

First Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| ALLAN, Nancy, Hon. | St. Vital | NDP |
| ALLUM, James | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | NDP |
| ASHTON, Steve, Hon. | Thompson | NDP |
| BJORNSON, Peter, Hon. | Gimli | NDP |
| BLADY, Sharon | Kirkfield Park | NDP |
| BRAUN, Erna | Rossmere | NDP |
| BRIESE, Stuart | Agassiz | PC |
| CALDWELL, Drew | Brandon East | NDP |
| CHIEF, Kevin, Hon. | Point Douglas | NDP |
| CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon. | Kildonan | NDP |
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| CULLEN, Cliff | Spruce Woods | PC |
| DEWAR, Gregory | Selkirk | NDP |
| DRIEDGER, Myrna | Charleswood | PC |
| EICHLER, Ralph | Lakeside | PC |
| EWASKO, Wayne | Lac du Bonnet | PC |
| FRIESEN, Cameron | Morden-Winkler | PC |
| GAUDREAU, Dave | St. Norbert | NDP |
| GERRARD, Jon, Hon. | River Heights | Liberal |
| GOERTZEN, Kelvin | Steinbach | PC |
| GRAYDON, Cliff | Emerson | PC |
| HELWER, Reg | Brandon West | PC |
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| IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon. | Fort Richmond | NDP |
| JHA, Bidhu | Radisson | NDP |
| KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon. | Swan River | NDP |
| LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon. | Dawson Trail | NDP |
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| MARCELINO, Ted | Tyndall Park | NDP |
| McFADYEN, Hugh | Fort Whyte | PC |
| MELNICK, Christine, Hon. | Riel | NDP |
| MITCHELSON, Bonnie | River East | PC |
| NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom | Interlake | NDP |
| OSWALD, Theresa, Hon. | Seine River | NDP |
| PEDERSEN, Blaine | Midland | PC |
| PETTERSEN, Clarence | Flin Flon | NDP |
| REID, Daryl, Hon. | Transcona | NDP |
| ROBINSON, Eric, Hon. | Kewatinook | NDP |
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| SARAN, Mohinder | The Maples | NDP |
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| SELBY, Erin, Hon. | Southdale | NDP |
| SELINGER, Greg, Hon. | St. Boniface | NDP |
| SMOOK, Dennis | La Verendrye | PC |
| STEFANSON, Heather | Tuxedo | PC |
| STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon. | Dauphin | NDP |
| SWAN, Andrew, Hon. | Minto | NDP |
| TAILLIEU, Mavis | Morris | PC |
| WHITEHEAD, Frank | The Pas | NDP |
| WIEBE, Matt | Concordia | NDP |
| WIGHT, Melanie | Burrows | NDP |
| WISHART, Ian | Portage la Prairie | PC |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 39—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2012

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 39, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2012, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Struthers: This bill implements measures in the 2012 Manitoba budget and makes other various amendments to tax and financial legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

PETITIONS

Personal Care Homes and Long-Term Care—Steinbach

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The city of Steinbach is one of the fastest growing communities in Manitoba and one of the largest cities in the province.

This growth has resulted in pressure on a number of important services, including personal care homes and long-term care space in the city.

Many long-time residents of the city of Steinbach have been forced to live out their final years outside of Steinbach because of the shortage of personal care homes and long-term care facilities.

Individuals who have lived in, worked in and contributed to the city of Steinbach their entire lives should not be forced to spend their final years in a place far from friends and family.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health ensure additional personal care homes and long-term care spaces are made available in the city of Steinbach on a priority basis.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by M. Friesen, A. Janz and N. Riega and thousands of other Manitobans.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I wish to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Eddie Orrell, the MLA for Cape Breton North, who is the guest of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here today.

And also in the public gallery we have with us today volunteers and board members from the West Kildonan Memorial Community Centre, who are the guests of the honourable Minister for Conservation and Water Stewardship.

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here today.

And also in the public gallery, I believe, we have with us Efi Stenzler, world chair, Jewish National Fund; Dalia Stenzler; and Mel Lazareck, president of the Jewish National Fund, prairie region, who are guests of the honourable Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism (Ms. Melnick).

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

And also in the public gallery we have two school groups. First, from Beausejour Early Years School we have 88 grade 3 and 4 students under the direction of Ms. Shannon Neustater. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

And also in the public gallery we have from Domain School 13 grade 4 to 7 students under the direction of Ms. Miranda Johnson. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome all of you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Sales Tax

Government Support of Proposed Increase

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): It's been more than a week since the Manitoba Federation of Labour brought forward their request that the government bring in an increase to the PST on hard-working Manitoba families.

In light of this Premier's track record of taking direction from unions on various initiatives in the past, including the forced unionization of the floodway, and the fact that for the past week the Premier has refused to take this tax increase off the table, will the Premier just come clean today and tell the people of Manitoba that on top of the \$182 million in new taxes contained within Bill 39 that there's even more on the way?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member raised the floodway project. It came in on time and on budget. And that one-in-700-year protection served us very well last spring as we fought the flood on the Assiniboine River. Southern Manitoba was well looked after. That billion dollars of investment we did in southern Manitoba made all the difference for people's lives down there.

And with respect to the PST, Mr. Speaker, second lowest in the country. That's our intention, to keep it that way.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, on the floodway, the only way they brought it within budget was by cutting bridges out of the project. And, you know, based on the track record, I expect we're going to see

a stadium without uprights by the time we get through that project.

But the reality is this: This is a Premier who on every significant issue along the way has said one thing and done something else. In the lead-up to the election, he said there will be no tax increases; after the election, \$184 million in tax increases in Bill 39. He said, Mr. Speaker, that he was ahead of schedule on deficit reduction; after the election he said, I'm sorry, I'm behind schedule on deficit reduction. He promised seniors and farmers that they wouldn't pay education taxes before the election; after the election, they're paying education property taxes. He broke that promise, and he's broken so many others.

We want to just ask the Premier again just to come clean and confirm to Manitoba families that they should be saving up for this next big hit coming with an increase in the PST.

Mr. Selinger: Yesterday I referred to the member's mendacity. Today I would say that he's casting aspersions where he ought not to, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: My apology to the House for not recognizing the word yesterday. There are a lot of words in the language that I have to look up definitions for from time to time. And that is one particular word, I draw the attention of the honourable First Minister and all members of the House, please, that word is not appropriate and I'm going to rule that word as being unparliamentary in our Assembly here.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Speaker. I hope you're comfortable with the word aspersions, because that's what we're seeing here today, more aspersions with respect to the—with the facts, the reality.

* (13:40)

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that the PST in this country—in this province is the second lowest in the country. Our gas tax is the second lowest in the country. The cost of living in Manitoba, the affordability of living in Manitoba puts us in the top three for all the provinces in Manitoba, and we have protected those things that matter: health care and educations, investments in roads and bridges. We're rebuilding the province's infrastructure after the billion-dollar flood hit. We will continue to—down a path of building prosperity in this province.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, and again, Mr. Speaker, and I don't know and I don't think that the Premier would

want to do it deliberately, but the fact is that Alberta has no PST and Saskatchewan has a five-point PST. So his information is incorrect, once again, in terms of the information he brings to the House.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, he promised no tax increase before the election and then hit Manitobans with \$184-million tax increase after the election. He said he was ahead of schedule on deficit reduction and then turned around after the election and admitted that that wasn't true. He promised seniors and farmers an education property tax elimination, and he hasn't followed through on that.

This is a Premier who has no problem with using and misusing the civil service in terms of the political work of the government, has no problem when a minister within his Cabinet breaks the election law. He's got no problem appointing former NDP MLAs to plum positions, in effect adding a taxpayer-funded 58th MLA.

Why should Manitobans take him at his word on the issue of the PST?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the objective of the government has always been to provide a high quality of services to Manitobans, particularly with the universal services of health care and education, while rebuilding our infrastructure and keeping our cost of living among the lowest in the country. That objective we have achieved once again in this budget.

There is one thing that changed in the last year, which the member refuses to acknowledge. And that was the largest flood we've seen in our lifetimes in the province of Manitoba, which is going to cost about a billion dollars. That flood had a material impact on our bottom line. Everybody acknowledges that except the members opposite, who did not want to support us through that flood fight.

We are making investments in southern Manitoba, which protected Manitoba through the entire Red River Valley and the city of Winnipeg to a one-in-700-year level. Then we fought the flood on the Assiniboine Valley and all throughout that part of Manitoba. And now we're in the process of building one-in-300-year protection in the city of Brandon, reinforcing the dikes and building a channel on Lake St. Martin, which will keep Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin lower than it has been in previous years.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Provincial Sales Tax Referendum on Proposed Increase

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Well, Mr. Speaker, under part 2 of the balanced budget law in Manitoba, entitled the tax referendum requirement, it states, and I quote: The government shall not present to the Legislative Assembly a bill to increase the rate of any tax imposed by an act or part of an act listed below—of which the retail sales tax is one—unless the government first puts the question of the advisability in proceeding with such a bill to the voters of Manitoba in a referendum and a majority of the persons who vote in the referendum authorize the government to proceed with the changes.

That is the law of Manitoba right now. The question is: Will the government abide by the existing law before they implement a tax hike on Manitoba hard-working families?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, what we have done is we've made a commitment, very clearly, a commitment to the people of Manitoba that we would set aside the equivalency of 1 per cent of the PST and we would dedicate that directly to roads and bridges, to infrastructure in our province.

The member for Tuxedo can lobby us all she likes to bump up the PST. She can do that if that's her wish. She should tell the people of Manitoba that that's what her goal is, if that is their goal. And then she can answer the question of whether or not they would do a referendum on that.

But, Mr. Speaker, our commitment has been clear: the equivalency of 1 per cent dedicated to Manitoba's infrastructure.

Mrs. Stefanson: One thing that's very clear, Mr. Speaker, and members opposite are stating it, is that the PST will likely go up under them—in this. They're not ruling it out.

And the question is: Will the government follow the existing tax referendum requirement and ask Manitobans whether or not they are in favour of the tax hike, or will they instead listen to their union boss buddies and go ahead and do it anyway, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: We'll do exactly what we told the people of Manitoba we will do, and that is the equivalency of 1 per cent. That was our commitment; \$262 million is what've dedicated directly to infrastructure in this province, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Manitoba know that. We've been up front with that. We're following through with it. It was contained in Budget 2012. I know the member for Tuxedo has read that budget. She's debated it in the House. We've been consistently saying our commitment is a 1 per cent equivalency. We've done that. We're following through with it, Mr. Speaker. Manitobans know that.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, in the past when this NDP government couldn't abide by the laws, they either broke it or they changed it. A referendum is clearly required under the balanced budget legislation and the laws of Manitoba in order to change the rate of the PST.

The question is, Mr. Speaker: Do they intend to follow that law, do they intend to change the law, or do they intend to break the law? Which is it?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear. None of the options that the member puts forward apply.

The option that we chose, that we chose very clearly and outlined to the people of Manitoba and received a mandate back in—on October 4th to do, is to set aside a 1 per cent equivalency and dedicate that amount of money, that \$262 million, out of a much larger budget—infrastructure and transportation budget, Mr. Speaker, that commits 2 to 1 in favour of the kind of support that we've committed to infrastructure in Manitoba.

It's a very important commitment, we think, Mr. Speaker, and it is the equivalency of 1 per cent dedicated to the infrastructure. But we stand by that, and no amount of lobbying by the member for Tuxedo is going to knock us off that commitment.

Assistant Deputy Minister Distribution of Email

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, media reports yesterday confirm that the politicization of the civil service by the Minister of Immigration go beyond the grassroots communication that she claimed and went wide and deep into the department, and staff were even asked to forward the email to everyone they could because the government wanted as many people as possible to attend the minister's political rally.

When is this minister going to provide a list of who received the email to come to the Legislature on April 19th at her bidding, Mr. Speaker? What is she afraid of?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism): Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that the very successful Manitoba model is kept intact.

We're not afraid of anything. We're not afraid of people coming into the Manitoba Legislature to see debate on the floor of this House. We're not afraid of a department that communicates with people who are calling in, who are afraid of the agenda of members opposite. We're not afraid to have people communicating, to have people talking and to have people partaking in democracy in this province.

The real question is: Why are they afraid of people being part of democracy?

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, if she's not afraid to provide the list, I expect to get it right today, Mr. Speaker.

On May 4th, we sent in a freedom of information request asking for any electronic correspondence pertaining to the April 19th, 2012, resolution debate at the Manitoba Legislature between Assistant Deputy Minister Ben Rempel and 'misterials'—ministerial staff, staff in the Department of Immigration and Multiculturalism, and settlement service organizations. It's now overdue.

Why has the minister failed to respond to this request within the legislated 30-day time frame? Is it because Ben Rempel is also the access and privacy officer in her department?

Ms. Melnick: We're not afraid of providing information, which is why two years ago this government was rated No. 1 across Canada for sharing information.

* (13:50)

The question is: Why was the member from Morris afraid to table a document in Estimates last week? She had it in her in hand. She refused to table it, Mr. Speaker. Then the next day, in this very House, she brought forward her own resolutions about sharing information—all the openness. Why wouldn't she table the letter she had in her hands?

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, I guess she didn't hear me yesterday when I told her it's her letter. She has it already.

Mr. Speaker, the ADM of Immigration has signed documents under the title, access and privacy officer for the Department of Immigration. No wonder the information about who sent the email

from Ben Rempel is not forthcoming; he's the access officer.

The minister refuses to answer questions. She stalls on access to information. She misleads the public with her fear mongering. She's eroded democracy in this province by co-opting the civil servants to do her political bidding, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Premier (Mr. Selinger) today demand the Minister of Immigration appear before a Legislative Assembly committee and answer to the public about how wide and deep her political tentacles reach into the civil service, Mr. Speaker? Manitobans have a right to know.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I'm not afraid to answer questions. I was answering questions in this House yesterday, answering questions in Estimates last week, answering questions in Brandon, answering questions in Steinbach, answering questions all around Winnipeg.

And the question is: Will this government support the Manitoba model and stand up for Manitoba? And I proudly say every member on this side of the House stood up for Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. Every member on that side of the House stood down.

High-Risk Sex Offenders Electronic Monitoring on Release

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): That's a minister who held a closed-door meeting in Steinbach and was scared to take questions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I asked the Minister of Justice why he wasn't using electronic monitoring for dangerous sex offenders who were released back into the community after their sentence. He told me that he was powerless, he couldn't do anything; if I didn't believe him, I should talk to my MP in Ottawa.

Well, I didn't believe him and I did talk to my MP in Ottawa, and lo and behold, I got a letter this morning, Mr. Speaker, from the Minister of Public Safety. It says, in relation to high-risk sex offenders who have completed a sentence but who have still believed to pose a risk to the community, a provincial Crown prosecutor can apply for a peace bond under section 810 of the Criminal Code, and that order can include electronic monitoring.

Mr. Speaker, why did this Attorney General mislead the House yesterday? Why is he not protecting Manitobans from dangerous sex offenders?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): It's very interesting how the member for Steinbach has now tried to move the goalposts and now tried to change his question.

Yesterday, of course, he wanted to talk of a specific case: somebody coming out of a federal institution on parole. And, of course, the member opposite won't stand up in the House and explain that if somebody is released from a federal institution on parole, the supervision of the individual is actually by the federal Correctional Service of Canada. And if somebody violates the terms of their parole, it is the federal Correctional Service of Canada that will take the steps to have the person perhaps breached for their parole and returned to a federal institution.

And I know the member for Steinbach, he's got his—he's got a loud voice; we know that. And today he's changing the nature of his question. He's trying to repackage, because he knows what he put yesterday on the record was incorrect.

And in my next two answers I'll be able to give more information, and I will enlighten the member for Steinbach, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: Now the minister believes that I'm wrong and the Minister of Public Safety for Canada is wrong, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite happy to table the letter that was written by the Minister for Public Safety, who indicated that the provincial Crown can simply apply for a peace bond and that peace bond can include electronic monitoring.

