



Third Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

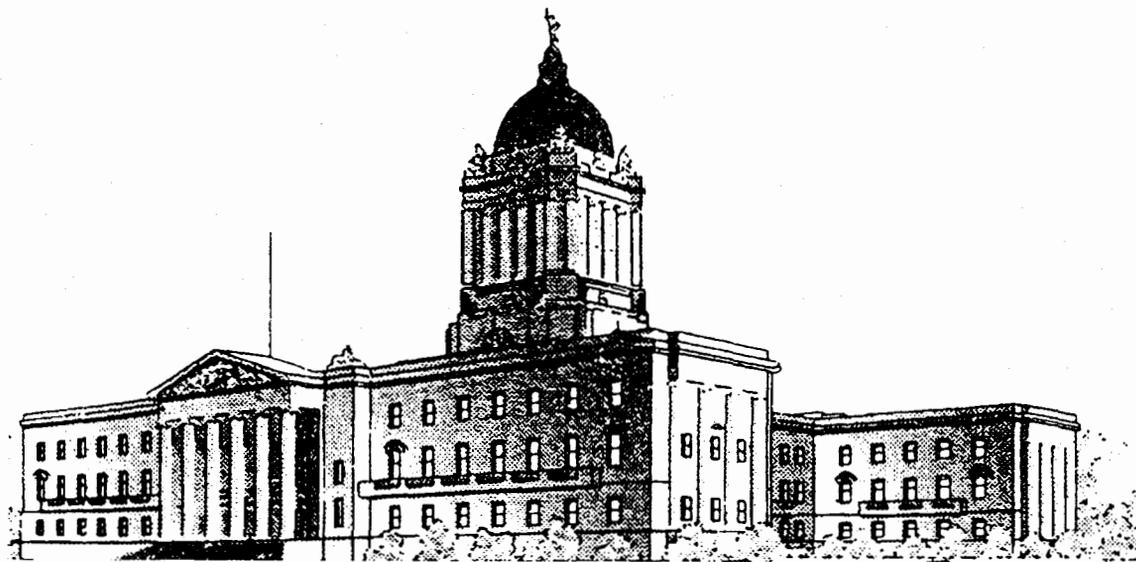
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 11, 2002

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Transcona-Springfield School Division

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of John Holland, Vince Boileau, Garry Brown and others, praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) to reverse the decision to split the Transcona-Springfield School Division and allow it to remain as a whole or to consider immediately convening the Board of Reference to decide the matter.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Transcona-Springfield School Division

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), I have reviewed the petition and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: The Clerk please read.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition. The proposed changes of school division boundaries for the purpose of amalgamation will divide the Rural Municipality of Springfield, resulting in the R.M. of Springfield losing 14.9 percent of its school levy tax base which will in turn adversely affect the quality of education that students in this R.M. receive.

The division of the Rural Municipality of Springfield resulting from this amalgamation

will result in 98 percent of the expenses of the R.M. of Springfield being transferred to the Agassiz School Division, while transferring only 85 percent of the R.M. of Springfield's school levy tax base.

The proposed changes to the school division boundaries may compromise the funding for several programs, some of which include band concerts, choral groups, drama productions and programs for special-needs students.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows: To request the Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell) to consider halting plans to place portions of the Rural Municipality of Springfield into separate school divisions, to request of the Minister of Education, Training and Youth to recognize that dividing the R.M. of Springfield will result in a lower quality of education for all of the students involved.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flood Forecast and Aircraft Accident (Winnipeg)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): I have a statement, Mr. Speaker.

As Minister responsible for Emergency Measures, I would like to provide information on flooding caused by heavy rains in southern Manitoba over the last few days. Some areas of southern Manitoba have received 9.5 inches of rain over the last few days.

This has, not surprisingly, resulted in elevated river levels and extensive flooding, particularly in the southeast part of the province. In fact, local states of emergency have been declared by the R.M.s of Piney, Stuartburn, Franklin and La Broquerie. Voluntary evacuations have taken place of 10 people from Piney and 4 people from Marchand.

* (13:35)

The Department of Conservation has released a flood forecast which indicates the Roseau River, the upper Rat River, Sprague Creek, upper Whitemouth River, Birch River, Main Drain and other larger rivers are continuing to rise. In fact, the Roseau River in particular is expected to reach record highs. Flooding on the Sprague Creek and Pine Creek, which are Canadian tributaries of the upper Roseau River, will also be at record highs when the crest of the river passes through Manitoba in the coming week.

These major rises may result in the need for sandbagging in Stuartburn. The provincial government will remain available to assist in this effort, should it be needed. The Red River is also expected to rise in this period and there may be some minor flooding in lower elevation locations such as Letellier or the Roseau River First Nation. Otherwise, the Red River is expected to stay within its banks with some small amounts of water entering the Red River Floodway next week. The Winnipeg River is expected to rise due to heavy rains in northwest Ontario, although major property damage is not anticipated.

These very heavy rains have resulted in a number of road closures. Rather than consume the time of the House, I have tabled a list of affected roads for the information of all honourable members. Local governments are responsible for establishing and implementing disaster readiness plans for the communities, and the provincial government is working with the affected local governments to assist with their response to the flooding.

Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization is co-ordinating the provincial departments involved. These include Conservation, Education, Health, Transportation and Government Services, Family Services and Housing and Communication Services Manitoba.

Residents in the southeastern area of the province are reporting that the water levels right now are the highest in recent memory. We will continue working to provide up-to-date information and whatever assistance the

Province may be able to contribute. Recognizing that financial losses come with the damage caused by floods, staff at EMO will be gathering information to determine whether this event qualifies for a program under the Disaster Financial Assistance agreement.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to provide the House with information on the aircraft crash that happened this morning on Logan Avenue in Winnipeg. The City of Winnipeg responded to this accident and the National Transportation Safety Board are conducting their investigations at the scene of the accident. While details of the accident are still emerging, I am sure I speak for all members in expressing our concern for the individuals who may have been hurt and their families, along with our gratitude to the people who responded at the scene of the accident.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House thank the minister for the report and update on the flooding in southeast Manitoba. It is an event that we seldom ever see in the province of Manitoba where we get, in a day or two, a rainfall of nine to ten inches of rain. Certainly, the people affected by the efforts that the department and the minister's staff are going to put into ensuring that all efforts will be made to secure life, to secure home and to secure the financial needs of those who are affected by this flood are truly appreciated. We believe there are volunteers that are going to make themselves available to those people, as has been done in previous floods.

Flood events are never easy. They are an emotional event. Many of the people I have talked to this morning on the phone certainly have demonstrated that. When you have two and a half feet of water in your general store, in the community of Sprague, you have waters going over 201 at numbers of places and bridges have been cut out in the community of Sprague and other areas, one only needs to realize how difficult the situation is.

* (13:40)

The Marchand community is affected by numerous homes being flooded, the hotel being flooded, the general store being flooded. The waters are now approaching the community of

La Broquerie and all efforts are being made to ensure that the water will not enter that community. So, again, we thank the minister for this statement. We thank the minister and his staff for all the efforts that they are making to help the people in southeast Manitoba.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for the honourable member to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I rise to comment on the flood situation in southeastern Manitoba. I thank the minister for giving an update to the Legislature today. I think we all realize when such a huge amount of water comes down so quickly there are things that are beyond our control and the best way we can react is to do whatever can be done to prevent further damage to property and casualties in terms of lives.

At the same time, I think the downpour we have had over the last few days in many areas highlights once again the critical needs, even in a dry year, of paying attention and making sure the provincial drainage system is functioning to the best possible capacity, that there is a province-wide effective water management plan in place and upper basin storage issues, as in the Tobacco Creek program, are pursued with great vigour. So I think we need to highlight once again the urgency of doing better water management, even as we realize there are times when doing all those things may not do much for Sprague, but it still would do some positive things in other areas.

I would also like to thank the minister for the comments with regard to the plane on Logan Avenue and say just sympathy to those who are affected and hope that as soon as possible there can be an understanding and that people are treated as well as possible.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to comment on the ministerial statement, please.

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

Mr. Faurshou: I just want to add to the minister's comments in regard to the air crash early this morning at the corner of Logan and McPhillips.

I do want to commend the citizens who were on-site at the time of the crash who attended to the crash site with fire extinguishers in hand. I also want to commend the actions of a registered nurse who was on-site as well for her gallant efforts to attend to those injured within the crash. I hope the minister will look favourably on citing those individuals who risked life and limb to assist those injured.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): I am pleased to table the Manitoba Public Insurance 2001 Annual Report for the fiscal year February 28, 2002.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 13—The Medical Laboratory Technologists Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), that leave be given to introduce Bill 13, The Medical Laboratory Technologists Act; Loi sur les technologistes de laboratoire médical, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, this act creates the college of medical laboratory technologists of Manitoba. Currently there is no legislation. The act will require a person who wishes to practise as a technologist and use the title of medical laboratory technologist to meet the qualifications set out in this act. Provisions in this act ensure that any standards set by this new college are not in conflict with the standards set in The Medical Act.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

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

members to the public gallery where we have with us from École Lansdowne Immersion 60 Grades 4 and 5 students under the direction of Mrs. Cathy Collier. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak).

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

* (13:45)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Flooding Emergency Measures

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, as has been indicated just a little while ago, we have seen probably almost historic amounts of rain that have fallen in some parts of southern Manitoba. The area from Carman, indeed even west of Carman, right through to the Ontario border and virtually everything south of No. 1 Highway has been affected by these heavy rains.

Could the Minister of Transportation indicate to this House today what direction he is giving to his department of highways and to Emergency Measures to ensure transportation routes will be reinstated as quickly as possible in order to let schools reopen, students attend school and businesses attend to the business they should be attending as soon as possible?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Our first priority in terms of the highway access situation has been to ensure public safety. With the statement I made earlier, I distributed a list of highways that have been closed. Obviously our first concern has to be to maintain a safe situation for people in that area. We are certainly cognizant of the inconvenience this will cause. I think it is important to recognize this is fairly widespread. We are dealing with areas that have received record amounts of precipitation, rivers that are reaching record levels. We will make every effort possible to reopen the roads once it is safe to do so.

Assistance for Livestock

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I understand also there are large herds of livestock that are in jeopardy. Could the minister indicate to us what

disaster plans are in place to help livestock producers move herds out of the area and/or provide emergency feed supplies to those herds of cattle and other livestock in that area?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food): There is a team that has been put in place and that is looking at the situation with regard to the livestock. We want to ensure that no livestock are trapped and there is adequate feed. The report I have had to this point is that livestock is mostly on high ground, but there are arrangements that will be made should any livestock be trapped or should there be a need to move hay into the area for livestock that cannot access feed.

Agriculture Disaster Assistance

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): There are also, Mr. Speaker, fairly large areas that will certainly have huge crop losses regarding this rain. Can the Minister of Agriculture explain to this House what extraordinary measures she might be bringing before this House as assistance measures to those farmers who have seen virtually all of their crop or most of their crop lost during this last rain event?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Mr. Speaker, staff in the region are dealing with a similar situation they have dealt with in other years when there has been serious flooding like this. What we are looking at is how we can get additional information out through the Crop Insurance office which is the office that would handle any claims should there be crop losses. We are following the same steps that would be followed in any other situation where there is excessive moisture.

* (13:50)

Mr. Speaker, it is far too early to assess what the damage is. There is a lot of water on the land right now. It will depend on how quickly the land will drain off. When the water drains off then an assessment can be made as to the impact of the flooding and then Crop Insurance agents will be very busy.

Manitoba Hydro Profits-Transfer Payment

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, this Premier likes to

compare Manitoba to other provinces when it comes to the amount of the dividend they raided from Manitoba Hydro. Is the Premier aware that according to Manitoba Hydro, in terms of payments of Crowns as a percentage of gross revenue, that New Brunswick takes 1.5 percent from hydro, Northwest Territories takes 6.2 percent, British Columbia takes 8.4 percent, Saskatchewan takes 9.3 percent and Québec takes 9.9 percent?

But thanks to Manitoba and thanks to the Doer government, Manitoba Hydro takes 25 percent of Manitoba Hydro profit. Thanks to this Government. How does the Premier justify that kind of a cash grab?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Members opposite took 100 percent of the profits from '95 on from Manitoba Telephone System. They took 100 percent of the assets to balance their Budget for three years, and they let the prices go up 65 percent.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, my question was about Manitoba Hydro and I will continue to ask the Premier about Manitoba Hydro. Apparently they know we are No. 1 in Manitoba for taxes west of Québec. Now they want to be No. 1 in terms of raiding of Manitoba Hydro Crown corporation. That is the kind of position this Premier wants to put us in.

When you look at 2002, according to the figures Manitoba Hydro will take 25 percent of gross revenues in order to balance the books because they had a deficit, 25 percent of the gross revenues of Manitoba Hydro. How can the Premier justify and continue to say this money will have no effect on the long-term of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, in terms of numbers being used by members opposite, he will note that Manitoba has lower hydro-electric rates than New Brunswick, lower hydro-electric rates than Ontario, lower hydro-electric rates than Québec, lower hydro-electric rates than Saskatchewan, lower hydro-electric rates than Alberta, lower hydro-electric rates than British Columbia. That is because we built Limestone for our future.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, Manitoba takes the most, the mother of all takers, raiders of Crown

corporations, is from this Premier. This Government has not just raided \$288 million from Manitoba Hydro in order to balance last year's books. Not only have they done that but they have increased the amount they have taken out of Manitoba Hydro since they have been in Government by some 240 percent. That is what they have increased it by since they have come into Government.

My question to the Premier: Why is he punishing Manitoba Hydro ratepayers just because his Government runs a deficit?

Mr. Doer: The only government that punished the ratepayers of Manitoba was the Tories who sold the Manitoba Telephone System and had the rates go up 65 percent. We went from having the lowest rates in Canada to the second-highest rates in Canada. That is the Tory strategy. Manitoba—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are producing hydro power for less than 3 cents a kilowatt-hour, and we are selling it to the United States for over 6 cents a kilowatt-hour. That was the plan that was brought in place by Wilson Parasiuk in the eighties. It was voted against by members opposite when they were in opposition. Their vision is to sell off the telephone system. If they were re-elected in '99, they would have sold off Hydro. We are using Hydro for the benefit of all Manitobans.

Manitoba Hydro Rate Increase

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, the Doer government is planning to strip \$354 million from Manitoba Hydro in order to balance last year's books. Hydro officials have testified, under oath, at the Public Utilities Board that this is roughly half of the domestic revenue that Manitoba Hydro receives from its customers within Manitoba. In addition to that it is \$100 million more than Hydro spends on running its entire operation, \$100 million more.

* (13:55)

I would ask the Minister of Finance if he really expects Manitobans to believe they are not at risk for a rate increase after the Doer government takes away close to half of Manitoba Hydro's domestic revenue.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Fort Whyte once again has missed the point entirely. The special payment or the dividend comes off the profits from export sales, and those profits in the last five years have exceeded the forecast profits by \$371 million. There is ample room within there for the special payment. As I put on the record before, the interim forecast, which is not an application for a rate increase, simply a forecast, shows no change before we took the special payment compared to after we took the special payment. The amount that they forecast on prudent assumptions for an increase is exactly the same.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Finance if he would guarantee to Manitobans that as a result of his Government's decision to take \$354 million from Hydro to balance last year's books, as a result of stripping Manitoba Hydro of close to half of its domestic revenues, will this minister stand up and guarantee Manitobans that electrical rates will not go up?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the one thing we have done that the members opposite had 12 years to do is we guarantee Manitoba Hydro will not be privatized without reference to the people of Manitoba through a referendum. I can tell you the people of Manitoba will never agree to Manitoba Hydro being privatized.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, this Government will not sell it; they will bankrupt it.

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, who is also the Minister responsible for—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Minister of Finance, who is also supposed to be

the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, expect Manitoba to believe that he is taking his Hydro responsibilities seriously when he simply stands back and lets the Premier (Mr. Doer) strip \$354 million, half of Manitoba Hydro's domestic revenue, from the corporation? Is that taking his responsibility seriously?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we will keep Hydro rates among the lowest, if not the lowest, in North America. I expect it will be the lowest.

The success of Manitoba Hydro has been improved by our investments in gas turbines in Brandon, by our conversion of a coal plant in Selkirk to gas. We are proceeding with the environmental review for the Wuskwatim project and, unlike the members opposite, when we take a benefit from Manitoba Hydro it will be for all citizens.

* (14:00)

You look at the Manitoba Telephone System, second-highest rates in the country. All the dividends went to private shareholders. None came back to the people of Manitoba.

Manitoba Hydro Profits—Transfer Payment

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Manitobans are just beginning to learn about the unprecedented amount of money this Doer government is raiding from Manitoba Hydro, not unlike what they did with Autopac many years ago.

Three hundred and fifty-four—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: That is \$354 million alone, an increase of 240 percent since 1999, yet they continue to deny that it will have any impact at all on the corporation.

Mr. Speaker, how can the minister justify to Manitobans and justify to Manitoba Hydro that he is draining almost \$1 million per day from Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, the members opposite had a secret waterpower rental agreement that they used to finance government projects in Manitoba. They never told the citizens of Manitoba that. When they had purchased Centra Gas, they never told the citizens of Manitoba that it would cost \$1.12 billion in borrowing costs and, in addition, Centra Gas would have to pay taxes to the Government of Manitoba when it moved into the public sector.

The difference between the members opposite and us is we are transparent and we tell people what we are doing. The members opposite have secret deals that they hide behind the scenes and do not tell the public about. It is a remarkable difference in accountability and transparency.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I am glad the Minister responsible for Hydro has just confirmed and is very transparent about the million dollars a day he is draining from Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Finance try to justify to Manitobans—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I wonder if the Minister responsible for Hydro, the Minister of Finance, could justify to Manitobans today that during the course of Question Period, 45 minutes, he will have drained another \$30,000 from Manitoba Hydro. Will he justify that and explain to Manitobans why he needs that money just to satisfy their spending spree?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, during the course of the last five years Manitoba Hydro has had \$734 million in profits, \$371 million more than forecast. What we have done with our decision to take a dividend from Manitoba Hydro last year, this year and the year following was we have stabilized services in Manitoba at a time when corporate revenues are down 60 percent, PIT is down 10 percent and we have a federal accounting error that has created uncertainty.

We acted in good faith to stabilize services in Manitoba, services that Manitobans have told us they want and members opposite never supported when they were in government.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Raiding a million dollars a day from Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker, \$30,000 during the course of Question Period—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Again, I want to cite some valuable words, this time from the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Laurendeau). I think these are very important words to share with the Chamber, once again. The member has stated: Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions should require no preamble.

