

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

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
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BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
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BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
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CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
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WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, October 22, 2007

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Neepawa, Minnedosa and Areas—Local Hospitals

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Residents of Neepawa, Minnedosa and the surrounding areas are concerned about the long-term viability of their respective local hospitals. Impending retirements, physician shortages and the closure of many other rural emergency rooms have caused residents to fear that their health-care facilities may also face closure in the future.

Local physicians and many residents have expressed their support for a proposed regional health-care centre to service both communities.

It is believed that a new regional health-care centre would help secure and maintain physicians and would therefore better serve the health-care needs of the region.

The success of other regional hospitals, such as Boundary Trails Health Centre, has set the precedent for the viability and success of a similar health centre for the Neepawa and Minnedosa area.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), to consider the feasibility of a joint health centre, including an emergency room, to service Neepawa and Minnedosa and the surrounding area.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider sustaining health-care services in this area by working with local physicians and the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority on this initiative.

This petition is signed by Danielle Davidson, Clive Nicholson, Steve Goudie and many, many others.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today the participants of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba's first annual Teachers' Institute on Parliamentary Democracy.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro Power Line Line Loss on West Side

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): My question to the Minister responsible for Hydro is in relation to the decision, the directive by him and the Premier (Mr. Doer) to Manitoba Hydro to run the long route for the next high voltage transmission line instead of the recommended route.

We know already that this is going to cost Manitobans half a billion dollars in debt in relation to the line construction alone, Mr. Speaker. We are told by this government that only 16 megawatts in line loss would occur and that we would only lose \$100 million as a result of this decision. We were told that they were worried that the recommended line could impact sales. Wrong again on that point. According to our customers, they're not concerned about the location of the line.

Now, Thursday, Mr. Speaker, after the Premier wrongly claimed that he had tabled a line-loss analysis, we finally got the document and it confirmed our worst fears. We saw in that document that the assumptions it was based on were incorrect assumptions about generating capacity that would take place. On Friday, it was reported in the media that the NSERC chair for power systems simulation at the University of Manitoba was estimating 56 megawatts of line loss and that this would reach a cost of as much as \$1 billion in lost sales going forward.

So, this is on top of the \$400 million-plus in debt and amount up to a billion dollars in lost power sales, Mr. Speaker, with no rational explanation from this government as to why they're going to throw away this amount of money.

So I want to ask the minister, Mr. Speaker: Why is he throwing away hundreds of millions of dollars for no good reason?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr Speaker, what hasn't been said clearly enough, perhaps, for the members to understand is existing bipole 1 and 2 lose 301 megawatts of power through line loss. The addition of bipole 3 will reduce that by 75 megawatts. That's 75 megawatts using the same numbers that have been put on the record. If 16 megawatts of loss east versus west is \$100 million, a gain of 75 megawatts is worth half a billion. By the numbers the member's using, if 56 megawatts of loss is worth a billion, a gain of 75 megawatts with current generation capacity would be worth more than a billion.

So we have a positive gain here, Mr. Speaker, of—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: So the Minister of Finance is using numbers based on no new construction of generating capacity in Manitoba which is absolutely unbelievable. So either he's utterly incompetent, or he's completely dishonest, Mr. Speaker, when he uses these sorts of numbers.

So, I want to just ask the minister, given that on Friday, the—

Mr. Speaker: Order. All honourable members know that each and every member in this House is an honourable member and using the words "completely dishonest" to another member, I think is totally out of order.

I ask the honourable Official Opposition House Leader to withdraw that comment.

Mr. McFadyen: I'll withdraw the comment, Mr. Speaker.

Carrying on with the discrepancy between what the minister says and what the truth is, Mr. Speaker, I just want to outline what the CEO of Manitoba Hydro said on Friday where he said, and I quote: Whenever this did happen and you did fully load the line, the value of the losses would be much more

than \$100 million for sure, Bob Brennan said in response to what the government has been trying to say.

So we know that the losses will be significantly more than 16 megawatts. We have an expert from the University of Manitoba saying it will be 56 megawatts. That very same expert, Mr. Speaker, has prepared an analysis, which I'll table for the House today, which indicates that even at a loss of 28 megawatts, which is an extremely conservative estimate of line loss, this is equivalent to adding 40,000 cars to the road in terms of the lost opportunity for greenhouse gas reductions.

So what we have is a significant opportunity to reduce the amount of coal being used to generate energy, an amount that's equivalent to 40,000 vehicles. This is coming, Mr. Speaker, not from the Minister of Finance, not from the Premier, (Mr. Doer), who I know view themselves as extremely credible spokespersons on this issue, but from Dr. Ani Gole, The NSERC industrial research chair in power systems simulation at the University of Manitoba, who says that the lost opportunity is equivalent to 40,000 vehicles.

How is it that the minister can justify a decision that is both financially devastating for Manitoba and that will damage our environment to an unprecedented extent in one policy decision, Mr. Speaker?

* (13:40)

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable Minister of Finance, I want to thank the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition for his withdrawal, and now the honourable Minister of Finance has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, using the same logic that the member opposite suggests, if 28 megawatts is equivalent to 40,000, a gain of 75 megawatts is roughly equivalent to 100,000 cars going off the road. We have to remember that the base case loses 300 megawatts of power, under the base case.

Under the base case, building a new transmission line would gain 75 megawatts of power for a gain of somewhere, using his own logic, between half a billion and a billion dollars of additional savings. Now, Mr. Speaker, if we build Conawapa, the additional power available in Manitoba would be 1,326 megawatts. If he totalled that up the gains would be enormous, well in excess

of a billion dollars over the life of the line, well in excess over a billion dollars.

Mr. McFadyen: If it's the minister's position that a longer line actually reduces the amount of line loss, why not run it west of the Rockies, bring it back through Montana, with a quick stop in Dallas, Mr. Speaker, up through Minneapolis and back into Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the remarkable thing about the member opposite is he thinks being a smart aleck is a substitute for doing some very clear thinking. You know what—[*interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the honourable member used some words that are unparliamentary, and I ask the honourable member for Finance to withdraw those comments.

Mr. Selinger: I withdraw them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable Minister of Finance for that, and he has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'll try to be a little bit more diplomatic.

Being too cute by half, no matter where you run the hydro lines, the base case shows a loss of 300 megawatts of power. A new bipole would save 75 megawatts of power. The alternative they're suggesting—they have said, no ownership, no sharing or revenues. They guarantee a hundred percent opposition to the line down their side. It's a non-feasible option.

We have three risks to mitigate here, Mr. Speaker, a reliability risk. Our option gains us 75 megawatts. Secondly, we have a risk to mitigate with respect to a UNESCO World Heritage site. Their option would dramatically reduce the chances of that being designated, and thirdly, we have market risk to mitigate. Their option would increase enormously the potential of losing our market. One year of losses of that market would be worth \$600 million.

Gun Violence Government's Response

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Winnipeg Police Service news releases and recent media reports confirm that so far this month there have been no less than 10 victims of gunshot wounds in the city of Winnipeg, and there are still nine days to go, Mr. Speaker, in October.

I want to ask the Minister of Justice: How many victims of gunshots does there need to be before his government takes serious action to round up illegal guns and go after criminals who are using guns to commit crimes, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, it's very hard to run after illegal guns if you don't have the police that we put in this budget and the last budget and the budget before that members voted against: 155 police officers the members opposite voted against. Not only would we not have police to go after guns, we wouldn't have police to go after the criminals that import the guns, that organize the guns and that carry out the activities with the guns if we had followed the practice of members opposite voting against additional police in this province.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer recently has been the gun amnesty. That's his answer to the gun problem in Manitoba. Gun amnesties are not for law-abiding Manitobans, they're not for criminals. I challenge the minister to point to one gang member who turned in their guns during this amnesty. Clearly, criminals and gang members have not been turning in their guns. Illegal firearms continue to pour into Manitoba. Police have been saying that they've been seeing more guns in criminals' hands because gangs and drug dealers are fighting among themselves to protect their turf.

So I ask the Minister of Justice: Why has he failed to get illegal guns out of the hands of criminals?

Mr. Chomiak: At the press conference last week to discuss the fact that 407 dangerous weapons were off the street, the police department spokesperson and, again, they are contradicting the police department spokesperson said, I quote: It's a win-win situation. Not only do we get a gun off the street, we get a potential gun that's recycled over and over again, perhaps as a result of criminal activity, off of the street, Mr. Speaker.

The gun amnesty is only one part of our justice strategy. I wish members opposite would support the rest, like our action against gangs. I wish they'd live up to some of the pledges they did when they came to Ottawa with us to try to get the federal government to change some of the laws. We've been working on this for years, and we've had some success, Mr. Speaker, and I'll finish that next.

Mr. Hawranik: Ten gunshot victims in less than a month after the amnesty. Winnipeg has the second highest rate of homicides committed using a firearm in 2006. How many more victims need there be in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker? If the NDP were serious about getting illegal guns off the streets, they would take real action to go after criminals.

Will this Minister of Justice commit to funding a full-time joint firearm enforcement unit to combat gun smuggling from the United States and other provinces? I ask the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Chomiak: I will pass that on to the firearms unit that's in place at the Winnipeg police.

I just want to mention to the member opposite a quote from Minister Nicholson. Minister Nicholson, in Ottawa, said recently: I will be moving forward with many of the justice items that the minister and others in Manitoba have asked for.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we're going to have action. I hope the members support our action on gang initiatives and our action on the—[interjection] on the streets.

Unfortunately, the budget vote that comes off Thursday, we will see on Thursday if they vote in favour of police or against police, in favour of helping safety on the streets or against it, in favour of more prosecutors or against it. They have a chance to put their money where their mouth is. We'll see on Thursday's budget vote.

Education High School Drop-Out Rates

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, for eight years this Premier (Mr. Doer) has been saying that his education strategy forms part of his economic strategy. Last week we heard that Manitoba's high school drop-out rate is amongst the highest in Canada. Obviously, this is going to have an adverse effect on our economy.

I'd like ask the Minister of Education to tell us why he and his Premier fell asleep at the switch and have allowed our lack of improvement in high school graduation rates. Why do we have almost the worst high school drop-out rates in the country?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): It's really interesting that the member would say that a 10 percent increase in graduation rates since we've been in office is not progress.

Mr. Speaker, there is a very strong relationship between how you fund and support education, how you fund and support teachers and resources in the schools and the success of our students. There is also a direct relationship between how you support community initiatives in the schools, such as our Community Schools Initiative where we have 20 schools that are engaging parents in lower socio-economic areas where there's higher rates of drop-out. We have a number of different strategies, none of which are supported by members opposite, every single time we've had a budget that's increased funding to education when members opposite have continued to cut funding to education in the 1990s. We're catching up, we're making progress, we're going to succeed.

* (13:50)

Adult Literacy

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the Minister of Education that that drop-out rate is the same as it was in 2001, and it gets worse.

A 2003 international survey points out another alarming statistic. Forty percent of working Manitobans do not have the literacy skills needed for today's economy, and since 2003 the NDP have done nothing with those numbers.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Advanced Education to tell us how Manitoba's economy is supposed to fire on all cylinders when her government has basically ignored these low literacy rates.

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, of course, this member is famous for putting fictitious information on the record, and she's done that once again.

Since this government assumed power in 1999, and more recently, we have doubled, Mr. Speaker, we have doubled the funding to literacy centres in the province of Manitoba.

We have introduced an Adult Literacy Act, the first of its kind in Canada. I look forward to the member, given her enthusiasm for literacy, passing that bill as expeditiously as possible.

The information put on the record is just fatuous, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves, and the 40 percent comes right from the minister herself.

Mr. Speaker, the estimate annual cost of low literacy to Manitobans is \$375 million a year. Yet, on the weekend, we saw the Premier (Mr. Doer) put himself up as a calendar pin-up for literacy. It seems kind of strange considering the poor statistics in literacy in Manitoba.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Advanced Education: How is Manitoba supposed to have a thriving economy when so many students drop out of high school and when the literacy rates are ignored by this government?

We're going to need more than a photo op by this Premier or any rhetoric from the Minister of Advanced Education before we're going to see any good changes happening in Manitoba.

Ms. McGifford: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, it wasn't a photo op by the Premier. The Premier was invited. The Premier was invited by Literacy Partners of Manitoba to participate in their fundraiser, undoubtedly because Literacy Partners of Manitoba recognized this government's commitment to adult literacy and, indeed, to wider ranging literacy. I think Literacy Partners are one of the champions of this government.

Now, with regard to the member's comments about literacy levels, Manitoba has exactly the same literacy levels as prevail across the country.

Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council Marketing Agricultural Products

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, recently the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council announced a letter of intent to invest \$1.2 million in Natural Prairie Beef. According to the press release, the funds will be used to help the company market its products. When MCEC was created, the stated intent was to manage a new industry fund to invest in slaughter capacity.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture tell this House whether she believes MCEC's primary role should be marketing beef or whether the provincial government should be taking the lead role in marketing agricultural products?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I know the members opposite view on slaughter capacity in this province, and I know that the members opposite were very

disappointed when the Enhancement Council was able to make an announcement that they were making an investment.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there were big challenges facing our livestock industry, whether it be south of the border where there are trade barriers or whether it be because of disease issues, and we have learned a lesson that we need more slaughter capacity in this province.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, every chance they get, speak out against this and are not in support of it. I am supportive in what the Enhancement Council has done.

Investments in Other Provinces

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, in announcing the creation of the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council, the Minister of Agriculture stated, and I quote, "producers have told us they don't want government to own slaughter facilities."