That is his responsibility, Mr. Speaker, but yesterday he said he couldn't do anything. He was an empty suit; he wasn't able to do anything in terms of protecting the community. Today, we have learnt, in fact, he can protect the community. He can ensure that his 'prown' prosecutors are asking for a peace bond when dangerous sex offenders are released into the community and it can include electronic monitoring.

Will he do that to protect children and protect women in Manitoba and Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Swan: Indeed, section 18—or section 810, peace bonds can be used, in fact. We've been supportive of federal Crown attorneys as they joined us in the fight—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: I'm having difficulty hearing the response to the question posed for the honourable member for Steinbach, the response from the

Minister of Justice. I'm sure if there was a breach of the rules, members would want me to rule on that, so I'm asking for your co-operation. Please lower the volume a little bit so I can hear the response and the questions.

Mr. Swan: And I was actually commending federal Crown attorneys for being part of the fight against organized crime, joined by our provincial Crown attorneys and law enforcement across the country.

The difficulty, of course, is that when there is a convicted sex offender who has served their time, whether it's in a federal institution or provincial institution, it's difficult to understand what a section 810 peace bond would say. If it is an individual who the police, in their judgment—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Swan: —who—I know the members opposite don't want to listen to the police judgment, but, frankly, I do, Mr. Speaker. If they believe somebody's in the community who poses a risk, they will make that public notification. If it is somebody who the police believe is a danger, for example, to women, it's difficult to see what kind of peace bond could prevent somebody from being in the world where 51 or 52 per cent of the population are women.

So there could be a section 810 peace bond. It would be impossible, basically impossible, to get a peace bond that would do the sorts of things—*[interjection]* The member seems to suggest a Crown attorney can simply walk into a—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, you know, it was almost like an apology, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't quite as good as the apology from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), but it was better than the non-apology from the Minister of Energy (Mr. Chomiak).

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear the attorney—the Public Safety Minister for Canada has made it clear that these peace bonds, they can restrict movement. You can add the electronic monitoring. You can stop sex offenders from going near playgrounds. You can stop sex offenders from going near schools. All of those things, it's outlined in the letter. I hope he can read it; maybe he'll learn something.

Once he learns something, I hope, Mr. Speaker, that he'll take the advice of the minister in Ottawa,

the Public Safety Minister, protect Manitobans, protect the city of Winnipeg, protect women and children and ensure that when a dangerous sex offender is released into our community that a public safety bond is applied for and ensure that there is safety for those who are at risk in our community.

Mr. Swan: Well, I can confirm to the member for Steinbach, we'll continue what we're doing, which is taking the advice of police in the province of Manitoba.

And when someone is released, again, whether it's from a federal institution and they're being monitored by the federal Correctional Service of Canada, if it's someone coming out of provincial institution under probation terms and they're being supervised by probation services, or if it is an individual who has served their term and there are no further conditions that either the feds or the provincial government can monitor, we will continue to listen to the police. And the police have the ability to decide that notification is necessary. Our provincial Crown attorneys have the ability to do various things if they believe there is a reasonable prospect of being successful.

And it's easy for the member for Steinbach to stand up and suggest something Crowns may do, without knowing anything about the law, without knowing anything about the duties and the obligations that are on Crown prosecutors. We'll continue to work with police, Crowns, things that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Minister's time has expired.

Child and Family Services Agencies Fatality of Child in Care

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): In 2010, a four-year-old defenceless little girl was returned to her mother by this minister's child and family services system. She was beaten over a five-day period before being taken for medical care. She was unconscious, virtually non-responsive, and had extensive bruises, cuts and wounds and swelling covering her head and her body. She died three days later.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Family Services why this child was returned to her birth mother after spending most of her life in foster care.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): I want to say, to begin with,

that I think, as the member opposite knows, having done the job of being minister of Family Services, that the most heartbreaking part of the job is having to learn about the horrible things that some parents do to their kids. And that's certainly been the hardest thing that I've ever had to do in my life is to read those reports and then at the end of the day go home to my own son and hold him and wonder how any parent could hurt any child. So it's—there's no other word for that, I think, than evil, frankly.

* (14:00)

In regards to the case that the member's talking about, we have put in place a system whereby every death that happens to a child who's been in care is reviewed by the office of the Children's Advocate. I know, at the time, the minister asked for that review to be 'prioritized' and it was. That review, the recommendations from that review, have been shared with the agency and the authority. They are working to implement those recommendations so they can improve the service and the care for those children.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But it's a little too late, after a child is dead, to talk about the reviews that have been put in place. Mr. Speaker, it's important that we have a system that is responding to children when they're alive and in need of protection. And this little girl, this defenceless little girl, was moved from a foster family into an unsafe situation with a birth mother that had a criminal record, and this was done by this minister's child and family services system.

Mr. Speaker, my question is: What did her system do to try to protect that little girl before the fact, before she was killed in her mother's care? What did her system do to protect that child?

Ms. Howard: As I said in my previous answer, I think one of the things that we have done is to put in place a much stronger process of reviewing deaths to make sure that there is a comprehensive review, that that review is carried out quickly by the office of the Children's Advocate, and that those recommendations go to the agencies and authorities who have been involved so that they can make sure that they're changing their processes to better protect children. Those recommendations also go to the Ombudsman's office, who reviews them and tracks the progress on them.

I know that in this situation, my understanding is that the mother involved has pled guilty to manslaughter in this case. None of that brings this child back, and I wish, I sincerely wish, that I had the

power to say that no more children in Manitoba will die, but that's not a power that I have, unfortunately. The power that I have is to work with the system, to work with the social workers, to work with the agencies that care for children every day, and to help them do the best job that they can.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But I believe it's this minister's responsibility to ensure that children aren't moved into unsafe circumstances under her watch. And she has responsibility for every child that is in care of the child and family services system here in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, it's her responsibility to set the policy and the direction that will protect children. She is—should be accountable for this little girl, for all children in Manitoba under her watch, and should be accountable to all Manitobans for what went so terribly wrong.

I know that she's seen recommendations from the reviews that have been done. Is she satisfied that those recommendations have been put in place so this will not happen again?

Ms. Howard: I want to assure the honourable member and all the members of this House that I take my responsibilities for the children of this province extremely seriously, as I know that she did when she was the minister. I know that we both share that experience of having to deal with deaths of children who are in the care or who have been in the care of the child welfare system and responding to that by doing our best to work with the system to strengthen the system.

There have been recommendations put forward. We are working with the authority and agency to make sure that they can put those recommendations in place. Some of those speak to how agencies across jurisdictions in different provinces communicate with each other to make sure that they know the case file and the history, and that children who are moving between provinces that we know that they—if they're in need of protection that we can take those actions.

And, no, I'm not satisfied that we have a perfect child welfare system, but I wake up every day dedicating myself to make it better, and that's the best I can do, Mr. Speaker.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Administrative Costs

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the most expensive regional health authority in Manitoba, the Winnipeg Regional Health

Authority, was left untouched in the minister's announcement to merge RHAs to save administrative costs.

I wonder if the Minister of Health could tell us why.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): The member is inaccurate in her statement in saying that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority isn't facing budgetary pressures and hasn't been asked by government to work very hard to amend their administrative and corporate costs.

Indeed, we passed legislation, Mr. Speaker, ahead of the mergers specifically designating the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority not exceed 2.99 per cent on corporate costs. Indeed, they are meeting and are underneath that threshold, and I might hasten to add that threshold is lower than what the members opposite said that they would hold the region to back in 2007.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, for years we've gotten more than enough spin from this Minister of Health who fails Manitoba patients on a daily basis, and while she says one thing she allows quite another thing to happen.

Mr. Speaker, the WRHA administrative costs go up each and every year despite all her rhetoric and they skyrocketed to \$105 million annually.

So I'd ask her: Why should we believe anything she says about saving administrative costs when she says one thing and then allows another?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, well, Mr. Speaker, we're all well aware, exceedingly aware that the member opposite doesn't let the facts get in the way of a good question in question period.

But the fact of the matter is that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, through legislation that we've put in place, is holding their corporate costs at under 2.99 per cent. That's absolutely a fact.

Furthermore, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, an entirely independent body, tracks our hospital costs as trending down on administrative measurements. The rest of Canada, we see, Mr. Speaker, is trending up. Manitoba is a performer in trending down.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—this year it has been given the task of finding \$14 million in administrative and corporate savings. So for her to stand up today to say

that they're untouched is factually, completely, wholly, thoroughly false.

Mrs. Driedger: This all coming from a Minister of Health who broke an election law because she was so desperate to have her photo op. She has no credibility in this House anymore, Mr. Speaker, with her answers.

Half of the Department of Health is led by three people who are secondments from the WRHA. And I would note that in that legislation of bringing RHAs together and forcing them to merge, the WRHA wasn't asked in that legislation or in her announcement to show any administrative savings; that was omitted from her public statements. But her department is led by three people who are seconded from the WRHA: the deputy minister and two assistant deputy ministers, one of those who is also a former NDP political staffer.

So I want to ask the Minister of Health to guarantee, despite the perception of conflict of interest out there, to guarantee that there is no favouritism by her department with the WRHA.

Ms. Oswald: So far I've corrected the record by pointing out to the member that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority is being held to 2.99 per cent on corporate costs. In addition, they're being asked to take on a \$14-million exercise in finding savings in administration and corporate costs and bulk purchasing.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has merged with the Churchill Regional Health Authority. I know that most people in this room know that some of the challenges that come with health disparities for those that are living in the north are the most significant that our province and, indeed, our country faces. I think now is the time for us to ensure that we're doing the best that we can collectively to improve the health status of Aboriginal people, but you never hear the member talking about that.

Vitamin D Deficiency Occurrence in Children

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, one of the most basic aspects of health care is ensuring that children receive the nutrition and the healthy living experience so that they are not deficient in basic vitamins. One of the most basic of the vitamins is vitamin D, and yet there're examples in the last few years of children in Manitoba who are

either deficient in vitamin D who are in—or are insufficient in vitamin D levels.

I ask the Minister for Healthy Living to indicate to this Chamber today the proportion of children in Manitoba who have levels of vitamin D which are either deficient or insufficient.

*(14:10)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from the question so I can put on the record, again, we do have a prenatal benefit for all young, pregnant mothers in Manitoba that does provide them with healthy foods and those things necessary to have a healthy pregnancy.

As the member knows, we have a Northern Healthy Foods program. I was just looking at the annual report. Over 800 in the report—gardening projects in northern Manitoba have greenhouse projects. We do provide a variety of programs in the school system for school nutrition, Mr. Speaker. We do have programs for traditional fishing and hunting as well as gathering and food preservation programs. We even have a revolving fund in the north which allows people to buy freezers, and through that revolving fund—and be able to store fresh fruit and vegetables in their community.

So we are doing a number of initiatives on food security that will help people have a nutritious diet to address the concern the member has raised from River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, a typical NDP approach: We'll throw out lots of programs, but we won't measure to see if they're actually having an effect.

Mr. Speaker, vitamin D is one of the most basic of vitamins. It can be obtained through sunshine, but in our climate, most people don't probably get enough sunshine in the winter and this is probably one of the reasons why vitamin D deficiency is quite common—and insufficiency.

Vitamin D is present in milk, and yet the price of milk in northern Manitoba is so high that few families can afford it. The government has steadfastly refused year after year to support the Liberal initiative for a single price of milk throughout Manitoba, although this year the government has indicated it might do something, possibly. So far no action has been taken.

I ask the Premier: When will his government act?

Mr. Selinger: As I said earlier, not only do we have a variety of community gardens, we have over 60 greenhouses in northern Manitoba as well, and none of these resources existed a decade ago.

And the reality is, Mr. Speaker, we also have seen a reduction in the price of milk in northern Manitoba, and to be fair, that reduction is through changes that the federal government has made in their program to provide healthy foods in the North. But those of us that have had the chance to visit northern Manitoba recently have been monitoring the situation. We have seen a reduction in the cost of milk in northern Manitoba and we think we can take that cost down even lower as we go forward, so those people that aren't lactose intolerant do have access to milk.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, when I was in northern Manitoba not long ago, in a remote community, the prices were still extraordinarily high.

Vitamin D is vital for the development of healthy bones to reduce the incidence of dental caries and may be also of help to protect people from diseases, including infections, autoimmune diseases, and possibly cancer. The widespread presence of vitamin D deficiency and insufficiency in northern Manitoba has been known for two decades, and yet this government has done nothing. And by the way, it's not high in vegetables, so greenhouses are probably irrelevant in terms of vitamin D.

The provision of milk alone is not enough, Mr. Speaker, and I ask the Premier why his government, in 12 and a half years in power, has not been proactive in ensuring that vitamin D deficiency and vitamin D insufficiency are eliminated in our province.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question and the response is this: that a decade ago, there was nothing in the north in terms of greenhouses or geodesic domes; now there are 59, according to the annual report that has been tabled in this Legislature. It is available to the member from River Heights, as well as every member of the House. There are 80 communities that are participating, over 800 gardens; 435 loan freezer purchase program have—loan freezer purchases have occurred under the program, refrigeration units of three. Livestock, chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks and goats have been made available to over 13 communities.

We have a prenatal 'benefit'—we are the first province in the—in Canada that bought 'froar'—

brought forward a prenatal benefit program under our Healthy Child program. We have nurses that visit young mothers. We have home visitors that stay with young mothers as they go through the early stages of becoming a parent. And all of these are intended to have healthy children with healthy nutrients and healthy lifestyles.

Grand Beach Provincial Park West Beach Blue Flag Designation

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, Grand Beach is one of our jewels in our park system. I'm proud to have it part of my constituency. I think all members would agree it's one of the best beaches in the world.

Can the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship inform the House about a recent designation awarded to this Manitoba treasure?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, Manitoba was certainly kicking sand yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when we discovered that—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Mackintosh: Oh yes, yes. I know the members opposite don't like good news. I think we should all celebrate the good news about Grand Beach, and I—if I could just have a moment, I'm sure that the—we'll actually see the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) there, I'm sure, at the volleyball net, and I want him to appreciate what is being recognized beyond Manitoba, because I think that we have long recognized that, indeed, Grand Beach is a jewel.

But yesterday, Manitoba was pleased to announce that Grand Beach, the west beach, has been recognized as one of 17 Blue Flag beaches in Canada. And I want to just say that this was—the Blue Flag Programme is actually endorsed by the United Nations and it's run by the Foundation for Environmental Education, based in Denmark. They looked at 33 criteria. It's very demanding, and I can say that the judges said the following: they congratulate Grand Beach on its outstanding environmental education program, its—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Pinawa Hospital Possible Closure

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, meaningful community consultation is an

important part of delivering responsive and comprehensive health services.

The recent amalgamation of Manitoba's regional health authorities involve little to no consultation with our local health-care community. As a result, there is confusion, anxiety and serious concern about the future health care in the Pinawa area. My constituents have heard that the Pinawa Hospital will close and will be turned into a personal care home. Closing the hospital would have serious impact on Pinawa, its residents, as well as the 30 to 35 thousand Manitobans who call the Lac du Bonnet constituency home for the summer months.

Can the Minister of Health commit today to my constituents and many other Manitobans that she will not close the Pinawa Hospital?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question. Of course, we have recently amalgamated regional health authorities, from 11 that were existing to five regional health authorities. We know that each of the pre-existing 11 boards appointed members on—which were appointed from across each region, passed a motion to agree to go forward with the mergers.

The new regional health authorities on capital planning will continue to do what they have done, and that is consult with the community. In fact, we're legislating a local health information network that will be required—local health involvement group that will be required. They will, of course, have a say on capital planning in the region. The region will prioritize.

And I can say to the member that the only time I heard hospitals being discussed to be closed was when the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) was scaring people in west Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to draw—prior to members' statements, I want to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Green Valley School 10 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Carrie Dennis. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook).

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Kelby Loeppky

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): I rise to draw the attention of this House to Kelby Loeppky, recipient of a 2012 Prairie Award of Promise at the 36th Annual YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards Gala. These awards recognize the achievements of women in a variety of fields, like the arts, education, volunteerism, communications, science, technology and health. The Prairie Award of Promise is presented each year to a graduating high school student and includes a \$2,000 scholarship for post-secondary studies.

