I necessarily agree to, but there has been a mad rush all across the country for governments to look at VLTs and look at casinos as a form of increasing their revenue. I think it is time, and the member from Russell is absolutely right, it is time to stop. It is time to stop the gravy train. It is time to stop the Government's addiction to gambling revenues, to VLT revenues and take a hard look at what gambling, and in particular, what VLTs, which have been described by those who have studied it, as the crack cocaine of the gambling industry. It is time to put a stop to the damage that this type of institutionalized gambling is doing to our society. I think all legislators should take this issue very, very seriously, not only in Manitoba, but certainly all across Canada because the bottom line is what is a life worth? What is a life worth to any government of the day?

We have had reports from the Chief Medical Examiner. We have not heard anything lately, but certainly over a two-year period there are at a minimum five suicides that involve people who had got themselves into trouble through gambling addictions, and I believe that is just the tip of the iceberg. I believe there are many members on this side of the House and many members on the opposite side of the House that realize the same fundamental truth, and that is that gambling and VLTs are doing a tremendous disservice and tremendous damage in all parts of our society. In particular, it is doing damage in the segment of our society that needs help the most.

I think we have to look in the mirror, look at ourselves as legislators and ask ourselves a question: Is that what government is supposed to do? I mean, government's role is to do those things for society that it can do on a collective basis that individuals cannot do for themselves: things like providing roads, providing transportation, providing services, health care, providing education, providing programs for the needy and

the less fortunate in our society. This gambling policy that this Government is committed to and committed to a rapid expansion of is nothing more than playing on the very weakest in our society, our young people.

The Minister responsible for Gaming indicated that the AFM has studies that show that the problem is no worse now than it was in the 1990s. Well, I would ask her to review that. I would ask her to study very closely the information that is coming out of the Canada West Foundation and the work that they have done, because I think they are truly the only organization in Canada that has really done some very serious and in-depth research on this issue. Their numbers show, in particular, that the most disadvantaged portions of our society are the ones that are being harmed the most by governments' gambling policies across this country. In particular, when it comes to the issue of Aboriginal gaming, there is no higher percentage of problem gamblers than in Aboriginal youth. It is not that Aboriginal youth is one or two percentage points ahead of other groups when it comes to gambling problems. Aboriginal youths' gambling problems are three, four and five times higher than gambling problems in society as a whole.

Here we have a government that is rushing ahead with initiatives to expand the casinos, to expand gambling in this province and, in particular, to create Aboriginal casinos with no idea of the damage that they are going to do.

An Honourable Member: Are you against it?

Mr. Loewen: The Minister of Transportation (Mr. Ashton) asked if I am against it. Well, I am against it. It should be stopped, and it should be stopped now. This Government as well as the rest of the provincial governments in Canada should take a serious look, and I believe that we should definitely not only have a moratorium as the resolution suggests, but we should pour more money into studying the issue so that while that moratorium is on we will be able to understand fully the significant damage that is being done to large segments of our society.

The minister wants to talk about all the wonderful programs that the AFM has to offer

the people of Manitoba on a measly, I think it is \$1.75 million that they get funded for a whole year. That is a drop in the bucket, a pittance compared to, I think at least \$145 million that this Government takes out of VLT revenue alone, \$145 million in tax dollars that is coming from the most disadvantaged people in our society. Imagine what those individuals could do if that \$145 million was in their pockets. Imagine how many families would be fed better. Imagine how many families would have a better existence if that money was simply left in their pockets and if they were not subjected to our Government's in-your-face gambling addiction. We talk about addictions and really the biggest addiction is the addiction that the Government has to gambling revenue. It is not just this Government, it is all governments across Canada. All provincial governments are addicted to the revenue that comes in through gambling. It is probably the most unfair form of taxation that any government could think of to impose upon members of its society. *[interjection]*

Well, the Minister of Housing (Mr. Sale) wants to again go back to the past in who started what, who did what to them, and politicize it. What I would suggest that everybody in this House do is start looking towards the future. Look towards policies that are going to be positive, that are going to be creative and maybe even one day this House would put itself in a position to have a free vote on this issue and an open vote. What would be nice about that is people could actually stand up and speak what is really on their minds instead of falling prey to this petty politics and heckling that, unfortunately, resounds through this debate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am in support for a start—*[interjection]* The minister asks if I am not speaking on my mind, and I am speaking what is on my mind. There should not only be a moratorium; that is a starting point. I believe we need to find a way as a government, as responsible legislators to rid our community of gambling, period, in the form of the VLTs and the casinos. Until we do that, we are failing the very people that vote for us every time we go to the polls.