Please, Mr. Speaker, would you remind members opposite of their esteemed Opposition leader's remarks in this House? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River East, on the same point of order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order. I mean, these numbers today, the million dollars that is being drained from Manitoba Hydro on a daily basis, are numbers that have been confirmed under oath by officials from Manitoba Hydro. I can understand why this Government and this minister and this Premier (Mr. Doer) are very sensitive about this.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, I would like to take this opportunity to remind all honourable members *Beauchesne* Citation 409(2) advises that a supplementary question should not require a preamble.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: I would ask the honourable member to please put her question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

How can this minister deny that it will not have an impact on Manitoba Hydro's bottom line when he is draining a million dollars a day, \$30,000 for every 45 minutes, and by the time he answers this question, Mr. Speaker, from beginning to end, \$2,700 will leave Manitoba Hydro and enter a huge bank account?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, in the time it took the member opposite to ask the question, Manitoba Hydro made \$2 million. With our plans—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind all honourable members, when the Speaker rises all members should be silent and seated. Also, decorum is very, very important, not only to us but also to the viewing public. I would ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only will Manitoba Hydro continue to be profitable into the future but we are going to expand its capacity by implementing comprehensive Power Smart programs which reduce the energy demands of Manitobans and create more power for export while reducing costs to Manitoba. We are proceeding on the Wuskwatim project and we have built additional capacity into Manitoba Hydro through not only programs with gas turbines in Brandon and Selkirk but other programs which will ensure that Manitoba Hydro is one of the most efficient and Power Smart utilities in North America.

Red River College Downtown Campus—Security

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, students at Red River community college are concerned that adequate security and basic facilities will not be provided when they start classes at the college's downtown campus which is scheduled to be open this fall.

Melanie Pittet, a journalism student at Red River, said, and I quote: There are certain times in the year you are just swamped with

assignments. You do not have a choice about staying late. Once it is dark, I do not feel safe walking. It is a very desolate area.

Can the Minister of Advanced Education indicate whether adequate security will be provided for students who are required to be on campus late at night, and will she indicate for this House today the details of the security arrangement?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education): Mr. Speaker, of course, we on this side of the House are very proud of the Princess Street Campus, very proud of building downtown Winnipeg. Just yesterday I visited the campus and I can report to members of the House that the progress is spectacular. I know members realize this campus has been nominated for an international award, and seeing it yesterday it certainly deserves it.

* (14:10)

Now with regard to the details of security, of course, I can assure the member opposite that officials from Red River have met with students. I can assure the member opposite that officials from Red River have met with officials from the University of Winnipeg and are being apprised of the security plan that has been implemented at the University of Winnipeg. As for the specific exact details of what that security plan will be, I would advise the member opposite to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Advanced Education consider offering an extension for the opening of the downtown facility until which time the students can be assured that adequate facilities are available, such as elevators, parking, lockers, library, book store, et cetera, so as to not impede their studies and their safety?

Ms. McGifford: You know, Mr. Speaker, time after time, we hear from members opposite in their questions their suggestions that we delay the rejuvenation of downtown Winnipeg. Last week, there were questions about True North. Now they want us to delay the opening of the Princess Street Campus. This Government is

interested in promoting post-secondary education in this province. We know the dismal record members opposite had.

No, we will not delay the opening of the Princess Street Campus.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, these are the students of Manitoba who are asking these questions.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Advanced Education so concerned about fulfilling a political agenda they are willing to put students' studies and their safety at risk in order to have their classes start before adequate security and facilities are available?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Tuxedo asked a question, and I hope that members will have the courtesy to let her hear the answer. I would ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Ms. McGifford: You know, Mr. Speaker, when the students of Manitoba asked members opposite for a government bursary, all they did was cancel it in the dead of the night in 1993-94. I guess that was the government policy.

This Government is interested in, as I said, rejuvenating downtown Winnipeg. We have an urban vision. We are interested in the economic development of the province and we are interested, as we promised in 1999, in providing hope and opportunities for young people in this province.

Protected Areas Government Record

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Conservation. The Canadian Nature Federation's grade for Manitoba for the performance of the NDP government in relationship to the protected areas in this province has fallen progressively

from a B-minus when the minister was first elected to a C-minus after the first year to a D recently. There were no new protected areas this year. The lowlands national park candidates are still without interim protection. A First Nations protected area consultation staff position is unfilled. The Parks Branch lacks the capacity to move park reserves, undertake park plans. There are delays, stalling and missed timelines all over the system.

I ask the minister: Why is he doing such a poor job?

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): I thank the member for the question. Of course I disagree with him in his suggestion that we are doing a poor job on this side because I would like to say I am proud that under this Government we have been able to permanently protect or reserve close to a million hectares of land in this province.

In September of 2001, the Pembina Valley Provincial Park was established, Manitoba's newest park. It is a protected area. In 2001, seven new park reserves were created and parts of eight existing wildlife management areas were protected.

So I want to indicate to the member that we are doing the best we can.

Mr. Gerrard: The D was in a standardized rating by a credible national agency.

I ask the minister to acknowledge today to members of the Legislature that it is a major disaster for him and his Government when his overall grade has fallen far below the marks that the terrible environment-bashing Tories received in their last year of office.

What is the matter? Does the minister have no clout in Cabinet?

Mr. Lathlin: I want to advise the member, in addition to the response I gave him earlier, we have released our priorities for sustaining Manitoba's forest that list protected areas, second only to collecting new scientific data on our forested areas in Manitoba.

* (14:20)

Mr. Speaker, we have also advised forestry companies that protected areas are a top priority of this Government. I am pleased to report that we are working in a very co-operative way with the industry. We are certain that we are going to meet our target.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Minister of Conservation. I ask why he says so much but delivers so little.

I would ask the minister: Why is it that his marks are getting worse each successive year that he is in office?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Conservation has been involved in the Pembina park that has been now set aside as a unique area. There is now the set-aside area in the Caribou provincial area. There are over a million acres of land that have been set aside under the three years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is more—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 417: Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and not provoke debate.

If the First Minister is going to put information on the record about the honourable minister, he should also put the information about this minister selling off Clearwater Lake.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable First Minister, on the same point of order.

Mr. Doer: On the same point of order. I was just going to complete a question about dealing with other parts of land use, just a short sentence left to go, Mr. Speaker, but the minister has not sold off the park, and I think that is very unfair.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition

House Leader, I have allowed latitude to all members and we have always followed the Manitoba practice of allowing leaders' latitude, but I would like to remind all honourable members when rising on a point of order it is to point out the breaching of a rule or departure of the practices of the House and not to use points of order for debate.

* * *

Mr. Doer: Just to conclude, one of the difficulties we are having is there is a strong lobby for us to cancel the diamond stakes in some of these areas in northeastern Manitoba. The Minister of Conservation (Mr. Lathlin) is attempting to have a balance between setting aside the million acres and not cancelling the economic opportunity that presents itself in diamond stakes. I think that is a very important point to make.

Bill 14 Debate Delay

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education, Training and Youth. A number of area residents, including many who live in the Agassiz School Division, have raised concerns with respect to the slow movement of Bill 14 through this House. They want this bill passed. Could the minister tell this House whether he is hearing these same concerns from other Manitobans?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): We have in fact had a number of communications from school divisions throughout the province.

I read here from Agassiz School Division: We are writing to express our concern that enabling legislation for school division amalgamation may not be placed by July 1 if Bill 14 continues to move through the House at its current pace. While we respect the fact that all proposed legislation needs to be fully debated and that some amendments may be necessary, it is our hope that members of the House will work in the same spirit of co-operation as did the amalgamating school divisions to ensure that enabling legislation is in place for July 1.

Mr. Speaker, this correspondence comes from the Member for Springfield's (Mr. Schuler)

constituency and from the Member for Lac du Bonnet's (Mr. Hawranik) constituency. I would encourage them to speak to their elected trustees about their activities in the House.

Adult Learning Centres Funding Overpayment

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): On page 8 of the Auditor's report on the adult learning centres, he indicates that Morris-Macdonald School Division was overfunded for the program by half a million dollars, the program being a creation of the Orlikow family.

I would ask the Minister of Education: Is this half a million dollars part of the \$2.5 million being requested from Morris-Macdonald taxpayers?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): I am not going to comment on individuals. I do not think it is seemly in this House to impugn the character of individuals, but speaking from the same report, quoting the provincial auditor, there is no evidence at all that ALCs developed as a result of considered policy development by the government of the day. Members opposite had \$40 million go out the door with no accountability.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to focus his mind on the question. The Auditor has indicated there was half a million dollars that was overfunded to the program.

Is that half-million dollars part of the recovery of \$2.5 million that he has ordered Morris-Macdonald to repay?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, the provincial auditor identified \$2.5 million to \$4 million worth of overpayments to the Morris-Macdonald School Division. Every taxpayer in the province of Manitoba, taxpayers in Boissevain, taxpayers in Minnedosa, taxpayers in Russell, taxpayers in Souris, taxpayers in Killarney, are on the hook for that money that we are seeking to recover.

If only the program had been set up by members opposite with accountability, taxpayers

throughout the province would not be out these millions of dollars.

Mr. Gilleshammer: On a new question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Minnedosa, on a new question.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Again I would ask the minister to focus his mind on the question. There is half a million dollars that the Auditor has indicated was overfunded because of a program called The Program operated by HOPE or the Orlikows.

Is that half-million dollars part of the repayment plan of \$2.5 million that he has ordered from the school division?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, if only the Member for Minnedosa was as concerned about the impact on his own constituents as this Government is.

We are determined, Mr. Speaker, to fulfil every recommendation in the provincial auditor's report, and primary amongst those is to recover \$2.5 million to \$4 million from the Morris-Macdonald School Division.

Adult Learning Centres Funding Overpayment

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers of Sanford are wondering why they have to pay back money that went into the pockets of the Cowans and the HOPE people and the Orlikows.

Mr. Speaker, on page 39 of the Auditor's report, there is a section entitled Comments from the Department. These comments are in relation to money that has to be recouped from the various programs.

The program as set up by the Orlikows was set up in the year 2000. I would like to ask the Minister of Education whether in fact his department is going to seek appropriate reimbursement of funds provided to The Program, as has been commented by the department in the Auditor's report.

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, the previous administration, the members who are now opposite and those who did not get elected in 1999 collectively, initiated funding to Morris-Macdonald for adult learning centres. Morris-Macdonald School Division, the board, contracted with HOPE, Anokiiwin and others to deliver these programs.

When allegations were made regarding ALC funding to Morris-Macdonald were brought to the department's attention, the provincial auditor was brought in.

The same requests were made when members opposite were in office. They chose not to act.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Alzheimer's Memory Walk

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, on June 8, I had the pleasure of participating in the 10th annual Alzheimer's Memory Walk co-ordinated by the South Central Regional Office of the Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba. This is one of over 150 memory walks taking place throughout the province this month.

The walk began with registration at both the Winkler and Morden arenas and ended with both groups meeting at Threshermen's Museum situated between the two communities. There participants enjoyed a delicious barbecue and a short program during which I had the opportunity to bring greetings and plant a memorial tree.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Memory walks raise much needed funds to provide services to persons affected by Alzheimer's disease. The South Central Office is made possible through fundraising and strives to increase public awareness and provide information about Alzheimer's disease.

* (14:30)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a 2001 study estimates that over 10 000 people age 65 or older in Manitoba have Alzheimer's disease. One in 20 Canadians over the age of 65 is affected by Alzheimer's disease. Over 52 percent of Canadians know someone with Alzheimer's disease. Sadly, these numbers are expected to get worse before they get better.

I commend the efforts of Sharon Webb, the South Central regional co-ordinator and all those individuals working so hard to combat Alzheimer's disease. Thank you.

Flinty's Boardwalk

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Flin Flon is a unique city. For example, how many cities have a lake in their centre? Flin Flon does.

For the last few years, Ross Lake, which is located in Flin Flon, has an added attraction, Flinty's Boardwalk. The boardwalk is popular with local residents as well as tourists. I am happy to announce that Flinty's Boardwalk has just been named one of the top community attractions in Manitoba by Attractions Canada.

Former Flin Flon mayor, Graham Craig, who is the chairperson of the Flinty Committee, travelled to Edmonton to accept a framed certificate and engraved glass on behalf of the Flinty Committee. The Flinty Committee consists of a group of volunteers who care for the boardwalk and surrounding park. I would like to thank the staff at Greenstone Community Futures Development Corporation for nominating the walkway for the award.

I am happy to see that further improvements of the boardwalk and Flinty's Park, which is the area surrounding Flinty's submarine structure along Highway 10A, are planned for this summer. The walkway will be cleaned up, and the trail may even be extended. Grass and more parking will be added to the park, and Flinty's submarine structure will get a new coat of paint.

The success of these projects has only been possible because of the hard work of many volunteers. However, more donors and volunteers are needed. I would like to encourage

the citizens of Flin Flon and region to get out and support the Flinty projects as much as possible. I would like to thank Graham Craig, as well as the rest of the Flinty Committee for a job well done and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Biotechnology Conference

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take this occasion to commend and congratulate the Government and, in particular, the Minister of Industry and Mines (Ms. Mihychuk), who recently attended the Biotechnology Conference in Toronto, and to expend a few moments on the importance of the biotech industry in Canada.

I am further prompted by these comments by the headline in today's *Globe and Mail* that Frankenfood activists failed to scare the public. I have words of advice to our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). The fact of the matter is that genetically altered food is safe, high quality food that more and more farmers are using, particularly here in Manitoba: 65 percent of our canola crop, 30 percent of our corn crop is that, and the Minister of Agriculture knows it.

The pity is where the activists have agreed to have stopped is that we have a potato that is genetically modified that requires no chemical at all. The current potatoes that we grow require sometimes three, four chemical dustings to keep the pesticides off them.

The activists have stopped us from growing them, because the people like McCain's fear the propaganda of these activists. For us the potato crop, as the minister knows, is of increasing importance. I want to urge her, her department and her ministry, to support her colleague the Minister of Industry, who returned so enthusiastically from the recent Biotechnology Conference in Toronto, to forget about the Neanderthals in her party, like the Member for the Interlake and others who are there trying to scare the general public—

An Honourable Member: The honourable member from Albania.

Mr. Enns:—about Frankenfoods and all that. Let her stand up on behalf of the farmers and assure the safety of genetically—

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

Point of Order

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Deputy Speaker, normally I listen to the Member for Lakeside, and I give him some latitude, given his tenure in the House here, but I have to rise and protest at being referred to as a Neanderthal. I ask that he retract that.

Furthermore, I want to address comments made by the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) here in referring to me, in addition, as the member for Albania. I wonder if he has a problem with people from Albania. I would suggest that the Member for Springfield rise in this House on his hind feet and apologize to the people of Albania in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader): On the same point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We can see that there is no point of order here. The honourable member did not refer to any rules that have been broken, and we are staying far away from the word used by the Premier (Mr. Doer), which is "Luddite," that he always yells across the way. I think the member should be privileged in what he is being called.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Since I cannot hear exactly what was being said, I think it is wise to take the matter under advisement.

* * *

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): This is under Members' Statements, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Under Members' Statements.

Nathan Micay Learning Resource Centre

Mr. Rondeau: I am pleased to rise today to highlight the activities of Nathan Micay Learning Resource Centre located on the campus at the University of Winnipeg.

This important student resource facilitates and promotes the ongoing development of an accessible learning environment, providing students with disabilities the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of campus life. Through individualized support to students and faculty, the centre provides individual academic counselling, visual language interpretation, computerized and volunteer note taking, alternative exam accommodations and invigilation, alternate format preparation, advocacy, physical space alteration and a host of other services designed to help disabled students and faculty participate in campus life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Nathan Micay Learning Resource Centre makes it possible for students to benefit from a university education where those students may otherwise not be able to undertake a university education at all.

This centre was made available through a Council on Post-Secondary Education one-time grant, of \$20,000, additional resources allowed for the centre to purchase much needed specialized computer and audio-visual equipment that will assist students with note taking and reading materials, et cetera. Many students take for granted the ability to take notes in class, read and prepare for assignments. These basic, day-to-day, routine, mechanical elements are major barriers for students who have to deal with a variety of disabilities. This centre helps those students overcome these barriers and allows them to focus more on the ideas, concepts and skills they are learning and less on the mechanics of attending class.

In the past three years, our Government has focussed on student success through ensuring that their education is affordable, investing in physical infrastructure and supporting innovative programs.

The learning centre makes a real difference for students. The centre helps students to learn and helps them become successful. It is important that people with disabilities become a full part of our society. I know that I speak for every member of our Government when I say that we are proud that we could assist the centre in fulfilling its mandate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time has elapsed. Grievances. Another member's statement, sorry.

***Walking Wounded* Movie Production**

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): Mr. Deputy Speaker, every year Arthur A. Leach Jr. High School makes a feature film. This year's offering entitled *Walking Wounded* premiered at Grant Park Cinemas on June 3, 2002, and was a great success enjoyed by all in attendance.

Walking Wounded was a true community effort, involving 58 Grade 9 students, teachers, parents and many others. Local film industry companies were especially helpful, offering advice and loaning professional lights, dollies and other equipment on many occasions. The movie was filmed over a period of 26 days, and the entire production was completed in 10 months. Six students helped organize and develop the story line over a two-month discussion period.

The finished product of directors James McLellan and Vincent Pearase and assistant directors Kylie Stasila and Manjeet Sidhu is a 90-minute feature film, which is polished and highly entertaining. The end result of the students' hard work is a truly magnificent picture.

* (14:40)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the production of *Walking Wounded* would not have been possible without the generous support of sponsors, Advance Pro, William F. White, PS Manitoba and Cineplex Odeon Cinemas. Their assistance has helped to make the vision of these students become a reality.

I would like to extend sincerest congratulations to those involved in the Arthur A. Leach Junior High production of *Walking Wounded* on a job well done, on behalf of all members of the Progressive Conservative caucus.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is our intention

to call Bill 14. Would you first, though, ask if there is consent of the House to sit from 6 p.m. till 10 p.m. tonight after private members' hour to deal with Bill 14.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that after private members' hour this House does not see the clock and sits until 10 p.m.?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There cannot be unanimous consent if some people are saying no. So consent is denied.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you canvass the House to determine if there is leave of the House to sit on Friday with Thursday hours?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous leave in the House to sit on Friday under the condition of Thursday sitting hours?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Unanimous consent is denied. Leave is denied.

Mr. Mackintosh: We want to hear from the public, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would you please call debate on second readings on Bill 14.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act and the amendments thereof, standing in the name of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) with 16 minutes remaining.