During the recent Estimates process, the Minister of Agriculture stated, and I quote: The council could not invest in bricks and mortar in another province.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture clarify whether the Manitoba government, through its involvement with MCEC is taking shares in either Natural Prairie Beef or in the Saskatchewan-based Natural Valley Beef?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of the Enhancement Council to review business plans that are brought forward. It is the responsibility of the Enhancement Council, then, to make a decision if the proposal that has been put forward to them will enhance slaughter capacity and create new opportunities for producers.

The Enhancement Council has reviewed an application and they have made a decision to make an investment and I—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: We still never got the answer to the questions. Manitoba or Saskatchewan, Madam Minister?

Mr. Speaker, recent media reports state that Manitoba cattle investment council will invest up to \$750,000 to buy Manitoba cattle for slaughter. This will be done by a repayable loan that can be

converted into shares, according to the council's executive director.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture clarify whether the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council will begin in the business of buying cattle?

Ms. Wowchuk: The Enhancement Council's role is to review applications and look at ways that we can increase slaughter capacity and meat processing in this province. There has been a proposal put forward and that proposal has been reviewed and the council has made a decision. Unfortunately, the members opposite do not want to see anybody succeed in this area so they can then say, we told you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the council has made a decision to help this facility build their business so that we will have processing of meat in this province. They will also ensure that they have a steady supply of beef so their facility can operate.

Ethanol Production Government's Support for Initiatives

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, this minister, along with her colleagues, is short on action and long on rhetoric. I want to ask this minister today, in that she has been making a lot of noise with her colleagues regarding the energy and the greening of the environment, why it is that investors in the whole area of ethanol production are ready to go full steam ahead but the problem is the continued stalling of this government, stalling on issues like licensing, infrastructure and environmental approvals.

Mr. Speaker, can this minister who is responsible for rural development and rural initiatives explain why she and her government continue to hold up projects in the province while other provinces are aggressively moving ahead in the area of ethanol production?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to inform the entire House that what's happening just now is that there's construction in Minnedosa. We're going from 30 million litres to 140 million litres in ethanol.

I also would like to inform the House that not only are we looking at the ethanol issue, we're also looking at biodiesel. I can inform the House that there are five new plants that are being built that are working from biodiesel. We've got a testing facility in Selkirk. We've got biodiesel facilities. We got trials of the biodiesel plants.

So it's not rhetoric. You can go see the Minnedosa plant. You can see plants that are producing biodiesel around the province and there's more being built. I'm proud of our record, because what we've done is moved it forward expeditiously, unlike the former government.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, this minister, like his colleague, is an embarrassment to people who really want to move ahead in the whole area of ethanol production. There are two projects on the west side of this province, projects that the developers want to see move ahead. The land has been assembled. The financing is in place, but the missing piece is that government will not move those projects ahead.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister finally take action and move these projects ahead so that developers will not abandon this and these projects will not die like the livestock initiative died on her desk?

* (14:00)

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, we are proponents of both ethanol and biodiesel. What we are doing is we are trying to do it so that not only do we do it where we have a green fuel, but we also do it so that there is economic development and there are benefits for the farmers.

So what we have is five biodiesel plants that are moving towards completion. We have some more on the drawing board that we are working with as a government to produce and get going. We are also working very, very hard on the ethanol mandate, and I look forward to unanimity on moving these important efforts forward as far as legislation.

So I look forward to your support of your party and all members of the Legislature in moving ethanol and biodiesel forward, not only as a green fuel but also for the economic development, because we have now got a number of plants that are up and operating, unlike the members opposite.

Mr. Derkach: This minister is a real stranger to the truth because, Mr. Speaker, developers are getting extremely frustrated with what is happening and this government's inability to move projects ahead. The world is moving ahead in the development of cleaner forms of energy. In Manitoba, investors and developers are in step with what is happening in the rest of the world.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why this government continues to drag its feet and not allow

these projects, which are ready to go into the ground to move ahead, simply because of government dragging its feet?

Mr. Rondeau: I wonder what the member is thinking when we look at the whole green energy portfolio and economic development.

What happened and when? We have the first 99-meg wind farm which was not in existence when you were in power. We have five biodiesel plants that are getting—that's not one, but five biodiesel plants that are nearing completion, that are producing biodiesel for processing and distribution in Manitoba. What did you have? None.

We have a movement from 30 million litres to 140 million litres as far as an ethanol plant in Minnedosa and that has continued to move forward. And we're willing to work with more people who are looking at economic activity and the green fuel or economic development.

Biofuels Plants Progress of Projects

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, we know this government is long on talk but short on action when it comes to the environment. For example, The Biofuels Act was passed in 2003. Here we are, four years later, only 20 percent of that legislation has been actually proclaimed. The government now proposes amendments to the original legislation, and there has been virtually no new biofuel plants built and licensed in Manitoba.

When will this government end the charade and actually get something done?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): I invite the member opposite to come and see a lab in Selkirk which is testing to ensure that there is good fuel dependability. I invite the member to go around the province, in Winnipeg and throughout the province, and see five biodiesel plants, some of which are producing and all of which that are nearing completion are producing fuel in Manitoba. I invite the member to go to Minnedosa and see their plant that is ramping up to 140 million litres of ethanol.

Mr. Speaker, we are moving forward, and what is interesting is we are moving forward with the industry, with the producers, with the farmers on a very balanced approach.

Turtle Mountain Ethanol Project

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, if the minister wants to line up a tour of biofuel plants in Manitoba, I would love to see all five of those, and licensed.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a number of programs on the table. The problem, of course, is in the delivery; for example, the Turtle Mountain ethanol project did not qualify for the 30 percent Manitoba tax credit program. Smoke and mirrors does not put shovels in the ground. Why did this project in Turtle Mountain not qualify for this provincial tax credit?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): I think the members opposite do not realize that what we are doing is, not only today do we work with producers and co-ops and different industries, we are working with individuals all the time to increase the economic development, increase the value-added and increase the green fuel capacity and production in the province. And so, what I have done on a regular basis is when people have ideas we bring them in, and we don't just work in my department; we work with my department, we work with Agriculture and Food, we work with Finance, to move these projects forward expeditiously. But what we want to do is make sure that they have the proper checks and balances so that they make sure that they have, you know, environmental licences and water licences so that we do it on a sustainable basis.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of frustration in the biofuel industry here in Manitoba. For example, the Turtle Mountain ethanol project has been successful to date in fundraising capital, even despite this government. The only thing holding them back, and that's a \$130-million project, is this government.

Mr. Speaker, all I ask the minister to do is to make a commitment to work with the Turtle Mountain ethanol group and move that project forward.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my previous answer, we do work with multiple people, multiple groups, in moving it forward.

And I'd like to point out to the members opposite, we have a biodiesel industry now which we didn't under the former government. I'd also like to

point out that under the former government we were producing 30 million litres of ethanol. We're moving towards 140 million litres of ethanol. For the members opposite, 140 is bigger than 30.

Jordan's Principle Implementation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The honourable Member for River Heights has the floor.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, if Jordan were alive today this would be his birthday. It is being honoured today in Norway House. Two years ago in this Legislature, I tabled a copy of Jordan's story and talked about Jordan's Principle, that children must always be considered first. Now, two years later, I learned in Estimates that Jordan's Principle has still not been implemented in Manitoba and that there are children in our province who are suffering because Jordan's Principle has not been implemented.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Doer): Why has Jordan's Principle not yet been implemented? I ask the Premier: Why is it that children in Manitoba are left in tragic circumstances and are still waiting years and years for this government to act to implement Jordan's Principle?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, today in Norway House there's a recognition of the life of Jordan, and it is our hope and indeed our expectation that the lessons will not be lost, because there has to be a better way of ensuring that the needs of children transcend the boundaries on our maps and the jurisdictions that exist in this country, however great it might be in other areas.

But, Mr. Speaker, the fights that arise from time to time between provincial and federal governments as to funding of children who have their home on reserve is an issue that has to be dealt with. I am pleased to announce to the House that finally Manitoba is taking the lead; I understand the first province in Canada. At least now there is a Manitoba-Canada committee on Jordan's Principle to make sure that there is going to be a dispute resolution process, and Health Canada has begun the necessary study.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, Jordan, as the Premier and the minister well knows, is the boy who never got to go home because this government spent two years bickering with the federal government over items as small as a shower head. The Premier and his ministers should have had the courage to ensure that Jordan's Principle was being followed seven years ago when Jordan was alive. Now, and then, the steps should have been taken to ensure that the children were being looked after, if necessary send the bill to the federal government and make sure that children were being looked after first.

While I am pleased at the progress, I see that Jordan's Principle is still not being acted upon and that there are children who are still waiting. When will the minister and the Premier ensure that every child who's in this circumstance will have Jordan's Principle considered first?

* (14:10)

Mr. Mackintosh: Where I left off, Mr. Speaker, we have some cautious optimism now that because we were able to bring the federal government to the table and commit in principle to bilateral discussions in Manitoba, we will continue to press for a tangible outcome.

The challenge, Mr. Speaker, is to recognize that Jordan's Principle without a dispute resolution process is a code word for offloading the federal fiduciary obligation to health services for First Nations people. Surely the member opposite—and if he believes otherwise, is the member opposite saying that provincial governments in Canada should now take over the funding of medical services on reserve? That would be a serious undermining of the fiduciary obligations of the federal government.

One final note, Mr. Speaker: Where was this member when he had his hands on the wheels of power, on the levers? He cut funding to on-reserve child welfare.

Criminal Law Federal Responsibilities

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is saying, take responsibility of Manitoba's children.

The Doer government's crime-fighting strategy is very simple: Talk tough and blame Ottawa. The reality is that Manitoba is ranked dead last when it comes to the issues that affect each and every one of us and that's the issue of crime on our streets. We are

going in the direction in which people are going to stop going to downtown Winnipeg because they're too scared to participate in activities.

This government has done very little, if anything, in terms of trying to get the trends going down in the province of Manitoba and it's been at a great cost. The issue that I ask the government today is: When are they going to be taking responsibility as opposed to blaming Ottawa for every problem that Manitoba has? Take responsibility.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, responsibility is a very important principle. Under the Canadian Constitution, criminal law is made by the responsible government which is the federal government. If the federal government wants to give criminal law to the provinces, we will take responsibility. Unfortunately, we have to work with them.

Mr. Speaker, of all members to talk about responsibility, I ask the member about his responsibility to this Chamber where he pledged he would resign his seat if it was found by the electoral commission that allegations could not be substantiated. The allegations were not substantiated, thrown out, and now the member is making a circus of these activities by running around.

Will he take the responsible move and resign as he promised to do, as Sheila Copps did, as any responsible member would do if they made that pledge in the Legislature?

Farm Tax Credit School Tax Rebate Program

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, the challenges our ranchers and farmers face on a yearly basis are many from inclement weather, whether it be drought or excessive rainfall, to trade challenges such as we have seen with the BSE crisis.

Taxes on farmland have been a concern for producers facing higher input costs and lower prices. Can the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives inform the House what positive steps she has taken to put more money in the pockets of producers through the Farmlands School Tax Rebate program?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, indeed, my colleague outlined some very important issues and the farm tax credit is one of those.

Mr. Speaker, since 2004, through our program that the members opposite voted against, we put back \$55 million in education tax cuts back into farmers' pockets. In 2007 alone that will be \$29 million back into farmers' hands.

Mr. Speaker, we started out at 20 percent. We've gone to 35 percent, then to 50 percent, 60 percent, 65 percent. We will go to 70 percent, 75 percent and then 80 percent to put education taxes back in farmers' pockets. Unfortunately, the members opposite always vote against every one of those cuts.

Rural Health Care Nurse Retention

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, residents of the town of Virden and area are very frustrated with the Minister of Health's total mismanagement of our health-care system, especially when it comes to long-term care. The West-Man Nursing Home in Virden has 13 beds out of 50 that are sitting empty because of a nursing shortage. Meanwhile at least four Virden seniors have been moved to other towns where families must travel more than two hours to visit their loved ones.

Can the minister indicate why Virden is having such a tough time retaining nurses, and when can the community expect this complement to be filled?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Certainly the single most important thing that a government can do in conjunction with the regional health authority is work very diligently to ensure that human resources are available on the front line. I'm happy to report to the member opposite that since July 2004, as a result of grants being offered to nurses for return-of-service agreements, we've been able to repatriate 237 nurses to rural Manitoba.

That's a good start, Mr. Speaker, but we know that we need to do more. That's why we're going to continue to work not only with the regional health authority in building those numbers but in looking at the staffing guidelines for personal care homes to ensure that those guidelines meet the kinds of needs existing in personal care homes today.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Minto Armoury Cadet Exercise

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): The Minto Armoury, located in the heart of Minto constituency, was very

busy this past weekend. Over 20 cadet corps, representing close to a thousand cadets from northwestern Ontario and Manitoba, gathered at the armoury for their annual competition exercise.

The cadet program has been a great Canadian institution for generations. It encourages youth to become active and responsible members of their communities and helps them learn valuable life skills such as teamwork, leadership and citizenship. In turn, cadets reap benefits throughout their lives in increased self-confidence and physical fitness. I would like to recognize the valuable contributions made by cadet corps to our communities and the innumerable benefits that these programs have for the individuals involved.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the Cross Lake Cadet Corps, which was established in 2006 and is the first-ever cadet program in an Aboriginal community. My colleagues and I had the opportunity to meet these young men and women during their visit to the Legislature on October 18 while they were here receiving certificates of merit for their summer training achievements.

The Cross Lake Cadet Corps also had a very successful weekend while participating in the events at the Minto Armoury. They came in second in the drill exercise and won the Tommy Prince Award which includes a \$1,000 bursary for the group.