It is unfortunate that so many members opposite, through their need for revenue, are put

in such a hypocritical position where they have to stand up and try and defend their Government's expansion of gaming. It is unfortunate that they have to be put in the position where they stand up and speak for putting 150 VLTs in downtown Winnipeg to subsidize a new arena. It is unfortunate. I think, until we as legislators show the maturity to get past that petty political spin on these issues, we are doing a great disservice to Manitobans.

So I look forward to the speedy passage of this resolution, and I would look forward to some concrete action by all members on all sides of this Legislature to bring an end to this Government's addiction to gambling and to restore civility. Thank you.

* (17:40)

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak on this important issue. It is interesting, and I know that some members opposite have talked about not going back to the past. The member previous had mentioned not going back to the past. I can tell you, if I had a history like members opposite, I would not want to go back to the past either, because quite frankly the expansion that we saw through the nineties was unprecedented, when we saw the amount of VLT expansion.

It is interesting when the member opposite talks about dollars and numbers. As I remember in the debate going back a few years when the previous government, in their financial management of dollars and projections, looked at what the expansion was going to cost and what the casino expansion, I am speaking of, the projections that they had at that time was the total expansion costs would be in the area of \$29 million. I can tell you that now, after the expansion being near completed at \$202 million, I guess they were times 10 out on their predictions or close to it.

I think even of more interest in that is the rejection of expanding the downtown casino at that time because of the exorbitant cost, as members opposite said, some \$90 million. So they removed this as part of their plan to deteriorate the inner city of Winnipeg. Quite frankly,

when you look at it now, obviously, pencils could have been sharpened, if they would had been a little better business projectors, and they could have balanced the numbers a little better, I think, in retrospect, many of the members opposite would have looked at it as being a bad decision at that time.

Even of more interest when we get into numbers, I know the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) had talked about a billion-dollar increase in program expenditures of this Government. You know, when I look at our Budget and revenue overview statistics, what I do see is I see, from 1996-97 to 1999, that is where a billion dollars expenditures in programming expenditures happened, in a short period of time from the member opposite. When we look at, and I will correct the member, the '99-00 actual to the projected 2002-03 Budget, it is less than \$600 million, so a correction on the numbers there. Certainly one thing I do see is the public debt cost that we have decreased continually since we have come into government is certainly a factor.

Mr. Speaker, the balance, I think, members on both sides can agree on, is certainly, as most people in Manitoba and most people in Canada recognize, there is a piece of gambling and gaming that many, many people or a large percentage of the population have completely under control and use it as a recreation, and people enjoy it. Certainly there are those that fall to addictions in this area. I think this Government has done more and recognized more regarding that than the previous government. They talk about a moratorium now.

Certainly, during the massive expansion that members opposite had done over the last 10 years, I would have thought that maybe they would have considered the huge expansion that they did in this province prior to this. There is a balance, and I know that this minister, this Government and members on this side certainly are interested in a balance in some proactive ways to deal with possible addictions.

That is why I think it was of considerable importance when the work that we have done with AFM and some of the training programs that are set up with AMM dealing with MLC

have been so important to identify people with possible problems. They have set up a help line. Certainly, it is well identified in the casinos throughout Manitoba and, certainly, in facilities where VLTs are present, I know, although there are those people that do need assistance. We are very interested in supporting that. Certainly, the municipalities that this Government deals with have recognized as well that certainly that strategy is a positive one to move ahead with.

The responsible gambling policy is believed, certainly, to be the first of its kind in Canada. It was initiated on November 9, 2001. The Corporation recognizes that, although the entertainment for most is simply that, entertainment and occasional enjoyment, there are those members, and we will continue. This side of the House certainly realizes that the research that has been done with the gaming and with venues here in Manitoba need to be supported by groups out there that have the expertise.

The dollars that the previous government used to balance their budgets over the years, some \$60 million as you look at some of the projections that they pulled in from the VLTs over the years, it is pretty blatant and pretty obvious. I believe that, in Canada, the gaming and the VLTs are something that will stay. I know, as we look to some of the municipalities across Manitoba, and the member from Russell here previously had talked about the problems that he is seeing in his community, but one thing he did not highlight, and I can tell you, in Russell, the contribution that was put forward just a few short months back from our Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Friesen), \$3.5-million extra announcement that was brought forth in Russell, specifically mentioned one of the contributions and where it went by their local community was the Pelly Trail Economic Development Board. The operation of economic development in that office received a considerable amount of funding. As well did the Russell arena receive a considerable amount of funding from that expanded payment to municipalities.

