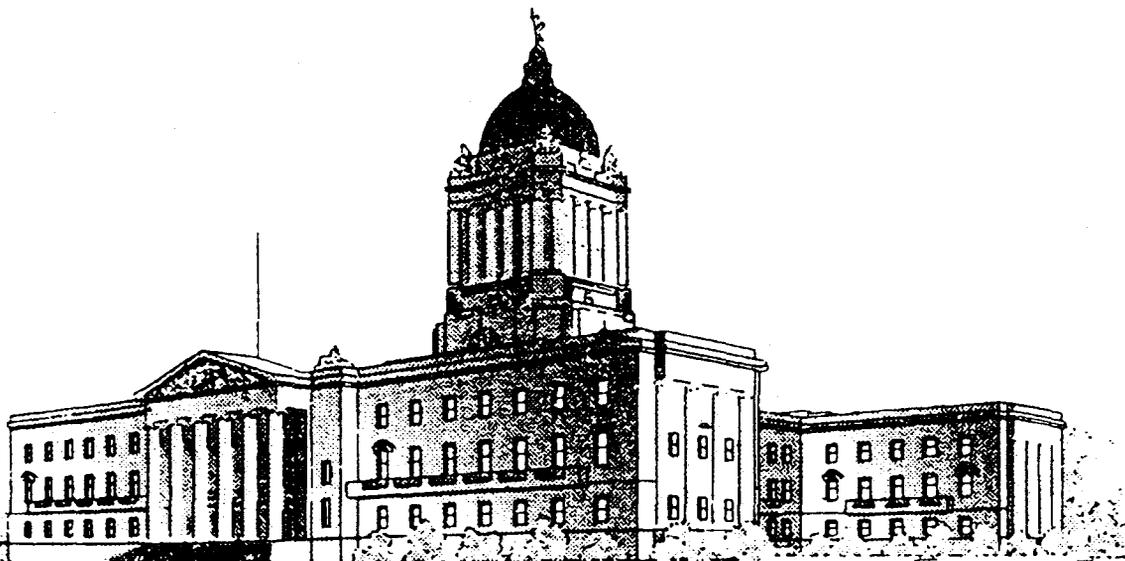




Third Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

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ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky, Hon.	Inkster	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean, Hon.	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold	Minnedosa	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
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PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
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SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
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STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 13, 2002

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Transcona-Springfield School Division

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of G. Crumb, Allison Kendel, Diana Risbey 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, or at least debate the bill.

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: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Clerk please read.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT on November 8, 2001, the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) announced a split in the Transcona-Springfield School Division but despite repeated requests has been unable to identify any benefits of this decision to the students and taxpayers of said school division; and

THAT this decision was not preceded by adequate public consultation as outlined in section 7 of The Public Schools Act; and

THAT this decision would result in significant hardships for the students in both Transcona and Springfield that would affect the quality of their education; and

THAT the proposal by the Minister of Education on February 12, 2002, neither alleviates nor remedies these hardships; and

THAT this decision results in an increased financial burden on the taxpayers of both the Transcona-Springfield School Division and the province of Manitoba; and

THAT on March 13, 2002, the number of resident electors required by The Public Schools Act requested the Minister of Education to convene a Board of Reference to decide the matter.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY THAT the Legislative Assembly request the Minister of Education 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.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flood Forecast

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement to make.

I rise to update the House on the flooding that continues to affect areas of southern Manitoba. Local states of emergency have been declared by the R.M.s of De Salaberry, Hanover, Piney, Stuartburn, Morris, La Broquerie, Reynolds and Franklin. A number of communities in southeastern Manitoba have taken action with pumping and closure of community dikes. Beyond the 14 voluntary evacuations from Piney

and Marchand and 100 people from Sprague, I am pleased to report there has not been the need to evacuate any other people. A boil water advisory remains in effect for the areas affected by the flooding.