Mr. Speaker, through the promotion of its core values of citizenship, leadership, respect and integrity, the cadet program has succeeded in producing responsible, active and engaged members of our society. Amid the many challenges faced by youth today, these individuals are role models to their peers for their hard work and dedication.

I'm proud that Minto was the weekend home to the cadets from across Manitoba and Ontario who came out to compete. It is indeed very exciting to see the potential in these leaders of tomorrow. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Allan Ranson

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Today I rise to congratulate Dr. Allan Ranson of Hamiota for being selected by the Manitoba College of Family Physicians to receive the 2007 Family Physician of the Year Award. Dr. Ranson is being recognized for his care, his attention and excellence in the field of family medicine.

Like Dr. Hudson, Dr. Allan Ranson is a true hero to the families in the Hamiota area and beyond. The approach taken by Dr. Ranson and staff is one which is unique in the way in which patients are treated at the Hamiota Health Centre. We would all learn an important lesson if we could emulate the approach taken by Dr. Ranson and staff in dealing with his patients.

Dr. Ranson and his family are highly respected in the community, take a very active role in the community life and have contributed richly to the quality of life in the Hamiota area. I know I am joined by all Russell constituents and Manitobans in congratulating Dr. Ranson for this prestigious award and thanking him for his dedication and his commitment to the patients, the community, to our province and our country, Mr. Speaker.

Dyna-Mite Cup Hockey Tournament

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, for 10 days every October, nearly 400 eight-, nine- and 10-year-old A1 hockey players take part in the Dyna-Mite Cup Hockey Tournament.

October 19 I had the opportunity to open the 23rd year of this annual tournament in the constituency of Southdale. For the past two decades, this hockey tournament has truly become a cornerstone of the hockey community in Winnipeg. In addition to kicking off the hockey season for community teams and providing kids with an opportunity to engage in high-calibre competition, this event also serves to bring the community together. The stands are filled with cheering fans. Local businesses are providing support through sponsorship and countless volunteers are working tirelessly to ensure the tournament's success.

Mr. Speaker, it's great to see so many kids getting active, and as a government, we're committed to promoting healthy lifestyles. As part of that commitment, we have promised \$60 million over four years toward recreational facilities, including community centres. Personally I'm proud to be working on behalf of my constituents to ensure that the Southdale Community Centre benefits through an expansion of its existing facilities in order to guarantee that events like the Dyna-Mite Cup will continue.

Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to go out and watch children play hockey, a sport which is such a big part of our Canadian identity. It's even more

enjoyable when you see the entire community coming out together. Thank you.

* (14:20)

Film Production in Teulon

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, both as a resident and the MLA for Lakeside representing the town of Teulon and area, I was excited to welcome Virginia Madsen, Martin Donovan and Kyle Gallner, along with the entire cast and film crew of *The Haunting in Connecticut* to the town of Teulon in our community.

Teulon was used as one of the settings for this film. That was an exciting venture for our close-knit community. Teulon has so much to offer with its beautiful scenery, small-town charm and friendly people. We are very glad that the crew for this movie recognized Teulon's potential and chose to film here. Mr. Speaker, this is not the first movie to be filmed in Teulon and I hope it will not be the last.

On our streets, the crew of *The Haunting in Connecticut* found a hidden treasure in the home owned by Murray Ledarney. The property is over a hundred years old, and its dramatic Victorian character served as a wonderful backdrop for this horror film. I know that Murray and his family are thrilled to see this home used in this capacity. This home was previously used in another production, and its most recent reincarnation of a movie set only adds to its rich history.

Fry-day's is a local restaurant that was also used to film scenes from the movie, creating quite a buzz amongst the coffee shop crowd. Beyond the immediate excitement that this project has brought to this town, it also brought with it economic benefits. We are thankful for their support of our local business.

This vibrant community is always happy to welcome newcomers, be they actors or tourists. We look forward to seeing this movie and glimpsing Teulon on the big screen.

On behalf of the residents, business owners, the town council of Teulon, I would express our appreciation and enthusiasm for this production. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Princess Margaret School

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, students are taking learning to a whole new level at Princess Margaret School in my riding of Rossmere.

Thinking outside the box is just the beginning for these students. Changes to their school ground has them thinking outside the classroom. The physical landscape of the schoolyard has changed with the creation of two outdoor classrooms. It is truly exciting to see students learning in rooms without walls. Tree stumps and rocks are in the place of chairs. The floor is made of bark chips and the roof is the wide-open sky. The two classrooms are surrounded by 25 newly planted trees and are connected to the rest of the playground by a limestone pathway.

Promoting environmental stewardship at a young age is key to developing awareness about our surroundings. The classes will be used to learn about nature. A kindergarten class has already used the classroom to observe the changing colour of the leaves. The space is also ideal for teachers to read to children and for silent reading time.

This initiative is popular with teachers, parents and students alike. One student remarked that he loves the classroom, particularly during recess. Exploring through playing is an excellent way to get our children interested in the natural world, but the work is not over yet, Mr. Speaker. These two classrooms are only phase 1 of a larger project. There are plans to add another classroom, plant even more trees, add a mural and an exercise path that will circle the entire playground.

I wish to extend congratulations to the staff at Princess Margaret School, as well as co-chairs of the Princess Margaret School Community Association: Carole Remmert, Eugenia Lehmann and all the parents who came out to help with the work bee in July. This truly is an innovative way to approach learning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Morris, on a grievance?

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Yes.

Mr. Speaker, it's necessary, I think, to rise and speak in the Legislature today on a grievance on the wrong-headed decision of this NDP government to build a transmission line down the west side of the province. It just defies logic, but it does speak to the mismanagement and the incompetence that we see in every aspect of this government, so we are not surprised to see them do it here as well.

The NDP has committed to a third bipole line on the west side of Lake Winnipegosis. We are in favour of a third line, Mr. Speaker, from northern Manitoba, but situated on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. This would increase capacity and security of our transmission system. The NDP's decision, on the other hand, adds at least half a billion dollars, and that's probably a conservative estimate. It's probably a lot more than that by the time the whole project is completed. But it's adding at least half a billion dollars to the capital cost of the transmission's lines. As a result of that, as a result of this route, this longer route down the west side, there is a significant line loss or electricity loss as a result of resistance during transmission.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair.

Now, these estimates have ranged anywhere between 100 megawatts, 16 megawatts, but today the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), our leader, clearly stated on the advice of professional people at the University of Winnipeg—experts at the University of Manitoba, I should say, excuse me—University of Manitoba, that it's probably in the neighbourhood of 56 megawatts of line-lost power on the lines that are existing. Once there are more transmission lines built with new dams coming on, there are going to be more. This is because of the longer route to go around the west side of the lake, Mr. Acting Speaker.

There are also estimates of what it's going to cost in terms of boreal forest. Some say no cost to that; some say a significant cost, but there is going to be some construction on the east side of the lake anyway. It's going to be necessary because of roads that are going to have to go there, Mr. Acting Speaker.

We know that our current system is vulnerable. With both transmission lines going down the Interlake area and being fairly close to each other, we know that there could be significant vulnerabilities to the system. Certainly, we need to increase the security for the area. So to put a line down one side or the east side of the lake makes a lot of sense. If you look on the map—all you need to do is look on the map and see the direct route from northern Manitoba, directly down to our neighbours to the south and to our neighbours to the east, Mr. Acting Speaker. It makes a lot more sense than the circuitous route going all the way around to the west side almost to the Saskatchewan border and all the way back and then east and south.

When you look at the map, it just does not make any sense. The east side is the shortest route, is the cheapest route, and it is the route that will provide for economic advancement of the east-side communities. We need that economic development to go along the east side to provide those communities with the resources that they need.

We would certainly propose that this line go down the east side. Of course, we've been very vocal on that, that the line go down the east side and that we consult with those communities on the east side to make sure that they are involved. Now I know the members opposite are saying, oh, yes, but don't they know—they do know that those community chiefs change over time and they have to have consultations on an ongoing basis. So, if they consulted five years ago, it's not the same as consulting now, Mr. Acting Speaker.

* (14:30)

Now, the NDP claim that the east-side boreal forest is pristine and they don't want to do anything to disrupt that, but—excuse me, I hope that you're awake, Mr. Acting Speaker, but—[interjection] Well, the member opposite is kind of rude; well, yawning in the Chair is kind of rude, too.

There are already two transmission lines down the east side, Mr. Acting Speaker, and three winter roads that run through this area. So to say it disturbs the pristine wilderness is just incorrect.

Now we do know that certain threats to the lines are real, and we certainly just have to look to the experiences in Québec in—

Point of Order

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rob Altemeyer): The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker. I actually hesitate to stand while the member's in progress, but I hope that her reference to someone yawning in the Chair was not referenced to the Acting Speaker and, if that was the case, I would hope that the member would withdraw that comment as reflecting upon the Chair. I don't think it's appropriate. I'm sure the member was referencing someone else in the House and wasn't referencing the Acting Speaker, when she said, yawning in the seat. I'm sure that was the case.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rob Altemeyer): The honourable Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Acting Speaker. Clearly, the Government House Leader doesn't have a point of order. It's clearly a dispute over the facts in terms of what our member obviously saw from across the way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rob Altemeyer): As interesting as this may be to learn, the Government House Leader does, in fact, have a point of order. It is not appropriate to make reference to anything that reflects on a presiding officer, and I can offer my personal assurances nothing in my mannerisms have anything to do with the speech being given.

* * *

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rob Altemeyer): The Member for Morris has the floor.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker, and I'll withdraw the comment.

Okay. We are still grieving, sadly. Very grievous situation with the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rob Altemeyer): Sorry for the interruption, but officially I thank you for the withdrawal of your comment. Please continue.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

I feel compelled to speak again further on the wrong-headed decision to build a line west of the lakes, which was going to be much longer with a lot of line loss, which is going to take that line all the way almost to the Saskatchewan border and back again, when the most direct route, the most cost-effective route, the one that would provide economic benefit to the communities on the east side and would not disrupt the boreal forest, would be the direct route down the east side of the lake.

There is just no logic in this decision, Mr. Acting Speaker. We just have to even listen to people like Elijah Harper when he stated that the east-side communities were totally devastated, totally devastated, that's a quote by him, with the NDP's decision and the Premier's (Mr. Doer) willingness to leave the east-side communities in, and he said, poverty in perpetuity.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

That is the legacy that the Premier would like to leave to the east-side communities on the east of Lake Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker, poverty in perpetuity.

MKO has stated that they've been ignored by Hydro and the Province before the decision was made to go the west route despite repeated requests to be part of the consultation process. Again, Mr. Speaker, the consultation process is very important in anything that affects the lives of all Manitobans, and to such a degree in this particular wrong-headed decision because it's going to cost half a billion dollars at least, more, to build the line this way, and this is going to impact on future generations. It's going to leave a legacy of debt for our children and grandchildren.

Chief George Kemp of Berens River was also quoted as being in favour of the east-side line, and felt that the agreement that had been signed was left in, and he says, in tatters, because of this government's abandonment of the east-side option.

As I've said several times, the west-side option is just wrong-headed, just wrong-headed; \$500 million, half a billion dollars more, Mr. Speaker. Estimates of 56 megawatts of line loss at current production, not to mention the production that would be coming on-line and the line losses associated with that.

The increased costs—just to put it in perspective—the increased costs of going this route could pay for the new Hydro office tower twice over. And even at a 5 percent interest rate, that represents \$30 million a year in additional carrying charges. One has to ask why would any responsible government waste taxpayers' dollars in this way.

An Honourable Member: We don't know.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, as the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) says, we don't know. There are a lot of people in this province that don't know. There are a lot of people scratching their head and saying, why are they doing this? Going longer—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Any more Grievances?

Okay. We'll move on to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would like to announce the following committee meetings to consider annual reports. I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Wednesday, November 7, at 6 p.m., to consider the annual reports of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the years ended February 29, 2004, and February 28, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

The Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Wednesday, November 21, at 6 p.m., to deal with the annual reports of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation for the years ended March 31, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

The Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Wednesday, December 5, at 6 p.m., to deal with the annual reports of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the years ended March 31, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

The Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Wednesday, December 12, at 6 p.m., to deal with Crown reports: the annual reports of the Workers Compensation Board for the years ended December 31, 2004, 2005, 2006; Workers Compensation Board Appeals Commission and Medical Review Panel annual reports for the years ended December 31, 2004, 2005 and 2006; and Workers Compensation Board Five-Year Plan, 2004 to 2008, 2005 to 2009, 2006 to 2010 and 2007 to 2011.

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* (14:40)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might call debate on second readings on Bills 6, 9, 11, 15, 19, 20, and I will provide further information to the House further on in the—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we will resume Debate on Second Readings, Orders of the Day.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might call debate on second readings on Bills 6, 9, 11, 15, 19 and 20, and Bill 5, although I am anticipating that we might revert to Bill 28 to deal with on first reading following—for second reading introduction following debate on Bill 20. But I can deal with it later in the House. Just for information of members.

Mr. Speaker: Okay we'll proceed with resumed debate on second readings of Bills 6, 9, 11, 15, 19, 20 and 5. If there are any changes, we will be instructed at that time.

After Bill 20, there is potentially a possibility that we would deal with Bill 28. If that happens, we will hear from the Government House Leader. Right now, we are going to debate 6, 9, 11, 15, 19, 20 and 5.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 6—The Adult Literacy Act

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on Bill 6, The Adult Literacy Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

What is the will of the House, for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. It's been denied.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak to the second reading of Bill 6, The Adult Literacy Act. I would note that under this bill the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. McGifford) is to lead the development, implementation and evaluation of an adult literacy strategy, and also, as part of the strategy, the Manitoba Adult Literacy program is established.