I know, when I go down the list, each and every one of us here in our communities has benefited from the revenue and expanded revenue that the minister announced a short time

ago in 2001. I look down the list of the R.M. of East St. Paul, where the library subsidies were expanded in that community. You look at the Ashern curling club and the improvements that were made there through the expansion of the revenues going directly to municipalities and areas within all municipalities in Manitoba: the R.M. of Woodsworth, the millennium museum restoration that happened there, the Kenton beautification project, the Harding community centre improvements. I know the member opposite from Portage certainly recognizes the consultation fees for development of the Poplar Bluff Industrial Park. The asphalt costs for the hard surfacing of roads and the development fees for the Oakville Industrial Park were certainly a benefit within his community. That was an expansion and part of the revenues that are going back to Manitobans and back to communities here in Manitoba.

We look at the R.M. of Riverside and the grant to the health facilities there and the waste disposal grounds, over and above what expansion that they had had in that community prior to that. You look at the village of Benito on the natural gas expansion program that went on there and the funding that they got through this commitment. You look at the city of Selkirk on the emergency operations centre, the community hall upgrades, the land purchase in connection with the waterfront development projects there, all benefits to Manitoba, all positives to Manitoba and certainly well recognized, as well as in Stonewall, the publication of the community directory there and Web site improvements and the main street beautifications in those communities. Now, certainly, Stonewall is a beautiful community, and I would agree with the member opposite that is saying that. I agree.

The balance that this Government has been able to achieve and, certainly, when we look back on the Bostrom report that was completed, I believe it was, '97 and acted on by this Government and, certainly implemented in 2000.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite had a considerable amount of time to look at that report and identify some of the things that were in it. The member opposite had mentioned First Nations casino projects that were obviously in the Bostrom report. This Government certainly

did agree and take the time to act on the recommendations that were brought forward. *[interjection]* It is a positive. It is a positive in Manitoba to act on that. Certainly members opposite, I am sure, would agree that the economic well-being and the development within those communities is something that needs to be addressed. It is something that 100 percent of all revenues would go to those communities and certainly where community unemployment in those areas is sitting at around 50 percent. It is a positive move, a positive step forward that this Government has chosen to implement. Certainly, under the guidance of the minister, it has been well received and well received by Manitobans, well received by those communities. People really see the economic benefits that are possible potentials in those communities.

* (17:50)

The balance, certainly by this side of the House, on the responsible gaming campaign, compared to none, no funding allocated by the previous government in this area is certainly something that I am quite proud of and I believe is outstanding. The \$3 million that was put into this program really has gone a long way in a short period of time. The MLC provides \$1.75 million in funding support gaming addictions programs through the AFM, which I believe is an extremely good start. The 2.5 percent of the net proceeds from the casinos on the reserves goes into a trust fund that will address problem gambling on the First Nations.

So I believe, Mr. Speaker, that, in conclusion, when we look at the balance, the positives and the negatives, this side of the House has been extremely responsible. The guidance and commitment by the minister certainly has recognized both the positives of gaming and the large amount of people in communities that use it as a recreational forum, but also the identification and the dollars and the money that is spent on the proactive side to assist people that do run into problems has been a good start by this Government as opposed to no start by the previous government.

Just in concluding, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we are moving ahead. Manitobans feel progress on both fronts on the balance on this

matter. I am quite proud of the statistics that we can put out and present to anybody that would like to see them. So thank you very much.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister charged with the administration of The Gaming Control Act): I am not surprised that there may be members opposite that do not want to speak on this particular issue, because, quite frankly, I have to give the mover of the resolution credit for one thing.

An Honourable Member: Chutzpah.

Mr. Ashton: "Chutzpah" is the word. You are part of a government that started with zero VLTs. You are part of a government that dramatically expanded those VLTs. He was part of a government that did not give any community input on VLTs until after they were expanded. They did virtually nothing in terms of dealing with the social side, then, in its last few months in office, dramatically expanded the number of VLTs in First Nations communities. Then you get up and you introduce a resolution that calls for a moratorium.

Well, I tell you, that is like opening up the barn door, getting rid of all the horses and then afterwards getting somebody else to say to close it up. I just say that member has got chutzpah. That is about as parliamentary as I can get. Not only that, I am not quite sure if even every member of the Opposition would support this resolution because it says on Aboriginal gaming that the moratorium would start after the Aboriginal gaming initiative is in place.

Now, what is interesting about that is the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen), in his speech, said he was against Aboriginal gaming as in shut it down. I do not know if he would include Aseneskak, but I say to members opposite I recall the last couple of years when the Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) was the minister. Since I have been the minister, they have criticized and they have criticized and criticized the Aboriginal gaming.