Mr. Speaker, river levels in the Stuartburn and Sprague areas are presently stable. This should not be mistaken as a sign that the flooding has subsided generally. Southeastern Manitoba is continuing to experience record high water levels in many areas and these rivers show no immediate signs of dropping. A number of rivers have been affected, including the Roseau River, Rat River, Joubert Creek, Sprague Creek, Pine Creek, Whitemouth River, upper Seine River, Birch Creek and Tourond Creek.

The Red River is rising rapidly and flooding of some lower areas along the Red River is expected. We will continue working with the communities in these areas to prepare for this possibility. Two crests are expected for the Red and the Roseau rivers in the coming weeks, one resulting from water accumulated in Manitoba and the second one moving north from the United States where very serious flooding is also occurring.

* (13:35)

A number of provincial roads have been closed or restricted due to the flooding. I have tabled a list of these roads for the information of the House. Mr. Speaker, with respect to the flooding of manure storage lagoons, I can inform the House that only one lagoon has reportedly been breached and this lagoon was emptied some 10 days ago.

We have received a number of calls from livestock producers in the area with concerns about the location of their herds and providing feed. Staff are continuing to monitor the situation with farmers in the area and are working to assist in dealing with the challenges that have resulted from the flood conditions. A town hall meeting has been scheduled for this evening in Vassar and staff from the provincial government will be in attendance to provide information to people who have been affected by this flooding.

Our work to address the spring flooding is far from over. Our Government will continue

working proactively with local governments and residents to make the best possible preparations for dealing with ongoing and rising flood waters.

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable minister for the statement. I want to assure him and his Government that all of us in the Manitoba Legislature share the concerns the residents of this affected area are facing. It is times like this that we call upon the services of all our people, provincially, municipally, to help out those in need.

Mr. Speaker, kind of a double tragedy in this befalls us. Manitobans have regrettably the experience of from time to time the spring floods of our rivers, such as we had in 1997, but a flood coming at this time when crops are just barely in the ground, homeowners in the towns and villages have their gardens in and are looking after their lawns and planting their flowers and things like that, then to have this deluge come unexpectedly and cause so much havoc. To all of those, we express our best wishes for a speedy recovery. Certainly we will be doing everything and we want the minister and his staff to know that Her Majesty's Official Opposition will be wholeheartedly supporting of anything and all the Government can do under these circumstances.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 32—The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Sale), that leave be given to introduce Bill 32, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les enquêtes médico-légales, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion presented.

* (13:40)

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, this bill sets out time limits for the completion of inquest reports and also deals with autopsy report submissions, Chief Medical Examiner reviews, penalties and information about inquests from the Provincial Court.

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 J.R. Walkof Elementary School 57 Grade 5 students under the direction Mr. Gerald Letkeman and Mrs. Mandy Friesen. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck).

Also in the public gallery we have from Ochre River School 40 Grades 5 to 8 students under the direction of Mr. Richard Shankaruk and Mrs. Wendy Oversby. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers).

Also in the public gallery we have from Christ the King School 26 Grade 5 students under the direction of Mrs. Shirley Gendron. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**Manitoba Hydro
Manitoba Business Council Advice**

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Doer government has forced Manitoba Hydro to give his Government a million dollars a day. The Premier is on record as stating that the Manitoba Business Council supports his raiding of Manitoba Hydro for a million dollars a day. When asked about capital expenditures, the president of Manitoba

Hydro said: We will have less available for other purposes. How we spend our money on capital and how we portion our capital will be separate decisions and it will be financed through debt.

I would like to ask the Premier if he followed the Business Council policy regarding current future capital expenditure requirements before a dividend is taken from Manitoba Hydro.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I answered the question yesterday. Secondly, a \$288-million dividend from export sale profit over a three-year period is hardly a million dollars a day.

Two weeks from tomorrow school children will be having their summer vacation. I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition whether he is going to allow parents and trustees the opportunity to speak out in public debate before the summer vacation period starts.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) and the honourable Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell), when the Speaker stands, the Speaker should be heard in silence. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, again, I will ask the Premier the question and I would appreciate an answer to the question I am asking about Manitoba Hydro.