Kelby's record of scholastic and extracurricular achievements and activities certainly speaks for itself. During her three years as starting setter on the school's volleyball—or varsity girls' volleyball team, Kelby led the team to the provincial championships twice and helped raised their ranking into the top 10. She was named Garden Valley Collegiate's Junior Varsity Girls Athlete of the Year for 2010. Kelby has an interest in student government. She currently serves as the co-president for GVC's student council.

*(14:20)

Community service is also an important part of Kelby's life. Just weeks ago, she helped organize a pledge wall of pink at Garden Valley Collegiate to remind students of the reality of bullying and that it's everyone's duty to take a stand. It's encouraging to see youth taking an interest in community and world issues and acting on their convictions to help and encourage others as Kelby has done.

Principal Scott Jantzen, who nominated Kelby, cited her incredible demonstration of potential, noting that within Garden Valley Collegiate, Kelby is viewed as a student leader whose focus is on excellence and on ensuring that GVC is a great learning environment for all students.

Kelby—her involvement in student governments, school groups, sports and the community will prepare her for future challenges, and Kelby will undoubtedly tackle these future challenges with the same resolve and determination she has shown in her current pursuits.

I was pleased to attend the Women of Distinction gala and witness Kelby winning this award with her parents, grandparents and others cheering her on.

I congratulate Kelby Loeppky on receiving a 2012 Women of Distinction Prairie Award of Promise. I wish her every success as she closes out her grade 12 year and prepares to attend university in the fall. I am confident that she will accomplish much and give her best to those around her.

West Kildonan Memorial Community Centre

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Community centres are founded on the principles of inclusiveness, fellowship and healthful activity. They can be hubs in their respective communities for people of all ages, but especially for young people, to build positive relationships and learn important lifelong skills. So it's with this in mind that I congratulate the West Kildonan Memorial Community Centre for 65 great years.

Located in the heart of West Kildonan, this small but vital community centre was founded in 1947 and named in recognition of the many West Kildonan citizens who served Canada in the Second World War. Upon their return, they, with their families, put down deep roots and built a strong and vibrant community. The West Kildonan Memorial Community Centre is a legacy that has served generations of neighbourhood children.

Over the past 65 years, the centre has grown and been able to add facilities and programs to better serve the people. The arena was built in 1967 to celebrate Canada's centennial, and in 1970 a recreation centre was built as Manitoba—as a Manitoba centennial project.

Today there is still an outdoor hockey rink, and while free public skating and community club hockey are very popular programs at the centre, a wide array of activities reflecting the diversity of the neighbourhood are offered. Volunteers work hard to ensure that reasonably priced activities are made available to the area youth, including dance programs, tae kwon do, yoga, kids' bingo, soccer and baseball. The centre also runs a popular farmers' market in the summer and houses the excellent Tiny Tots preschool program.

Mr. Speaker, a community centre provides us, especially our youth, with a central place to meet and engage. Without a doubt, West Kildonan community—Memorial Community Centre is one great place thanks to the hard work of many dedicated people over 65 years. I commend these people, including Bryan and Randy and, of course,

Darlene [*phonetic*], who are here today, for keeping that legacy alive and well.

So keep up the great work, people, and, hey, go Cougars. Okay.

Mr. Speaker: Any further members' statements?

Maples Community Centre

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, today I am glad to rise and tell you that the improvements to the Maples Community Centre and the Maples Collegiate outdoor facilities are complete. I attended the official grand opening to celebrate the renovations on May 31st.

Athletes of all ages and skill levels gather at the Maples Community Centre and the collegiate, which are in the heart of the neighbourhood. The cracked pavement of the former track has been replaced. A drainage and irrigation system has been added to the sports field. These renovations will give residents a place to play and compete safely.

All three levels of governments and the Seven Oaks School Division contributed funding towards the construction of a new track, an all-purpose field and bleachers. The Province contributed \$100,000. The Province of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg also each contributed \$125,000 under the Building Communities Initiative to upgrade the outdoor basketball and the—and tennis courts.

It is important for all Manitobans to live active and healthy lives. Improvements to recreational facilities make our communities better places to live. In particular, sports gives young people fun and safe ways to spend their time.

The project is close to my heart, and I enjoyed working with the community to make it happen. I would like to thank and congratulate local residents, including staff and volunteers at the Maples Community Centre as well as the Seven Oaks school board, who worked hard to achieve this goal. The Maples is a wonderful place to live. The community is growing, and we expect it will continue to grow in the coming years. I look forward to the projects we will work on together in the future to make it even stronger. Thank you.

Food Development Centre

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): A recent \$7.74-million investment in the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie from the Government of Canada's Western Economic Diversification,

Canada's Community Adjustment Fund, and the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agricultural Flexibility Fund, in partnership with the government of Manitoba, has brought new jobs, innovation and new technologies to the processing capabilities of Portage la Prairie and Manitoba's agrifood industry. This could mean 60 or more new high-skilled and sustainable jobs in food processing in the Portage la Prairie area.

The Food Development Centre expansion is designed to simplify research and product development as well as access to services from the Department of Agriculture, Foods and Rural Initiatives. For example, the Canadian Prairie Garden Puree Products Inc. will be able to develop their new—their unique technology creating puree products for export to global markets. Other locally grown products will begin seeing new equity, and it could save—greatly save—on waste as well. It's a win-win situation for agriculture and research and development.

The expanded facilities include training rooms, dry labs, processing space, a warehouse expansion and office space. Of particular value is the value-added suites that allow emerging businesses to operate on location until they are ready to operate on their own. Renovations are designed to be capable of keeping certain products separate, such as dairy, eggs, gluten, nuts, soy, organic and non-organic products. Along with renovations and upgrades to the existing facility, I am very happy to see their scale of technological innovation and job growth in Portage la Prairie through the FDC.

This initiative will bring lasting benefits to the entire agrifood industry in Manitoba and western Canada for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Vitamin D Deficiency

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to speak for a moment on the importance of addressing the issue of vitamin D in our province. Vitamin D deficiency in northern Manitoba was shown to be very common 20 years ago with an article in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, which showed that 43 per cent of children and 76 per cent of mothers had the 25-hydroxy vitamin D level below the normal range. That was children who were in the communities of St. Theresa Point and Garden Hill, communities which were very affected by the H1N1 flu.

Much more recently an article that was present in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* shows that vitamin D deficiency, rickets, is persistent in Canada, particularly among children who reside in the north and among infants with darker skin who are breast fed without appropriate vitamin D supplementation.

Indeed, the article points out that the Canadian Paediatric Society has recommended that for the prevention of rickets and the health of children, that infants and children receive 400 international units of vitamin D per day either through diet or supplementation.

And over the last number of years it's become increasingly apparent that vitamin D is very important not only for preventing dental caries and bone—ensuring good bone growth, but vitamin D may have a critical role in preventing infections, autoimmune diseases, perhaps even in diabetes and even more strongly, it would now appear, in preventing cancer.

Sadly, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) did not have basic information today that he should have had at his fingertips about the number and proportion of children in Manitoba who are deficient or insufficient in vitamin D. Sadly, the Premier was misinformed when he started talking about greenhouses, because vegetables are not a significant source of vitamin D and are basically irrelevant to this discussion.

Milk is very important, and the government has refused to have what Liberals have been campaigning for for many years: a single price of milk throughout the province. And supplements can play an important role too.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

* (14:30)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to calling of grievances, I want to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Brigitta and Stefan Schuler, who are the family members of the honourable member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here today.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Grievances? Seeing none, move on to orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, would you please call second reading of bills 6, 21, 7 and 34.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 6—The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Improved Fiscal Responsibility and Community Involvement)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call debate on second readings of bills 6 and 21, 7 and 34, starting with Bill 6, The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Improved Fiscal Responsibility and Community Involvement), standing in the name of the honourable member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu).

Is there leave for this matter to remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Morris?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I really appreciate the opportunity to get up and put a few comments on the record about Bill 6. It is about the regional health authorities, and it is about amending them with the intent, hopefully, to improve fiscal responsibility and community involvement.

Now, Mr. Speaker, while we support the intent of this legislation, because we have been great champions of asking for greater accountability and transparency within the health-care system, we do not have any confidence that this government is going to do what they say it is going to do. We've seen time and again where the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) says one thing and we see quite the opposite happening. So, while we support the intent of this bill, we do look forward to it moving to committee. We do look forward to the input that we will hear from community presenters on this. And we will look forward to seeing whether or not the intent of this bill will actually come to fruition.

This bill does aim to impose greater accountability and transparency practices on regional health authorities in a variety of ways. And it also puts in place new policies relating to employee contracts and provides a framework to decrease RHA admin costs. We have been bringing this issue up on RHA admin costs ever since the NDP formed government, and it has been something that has absolutely skyrocketed under the NDP. So, while we

are very supportive of decreasing admin costs, we are totally skeptical that this government can do it, because they have allowed administrative costs within RHAs to absolutely explode under their watch.

So, while there's a lot of rhetoric and spin from the Minister of Health about her commitment to do this, and that they're doing better, what's actually happening on the ground is very different from her rhetoric, and admin costs are at an all-time high. I believe they're in the vicinity of \$159 million a year in this province—just going to administer the regional health authorities. Of that—\$105 million of those costs are borne by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and despite the minister's spin in question period today, in fact, there was nothing in her legislation or in her public announcement that there was any intention of the WRHA being expected to rein in any of their bureaucratic costs. So, while she says something in the House, what is actually happening out there is very different. And knowing how much she loves photo ops, why didn't she just go out there, then, and do a photo op and tell the public what her expectations were about the WRHA reining in bureaucratic costs? She didn't do that. None of that was public information.

So administrative costs under this government have absolutely ballooned, and the concern around that is the fact that it takes a lot of money away from front-line health care. And when we became opposition, year after year we brought this forward. Finally, the government started to pay a little bit of attention to it; and then what did they do? Because the public anger was starting to really bubble out there, the government actually allowed the WRHA to change how they reported their bureaucratic costs. And what the WRHA did, instead of just reporting their own corporate headquarter costs, as they had been doing, they then merged all of those costs in with the whole administrative costs across the system. And, Mr. Speaker, even after doing that the costs continued to go up year after year, tens of millions of dollars higher than what it was.

This government likes to say, well, they brought together the two Winnipeg regional health authorities, merged them into one and save money. Well, at the beginning, in 1999, those two regional health authorities only cost something like \$6 million in admin costs; now it's \$105 million. So there's so much incorrect information and spin put on issues by this government that—and the other part about it is this government really believes it's spin, and they're

very good at, actually, their spin and I will give them credit for that.

Unfortunately, their information is very misleading, and it's not giving the public a true picture about what is happening with costs within the health-care system. So the admin costs have grown to be something that is very detrimental, I think, to the health-care system. We see problems on a daily basis in Manitoba based on the many challenges in health care, and if you look at all the money that's being siphoned away and put into admin costs rather than into patient care, it is alarming.

So, Mr. Speaker, the other point on the government making their announcement that they are going to force this merger of RHAs and they're going to find \$10 million in administrative costs, we're not sure where they got the \$10 million from. They said the same thing when they forced school divisions to amalgamate and, again, there they used \$10 million. Is it a coincidence that they've cherry-picked the same number? I don't know. But they indicated that when they forced the amalgamation of school divisions that we would actually see \$10 million in savings and, in fact, that is absolutely not what happened. In fact, school division costs just skyrocketed. Bigger isn't always better, but good planning is what might have made it better.

Unfortunately, with this legislation, it looks like it's more smoke and mirrors than it actually is about a vision for health care. There's absolutely no vision for health care in this bill. All the government has done, and it's obvious with the chaos that we're hearing is occurring within the health-care system right now with this forced amalgamation, there's no vision. The government scrambled before the last budget and they scrambled to put this together with absolutely no consultation with the public; we've heard that. We are hearing from all across Manitoba that nobody was consulted about this. Aboriginal groups have asked for a voice in consultation. They didn't get any; nobody did. Instead, on a napkin or maybe on one of these little doilies that we use in the House, maybe that's where they crafted their position. But there was no vision to what is in this legislation. If you're going to change regional health authority structure in a province, surely to goodness it could have been done with more insight, more forethought, more consultation, more expertise, and there's none of that.

So now what we're hearing, and it's actually very disturbing what we're hearing, is the chaos that's out

there, the low staff morale in the Department of Health and across Manitoba, people not sure who's going to have jobs now. You know, here today, we're hearing about unions now that are going to be fighting to see who's going to get to represent the 3,000 members out in western Manitoba. There's absolute chaos out there. If the government had done this right, and if it would have been about a vision for health care, we wouldn't be seeing and experiencing what we are now.

Other provinces at least have taken and made the effort to have a better look at what they were doing rather than scrambling and putting something together the way this government has done. So, while the intent of the bill is valuable, we really are concerned about the process the government is using right now in order to move it forward.

* (14:40)

And, based on all their past failures, it's really, really hard to see how this government is somehow going to reduce administrative costs by amalgamating RHAs. In fact, if you were to look at the travel costs right now across all of the RHAs, it's something like \$21 million a year that RHAs—of the 11 RHAs that are spent on travel costs. Now that they've made these regions so huge, I have no idea how they think they're going to save money because there will be much greater travel costs in these regions than what they had before.

So I don't know where they get the \$10 million from. Is it just the 35 staff that they said that they're going to fire? Is that where they intend to find their savings? That's the one thing that is so unclear out there. Nobody has a clue as to where this government is going to find their savings. So it's put everybody on edge.

So, Mr. Speaker, time and time again we have seen gross financial mismanagement from RHAs because of a lack of oversight of this government. All we have to do right now is look at the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority, and before that, Burntwood Regional Health Authority. What happened in NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority was something that this government should have been in front of and should have prevented.

Instead, we saw very, very significant abuse of health-care dollars being spent in ways that it wasn't meant to be spent, and people have since lost their jobs because of it. I don't know if fraud is too strong a word to use, but certainly there was abuse and

mismanagement of finances at the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't the government that discovered it. It was a whistleblower that came forward, that brought forward the abuses of spending in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority. And it points to something that is critical and that no legislation is going to solve for this government: If you do not have government oversight on these issues, if you do not have leadership by the government, no amount of legislation is going to fix the problem. This government should have been on top of what happened there. There have been enough concerns expressed by the public in our northern health authorities that this government just ignored.

Hundreds of people have come together to have their voice heard in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority, and before that, in Burntwood—hundreds of people. And this government did not listen to them. Now they're going to change their district health advisory councils and turn them into something else. I have absolutely no faith that what they are going to do is going to give communities a bigger voice. They ignore the voices. They ignored what was happening in NOR-MAN, and I don't know how you can ignore that many voices. They ignored the voices in—from southwestern Manitoba, of people coming together with very, very credible information and advice to the government. The government doesn't listen.

So, sure, you can bring in all kinds of legislation, but if the government is not listening, if the government doesn't respect the voice of the communities, if the government doesn't have any oversight of spending, how is any legislation going to fix the problem, because the problem is at the top. The problem is with the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and the lack of oversight and the—her lack of understanding about what is going on in the health-care system.

Mr. Speaker, when the RHAs formed, we asked this government to put a plan in place and, in fact, it was the first Minister of Health who said that it wasn't the job of him or his department to put forward a strategic plan for health care. As he said, we have, and I quote, no grand scheme. Well, indeed, they didn't have a grand scheme, and because of that RHAs have floundered because how are the RHAs supposed to know which direction to take if the government isn't setting the strategy and setting

the direction for the province? Nobody knows what their priorities are. I've asked this government time and time again, you know, how are RHAs and the public supposed to know what the strategy is for health care in Manitoba? And the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), the current Minister of Health, said, well, actually, just look at our election platform. Well, that's not a strategy, Mr. Speaker. That's not a vision for health care. And a lot of their health promises were cherry-picking. It wasn't about a grand vision for health care, and that is the job of the Minister of Health.

When I look at what's happening in Saskatchewan right now, where they do have input from all of the RHAs coming forward to the Minister of Health, then the Minister of Health actually takes into account what the RHAs have put forward, and the government moulds it all together and puts forward an annual strategic plan for the province. So, in Saskatchewan, you look at them, you can see what their goals are, what their measurements criteria are, you can see when they want to achieve something, and you can actually tell whether or not they're achieving something.