I say to members opposite that what is particularly unfair about that is the fact that, you know, all these statistics, but I want to get to the addictions issues. Not one person in the entire

decade of the 1990s, not one person was addicted to Aboriginal gaming. There was no Aboriginal gaming. So any statistics members opposite are bringing forward deals with the challenge of overall gaming, not one person.

I want to tell you the difference with the way we have approached this. I want to put on the record that, for the time in the 1990s when I was critic in terms of Lotteries, we made it clear that we supported the Aboriginal gaming initiative similar to what they have in Minnesota, similar to what they have in Saskatchewan and in Ontario. One of the first initiatives we brought in was moving ahead in something that should have happened in reaction to the Bostrom report in 1996. We learned from the lessons of the 1990s, the mistakes of the Province. We did not go in and ignore the social side. In fact, when we opened Aseneskak, the day before Aseneskak opened, they had a policy in terms of the social side of the gaming. We learned from the 1990s as well. We have put in place a specific fund, administered by Aboriginal people, to deal with that side of the issue. That is the NDP difference.

We also learned from the 1990s as well. In the 1990s, they did not give a single community the say on whether to have VLTs until after their expansion. Then there was a referendum in which one community moved. I want to point to Hansard where, time and time again, we said in opposition have the ability for community input. Do you know what we did with Aboriginal gaming? All of the Aboriginal casinos have had that built in, either through approval of the First Nation itself or where it is an urban reserve, in that case, the proponent and the host community. Talk to people in Brandon; talk to people in Thompson; talk to people in Headingley. They will tell you that they have had, and they will have, the opportunity to have public community input. We learned from the mistakes of members opposite.

Now I want to say that if the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen) thinks that it is appropriate now to cancel the Aboriginal casino, I want to put it in perspective because, assuming all four go ahead, and that is an assumption because they have to meet the criteria which are set out, which are quite stringent, but even if they proceed, the increase, for example, in the

number of VLTs is not even 10 percent of the provincial total, not even 10 percent.

I say to members opposite, when you consider, and I say this particularly to the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen), the high rates of unemployment in our First Nations communities, it was unacceptable in the 1990s for the Conservatives, at the time, to rapidly expand the VLTs and gaming because they thought it was okay for them but, in the paternalistic way in which categorized their policies in the 1990s, would not even look at the Bostrom report which they commissioned.

We say, if it was good enough for the province in the 1990s, it is good enough to work in partnership with First Nations people in this decade. I want to say to members opposite that I hope that the words in their resolution are their true position, because I am not so sure that they still are not willing to do almost anything to stop the Aboriginal casinos.

Let us look at the issues. Do you know what? Absolutely, there are social problems related to gaming. That is one of the reasons we fought in the 1990s for a balanced approach. I say to the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen), the Member for Fort Whyte is a throwback to the era that we had in alcohol. It is called prohibition. We had prohibition in this province. At one time, there was a strong prohibition movement. There was a strong suffragettes and prohibition movement. There was a combination. It was a very strong part of the political dynamic. I want to say that prohibition did not work.

An Honourable Member: I still support it.

Mr. Ashton: The Member for Lakeside says he supports it, in theory, I am sure. But it did not work. What we have evolved to in terms of alcohol is a much more balanced approach. We have availability, but we regulate it.

Now I want to put it in perspective, by the way, because, if you talk about problem gambling, I ask this question, and this is a question all members should ask, what the percentage of problem drinkers is. What is the percentage? You know, in problem gaming, we

are talking about around 2 to 3 percent. Problem drinkers, and I am sure the Member for Lakeside will be interested in this, the numbers run in the double digits. By the way, the studies that are coming out, the members opposite have not been following, because they are showing quite a different profile in terms of addiction. But it shows to me that we still have a long way to go in terms of alcohol. In fact, you have to put in perspective, if anything happens on the gaming side, with alcohol. If we are going to have prohibition on gaming because of a 3% problem rate, are we going to have prohibition on alcohol?

I say to members opposite it did not work, neither does the approach of the nineties. Quite frankly, in the 1990s, the Conservative approach was to basically expand gambling first and ask

questions later. I say to members opposite, you know, it is a good thing we do not put people to sleep for about a decade because, I think, if somebody was to come up here and sit in the gallery today and see the Conservatives first on Workers Comp for firefighters and then see this position on gaming, I say it is like something out of a Star Trek episode. I mean, these are not the same members who were in government for 11 years, the same members that expanded the VLTs, that expanded the casinos.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have seven minutes remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 15, 2002

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