Order, please. The honourable Member for River Heights, having moved previously adjournment and it has been denied must now speak. The honourable Member for River Heights, with 16 minutes remaining.

The honourable Member for River Heights' time has therefore been concluded.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to present a couple of comments on the record in regard to Bill 14.

As we witnessed earlier here today, we are getting a perfect example of what the NDP and what the Doer government consider to be the Manitoba way. The Manitoba way, which similar to this bill is, if you do not like what we say or what we do, we will legislate you, and that is how you will have to deal with it after the fact. Above the law, the government side and, if we are not above the law, we will make ourselves, by legislation, above the law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have heard the Premier (Mr. Doer) often referred in Manitoba about doing things the Manitoba way, and what is the one thing that he said to the Manitoba Association of School Trustees? What is the thing that he gave them as assurances that amalgamations will move forward on a voluntary basis? What is the confidence that he gave our elected representatives as trustees in the province of Manitoba? Well, at a meeting with all these people, in front of a grand table of Manitoba school association trustees, the Premier stood on his feet and proudly declared there will be no forced amalgamations; it is not the Manitoba way.

Well, today and previously, we find out that is the Manitoba way. That is the Manitoba government way, and that is the NDP way in Manitoba. If you do not like what we are doing and you are not happy with what we are doing, we will silence your voices and we will legislate you to be silent. We will take away your voice. We will not allow you to speak in protest against government decision. If you do, we will change the rules and legislate again so that the courts' rulings are invalid after the fact.

That is the Manitoba way today that we see, the way the Manitoba New Democratic Party operates in Manitoba and the way the Doer government operates in the province of Manitoba. They have absolutely no respect. They have no consideration of people, and they move forward with their own agenda. They talk about taking it to the public. Yes, we can take it to the public. Call the committee. Bring the

people in. Well, they know that they did not do it right. They know that they did not do any part of this amalgamation theory process right.

* (14:50)

What they did is they chose to go out, and I suspect that the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) and a few of the cronies on the other side sat down, perhaps in a darkly lit corner room in the building, with a crayon and drew out the boundary lines, took it back to the Cabinet, and, oh, goodness' sake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that there was somebody that objected to those lines. So they asked the Minister of Education to return to his lonely writers garret and take out a new crayon and draw another line. He did that, and, again, members on the government side said, well, that is not quite right yet either. I suspect even at some point during that conversation, perhaps one of the members opposite said, gee, has anybody talked to the public about this. What is their sense, what is their take, what is their feeling on this? The minister stood on his feet and proudly proclaimed, well, back in 1990, early nineties, I am not even sure, '94 perhaps, the previous government did a tour around the province and consulted with people and talked to people.

Dare I say, when you check the list of the people who presented in 1994 to the Norrie Commission, many of the same people are showing up to voice their concerns on Bill 14 eight years later, and I suspect we will get a different story from some of the people. I notice that Mr. Alex Krawec spoke volumes against amalgamation in the sense that it would not save any money. Now, that seems to be one of the ruses that this Government is putting out to the public. Do not worry. We are doing this amalgamation with the idea of saving huge amounts of dollars to the people of Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Well, we have not heard one piece of evidence from the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) that would suggest that. He has used the words "\$10 million." He has used "substantial savings." He has used everything that I suspect when you are not really sure of the numbers and, because you have not consulted or talked to anybody, that you probably are not sure

of the numbers. We do know that the Norrie Commission suggested in its final report that the savings of dollars would be minimal at most and, if anything, more apt to cost more money.

I find it interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have been challenged by this Government to get up and speak on this bill. We have been asked by members opposite to move it forward, but what we see is now the Manitoba way. If you do not like what we are doing, if you do not like what we are saying, get out of the way because we are going to bring forward legislation to ram it down your throat, to ram it down the people's throats of Manitoba, and for what? That is what I ask.

Did the minister go out and consult with people? No, he did not. He talks about the Norrie report. He talks about the consultations. If the minister was aware of the Norrie report and all the time and effort and good work that was put into that report, he would recognize that these people put an awful lot of time into it and came forward with a strong report. The government of the day followed the process. Unfortunately, this Government has not. What they are doing is they are saying, if you do not like what we are doing, be silent, or we will silence you through legislation, and the bill will pass.

Now, we have heard the minister talk, and we have heard other members of the Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talk about consultation. Well, I talked to my school divisions. They got a letter from the minister and he asked them, well, you guys do your consultations. You kind of know what is going on, and I respect what you say. Well, again, the communities that I represent and the school divisions that I represent all reported back to the minister that there would be increased costs. So I think it takes away the argument. I suspect, if the minister is willing and, well, I would not want to use the word "willing" because that is not the Manitoba way. I would suggest, if there was some way this minister could be forced into presenting to the public what school divisions told him, I suspect the public would have a different opinion or would have a better understanding of what the minister actually did in this process to take away people's voices.

The minister refers to the Norrie report, and he refers to following it and parts of it that suit

his agenda and other parts that do not. What he did do is he used it to say that this is the document that we used to consult, but their recommendations did not satisfy our Cabinet, did not satisfy our caucus members, did not satisfy the NDP government, so although we used the Norrie report for our consultation purposes, we are not going to listen or hear any of the words that he made comment to and recommendations that he made. What we are going to do is sit down with a crayon and draw our own boundaries.

The minister talks, you know and we know, as an opposition, and I believe the people of Manitoba are starting to discover, that this minister had a process in place to consult with the people of Manitoba, to ask their concerns and their questions and their issues in regard to amalgamation, but he chose not to. He chose to ignore the biggest, most singular, fundamental right of all the people of Manitoba, and that is the right to express their opinion, to express their point of view, to talk amongst their neighbours and friends and bring forward positions on behalf of their children, because we are told that in the long run, according to the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), this is all about the children.

Well, they seem to have been lost in this process. It seems more in regard to what the Government wants to do, what the Government deems is right and that no consultation, no discussion, no consulting with the people in the province of Manitoba would be followed. What he said is: I am the Minister of Education. I deem this to be right and I will legislate it just to prove to you that I am right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question that we have asked on this side with absolutely no response from the minister was was there a process involved. Well, first he says there was, kind of, and then, well, not really. We kind of just went out and talked to them, but, no, we did not talk to the people. We sent a letter to the superintendents; well, no, we actually sent a letter to the school divisions and we asked them to do all this.

I got comments back from my school divisions and my people in MAST, and they said

to me that there were no guidelines. There was nothing given to them by the minister. They were told to consult. In some cases, they did not even know what they were told to consult about.

Nonetheless, the minister has deemed this to be his legislation, and we just want to make sure that the minister understands that this is really not a bill about education. It is really a bill about the minister protecting his working environment, the minister protecting his esteem, if there is such a thing and about the minister saying to the public: No matter what I did, no matter what process I did not follow, no matter what acts I broke along the way, I am going to legislate the amalgamation of school divisions.

But not only that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while he is at it, he says: I am a little concerned that the members of the Opposition have pointed out several of the inadequacies of my ministry and of my department. They have questioned me along the way about boundaries and how they were drawn. They have questioned me about the process. They questioned me about were people consulted. They questioned me about were there going to be monies saved. They questioned me about many, many things, but I could not answer all of them. In fact, I would not answer all of them. I chose not to answer all of them, but, by golly, let one person in the public challenge my authority, and they will feel the heavy hand of this minister and of this Government.

We only have to look at the Validation of Manitoba Regulation No. 61/02. There in 9.3 it reads: "*The School Division and School District Amalgamation (2002) Regulation*, Manitoba Regulation 61/02, made by the minister and confirmed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council in the *School Districts Amalgamation (2002) Confirmation Regulation*, Manitoba Regulation 63/02, in accordance with section 7 is validated and declared to have been lawfully made, and everything done pursuant to that regulation is validated and declared to have been lawfully done."

* (15:00)

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we asked the minister about that. We challenged him on it in Question Period. The public have asked

questions about it. What does it mean? Has it ever been done before? Is this something that the minister had to throw in basically, as we stated in this House at that time, to cover off the minister's derrière. It seems like it. It seems like he has acknowledged that he has made mistakes in the process. He has acknowledged that he has not followed the act. He has acknowledged that he has not consulted with people, but, by the way, with one swipe of legislation, the validation portion of this act, he is saying that, regardless of how I behaved and what I did and what I did not do, everything I did will be validated when we pass this legislation.

By the numbers on the other side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have the ability. They could make every untruth that they have ever spoken true simply by legislating it.

I suspect we are going to see more of this type of legislation, because as we go through day to day and day after day, we continually see this Government acting outside the acts that they are responsible for, acting outside of the responsibilities that they have as ministers of Crowns, acting outside of the interests of the people of Manitoba, acting outside of the children's interests in Manitoba, but in one fell swoop, in one mighty stroke of the pen they can validate everything that they have done simply with the strength and the numbers that they have in government by passing legislation that says yes, I made some mistakes but I am validated because the law says I am.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to read a little further into that same portion of the act. Not only does the minister absolve himself of any responsibility or any wrongdoing, although we know and it has been shown time after time that he has, he chooses through legislation to absolve his responsibility. He even goes further. It is common knowledge across the province of Manitoba, it is common knowledge across the school divisions in the province of Manitoba that this minister is being challenged in court. His rulings are being taken to court. Rather than face the public and take it to court and let a judge make a decision, he chooses to hide behind this gutless legislation. He chooses to hide behind the words of legislation that he creates to silence people.

The act goes on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, section 9(1) subsection 12(3) is amended by striking out "under section 5 or 13" and substituting "by an award or order of the board of reference or by a regulation made under section 12.2," he will be absolved of any of that responsibility. He has taken himself and said, you know, you can take me to court; you can win in court. You can have the judge pass down a recommendation to me and by the stroke of my pen in this legislation, I absolve myself of all that responsibility. I, the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), am bigger, far bigger than any one person in the province of Manitoba. I am far bigger than any group of people that want to take forward a challenge to the Minister of Education. In fact, he is almost saying with this legislation, how dare those people challenge me. I am the king of education in the province of Manitoba, and I rule Manitoba. I am the king, and if you do not believe me, I now have legislation that says I am the king. I now have legislation that says people in Manitoba, you can challenge me; you can take me to court; you can even get a good judgment against me, and by the acts of this legislation it means nothing.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Manitoba are becoming far more aware of the actions of this Minister of Education, and it is reflecting upon the entire government. We now have the Premier tied into it. I mean he stood up at a public meeting and said to people do not worry people, you are responsible for the education in the province of Manitoba. We have had some voluntary amalgamations along the way. Things seem to be running pretty smooth. We will not force amalgamation upon the people of Manitoba. It is just not the Manitoba way.

Well, I guess, unfortunately, today we find out what is the true Manitoba way, and it is the self-serving way of the Minister of Education, the Premier of Manitoba, the Cabinet of this NDP government and all the backbenchers that sit across the floor. They have deemed themselves more powerful than the voice of the people of Manitoba.

When you get into that type of legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I suggest to you that we are on a treadmill downwards very quickly into the idea that Manitoba and the people of Manitoba

believe they have a voice, because when this legislation passes, and because of the numbers it is not a matter of when it passes, we will know that the minister has deemed himself to be more powerful than any group or any individual in the province of Manitoba when it comes to dealing with education issues in the province of Manitoba, and amalgamation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, have we argued that amalgamation is bad? Actually, no. What we did as a government is we said, you know, there is a process that we followed. We talked to many, many Manitobans and understood what they were saying. Really what they said was, give us a little more time. Perhaps even give us a little bit of an incentive, and we can try and make this thing work.

I happen to be a representative of school divisions that have voluntarily amalgamated. They have done a good job of it, and they are working hard to make a second amalgamation. Their concern is: Where does the minister get off on taking the authority to himself and putting himself above all other people in the province of Manitoba? You know, it is one thing to stand up and boast, and it is easy for the minister to sit on his haunches and chant over there, but the fact of the matter is that he chose not to talk to the people of Manitoba. He chose to listen to himself and probably the friends inside of his head, and he said, you know, I am the almighty, I am the god of education, and, therefore, no one in this province shall have the right to challenge me.

We have a minister that has in his role as Education Minister been seen to funnel money off to Agassiz under suspicious conditions. It was brought to light, and the minister gave us some sort of an answer that I suspect he probably was not even comfortable with, but, nonetheless, he chose to ignore the facts and funnel the money to a school division to prop them up. On the other hand, we have a Minister of Education who under similar circumstances chose to fire a board. He chose to fire a board. He chose to say I am bigger than this group of people, this group of elected voices in Manitoba, and I will rule supreme over them. But it does not surprise me, because that is the attitude of the Government. We have seen it before and we

are seeing it exemplified by this minister and by this bill. He is placing himself far beyond—

An Honourable Member: *El presidente.*

Mr. Tweed: Yes, we are probably going to have to change his title in this House. We may have to refer to him as *el presidente*. Well, I will not go any further than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of the decorum that we are supposed to express in this House.

He goes out to Morris-Macdonald, where there is a group of hardworking people, and he fires a board. I guess I am new to this, but I do not know if it has been done before or if it is a precedent. I suspect it has not been done, but I am not sure if the minister, again trying to be first at everything that he does, would feel that, hey, I have got to show my flex, I have got to show my muscle out there, and I am going to punish these people and I am going to punish them by taking away their voice, I am going to punish them by firing them so that they cannot represent themselves to the government of Manitoba. I am going to appoint my duly appointed by me czar of education. I am going to send him out there and tell him to negotiate every deal. I am going to ask the Morris-Macdonald School Division to pay back the two and a half million. He does not really know if that is the exact number. Even his self-appointed administrator does not know if that is the exact number, but let us draw a number out of the air. The Auditor suggested it was somewhere between \$2.5 million and \$4 million. Hey, I am the minister, I am the king of education. Let us just pick out \$2.5 million and send them a bill. Do you know what? Do not worry about who we are going to collect it from, because the taxpayers will pay.

* (15:10)

I am advised that the payment, the tax increase is around 28 percent, 27 percent for the next three years for these people. And do you know what? Who made that decision? The Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), the czar of Manitoba education rose from his mighty seat and donned his crown and said these people shall pay.

Do you know what happened? The people in Morris-Macdonald said we disagree with the

minister. We do not think that the minister is being fair. We do not think that the minister is listening to us. We do not think that the minister is involved enough to represent our views, so we would like to have our own school board. We would like to have a duly elected school board, which we had, but the minister in his thirst for power chose to fire.

So what does the community do? The community of Morris-Macdonald, the School Division of Morris-Macdonald have a public meeting, and they say, you know, the minister has acted outside of the school act. He has done some things that we are not certain about. We challenge or question whether he has done everything that he should have done or perhaps some things that he should not have done. So they said, well, let us throw some money in a pot. Let us get a group of interested community people—and their only interest is the children of their district that they represent, but they do not have a voice for that, so they got together and they said in the community, gee, you know, this minister is acting far and beyond the powers of any Minister of Education or for that matter any minister in government. To act solely with the hand of force on these people, we just do not believe that is right.

So what did they do? They decided there has to be a way, as in a democracy, that we can challenge this. There has to be a way that we can go out and consult our community since the minister refuses to, take a point of view, bring it forward to the Government, have them listen, at least give us some sense that they are listening even though they may not respond, but at least listen, and what did the minister do? Basically he said to them, well, look, he said, I do not know, it is two and a half million, it is four million, let us throw out two and a half. But, listen, if you guys do not like what I am doing, feel free to sue the third parties and take them to court. In fact, I challenge you to run in your next campaign for school division office that you are going to take these third parties, the friends of the NDP government, the friends of the Premier (Mr. Doer), take them to court and challenge them.

Well, the representatives of Morris-Macdonald, heeding the czar of education's words said, you know, that is a good point.

Perhaps we will do that. But in the same breath, maybe we will take the minister, take the Department of Education to court. So what did they do? They hired a lawyer. They got a group of people together. I think they even got a court date. I am not sure, but I think they have a court date.

We suspect that with the power of the minister's office, of the czar of education's office, he will thwart them as much as he can, as he is with the Springfield group by remand, remand, remand. Once again, we have the power, the mighty power of government dictating to the few, to the defenseless, that we are government. We are more powerful; we make the laws; you obey the laws and you shall have no right to challenge.

The people of Morris-Macdonald said, well, we are still going to go forward with this. We would like to hear what the Department of Education has to say about the wrongful dismissal of the board, about the representation or taxation without representation that the minister has forced upon them with these huge tax increases.

So what does the minister do? The minister goes back to his office and says, boy, these guys are serious out there. They have raised some money. They have hired a lawyer. They have a court date. What am I going to do? Well, he sat down and I suspect probably with most of the front row of this Cabinet, because I suspect that is where this type of devious behaviour would come from, and he said, what am I going to do? I am in a bind. I have Springfield people taking me to court—Transcona, I am sorry—challenging my ruling. I have the people in Morris-Macdonald, they are up in arms. Geez, they have even hired a lawyer. They want to take me to court and now they even have a court date. What am I going to do?

The light goes on. Let us create a law that says these people, if they get to court—but first our plan is to keep them out of court as long as we can, and if we can get this bill passed, well, then we have got them. Around the table I am sure one of the smart members opposite said, well, what if we do not get them to court? Well, we will; we are the Government. We can delay;

we can delay, we can delay. We have the revenue. Maybe we will phone Bob Brennan at Hydro and ask him for a million dollars to help us defend ourselves against the public for the saviour of the reputation of the czar of education. So what do they do? They said, hey, I got it, I got it. A light came on and someone said to the Minister of Education: Hey, do not worry, Minister, we have got you covered. We are going to include in this bill a section that will silence the voices of the masses of the people of Manitoba. We are going to shut these people up with legislation. Do not worry, Mr. Minister; do not worry, czar. We will protect you. We will cover your butt because we know there were some iffy issues along the way, and you have had your problems dealing with some of the questions that have been asked. You have had difficulty responding to the media about what you did or what you did not do and some of the definitions that you have tried to throw at people. I mean, symmetry, give the world a break.

So, anyway, what they did is they drafted, and I am sure they probably had to consult thousands of lawyers to do this. I suspect, because I imagine probably the first few lawyers that they asked to do this said: You know, there are countries where they do this, where they take away the rights and the voices of the people. There are countries where we silence the people when they want to challenge the Government on issues that they are inflicting upon the people of Manitoba. There are places in this country where we do not even have to pass a law to do this, but no, this minister says no, I want to be seen, whether real or not, I want to be seen by the public of Manitoba as having done the right thing, as having followed the process, as having obeyed all the rules within the acts and regulations that he is responsible for.

So what does he do? He brings forward a validation. I always call it a validation-of-what-I-did-wrong act, so no one can sue me or no one can blame me, and if you do not like it, it is legislation and we passed it, so get on with it.