It is very clear the only concern this Premier showed about raiding Manitoba Hydro is under balanced budget legislation he and the other Cabinet members would have been forced to take a 20% reduction in pay. That is why they decided they had better raid Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Speaker, when talking about debt equity ratios, asked under oath, Kathy Kalinowsky said, and I quote: In fact, 75-25, which was your financial target for debt equity, is not going to be achieved in 2006, as was originally planned, but because of the special export profit payment it will be achieved in 2010. Which Ms. Wray under oath answered: Yes.

I would like to simply ask the Premier: Did he follow the advice given by the Manitoba Business Council with strict attention to be given to financial targets such as debt equity before taking a dividend from Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member will know the projections on income that also are based on the projections into the future are based on very conservative, small "c," prudent projections. They have been exceeded almost by a hundred percent over the last four years because of the great success of Limestone. For example, this year the surplus is projected to be some \$109 million, I believe. Last year, there were comparable numbers earlier in the year, and the number was \$220 million for the last year.

* (13:45)

When the member is talking about receiving advice, I would ask the member: Has he received the advice of the Rhineland School Division who state "in the spirit of co-operation." He is asking the Opposition, he is advising the Opposition to not take the advice from the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) but to have the public hearings, allow the people the chance to speak and pass this legislation for school boundaries by July 1.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, I believe *Beauchesne* 417 states—

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order?

Mr. Derkach: It is on a point of order. Mr. Speaker, I believe *Beauchesne* 417 states that answers to questions should be brief, deal with the subject matter raised and not provoke debate.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) asked the Premier about Manitoba Hydro. If the Premier really was serious about wanting to pass the legislation regarding school boundaries then he would have called this House back in

January, February, March or April, instead of sunning in the south, and then brought the legislation in on a timely basis.

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

Mr. Doer: Yes, on the same point of order. I am pleased the member, in making his point of order, begins the debate on the need for a necessity for the school boundary amalgamation.

We are just calling on the members opposite as part of receiving advice, which was in the question raised by the Leader of the Opposition, the generic question about following advice. We were just hoping the members opposite would receive their advice from parents and trustees instead of just from the Member for Springfield.

So I think he does not have a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Russell, Manitoba practice has been to allow leaders' latitude, and I have been following that—[interjection] Order. I have been following that practice, but Question Period is a time for questions and answers.

I would ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

* * *

Mr. Murray: I understand that the Premier is having difficulty explaining to Manitobans why he has had to raid Manitoba Hydro for a million dollars a day. I understand why he is having trouble doing that.

But I believe, Mr. Speaker, we have heard in this Chamber time and time again when questioned from members opposite, when we asked the question about Manitoba Hydro and the concerns about Manitoba Hydro, the ability for this Government to go in and just raid Manitoba Hydro, then the First Minister will stand up and say: Well, but the Business Council agrees. They agree with what we are doing.

Well, the fact of life is I am just asking him: Does he support the advice of the Manitoba

Business Council with his ability to go in and raid a million dollars out of Manitoba Hydro on a daily basis?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I have answered the question on the Business Council, the short term versus long term. The Business Council also talks about a long-term policy dealing with a public Crown corporation for purposes of revenue in a comparable way to a private company. I have mentioned the short term versus long term. We feel we only need this bridge for the short term, \$288 million over close to well over 850 days is hardly a million dollars a day.

The only raid that has taken place in this province has been the undemocratic sale of the Manitoba Telephone System, a transfer of \$400 million. The members opposite talk about balancing the Budget. They used the sale of the telephone system, under the balanced budget legislation, as a one-time only transfer of over \$400 million.

Finally, dealing with debt, the largest debt increase in Hydro's history was the purchase of Centra Gas, that had a secret tax deal that we revealed and also had a loss of \$10 million last year, as opposed to the Hydro operation that made money in the last current year.

Manitoba Hydro Transfer Payment—Board Awareness

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): The Premier is certainly showing his sensitivity to this line of questioning.