In Manitoba, we don't have that. In fact, a few years ago, this government cancelled performance agreements with RHAs. Well, how are RHAs supposed to know what this government wants when the government doesn't even have a performance agreement with them? And so you can see the RHAs have been really put at a disadvantage in many ways, and this government hides behind them, but they give them a very short amount of direction.

When we look at the Auditor General's report from a number of years ago—where the Auditor General went out and talked to all the CEOs of the RHAs, talked to the chairmen of the boards, or chairpersons of the boards for RHAs, and then talked to government—wow, what different pictures of what everybody thought was happening in Manitoba. And, certainly, this government was presenting everything through rose-coloured glasses, pretending that it was all so good, when, in fact, the RHAs said the government didn't give them adequate information to do their jobs; the government micromanaged; the government stuck their noses in at times—at many times, actually. And that was very hard for them to do their jobs.

One of the things that the government is doing in this legislation, now, is really taking control of the CEOs. And right from the Department of Health, I

think there's going to be this downward thrust of power, where CEOs are going to have to, I think, watch every step, watch everything they say, because now the deputy minister is going to be able to make a lot of decisions about whether those CEOs are going to keep their job, not keep their job. What's going to happen? How are these CEOs going to speak up for their communities? That's their job—is to speak up for their communities, to speak up for patients, to speak up for staff.

Now, there is some real concern from many people in the health-care system at the amount of power that is now put in place at the deputy minister's position to control what all of these CEOs are going to do and say. And you know, I don't mind, and nobody minds, accountability and transparency and expectations, and telling, you know, CEOs or management within RHAs, you know, some of the rules, and having rules. We all have to live by that, and I think there should be a lot of transparency about how CEOs spend, you know, money and use expenses. We all have to do that. That is not unusual, but there's something more pervasive that is potentially going to happen here, and there is a huge amount of concern about that being expressed at many, many levels.

So we didn't have a grand scheme, and I think that that's how this government—that's one of the big ways they've failed RHAs and patients in Manitoba, and then they wouldn't review regional health authorities. We said, you know, yes, we brought them in. They should have been evaluated at about a five-year mark. Year after year after year, I can remember asking: do an evaluation; there are problems, there are issues. We brought them out; this government ignored it. They waited for 10 years before they even reviewed the regional health authorities, and by then, Mr. Speaker, what we have are behaviours and systems so entrenched that it's hard to unscramble that egg, And you just—you can't do it.

*(14:50)

And perhaps some of the opportunities for correcting problems could have happened, but it didn't. And so we ended up allowing a lot of things to go unchecked and unchallenged for 10 years, and then we did have a—the government did move forward and did put in place a task force to review regional health authorities, and when you read through that, it is pretty scathing—some of their comments—and the gaps that they point out by this

government. And, you know, they did. They pointed out a lot of gaps, and I don't think the government paid a whole lot of attention to it.

You know, one of them, certainly, was the fact that Manitoba Health should establish clear and transparent processes to provide regular and clear feedback to RHAs on their performance measures. Well, what performance measures? We don't have performance agreements.

You know, the government was given a lot of good advice, and it was a very thick report, and the NDP, again as they, you know, do, do a report, ignore the report, it gathers dust and now here we are, you know, 12 and a half years later, they're scrambling and they're trying to force a massive change onto the health-care system without getting all their ducks in a row, and it is creating such chaos out there.

All we have to see is how they handled the midwifery program in Manitoba. They were so anxious to beat us to the punch on that that they—in an election—that they scrambled, they threw it together. Now, we've got a—the whole northern program for midwifery collapsed. We've got a lawsuit going on. We've got four students suing this government, because they made such a mess.

And now, they're making a mess again on something that, this time round, is affecting a lot of people. And, Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing to hear. I wish the government would've taken more time to—and they've had lots of time. They've had 12 and a half years. It didn't have to take them till now. They could've been doing this. And they certainly could have put together something that would've been a vision—not just a bill that's going to try to plug a few holes based on, you know, some incidences that have just recently happened.

The bill is also watering down these district health advisory councils and replacing them with the new local health involvement groups. Again, this is so vague. The government says, well, they're going to go out and do consultations. Their track record is so poor at listening to the community, I don't know why anybody would even have faith in them with this.

Now, the other things I'm really worried about, and that is what is happening to staff morale within the Department of Health. I am very worried about what I'm hearing. I'm very worried about the morale. I'm very concerned that many people within the

Department of Health feel that the department—the environment has now become toxic. And that is very disappointing to hear, because here we have our caregivers, our leaders—some great innovators within that department—that should be healthy, and they're the ones developing Health policy. And then we're hearing that within Manitoba Health, the environment is toxic. And I think that just reinforces all of the comments that I'm making, not just today, on this bill, but about how this government does business. And it's creating an environment where people are not happy to work in. And if we don't have a healthy front lines, if we don't have respect for them, if we don't care for them, if we ignore them and treat them like they don't matter, and then just, you know, put through a bill like this that is causing chaos and confusion out there and is just going to make life so difficult for so many people, you know, this just isn't good for the health-care system in Manitoba.

So I think this government scrambled to put forward this legislation. It got bigger headlines than what it deserved. It's not going to solve the problem of the glaring—glaring—lack of government oversight and the poor government oversight is just, you know, starting to show up more and more and more.

It's hard to think that after, you know, 12 and a half years that the government is all of a sudden going to change its behaviour. You know, they've allowed RHA admin costs to skyrocket. They, you know, say, oh, we're controlling them, things are better. The Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) stands in here all the time and talks about what a great job she's doing. Well, no, she's not. These admin costs have gone through the roof. And while this minister, and I know it's her job to defend what's happening, you'd think she'd do it with a little bit more humbleness, maybe, because she's saying one thing while quite another thing is happening.

And so I think because the government—and maybe it does come down to government arrogance thinking they can do whatever they want for all this time and that they're never going to get called on it or they're going to get away with it because nobody's really paying attention. I think they just have, you know, done what they've wanted. They've done it without a grand scheme and then just recently they realized, oh, health spending is way out of control, and they've allowed it to get that way.

Now, you know, we saw in the last election basically a flip-flop on the road to the election when

they realized they were out of touch with the public. The public does not want money spent on administration. They want it to go to front-line care. So the government has staunchly defended all of that, and then all of a sudden on the road to the election they thought, oh, oh, better do something about this. They were asleep at the switch and then they had to change. Unfortunately, the change is coming through a piece of legislation that I don't think is really going to change much.

The other significant concern, and I raised it in question period today, is that the WRHA and Manitoba Health are too enmeshed and entangled and there are unclear lines of accountability, and because of this there are perceptions out there of potential conflicts of interest.

When we have the deputy minister and two ADMs seconded from the WHRA making big decisions about the WRHA and about other RHAs and making significant decisions, it really does raise a lot of concern about potential conflicts of interest. Because who's their master? Nobody really knows, and every single Health minister on that side has staunchly defended this.

They do not have a clear understanding that there is a perception out there of conflict of interest, and it's too bad because one of those ADMs is also a former political staffer. I think, you know, he was an NDP political staffer. So here you have a civil servant now, I mean, who's his master? I mean, he was wed to the NDP Party, their policies, their priorities. NDP put him into the WRHA so he could gather information there, brought him back here, made him an ADM. Well, who does that person have his loyalties with? He's a former political staffer made an assistant deputy minister. So here, again, the civil service is corrupted by the NDP.

And, Mr. Speaker, the fact that there are no accountability agreements between Manitoba Health and the regional health authorities really doesn't allow for an accountability mechanism to allow for adequate evaluation of RHA performance. So the government has really cherry-picked some issues, put them into this legislation and these issues really are not about fixing the health-care system or fixing the problems in there, and the sooner they realize it the quicker they might be able to get a better handle on all of this.

* (15:00)

So, Mr. Speaker, I see that my time is almost up. I would note that accountability is thin when it comes to health care in Manitoba. There is no grand scheme or grand vision for health care. The RHAs scramble to do their best, but they're not given any direction.

We don't have a health quality council here. Every other province has a health quality council that—arm's length, that evaluates the health-care system—and, I note, with great success, that they're having, for instance, in Saskatchewan with that. I wish we had something like this too, and then it would prevent the NDP from manipulating information too.

So, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to the public comments that are coming forward from committee. We support the intent of the legislation, but I'm afraid we have no faith in the fact that the government will be able to achieve what they hope, and we'll hear, I guess, what the public has to say. Thank you.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill. It's an interesting bill. It is something that, obviously, we have talked about as a party in putting things together in the RHAs and how that would work out, but there was a great lack of consultation in this one.

I mean, this government talks about—we should consult. They complain when the federal government doesn't consult them, but it's okay when they do it to other people, you know, total surprise to the majority of people here that this was going to occur, that they were going to merge some RHAs in Manitoba. And, you know, there's lots of these bills that they've presented over the past little bit, talk about being open and transparent. Well, that was definitely not apparent in this circumstance, because that openness and transparency just wasn't there. It showed up in the budget, and, apparently, we're doing this. So we'll move ahead, and let's cause some fear out in everywhere that we deal with the RHAs.

And, certainly, in Brandon it has caused a great deal of fear amongst the staff there. I spent some time there on the weekend, and, in between Brandon University convocations and the Legion wreath laying and that type of thing, the Westman Dreams for Kids had their country fair at the school grounds, and they feature the DASH tent as part of that fair annually. It's Dudley's ambulatory surgical hospital, and I understand it was so hot, they even had to put a

fan in Dudley's head to cool down the person walking around in it.

But, anyway, great event for the kids. I am, apparently, not trained in the whip stitch endeavour and how to do that, so I'm not qualified to deal with some of the stuffed animals that the children brought for care to the hospital. But it was very, very well attended, and saw a lot of fun, lot of great times there and certainly a lot of sunburns. But also in putting up the tent and taking down the tent, it was one of those times; I have many, many friends in the RHA in the area and a lot of concern out there, Mr. Speaker.

You know, obviously, they see me as a friend, but they also see me as an MLA, and they are sometimes cautionary in what they say to me, sometimes they think they say something, and then say, oh, I shouldn't have told you that. So there's a lot of—obviously, a lot of discussion in the RHA and a lot of fear, a lot of trepidation, because change is very difficult for people.

Change is scary. Change is very frightening. And, when you talk about large changes of this nature with little guidance from this bill and how it's all going to carry forward, there's a tremendous amount of fear, because what it really means—it comes down to the individual. What does this mean to me as an employee of an RHA? What is going to happen to me? Will my job change? Will I still have a job? You know, will I be able to provide care to the people of Brandon? Will I have to travel to provide care outside of Brandon, because this RHA is going to be, as I understand it, the western RHA.

So I don't know if we call that the WRHA and we call the Winnipeg one, the WRHA and we'll have the WRHA 1, WRHA 2. Don't know how it'll all work out. Anyway, they're still working on a lot of things, and the name, I'm sure, will be one of them.

Staffing, as I said, is a huge concern, but, really, what it comes down to, as I said, is for the staff there, what does it mean to them? But in the people of Brandon it really means—what does it mean to them? How is their care going to change? Is this going to be better patient care for the people of Brandon? When you go into the emergency room, are the wait lists going to be longer? You know, are you going to have better care? Are we going to change that? Because, really, I think the goal of most of us is it's the front-line care that we need to make sure is the best that we can possibly deliver in Manitoba, and, certainly, that is the concern in Brandon.

We've got lots of wait lines. Are there going to be, you know, longer, shorter waits for procedures, waits for tests? I have many, many friends that are waiting on procedures and some of them that, you know, unfortunately, have had that devastating meeting with their doctor that, you know, said, I'm sorry to tell you that we have detected some cancer and here's some of the opportunities or here's prognosis for the treatment, here's what we have to do next. And people are now waiting on those procedures as they always have, and some very close friends that are going through that right now.

This is just another thing that it's going to mix up that particular care, and we're not sure how it's going to proceed forward. Because, now, if you're in care in Brandon, you're in care in Dauphin, do these two things intermingle? Do the waiting lists get longer because of all that? And that goes on and on and on.

So, really, we want to know that health care will be improved by this procedure, by putting the RHAs together. Administration is always a challenge. Even people in administration—lots of friends there. Lots of fear and trepidation. Is—what does this mean to them? Will they be losing their jobs? How is it going to move ahead?

We have a dialysis unit in Brandon that they have brand-new equipment in now, again, but they can't staff it fully; we can't get the staff to do it. And how is that going to change and how will it put—merge together with Dauphin's? You know, Dauphin is a very strong centre. It's southwest. It is a very strong centre, as Brandon is obviously a very strong centre. And one of the worst things I think could happen, that we could have these strong centres fighting each other for staff or resources, and that is certainly a concern in putting together these types of environments. Dauphin, traditionally, is not seen as part of the Westman area. It tends to go north; it tends to go to Winnipeg. But this will be something new for all of us, and we're going to have to find out how to work together.

Staff movement is a big concern. What happens? You've got overtime. It used to be a different way of dealing with it when staff moved between RHAs. Now that they're all within RHAs, that'll be, perhaps, another huge cost that we have to deal with.

And for those of us that are dealing with seniors and have them in our care, or we see them on a daily basis, the personal care home list is, perhaps, the concern that I heard about the most. Because, right now, in Brandon, if you go on a personal care home

list, if you've been—gone through that process, you know, you put your home of choice, which one you want to go into first. And, if another one comes up, you have the choice, obviously, of going into that home or then going to the bottom of the list, as I understand it, waiting for your home of choice.

So now if we expand the region to outside of Brandon, does that mean that I could be offered a personal care home in Killarney or in Dauphin for this and have to have—take that for my loved one, and have to travel there to visit them? What kind of hardship is that going to put on families? Or how do we restrict those personal care home lists? Do they remain how they are? How does this new RHA fall into that?

So we really don't know a lot of the answers on how this is really all going to roll out. And, you know, down the road, does this move us all back to the model that there once was here, of one central Manitoba health agency in Winnipeg that oversaw everything? But look at the growth we've had in the administration of the RHAs, and how do you merge all those back into one centre again?

But really, in the end, I think what this is, is a bit of a misdirection, because we've been dealing with a fairly substantial budget, huge tax increases here, and now I'm reading in this latest bill that was presented today, about how some of those tax increases are going to come forward. And that is one of the critical issues, Mr. Speaker, that we have been trying to deal with, but now we have an issue that is causing fear in the communities throughout Manitoba. And this fear takes all precedence to the money types of situation, because this is what it means to the individuals.

And those are the types of things I'm hearing in Brandon and in western Manitoba, and I know that some of my colleagues will speak to what they're seeing in their own particular areas. So those are my comments on this particular legislation and, really, just concerned on how we're going to deal with rolling this out. How we're going to deal with the fear that's out there, because it is really shortage of answers for any of these questions, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

* (15:10)

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand up and put a few comments on the record about Bill 6. This bill aims to impose greater accountability and transparency practices on regional health authorities in a variety of

ways. This bill also puts in place new policies relating to employee contracts and provides a framework to decrease RHA administration costs.

Although the intent of the bill may be valuable, I have serious doubts about the ability of this government to fulfill the goals of this legislation. Based on the NDP past failures, it is hard to believe that this government will somehow reduce administration costs by amalgamating the RHAs.

Let's look no further than to the government's promise to decrease school division administration costs by amalgamating divisions. Due to the financial mismanagement and this government, administration costs actually grew after the amalgamations. This government thinks that this legislation can solve their woes by respect to RHA finances, but time and time again, we continue to see gross financial mismanagement from the RHAs because of a lack of oversight from this government. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the government to deliver quality health services throughout the province at the lowest possible cost. Since the government has not shown the initiative to do this in the past, I don't think this bill will help then now or in the future. This bill has no vision. If the RHA structure and model is going to be changed, it should be done with far more consultation than what has occurred with this process.

This NDP government is attempting to take away the voices of regional health authority CEOs with this legislation. If CEOs wish to speak up for their communities, they may be intimidated by the power of the deputy minister—by the power the deputy minister has over them and such become silenced in fear of losing their jobs. Maybe that is the most disappointing part of this NDP plan. There is chaos and confusion throughout the entire health-care system and staff is extremely concerned. Morale is poor and the environment is toxic.