It is a shameful piece of legislation. It is a shame when a minister of a government cannot stand up and defend his position in public. He cannot explain to the people why he is doing

what he is doing. He cannot explain why he did not follow the process that is written in acts that he is responsible for. He just decided that I will be the king of education, and let no man, woman or child challenge me. Let no one question my ability or my authority. I will make the final decision. He has done this with the full knowledge, perhaps with the full knowledge of legal counsel, well, obviously, with the full knowledge of his Cabinet and, I suspect, that they are probably a little bit humble or a little bit of ashamed of the minister and his actions, and the fact that he has to legislate in the province of Manitoba that he has acted properly.

Can you imagine in the workplace of citizens in the province of Manitoba if a manager of a company or a manager of a business or an owner of a business decreed to his employees that I am always right and everything I have done before and that cometh forward ahead, I shall be redeemed? I shall be free of all challenges from the public. I shall be the king. I shall be validated.

* (15:20)

What a great way to have it. What a great piece of legislation to bring to people, and you know what? What makes this even more appalling is the very people that he is trying to protect, as he says, the children of Manitoba are the ones that will be most affected by this type of legislation. They will be affected because they will learn when they read the histories of Manitoba, that one minister who made so many mistakes along the path to amalgamation chose to legislate his righteousness as opposed to going out and facing the public and consulting with them and talking. He chose because he has the power, because he has the strength in numbers of government, he chose to legislate his validation of everything that he did in this act.

We have heard the minister's excuses for doing this. We have heard him talk, in fact, it almost brought me to tears one day hearing him talk about saving the children, and you know, going to reinvest all this saved money into education. But, again, when questioned and challenged by the public, by us in here, by the media, he cannot produce one shred of evidence that there is going to be one dollar saved. Shame.

There is not one piece of evidence that he has produced to the people of Manitoba that justifies that he is saying that there is going to be a \$10 million saving. He cannot produce it.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the minister chooses to chant from his chair, I would ask him to get up and put it on the record, and we will verify the numbers that he is talking about. If not, perhaps you should just sit on your haunches and be quiet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side, unlike the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), have gone out and consulted with people. We have gone out and talked to school divisions. What they tell us is that there are no savings. So there will be no more reinvestment in education based on amalgamation because the fact of the matter is that there will be no savings. The minister knows it. The NDP members know it. But they are using it, and you know what? It does sell. I will have to give the minister credit. People in Manitoba want governments to be efficient. They want them to save money. What they do not want to have done to them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to be lied to.

They are using the fact that they are saving money and going to reinvest it in education, and we know that that is not true. If they believe it is true, I would ask the Minister of Education, the czar of education in the province of Manitoba, if he would choose to table anything. In fact, if he could even table a question that he asked any school division, or any individual taxpayer in Manitoba, about saving of money, I would like to see it. I think the people of Manitoba would like to see it too.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when that does not quite catch with people, everybody is happy about any government that is trying to save money. Lord knows, they would be thrilled with this Government if they could save a penny, but they cannot, and they cannot show it, so the people are starting to ask questions: How are we going to re-invest in education with the savings if now we are hearing that there are no savings? So what does the minister do? Starts changing gears a little bit. He goes out and he starts negotiating individually with the school divisions. Where should I put this line? What

about this municipality? Where do you guys fit in?

I know the Member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) was being flown back and forth to negotiate with one of his school divisions. Even up until the very last day they were not sure if they were in one school division or out of another or in another, and the minister stands, the czar stands and professes to have this tremendous process that we followed, and we followed it. Well, no, I guess we did not follow it, but I want you to think we did. I mean, we are really serious about this. We did listen to our members in the caucus, so that is kind of like consulting with people, so, well, maybe we will try that.

When that fell through, when that argument did not seem to wash anymore, and they were getting challenges from other school divisions, school divisions decided, well, you know, we are going to try and do our best. There are school divisions out there that are working hard to amalgamate. There is no question about it, because their main concern is with the children and with the taxpayers that they represent. They were elected by those people. They were elected to do a job for those people. They were elected to bring the best, the highest quality of education to the people that they represent and to the children that they represent.

But you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The minister did not even need this legislation to do that. He did not need it. It is in the regulations. He could do it all, but you know what, he had to get one little piece into this legislation that validates all the wrongdoings that he has committed in this process towards amalgamation. He had to prove to the people that he could stand up, and you know what? He will, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He will stand up in public and say: I did everything right. I followed the rules. I did not violate anything. In fact, I got a law that says I did, and how do I know that? Because I wrote it. I wrote a law that says I am validated. Everything that I did before me, whether it was right or wrong, was right. I have a law that says if you challenge me and win in court, you are not going to get paid, you are not going to get a settlement, because I got a law that says it. Talk about the way we run our

system and the way we run our education in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is probably the most disappointing piece of legislation that I have seen in the time that I have been in this Legislature. It is the most upper-handed, it is the most undermining, it is the most—I do not even know the words that would fully describe the power and the thirst for power that this minister is displaying in this type of bill with this type of legislation. He is saying: I will do anything it takes and everything it takes, whether it be within the law or outside of the law, but when I am done I will pass a bill because I have the ability to and I have the strength that says I was right. That is what this bill is all about. It is cover-your-butt legislation. It is validation of a minister who has shown such ineptness in his job that he should be removed.

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

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to stand and discuss Bill 14. I would like to remind the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) that there are a number of people out there, both current and past trustees, who on closer examination of this bill and review of some of the implications of this bill are starting to realize that perhaps, and, you know, one does not want to give the minister too much credit. I do not know whether he was underhanded enough to sit down and quietly plot how he was going to put this bill into place so that he could control the amalgamation or whether he has a bureaucracy that is a little overactive and has decided to plug any potential loopholes.

I really cannot put a finger on what the rationale of the current Minister of Education was when he put together this bill, except that in looking at a number of bills that have been brought into this sitting of the Legislature, a lot of these bills that really are window dressing in the sense that the work that is required or the authority that is required under the bill is really already available to government with the mechanisms that are in place. There are lots of bills that need modernization. There are lots of bills that need improvement. There are lots of

bills that could have the wording redefined. There are lots of bills that have loopholes in them, but this really was not one.

* (15:30)

To tell you the truth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to call Bill 14 The Public Schools Modernization Act is a bit of a farce, because this is not, in my opinion, modernization. This is a government of the day, the minister of the day, putting in place authority so that he can force march some amalgamations of school divisions across the province. If it was just confined to that, perhaps it would not be as big an issue as it is with a number of people who have growing concerns about this legislation.

First of all, if you take a look at the preambles of some of the early clauses in this bill, a person really does not realize that this might cause any kind of debate. It seems like a pretty lacklustre bill, but as soon as one starts to look at the authority that is being seized by the minister as he goes through the implementation of this bill, all of a sudden school divisions that are not being amalgamated are starting to question where this is going to take us. We are not amalgamated today.

It is very interesting that within minutes or, certainly, within a half an hour to an hour of the time the Minister of Education made his pronouncements about the boundary changes and the amalgamations that he intended to put on the record within—let us give them the benefit of the doubt—a whole hour of the press conference being held by the minister, here, to announce his intentions, there were representatives of MTS in the staffrooms of schools in divisions telling them, do not worry, this is just the first phase.

Well, some of the members across the way sort of wiggled their eyebrows there. Well, just what kind of game is being played here? If in fact the minister has indicated to MTS, do not worry, this is just the first—did I say something to insult the minister? I am sure he did not want to snub my remarks. I hope he is sitting carefully with the speaker on somewhere so that he can hear my remarks. He might be here, you think? *[interjection]* He might be under his desk, I suppose.

One of the concerns is, when we bring forward this debate, we want to make sure that the Minister of Education is listening carefully to what we have to say because, if there is anybody in this Chamber who does not take this legislation seriously, if there is anyone and especially the minister who wants to ignore the comments of the Opposition and walk out at the very middle of my speech, then I suggest that perhaps he is not nearly as serious about passing this bill with good and solid and reasonable debate as we thought he might be.

We were getting jabs from across the way consistently: Get on with the bill, get on with the bill. Well, the minister may not like what I am saying, but is that any cause for him to walk out of this Chamber? Is that any cause for him to walk out? It is very unfortunate that he would take that attitude. Well, a couple of members across the way say that I have lowered the bar. The bar is so low as being set by this bill that just about anybody could trip over it. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think maybe that the members across the way doth protest too much. If they object to my reference to their minister being absent, they should go and get him and bring him into the House so that he will listen and participate in this debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Although I was waiting for any point of order, the member himself cannot, by the rules of the House, intimate expressly or directly the absence of any honourable member.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I challenge your ruling.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There was no one who raised any point of order, except the Government Opposition House Leader. I just expressed a caution on the member speaking, so there was nothing to raise, nothing to appeal.

Mr. Cummings: The amendment that we are debating—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Member for Ste. Rose, with his speech.

Mr. Cummings: The Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) would like to know what is on my mind. Perhaps some of the things that are running through my mind at the moment might be best not stated in the Chamber.

The concern that I have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that here we are debating the amendment that says that there should be consultation by this Government, there should be consultation by this minister, and at the very time that we were trying to make a salient point about the importance of that consultation and the very fact that the Manitoba Teachers' Society, some members of that organization seemed to realize that the minister—*[interjection]* Well, here we go.

I am pleased to resume the thread of my speech, because it seems to me that having the minister prepared to sit and listen to the reasons why he should be consulting more is particularly important when his bill is going to have that much of an impact on the citizens of this province. The impacts are one which he has not talked about in this bill.

What this bill really is is the seizing of authority. It is assuming unto the ministry and under this current minister, taking authority that really goes beyond what we normally anticipate the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) would assume. It gives him authority for amalgamation that in our opinion he does not have to take excessive authority to do. He has the ability under the current act to proceed with amalgamation. He has under the authority of this act said to the trustees out there, not only the ones that he intends to amalgamate, but the rest of the trustees across the province: I will decide what is good for you and what is good for the boundaries in this division. I will decide and if you do not like what I decide you have no grounds to appeal.

The two-pronged approach of this bill, one, assuming the authority, and on the other giving the minister a safe, harmless clause that basically says that whatever I decide cannot be challenged in the courts leaves this side of the House with very little option except to challenge it right here. We need to make sure that he listens to that debate and that he understands the necessity of

having a debate, not that is boring, not that would put him to sleep, but a debate that means a lot towards the future of the self-determination of school divisions in this province.

Does this Government respect the authority of elected trustees? Does it trust elected trustees? Or is it embarked on the father-knows-best approach that, frankly, was the way we treated municipal councils in this province not that long ago where they had to bring their budget for approval to the government of the day?

There was also legislation that said they could not assume any debt. As local governance grows and achieves greater capacity and stability, then of course they go on and manage their affairs independently of other levels of government. This bill tends to interfere with that relationship between school divisions and the trustees who represent the parents and the students in those school divisions. It interferes with that relationship and changes it to a relationship that in the extreme could be called dictatorial. On a more generous reflection it could be called mandating beyond what is the normal responsibility of the Province of Manitoba or any other province in this land.

* (15:40)

When we are talking about amalgamation of school divisions, the minister says that he can achieve savings. Well, the Norrie report was done almost eight years ago, I guess, not a decade, but about eight years ago. A lot of people said: Why was the Norrie report not implemented immediately, forthwith? Why were the changes not implemented through legislation and put into place?

Well, there were a number of sober second thoughts that revolved around the Norrie report. It was an excellent report in digging in depth into the rationale and financial aspects of managing school divisions in this province, but in the end, Norrie indicated that there were not significant dollar savings in amalgamation. There might be program improvements that could occur as a result of amalgamation. There certainly might be some management synergies. Symmetry, that is the word the minister likes. There could be some management symmetry that could be brought together.

In fact, if implementation of amalgamation was to occur, what it should do is be based on the educational opportunity that it provides for the students, because it was very well established that the dollars would probably be close to being neutral.

In fact, what we may be seeing right now with the plan that the minister is putting forward is that we may actually see that where school divisions are being amalgamated, there will be cause to deal with the collective agreements. There are collective agreements for those who are providing the service or, more directly, the professional teachers. If there is a spread between those collective agreements, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask you do you think there honestly is a chance of freezing the one pay scale until the other one catches up? Do you think that the ones who are at the lower end are going to say, well, now we are part of the new amalgamated school division, but our pay scale is 5 percent below—do you really think that they are going to wait for very long until that is harmonized, until some symmetry is brought to it, as the minister always wants to refer to? His kind of symmetry is going to cost the taxpayers of that school division. It is unavoidable.

It does not mean that amalgamation, in and of itself, should not go forward, but it need not go forward by the methods and by the direction that this minister is giving. When he has taken away the right of the people to go beyond the normal interrelationship between the parents and the school board and the function of that when they are joining the two, he has taken away their ability to appeal in a way that is quite unprecedented, frankly.

What we see, we jokingly on this side refer to the map that was drawn with the minister's crayons, and the fact is that we have some privilege to say that, because these boundaries, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are somewhat illogical in some areas.

One of the things that has caused stress and differences between school divisions is, No. 1, if there is a difference in the educational demands of the community. Frankly, there are some communities that would like some other second languages taught. The school boards will

generally try and comply with that within the ability of their budgets.

The other difference is what the tax base between the school divisions looks like. There are ways that the ministry tries to offset this through the formula of the education school tax redistribution, if you will. The provincial funding has a formula that will adjust it to make it possible for some of the less well-assessed, less highly assessed school divisions to provide programs that they might not otherwise have been able to provide.

But we have a curious situation and there are several curious things that occurred during the evolution of this bill of amalgamation. Number one was the one I mentioned, that there is confidence in the Manitoba teachers' association that this will only be phase one. So that leads me to ask suspiciously: Does that mean that the minister has artificially and politically maneuvered these boundaries to try and only have controversy in areas where he thinks they can deal with that controversy? If that is what he is thinking, he is compounding his problem in getting this bill through because those areas where there was some controversy are seeking every angle and avenue to be heard.

There are others out there who have been sitting on pins and needles, frankly, for many years, some of them going back to the Norrie report, saying we know that we could benefit from joining with some of our neighbouring divisions. We could improve our program offering. We know the overall tax base of the division, if it was of a different configuration, would probably go up. We know that there would be some symmetry in terms of the administration, provided the area did not get too big. So how come we were left out? It really does raise the question. There is no rhyme nor reason, and for the minister, which he does on many occasions, to reference the Norrie report and say the consultation has occurred; the Norrie report was out there. If he was following the Norrie report and implementing it, either in a phased way or otherwise, then he would have some validity to make that argument that public consultation has occurred. The fact is the public consultation has not occurred on the boundaries as he is proposing them.

I suppose one should not personalize this any more than necessary, but the fact is I spent a number of years as a trustee. If there is one thing that annoys people in rural Manitoba when they are talking about boundaries, the first thing is, sometimes they have a choice of schools. Which one is far away and which one is the furthest away? They do have, in many cases, to deal with, particularly in the area where I come from, some pretty long bus routes. There are people who spend an hour or more on bus routes. That becomes a focal point for debate in many cases.

When those same divisions look around and say: So what happened here? Why is there amalgamation over on the northeast corner of the Perimeter and east of the city of Winnipeg? There is amalgamation on the west side of the province, but there is a whole mess of other areas in between where some amalgamation would have been, not necessarily non-controversial, but it would have been able to be defensible because of some of the issues that I am talking about where you look at the configuration of the educational requirement, the services that need to be available, the classes that need to be made available to a certain grouping of students, the costs of transportation. Some synergy could be developed and savings in that respect.

In the end, aside from the fact that this minister has not consulted, and that is really what we believe is causing the most distress in the debate around this bill, he can argue all he wants about when it goes to committee that there will be consultation. The fact is, my first experience with provincial government was sitting till four o'clock in the morning at a committee; actually, it was an education committee. In fact, the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) and I were still sitting on the hood of my car out here in the parking lot discussing the aftermath of that committee when the sun was coming up. In the eyes of an awful lot of people, that is not necessarily the kind of consultation that they want. I do not think the minister today can say that that kind of consultation is going to substitute for what the members of MAST and the trustees across this province—it will not substitute for addressing the concerns that they are raising and the authority that he appears to be taking unto himself when he proposes this bill.

I come from an area where no amalgamation was proposed, but I get concerns and I get interest raised by members of the board of trustees and by members of the public out in my area. They are saying, if the minister wants to approve the budget, I understand that he is going to do this for a lot more school divisions. He is going to do it as a standard practice.

I would like to hear whether the minister will confirm that or not. Can you think that a division that has \$7 million, \$8 million, \$10 million worth of budget—they have been running it themselves for 40 years, ever since amalgamation was proposed in the sixties. The early sixties was when a lot of the larger divisions were put together in this province.

* (15:50)

They have been managing their own affairs, in my mind, quite competently. They have their problems, obviously, as they have to deal with a balance between their tax base and transfers from government, but now they are going to go back to the sixties, back to the days when they were amalgamated, when their first budgets had to be approved by some higher authority. Now, really. I look at the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Friesen). I wonder how she could possibly support this kind of a move when the independent authorities that she has been responsible for have been given more responsibility. They have been given the recognition that they are, in fact, representatives of the people, duly elected by the people, with taxing authority. Now their budget, provided it meets certain parameters, is their budget. Now it appears that we are not going to be able to deal with school boards in that manner any longer if that is truly going to be one of the results of this bill or, if it is not, the minister should be putting a lot of these fears to rest very quickly.

I would challenge the minister if for some unknown reason I have assumed that what I heard about the position of the teachers' association in support of amalgamation and that someone apparently of some authority in this Government, I would assume it might have come right directly from the minister, if indeed he has indicated this is just the first stage, then that verifies my concern about whether or not

the boundaries and the amalgamations that were chosen now were chosen politically. They were not chosen for education reasons. They were chosen because these might be the areas where government could withstand some opposition, where they could withstand raising of significant concerns about, and still milk that sweet milk of public perception that they are going to save money for the public.

That is a common perception, by the way. There are many people out there, and the minister is riding his hobbyhorse perhaps to his own benefit. There is a perception among a significant percentage of the taxpaying public that school divisions have not always reacted prudently to demands for increased expenditures or revenue, but, you know, that goes back to how fair is the formula. How fair is the transfer of funds in this province to individual divisions? In 1988, '89, '90, there was probably only one or two or three school divisions in the whole province that were still on the formula. Everybody had an exception. There was only the very rare school division that was on a pure interpretation of the formula.