After spending a considerable amount of time looking at this legislation and spending some time looking into the background of literacy in Manitoba, it begs the question in my mind why this legislation is necessary in the first place for the government to put together an adult literacy strategy. They have had a considerable amount of time to do what needs to be done in this area.

I know that the Minister of Advanced Education has said this legislation is the first of its kind in Canada. Well, it may be, Mr. Speaker; nobody else in Canada needs to be legislated to do their job. This should be something that this government has been doing for the past eight years that they've been in government: working within a strategy for literacy. This is not something new that's just arisen. They should have had a strategy a long time ago. This should be something that the government has been worried about and addressing for some time, considering that the statistics around literacy in Manitoba have not been very good for a very long time.

I find it curious strange that legislation is necessary for a government to put together an adult literacy strategy when it basically forces the government to work. It forces them to do something that they should have already been doing.

When I look at the aspects in the legislation, it does cause some concern because within the legislation it indicates that there would be formalization of existing collaboration between government and community stakeholders. I'm concerned because that kind of collaboration should already be strong within this province. For the government to have to actually legislate that they're going to formalize the collaboration does draw some concern.

Another area of concern within the legislation, as the minister says in the news release, is to promote the development of a more strategic and effective approach to addressing issues. Why, I wonder, Mr. Speaker, does the government need to legislate

itself to develop a more strategic and effective approach, considering that we have seen, basically what I would say, alarming statistics, 40 percent of working Manitobans do not have the literacy skills needed for today's economy?

Why after eight years is the government all of a sudden waking up and formalizing and forcing itself to do something it should have been doing for eight years, where they are talking about refining the criteria for funding? Where have they been for eight years? That type of an aspect of a program should be well defined already. Program standards? Well, if we have to at this stage legislate a more strategic and effective approach to program standards, no wonder Manitoba is not doing well.

This is something that this government and this Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) should have firmly in place. That program standard should be there. It is quite disturbing to think that the government found out in 2003 that we weren't moving ahead in this province in terms of improved literacy rates, that our literacy rates are low and yet the government hasn't been doing anything for four years in this area that will effectively move that along. So where have they been for the past four years, but, overall, where have they been for the last eight, because this problem has been going on for some time?

Those program standards, the criteria for funding, criteria related to student outcomes should be well developed in Manitoba already because that is the only way we're going to move towards improving. Obviously, if we are not improving in Manitoba, it is indicating that something is wrong and that what we have now in our literacy program or our literacy strategy is not working and that the government is having to force itself to do what it should have been doing for eight years.

So, while the minister may like to pat herself on the back and say this legislation is the first of its kind in Canada, I think that what it might mean in looking at it in a different way is that other provinces don't feel the need for it. They're already doing their jobs. They have a strategy for this. They have their standards, their funding criteria, their expected student outcomes already delineated, and now we find the government here in Manitoba is having to force itself to do what they should have been doing all along.

The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey that was done that indicates that

40 percent of working Manitobans do not have the literacy skills that will allow them to access new opportunities or respond effectively to changes in their work is cause for some alarm, Mr. Speaker, considering that in Canada and the world we are moving towards a knowledge-based economy. If we do not have people, workers, with good literacy skills we are not going to be able to move Manitoba forward and as the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province likes to say, his economic strategy hinges on the education strategy in this province. Well, if the education strategy is failing, it certainly can explain why his economic strategy is sputtering in Manitoba right now.

I would think that this minister would have been more on the ball in dealing with this so that we could have an economy that is firing on all cylinders and we don't have that now. Instead, when it comes to literacy, we see the Premier on the weekend in one of the papers standing out there as a calendar pin-up for literacy, but I would note that he didn't make the original list, that he was a replacement because they were looking for somebody else when somebody dropped off. Certainly, if they knew what the Premier's track record was on literacy in Manitoba, they might not have been so quick to put him as a calendar pin-up in this particular area.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker, we've got these statistics that are four years old and it begs the question, where has the NDP been for four years? The other thing that the Literacy Partners of Manitoba has pointed out is that this government has only added \$100,000 to the literacy program in Manitoba in the last three years. In 2004, we had 35 provincially funded programs, according to the Literacy Partners of Manitoba, with a budget of \$1.3 million. In 2007, according to the Literacy Partners of Manitoba, the budget for literacy programs is only \$1.4 million. So, in the year that this government received the information that we have low literacy rates between 2003 and 2007, they have only added \$100,000 more to literacy.

We wonder why the minister has to bring forward legislation, when, in fact, maybe she should have been spending a little more time looking at what she has been doing in this area and looking at the kind of strategy that she could have been putting forward without legislating herself to do so.

There are some stakeholders out there very, very concerned, actually, that they have not been consulted in this process. There are a number of

stakeholders in the literacy field that are very worried that what is going to happen with this legislation is that it is going to set up more barriers for some of the programs. I know that I have discussed this with the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), and I have some assurances from her that that is not the intent of this legislation, that it is not intended to raise barriers but, in fact, prevent that from happening.

I look forward to watching this legislation unfold to be sure that there is proper consultation during the establishment of the regulations, which will see that there are no serious additional barriers set up for adult learners. This is particularly true—and I don't think it's only in rural Manitoba, but that's where a large amount of the concern comes from, but I'm sure there's going to be some concern among cities and towns as well, that we don't want to see barriers set up because I'm told now that there are a number of people on waiting lists to get into some of these literacy programs.

Again, when we're looking at an economy that needs these people working, it is disconcerting for sure to see that we have waiting lists now not only in health care but we've got waiting lists of adult learners that want to get ahead. They want to do what's right for themselves and their families, and they want to have an opportunity to get into the workforce or better themselves in their workforce, but there are now waiting lists to access some of these programs. I hope, as part of what the minister is forcing herself to do in developing, implementing and evaluating a strategy, that indeed she has a look at why there are waiting lists for people that want to access adult learning in this province.

In order for our economy to be strong, Mr. Speaker, we do need to ensure that we have a trained, skilled and educated workforce. As the literacy partners point out, the estimated annual cost of low literacy to Manitoba society is \$375 million. Now that's on an annual basis. That's why it seems a bit ironic that we have the Premier (Mr. Doer) who sets himself up as a calendar pin-up for literacy when, in fact, low literacy in Manitoba is costing \$375 million. A lot could be done in this province if we did not have to have that kind of a cost when we could see that kind of money certainly moving education forward in a much more advantageous way to everybody in the province.

I do note that, in looking at some of the things the minister is intending to do here, I don't argue that

we need accountability. I do believe we do need accountability, whether it's from government to adult learners or to the stakeholders out there. I think the government's accountable to them, and it works in the reverse, too, that there needs to be accountability by adult learning centres or literacy programs back to government. But it is a bit disconcerting, considering we've had literacy programs going on here for a long time. We saw adult learning centres set up when the last international survey showed that there were problems with adult education and a lack of, you know, poorer graduation rates, and more people struggling with literacy. At least then, we saw a government that did act and move forward to put some things in place. What concerns me right now with the legislation is not almost so much as looking for accountability, but that this government has not been expecting that, or has failed in achieving that on its own, without legislation, for the last eight and so years.

The legislation also sets out the eligibility criteria to receive funding. Again, here's another aspect of the legislation that I would think would have been firmly in place already. It also sets out what the minister may do in evaluating agencies and adult literacy programs that receive funding. Again, unless the minister has not been clear in articulating her position over the past number of years, that may be why the minister actually has to legislate herself to ensure that there is a certain amount of transparency from her in terms of what those agencies and literacy programs that receive funding can expect.

Also, the regulations will pertain to requirements and standards for programming; terms and conditions under which agencies may receive funding; creation, maintenance and standards of records by agencies; establishment of the program year; definitions, and any other matter considered necessary or advisable.

Again, I can see why the stakeholders out there may be a little bit nervous. Part of their nervousness may be a lack of trust in the government, or perhaps, you know, misinformation being given forward by the government, or various different criteria being applied and maybe unevenness of criteria being applied by this government.

So I can understand why there could be some concerns out there as to where this government is going with regulations, but I'm sure all of us are going to be watching very carefully. I certainly do

urge that the minister follow what she said in the briefing that I received from her that, indeed, there will be significant consultation with all of the stakeholder groups out there prior to this legislation coming into effect.

I do note also that the act, or the way the act is written, it is the minister and not the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council that may make regulations. I do note also that an annual report will be prepared on the adult literacy strategy for Manitoba within six months after the end of each program year, and it will be tabled here in the Legislative Assembly. Again, I don't have a problem with the area of accountability and transparency. I think it's really important that we have that, and the legislation will also set out what the report must include.

I just hope that, as that annual report is put together, that indeed it is clear, unlike what we've seen with Manitoba Health and their expectations of annual reports of the RHAs. I hope that indeed, this report is clear, or the expectations are clear in terms of what is expected in that annual report.

* (15:00)

I would just like to conclude by indicating that what we heard last week in the Manitoba Check Up piggybacks onto the concerns around adult literacy, and that is, besides the low literacy rate, but that we also, in Manitoba, have amongst the highest high-school drop-out rates in the country. When you piggyback the two together, both are going to dramatically affect our economy. I think what the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) and the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba need to do is look for more than photo ops and rhetoric around this issue because we are not moving forward. The people who are counting on this government, the students who are counting on this government, whether they are high school students or adult learners, are counting on this government to deliver better than what we have seen. I think the Premier and the Minister of Advanced Education owe that to the Manitoba students at all levels to certainly sit down and have a look at what these statistics are telling us and to do a better job of working within our education system to try to strengthen it because, as the economy is being challenged, and our economy in Manitoba is definitely challenged, we are not performing nearly as well as other provinces in the country.

We also are relying so heavily on the federal government for transfer payments. A third of our dollar spent here in Manitoba comes from taxpayers in other provinces. That is not going to last forever, and we need to give the advantages to our students and our adult learners out there to be able to earn a good living, to be able to work within the changing economic environment here so that they benefit from it, and not just that the economy benefits but the economy will benefit. But as individuals these people will certainly have a much better opportunity in this province to become all that they can be.

So I think this government has a lot of work to do, and I look forward to a further discussion and further questions of the Minister of Advanced Education in committee.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk to the adult literacy bill. In contrast to the Conservative critic, from a Liberal perspective we see this as a positive step forward and as a necessary step forward. It is important that we have a solid framework for the provision of services to make sure that we can accomplish a dramatic decrease in illiteracy in Manitoba. Under consecutive governments over the last several decades it has not been accomplished, and clearly what the NDP government of Gary Doer is now realizing is—

An Honourable Member: A Doer government.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm sorry, the Doer government is now realizing, in bringing forward this legislation, that their efforts in the last eight years have not been particularly successful in giving us the dramatic decrease in illiteracy that we need and the dramatic increase in literacy that we need. So, after eight years, they've come to a realization that there needs to be a better framework than there has been for the first eight years.

We congratulate them for having their eyes opened after eight years and realizing that this is an essential step forward. So we are certainly in support of this legislation. We see that it could have some advantages. If you had a Conservative government it would make it more difficult to cancel the literacy program without having a debate in the Legislature. It seemed to me that that happened at the federal level recently, didn't it? The federal government cancelled a lot of literacy efforts. So there's some history there.

But let me get into some of the aspects of literacy and illiteracy in Manitoba. It's important to

recognize that there are something like 40 percent, 42 percent of Manitobans, adult Manitobans who would not be classified as adequately literate. That is to say that this roughly 42 percent of Manitobans from a 2005 International Adult Literacy Skills Survey scored at levels 1 and 2 in literacy, and those are levels which are below what is needed. It should be added that some 50 percent approximately of Manitobans scored at levels 1 and 2 in numeracy, and so we mustn't forget that numeracy is an important part of this.

The comparison, and interestingly enough Fraser Mustard was making this point just last week in his talk at the Canadian Club, that when we compare Manitoba with certain countries, Scandinavian countries in particular, like I believe Sweden and Finland, they have much higher rates of adult literacy than we do. That is to say that a much higher proportion of their population scores at level 3 or higher, and, notwithstanding the objections of the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), we need to be doing better than we are here in Manitoba. I think there's just no question.

I think that no one would argue with that position, that 42 percent with inadequate literacy and 50 percent with inadequate numeracy is way too high and that we need an approach which is going to make a dramatic difference. That's why we not only need this but we need the accompanying strategy. We need the accompanying funding. We need initiative which is going to really work. So I would hope that the minister, when she gets up, and perhaps the Premier (Mr. Doer) at third reading or when the Premier gets up to sum up at the end of the session, that he will make a commitment to making sure that there is the funding, as well as the act, to make a difference in this issue.

Certainly, when one has a look at some of the details of this act, I would suggest to the minister that there are some that we agree with, indeed quite a number, actually, that we would agree with but some which we think needs to be looked at a little more carefully. We would certainly agree with having an annual report and I compliment the minister. Just last week, we were dealing with another bill about children where the requirement was only for a five-year report, and at that time I got up and indicated that I felt that that was totally inadequate. So I'm pleased to see that there is an annual report on adult literacy that will be coming forward.

I think that in this act there is a little too much emphasis on programs and not enough on the development of a learning system, as it were, for the province, to make sure that we really are able to make a difference. I would suggest to the minister and to others in this Chamber that one of the things that is important here is to address not just those who are unemployed but those who are employed. I am told, on good authority, that some 85 percent of the adults who are scoring 1 and 2, that is that they don't have adequate literacy skills, are actually employed and that one of the things that we need to do is to engage businesses and have an approach which will engage businesses, where they have individuals who are not sufficiently literate or numerate, that there will be an approach which ensures that we are helping the people who are employed as well as those who are unemployed. This is clearly fundamental since quite a high proportion, 85 percent, of those who are not sufficiently, not adequately literate are, in fact, employed. I would suggest that this bill should therefore look at the approach which deals with businesses.