Serious concerns have been expressed by front-line professionals that this bill will give government sweeping powers to cover up issues. The decision to amalgamate RHAs got bigger headlines than it deserved, part of the smokescreen budget. It will not solve the problem of glaring lack of government oversight, which is the cause of many problems. The NOR-MAN RHA scandal is a good example of this. The fact is that the whistleblowers exposed the serious financial abuse, not the government. Had there been proper oversight by this NDP government, this would not have occurred.

The government says that it would—this bill will save \$10 million over the three years by amalgamating the RHAs, but we have no proof that this government is capable of doing so. Again, I have serious doubts that passing a bill will moderate this government's out-of-control spending habits. We are talking about saving \$3.3 million a year out of last year's \$1.12-billion deficit. And from this upcoming year, \$504-million estimated deficit, \$3.3 million a year is just a drop in the bucket.

The NDP promised to reduce school division administration costs in 2002, when they reduced the number of school divisions from 55 to 37. We saw the same number come up. The Education Minister at the time said that this amalgamation would save the government \$10 million, too. However, instead of decreasing spending for school division administration, spending actually grew by \$36 million. So this isn't the first time that we've heard a promise to reduce administration costs from this government.

If the NDP government could not reduce the cost of school administration costs after promising to do so, why should we believe that they can decrease RHA administration costs now? If we look at how much RHA administration costs have increased over the period of NDP governance since 1999, the stats are really quite shocking. In '99, RHA admin costs were at just over \$19 million. But, over the course of 12 years, they have increased to almost \$160 million. This represents a massive 842 per cent jump from 12 years ago.

How could this government let administration spending rise so exponentially? I don't think many taxpayers would support such a large sum of money being used simply for administration of one department. Certainly, the unprecedented spending increases in administration costs cannot be due to inflation alone, which is normally around two to three per cent per year in Canada. This has to do with the utter financial mismanagement of the NDP.

Instead of improving front-line services, the priority of this government is to increase the number of staff and the cost of health administration. We've even seen that the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) has built a roof-top patio for RHA bureaucrats, which makes me think this bill is nothing more than an attempt to convey the idea that this government is serious about reducing RHA administration costs.

Government should also be keeping a close eye on containing administrative costs. It is vital to

long-term financial sustainability. The problem is that the NDP have failed to do this thus far. The Health Minister said that the Manitoba's 11 RHAs will be reduced to five, which is supposed to reduce administration staff by 35 positions across the province. Will she fulfill this commitment?

What other RHA costs will she reduce with the mergers? Clearly, she will have to decrease administrative costs in other areas because more will have to be done to find \$10 million in savings over the next three years. The cost to change over all of the stationery is one example of increased costs: letterheads, envelopes, business cards, just to name a few—additional mileage for administration and also board members.

While I support the intent of the bill, I am incredibly disappointed in this NDP government for the lack of management and vision for the health care—for health care in Manitoba. I'll point to a few specific aspects that this bill seems to have good intentions for. For instance, it is a good idea to impose the disclosure of health facility heads and CEO expenses on their website. This will, hopefully, help improve government accountability in the future. The lack of financial oversight by the government has been apparent in an audit for the NOR-MAN RHA. Taxpayers' money was totally abused by senior management on unnecessary items. This fraud was not revealed by any audits. It was due to the whistler-blowers who honestly came forward with this information. While red flags were everywhere, including successive debts totalling \$14 million, this government turned a blind eye to the financial mismanagement of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority. There is something fundamentally wrong with a system where financial mismanagement of this magnitude can fall through the cracks. The Minister of Health has tabled budget legislation that is meant to be used as a tool for RHA oversight, but she has yet to prove that any of these tools have had a significant impact.

With respect to the section of the bill that addresses how regional health authorities and health facilities can use revenue they receive from ancillary fees, like from parking, I believe that not only should this revenue be regulated, but, in addition, it is important to re-examine the ancillary fees like parking that burden Manitobans who visit and care for their family members and friends in the hospitals. I have heard a number of complaints on this specific issue from Manitobans. So I would like to urge the minister to take a serious look at how these ancillary

fees affect Manitobans. It is not enough to regulate how RHAs and health facilities use the funds from fees they impose, it is important to question the fairness of imposing these fees in the first place.

As I had brought up in question period today, the amalgamation of the regional health authorities are creating fear, anxiety and serious concerns about the future of health care not only in our Pinawa area, but in north Eastman, but also right across the province of Manitoba.

This bill makes several amendments to The Regional Health Authorities Act, and while I think the proposed amendments have a good intent, I can't help but wonder whether or not positive change will come from this bill. This bill gives the government power to change the number of RHAs in this province, which is supposed to decrease administrative costs. This bill also requires the government to keep a closer watch on financial and administrative aspects of regional health authorities. As we've seen, the lack of government oversight in the past has resulted in abuse of powers in many RHAs. North Eastman might have been the only one in the province to be relatively fiscally responsible.

Finally, this bill imposes greater accountability on senior managers of regional health authorities. This is an important step to finally unveil some of the financial mismanagement that the government has failed to stop. It is important to create a broader framework for regional health authorities to be more transparent and accountable as is necessary for any other public entity. However, this government has proposed legislation in the past to increase accountability and decrease administrative spending, but have not actually followed through with these commitments.

Manitobans deserve a high quality, cost-efficient, and transparent health-care system, but that can only come from a dedicated and hard-working government, not ineffective legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(15:20)

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I certainly welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill 6 this afternoon.

Clearly, when we look at the provincial budget—provincial budget is just in excess of \$11 billion; the provincial health-care portion of that is in excess of \$5 billion, certainly the single largest component of

our entire provincial spending. I think it's important that we take time to have a look at where the government is heading in terms of the direction of health care in the province of Manitoba. And certainly I'm been getting feedback from my constituencies in terms of their concerns when they first heard about the proposed legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to talk, first of all, about the timing of the principle of this particular legislation and when it was brought forward. It was brought forward at a time—in conjunction with the provincial budget. And quite frankly, I think there is some skepticism about the timing of this particular announcement, and I think there should be. Clearly, there's a lot of issues in the provincial budget that had a lot of Manitobans alarmed and asking questions.

And as we know with NDP policy and direction, if they can come up with some kind of a red herring to take people's minds off of the real issues that are impacting Manitobans, they will do that. And I firmly believe this is one of those pieces of legislation that they threw out to try to distract Manitobans from the financial issues of the day, and, Mr. Speaker, I say that for a number of reasons. First of all, I say it because there was very little consultation with communities about the change in this direction, and, quite frankly, this is a substantial change in direction for delivering health care here in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we, over the years, have, you know, been asking the NDP for their vision in terms of how they're going to deliver health care in the province of Manitoba, and unfortunately we're not getting any kind of a response back. And that's been the same thing for 12 years, since the government has been in office. We're not getting any kind of direction that they were wanting to change the delivery of health care. So it was kind of interesting that this particular legislation, this whole concept of amalgamating RHAs, appeared out of the blue at the same time as a new provincial budget came forward.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we've asked the minister about direction in terms of where government's going to go, getting no response. I know a lot of us, certainly the members in western Manitoba, met with the senior staff of the western region—the Assiniboine region, pardon me, the Assiniboine region health district. And we asked them a couple of years ago, okay, where is the planning going in terms of delivering health care in

Manitoba? And at that time, you know, we're getting the answers from the senior levels of management there that, no, we're not looking at planning changes or planning the future of health-care delivery in Manitoba, we're not—you know, we're not even thinking about changes here. So it begs the question: Who is actually planning the delivery of health care here in the province of Manitoba? And it's pretty clear that no one has been.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

This is another one of those pieces of legislation that came out of the blue, you know, could've been developed on a napkin just like some of the other policies that I know the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has been putting forward. Some of his policies seem to be written on the back of napkins as well and brought forward, and this looks to be exactly the same.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, there's a lot of questions out there and there's a lot of frustrations out there. And I know other members have raised the issue: What does this mean to the delivery of health care, and what does it mean to the patients that are going to be impacted in Manitoba? And those are the questions.

You know, Mr. Acting Speaker, we had several issues raised in my communities just over the last couple of weeks in terms of health-care delivery, and one concerns a couple of seniors—a couple of seniors that were in beds in a hospital, in a facility there, waiting their turn to get into the personal care home in that particular 'facility'—facility in their community, communities that they've lived in for 90 years in these cases. So we have, in this case, two 91-year-old ladies and a 94-year-old lady who were, on very short notice, in a matter of minutes, were loaded in the back of ambulances, transferred 35 miles down the road and dropped into another facility, for what reason? And that's what we're asking the RHA: What's the reason behind that? And we haven't got to the bottom of that yet.

But obviously the communities have a concern for those individuals that are being impacted. And the families have a concern about those individuals that are being impacted. Now we don't know when they're going to have access to a permanent bed in a personal care home. We don't know how long they're going to be away from their family members, 35, 40 miles down the road. Those are the questions that we're asking, trying to find out answers for these

families. And, quite frankly, we're not getting answers at this point in time.

So the fear from the community and the fear from the families is if we create a larger entity, how are we going to get any answers at all? And that's the concern out in the communities.

You know, we've got another situation where we—we've got a hospital that is closed on weekends. There's not sufficient staff there to staff the hospitals on the weekend. So in Carberry what happens is on a Friday, they will load the patients up that are in the hospital and they will ship them down the highway in different directions, find beds for them in adjacent facilities for the weekend and then Monday morning rolls around, they will go and get those patients and bring them back to that facility in Carberry. Now, I ask, is that any way to run health care here in the province of Manitoba?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Cullen: Well, yes, and then we hear today from the minister upon questioning that, no, we don't close hospitals. We don't close emergency rooms. Well, the fact of the matter is we've got 18 emergency rooms closed under this government across the province, and those emergency rooms remain closed, Mr. Acting Speaker.

And even some of these ERs that are in hospitals that are open, are running part-time. You know, we've got part-time hospitals now here in Manitoba. And so the minister gets up and talks about all the good things that are happening in Manitoba. Well, she has to really take a look at reality and see what is really happening to the elderly patients and the patients that are in hospitals across the province, Mr. Acting Speaker. This is, you know, it's a very important issue. You know, we're dumping, as I said, close to 45 per cent of our entire budget goes into health care, and it appears that the government is making direction on the fly, without consultation with the communities, without existing RHAs, without talking to doctors, nurses, and the lab technicians and all those other people involved in health care.

Now, Mr. Acting Speaker, we hear from those people on a fairly regular basis. And there's a lot of frustration out there because there's no communication. And they're very frustrated and clearly the patients and their families are frustrated as well. You know, I talk to—good friends with a number of doctors in our communities, and they

want to—and they recognize that there's certain programs that should be established within communities. Each community is a little different. And they recognize that they can establish or should establish certain programs for the clientele within those communities.

And I know some of them went ahead and they did that on their own. They set up programs, special programs for certain needs within certain communities. Well, it wasn't very long until the RHA found out about this. And they said to the doctors, you can't be providing those services to those people. And the doctors say, why can't we provide those services in those communities? They say, well, we can't provide those same kinds of services throughout the RHA, so, unless you fit the mould of the RHA, we're not going to allow you to set up those specific programs.

Obviously, that's not very—not a very good, positive message to send to the doctors who recognize the need in those communities, and that's certainly frustrating from the doctors' point of view. And I know the staff in there share those same issues. And we have, you know, as the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) pointed out, we do have people that work in the system come to us and say, you know, I would love to say what's on my mind. But they have a concern with going public on some of the issues within health care, because, quite frankly, they're concerned about their job.

So that tells me that we have a top-down approach to health care in Manitoba. We've got a top-down approach from the government here who is providing direction to RHAs. In fact, the government is—appears to be providing direction to how we're going to run health care without even having the next—the new RHA boards in place. You know, these boards aren't even in place to allow discussion and consultation with their communities, to see what kind of direction they should be going in. But the government of the day sees fit to give direction to delivering health care in Manitoba. So that's part of the irony in this whole process, Mr. Acting Speaker.

* (15:30)

So we've been calling for a plan. We would love to be part of the discussions in how the government's going to move forward in terms of a plan here in Manitoba. We think we could offer some constructive comments, but we have to have a dialogue, we have to have an open dialogue, where we can do that. And I'm sure the communities around

the province would have great criticism, and, hopefully, some constructive comments in terms of delivery within the regions as well.

Clearly, we've had a lot of discussions about emergency services, as well, and I'm talking about ambulance services in our communities. Clearly, there is some financial pressure on the EMS system. There's also pressure on volunteers, because a lot of the communities still have volunteers that provide services to communities. And, unfortunately, with the regulations that have come forward, and the pressure that they're put under by the RHAs, by the government, there's been less and less people willing to come forward and volunteer as far as the EMS services. So what we're finding is is that we're actually having less service available in a lot of the communities because they don't have the staff there to provide 24-7 service to the communities.

So this is a very important issue that we should be, as a region, at least, having a discussion about on how we're going to fill those gaps and how we're going to provide those services. But the RHA, and, in fact, the government, has been unwilling to sit down and have those formal discussions that we think we should have. And then there's a huge—a huge—problem here, and it—this problem—is a direct—is then going to have a direct relation to health care in Manitoba. And it's just a matter of time 'til we hear stories of people not having access, and a timely access, to ambulance services here in Manitoba. You know, and the same thing exists with the—you know, with 18 emergency rooms closed around the province; the same thing exists in terms of timely access to emergency-room services.

So, you know, Mr. Acting Speaker, I'm surprised that they—you know, the government members, I would think, are probably hearing the same sort of comments from their ratepayers as well. And I would—curious that their members aren't standing up to address this very significant change in health-care policy in Manitoba. And I would look forward to having some discussions with them and hope that they would make their views, thoughts to the public, to their constituents, and maybe make their views known to the minister, as well, because I'm sure their—the similar situations exist across the province.

The other one thing I did want to mention to you, Mr. Acting Speaker, is in terms of the Assiniboine region. As it exists right now, you know, we have an office in Souris and we have an office in Shoal Lake; that's—those are the two head offices, if

you will, for the existing RHA. And certainly, there's been questions arise now that the Assiniboine region has amalgamated with Brandon. What does that mean for the existing offices there? What does that mean for the existing staff? And there's certainly lots of questions out there being asked. Clearly, the community is concerned about potential job losses; who's going to go where; who's going to be left at the end of the day; what is the new management structure going to look like. And where are we going to be able to go for answers? So there's a lot of questions out there. We are certainly waiting, as this whole thing will unfold, what—how those answers will be addressed and how those concerns will be addressed.

So, with that, Mr. Acting Speaker, I just wanted to put those ideas on the record. Obviously, health care is a very serious issue here in Manitoba, and it's certainly a concern for a lot of my constituents as well. So we look forward to this bill getting to committee, and we look forward to some feedback on Bill 6. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mohinder Saran): Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mohinder Saran): The question before the House is second reading of Bill 6, The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Improved Fiscal Responsibility and Community Involvement).

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

**Bill 21—The Public Schools Amendment Act
(Code of Conduct for School Trustees)**

The Acting Speaker (Mohinder Saran): Order. To resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Education (Ms. Allan), second reading of Bill 21, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Code of Conduct for School Trustees), standing in the name of the honourable member for Spruce Woods, (Mr. Cullen).

Is it the will of the House to debate remain standing in the name of the member of Spruce Woods?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It is my pleasure this afternoon to rise in the House and put some comments on the record with respect to Bill 21,

The Public Schools Amendment Act (Code of Conduct for School Trustees).

And this bill is—basically requires for school boards to establish a code of conduct for school trustees, whereas, at the present time only censure is available for those trustees who would breach confidence or other transgressions. And this bill would seek to put in place other mechanisms that would be available to school boards in the event that they deem that a trustee has not acted with integrity in manners, or who have not respected others and who have not kept confidences. And so it'll be my pleasure this afternoon to put some points on the record.