Now we have a situation where I think the minister could have done as much service and maybe more to the educational community if he would have really taken the opportunity to review and change appropriately the model for distribution of funds in this province for educational purposes. That would have dealt, in many respects, with the concerns that the public has, because the public value the ability to have their school divisions and to elect them independently. They also value the thought that they can expect fiscal prudence from anybody who has the right to taxation, and that fiscal prudence is highly regarded but sometimes misunderstood when it comes to education finance. The school divisions do not collect their tax directly, so therefore there is a buffer between them and the municipalities and a buffer between them and the provincial government, for that matter.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So, in reviewing this bill, my concern is that the consultation that we are asking for will not happen. The minister will have an opportunity to

use the majority of the Government to force forward the bill as he sees fit. Certainly, I would assume that Cabinet has approved the structure of this bill. Cabinet has said to the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell): Yes, you can proceed with this bill, and we will stand up and vote appropriately so that you can bring closure, so that you can move this into committee and so that you can appropriately or otherwise achieve your goals in terms of amalgamation.

If it was only amalgamation, then that might not be as big a problem, but, when there are other items included in this bill that give, in our opinion, unwarranted authority to the minister, then I suggest some of the members of the Government who understand their local school divisions, who understand the autonomy of local school governance, who understand that big is not always better, but understand that just because you think there is savings there, it ain't necessarily so.

If there were millions of dollars worth of savings that would be produced as a result of the implementation of this bill, I think there are a lot of people out there who would be less vociferous in their disagreement. A good word, is it not, vociferous. I am not sure if it is a derivation of vicious or not, but that is the kind of opposition the Government may well be inheriting on this bill. I never was an English teacher, so I am sure I am wrong.

But the point is that what is in this bill has a hidden meaning, and, unquestionably, then, people say is there a hidden agenda. What is the hidden agenda in the minister taking this much power unto himself? Believe me, this is not just authority that is going to impact on the minister's department. It is going to impact on almost every one of the school divisions that you represent out there. So, when you go back to your constituency, you are going to have to answer to your constituents the same as we will about why the Government would need this much authority.

They could have already achieved amalgamation with the legislation that is in place. Then to add a clause to save the ministry harmless from having made an error somewhere in this flies in the face of logical, democratic

principles that this Chamber stands for, that intends and always does become offended by when somebody comes close to violating those principles.

So I think that the minister has probably because of his diving—I can think of no better phrase—into the middle of a number of issues in education without having given perhaps enough thought to the impact that the Minister of Education can have and entering into the middle of a fray without giving it enough thought thrown in a number of, well, rear guard would be a polite way of referring to it in terms of protective clauses in this bill, because there are a number of issues in various school divisions that are going to come back to bite him if he does not put the save harmless clause in there.

The very fact that it is there makes people say if he had done it right, why would he have to do that? Why would he take away our appeal opportunities? Why would he take away our democratic rights? People under those circumstances look around and they say I do not want to function under the yoke of legislating reduced rights, legislating reduced opportunities for appeal, legislating away from me my ability to make decisions and provide direction.

* (16:00)

I mean, for goodness' sake, in education we have people who will home-school because of their concerns about how and in what manner they want their children raised and what teachings they want to make sure that they get within the curriculum. There are people who will send their children to private school and pay out of their pockets to make sure that their children have what is considered an appropriate educational opportunity. Here we have a government who has not necessarily through skulduggery but I suggest through carelessness allowed themselves to be put into a position of where they are appearing to trample on the rights of the individuals who care about their school divisions. It is not just the divisions that are being amalgamated. It is the other divisions in the province that will be affected or believe they will be affected.

I hope that at some point we will hear the minister stand up and enunciate whether or not

he is prepared to accept amendments or explain the reasoning behind what can be considered a very ham-handed approach to education and school division amalgamation, because it is, frankly, an approach that flies in the face of what his Premier (Mr. Doer) has said. It flies in the face of what a number of ministers of this Cabinet have said. They want to be a consultative government. They want to feel that they can embrace John Q. Public.

But I fear that what they have done is they have looked at some polls that said, well, if you form bigger school divisions, 70 percent of the public think that is a great idea and 70 percent of them will probably think that it will save money. If we then proceed, by golly, we will be popular.

An Honourable Member: More popular.

Mr. Cummings: Well, more popular, the minister says. Well, the fact is that is not just quite the way democracy works. When people feel that their opportunity to express their democratic rights is being reduced, then all of a sudden they are not nearly so co-operative and they are looking for somebody to blame. In this case, they are going to be pointing the finger in one direction, and that is the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell). They will be pointing to him and they will be asking the Premier why does he intend to leave this kind of an administrative minister who likes to steal that kind of authority in charge of one of the most politically sensitive departments.

After all, how many people in this province are not touched by education? If you are not a parent or a student, you are probably a grandparent or an aunt or an uncle. If you are a property owner, you certainly are involved. It is one of the most intricately intertwined aspects of our society. Education says an awful lot about where we are going as a society. Education that we provide propels us as a society, so almost everyone in this community has an interest in this legislation.

Then, on top of it all, the Premier says, well, we will not be forcing without consultation. Here we are headed into the hot months of July and August. We are going to be in here debating, and I think that this minister and this

Government are probably wishing that the public will have forgotten by then. They will have forgotten when they head down to the lake with the kids. They will have forgotten when they go down to the swimming pool in the afternoon. They will have forgotten when they slip into a ball tournament with their kids. They will have forgotten when they go over to the soccer pitch. They will not be keeping a sharp eye on this Legislature and on these legislators.

We are going to end up with this piece of legislation being put through not in the dark of night but in the heat of the summer, when many people are not politically attuned. Frankly, that tells me that when we came back into this Legislature in April, being told that there were a number of pieces of legislation that had to be passed as quickly as possible, that we had to quickly approve, I think we are about to show the Government that that may be their agenda. But, unless they are prepared to be consultative, unless they are prepared to understand and listen to the public input and the public concerns, it will, indeed, be a long, hot summer and we will be here debating this bill far longer than need be if the ministry had taken it out for further consultation, an up-front consultation with the affected parties.

You do not have to take the verbatim bill out. You have to be prepared to take out the discussion on the principles of what you would intend to legislate. You need to be able to discuss with the affected parties, first of all, and with the subsequently affected parties what the reality of this legislation would be.

The reality, as we see it, is not good. It does not square with what this Government says its intent was to deal with the public. It does not square with what are generally the approaches that the Department of Education takes. Oftentimes we used to accuse them of being far too consultative on how they approached the changes. In the implementation of curriculum amendments, we find that governments are generally terribly slow, the implementation of boundary changes, governments are terribly slow, but in the one case where it really counts in terms of bringing forward some substantive and very large changes that are going to affect a large number of students, a large number of

taxpayers in this province, all of a sudden we have a minister who says, well, this is the way it is going to be done; and, if it causes any grief, I am saving myself from any consequences by having put in place a piece of legislation that will save me harmless from any actions in the court. That is the one thing that the Opposition cannot condone. We cannot condone a—

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

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I will take this opportunity to put my comments on the record. Unfortunately, members on the opposite side are not interested in debating this bill, so, once again, another member of the Opposition will get up and speak to what is taking place right now in Manitoba.

I will preface what I have to say with: What we are facing, and it is probably the most unfortunate situation that you can have in a democratic system, where a group of individuals, a political party, which is under the NDP, is a group that is unprepared and unfit to govern. They have no idea how to proceed. They had no plan, no vision when they came in, but they had some conceptual things that they wanted to attack, that they wanted to tackle. What they have done is hired lots of staff, probably double and triple whatever has been, certainly under the last administration. What they attempt to do is, with every action, spin a certain message out in the public. That does not mean it is a good governance. It is hardly the case. It does not mean they are doing what is in the best interests of Manitobans, in this case, in the best interests of teachers and of children and of taxpayers. What they do is what is in the best interests. They do something, and they spin what seems to sell best out in the public.

So it was, Mr. Speaker, that the minister, on November 8, 2001, had a press conference and announced that he was going to proceed with the amalgamation. It was with absolute shock and horror, there was this collective gasp in Manitoba when the Government made this particular announcement, in large part what was in it and in large part what was not included in it. That is the point from which we are working from today.

In the case of my constituency, the Rural Municipality of East St. Paul is part of River East, and the R.M. of Springfield was part and still is part of Transcona-Springfield. Two school divisions that were providing a good level of education, were providing a good standard by which others could be measured by. Some very notable, some very powerful, some very influential individuals came from both of those school divisions. They have proven in both of those school divisions that the education given was second to none.

* (16:10)

What was shocking, I guess, right from the start for both of those school divisions is there had been a certain criteria that had been set up ahead of time. One of the criteria was that smaller school divisions were going to be amalgamated into larger school divisions. That was one of the plans. So the government of the day took the second-largest school division, the River East School Division and made it larger. So where was the logic in taking small school divisions and creating larger ones when all that they have done basically is taken large ones and created even larger ones? Then what was even more confusing is small school divisions were left alone.

So, basically, I think what you have to do is you have to take a step back from November 8 and look at exactly what must have been done leading up to this. I would suspect that the minister and his staff and probably the Premier (Mr. Doer), who loves to spin and be political, laid down the electoral map and said, okay, how are we going to do this whole amalgamation issue? And they targeted all the Tory areas first, and those were the ones that they went after first. It is remarkable, Mr. Speaker, that in marginal NDP seats, there is no amalgamation.

The Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), and I will be re-referencing his comments again later on, I think he spoke, and he has this knack for speaking when he is not supposed to. He tends to speak those things that his Premier and that the Cabinet would rather not get out into the public. I think, basically, he said what was on their mind that day, when round the table they gleefully carved up school divisions, and he came up with

the punishment politics. This was an attempt to punish those parents, those taxpayers and punish those children whose parents did not vote for the NDP and whose children might, and in this case certainly will not, vote for the NDP in the future because of what was done.

The Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) says it is shameful, and we agree with him. It is shameful what was done. It was punishment politics. This was politics from day one because, if you take the first premise that this was supposed to take smaller school divisions and create larger ones, the fact that they took the second largest, made it bigger and took Transcona-Springfield, another large school division, split up and created other bigger ones, when there are small school divisions, the proof is there and one need not beg the issue.

The second thing that was discussed was that it must save money, and this is where the NDP and their spin machine, which is costing the taxpayer tens of millions of dollars—the hundreds of staff, Mr. Speaker. You go into the hallway here, and the spinner staff far outnumber everybody else in the hallway. In fact, they have got so much spinner staff, if you look during Question Period, they are filling the galleries with their spinner staff because they do not even know where to put them anymore, there are so many spinners in this building. They take their millions of dollars of spin machine, and it was supposed to save \$10 million. It is like, what was it? Fifteen million in six months for health care and solve hallway medicine. Well, this was going to save \$10 million. Well, you know it is like Humpty Dumpty. Not even all the King's men could put him back together again. Not even all the spinners in the entire spin machine worth millions of dollars yearly could actually put together that argument that it saved money, and they have strategically dropped that line. I guess, good for them because it was a poor line and had no resonance anyway.

Amalgamation, it was identified in the Norrie report which the Minister of Education constantly throws himself on top of and hugs dearly to his chest, Mr. Speaker. Even the Bill Norrie report states very clearly that there will be no savings of money. First premise was, smaller

school divisions larger. Second was to save money. What they did not put into their premise or the reason why they were going with amalgamation, and again because the millions of dollars of a spin machine just could not even swallow this one, is what about the children. In none of this do we hear about in the best interest, the best education, the most competitive education, the highest standards in education. Nowhere is that heard, nowhere is that mentioned, nowhere is that brought up. Why? Because none of those criteria fit with this. If that would have been one of the criteria, we would not be here having the debate about this bill that is in front of us right now. First and foremost, what is important with our education system is that it have the highest of standards, that it be competitive worldwide, and it not be played with, toyed with, like this Government is doing with this amalgamation issue.

The two premises that they used they never lived up to. The premise that they should have based it on was not even put forward. The whole basis, the whole foundation of the argument of amalgamation, what they have gone with, is wrong. There is no foundation. The saving of the money and the smaller school divisions, does it improve the quality of education? None of those are covered off with this. This is pure punishment politics. Members across the way howl in protest, and all the rest of it.

After the 8th of November many people, after the shock of what was taking place wore off, sat down and started to work through what it was that the Government was looking at. Slowly, the message started to filter through. It was actually the reeve of Springfield who finally called me up. He said, Ron, have you any idea what this Government is planning on doing to the R.M. of Springfield?

He laid it out to me. He said do you realize that they are not taking the city boundary, but that they are taking the floodway as being the boundary of the new school division, the new River East-Transcona, and thereby stripping the industrial base off of the R.M. of Springfield education side and adding it on to the city?

All of a sudden the alarm bells went off. I spoke with the council of East St. Paul. The

feeling was, once you have taken everything within the floodway and added that, school tax-wise, onto the city, then what is the next natural step? It is adding everything within the floodway for city taxes onto the city. This has always been the fantasy of the NDP government, to basically swallow all the tax areas around the city and put it into the city. That has always been the fantasy of this Government. Furthermore, what is within the floodway is all of East St. Paul and parts of St. Clements.

The cry to battle went out in Springfield. The residents realized that 90 percent of the students would be going to the new Springfield-Agassiz school division, but 15 percent of the money would not be going with them.

I would like to read into the record a letter that was sent to *The Clipper Weekly*, January 7, 2002: A call to all Springfield residents. Dear Editor—the following is an open letter to all members of the Rural Municipality of Springfield and the Transcona-Springfield School Division: Due to the many concerns that have been raised in reference to school division amalgamation, we wanted to share the following facts. The proposed changes of school division boundaries for the purpose of amalgamation will divide the Rural Municipality of Springfield into two parts, resulting in the R.M. of Springfield losing 14.9 percent of its school levy tax base, which will in turn adversely affect the quality of education that students in the R.M. receive. The division of the Rural Municipality of Springfield resulting from this amalgamation results in 98 percent of the expenses to the R.M. of Springfield being transferred to the Agassiz School Division while transferring only 85 percent of the R.M. of Springfield school tax levy. The proposed changes to school division boundaries may compromise the funding for school programs and facilities and/or may result in school tax levy increases.

* (16:20)

With this information being considered, we are planning to hold a public forum on January 10, 2002, at Springfield Collegiate Institute at 7 p.m. We feel that it is in the best interests of the public to hold such an event so that your individual concerns can be heard. Concerning

the importance of this issue, all residents of the Rural Municipality of Springfield are urged to attend. The Minister of Education and staff from his department will also be invited to attend. We hope to see you on January 10, 2002. Sincerely, Signed by the MLA for Springfield, the reeve for Springfield, and the school trustees.

It raised such a concern, because then it uncovered what was actually taking place, not about saving money, not about the best interests of the public school education, furthest from the truth. It was about punishment politics.

On December 5, when I raised the issue here in the House, and I raised it on numerous occasions—I read from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 5, 2001, page 3: An NDP MLA insinuated yesterday that a school division in a Tory riding was being amalgamated and cut off from valuable tax revenue as payback for years of dumping industrial waste into an NDP riding—an issue, by the way, he has not got his facts straight on. In recent school division border changes, the NDP said that the division of Transcona-Springfield would be split up. Transcona would be merged into River East and Springfield would be merged into the Agassiz School Division.

The Springfield MLA, a Tory, complained during Question Period yesterday that Transcona was taking with it the tax revenues from an industrial park in Transcona, not allowing any of that revenue to go to Agassiz, a poorer school division. But during the debate on that issue, the NDP MLA for Transcona, the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) shouted across the floor to Schuler that the residents in the MLA for Springfield's riding of Springfield had been dumping industrial waste in Transcona for years, implying that they were now getting their just deserts. The comment sent a wave of anger throughout the Tory caucus and enraged the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler). Shame on you.

Outside the House, the MLA for Springfield said that to him it is obvious that the NDP is punishing the voters in Springfield and Agassiz for not voting NDP. I think the Member for Transcona proved it is punishment politics. This is shameful. And the article goes on.

Mr. Speaker, that, culminating with the fact that the tax base was being taken away, had deep resonance. I have to say it is with great pride that I stand here and tell this House how my community pulled together. Never before have I seen something like this where a community—and it was all walks of life, all facets of life. They came together and decided that this is something that the community would not stand for, that punishment politics was not something they were going to put up with.

On Boxing Day evening, the reeve, councillors, trustees, citizens, there were over 24 or 25 of us, came into my constituency office, and we forwent having dinners with families, spending time with families, and we stuffed envelopes and put labels onto envelopes, so that the message could get out about a meeting being held at the Springfield Collegiate. I think they are to be commended for the work that they put into it, the parents, the children. Parents brought their children along, and we all sat and we stuffed all of these envelopes to get them out in time for the January 10 meeting.

What was surprising about that particular evening, and I share this with the minister, is there were Conservatives, and the former Liberal candidate, her family was there, and, yes, Mr. Speaker, card-carrying, hardworking supporters of the New Democrat Party were there as well, participating because they disagree with what this Government was doing with amalgamation. *[interjection]*

I hasten to add to the minister's comments, I have not gotten to the meeting yet. I am just talking about what was taking place in the community. The community came together. The parents drove this. The issue was brought up at band concerts, and it was not Progressive Conservative members who were driving this. These were parents; these were citizens. In fact, I daresay that it probably had far more New Democratic Party members involved than any other party that was involved in this issue, because, Mr. Speaker, they were betrayed by their own party.

In fact, I have a letter, and as this debate continues and I have another opportunity, I will have to read that letter into the record. It was

sent to the Premier (Mr. Doer), and that individual said: We have worked for the NDP. We have been strong NDP members, but what you have done to Springfield makes us reconsider our support for the NDP party.

What happened was the punishment politics, the betrayal that took place, crossed all party lines.

I have been involved in putting a lot of meetings together, and certainly at school board meetings, Mr. Speaker, it is most unfortunate that the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) does not stay in the Chamber. I mean, it is, after all, his Government that calls for the debate.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind all honourable members it is against the rules to make reference to members that are in the gallery or members that are away from the gallery. So I ask the honourable member to follow the Manitoba practice.

Mr. Schuler: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I have to challenge your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was not a ruling. That was information for all members of the House, because we have standard practices, and I was just kindly reminding the honourable member and all the honourable members in this Chamber. It was a kindly reminder.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, it is just the tone of voice really sounded like a ruling, and I think it is very unfortunate that the Government heckles from its perches in the back bench that they want to have Bill 14 debated, and they go on and on and on, and then the Minister of Education leaves the Chamber and will not participate in the debate. This is his legislation. It is the Government's legislation.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will kindly remind all honourable members again that it is against our rules to make a reference to members that are in the Chamber or members that are not in the Chamber. So I would kindly ask the co-operation of all honourable members to respect the rules of the House. Those are the rules that have governed us for hundreds of years, and I

would ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

The honourable Member for Springfield, please continue.