* (15:10)

I think that the bill could be a little bit more inclusive, as it were, and recognize as the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) that we need to make sure that we are bringing to bear not just programs, but, indeed, all the resources and the potential of our wonderful province, including the potential assistance that can come from those involved with primary and secondary education and those involved in colleges and universities, to build a system that will address literacy much better than we have been able to address it in the past.

I think that in the light of what I have seen in terms of, for instance, the ability of companies like Dragonfly toys to build software that can help people with disabilities learn to use computers, that similar types of software could be developed to help those who have disabilities, learning issues, learn, and who are new immigrants learn, and take the next step in improving their own literacy. Certainly, there are some efforts in this direction, but we can do, and we have to do, much better than we have done in the past.

I would suggest that there can be some improvements in the areas of the evaluation. That the approach here looks at how, or at putting in place certain aspects of an approach to evaluation. But, certainly, we have *Literacies: Researching practice,*

practising research, a journal for example, and that there can be some significant independent research and the ability funding for that to improve the way, step by step, to provide for continuous improvement to the way that we address this kind of issue would suggest that we have some significant steps to move forward.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there are things which we can do better when it comes to early childhood education so that we don't in the future have such a high proportion of adults who are lower than they should be in terms of literacy. I suggest that the provision of approaches, better approaches to early childhood education, may also help in ensuring that mothers and fathers who have low literacy skills will be able to have the time to ensure that they're given a much better opportunity to improve their literacy skills. Indeed, there may be opportunities for parents to work together with their children in early childhood education programs to develop literacy skills side by side with their children.

I believe that the opportunities here need to be taken to look at how one can work in terms of task-based skill development. We have shortfalls, for example, in the ability to read prescriptions. Can we work with pharmacists, for example, to ensure that there is an approach which is going to be useful in this respect? The same applies to anchors and using ATMs, retailers counting change and understanding the nuances of what's happening when you purchase goods in Canada if you're an immigrant; interacting with government and health care, places of worship; there are trades, there are many, many opportunities for working with those in the business community and the non-government community to advance skills and we need to benefit from these opportunities and make sure that we can advance literacy skills on a broad level.

There are a variety of new learning media. I've talked about computers, but videos, CDs, DVDs, telephone learning, one-stop learning centres, drop-in centres and so on, avenues to be able to use in today's world to improve things are certainly significant so that the use of task-oriented approaches, the use of approaches which will help prepare people for further training and the use of learning in literacy to help the people prepare specifically for employment opportunities, whether it be related to driver's licence, business e-mails, being able to complete job applications and various other things. There are opportunities to learn in one's daily life and to help people in their daily lives to be able

to be more literate, to be more numerate, have the broader skill base that will help the person in their individual lives, their family lives, in their everyday life to improve their quality of life as well as in their working opportunities.

I would suggest that, for seniors, while this is not often a focus of literacy skills, seniors should not be neglected here because seniors who don't have the sufficient literacy skills tend to be cut off and isolated, and marginalized to some extent, from the community and from people in the province. If we're going to help people live high-quality lives, then we need to be able to connect them to the community, and that includes seniors as well as adults who are working age.

Certainly, addressing these issues as well as those who have, in fact, a variety of learning disabilities, learning issues, that we can make a big difference, we must make a difference. We need to regard this only as a step along the way. There is much, much more to do, Mr. Speaker, and we hope that there will be much, much more coming after this. Thank you.

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

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 6, The Adult Literacy Act.

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

Bill 9—The Securities Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: We now call Bill 9, The Securities Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie.

Mr. David Faurchou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in debate on second readings for Bill 9, The Securities Amendment Act.

May I begin by expressing my gratitude to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) who took time along with staff to brief me about Bill 9.

It's very interesting The Securities Amendment Act is once again coming forward when we just did a number of amendments to this act just a short year ago. Mr. Speaker, it's something that is a bit dismaying that we find ourselves having to amend the The Securities Act so often.

I recall, quite vividly, the presentation when the previous amendments were proposed in this House. A gentleman came forward, Mr. Richard Yaffe, a very well-renowned solicitor in Manitoba that specialized in securities law. He stated, at that time, that all of us are aware of the infrastructure deficiency as it pertains to roads here in the province of Manitoba because we see it every day. But what we don't see is the decay and neglect that has taken place on the infrastructure within our statutes that guide the legal profession in our province. Mr. Yaffe went on to say that it is just as vitally important that we maintain our legal infrastructure as we do our physical infrastructure. I mention, as an example, highways.

* (15:20)

So, once again, we are making an attempt to do so by presenting this bill to the House. I would very much like to see even further updates to The Securities Act, so we can not only be considered as laggard in this regard, but perhaps we could be considered as leaders in the nation, and to make absolutely certain that the companies that operate and incorporate and offer for shares in Manitoba are doing so in a fashion that is advanced and very much in keeping with the worldwide business practices.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will say that there has been a push from the federal government to make absolutely certain that all jurisdictions here in Canada have their securities act up to date and to also make sure that the securities act that are in each one of the provinces do provide a virtual seamless share offering regardless of where the individual companies are incorporated and go before provincial securities commissions. So that way then if a company would be to incorporate and offer shares in Saskatchewan by permission of the Saskatchewan Securities Commission, then the company could also make that share offering here in Manitoba and vice versa.

Now the federal Finance Minister, Mr. Jim Flaherty, has stated that if the provinces do not come together and have this seamless passport system in place a little less than a year from now, then the federal government will act and put before Parliament legislation that will effectively deal with the incorporation of companies regardless of which province. They do so to come before a federal securities commission and that way then the companies putting forward a share offering would be

able to have sales of those shares in any jurisdiction in Canada.

If we, as a province, want to maintain our Securities Commission and the autonomy that that provides, I would say that we better move and move very swiftly with further amendments to this Securities Act.

The Finance Minister, as is his responsibility for The Securities Act, stated that he will be bringing forward further amendments because, as a province, and as I've just previously stated, we are behind most other jurisdictions in bringing forward the changes to The Securities Act that provides for this. Now, with the changes in this bill, Mr. Speaker, we do see a movement towards the harmonization of statutes as it pertains to the Securities Commission's operations, and we also see that there are changes made whereby greater powers are provided to the Securities Commission in order that they be able to make adjustments without coming before the Legislative Assembly, whereby giving them more flexibility to deal with share offerings in the corporations which are putting them to the public.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do want to see this legislation go on to committee so that interested parties will be able to offer up their concerns, and I'm certain, I'm absolutely certain that government members serving on the committee will get an earful from those that ply their trade and also, to want to see Manitoba prosper with the incorporations of companies and providing the mechanism in which those companies can secure the working capital that they need in order to carry on their businesses.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So I know that there are many bills before the House today, but I want to leave the honourable members on the government side of the House the message that it is absolutely imperative. It is very, very timely that we address the needed changes to The Securities Act in order to provide for a harmonization and the ability for companies incorporated here in Manitoba the chance to make their shares available in other jurisdictions, and that cannot happen until the necessary changes are made to our Securities Act.

So, with those few short words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I look forward to seeing Bill 9 proceed to committee. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wanted to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 9, The Securities Amendment Act. As the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurchou) has pointed out, the essence of the bill is that of a positive nature, and we look forward to it hitting the committee stage. True to form, there are, no doubt, always some needs for some amendments and we'll wait and see what actually takes place.

But, you know, what I find very interesting in terms of wanting to talk about the principle of the bill is if we read the explanatory notes of the bill and you contrast that to what has been one of the scandals of this government, that, of course, being the Crocus Investment Fund, Madam Deputy Speaker, we really haven't had the opportunity to debate the Crocus fund thus far since the House got back into session in September, and I wanted to use this particular opportunity because it's about the investment.

We know that the Manitoba Securities Commission is just one of many different organizations that is looking into the Crocus Investment Fund. As an opportunity to put a few words on the record, once again reinforcing what I believe is very important for us to realize—see, this government has a tendency to ignore questions and valid arguments. In response to questions and arguments they tend to downplay it, much like the other day, you know, I heard the Member for Portage la Prairie comment to one minister saying, well, you know, when we speak, it's a rant, and, of course, when you speak, it's not.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that there are many valid points that are raised from the opposition benches, and the government really needs to start listening as to what is being said and maybe to take their collective heads out of the sand and open their eyes and see what's happening around them.

You know, for years, we waited for the Manitoba Securities Commission to come up with a report with respect to the Crocus Investment Fund. The number of people that have invested in that particular fund and the reasons for that investment are just huge. I think we'd have to look a long way in terms of our history as a province where we have seen a government which was so much in favour of and promoting a particular fund and then turning its back on those investors.

Here we are in this legislation empowering the Manitoba Securities Commission to do more in

terms of due diligence and investigations. We're empowering them to be able to even come up with stiffer penalties and so forth. Yet, on the other hand, when the government had responsibility, it's done nothing to live up to it. For years we've been challenging the government to tell us what it knew in regard to some of the problems with Crocus, and the government would just stand up and say, well, we didn't know anything; we didn't know anything, and consistently gave that line.

* (15:30)

You know, it's interesting, it wasn't until we actually had a document that came from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). That document was circulated in Cabinet where it was very clear that the government did know that Crocus was having problems. All the way up to that point, Madam Deputy Speaker, the government insisted that they knew nothing. I'm beginning to believe that, no, the government obviously knew a lot, but they didn't understand anything.

They either didn't understand or they were intentionally trying to mislead the public on the issue, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is no in-between, and, as much as this government tries to shed its responsibilities to those 33,000-plus shareholders, as much as it tries to say we had nothing to do with the demise of Crocus, I and others will be in their place to remind the government that the failure of Crocus as a fund, as a venture capital fund, in good part is as a direct result of this government's negligence, this government's inability to do what was in Manitobans' best interest, and through that, also, the investors.

The actual cost, I believe, we aren't even close to imagining for the simple reason is, if you take a look at the importance of venture capital funds, the setback, because of this government's neglect, Madam Deputy Speaker, is huge. Try to convince investors, or would-be investors, to go into venture capital funds in the future is going to be that much more difficult because of the way in which this government dealt with the delicate file of Crocus.

It was more important for this government to have political damage control than it was to do the right thing for Manitobans. We will continue to see that damage control and the 100-plus spin doctors that they have, Madam Deputy Speaker, to try to keep this government out of hot water on the Crocus affair.

We look forward, because, ultimately, the truth will come out. Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't believe that this Premier (Mr. Doer) is going to be around three years from now. I believe what's going to happen is we're going to start to see some of these issues that have been on the back burner, that he's been successful, through his spin doctors, in terms of putting off, will see the light of day. There will be more truth on important issues, whether it's The Maples nomination, to the Crocus fiasco, to so many other things that are there. Once we start to see the truth, how is the Premier going to defend himself?

To this date, I haven't heard the Premier comment on the Cabinet document. For how long did we hear the Premier avoid taking any responsibility, avoid saying that he even knew anything about the Crocus and the problems with Crocus, yet we know, for fact, not because of this government, because someone, some responsible civil servant—we don't know who—slipped a yellow envelope under our doors, Madam Deputy Speaker. Otherwise, we would never have found out. At least, we wouldn't have found out this earlier.

In that yellow envelope was a Cabinet document. That even means the Minister of Labour knew about that event, or what was happening in Crocus. The Minister of Finance signed that document. That was a Cabinet brief, and there is no doubt. Does the Premier even talk about it, Madam Deputy Speaker? No. Why? Because he believes the best way to stay in the seat of the Premier's chair is to say nothing and ignore those very important issues.

Then he ridicules the opposition members, whether it's the vote-rigging scandal of the '90s or the Monnin inquiry—I should say, the Québec inquiry at the national level, Madam Deputy Speaker. But, you know, at least those leaders had the political courage to do the right thing. They both had inquiries. This Premier will not call an inquiry, even though Manitobans, investors, opposition parties, independent media outlets have all called for a public inquiry. We have agencies like the Manitoba Securities Commission, the RCMP, we have Revenue Canada and others that are investigating. We have our law courts, a lawsuit that's being levelled against this government because of the issues of this government being negligent on a very important file.

That's why when I see Bill 9, where Bill 9 is all about enhancing the strength of the Manitoba

Securities Commission to ensure that there's more transparency and that there's more accountability on the issue of our securities that are out there, Madam Deputy Speaker, I see that as a good thing. What I don't understand is why doesn't the Province, in particular this Premier, enforce the same sort of principles on the government of the day. Why doesn't it see the value of transparency and accountability? It is only a question of time before the truth will, in fact, get out, and then it'll be interesting to see what members heckle from across the bench.

They take an issue and they try to manipulate it to the degree in which they get the media to want—or I shouldn't say to want, but try to manipulate the media to see it through their eyes, Madam Deputy Speaker. They feel because they have the numbers, because they have the spin doctors, that they will be successful. At the end of day, it's just not going to work, because at the end of the day more and more information is going to come out. It's only a question of time.

So whether it's the Crocus fiasco, something on which I still introduce petitions—and if we had more opportunity, we'd love to be able to debate this, the Crocus fiasco, for many more hours because I know that the government of the day does not like to hear it, but it is important to be heard because what we're talking about—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I just would like to point out, I'm not sure—it could be my hearing—but I just find the speaker is straying just a little from the subject. If he could bring it around to more relevance to the bill at hand, it would be appreciated.

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I suspect that given that we are empowering Manitoba investments, The Securities Amendment Act is to empower more transparency, to provide more penalty. It is to ensure that investments are protected. One of the largest and most important investments that we've had is Crocus, and it shows just how very important it is that we have legislation of this nature.