But I do want to begin this afternoon by mentioning, without equivocation, that the vast majority of school division trustees are respectable individuals who are able to conduct themselves in a manner that requires no legislation to prescribe behaviors and minimum standards of acceptable behaviour. And, indeed, I know from my own—from meeting with trustees in school divisions, from knowing various school board trustees across the province, and getting to know more of them all the time in conjunction with my new role as Education critic for the caucus, that school division trustees are interested in educational issues. They are giving up their time; they are getting involved in issues; they are sincere; they are motivated; and they are governed by their own codes.

The Acting Speaker (Mohinder Saran): Order, please.

For the record, leave are denied for the motion to remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Spruce Woods. It was denied already. Just for the record.

Now, the member for Morden-Winkler.

Mr. Friesen: And as I was saying, the school trustees that I know, the ones with whom I have met and the ones that I continue to meet, continue to convince me that school division trustees are a fantastic group of individuals who are committed to the cause, and that cause is to continue to enhance student achievement in school divisions across Manitoba and also to foster community engagement.

* (15:40)

And I think that, if you did a poll of trustees that you meet on the street, they would quickly tell you that they understand those two critical roles, those

capacities in which they act. And the first one being to enhance student achievement; second one being to foster community engagement. And that second role is a very important one. I think we all understand the tremendous importance—importance of the first one, of increasing student achievement.

Certainly, we should never lapse in our effort to measure the success of our programs, to measure the success of our learners, to measure the success of the strategies we're using in the classroom, and to ask ourselves what can we do better, how can we enhance student learning, what are the methods, where are other things taking place that we should be observing, where is best practice that we can adopt and put to work and implement in our own schools. Certainly, we understand that school division trustees will concern themselves with those matters.

But second, as well, that they are that link between the school division and the community. They are that link between ratepayers and parents and caregivers and the school, and the school division. And that's a—it's a huge responsibilities for school division trustees to assume, and it's one that they perform well. They're always on duty. Whether they're at the grocery store or whether they're getting gas or whether they happen to be in a school board meeting, they know that they can be called upon to answer for policies that they have in place; they know that they can be asked questions; and they need to be conveying to those people who have elected them those—the answers to their questions.

And, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would want to make note at the beginning of this discussion on Bill 21, that there really is no typical school board trustee in the province of Manitoba, but rather—really the board members represent all age groups, they represent all occupations and all levels of educational attainment, but they share some characteristics. And I've had an opportunity to read through Manitoba School Boards Association, *A Guide to School Boards and Trusteeship in Manitoba*, and there's a part of this document where it basically indicates what kinds of characteristics typify trustees in Manitoba, and I would just want to mention a few of those things.

The first one being that—their ability to work as members of a team; that they maintain an open mind; that they have the ability to engage in, give and take, and to arrive at a decision; that they know that authority rests with the corporate body and not with the individual trustees; and that they must work with their colleagues in order to achieve their goals.

Further, that they are going to be required to spend time to get informed and do their work and to be part of an effective school board meeting, and that they share that desire to serve their community, to serve children, to serve students, and they have a strong belief in the value of public schools. And further, the document goes out—goes on to point out that effective trustees respect the needs and feelings of other people and they have a well-developed sense of fair play and they understand that that school board which they serve might be one of the biggest businesses in their community, and that it is their responsibility to see that that business is well managed.

And, Mr. Acting Speaker, what I would want to say is I think this is a very good description of the characteristics of the trustees who are currently serving Manitoba school boards across the province. And, furthermore, as I stated earlier, it's my belief—and I will put words on the record this afternoon to indicate that—that good behaviour that is exhibited by trustees across this province is not something that can be legislated; that good behaviour cannot be legislated.

But also, on the opposite side, we have to understand that increasing sanctions and increasing enforcement measures for trustees who are deemed to have not respected their colleagues or to have breached protocols or who have done something like that, in the same way, that that's not going to have the effect that's desired because probably good behaviour can't be legislated, can't be enforced by anything that's being introduced by the government at this time.

So we do have some concerns about this bill and, as I mentioned, the code of conduct must, at minimum—the code of conducts that are being called for must, at minimum, require a trustee to act with integrity and in a manner that maintains the dignity of the office, but, second, it calls for them to respect others who may have differing opinions and, third, that they keep in confidence any personal or confidential information obtained in their capacity as a trustee and to not disclose any information except where required by law or authorized by the school board to do so.

And I do want to take a little time to unpack those things. As I mentioned earlier, at the present time, all that exists is the ability for a school board to prescribe a censure against a trustee and so, of course, we see that this is a significant expansion of

the requirements for a trustee and—but, beyond that, what's brand new in this legislation is, of course, the enforcement measures that are set out.

And these enforcement measures indicate that if a school board determines that a trustee has breached the code of conduct that applies to the trustee, well, then the board can impose one or more of several sanctions. They can censure the trustee, and that is currently in place, as I said, but now they also have available to them the option to bar the trustee from attending all or part of a meeting of the school board or a committee of the school board and, further, they have the option to suspend the trustee from the board, including suspending all the trustee's rights, duties and privileges as a member of the school board for a period up to three months.

And, Mr. Acting Speaker, these are, as I mentioned, totally new components, and they're ones that are worthy of our discussion and consideration this afternoon.

I would want to make mention of the fact that the censure requirement would require a 50-per-cent-plus-one vote by the board, while that second measure, of barring a trustee from a meeting, or the third measure of suspending a trustee, would require a two-thirds vote of the board as set out in this legislation.

Now, I'd want to remind the members of this House that we have school boards across Manitoba that range, basically, from having five to nine trustees on a board, and we need to consider that composition when we're talking about a measure like a vote to bar a trustee that would require two-thirds vote of a board, because we have to understand that in some school divisions across this province, there are only five members of a school board. And so that two-thirds vote of a board to actually suspend a trustee, it doesn't take the agreement of many individuals to get done.

And, now, if you even extend that idea further, and think about the case whereby maybe a seat on a school board would become vacant for some reason and perhaps that would be because of a death or the inability of a school board trustee to keep going with their duties, but it is the case, from time to time in our province, that school board seats become vacant.

And at that time, of course, then there can be a decision to proceed to a by-election but, in the meantime, in that interim period, that seat is open.

Now think about this with respect to a school board that only has five trustees at any one time. Well, now that requirement of having two-thirds vote of the board, if you had five trustees, now you only have four, and you're talking about three people being able to get together to coalesce around an idea or around a grievance that—I'm not saying it will happen—I'm saying there's the possibility for it to happen. And they could, now, have the means by which they could remove someone who doesn't agree with them, someone who is representing a different viewpoint. They could remove that person, and it seems that it wouldn't be overly difficult for them to get that done.

*(15:50)

And that is something that is worthy of our consideration this afternoon, and there's a lot that is in this legislation that isn't spelled out. And, certainly, I will be interested to see the regulations that come up with respect to this bill if it is, indeed, passed, because there are many questions that I have about what this looks like. It seems like a good idea when—at first reading. Very preliminarily, you could read this and say, well, that seems like it makes sense.

But I think what we have to ask ourselves as legislators is, what does this bill actually say and what does it—what remains unsaid? And I believe that's the real test of any legislation, is that litmus test of unpacking it, looking at it carefully and asking, what does it say and what does it—what is left unsaid, what remains unsaid? And I believe that's where the trouble lies with this particular bill.

And speaking of trouble, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would want to draw your attention to the fact that not only is there the possibility here that a trustee who was elected by that community to be suspended by the school board, but I believe that a key characteristic and problem of this bill is the extent to which it leaves open the option for a trustee to actually be removed from their seat. And I know that the members opposite might say, well, there's no—there is no means by which a trustee can be removed from his seat within this. This only contains a provision that where a sanction has been imposed, that a trustee could appeal to an adjudicator. But if we read this legislation further down on the page and we notice that, indeed, under 35.3(1) it indicates that a trustee who is sanctioned under item 2 or 3 could appeal to a single adjudicator appointed by the minister. Even so, in the power of the adjudicator as

set out in this proposed legislation, I want to read that this afternoon. It indicates, under 35.3(3), that an adjudicator who hears an appeal under this section may vary or set aside the sanction imposed on a trustee, as the adjudicator sees fit.

Now, when I read that, I'm troubled by that because I don't believe there are enough measures contained there to constrain the power of an adjudicator. And, of course, we want to put our faith in that adjudicator, but we can't lose sight of the fact that this is an adjudicator that is appointed by the minister. It's not appointed by an independent source. And we want to believe at all times that the minister is going to act with independence and with good faith, but, you know, at a different time and with a different minister and with different considerations, we have to ask ourselves if it would be possible for a minister to appoint an adjudicator who would have a bias already against this individual. And, certainly, I think that, yes, that opportunity at least exists under 35.3(3).

And when I questioned the minister about this in the bill briefing, and I did appreciate having the opportunity to have that bill briefing with the minister and with her—and with members of her staff present. But when I questioned, it seemed that there was a door left open that at least that there was some significant flexibility built into the wording of this legislation with respect to "as the adjudicator sees fit" and also specific to the statement "may vary or set aside the sanction."

And I think that a—while it's good news that if a trustee was—let's say that an action was taken against them, and they were suspended and they felt wrongly accused, that they would have this ability to go to an adjudicator and there would be that ability for the adjudicator to hear the facts and to overturn that sanction. But at the same point, I don't see why it is necessary that the wording would include "may vary". Because I think by the virtue of the fact that the word "may vary"—or the phrase "may vary" is in there, it doesn't just suggest that that adjudicator may vary the sanction to contain it or reduce it. Doesn't it also suggest that the adjudicator would have that ability to increase it? And that's where my concern lies with respect to that power of adjudicator not being significantly contained in latitude—in the latitude afforded to that adjudicator. And I would suggest that, with this wording, it at least—there at least exists this possibility that they could increase the sanction, and you could remove, from the seat, that trustee who's in that role.

I know that the minister indicated in that same bill briefing that this bill was created in consultation with boards to give them greater power in dealing with problem trustees.

And, as I already said to you, Mr. Acting Speaker, we all believe that the vast majority of trustees are going to conduct themselves with the utmost of integrity and with—and in a manner that maintains the dignity of the office.

And we understand that, but I have to ask: How many boards have been publicly requesting codes of conduct? Is there—is this legislation coming forward the result of one incident? Is it the result of two incidents? Is it the result of five? And is there, in fact, any kind of minimum number of incidents where at which the minister would say, well, that's enough now that we should probably put legislation together? I'm wondering what the threshold amount is, because the fact is that I have not seen a resolution in the Manitoba School Boards Association resolutions over the past number of years.

So we do have to ask the question: Where is this coming from? And I would hope it's the case that this is responding to more than just one or two isolated cases. And I believe that the provincial media has suggested that this may be legislation that was predicated on the conduct or—of one or two trustees. And I certainly hope that wouldn't be the case, because I would suggest a better way to go about those kind of situations would be to work with the specific situation. And not just to enact legislation for everyone, but to work with those specifics, and then to deal with it from a policy perspective instead of a legislative perspective. But I think it's often the case with this government that they approach things and they think one size fits all and they think why deal with policy when we can just deal with legislation.

As I mentioned, Mr. Acting Speaker, we have every confidence on this side of the House that a vast majority of trustees conduct themselves every day in a manner that is befitting of their role. They exercise their duties, they show hard work, and they are sincere elected public representatives, who care deeply about those two key components that I identified earlier: being (1) to improve student achievement; and (2) to stay in regular and meaningful contact with the community. And while there have undoubtedly been some instances of some trustees being more publicly outspoken than others,

I believe we also need to consider that there is a broader discussion that we need to have with respect to this legislation.

And that discussion has to do with the place of appropriate dissent within systems. And my concern, Mr. Acting Speaker, is that this legislation actually works to limit the extent to which a broad discussion can take place within systems; in this case, within a public school board where you have democratically elected trustees, who take very seriously their role, acting exactly according to the—criteria to which they've been elected. They know their role; they know their responsibilities; they know that they will be held to account by the communities that elected them. And then they go out to do their job and they get their wrists slapped with a censure. Or, far more seriously, they, perhaps, get barred from meetings or they get suspended by their school board. Now, I want to be clear that we understand there could be, in exceptional circumstances, an individual who is difficult to deal with, but the vast majority of trustees are out there and they want to hold that majority to account. They are going to be guided by their conscience; they're going to be guided by their beliefs; they're going to be constantly improving their knowledge of educational issues; they're going to be reading up about things, but then they're going to go into the forum of that school board meeting and they're going to say, what about this?

* (16:00)

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And with respect to my colleagues, I am not in agreement with the direction we are heading. And so, I know that it is of primary concern to me that we safeguard the place of appropriate dissent within our system, that we need that broad-based discussion. We need that rigorous debate within that school board chamber, just as we need it in this Chamber, in the same way that we, every day, come into this place and we look at legislation, we consider resolutions and we are made sharper by the discussions. We are made sharper by the variety of viewpoints that are expressed, and it's no shock that we're not always in agreement. As a matter of fact, there are many days when we aren't. Even within a caucus, there are times when we have broad-based discussions and we represent viewpoints, and it's important that that process be allowed to take place.

And we have to ask to what extent it will be the work of a bill like this to pressure individual trustees to comply with the will of the majority. To what

extent will this bill work to exert pressure on trustees to conform and to not ask those tough questions? To what extent is this legislation at cross purposes with the actual democratic process of school board elections?

Let's not lose sight of the fact that these school board trustees are elected just as we are. They have to conduct campaigns; they produce campaign materials; they have to get signatures of, I believe, 25 community members, to sign their nomination form; they go to public forums; they get involved with debates; and, often, they incur expenses en route to election just like MLAs do and just like MPs do and just like municipal officials do.

And I am concerned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that within this bill there is a measure would allow an adjudicator to subjugate the democratic process, if that's not critically and explicitly spelled out. So it's certainly something that we have to keep in mind, that these trustees are elected; they're not there just because the other trustees want them to be there, they are there because the public has put their faith in them. And, sure, in some instances, there are uncontested trustees, but in many, many cases, those seats are sought after and they are hard fought for. And so, they are citizens who put them there, and we have to be very careful before we put anything in place that would override the public's right to put those trustees in place that they deem the best individuals to represent them.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, further, I would just want to make the point that would such a measure like this legislation make it more difficult, even for members of the media, to obtain information from school boards, noting the fact that some trustees and boards are more reluctant to provide comments to reporters than others are. And so, it's something that we need to keep in mind. We have to come back to that key job of a trustee being community engagement, and I think we could add to that list that openness to respond to media requests. We want to make sure that the business of school boards is not being conducted in closed sessions, but it's available to the public so that we can all understand, not just a few key individuals who have been elected to a role can understand what the issues of education are in our areas, but that the public can understand them, and that efforts are being made every day by trustees to bring to the public's attention what the issues of education are; what the policies are; what their regulations are; what the things they are doing day to day.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also have to ask about equivalency, and I have to say that the timing of this—the introduction of this legislation was very unfortunate for this government, because we have to ask why it is that this government is putting in place legislation that would call for a code of conduct for trustees, but they're not willing to actually put in place a code of conduct for their own ministers. And it was so unfortunate for this government that this legislation was actually tabled at the very time that the revelation came forward that the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and, I believe, the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) was also at that event, were—had broken Elections Manitoba regulations, with respect to the blackout period for holding a media event and, indeed, during that blackout period, that they had conducted a public event and media was there, and it took place after that blackout came into effect.

And, certainly, there were no sanctions that were brought against the Minister of Health for that action of holding that media event. There was no censuring of that minister. There was no barring of that minister in an equivalent way, of attending all or part of, let's say, a caucus meeting or a Cabinet meeting, and there was no suspension of that minister from this Chamber or from her role. But those are exactly the provisions that this legislation would bring into effect for a—school board trustees, and you have to ask yourself why this difference of approach between what they're proposing for trustees and what they're putting in place for their own ministers.