Point of Order

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

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I find it really disturbing and somewhat disrespectful of the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) to walk out of the Chamber at a time when a piece of legislation that he has brought into this House and is trying to ram through this Legislature is being debated. That shows disrespect to the parents, the taxpayers, the children and the educators in our province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Transportation and Government Services, on the same point of order?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. Having been in government, having been in opposition and having various roles in this Chamber, I can indicate, first of all, this is clearly not a point of order. I can also indicate that, quite frankly, references to ministers or members being in the Chamber not only is out of order, but I think it would be re-inventing history to suggest that anything different occurred the 11 years that I was in opposition and members opposite were in government.

An Honourable Member: We were never absent.

Mr. Ashton: For the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns), it may have felt like I was always in the House at some point in time. There were long periods, but, Mr. Speaker, this is a long-standing tradition that reflects the fact that we all have other roles. I mean, I as the Minister of Emergency Measures have obviously been monitoring various different situations and that may require me to not be physically in the House.

When we have this particular parliamentary tradition of not making reference to absence or

presence of a member in the House, I think it is because we do have other roles. It also has never been standard practice, was not standard practice for 11 years that ministers were, shall we say, physically present to listen to entire debates. Members opposite should be aware that we have Hansard. By the way, I was just listening through the Internet, which may give some indication of where I was, access, and this is really critical.

* (16:30)

I would say to members opposite when you have an issue to raise, it is important to raise that issue, but to get into whether members are present or not or ministers are present or not, not only is that not in keeping with our rules, it is not in keeping with the traditions of this House. Ministers have always attended debates when they could, Mr. Speaker. They have other responsibilities, as well, and this was definitely not a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Laurendeau: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the member says it is unprecedented. It is unprecedented for this House to ram legislation through the way this Government has chosen to do so. This Government, if they had found this legislation so important, could have called this House back in March or even back in January, but, no, what do they do now, today? This minister who refuses to be in the House today turns around and forces members to stand and not allow the bill to stand. They force us to continue to speak on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of the members still have to have the opportunity to go out to their constituencies with this bill and hear from their constituents as well as their school trustees. I have a meeting with my school trustees on the 20th of June. It is important that we all go out, especially with legislation that takes away the rights of Manitobans. It is important that we have it heard by Manitobans and that we listen to those Manitobans. It is important that this

minister listens to what we have to say on this bill.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Well, let us get one thing on the record, Mr. Speaker. The Opposition is being obstructionist on this bill, and the record is absolutely clear. It speaks for itself.

I think, for a matter of about a month, we had, was it, three speakers, Mr. Speaker, on this bill even though it was called. In terms of the last two sitting days, I believe the bells rang for five hours, and that is just out-and-out obstructionism.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think the Opposition has ever been shy of—*[interjection]*

Mr. Mackintosh: The Member for River East promises more obstruction to come, from her seat, I understand.

Mr. Speaker, of course, they have never been shy about admitting that they are going to obstruct this bill, and that is what they have been doing. So let the record be clear on that.

Mr. Speaker, the reason that it is out of order, of course, they are looking for something, a little hook over there.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite refer to the absence of a member which has been ruled unparliamentary so many times. Of course, they are unparliamentarian when they come to this issue. The reason for that is that members on all sides of the House are in the public service as MLAs. They can be called away. They can be involved in meetings. They can be meeting on the legislation before the House.

There is Hansard, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if members opposite read that. There are the transmission of debates around this building and indeed outside of this building, but, if they want to start to change the rules about referring to the absence or presence of members, it will not serve them well, and it will not serve democracy well. It is too bad they do not have

something that they can contribute to the debate with rather than trying to raise points of order. That is my point.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for River East, I would like to kindly remind all honourable members, when making reference to members that are either in the Chamber or out of the Chamber, to not make reference to members that are out of the Chamber and, when making reference to members in the Chamber, by their constituencies, or ministers, by their title, so a kindly reminder to all honourable members. I thank the honourable Member for River East for drawing that to our attention.

Mrs. Mitchelson: With all due respect, I must challenge your ruling.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I took the advice of the honourable Member for River East, and I just gave a kindly reminder. That is all. I am asking for the co-operation of the House. That is all I am doing.

An Honourable Member: So we can continue to refer to him not being here.

Mr. Speaker: It is a kindly reminder not to.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): On a new point of order, Mr. Speaker, I challenge your kindly reminder.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Springfield has the floor.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, I did not wish to choose to speak on the point of order. I am still waiting for your ruling on the member's point of order.

Mr. Speaker: If the honourable member was serious about his point of order, were you, the honourable Member for Lakeside?

An Honourable Member: Absolutely.

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker, that is an official point of order.

Mr. Speaker: No. Well, he challenged my kind reminder to members. *[interjection]*

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: Well, if my kind reminder has been challenged, then I guess I have to put it to the floor.

All those in support of sustaining the kindly reminder from the Speaker, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the kindly reminder from the Speaker, please say nay.

An Honourable Member: There is nobody opposed to it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. So it is unanimous.

* * *

Mr. Schuler: Again, I do find it strange that those who cry the loudest for debate are the first to leave, but we will leave it at that.

Mr. Speaker, after the residents had gotten together and realized that the punishment politics laid out by the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), and he tends to have that role in the NDP caucus, of being the negative individual on that side, and he says he is proud of it. Hey, everybody should be proud of something. I am proud of the record of standing up for my citizens. He is proud of being the negative individual on his benches. I guess it takes all kinds.

The meeting that was held on January 10, and if one is going to point out any bright light on the other side, I give the minister at least this much. They had the courage to show up, which the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) never had on the whole Hydro issue in East St. Paul. Perhaps the two of them could get together. One could give one courage, and the other one could

give the other one, well, you know how that story goes. I will leave it to the imagination.

The Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) did show up for the meeting and so did well over a thousand people from the community of Springfield. You know, whenever you put together a meeting like that, you are always concerned how many people are going to come out. Certainly, we thought that a good turnout of 400 people, 450 people, perhaps 500 people would show up.

An Honourable Member: How many came?

Mr. Schuler: Well over a thousand people showing up, standing room only, was an indication of exactly how serious people felt this issue was for the community, again, Mr. Speaker, not just for the residents of Springfield, but it has very ominous ramifications for all public school systems, for the whole public school system, for all children in our education system.

The event was really a telling indication. In my short political career of seven years, I had never quite seen anything like it. The minister came very unprepared. He did listen. Did he hear anything? I do not know—

An Honourable Member: The devil is in the detail.

* (16:40)

Mr. Schuler: The devil is in the detail was sort of the standard comment, but what really frustrated parents and teachers and citizens is the fact that the Minister of Education did not know the details. For instance, the students that are currently being transported out of the R.M. of Springfield are currently enrolled in programs in Transcona. He was not aware that Springfield Collegiate, basically the only high school in the community, is over capacity.

For those, including the minister, who do not know what that is, and I suspect that is the 31 members opposite on the NDP benches who do not know what capacity means, it means that basically the services of the school can only

handle so many students. After that, you are basically straining the ability to evacuate in case there is a disaster, whether there is a fire or something else, washroom facilities, food services, all of those kinds of basic health issues, clean air, that kind of stuff.

If the hundred-plus students that are currently bused out of Springfield into Transcona are brought into Springfield Collegiate from Transcona, they would be so over capacity that it would actually be a health hazard for the school. The Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) sat and said: I did not know that.

This is a minister who has an entire bureaucracy at his disposal for them to come forward and to brief the minister. The problem is it was not just that issue. It was issue after issue after issue after issue. It went on all night, and the minister, the best he could come up with was, I had no idea, the devil is in the details.

That is the basic ignorance is bliss. It was very frustrating for parents. People got up, normally very staid, very soft-spoken people, and were flabbergasted at the fact that the minister had no idea of what his amalgamation was doing.

That goes province-wide, because it is not like Springfield is a unique case. That is hardly the point. The point is that the minister has no idea the real human element of those who are going to be affected. I take, for instance, the French immersion. Currently, there is not in what will be the new Sunrise School Division an accredited French immersion program.

So where exactly are these students supposed to go? Well, the minister stepped out of this Chamber after one Question Period—the parents were here—and he grasped on a shared services agreement. That was his answer. He spun it out there. The Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) came out and he had him do his little spinning, and all the other high-paid, underworked spinners that the NDP have hired for millions and millions of dollars instead of putting the money into education, and they spun the parents out there.

The parents said to me, well, what about the shared services agreement? I said, you know, I

was on the board for four years. I understand how this works. The problem is who pays for it. Did the minister say that the Department of Education would pay for it and for how long that would be paid for?

The minister has since then dumped it on the school divisions. He has said, well, I will ram through school division, I will fire school boards, I will tell them what to do. Oh, but on the shared services agreement, that really is a school board decision. The school boards are sitting there, and, Mr. Speaker, which taxpayer is going to be paying for this? What happens is the minister starts this process, backs out of the process, and the trustees have no idea of who is supposed to be going where and how is this going to work and which facilities they are going to use.

The member from Transcona spoke about punishment politics, but, in the end, the only people that are being punished by this Government's amalgamation are the students, because, in the end, I mean, the taxpayer, well, they elected a tax-and-spend government. That is what they got. That is what they will have to live with. But do you know what? They have got a very good tax, tax, spend, spend government. If that is what you think is good, that is what you got. You got tax, loot Hydro, spend, spend, careless abandon. In the end the punishment that is meted out is meted out against the children, because now what happens to École Dugald elementary school, which actually goes up to Grade 8, because what they have is a very strong, very healthy French immersion program? Now what is supposed to happen is they would like to go from Grade 8 into Senior 1. Where? Are they grandfathered in?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Schuler: The Member for Transcona says yes. I understand from all the boards that are involved that that is not an issue that has been decided. Who is paying for it? Who pays for the minister's blundering on this issue? The fact that the minister did not even know when he came to a meeting, had no idea that there was even a problem, came up with the shared services agreement issue and, now, the devil is in the details. Now who is going to pay for it? In the

meantime, parents are deciding whether or not they are going to put their children into Grade 6 and Grade 7 French immersion because by the time they get to Grade 8, how far down the line are they grandfathered, and then where is the program going to be established, Mr. Speaker? I believe I just made it clear that Springfield Collegiate is full, over capacity. So they cannot put the program into Springfield Collegiate, and there is no other accredited program in the new Sunrise School Division. So they are basically damned if they do and damned if they do not as parents.

So you know what is going to happen? In the end, this Government will punish the French immersion program and maybe that was their whole point. Maybe their point was to get rid of some of these programs, to punish those people. I think that is shameful because I think, whether it is French immersion, whether it is the Hebrew, Ukrainian or German bilingual programs, those are jewels in the crown of any school division, and what is happening is this NDP government is destroying that because it has brought so much confusion, it has brought so much instability into the program. The parents are throwing their hands in the air.

The Government is the one on November 8 that made the big announcement, and now they have legislation, Bill 14, that they are trying to ram through. Cover-their-backside legislation is basically what they have here. Mr. Speaker, instead of putting the legislation in first and then announcing amalgamations, no, everything is backwards on that side. It is always cover your backside, make sure that if something happens at least you are covered by it. This has been so poorly laid out, it has caused so many problems and the school boards are caught in the middle.

If you look at this legislation, Mr. Speaker, I mean there are brutally draconian pieces in here. If this was a simple straightforward mandating school boards, if it was straight up and down, I do not think we would have a problem with it because at least that process goes through. But the draconian stuff that is included in here where the minister can come in and set budgets, this is basically how the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) wants to run school boards. It is interesting. It is like a smorgasbord for him this

whole education issue, contentious issues he leaves on the table and forces the trustees, with no tools, with no instructions, to try to figure out how this goes, and then he cherry picks other issues off when it does not appease or appeal to his political agenda, which we know that is what drove this whole issue in the first place.

So I get back to the parents of École Dugald who have their children in French immersion, how long are they going to be grandfathered? Is it everybody from kindergarten up? Is it going to be from Grade 3? Is it Grade 6? Is it just the Grade 8s? What? Is it a three-year grandfather, a six-year grandfather? Nobody knows. Again, the answer from the minister, well, you know, the devil is in the details. Yes, I would suggest there is more than the devil in the details, Mr. Speaker. There is a problem and what this Government has done, it has punished the children. You know what? They can get up and they can attack me, and I hear the petty comments thrown at me.

An Honourable Member: They would not do that.

* (16:50)

Mr. Schuler: They would, Mr. Speaker. You know, the pathetic little comments thrown at me, you know what? That is fair game. Going after the taxpayers, people know. They hired themselves a tax-and-spend government. That is what they got. Though I despise that innocence, I guess we can still accept that to some degree.

But why do you attack the underpinnings of our public school system, a school system that has been built up, that is strong, that has produced probably the majority of us in this Chamber? Except for the Premier (Mr. Doer) who went to private schools, most of us come out of the public school system, and they are out to destroy it. That is what Bill 14 is. I think it is just an absolutely disgraceful title, the modernization act. I would call this the destruction act, the beginning of the end of a good public school system, which they inherited and they are destroying with their actions.

I said in the beginning that this is a group of individuals who are nice people. I would go out

for dinner with any of them. But, as far as the Government is concerned, they are unprepared and they are unfit to govern, because everything is the wrong way around. The legislation should have come in, and then the announcement of amalgamations. I lay it out it again, Mr. Speaker, and I will do that for the rest of the debate.

What is the grandfathering, first of all, for the French immersion in Dugald elementary school, École Dugald? How many years are going to be grandfathered? In the end, the legacy of the NDP Doer government will be the end of the French immersion program in Dugald, because they have undermined it. The NDP government has completely and totally undermined the French immersion in that section of our province, and I think that is shameful. Then they ask why are you having such problems with this bill. There was a time when this was happening, not even I, not my constituency assistant, we had a volunteer come in to help us return phone calls. I could not even handle all the phone calls coming in. I still have them on my desk.

Please fight this bill. That is the message I am getting. It is not just from my constituents. It is also from the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid). He should spend a bit of time in his own seat instead of throwing around nasty comments in this Chamber. It is terribly, terribly unfortunate what has taken place with this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I presented a petition today. It is now in your hands. Over 2000 people signed the petition, over 2000 people. I think what this Government and all their fancy polling and their paying off all their supporters, giving them polling contracts, whatever, I believe this issue is under the radar screen. It is festering out there because, you know what, in the end, if there is something that Manitobans have never tolerated is where, and that is what this Government is trying to do, is trying to take the majority and trying to crush a minority. It starts with Dugald elementary school. Crushing the French immersion program in Dugald does not bode well for this Government because, if they had any courage, if they would have realized the mistakes they would make, there would be a plan.

How are you going to deal with it? There is no plan. Oh, I will give the pat line, the answer

to how they are destroying the immersion program in Dugald. Well, you know, the devil is in the details. That is the best we can get out of our Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell). I ask about the overcrowding in Springfield Collegiate. If those students are not bused, where are they going to go?

The issue then goes on. I understand that there will be other opportunities to speak on this as far as amendment goes. I will be speaking at other occasions. I find what has been done, amalgamation itself is not wrong. Punishment politics, when the underpinning of it is punishment politics, that undermines our public school system. I have children. A daughter and my son will be in the public school system, and I want what is best for the children. This is not what is in the best interests of the parents.

When I think of those parents from Dugald elementary school who are fighting on this issue, who in tears come into my office, and say what is going to happen with the French immersion program, the least we could get out of the Minister of Education is an answer that he will take care of it, that he will look into it, he will make sure that it will be taken care of, and not these pat, trite answers.

We need leadership in this. We know that this has been botched from day one. Now it is time for leadership and try to make this work. Bill 14 is not an attempt to make it better. It only makes the whole situation worse. That is why we will oppose this. That is why we do oppose it. I would say why do the members opposite not have the courage and stand up and debate it, because they do not have the courage. They do not have the courage to get up and debate it, and they should get up and debate it. Do you know what? We would like to hear their comments. Let us have a debate on this particular issue.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say a few words on the record on Bill 14. I am actually perplexed that the Government would even bring forward such a bill. They must be aware that in order to amalgamate school divisions a bill is not even needed. They must be fully aware that this legislation is not necessary. That is why I find it perplexing that even right now that we are

having this debate. It is just unbelievable. We have serious concerns, Mr. Speaker, about this bill as it stands right now and the lack of process in regard to school division amalgamation.

I think, certainly, what I would like to do first is indicate some of the quotes from some people in the community that have expressed their concern over amalgamation. In particular I would like to make note of some of the members opposite who have put some quotes on the record and talked about their concerns with amalgamation.

Let us start, first of all, Mr. Speaker, with our Premier (Mr. Doer). The Premier said there would be, and I quote: No forced amalgamations. It is not the Manitoba way.

This is such an unbelievable thing for the Premier to say and then turn around and introduce such legislation.

The Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) on amalgamation said, Mr. Speaker, and I quote: I am not inclined to impose anything. I am really not. What does he do, though? He turns around and imposes this bill on people. Something I will note again, he can, as the Minister of Education has, the authority to go ahead and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 38 minutes remaining. The hour being 5 p.m., we will now go to Private Members' Business.

An Honourable Member: Six o'clock?

Mr. Speaker: Six o'clock? It is the will of the House to call it six o'clock?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PRIVATE BILLS

Bill 301—The Assiniboine Memorial Curling Club Holding Company Ltd. Additional Powers Act

Mr. Speaker: Will we be resuming debate on second reading on private member's Bill 301,

The Assiniboine Memorial Curling Club Holding Company Limited, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck)? Will we be debating that? No?

Some Honourable Members: Stand.

Mr. Speaker: We will leave it standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 200—The Elections Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: Resumed debate on second reading on Bill 200, The Elections Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale)?

Some Honourable Members: Stand.

Mr. Speaker: Stand? Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the Member for Burrows? *[Agreed]*

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Now we will go to Resolution 14, Phone Coverage in the North.

Res. 14—Phone Coverage in the North

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers)

WHEREAS in our modern society access to a telephone is a necessity; and

WHEREAS cellphones are vitally important to those who live in remote areas such as in the North; and

WHEREAS currently there are many Manitobans who live hundreds of miles from areas where cellphone service is available; and

WHEREAS cellphone service is not even available for larger communities such as Snow Lake, Leaf Rapids, Lynn Lake, Pukatawagan, South Indian Lake, Cranberry Portage, Garden

Hill, Shamattawa, Cross Lake, Norway House and others; and

WHEREAS this creates a serious risk for the Manitoba citizens living in those communities who have no way of accessing emergency services in a time of crisis, or automotive help should they experience car troubles; and

WHEREAS, due to the previous government's shortsighted decision to sell MTS, the phone inequalities across the province have been exacerbated and the North and rural Manitoba is paying the price.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to require that telecom providers extend adequate cellular telephone coverage to those remote, rural and northern communities which presently have inadequate or no cellular telephone services.