So for those New Democrats that might feel a little uncomfortable about me talking about Crocus because maybe they don't feel it's relevant, too bad. I don't feel sympathetic. I feel very little sympathy for them because, quite frankly, I'm more interested in the 33,000-plus shareholders that this government, through its neglect, has shafted. Had they had some of these very same principles that are in this

legislation, if this government had some of these very same principles, well, maybe we would have the Crocus Investment Fund today. Maybe we wouldn't have those many seniors or labourers that invested thousands, tens of thousands of dollars being shafted by the New Democratic Party of Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker.

* (15:40)

So I make no apologies in taking the opportunity to talk about the Crocus on this particular piece of legislation and, as I said at the onset, the principle of the bill is something which is positive; something which we want to be able to see go to committee, but wanted to take this opportunity to remind the government of its ultimate responsibility and that is to be more transparent, to be more clear as to what it has been doing and some of the failures and shortcomings that this government has done in particular for those Crocus shareholders.

With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are prepared to see the bill pass.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is the second reading of Bill 9, The Securities Amendment Act.

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

I declare the motion carried.

**Bill 11—The Children's Advocate's
Enhanced Mandate Act
(Various Acts Amended)**

Madam Deputy Speaker: We will now move on to Bill 11, The Children's Advocate's Enhanced Mandate Act.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I am pleased to rise today and put a few words on the record about Bill 11, The Children's Advocate's Enhanced Mandate Act. This act is designed to take Part 10 from the Chief Medical Examiner's Office over to the Child Advocate's office on the investigation of deaths of children in custody. It proposes not to take any of the authority away from the Chief Medical Examiner's Office, but it does propose the investigations into the circumstances surrounding the death.

There are a number of issues about this bill that I think need to be put on the record. We do have some concerns that pertain to how these investigations will be conducted from this point forward. The Chief Medical Examiner's Office has been responsible and we think in some cases that may be where it should stay, and maybe some more resources should go to the Chief Medical Examiner's Office instead of transferring responsibility and growing the bureaucracy at the Child Advocate's office. They were told that there will be two staff transferred from the Chief Medical Examiner's Office, and I was told by the Child Advocate the other day that it would require possibly another two staff. I think that's far underestimating the amount of staff that would be required for this job if they do it in the manner to which they have said they propose.

At the present time, when there's a death in distant communities the Chief Medical Examiner's Office requires reports and background from those communities, but doesn't actually go to those communities and conduct a hearing of any sort. This bill gives the Child Advocate's office the ability to go into those communities. So I think, if they're going to start covering a lot more ground, I think they're really, sadly underestimating the amount of resources they will need.

A lot of these problems arose from the devolution process, which I think was necessary but done too quickly. Instead of exploring and cleaning up the problems that were inherent in the system at the time, the government rushed to do the devolution and just transferred the problems to the four authorities who are now in charge. I think this bill is somewhat weak on the reporting end of things. It states where the Child Advocate has to present their findings but it doesn't state time lines or anything for a real good follow-up on how those reports should be made.

The whole problem with the system at the present time is—or a big part of the problem with the system at the present time is the caseloads on workers. They're overworked. They have too many caseloads. They haven't got opportunity to keep proper watch on their cases. This is at a time when the population, the numbers of children in care, is rapidly escalating. We're somewhere around 7,000 cases now.

In Estimates I had asked the minister a number of questions on the reporting and how the minister follows up on what is actually happening in his

department. I had asked for the audited statements and the follow-up, other reports from those agencies, from both the four authorities and the agencies that work under them, and I was promised those documents. I haven't seen them to date yet, but I think they would give us a good idea of what the caseloads are and what the costs are on some of those actual workers out there. I think it's a tremendous load and I don't think they're capable of handling it. I think some of the resources would be better spent, better cared for, if it was to add resources in the caseworkers' side of things.

The Child Advocate is required to report to the minister and the Ombudsman and the Chief Medical Examiner, and then the Child Advocate is also required to report to this House. I would hope that the reports are available, that we can follow what's going on in this to see if this process is actually successful or not. The Ombudsman is also supposed to report to us on what happens with this transition.

We need to always consider the best interests of the children themselves and sometimes we get clouded on those issues and make decisions based on other rationale when their interests are absolutely of paramount importance.

As I said before, the caseloads of the front-line workers make it difficult. We find that just throwing money into a system doesn't necessarily solve the problems. We had some 289 recommendations come out of two reports in the last year or two. The response of the government has been to put an extra \$48 million into CFS, which I haven't seen any reports on the success of that or how well it's working, and I sometimes wonder if just throwing more money at things actually helps.

* (15:50)

This move to the Child Advocate's office of section 10 was recommended through a couple of reports and it was some of the recommendations that went to government. It was prompted by specifically the Phoenix Sinclair case and the study that was done on it. We believe it does present somewhat of a conflict of interest in the fact that the Child Advocate's office in our view should be investigating the circumstances and doing preventive development to help children that are in CFS. They should be, in essence, dealing with living children, not so much with investigating the deaths of children in care.

This bill is very vague in another area, and that's on the issue of the agencies that the Child Advocate

will have the ability to investigate. It states that it will be children in care but it doesn't really state what falls into the care, and I think it has to be a little more specific in those areas.

I think section 10 reviews are of a very private nature, and when the Child Advocate makes these recommendations on a case where there's been a child death, I would like to know—and I don't think the bill tells us very clearly—the level of reporting, and how it does actually get to the minister, and the time lines around once it gets to the minister, and the responsibility is always at the minister. At the present time, the authorities and the agencies are required to make reports to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in these cases. I wonder if the agencies and authorities will be as willing to make reports and background information available to the Child Advocate's office. I would suggest that it might not be near as much willingness. And I think the bill probably needs to contain something that indicates that that must be done.

When I mentioned that the bill is vague on what government agencies, where the Child Advocate will be investigating, a couple of areas that don't seem to be specified under the bill are education and health-care systems, and I think they probably should be. We also have, in the reserve system, on the First Nations, a differentiation on whose responsibility it is, and I think that will cause a lot of problems on whether the reports get made to the Child Advocate in a timely fashion.

Once again, I think this is a piece of legislation that was probably drafted a little bit too quickly and without an appropriate consultation, and I think there is certainly room for improvement in it. We will of course be debating this later in third reading, and we will be monitoring what comes out of committee hearings to see if there are some suggestions that would be made to improve this bill, and we may at that time consider an amendment to this bill to try and improve some of the weaknesses that are in it.

With that, I think I'll cease my remarks and I'll turn it over to the Member for Morris, or, one of them, River East or Morris, is going to make some comments on the bill. Thank you.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I'm pleased to speak on Bill 11, The Children's Advocate's Enhanced Mandate Act, because I think that when we look at this kind of legislation, when it revolves around children and families and the tragedies that have occurred in the child welfare system, I think that one

thing stands out to me and that is that we have to get it right. There cannot be any errors. In getting it right, it takes some time and some thought to be put into the process. Look at what other jurisdictions are doing, gather information, and make sure that this is what we want to put into legislation to get it right. In a certain way, I know that we have had recommendations that this occur, and I think that there are some elements of it that seem to be quite, quite favourable. But, again, I think when you're dealing with vulnerable children—and we all know about the chaos that we've seen in the child welfare system—it is incumbent on all of us to get this right rather than have to look at it again and again when things happen.

Indeed, the Chief Medical Examiner has said, Madam Deputy Speaker, that unless we have standards of care in this province, things will still occur, and just shifting the resources and the duties from one office to another is not going to alleviate these things unless we have a standard of care in this province that's adhered to, that's respected. That is the only way that we are going to make sure that we're protecting our most vulnerable children that are taken into care in this province.

I know that this came out of the most tragic case of little Phoenix Sinclair and the reviews that followed this, several reviews with hundreds of recommendations, an Auditor General's report that looked at the system, and we know from those the problems that occurred in the last few years happened with the devolution process. The devolution process is very good in principle and we supported it, but the problem has always been that it's gone rushed through very quickly. Any time you rush something through, you are going to have unforeseen things that occur, because the normal procedure when you have it change as drastic as this is you change and you evaluate and you change and you evaluate, and you correct the things that are not going right.

* (16:00)

In this case, it was a very, very chaotic transition and workers themselves will say the workloads that they had, the caseloads that they had—and that was of course compounded by the fact that they had all of this paperwork to do and the whole transition process that they had to go through; they had to do all of that. So I know that the people that have gone through this system have done the best that they can do, but I say when we're going to change a system so quickly, we

need to listen to the recommendations of the people in the system as well, the front-line workers. They get overburdened, they get burned out, and we don't want that to happen in the system because I know that they go to work every day with the best interests of the children at heart and they do the best they can, Madam Deputy Speaker, but certainly we want to provide the framework in which they can do their jobs.

As I said, I think that there are some things in this bill that we could look at to make sure, just to make sure that we're going to get this right. We've looked at it fairly well. We've spoken to people that may be affected by this, and there are some things that do come up. One of the things that I think the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) has said already is, is this the appropriate place? We need to look at it. Is this the appropriate place? Is the Children's Advocate the person that should be investigating the deaths of children or is she the person that should be looking for the welfare and well-being of the children that are taken into care and perhaps using those resources to look at ways to strengthen the family relationships and strengthen the system that is looking after the caring for these kids.

Certainly, a lot of the agencies now know that they do speak with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. They know that is the route to go and they understand the requirements to do that when the Chief Medical Examiner is investigating the unfortunate tragedies that have occurred. We want to make sure and we ask the question, are these people going to feel the same reporting responsibilities to go to the Children's Advocate? Will there be that compelling piece of legislation, I guess, that says to you, you have to go; you have to deal with the Office of the Children's Advocate. This is something, I think, that has to be determined.

When you look at the work that the Children's Advocate office does in the nature of looking at cases of children that would be contacting her office, now we can sort of imagine a case where there would a conflict of interest, where the Office of the Children's Advocate would be advocating for children in care and maybe looking at the situation with the family or foster family or the children, and then a tragedy may occur and she would then find herself on the other side investigating the circumstances surrounding the death of that child. So I think in that way she would sort of be investigating herself.

So I think that there is some conflict-of-interest perceptions here that would need to be addressed before this legislation should just be pushed through. So I'm cautioning the government to look very carefully at this before they actually look at enacting this bill. Look at what's happened in other jurisdictions because, from what I can see, in most other jurisdictions in Canada, it is through the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. So we do need to know that if we're going to do this, it has to be done right, as I said, because you are dealing with children here.

Certainly, the resources that are in the Chief Medical Examiner's Office would transfer, but to me there seems to be a need if there is a backlog with the number of investigations going on, that if you're just going to transfer it to the Children's Advocate office, it doesn't really address all of that, in fact, because they want to investigate beyond just the agency involvement. They want to investigate beyond that into other things surrounding the death of a child in care which would be mental health issues, community issues, education issues, all of these things. So that is going to require additional resources, as well, in the office.

So we can see that there's going to be a bit of bureaucracy-building going on here, and is this what we really need? I ask the government, is this what we really want, is to build more bureaucracy? Is that what's necessary? We want to caution against that. We want to say on the record that we certainly need more resources in advocating for children, but is it necessary to expand resources to look at these kinds of things? We already have a minister who is in charge of Healthy Living. We already have a minister who is in charge of Health and mental health. We have a Healthy Child Committee, the government does. So maybe those people should be accountable within their areas and looking at all of the ways that this has impacted on children in care. I just say that perhaps we're duplicating some services here that we really don't need to do, and perhaps that money can be better spent in front-line services, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I think that, under the present legislation, under the present circumstances, there isn't really accountability. Once the review is conducted by the Chief Medical Examiner it just goes through the system internally all the way down to the agency and all the way back up to the minister and, if everybody along the line agrees that there's not really a problem, everything has been taken care of, then it's not really

made public and there's no real accountability. So I think one of the things that is brought out in this bill is that the Ombudsman would be responsible for ensuring that the investigation completed by the office of the Children's Advocate would come to the Legislature, and there would be some necessity then to respond to the recommendations from the reviews that would be conducted.

Of course, we would want to be able to think that there would never have to be any reviews, and that we could get this system working. The system that, continually, the NDP have not been able to get it right, and in fact, we've seen so many children die. You know, I want to say 31, because that's the number we talked about last year, but we already know we have another tragedy that's occurred just recently. So now it's 32 and we don't want to get to 33.

So we certainly want to, again, make sure that we look very closely at this and get it right so that we can avoid, avoid having to have this reporting system in the first place. Having said that, we recognize that the reporting is important and there is the accountability of having the Ombudsman report back to the Legislature and have it that there be a requirement to act on the recommendations that come out of the section 10 review would be positive. Now, I don't think that that necessarily is something that couldn't be done already, so I don't know that we need to have this bill to do that. I think that, if the government wanted to, they could certainly just have a requirement that the Ombudsman now receive the report from the Chief Medical Examiner and have it reported to the Legislature and we would then, the government would be responsible for looking at the recommendations. So it's a good thing in this bill. I'm not sure, though, that we need the bill to specifically do that where there are other ways that we could do that.

I think that that external compliance, as I was just speaking about, would be very important and I certainly don't think that there would be a problem with that, as I said. But, again, the conflict of interest is something that we do want to look very closely at. I encourage the government to do that because there is that potential area there.

* (16:10)

Some things that, again, have come up with discussions with other people in that the ability to get all of this work done, through an office right now

that is overloaded with the number of children in care. As we see, the number of children in care is increasing every year. It's increased dramatically every year since the NDP have bungled, I guess is the word I want to use, that the whole process of caring for children, and the child welfare system and the child welfare agencies and I mean that, of course, we know that. I mean, I hear people on the street saying, when they talk about Family Services, oh, the department in chaos, and it's true because of all of the things that have occurred necessitating all of the reviews and all the recommendations that have come forward.