In the dictionary, Mr. Deputy Speaker, "hypocrisy" is defined as a pretense of having a virtuous character, beliefs, or principles that one does not really possess, and I have to think that the term "hypocrisy" could be aptly applied in this instance. This bill has hypocrisy written all over it because what they will put in place indeed, for trustees and what they propose to put in place for municipal officials is—are not measures that they will put in place for their own ministers. It's a classic do-as-I-say-and-not-as-I-do kind of situation. There are no consequences for those ministers. There's no consequence with respect to ministers accepting Jets tickets from Crown corporations and going to the front of the line. There are no consequences to the Finance Minister sitting idly by while his colleague in Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade gave Bonnie Korzeniowski, a former MLA, a position as the military's affairs special envoy, and there is no

consequence for these ministers in other situations as well.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker, it comes back to this point. You cannot legislate good behaviour. It would be naive to suggest that you could do so and so I just have to, once again, state that I have significant questions about this bill. I will be interested to see the regulations process. We need to encourage transparency. We need to get at the real issues on this matter. Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate getting the chance to stand up this afternoon and speaking towards Bill 21, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Code of Contact for School Trustees). The bill amends The Public Schools Act to require school boards to establish codes of conduct for school trustees. This school board may sanction a trustee who breaches the code of conduct.

In the trustee code of conduct, code of conduct 35.1(2) a code of conduct must, at a minimum, require a trustee to act with integrity and in a manner that maintains the dignity of office, also respect others who may have differing opinions, and keep in confidence any personal or confidential information obtained in his or her capacity as a trustee and not disclose the information except when required by law or authorized by the school board to do so.

Mr. Speaker, the code is to speak to integrity. There is some irony here. Differences of opinion, being respected, and confidentiality. The penalty for breaching the code is censure, barring a trustee for attending—or from attending all or part of a meeting, or a three-month suspension. Censure requires a 50-per-cent-plus-one vote, while barring a trustee from a meeting or suspending a trustee requires a two-thirds vote of the board. The trustee can appeal to the minister and request an adjudicator hear their appeal, the cost of which is paid by either the board or the trustee, depending on the adjudicator's findings. The adjudicator can recommend that the trustee lose their seat.

The minister indicates that the bill was created in consultation with boards to give them greater power to deal with problem trustees. We all have heard of situations within the city and within our province. Is this bill specifically targeting a certain trustee? I don't know. Are these people not elected by the public?

* (16:10)

Also, with—in regards to the appeal, the appeal must be made within 10 days. As it says in 35.3(2), a trustee who wishes to appeal a sanction must provide written notice to the minister within 10 days of the day of the sanction was imposed. And, again, as my colleague before me from Morden-Winkler pointed out, an adjudicator who hears an appeal under this section may vary or set aside the sanction imposed on a trustee, as the adjudicator sees fit. Once again, the adjudicator seems to have the power to not only possibly lessen or dismiss the sanction that was imposed on the given trustee, but very well could possibly increase or possibly removed from their seat—[*interjection*] Thank you.

Have the boards been publicly requesting the code of conduct? Have we not seen, in the MSBA, resolutions in recent years? We have confidence in vast majority of trustees to conduct themselves in a matter befitting their role: hard work, sincere, elected public representatives who care deeply about their community. We have often seen elections go for months and months in regards to get trustees hired within our communities. It is a process and they are elected.

While there have been incidences of some trustees being more publicly outspoken than others, have there been other more serious incidents that precipitated this bill? We look forward to hearing more about the reasons behind the need for this bill at committee, without the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan), of course, breaching any confidences. We are concerned about the broader issue of the place of appropriate descent in the system, freedom to hold the majority to account.

The minister may make certain regulations in 35.4 governing codes of conduct that apply to trustees, which include prescribing matters to be addressed by the codes, prescribing provisions that are to be part of the codes, and respecting the processes to be followed by a school board in determining if a trustee has breached the board's code of conduct.

Is this bill merely an attempt to silence trustees who disagree with the majority? How will the determination of what information is considered confidential be determined? Likely, targeted at one or two of the more outspoken school trustees in Winnipeg who tend to make issues public that at times the board would rather not become public.

Will this make it even more difficult for members of the media to obtain information from some school boards, noting that some trustees and boards are more reluctant to provide comment to those reporters.

What about equivalency? For an example, for ministers, will they, too, be subject to a code of conduct? Are they going to draft one with each Cabinet minister which each Cabinet minister must sign and abide by? We've seen ministers in this House violating The Elections Act during the blackout period. Will they face censure, suspension, disbarment?

Jets tickets, they didn't disclose that they were getting tickets through Crown corporations, publicly funded organizations until, of course, they were caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Arrogance, Mr. Speaker? They just don't seem to get it.

In another case of do as I say, but not as I do, the Finance Minister talks about bringing the Province back into budget or back into balance, but clearly has no intention of walking the walk. If he did, he would sit by while his colleague in Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade gave Bonnie Korzeniowski, the former MLA from St. James, a plum position October—on October 5th, the day after the provincial election, with a total budget of about \$184 million—

An Honourable Member: Thousand—thousand.

Mr. Ewasko: —which—\$184,000—I stand corrected— which, technically, her salary is the same as a sitting MLA. So, technically, a 58th MLA, Mr. Speaker.

A special envoy for military affairs performs an important function, but it's function that the current member for St. James (Ms. Crothers) should be able to fulfill, or if they're looking for an MLA with more experience, then the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) might fit the bill. Instead, they reward their friends by ensuring they maintain their MLA salary, even though they're no longer MLAs.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to many of these questions being addressed in committee, and I thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): And always is a pleasure to have the right to stand in the Manitoba Legislature and address legislation. We should never forget what an important and often difficult job we have as legislators, because often I'm speaking to students or they're here in the galleries, and later on

we get to speak to them on the stairs. And they will say, you know, what is that legislators actually do in the Manitoba Legislature? And I always point out to them, when you go home, there are rules at home and they are rules that you have to live by. Well, it doesn't change when you get older. There are always rules that you have to live by, there are always parameters that you have to live within, and that's a very important thing for young people to understand.

So Bill 21 is one of those bills that I think are very important. There are some areas in here that I find, perhaps, a little troubling. And I guess one of the things that I find most troubling with, is the fact—if you look at the explanatory note, it says it deals with code of conduct and appeals respecting alleged breaches of the code of conduct. And it deals with code of conduct for another level of governance, men and women who've put their names on a ballot and went door to door and canvassed and put forth different ideas of what they believe that their society should have.

In fact, I would say school boards are probably the most hands-on governance of any elected official, more so than councillors and certainly more so than members of the Legislature and certainly MPs, because they actually directly impact lives. I've often had explained to me that government at the Manitoba Legislature or the federal government, it's like turning around an ocean liner; it takes a long time for things to come into effect. Whereas, as a school trustee, as a school board, you can have an immediate effect on the constituents, the people that you represent.

So I—right away, I'm a little bit concerned that we have a provincial government that somehow wants to go to another level of governance and deal with how they should be conducting themselves, when we have a government that is probably the—I would say this NDP government is probably the last group of individuals that should be talking about any kind of ethics, any kind of code of behaviour to really anybody else. And we have a government, for instance, that ran an election in 1999 in which less than above-board, less-than-truthful things took place.

There was all kinds of money swapping and bundling and all kinds of issues that took place in the '99 election. Fact, it was the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) who was involved in that campaign. I understand he was one of the senior advisers, and after the election the now-Premier (Mr. Selinger)

was then the current Minister of Finance, and the now-Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) who used to be Minister of Labour, asked from the party that they receive a letter absolving themselves of some of the illegal activities that the NDP party had partaken in, in the 1999 election.

And to this day, we've never heard from the Premier or from the Minister of Education what was in those letters. In fact, we 'summize' it was written by the—and signed by the member for Kildonan. But we will never know, because those letters were shredded. And, there again, you know, maybe we should be putting up a bill which talks about the ethics and the behaviour of NDP MLAs and Cabinet ministers, because shredding a legal document is hardly something that you'd call ethical. And that's hardly a code of conduct that one would think is the behaviour of an individual in the Legislature.

There's only 57 members of the Legislature in this entire province, and we should be held to a certain standard, certainly higher than those that we're trying to legislate. In fact, there's another piece of legislation dealing with school trustees. And again, they're trying to talk to school—pardon me, with councillors. This one deals with trustees. The other one deals with trust—municipal councillors. And again, what they're trying to do is trying to preach to them that what they would like to see, is do as we tell you to do and not as we do. And that's a pattern that we've seen develop under the NDP.

*(16:20)

And, you know, perhaps the Minister of Education or the Premier would like to get up and tell us why is it they felt they needed a letter absolving themselves of their behaviour during the 1999 election which they felt they needed to make sure that they didn't get in trouble with Elections Manitoba. Is that the kind of ethics that they would like to have trustees and municipal councillors participate in? Is that the kind of behaviour that they would like to see other levels of government participate in? I think not. Because, certainly, nowhere in their legislation does it say that you should break election laws, get your party to write you a letter absolving you and then when you're asked for the letter say, you know, I shredded it.

You know, right here it says school boards may sanction a trustee who breaches the code of conduct. Well, does that apply to NDP MLAs? Shouldn't it? I mean, shouldn't the Minister of Education, shouldn't she have to get up and explain what it is that she and

her campaign did in 1999, why she needed a letter to absolve herself and why the letter somehow magically was shredded? Should that not be covered under the explanatory note which says—maybe we should put in there that MLAs may sanction a Cabinet minister who breaches the code of conduct? I think that would be very fitting here, Mr. Speaker.

And that's the problem when you have an NDP government trying to preach a code of ethics to do other levels of government that they don't even subscribe to, a level, a bar that they don't even try to achieve. And, yet, somehow they feel that they have the right to legislate and preach and tell others how they should behave, and have no intention—no intention—of living up to that standard and, unfortunately, the list goes on.

You know, I've mentioned before in this House and I lived through the whole debacle of the Crocus scandal, and, you know what? I would like to say to the House it's almost a foreshadowing of what was going to take place in the United States and in Europe, because what you had was gross mismanagement that was covered up, that was shielded from the public, that basically there were individuals who were telling less than the truth about what was going on in Crocus, and it was known at the highest level of the NDP Cabinet: the former premier, Minister of Finance and his colleagues, certainly a Treasury Board and perhaps a full Cabinet, and we're not allowed to see those documents. But for sure it would have been at a Treasury Board. They discussed the fact that the Crocus Fund was in terrible shape.

Now does that sort of remind you of like the Lehman brothers and Freddy Mae and Freddy Mac? And, you know what? The discussions were taking place, yet somehow those things never came public.

But, in the meantime the government of Manitoba, under the leadership of now—the now-Premier, the former Minister of Finance, actually put into the pay stubs, into the envelopes—I got one of those at that time—and it said, buy into Crocus, when they knew it was going down. It's no different than the fraudulent behaviour that was taking place in New York and in Greece and in Spain and in Portugal and in Italy. There's no difference—no difference.

Yet it's that same group of individuals that are saying to school trustees as well as councillors that, and I quote: that they may sanction a trustee who breaches a code of conduct. The question that is,

does that apply to the Premier? Does it apply to the Treasury Board? Does it apply to Cabinet? Shouldn't it? Perhaps we should change that sentence a second time to read, that the Manitoba Legislature may sanction a minister of Finance or the Treasury Board or the Cabinet who breaches the code of conduct. Because the code of conduct was breached, and who paid the ultimate price for Crocus? Sixty thousand investors paid the price. And I don't blame anybody there for what happened before they found out, but the minute they found out that there was liquidity issues with the Crocus Investment Fund they had a fiduciary responsibility to let it be known.

And what was more disgraceful than anything else, there was a member of this House who sat here for Fort Whyte, and that was John Loewen.

John Loewen got up at a—and was going to hold a press conference and was going to say there's a liquidity issue with Crocus; there's something wrong with Crocus. And he was ganged up on by, amongst others, the now-Premier, the Minister of Finance, and the Treasury Board, and he was forced to back down. In fact, he even had to pay restitution for it and, Mr. Speaker, in the end John Loewen was dead right. And did anybody go to him and say, I'm sorry, because they knew at that time he was right? They all knew. The entire front row of the NDP knew he was absolutely right and they knew that they were hanging him out to dry. One of the honourable members of this Legislature was hung out to dry and when—and they knew he was right; they were just delaying the inevitable.

And I would like to know, if anywhere in this explanation, we could put in the sentence, and that John Loewen may sanction the Premier, or the Minister of Finance, or the Treasury Board, or the Cabinet, who breached the code of conduct by letting him hang out to dry, by letting John Loewen hang in the wind and have to pay restitution. And he was shamed publicly in the media when they knew he was dead right. Does that cover it? Should it not cover it?

Perhaps one of the New Democrats would like to get up and would like to explain to us how is it that one of 57 MLAs was left to hang out to dry. What a shameful—what a shameful display. What a black smirch on this Legislature. It was absolute disgrace what happened; that they would throw one of our own to the wolves when they knew they were in the wrong and it ended up going bankrupt. What a disgrace.

If we want legislation, if we want to preach to others, should we not first clean up our own house? Should we not 'foresweep' our own doorstep first? Doesn't it come here first? And, when we've cleaned up our own doorstep, then maybe we should go and talk to other levels of government and tell them: perhaps you should clean up your act.

And if it was only those two, only those two examples, you might say, well, you know, that's now eight, nine years ago. But it gets worse. Oh, it keeps coming, Mr. Speaker, there's more.

I would like to point out the case of the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick). She had a disagreement with the federal government, and I think we would all say that's allowed; you're allowed to have a disagreement with the federal government. And you can have your say and you can have a debate in the Legislature, all on the up and up. We don't have any problem with that. But to send out emails, through a deputy minister, to public servants and encourage them to come to a rally that had taken on political tones is an absolute disgrace, and I would say that maybe it's only in the era that we live in that people aren't riled up anymore because they just assume politicians do these kinds of things.

And then we hear the Premier (Mr. Selinger) on election night and the next morning, oh, wringing his hands and, oh, we have to work on voter turnout. I don't know why voter turnout is so low, says the 'mameber'—member for St. Boniface, preaching to the people on why there was such a low voter turnout. It's because of cynicism that he was part of. That he would even allow his minister to politicize the public service is unheard of and yet the minister gets up and says, well, they should have freedom of speech. Yes, they should. But it shouldn't be for political events that the minister's organizing herself. There's supposed to be a divide between the political side and the public service. I have great respect for the men and women that work for our government, who represent us in the public service, and I hope that this NDP government is going—isn't going to go through each and every one of them and try to politicize them. What a shameful thing for that government and for the member for Riel, the minister responsible. What a shameful thing for that individual to have done and to get—and basically, she's corrupted the public civil service.

And then it gets worse. Oh, no, no. She wouldn't just ply her trade to that. Oh, no, then she even went further and had them email organizations that get

funding from the government and that they should come out and they should fight for their funding, that they should come to a political rally and stand up and fight so that, you know, they might get cut. What a disgrace. She knew that wasn't true. She knew that was furthest from the truth. Why would the member for Riel not tell the truth on this? And I'm choosing my words carefully. I did not—

* (16:30)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) well knows the rules of this House, and to make reference to the—whether a member is telling the truth or not, the member knows it's unparliamentary to make those kinds of comments in this House.

And I also want to remind the honourable member for St. Paul that we are debating Bill 21, The Public Schools Amendment Act, code of conduct in—for school trustees. And the member has, seems to have, strayed a considerable way from the intent or the principle of the bill, so I'm cautioning the honourable member and reminding him, respectfully, that we're debating Bill 21 and the title of the bill.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, and thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to figure out how I was going word that, and we always want to be respectful, certainly, when we're talking about a bill that we're trying to preach to other levels of government how they should behave. So I take your words, and I appreciate that very much. I will take that.

However, this does deal with this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, because what we're doing is we're trying to preach to other levels of government, and then we have a minister, the member for Riel, who goes out and does exactly the opposite. So my question is: Could we also add another amendment? Could it read, and I quote, that the Manitoba Legislature may sanction the member for Riel who breaches the code of conduct? That would be another really good amendment, because what she has done is gone way, way over and above what is should ever be allowed—should ever be allowed—in a pluralistic, in a modern, democratic system where there's a definite line between the politicians and the professional public servants.