* (17:00)

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for Flin Flon, seconded by the honourable Member for Dauphin-Roblin,

WHEREAS--dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: It has been asked to have it read.

WHEREAS in our modern society access to a telephone is a necessity; and

WHEREAS cellphones are vitally important to those who live in remote areas such as in the North; and

WHEREAS currently there are many Manitobans who live hundreds of miles from areas where cellphone service is available; and

WHEREAS cellphone service is not even available for larger communities such as Snow

Lake, Leaf Rapids, Lynn Lake, Pukatawagan, South Indian Lake, Cranberry Portage, Garden Hill, Shamattawa, Cross Lake, Norway House and others; and

WHEREAS this creates a serious risk for the Manitoba citizens living in those communities who have no way of accessing emergency services in a time of crisis, or automotive help should they experience car troubles; and

WHEREAS, due to the previous government's short-sighted decision to sell MTS, the phone inequalities across the province have been exacerbated and the North and rural Manitoba are paying the price.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to require that telecom providers extend adequate cellular telephone coverage to those remote, rural and northern communities which presently have inadequate or no cellular telephone services.

Mr. Jennissen: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on this particular resolution. I do understand the Member for Portage (Mr. Faurschou) suggesting that there is not cell service in other parts of the province. I am quite aware of that as well.

In fact, when I drive to northern Manitoba, I do not have any cell service once I leave Ashern until I get to The Pas. That is roughly four hours if I drive within the legal limits, three and a half if I am pushing it a bit. I have telephone service for 10 minutes around The Pas, then I do not have it again for an hour until I get to the Flin Flon region. So, out of my eight-hour drive, I guess I can argue that at least for five hours, I do not have any kind of coverage. *[interjection]*

This may not necessarily be a bad thing, as the member pointed out, because it gives me some peace and quiet, but that is not the feeling of many of the northerners. It is not just cellphone coverage that I am talking about, Mr. Speaker. It is phone coverage, period, and the affordability of telephones because they are not just a luxury anymore. They are really a necessity in many parts of the province, well, in

all parts of the province, particularly in the North.

I should put this in context, Mr. Speaker. The North is a large area and is poorly serviced in terms of telephone coverage, any kind of coverage. It is a huge area. The average temperature in the region, let us say around Thompson, is -27 degrees in January. So it is a climate of extremes where, of course, it would be useful to have some kind of phone coverage, particularly when your car breaks down.

I should also point out that northern Manitoba has over 82 000 residents. Industrial communities are home to 32 500 northerners or roughly 40 percent of the population. There are 41 First Nations in northern Manitoba with more than 36 000 people or roughly 44 percent of the total population of the North.

Now, because the majority of northern Manitoba is unpopulated, it is dangerous, particularly in the depths of winter, to drive from one community to another. Particularly in January, it can be life threatening. This danger is made worse by the fact that help is a long way off and difficult to contact. I remember the story of the lady phoning me from Snow Lake who wondered why do we not have cell phone coverage in the North because when she went to visit the doctor in The Pas, I guess she had a medical appointment, her car broke down, and, of course, the distance from Snow Lake to The Pas is roughly, I am guessing 200-and-some kilometres.

Similarly, I remember a lady phoning me from Leaf Rapids who had taken a busload of young hockey players to Thompson. They broke down in the middle of the winter. Again, that distance from Thompson to Leaf Rapids is 212 kilometres. So we are talking about vast distances, and it can be life threatening when you break down, so decent cellular coverage in the North would be much appreciated.

Being without a telephone is a social policy problem that needs to be addressed, particularly by the federal government. It has serious implications for employment, for skill development and delivery of social services. For the sake of the safety of a significant proportion of

our population, I am therefore encouraging the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, otherwise known as CRTC, to enable telecom companies to extend adequate and affordable cellular telephone coverage to the remote rural and northern communities of our province.

In fact, this has traditionally been the vision of Canada, that we share, that we do not simply put services where there is a high concentration of population.

Now, we have drifted away from that. We have drifted away from that, for example, in transportation since 1996, and it has become a user-pay system. We have certainly drifted away from it ever since MTS was privatized.

However, despite the CRTC's stating that they will give service to all Canadians, the fact is that more isolated Canadians are provided with less telecommunication services. Therefore, I think the CRTC is failing in their promise, and it is northerners who are suffering for it mainly.

The technology of telecommunications has progressed more quickly than we could have guessed 10 years ago. In 1993, the first cellular telephone network was established in Florida, and two years later, there were already 25 million American users, two years from basically zero to 25 million. This indicates the speed with which the technology is moving. It is less than 20 years old, and there are millions and millions of customers. Therefore, not only is it perfect timing for us to begin to plan for the future, but planning is of paramount importance.

Global positioning systems, satellite telephones, mobile satellites and high-speed Internet are some of the high-tech equipment that can help increase the safety and quality of life of northerners. These systems need a network base established which requires the assistance of the CRTC. It is imperative that there be a united federal and provincial effort to establish the appropriate technological base so those in the North of Manitoba do not fall further behind than they already have.

Now we have appealed over and over again to MTS for better service. In fact, I can read an

excerpt from a letter. I sent a letter to Mr. Bill Fraser of MTS, and I got a reply back, not from Mr. Fraser this time, but from Roger Ballance, the Executive Vice-President of Sales and Marketing. It is typical of the reply that you get from MTS. I understand the position they are in. They are a company that has to make money. They are a private company.

Here is their answer, which is, like I said, typical of their earlier answers: MTS must ensure there is a sufficient population base and traffic flow to recover the capital costs of establishing a cell site. Cellular is a very competitive service, with several providers in Manitoba now competing for business, and we must be mindful of our costs in order to continue to provide competitive rates to the customers. Unfortunately, there simply is not a sufficient population base in the Snow Lake area to warrant the installation of a cell site at this time.

Of course, you could substitute Snow Lake with dozens of other communities.

As an alternative to cellular service, residents of Snow Lake may wish to consider FleetNet 800. This is a powerful state-of-the-art two-way radio communication system providing group and one-to-one private communications throughout most of Manitoba. Of course, it is a very expensive system, and a lot of our people are faced with affordability. Affordability has become a serious problem.

* (17:10)

Since the privatization of Manitoba Telephone System, completed by the previous government, basic rates have escalated at a stunning rate for northerners. In fact, since the privatization, rates have increased at least 66 percent in Winnipeg and even more in rural and northern areas. City rates alone have jumped from \$15.30 in 1996 to a shocking \$25 in 2002. In fact, in Cranberry Portage, I know that the rate in December of 1995 was, I believe, \$9.75, yes. Phoned my wife yesterday, and I asked her, hon, please give me the bill for May as well, so she did, and the bill for May was not the \$9.75 for basic service in 1995; the bill for May was \$57.50.

Now I have to be honest; not all of that was for the basic service. The basic service actually was only—well, I should not say only, was \$24.45. That is still a 250% increase. Now the other \$33.05 were for bells and whistles that my wife and I love so dearly such as the Vista 350 display screen loyalty price for \$4.95, the Visual Call Waiting for \$2.65. The Call Waiting was \$4.65, the Call Display was \$7, the Call Answer was \$7, the Harmony Touch Tone was \$2.80, the Vista phone base was \$4. My goodness, that thing is more expensive than a kid going to college, but anyway it is fairly expensive. So even the basic rate has jumped then from 1995-1996 from \$9.75 to \$24.45. That is enormous. That is a 250% increase. That is the rate shock we actually warned about.

If we are talking about affordability, I think affordability explains the fact that if you take a look at a northern community such as Pukatawagan with a population of somewhere between 1800 and 2400 people, I could only count 70 private telephone numbers listed in the book.

When I checked with Pukatawagan yesterday, they actually thought there were only about 50, maybe as low as 30. Now, that is a community of roughly 2000 people with between 30 and 50 active phones. That is getting very dangerous. We are putting phones out of the price range of ordinary citizens, particularly poor citizens, particularly poor citizens living in northern Manitoba.

Compare that to a random community in southern Manitoba. I looked at McCreary. McCreary has a population of between 600 and 800, say 700. There were 10 columns of names listed, Pukatawagan only three. McCreary has less than a third or roughly a third of the population of Pukatawagan, but they have well over three times as many phones, so you see a factor of at least 9 or 10 difference.

We have put telephones out of the range of poor people in northern Manitoba, and I think that is dangerous when you are talking about security, when you are talking about elderly people or elders when they have to phone the ambulance or the doctor or the police.

Presently, there are northern communities with absolutely no phone service, and the implementation of cellphone coverage would address this deficiency. Although the initial cost for such an endeavor would be high, the technology is changing rapidly and becoming less expensive, making it a possibility in the near future. We could actually plan to do that.

While I am talking about affordability and accessibility of phones, I should mention one other community, Granville Lake, 50 people, two phones. Now, they may have three. There used to be a public telephone, but I think they took it out. There are two phones in the entire community, and it is very difficult to phone into that community. You have to go through the operator. We are not improving the system, at least not for northerners, and the argument always is money, money, money.

Now, compare that to Hydro which is also a public system as MTS used to be. Now, notice we have equalized the hydro rates. If you can equalize hydro rates, you would think you could equalize, as we once did to some degree, basic telephone service rates as well.

Hydro managed to say we will take a loss of \$14 million a year in order to equalize rates for rural Manitobans, and I think the members opposite would appreciate that, would appreciate that many of the farmers are paying \$10 or more less for hydro rates now because we have equalized those rates. If we can do it for hydro, I think it certainly was possible for MTS. In fact, we did this for MTS.

But, as members opposite know, MTS was sold. It was sold, even though the premier of the day said he had no intention of selling it. It was sold by a party that claims over and over again that it is the party of sound business, a sound business party. Despite it being allegedly a sound business party, notice that they, first of all, sold off the MTS cable network for \$11.5 million, the profitable portion which was really worth about \$60 million. They also had a somewhat murky deal with Faneuil.

Even when they did sell the telephone system, I think they only sold it for approximately a third of what I think was the

real value, because share prices certainly went from \$12 to \$30-some. They almost tripled. So we can argue it was a bad deal all around.

But more than that, once you take it out of the public arena, you can no longer use a Crown corporation for public policy. You cannot use it for public policy anymore.

Anyway, to get back to the party of business that allegedly knew what they were doing when they told MTS, let me quote one of my favourite journalists, Frances Russell, from an article: *Just Call 1-800 Giveaway*. She says: The sound business party knows that the purpose of selling something is to get the best price, not to give away or sell for a few cents on the dollar its best assets beforehand. The sound business party knows to put its financial house in order before leaping into competition. The sound business party knows not to cling to the loss side and throw away the profit side. The party of sound business knows not to make a big investment at a loss, particularly when simultaneously plunging into the marketplace and stripping revenue potential. The provincial Tories have done every one of these things when they sold MTS.

So, that takes away from us the ability to use that corporation for the good of all the people of Manitoba, particularly northerners who are living in a very isolated area. We are no longer capable, then, of cross-subsidizing, of taking profitable high-density areas and applying it to other areas, as we did with hydro. It is perfectly possible. All it takes is political will, political endeavor, and I am glad that our party had that, with regard to Hydro, that we are willing to do the equalization.

Mr. Speaker, I see that I am running out of time. I would like to just wrap this up by saying that Canadians currently use more than 13 million wireless devices on a daily basis, including 10 million wireless phones, more than 1.8 million pagers, 1 million mobile radios, 10 000 mobile satellite phones; 44 percent of Canadian households own or have access to a wireless phone, compared to 41 percent in 1999. In 2002, likely half of Canadian households will have cellphones.

This is an important issue for northerners. Why should those who have made homes in

northern areas of the province suffer because of the previous government's lack of foresight? Indeed, why should they be treated like second-class citizens? I think we have to pay attention to providing better phone service all around, better cellular telephone service, high-speed internet for northern people. Thank you very much.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and put a few words on the record about the private members' resolution that was brought forward by the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen). I agree with the member that in our modern society access to a telephone is a necessity.

I can recall many, many years back, driving an 18-wheeler up and down the freeways and the by-ways of our great North American continent. We all thought back then that a walkie-talkie, if you will, a two-way radio, was the greatest comfort we ever had. Many of us could recall the many songs and movies, breaker-breaker one-niner, where are you, right, accident ahead, or there is a smokey down the road, or whatever it might be. It was communicating. We were communicating back and forth, and we were communicating with each and every one of us. My God, if ever something did happen on the road, you had somebody that you could get a hold of.

From then I went on and I started moving houses. When I was moving houses we were the greatest threat on the highway because we would come down the highway, Mr. Speaker, with a building that was 30-some-odd feet wide, maybe 40 feet, maybe an elevator, but we would hope that, when we coming down the road with an elevator, somebody would know that we were coming. But, when we had our walkie-talkies, we had trouble. We had trouble explaining to the people that were coming up and down the highway, whether or not it was safe to pass. It was a necessity. It was for safety reasons.

My flag truck in the front and flag truck in the back, it was up to them to communicate with me, because I could not see around a building that was 40 feet wide, Mr. Speaker. I could not. It was up to them to tell me when I had to pull over. It was a necessity again. This is something that we had to have. So we went from walkie-

talkies, we went to FM radios. We thought this was absolutely great. I mean, all of a sudden now, there was supposed to be nobody on my frequency.

What we did find out a little while down the line, that we had a Hutterite colony, and, if we could understand German, we would understand a little bit what they were saying. But we were always scared of the fact that, if my pilot truck in the back would say to me to move over, that there was a car or a truck trying to pass me, at the same time, if that individual on the farm would key his mike, I could not hear what was happening. My word, what was going to happen then? I would come back on the highway and kill somebody. But we had that necessity.

From there we went to farming. Farming, we took the FM radios, and we thought that was just great because all of a sudden we could tell mom when we were coming for lunch or bring a grain truck or bring this or bring that. It was just wonderful to communicate with the world. We knew all of a sudden that if, heaven forbid, something would ever happen, safety, safety, safety. Safety was there.

Mr. Speaker, I recall when I held that same office. The member talks when they started out in California or thereabouts in the United States. I remember when they started. We all talked about a brick. They looked like a brick. That brick cost me \$3,700 out of my pocket. I bought that brick because I wanted to communicate with the rest of the world. I wanted to have this luxury of being able to push a few buttons, and somebody on the other end would say hello, Denis, because what I had just come from just before that, which I forgot to tell you, I used what we referred to as ship-to-shore radio. When I was hauling grain, I had to let the farmer know that I was showing up.

* (17:20)

We had a ship-to-shore. My number, I never forgot it. It was like a stamp on me, GL72592. When I keyed on my phone, the operator at the other end would say operator, and I would say operator this is GL72592, and I would like 744 ta-ta, ta-ta. We had to communicate that way,

but we were always moving ahead. The technology was there. But when this brick showed up, can you imagine how many cell towers we had? Can you imagine? Let me tell you, the member talks about going out of town a few miles and all of a sudden dead quiet. The same was here, my friend. We did not get out the Perimeter Highway, Mr. Speaker, and this big brick that I paid over \$3,500 was useless. It was just that, a brick. It was not worth an awful lot.

I was then fortunate enough, Mr. Speaker, to be put on the board of MTS. There, hence, I found out, all of a sudden, the reasons why my brick, my telephone, would not work outside the Perimeter Highway. I found out then the astronomical costs of putting up towers, towers that this infrastructure is required to provide. The cellular service, it employs what they call line of sight, line of sight, this technology that uses transmitters to transfer the message through the air between cellular towers placed 20 to 30 kilometres apart. Dense vegetation, such as where the member comes from up North, in northern Manitoba, reduces the distance each tower can cover as compared to the clear lines of sight in southern Manitoba. Hence they have started putting more towers in rural Manitoba because the traffic was there.

I can recall the fight that we had, and the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) was very instrumental because we got countless letters from the Member for Thompson because he wanted No. 6 to 391, from Wabowden, Soab and Pike up into Thompson, he wanted that to be covered by the number of trucks, traffic that was travelling through there. I believe they went to great lengths to try and fulfil that commitment. They really did.

I agree with the member and I agree with your whole resolution, by the way. Had the member not wanted to get his political smarts in place in his last WHEREAS, I might of. I might of because that is clear speculation on his part. Every other WHEREAS I might agree with because it would have been fact, but the last WHEREAS, clearly speculation on his part.

The requirements to build these towers, by the way, that the member talks about, that we

should be able to put in front, these requirements to build the towers at these regular intervals makes this cellular service extremely expensive to implement in the remote areas since the high cost of the towers and the technology over such long distances would translate into rates that are far higher than what customers are willing to pay.

The member sits here and he talks lots about his land line phone, that his wife sent him the bill in May. What he did tell us, and he was quite honest about it, all the little add-ons and the bells and the whistles. But I think if he went down to your base price again, and I cannot recall now right offhand what the member was saying, \$9 or \$11, but by the time he got finished adding all the call waiting, call display and the ta de, ta de, ta de, it added up to \$40-some-odd dollars, but because he wanted the bells and whistles. I would like to drive a Cadillac too, but I drive a Volkswagen. So I do not get that. *[interjection]* He has a Cadillac. He just finished telling you, my good friend from Dauphin, if you listen to what the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) was telling you, because he was quite sincere in his remarks. He just does not have all the facts straight.

He just does not have all the facts straight. He talks about the CRTC. He talks about the role of the CRTC. Let me tell the member that the CRTC does not regulate cellular service because the wireless market in Canada is very competitive. There are a number of major wireless service providers operating in Manitoba, and each of them has to manage costs in order to remain competitive, and in a competitive environment, companies cannot make major investments that they will not be able to recoup.

The member sits here and he plays games with us, because I am looking across the way and I do not think there is one of the members here, and to their credit, who were here when this Legislature lost \$28 million with MTX. Who do you think recouped that money? Where did that money come from? Where did that money go? Do not sit there with your head in the sand. Try and tell me that this money just disappeared. *[interjection]*

The Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg) is going to take me on on this one.

You go right ahead, my friend, because I recall back then my clientele in rural Manitoba, we were short \$28 million. You wonder why the phone service is more expensive than it was. Let me tell you who blew away that money. Where did that money come from? Where did it go? On whose head?

The member again, his facts are correct when he said that cellular service is a discretionary service. However, it is important to note that there are alternatives to cellular service for emergency purposes available in rural and remote communities. Again, the member is right when he puts the facts on the record. When he talks about FleetNet 800, and I congratulate him for doing his research, but the FleetNet 800 is a two-way radio service which interconnects with the regular telephone network. I use that service.