I know that the minister would like to stand up and say: But we've put so much more money into the system, and we're doing this, and we're doing that. But I think we need to look at what we do in health care, for example, as putting more money into the system has not resulted in better care for patients. Putting more money into child welfare, will it translate to better services for our most vulnerable children that are taken into care? Certainly, we'd like to think that it would, but we know that a lot of the resources are directed to administrative positions and aren't translated into front-line workers. The sad situation is that front-line workers are still reporting very high workloads and caseloads of the number of children they have in care and find it almost impossible to maintain and manage those and do the visitations with the families that they need to do on an ongoing basis.

So I think that transferring the responsibility to the Children's Advocate for investigating the deaths of children in care and expanding that to look at not only the system and the agency involved, but other influences that may have been brought to bear on the case has some merit, I believe.

But, as I say, I think that it behooves everyone to make sure that we get this right, look at it very carefully, look at the resources, look at the conflict of interest, make sure stakeholders are consulted, look at the advice that they give, speak to other jurisdictions to make sure that this is something we want to do and get it right.

You know, we talk about the child welfare system and the devolution process, and the government has said that they were the first jurisdiction to do this, and certainly, they didn't get it right. They didn't get it right because the failure of the system is the fact that we had so many children die in the system.

So they didn't get it right. They could have looked at other jurisdictions. They could have looked at the Alberta Response Model way back when they were looking at the devolution process. They now have decided they are going to look at that and adopt it and refine it for Manitoba. They are also going to look at what's happened in some of the states like Minneapolis.

My question would be: Why not look at these things first and adopt what's happening well in other places, rather than go ahead and do something which could be politically motivated before actually looking at what is right for the children? I can't say enough times that it is the best interests of the child that must be first and foremost, and the circumstances with that individual child have to be looked at very carefully. That's what we should be doing in the child welfare system.

We want to get a system that works well. I think that that is the goal, and we want to do that. There are certain things in this bill, I think, that may move toward that, but there are certain things that I feel that there are concerns about. Having said that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think I have outlined the concerns that have been brought to me and the concerns that I have and certainly would like to hear what Manitobans will say when they come to present to us and committee. I encourage the government to listen very carefully, make sure they do not rush into something that is going to cause problems because, as I say, we want to get this right.

So, with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will pass the floor to others of my colleagues that would like to speak on the bill. Thank you.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Madam Deputy Speaker, I just would like to put a few words on the record about Bill 11, The Children's Advocate's Enhanced Mandate Act.

You know, I have some understanding of the Child and Family Services system and really sort of question how this government has gone about making the significant changes in a very short period of time that has put the lives of children and families at risk. I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I were both on the committee when this legislation went to committee before it passed in the House, and I raised some significant concerns about ensuring through the process that the interests of children came first and there wouldn't be children that would be harmed as a result. The minister of the

day assured us in the committee that things were going to be better than they were before the new process was put in place.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think that we've witnessed first-hand the chaos that's been created in the Child and Family Services system as a result of the process of devolution that was moved ahead much too quickly without the proper checks and balances and the proper procedures in place to make sure that children were protected. We do have a system that is in chaos today, and I'm somewhat disappointed that the piece of legislation that we're looking at today that's talking about The Children's Advocate's Enhanced Mandate Act doesn't have that enhanced mandate being looking into the system and ensuring that children are protected before they get to the point that they're dead, and then we have the Child Advocate coming in after the fact.

The mandate of the Child Advocate should be that the system is looked at and she or he, whoever might be in that position, is monitoring what is going on in the system and monitoring to see whether children that are alive and are needing support and services are getting those services. And if there's something wrong in the system that the Child Advocate can identify, that information should be passed on before the child gets into a situation where they're murdered. We and I believe, and I think many, many people believe, that a Child Advocate is there to advocate on behalf of children who are alive and in difficult circumstances and needing support, and if the system that's been put in place by government isn't meeting the needs of those children, then that should be identified up front and the system should be challenged to get it right before we get into a situation where a child is placed in an unsafe circumstance and that child is murdered as a result.

So it seems to me that we've got priorities wrong and we've got a process that's in place in one office but we're going to move it to another office—we're not going to do anything in the system that presently exists to try to ensure that children stay alive, and I would think that that would be the main responsibility of the Children's Advocate, and the Advocate's office shouldn't be there to investigate deaths after the fact. The Advocate's office should be there to advocate on behalf of children who are at risk, children that are in the system that may not be served well and trying to get the system to change before that child gets murdered.

* (16:20)

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think this bill has its priorities all wrong. I think that if we're looking at enhancing the Children's Advocate's mandate through a piece of legislation, that mandate should be looking at the up-front prevention and protection and ensuring that she's looking at the system to see what's lacking, where the standards don't exist, where a child might be at risk before that child gets put into a risky situation.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, maybe the concept of moving section 10 of the legislation—I believe it's, I think it's section 10, yes—of the review of child deaths before looking at that being the main focus of what the Child Advocate should be doing and focussing on, we should have been looking at the bigger picture. This may be one piece that ultimately—and one recommendation that should be implemented. But what about all the other recommendations that should be put into legislation that aren't been dealt with by this government?

We're still seeing children falling through the cracks. We're seeing a dysfunctional system out there that isn't serving the needs of children, and this is the best that this government could do? To bring in a piece of legislation that mandates the Child Advocate to advocate on behalf of children that are already dead? Madam Deputy Speaker, it just doesn't make any sense to me, that this would be the priority of a government that says that it cares about children at risk and cares about children in need of protection in the system.

So this government, to me, has its priorities all wrong, Madam Deputy Speaker. There may be some merit to moving this, but is this the best that a government can do for children in need when they've created the chaos by the changes that they've made in the Child and Families Services system? They have put children at risk, and this is the best that they can come up with in dealing with the recommendations that have been put before them by the many, many reviews that have been undertaken. How many recommendations have been presented to this government, and is this the only one that they can act on?

They have their priorities all wrong; they think that through this piece of legislation, they're going to fix the system. Well, we know that this does nothing to support the front-line workers who have heavy caseloads that can't manage the children that they're dealing with and if anything, the Child Advocate should be working with those front-line workers and

listening to what they have to say and implementing recommendations that might, in some way, help a child get into a safer situation and be at less risk.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have grave concern that this government has no idea where it's heading and what direction it wants to go when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable children within our society. You and I both know—and I know that you have a social work background and really do care, and I know that many, many people on the government side of the House—I would believe everyone in this House does care about protection of children, but it's all about where we put our priorities and where we put our resources. In my mind, the enhanced mandate for the Child Advocate should be in advocating for children that are alive and at risk within the system, not in fact dealing with children after the fact, when they've been murdered or killed by someone because of a lack of support within the very system that's been set up under legislation to protect those children.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can't specifically take issue with this piece of legislation. I'll be interested in hearing what the general public has to say, but I can take issue with this government that makes this enhanced mandate for the Child Advocate its No. 1 priority. In my mind, and I think in most Manitobans' minds, and if you talk to the social workers on the front lines in the Child and Family Services system that needs support, they wouldn't be thinking that this was a No. 1 priority. The Child Advocate should be there to advocate on behalf of children who are alive, who may be at risk, who may not be getting the service that they desperately need in the Child and Family Services system, and the Advocate should be there to make recommendations to the agencies and to government to fix the problems before children die, and not to spend the time and the energy and the effort after the fact in trying to figure out what went wrong. Let's try to fix the problem before children die.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'll be interested in hearing what other Manitobans have to say, but I have to say that I'm extremely disappointed that this is the best that this government could come up with. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): This bill deals with the Children's Advocate. I've listened to some good comments from the MLA for River East, the MLA for Morris, and the MLA for Ste. Rose. I differ from the Member for River East who says she

doesn't have any issues with this because I think that this bill is quite troubling. The reason I believe this is quite troubling is that the Children's Advocate is often, and indeed should be very, very involved with children in care, making sure that things are optimum, and as a result, the Children's Advocate is and should be very involved with a lot of these kids who are coming forward, who have ended up having very tragic circumstances.

If there is a single message from the huge review that Dr. Peter Markesteyn did in Newfoundland, it is that you have to have a separation of the review from the Office of the Children's Advocate because the Children's Advocate has a role in the process of helping children and is very often involved. You just can't have an adequate review if the Children's Advocate is reviewing herself, or himself, as the case may be, whoever is the Children's Advocate.

I would like to say that I believe the government would be very smart to give the Children's Advocate more and better resources, for the Children's Advocate could do a much better job at what she's doing. There is no doubt that this government has handicapped the Children's Advocate from being able to do an adequate job by so limiting resources.

I have talked, on quite a number of occasions, about the differences in involvement in research. Certainly, what is being proposed here is that the Children's Advocate would be involved in, as it were, research after the fact. This is looking at a situation from a distance. It's what I call bystander research; that is, looking objectively at a situation of what's happening without having involvement directly in it. The problem is that the Children's Advocate is not a bystander in the process. You need somebody who is indeed, a bystander—a medical examiner—which is why we've had the Medical Examiner doing the reviews, as a bystander doing this type of research.

Now, I'm not opposed, and I think it would actually be rather interesting if the Children's Advocate was involved in what I'd refer to as action research, and that is that members who are involved in the process of improving care. I think it would actually be rather interesting to give the Children's Advocate a significant role in research in that area to improve, on a continuous basis, what we do and to supplement the other things that are being done in terms of looking after children. That would be quite an interesting role and a significant role.

I think also that the Children's Advocate should have a role with regard to Jordan's Principle, and what a day we have today to talk about this, because this is the day that would have been Jordan's birthday. I would suggest that the Children's Advocate might be in a good position to be given powers with respect to implementation of Jordan's Principle, make sure that the child is always considered first instead of governments arguing.

* (16:30)

So I think there are some very interesting things that could be done to enhance the role and the powers and the ability of the Children's Advocate to do her job, but I don't believe that this is the answer, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that there clearly is an alternative to this legislation.

I think that the mistake that the government is making here is not understanding fully the involvement and what should be the full involvement of the Children's Advocate in promoting the well-being of children and avoiding deaths in the first place, and when such deaths occur then it does need to be somebody who is independent, a real bystander like the Medical Examiner who can take a thorough and careful look at this circumstance of a child dying, a child who has been in care or involved with the child welfare system.

So I have grave concerns about this legislation. We will wait and see what comes up during the committee hearings, but I'm stating those grave concerns now. I believe that this is a piece of legislation which not only needs to be looked at very carefully but I suspect needs to be very strongly opposed. Thank you.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Madam Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), that debate on Bill 11 be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Madam Deputy Speaker, on House business, I wonder if you might canvass that we have leave of the House to revert to Second Readings—*[interjection]* Don't need leave? *[interjection]* Thank you. I'm utilizing my power here that I understand I have to revert to second reading, Bill 28, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act. I

thank members opposite for their concurrence on this.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 28—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 28, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2007 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of the bill and I table this message.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Marilyn Brick): It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 28, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2007 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of the bill and a message has been tabled.

Mr. Selinger: I understand we have 25 minutes to discuss this, so I will read into the record at least 10 minutes' worth of stuff and then leave my critic the opportunity to support the bill that we're putting in front of you here today.

This bill implements measures in the 2007 Manitoba budget. It makes various other amendments to tax and financial legislation.

The amendments to implement tax measures announced in the budget include the following:

Corporate Capital Tax,

reducing the tax rates as follows for fiscal years beginning after January 1, '08, except for Crown corps and financial institutions;

from 0.3 percent to 0.2 percent for corporations with taxable amounts not over \$10 million;

from \$30,000 plus 2.5 percent on the taxable amount over \$10 million to \$20,000 plus 2.4 percent on the taxable amount over

\$10 million, for corporations with a taxable amount over \$10 million but not over \$11 million;

from 0.5 percent to 0.4 percent for corporations with a taxable amount over \$11 million; as well as

eliminating the quarterly instalments for corporations paying taxes of \$5,000 or less per year.

On the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax, Part 3:

increasing the annual payroll exemption from \$1 million to \$1.25 million and increasing the threshold below which employers pay a reduced rate from \$2 million to \$2.5 million.

Income Tax, Part 4:

reducing the personal income tax rate for the middle bracket from 13 percent to 12.75 percent and raising the upper limit of the middle tax bracket from \$65,000 to \$66,000; as well as

increasing the basic personal amount and the maximum spousal and eligible dependant amounts to \$8,034; as well as

adding provisions to parallel the federal children's fitness tax credit; and

replacing the family tax reduction with a family tax benefit; and

providing graduates with tuition fee income tax rebates; as well as

increasing the education property tax credit base from \$400 to \$525; and as well

reducing the general corporate income tax rate from 14 percent to 13 percent and the small business tax rate for active business income from 3 percent to 2 percent; and

increasing the refundable portion of the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit from 35 percent to 50 percent; in addition to

extending the Film and Video Production Tax Credit for three more years to March 1, 2011; while

introducing a refundable green energy tax credit in relation to equipment manufactured and acquired to produce energy from certain renewable resources;

broadening the community enterprise development tax credit to include a new 30 percent non-refundable tax credit for investments in certain enterprises that require larger investments than can be provided through investments qualifying for the existing credit.

On the Insurance Corporations Tax,

allowing the minister to waive interest and penalties.

On the Property Tax,

increasing the farmland school tax rebate; as well as

On the Retail Sales Tax,

moving the tax on electricity and natural gas under Part 1.1 of The Tax Administration and Miscellaneous Taxes Act to The Retail Sales Tax Act; as well as

extending by two years the tax exemption for manure slurry tanks and liners for manure lagoons; in addition to

eliminating the requirement for small home-based businesses to collect and remit retail sales tax.