And you know what? We don't blame Ben Rempel for this, because he was forced to do it by the member for Riel. And, Mr. Speaker, if she would

have stopped there—and we're talking about preaching to other levels of government. We're talking about a code of conduct for other levels of government. In fact, not just this bill, but there's another bill coming, which I hope to have the opportunity to speak to. But, on this particular bill, Bill 21, we are going to preach. This is the NDP preachy bill. They're going to preach to everybody else about code of conduct. Then the minister went to Brandon, the member for Riel, and talked to them and said, I fear to leave the country; I fear that they may never let me in. In other words, insinuating that somehow our country is going to turn on its citizens and not allow Canadians back in the country. That's the kind of fear mongering, the over-the-top—incomprehensible that a minister of Her Majesty's government would go to such lengths to try, for lack of any good argument, for lack of any ability to convince people otherwise, to use that kind of language.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? In the preachy bill, Bill 21, we're trying to tell people, this is how you should conduct yourself. And if you read through the bill, as I have, I mean, it talks about how they're supposed to conduct themselves at meetings. You know what? I would say that the best amendment, that amongst the 10 that they should have, should include the member for Riel and her code of conduct; that should be included in this bill.

And so far, now—and, Mr. Speaker, we are now at three for oh—I mean, this government just—they just can't seem to keep their hands out of the glue. Then we have the member for—the Minister of Health, the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald)—the member for Seine River. If you listen to the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), the way he describes it, the Minister of Health accidentally walked, inadvertently walked, into a health centre; and inadvertently bumped into the news media that she had invited; and inadvertently had them ask her questions about the press release that she had inadvertently given them. And then she is going to get up and she is going to talk to other levels of government about their code of conduct. Now, if that isn't the pot calling the kettle black. I mean, how is it that—like, how shameless can our NDP become that they can actually, one after the other, after the other, after they've broken laws and done all kinds of things—the Minister of Health had a press conference, knowing it was against the law, had a beautiful press opportunity. In fact, the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) was there, though I haven't heard the Minister

of Education (a) explain her letter that she shred, absolving herself of what happened during the 1999 election, and neither have we had her explain how it was that she inadvertently happened to be at the press conference, breaking the law at the same time. But the—it was the Minister of Health that actually broke the law, and Elections Manitoba found her in contravention of it.

No repercussions. No repercussions whatsoever. But read, read Bill 21; there's all kinds of repercussions. There can be censures. Evidently, I—from what I understand, if I'm reading this correctly—oh here, enforcement of code of conduct: You can censor the trustee, bar the trustee, suspend the trustee. I have an amendment for you, Mr. Speaker. How about 35.2(1), item 1? Censor the Minister of Health for breaking the law; bar the Minister of Health for having broken the law; or suspend the Minister of Health for having broken the law. Then you'd have something, instead of running around being preachy to everybody in the province how they should conduct themselves, every trustee and every councillor. Perhaps you should take your own medicine.

The Minister of Health broke the law, and no repercussions. But a trustee who might, inadvertently, which is the word of this Chamber—might have gone out of camera and said something and could be censured and could be barred from meetings for simply having spoken out of turn, but someone who breaks the law gets to sit in her seat with no repercussions. And yet they want some kind of moral authority on Bill 21, by being preachy to everybody else, and the next bill that's going to come, dealing with councillors. And yet they won't live by any of those examples; they will not lead by example; they will not show the way with good conduct; not at all, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen over and over again, and I've listed a few examples. I've listed a few examples of how they are prepared to bend the rules, to change the rules, to make it however they can to make sure that they get their way through, whatever conduct, breach whatever they have to. And, Mr. Speaker, I'll give you another example: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) of Manitoba, in the last election, along with 56 other candidates, went door to door, had press conferences, put it in their brochures that they would not raise taxes in their next term; no sir. In fact, it was one of those, read my lips, no new taxes. And maybe if they'd had been in for three years and found that things were getting a little tight and, you

know, maybe they'd have been in for two years and that things were getting a little tight and they had to raise some taxes; maybe if they'd have been in for a year and things would have been a little tight and they could have raised taxes.

Mr. Speaker, it only took them till the next session of getting in here. They couldn't wait to get in here and present a budget and raise taxes. And we're not talking about \$50 million or \$60 million or \$100 million. No, \$180 million worth of new taxes. Do you know what? The fumes of the bus had barely dissipated from the NDP campaign bus, and already they were in here raising taxes. And yet they want to go to municipal governments and they want to tell them how to behave themselves in an ethical fashion.

So perhaps we should have another amendment. And the amendment could read, that the NDP campaign—that I'm sorry, that the Manitoba Legislature may sanction the NDP campaign and the Premier who breached the code of conduct of saying one thing during an election and doing another thing the minute they came back in the House. There would be another amendment.

*(16:40)

And, Mr. Speaker, to think that they went for how many days of a campaign, and day in, day out, we would never raise taxes. They taxed volunteers. They raised taxes on volunteers by 50 per cent, and the list goes on and on. They taxed anything that moves, that doesn't move, that crawls, that walks, that doesn't crawl, doesn't walk, that's dead, that's alive. They've—they taxed basically everything.

Now, we have the NDP. They floated that balloon at their last convention and we know, we've been around long enough to know how this works. You float a balloon at the convention, you shoot it down, then you try to see what the reaction is. And that's a PST increase. Now the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has been all over this issue. I mean, he's a great Minister of Finance if you want five different sides to any argument. I mean, he has said we're going to raise it; then he said we're going to apply it; and then he said we're going to get it; and then we were going to raise it, and, you know, his 'messaging' hasn't been clear.

Mr. Speaker, there's another code of conduct that, perhaps, would be a really good amendment to this legislation and, perhaps, we could put in there that the Manitoba Legislature may sanction the Minister of Finance and the NDP government who

breach the code of conduct on raising the PST. They've been asked, now, for almost a week where they stand on PST. And what has their answer been? Well, you know, we have a budget and, well, you know, we have things, and, you know—everything. They've given us everything on the record, everything you'd want, except for the answer.

If you go back and you read *Hansard*, there's all kinds of stuff on the *Hansard*, but there's never once has the Premier (Mr. Selinger) gotten up or the Minister of Finance and said: no PST increase in the next four years. Not that Manitobans would necessarily believe them, but it would be nice to hear it, because in the environment, you know, we're in right now, we can't handle any more NDP tax increases. We can't take it anymore. Property taxes going up, everything's going up. The tax is going up by this government. Everywhere—everywhere—there's taxes going up because of this NDP government, and a PST increase on top of that, yet, too? I would suggest that what we should do and make sure, Mr. Speaker, in this preachy bill, we should put in here, Bill 21, that, by the way, they have to abide by the rules of holding a referendum before they hold a tax increase. And I wouldn't be surprised if we don't start seeing an amendment coming around soon that will take that provision out because they gutted—guttied—the entire balanced budget legislation years ago, which—I forgot—they committed they'd never change.

How could have I have forgotten that one? There's so many, I can't keep up with them all. I'm running out of time. All the breaches of conduct you can't do it in half an hour. You just don't have the time. And I would suggest there was another one, that they were going to live by balanced budget legislation. Well, that was thrown out the window. They were going to fix hallway medicine six months and \$15 million; there's another one that flew out the window. But they have time, Mr. Speaker, they have time to say to other levels of government that if you don't live up to a certain code of conduct that you can be censured; you can be barred; you can be suspended.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to members opposite: When does any of this apply to New Democrats? When do the NDP ever live up to this standard? Why can't they say, we will live up to Bill 21 first. We'll live up to that standard. Because they can't. They've been in the glue for so long they can't get out, and it just keeps coming over and over again. There isn't a bureaucracy that hasn't been

pushed around and made political. There isn't a Crocus fund—investment fund that they haven't gotten into. There isn't an election that they haven't gotten into the glue in and gotten into trouble in, and the list goes on and on and on.

But preach to other levels of government, preach to school trustees and tell them how they should conduct themselves, and the same thing with city councillors. That, they can do, because they want everybody else to look at everybody else but them, and they are the problem, Mr. Speaker.

I would suggest we don't necessarily need this and the bill is whatever, but, you know what? Bill 21 should apply to them first. That's where it should apply. That's where it's needed the most, Mr. Speaker. This province is crying out for accountability from our provincial government first and foremost.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on Bill 21?

The House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is Bill 21, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Code of Conduct for School Trustees).

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

We'll now proceed with Bill 7, The Community Renewal Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 7—The Community Renewal Act

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), that Bill 7, The Community Renewal Act, be now read a second time and be referred to the committee of this House.

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

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Housing and Community Development, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 7, The Community Renewal Act, be now read for a second time and be referred to the—to a committee of this House.

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

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to rise and speak today on Bill 7, The Community Renewal Act, which supports community-based planning and renewal initiatives in designated communities across Manitoba. The province plays an important facilitative role in the promotion of community economic development and creating opportunities for individuals and families to engage in activities that foster well-being and social inclusion where they live.

The Community Renewal Act is an important legislative initiative to support this activity. As government, we recognize that we need active partners at the community level to realize our mission to support the positive development and growth of communities. The act sets a clear course and defines how residents of communities in need of renewal can participate in a purposeful way, by planning the ongoing development that is required to revitalize their neighbourhoods and strengthen their communities.

I suggest that all members support this bill.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a few words on the record with regard to Bill 7, The Community Renewal Act, and would just like to put some cautions out also on the record with regard to Bill 7.

The Community Renewal Act is actually based a lot on the Neighbourhoods Alive! program, and looks at creating, which is a concern, another committee that would be a board appointed by the minister. The reason we have some concerns with that aspect of it is because just a few weeks ago, the NDP Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) had indicated that during his budget address, that we would reduce the number of government appointed agencies, boards and commissions by 20 per cent. So these measures would actually reduce duplication and result in more efficient use of public resources.

Well, I don't think that that's happening, Mr. Speaker, because Bill 7 is actually creating another board, creating another committee within deputy ministers.

And what I've been hearing from communities who actually have embraced the Neighbourhoods Alive! program is that they're very concerned that they're going to lose the control of their projects within their community, the community-led

initiatives. They're very concerned that this government is actually going to appoint people who have no interest or no understanding of what each specific community would like to see moving forward with regard to initiatives.

And several of these municipalities or cities have indicated that they like the Neighbourhoods Alive! program the way it has been operating. They have their neighbourhood renewal corporations in place. They have their boards in place. They have their bylaws in place, and are concerned, Mr. Speaker, that by creating this act that it's going to take away from the communities-led initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that, you know, the program has been fairly well received—the Neighbourhoods Alive! program. What we're hearing from AMM is that they would like to see more communities be recipients of the Neighbourhoods Alive! program. And, as a former economic development officer for a rural community, I would welcome that gesture and ensure that more communities within Manitoba are given the opportunity to explore renewal and to be able to have programs that will support the ideas that will address challenges within those communities. But that's not going to happen.

*(16:50)

Mr. Speaker, I have a few more questions with regard to this bill. With regard to statements, with regard to how and why the designation process is happening, without actually having any ongoing review or evaluation to maintain that designation. It's important that when you bring in programs, especially with dollars attached to them, that you do have a process of review and evaluation. And I believe that what this legislation does not provide is a criteria that would result in this happening.

So I would just encourage the minister, because we have just recently finished Estimates and what the minister and I had chatted about was some interesting stats within the Estimates book. We've seen an—a decrease in community development expenditures by 23 per cent within this department. So I'm very concerned, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is just rebranding the Neighbourhoods Alive!, creating a board of political appointees, but really will not be providing any additional needed supports within the community, in the area of community development, especially when we see in the expenditures of this department a reduction of funding by 23 per cent, or almost \$4 million.

But we do see, Mr. Speaker, an increase in administration by four and a half per cent in this department. And again that will be, you know, a concern to many people who are looking for programs that will provide supports for front-line people of communities that are looking for programs that will actually enhance or renew their communities, whether it be an arts council, whether it be an initiative like a Lighthouse program. What we want to see is actually more outcomes in that area and not more administration. And what we're finding with this bill is that there is going to be another branch or advisory department created within government. And I'm very concerned that we're going to be given a director, that director is going to have staff, there's going to be an office. And I guess what we're hearing from communities is that they would really like to continue to have the neighbourhoods renewal funds administer their own programming and continue to do that.

They really believe that local decision-making authority really should be able to oversee and expend those funds the way they see fit, in partnership and agreement with the Province, the other funding body. But they do believe that they know best what their communities want.

So I would—I look forward to this bill going to committee. I do know that there are some concerns with the community. I do know that there are a lot of great programs that have seen results from the Neighbourhoods Alive! program, but there's always room for improvement, Mr. Speaker. And I believe that this bill raises some questions with regard to how communities will actually benefit from this bill. But we will see through committee and third reading how we proceed with supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise to put a few comments on reckon regarding Bill 7. And I know my colleague has outlined, to a significant degree, why we're so concerned about the future of community alive program.

The community I represent, the city of Portage la Prairie and the constituency of Portage, has been a beneficiary, in fact a significant beneficiary, of the community alive program over a number of years, and it has been very successful in it.

And the board that actually functions is a group, a really good group of volunteers in the community.

In fact, I dare say you would be hard-pressed to find a—to hand-pick a better group to represent this type of interest. It's very diverse in nature, right from the business community to a lot of the social service providers who are also members of the board. And I cannot imagine why we would need to put another level of appointees in there to give advice. Groups like this are the grassroots. They're what keeps boards like this functioning. What—they're really plugged into the community. They are very good at assessing the needs of the community. Another level of administration in here, whether it's an advisory board, no matter how little they might be paid really only asks—adds to the administration cost, and it will get in the way of giving good advice to the minister. And is that not the object? Is that—are we not out here to make sure that these programs function well in the community? And I have a long list of things, if I had time to go into them, of how well this has worked in the community, but I can tell you, most of their programs are oversubscribed. That's a good-news message, I guess, in terms of the demand is obviously there and people are responding, but more money to make these programs run and more monies for people in the community would be a far more effective use of our dollars and time than putting in another level of administration.

Now we have seen—back to the original Throne Speech, or the budget speech—that we're going to cut 20 per cent on committees. And I sort of lost count as to how many new committees have been introduced in the bills that have already come forward, but it's not zero. In fact, it's quite substantial in number. We seem to be moving in the other direction, not in the direction that was originally indicated, and maybe that's something I need to get used to, that we'd say one thing and do another. But it's certainly very disappointing to hear that we're supposed to be moving in a direction and we see absolutely no sign of progress in that direction.

And this one, actually, I view as a very negative part of the process. We certainly support the programs. We are a little worried about where we're headed in terms of rural development. I mean, we've seen some initiatives coming out of MAFRI that have been cut, like the local community development corporations and community works loans programs. We're really beginning to wonder what the government's intention in terms of rural development is.

I know they frequently say that, well, we have staff. We have other programs. And I know from

past experience that some of those staff in MAFRI are actually co-funded through the Growing Forward initiative that the federal government funds with them, and I know that that program, too, is coming to an end next year. And the co-funding probably will end at that particular point because I'm—I was certainly part of a process and was very aware that other provinces were expressing quite a bit of concern that Manitoba had a special deal in that last agreement and that they would certainly like that kind of a special deal as well. And I think it's very evident in this round of negotiations that that's not going to happen again. So we're going to be looking forward to, I suspect, another whole round of cuts generated by MAFRI in terms their rural development.

So the programs that you're slowly winding down now, or already have cut, and the future problem that are coming at us, where are we headed? We're obviously headed in a direction where rural development is not a priority and that funding for it will be very pick or choose. Maybe we want to appoint boards, such as this bill will do, that'll allow us to decide who will get them so that we can have funding for particular projects—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): I just wonder if there's leave to not see the clock until everyone who wants to speak to this bill has spoken and then we could conclude for the day.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to not see the clock until all members of the House wishing to speak to Bill 7 have had the opportunity this afternoon and we put the question to the House?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, to continue.

Mr. Wishart: I don't have too many more comments anyway, but one of the other areas that certainly leaves you very concerned here is the lack of accountability. And I know in the case of our own community development—no, sorry—on our own development, Portage district development corporation, we're very happy with the work that has been done on Neighbourhoods Alive! This group has worked very well. They've been very accountable

with the dollars that they've received. We certainly heard rumours that there have perhaps been in some other communities not the level of accountability that we would like to see.

I think what we're doing here is introducing a bill—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Portage la Prairie will have 25 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

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