It is a good service, but it has coverage that extends along virtually every road in Manitoba. FleetNet service is available today in every Manitoba community that has an RCMP presence. There is a connecting facility there.

The satellite communication. I played with that instrument one day and I thought, there is no way that somebody is going to hook a satellite phone on my bill. I would not want to have to carry around that size of a telephone. That technology is there, and it is available. It uses special telephone equipment to transmit messages via satellite. It is provided by several alternate telecommunication providers. MTS uses satellite service as a means of providing emergency communications in remote communities when telephone service is disrupted.

Some of the facts I think the member did not quite get right, or did not put on the record, was the fact that Manitoba Telephone System offers the largest cellular coverage in Manitoba, covering over 95 percent of the population, which compares very favourably with cellular coverage in other provinces such as SaskTel, with service which reaches approximately 90 percent of the Saskatchewan population.

In the North, MTS is the only service provider to have built cell sites in Thompson, Flin Flon and The Pas. Manitoba Telephone System, and I am proud to say once again, that I was on the board of MTS Mobility, and because the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) lobbied

extremely hard is the reason those services are up and running in those areas. The sad fact of the matter is that our topography sometimes works against us when it comes to getting good, clear cellular telephone services. I do not believe I have ever had one trip from here to Somerset, here to Carman, here to Cypress River, here to Mariapolis, where I have not dropped a call, lost a call or switched between cells. We glad-hand. As I am driving out to Fannystelle, I will glad-hand with the tower that is showing up, Elm Creek-Haywood. From there we have to glad-hand again. The town of Treherne, the member for Brandon. The town of Treherne does not get good cell service. The reason is, they are in the valley. Line of sight, line of sight, again, I will recommend to the member.

I would argue that cellular service providers are doing the best that they can at this time with the technology that is available to them. I am confident that future advances in technology will allow cell phone providers to overcome the challenges presented by natural features and to extend cell phone service to the farthest reaches of our province. It was not that many years ago that my cell phone was almost the size of that shoe that I referred to, and now it easily fits in my pocket. Given these rapid advances in technology, I am confident that cell phone services will continue to improve and expand around the country.

In January 2001, MTS announced a two-year, \$50-million expansion program, the biggest investment by the company in its digital cellular network to extend the service throughout central and southern Manitoba by installing over 50 new digital sites. More than 30 sites were installed last year. MTS will continue to add more sites in the years ahead to meet the growing demand for digital service. Moreover, on April 23 of this very year, MTS announced a continued expansion of their digital cellular service. MTS announced that more than 20 communities in rural Manitoba are joining the company's digital cellular network in the second year of the company's digital cellular expansion program.

Over the course of this year, MTS has already or is expanding digital cell phone service to Pine Falls, Virden, Griswold, Haddashville, Falcon Lake, Richot, Souris, Beausejour, Lac du Bonnet, High Bluff, Holland, St. Andrews, St.

Laurent, Pilot Mound, Pelican Lake, Boissevain, Melita, Strathclair, Foxwarren, Russell, Roblin and Anola. I have great confidence in companies such as MTS and others and their ongoing commitment to expansion of cellular telephone service throughout our province.

* (17:30)

I would like to take a couple of moments to put a few words on the record about this recent CRTC decision regarding local telephone service. This message, by the way, about the CRTC, again—I see my light is flashing. Obviously, I am running out of time.

Rather than ask for leave by the members, I would like to thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to finally get some of the true facts on the record. Again, I thank the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) for bringing forward his resolution. Unfortunately, I will have trouble supporting it because of the facts, as I lay them out, the cost it would be, because even for my constituents, who we feel are being left out in the cold just as the Member for Flin Flon feels that his constituents are being left out in the cold, it is a costly endeavour.

As I think I have pointed out, I believe that our telecommunication technology is advancing so fast, so quickly, that I hope and I dearly pray, in the very near future, each and every one of the communities that the member is making reference to will have the ability to communicate as we do here in the city of Winnipeg. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and speak in favour of this resolution. I would like to read the resolution.

Being a resident of Norway House, Cranberry Portage, The Pas for many years and working within Frontier School Division, which has 36 communities up north, I have travelled extensively. I have worked extensively in the North, and I know the importance of good communication. In fact, when I started to work with Frontier School Division, Brochet actually only had two telephones in the entire community of about 700, and they were radio telephones that worked with the communication satellites.

They were very expensive, they were undependable, and they did not work all the time.

In the North, we do not have good Internet service; we do not have good cellular service. The other thing is when I was a community volunteer ambulance attendant, I noticed how important good communication was, adequate communication was. I think it is important to know that all citizens deserve good utility coverage. All citizens deserve good emergency phone service, and all citizens should be able to have decent access to Internet. It is not something that is taken lightly by our Government, and we are working very, very hard to try to connect people through the Internet and through other resources.

I look at some of the things that have happened in the past. As a northern resident, I was pleased because MTS was working to develop good phone services for all the citizens. So it was not just the people who were living in the city, it was not just the people living in urban environments, but it was all Manitobans that were being treated fairly, that had decent rates, and actually had decent coverage.

Since MTS has been privatized and since the profit motive is paramount, and I am not saying that it is not important to run a business and make money, I am not saying that it is not important to provide good service, but I think that what we wanted to do was have a phone company that provided good service and also would be expanding service to the rest of the province, just like it did in rural Manitoba.

In the early days of MTS, the service was mainly focussed on cities, and what happened is in the early years of our province, the sixties, et cetera, was phone service was expanded. It was expanded to rural Manitoba. A lot of times what would happen is the multiple phone lines were changed into individual phone services. That was done, and it was done well, and it was done for a reason. It served to allow all Manitobans access to phone service.

Well, I look at it now, and I agree with the members opposite when they say that we should use technology. I know that the actual wiring of

communities, the actual laying of telephone lines is impossible, but under the old system where MTS was a Crown corporation, it looked at profit and it also looked at the benefits for northern Manitobans. So what it was trying to do was allow Manitobans the right to have decent phone service, the right to have decent Internet service and affordable Internet service. It was not just market driven. It was market driven and it was also community driven and set up for Manitoba.

I would like to stand up and say that I very strongly support that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the CRTC to require telecom providers to extend adequate cellular coverage to those remote rural and northern communities which presently have inadequate or no cellular telephone service. I believe it is essential. I believe it is an essential service for all Manitobans, and I think that just in the past, when this service was extended, and the city actually helped pay for the extension of service to rural Manitoba, what happened was the people who were using telephone rates expanded the service to all of Manitoba through its normal rate structure. What happened, with prudent investment and prudent planning, all of Manitoba was linked with telephone service. I just hope that we would, as a province, work together to allow all people to have essential services.

Now, we talk about economic developments such as the Internet, and I think everyone should have adequate support and services. I would hope that the members opposite would not talk this resolution out, which would support it, and look at benefiting all of Manitoba in allowing those people living in rural and northern communities access to 20th century technology and 21st century technology of the Internet, and the technology of the phone system so that they can all benefit. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope we all can unanimously rise and support this motion.

* (17:40)

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member from Flin Flon for bringing forward this resolution. Indeed, I think that it certainly has its merits, in terms of the thinking behind it and the need to bring

northern Manitoba into the same level of service as the rest of the province, and certainly a laudable thought behind it. Unfortunately, for the member, and in particular, for the member from Assiniboia, when building his argument, he simply has a number of facts wrong. He should do a little better on that line.

Just in particular, to the member from Assiniboia, who tried to imply that somehow telephone rates charged in the city were used to subsidize expansion into rural Manitoba, in fact, not the case at all. If the member had done his research, he would have clearly found out that for years and years, in all telephone systems across Canada, long-distance rates, profits from long-distance phone calls subsidized the reduction in rates of residential and, to some extent, retail base rates throughout all the country. That was a fact that is common, known in every telecompany across Canada and, in fact, was there as a standard until the late 1970s.

In the late 1970s, there was a dramatic change that was brought on by the federal government that completely changed the landscape in which telephone companies across Canada operated. That was, possibly, the forebearer to what we now refer to as globalization, but, prior to that time, it was illegal for anybody to transmit data on a line across the border. In fact, if a company wanted to send its financial information from a subsidiary in Canada back to its head office in Minneapolis, or New York, or Dallas, or wherever, the only way to do it was a very cumbersome way, by hard copy. It was illegal to transmit data, something called cross-border transmission. It was the federal government that basically deregulated that, a federal Liberal government that deregulated that and opened up the borders. At the same time that they did that, they opened up the borders in terms of competition. They allowed telcos from the U.S., and, at the same time, to be fair, in the U.S., baby Bells were being formed. We saw the break-up of Bell Telephone, and the whole system was going through some very, very dramatic changes. So, just to correct the member from Assiniboia, it had nothing to do with rates in the city from urban telephone subsidizing phone service in rural Manitoba. It had everything to do with long distance subsidizing local rates.

Of course, once deregulation was introduced, huge pressure was mounted on the federal government to reduce the cost of long-distance telecommunications, particularly as it applied to data telecommunications, along with the advents in technology, the high-speed wires, the new connections of fibre optic lines. So the whole industry has had to change and shift, and has adjusted.

Competition was introduced. Telephone companies were faced with the possibility of massive, massive capital expenditures in order to keep up to date, in order to keep their revenue stream flowing. At the same time, there was a movement to in fact have consumers and businesses pay for the services they were using. That is what drove the cost of residential services up, was a move in terms of deregulation, was a move to make competitive rates, and, quite frankly, one cannot argue against business for arguing their case. They were in a global environment. Businesses in Canada who were transmitting large amounts of data had to compete with competitors from the U.S. The rates in the U.S. were much, much lower because they did not have the false economies that regulation had brought to Canada.

The whole network changed. As a result, we have what we have today. We have massive privatization of telephone companies. Everyone but SaskTel is in private hands. We have telephone companies with the freedom to invest and reinvest their capital to help build their business, not wandering off to Saudi Arabia and investing there because some governments have fallen for the notion that that would be okay.

The landscape has changed totally, and the landscape and technology has changed totally. I noticed earlier the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) was working on his desktop. Certainly, we all realize that 15, 20 years ago it would take computers to fill this room to have the same type of computing power as the member has in his desktop computer. That is just the way it is. I mean, those are the advances in technology. I would suggest to the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) that he can look forward to the same types of advances in technology when it comes to wireless.

Now, to the resolution itself, I think the member, although well intentioned, certainly is off-base when he tries to politicize it, because that does nothing for the people in the North. Making a statement trying to get into the argument about MTS, whether it should or should not have been privatized, that is a political argument and does nothing for the people in northern Manitoba. I just wish that he had left that out. As my colleague has mentioned, perhaps on that basis we would have been willing to look a little differently at this resolution and judge it on some of the merits of some of the other clauses.

The member spent a great deal of time talking about affordability and how systems in the North, you know, we all admit they have challenges; they have systems that are available to them. Again my colleague has mentioned a number. There is satellite. There are various different types of telecommunications. So the service is available. It is not that they cannot have service. The service is available. It is just, in some cases, because of the remoteness, priced out of the range.

If the minister, if the Member for Flin Flon, I tried to give him a little promotion there, but if the Member for Flin Flon really wants to talk about affordability, he should be talking about it with his own members, and he should have one of them raise the issue at the Cabinet table, because affordability is something that his Government could address if they felt there was a high enough priority. The Minister of Family Services (Mr. Sale) has decisions to make every day about affordability. The Government made a decision which we agreed in part with, that there is an issue with some pregnant women not having the resources to feed their children, supply the proper nutrition, particularly as it came to milk. So they put in a program for that. They looked at all the decisions they had to make and decided to go with it.

Again, if it is an affordability issue, it can be dealt with by the Government. It can be dealt with at the Cabinet table. I would urge him to take a little stronger approach with his own members and have those issues raised at the Cabinet table as opposed to trying having them imposed by the CRTC, who, by the way, does

not even regulate the mobile industry. Yet he is looking at them and saying, well, you impose that on these independent companies. If he is that worried about it, if his colleagues are that concerned about the issue, then I would suggest they do something about it at the Cabinet table.

Now, again, with regard to this resolution, and I think it is very unfortunate that here, once again, we have a government trying to talk out of both sides of its mouth, here they are suggesting through this resolution that the CRTC should somehow, well, first of all, get the power to do it and then presumably when they do, impose upon the telecompanies across Canada expenditures for which they have determined and which has been clearly indicated to him in response from MTS that, at this present point, there is no cost justification, there is no return on making that type of investment.

At the same time, we have a government—and I am glad he raised the issue of Hydro—who is stripping \$288 million out of Hydro, and in fact, they are forcing Hydro to go and borrow \$288 million at a further cost of \$276 million. So here is a government that is willing to say to Hydro: You go out and spend \$564 million. Do not worry about the cost. You do not have to make any, any analysis in terms of return on investment, but, by the way, if you want to invest in capital, the only way you can invest in capital is by taking it through a process that involves a rate of return on your investment in capital and justifying the lending that would have to take place for that. So again, a complete contradiction.

Here is an NDP government, a member of the Government, trying to say to independent, private companies that some foreign body should impose capital expenditures on them which clearly does not produce a rate of return. At the same time, in the company that they are supposed to be managing, the Finance Minister (Mr. Selinger) who is supposed to be responsible for Hydro, simply reaches into the cookie jar, forces Hydro to fill it up with borrowed money and takes it back because he cannot meet his obligations to balance the Budget. A total contradiction.

So I would again suggest to the member that if he is serious about this issue, that if he really

wants to stand up for the people of the North that he represents, then I would suggest he stand up, first of all, at the Cabinet table, talk to the ministers individually or in a group, and ask them to make affordability part of their decision-making process, because if they have the desire, they can do it.

With regard to Hydro as well, Mr. Speaker, Hydro has a number of remote locations which they need to communicate with, and they have installed communication facilities at those sites so that they could have reliable and direct communication with those sites, which is needed from time to time. So they have made those investments. They are making investments into communication.

If the Government really, really, honestly believed in this, and I do not agree that this is the way to go, but all they would have to do is go to Manitoba Hydro, which they have done through their Finance Minister and through the chairman they have appointed, and say, look, we feel it is a better idea to have cellular communications available to everybody in the North. So, instead of us taking \$288 million and costing you a further \$276 million, just take some of that money and invest in cellular towers in northern Manitoba. That is all they would have to do.

If the Government feels that that is an issue, then simply take your hand out of the cookie jar, leave the money in Hydro and ask Hydro to take a look. I mean, that is the style of this Government. They have no regard for the independence of Hydro. They have no regard for the management of Hydro. They simply make ad hoc decisions. Unfortunately, they are making those ad hoc decisions based on the fact that they are out of money as opposed to making a decision on what would benefit either a large group or a small group of Manitobans.

* (17:50)

I am not advocating that they do that, but I want to point out to the member from Flin Flon that that is definitely an option that is available to him. So, again, I would stress that if he really is serious about this resolution, if he wants to see this issue passed, and in the future, if he would bring it back to this House, depoliticize it, talk

about it as a serious issue, perhaps give a little briefing to the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) so he does not stand up and make the same mistake on the record, we on this side of the House would gladly open up debate and take a look at it.

In fact, if the Minister responsible for Hydro (Mr. Selinger) wants to go to Hydro, then we are even willing to debate that in the House. We will not agree, but at least we are open to suggestion and open to debate as opposed to this Government, who is completely closed-minded about most issues.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to have placed a few words on record with regard to this resolution. I see that my time is drawing to an end, so I will leave it at that.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity to rise today in the House to debate a resolution which I really truly believe comes from the heart of the member that represents Flin Flon. He cares about his constituents and believes this particular service is necessary so that his constituents can effectively enjoy some of the modern conveniences that are afforded other areas of the province. Mr. Speaker, that is as far as I believe that the member and I share thoughts in common on this particular topic.

I come from rural Manitoba, and understood full well the choice in my life to live in rural Manitoba that effectively was serviced, at the time of my own recollection, telephone service that had 16 other parties on that one telephone line. Now it was a personal choice, and I was willing to live with that type of service. I believe that persons make choices within their own lives. The member from Flin Flon stated that persons cannot afford telephone service. Well, there are people that do not have telephone service. I will speak very specifically of Portage la Prairie. One of our schools, the new principal attempted to put together a telephone list—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Faurshou: Mr. Speaker, I am having difficulty competing for members' attention. I know it is getting near six o'clock here and

everybody wants to go, but I believe you were having difficulty hearing me, so I paused hoping that the conversations opposite would subside.

Mr. Speaker, as I was stating, there was a school in Portage la Prairie where a new principal attempted to garner the telephone numbers of all his students within his school and found, very distressing to him, that more than 25 percent of his student population was without telephone service. The question was then asked why the individuals did not have it. So he started to pursue it. The first thought in mind was that the persons had not enough income in order to hold the telephone in good keeping because they would either get broken for whatever reason or perhaps bill payments were not made for whatever reason, but he wanted to investigate this and understand the background of the students that could not provide him with a telephone number.

The students themselves offered up many very interesting reasons why they did not have a telephone: because Dad wanted to drink his beer in the afternoon; Mom wanted to go to bingo every night. There were trips to and from in-laws that were on every weekend. These are the types of decisions that were lifestyle decisions that effectively prevented those individuals from having telephone service. It was a lifestyle decision.

So, where I come from here, we understand that in rural Manitoba we are not going to have the same service as that of those urban cousins. In rural Manitoba, with the 16 people on our party line, Mr. Speaker, actually there were individuals that did not want to go to private lines.

When private lines came, through the vision and support of the Conservative government, to extend individual private service throughout rural Manitoba, there were people that did not want private service because the comfort of having numerous individuals on that same line brought forth an air of comfort, that if you needed assistance, all you had to do was take the handle of that telephone and ring it multiple times, and our neighbours would come to one's aid by picking up the telephone and seeing what was causing the distress of that ring.

When we went to private lines, that was no longer available. We had to physically dial our neighbours if we needed assistance from there, and that was time-consuming. Sometimes, in time of panic, you cannot remember your neighbour's number, and that is why people liked the ringer on the side of the telephone. So, Mr. Speaker, we understand the technology changes, and sometimes we are not all that comfortable with technology change, but I wanted to also talk about MTS that they referred to as somehow being elusively to Manitobans' ownership. I wonder how many members opposite really truly wanted to maintain ownership in MTS and in fact went out and purchased shares. If you were

truly committed with not taxpayers' money but with money of your own, how many people over there went out and bought MTS shares? I think very few, and then that spells the commitment of members opposite towards ownership of MTS. If they cannot use taxpayers' dollars—

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

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 11, 2002

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