Other amendments to the tax statutes include the following:

making corrections and minor amendments;

enhancing or streamlining the various tax administration and collection measures; and

exempting from motive fuel tax the biodiesel portion of blended motive fuel purchased before April 1, 2011; and

providing greater flexibility to purchasers paying retail sales tax on property brought into Manitoba for temporary use; while

restructuring the existing exemption for non-profit organizations as an exception from the requirement to register as a vendor and to collect and remit retail sales tax in certain circumstances; as well as

giving peace officers the powers of tax officers for certain purposes.

In addition, amendments to The Financial Administration Act include the following:

defining "government reporting entity" and "reporting organization," terms that are used in

relation to summary budgets and financial statements;

requiring the government to provide audited summary financial statements for the government reporting entity instead of audited financial statements for the Consolidated Fund; and

requiring reporting organizations to provide financial information in order to facilitate summary budgets and financial statements; and

continue the pension assets fund and regulate its uses.

* (16:40)

In the interests of being fair, I should do this entire thing over again in French, but I will do a brief summary.

Le présent projet de loi permet la mise en œuvre des mesures prévues dans le budget de 2007 du Manitoba et apporte diverses autres modifications à des lois fiscales et financières. Les mesures budgétaires: figurent ci-dessous certaines des modifications visant à mettre en œuvre les mesures fiscales annoncées dans le budget. Par exemple, concernant l'impôt sur le capital des corporations, il y aura des réductions pour chaque seuil d'imposition. *[interjection]*

Translation

This bill implements measures in the 2007 Manitoba Budget, and makes various other amendments to tax and financial legislation. Budget measures: The amendments to implement tax measures announced in the budget include the following ones. For example, concerning the corporation capital tax, there will be reductions for each tax threshold.

English

Okay. No translator.

Well, I'm sure the member opposite has read the French version and will be able to respond in French when we get to this section of the bill. I'll turn it over to him now. Thank you.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): I do appreciate the minister giving his translation in French. I do have the opportunity of understanding a bit of it, but certainly it would be best that we do it in English.

Madam Acting Speaker, BITSA is a fairly complex bill, as the minister has already identified.

It's The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, but it really should be I think for simplicity's sake renamed the tax-and-spend portion of the legislation, because this minister and particularly his government are very good at both of what they do. They're very good at taxing and they're extremely good at spending.

Basically, we're going to deal with those key issues over the next opportunity to debate this. This is second reading. We are going to go back into committee, and at that point we'll come back for third reading, and I understand that we're going to have an opportunity to be able to debate this particular bill at some length.

But I would like to put some issues on the record in the time remaining. This government and this minister particularly have had eight years, eight years of unprecedented economic prosperity. The reason he had the eight years of unprecedented economic prosperity is because of a previous government laying the groundwork to be able to develop an economy within the province of Manitoba that certainly would allow this minister to tax, as we said earlier, substantial amounts of dollars and spend even more, unfortunately.

This unprecedented time of economic prosperity unfortunately has been an opportunity lost. There are a number of areas that we have to talk about with respect to BITSA, but it is without question a wasted opportunity, a wasted opportunity to lay a solid fiscal foundation to go forward for not only the next four years but probably the next decade for Manitobans and all people residing and coming back to—hopefully, if we did lay that foundation properly, we would have encouraged other people to come back to the province of Manitoba.

Unfortunately, the opposite is true. Because of wasteful spending and an opportunity lost, we are losing our population to other more progressive provinces, and it pains me to say even one of those progressive provinces is to the immediate west, in Saskatchewan, which normally would not be seen as a competitor to this province, but unfortunately right now is not only a competitor but a competitor that is, quite frankly, head and shoulders above this particular government.

We're going to deal with a couple of areas. First of all, BITSA is pretty simple. It's raising money called revenue, and it's spending money called expenses. This government is very capable of raising

the revenue because of the high taxation levels as well as revenues that are generated through transfers and equalization. The reason I mention that is not only are we excessively taxed, but Canadians from across this whole great country of ours are excessively taxed on behalf of this government and Manitobans. This past year \$1,800,000,000 in equalization funds, \$1,800,000,000 of equalization payments will come to the Province of Manitoba from others throughout this great country of ours. That's only the equalization portion of the funds that we receive from the federal government. Total funds referred to as transfer payments will equal some \$3.4 billion, with a "b"; \$3.4 billion will come from other sources, the federal government taxes, \$3.4 billion.

The total budget expenditures for this year in the Province of Manitoba will be approximately \$9.3 billion. If you do the math, \$9.3 billion of expenditures and \$3.4 billion of transfer and equalization payments means that Manitobans and this government, for every dollar that they spend, approximately 38 cents of it is coming from other Canadians; coming from hardworking, taxpaying Canadians who are, I would suspect, getting a bit tired of continually feeding this particular government. Thirty-eight cents of every dollar that this government spends which, whatever way they spend it on whatever programs, comes from other hardworking Canadians.

That wouldn't be so bad in itself, but the fact is that Manitoba is quickly becoming the only have-not province in western Canada. Well, Saskatchewan—remember the number I said—\$1.8 billion in equalization? Saskatchewan this year will receive \$226 million in equalization. Madam Acting Speaker, \$1.8 billion for Manitoba; \$226 million for Saskatchewan. Now Saskatchewan with their government, as well a socialist government, the NDP government, they're actually going to court because they don't feel that they're receiving sufficient dollars from the other hardworking taxpayers of Canada. So they're going to go to court to see if they can get their share bumped up.

What I would rather see, Madam Acting Speaker, is that we try to put in place a fiscal plan that would reduce the dependency on transfers and equalizations, that we no longer stand proud as a government across the way and say: Isn't this wonderful? We can receive all of these other funds from the federal government and we can actually be seen as a welfare state. That's deplorable.

I would much rather stand and say we can do it on our own, we can stand on our own two feet. We can put policy into place whether it be taxation policy, whether it be labour policy, whether it be policy that's going to encourage the youth of our population to come back into Manitoba, that we now are going to be able to say we can stand on our own. We don't need handouts from the federal government.

I don't like going across the country and having to defend this government and its continual hand out. It's sort of like the *Oliver Twist*: "More, please, sir; more, please, sir." Well, unfortunately, at some point in time in the not-too-distant future, the "more, please" is not going to be able to happen, and we'll get into that certainly in committee and into third reading.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So the transfers and equalization is certainly an issue that we have within the Province of Manitoba but as part of that, and a very serious part of that, is also the debt that this Province has incurred over the last numbers of years, Madam Deputy Speaker. This debt has increased quite substantially. As a matter of fact, we're sitting around an \$18-billion debt currently in the Province of Manitoba that includes Manitoba Hydro and the debt that's being incurred there.

But, by the way, that doesn't matter much because it seems this government really doesn't care how much debt they saddle Manitoba Hydro with, because they're going to expend an additional \$500 million wastefully that's going to be debt-financed, that's going to be put on the backs of Manitoba Hydro and ultimately on the backs of you and I who are the ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro.

* (16:50)

So now we're going to be saddled with sufficiently more debt over the numbers of years, but there's no plan. There's absolutely no plan to retire that debt, none whatsoever. We have, in this great Province of ours, a debt retirement fund—are you ready for this?—funded with \$51 million. We have a debt of close to \$20 billion—18.5, plus we've got some unfunded liabilities. So you look at a rough debt of \$20 billion and we have a debt refinance plan of \$51 million. You might as well not waste your time. Don't waste your time; it wouldn't even cover a

very small portion of the annual debt servicing that's required.

As a matter of fact, in this document that I have, in the budget documents, in what bits it deals with, we have debt servicing of about \$1.1 billion. The minister stands and tells us how wonderful a job we're doing with the debt, the GDP, whether it be real debt or whether it be net debt. You can fudge the numbers, but we do know that our debt-servicing costs to this province, right now, will be about \$1.1 billion, of which \$531 million of that debt servicing is attributed to Manitoba Hydro.

Again, we have issues here, not only with the provincial debt that they are incurring, and there's going to be more. We have a floodway that's going to be substantially over budget, and that's going to have to be debt-financed. Manitoba Hydro now has a building going up in the skyline of the city of Winnipeg that probably will be in excess of \$300 million, which is going to be, believe it or not, Madam Deputy Speaker, debt-financed. We have got no plan in place to retire debt, but it seems they've got a great plan in place to acquire debt. That is going to come back to haunt every taxpayer, every person who resides in this province. It's going to come back and it's going to sit on our shoulders, unfortunately, and there is no plan on debt. But we're going to get into debt a little bit longer when we have an opportunity to speak at third reading.

Taxation: The minister has mentioned and read a number of the clauses in Bill 28 with respect to taxation. He told you of all the wonderful things that he and his government are going to do in reduction of taxes over the next little while. But what he didn't tell you is every other jurisdiction in western Canada has been head and shoulders above the province of Manitoba and this Finance Minister. They've already reduced their taxation levels. They've already put into place a reduction of taxes that's going to attract people to come and reside in their jurisdictions and their provinces. We're losing them. For every little, minor, Mickey Mouse step that this government takes, there are other jurisdictions that are taking giant leaps. That, unfortunately, is again going to come back and haunt us, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We're going to talk about those levels of taxation, whether they be personal taxes. We have the highest personal tax rates. We are not indexed. We have a thing called bracket creep in this province. So the more you make, the more the government gets. They aren't going up with respect

to inflation on the brackets. Our brackets are the lowest in western Canada. Right now, anything over \$66,000 that you earn is taxed at the highest rate. In British Columbia, if we lived there, \$115,000 is the limit before you hit the high taxation rate. That, in itself, is certainly a detriment to the economic growth in this province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we're going to talk about the taxes corporately. We have the highest corporate tax. We have the only—the minister read off a clause about payroll taxes and how he's changing the limits of payroll tax. Well, we're the only province that has a payroll tax in western Canada. So the minister can be very proud of the fact that he's going to change the limits. The fact is we still are competing with other jurisdictions with respect to payroll tax.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm going to stop now because, certainly, we're going to have a lot of opportunity to debate this in third reading. I would like to acknowledge the fact that the minister is certainly going to be answerable to, not only the taxes, but the spending that this legislation speaks to. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'm speaking to this bill and would like to make a few comments. We see that there are big gaps in terms of the budget, in terms of what it's doing and not doing. Yes, it should have put forward an optimum environment for business and optimum tax which provides the opportunity for business to grow, but provides, at the same time, the revenue for government to be able to provide those functions for Manitobans that we need.

Certainly, there are some big gaps in this budget. Let me give one example that was clarified in Estimates. There is no dollar put there in terms of the environmental liabilities with respect to the clean-up of Lake Winnipeg. I think every MLA in this Chamber recognizes that there is a substantial amount of dollars that are going to have to be spent, but that environmental liability is not even recorded here. It should be.

We have concern about the accuracy of some of the other environmental liabilities for some of the sites up north, Kississing Lake, Lynn Lake, and others. There is nothing in here with regard to any liabilities with respect to the Crocus Investment Fund scandal, and the problems that have arisen as a result of the class action lawsuit that is directed at the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) in this particular

government. We have no liability with respect to sorting out the problem of pensions of retired teachers and that has certainly been discussed quite well recently in the Legislature and is something which must be done. This government has dilly-dallied on that subject for quite some time but it's not addressed in a way that it should have been addressed and the way that all the members of this Chamber need know, that at some point it will have to be addressed properly.

I would suggest that, in terms of the area of health care, there are real problems in this budget in terms of failing to address the issues of accountability in health care, a failure to make the switch from global budgets to budgets for services actually delivered, and there is a problem here in terms of how it addresses the waste under the NDP in health care at the moment. I pointed out just earlier this week that 30 percent of antibiotics in many circumstances are being used inappropriately, a huge waste in terms of dollars. At the same time, a failure to provide dollars for some critical medications for people with certain types of cancer. A real failure in terms of good, solid organization and accountability in terms of health care, and it's not addressed.

There is a failure to address issues which surround poverty. Again, an issue which has been front and centre last week on the international day of poverty. There's not an adequate plan; there's not a commitment, as we Liberals have asked for, to reduce the incidence of child poverty by half in four years. Clearly, that was missing in this budget.

There are issues that I was talking about earlier today in terms of the application of Jordan's Principle, that the child has to be considered first. Now, albeit that the bulk of the expenditures here are federal, and that's exactly where they should be, but there needs to be commitment to have a system in which Jordan's Principle is the paramount principle, the operation of child care for every child in Manitoba. It doesn't matter whether you're in Winnipeg or Norway House or Opaskwayak Cree Nation or any of many, many other communities in this province, that it is important that the child be considered first. Sadly, that principle, although the government is now starting to give some positive verbal support, that we don't yet have an implementation plan to make sure that every child is considered first. It certainly was not mentioned in the budget, and the fact that we are now starting to get a

little bit of movement can be attributed to the fact that we made that a major issue in the election, and there is at least a start of a growing recognition of the importance of moving in this particular area.

So, with these few comments about the areas which should have been there which were not, changes which were lacking, a budget which didn't meet the standards which we would expect, I will close.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, on House business, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, October 23, at 6 p.m., to deal with the following bills: Bill 6, The Adult Literacy Act; Bill 8, The Public Schools

Amendment Act; and Bill 14, The Government Purchases Amendment Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Justice has announced that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, October 23, 2007, at 6 p.m., to deal with the following bills: Bill 6, The Adult Literacy Act; Bill 8, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Regional Vocational Schools); and Bill 14, The Government Purchases Amendment Act (Responsible Manufacturing).

* * *

Madam Deputy Speaker: The debate on Bill 28 remains open, and the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise—*[interjection]*

The House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, October 22, 2007

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