On more than one occasion, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has indicated to this House and to the people of Manitoba that Manitoba Hydro found out about the dividend on Budget day, the same as all other Manitobans. That is in direct contradiction to sworn testimony given before the Public Utilities Board by Mr. Vince Warden, the CFO. I will quote the testimony for the minister's referral. The question from Mr. Byron Williams: When, prior to the April Budget, did you become aware of the possibility of this special payment such that you decided to run some different scenarios? The response from Mr. Vince Warden, chartered accountant, who swore under oath to tell the

truth was: Well, it would have been early in the new year, 2002 that is.

* (13:50)

My question to the minister is: When did he inform officials of Manitoba Hydro that he was going to take a dividend in his Budget?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): The Member for Fort Whyte is very good at selectively choosing sentences from the officially sworn testimony at the PUB. The same person that he quotes also made it very clear that he had no knowledge of the details until the Budget was presented in front of this Legislature. That is exactly consistent with the statement I made in this House yesterday.

Mr. Loewen: I would ask the minister once again. We have sworn testimony, under oath, given at the Public Utilities Board. Is this minister calling Mr. Warden a liar?

Mr. Selinger: This tactic from the Member for Fort Whyte where he encourages us to cast aspersions on public servants is not one that we will engage in, but I will give other testimony by the same member that he quotes. It is with respect to the water power rental agreement, where he says: The rates by the previous government were frozen for a period of time for which you know there are other payments being made on behalf of the Province. So when the freeze came off it was not unexpected that it would be a substantial increase.

This statement confirms that the former government, through the back door, secretly and without any consultation with the public, was using Manitoba Hydro to fund government projects. We come to the Legislature and explain things to people. They hide it from people.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, the minister is obviously trying to hide from the fact that he knew full well the effect of this dividend.

I would ask the minister today if he will stand up and admit to Manitobans that indeed Mr. Warden was asked to run some scenarios for the dividend, and that, in fact, prior to his April

Budget this minister knew full well that Hydro would have to go out and borrow the full \$288 million in order to pay his dividend. He did not care, and he did it anyway.

Mr. Selinger: Once again, we have explained on more than one occasion that Hydro has to make a business case for any borrowings they do related to capital projects which build the assets and the productive capacity of Manitoba Hydro.

We have put on the record ample evidence to show that the rates forecast will be the same before and after the dividend payment. There is evidence at the Public Utilities Board that confirms that. At the end of the day we have put forward a proposal that deals with a 60% reduction in corporate income tax revenues, a 10% reduction in personal income tax, stabilized the programs to Manitoba and built on the legacy left to us by the Pawley government of building the Limestone project, building the Limestone project for exports in Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind all honourable members that the clock is running. We are losing time for Question Period.

Agriculture Federal Compensation Package

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. It is my understanding that the Prime Minister, yesterday, confirmed that Ottawa will expect the provinces to participate up to 40 percent of any new farm bailout for the agriculture community. It is also my understanding that Premier Calvert is in Ottawa today.

* (13:55)

My question to the Premier is: Why is the Premier of Manitoba not in Ottawa today seeking and supporting Mr. Calvert's position that Ottawa should be the sole bailout agency for the province of Manitoba as well as the other provinces?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): It is my intention to visit Vassar today where there is a town hall

meeting, and I think they were even talking about the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) joining me.

Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that you are asking the agriculture question third today, given the importance of that item for all Manitobans. Premier Calvert did meet with the Prime Minister yesterday.

Mr. Jack Penner: Could the Premier tell this House today whether the programs that will be announced by the federal government will be contingent on 40% contribution by the provinces, and will he participate?

Mr. Doer: I know that two negatives make a positive but I do not know what three will do in terms of will the federal government do this and will we do that. I know former government members would want all of us to be united in the resolution we passed in this House that *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The House has a resolution that calls for 100% funding from the federal government. The Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Liberal Party and I attended a meeting with farm leaders in Saskatoon some two and a half weeks ago, and in Regina four weeks ago, calling on 100% funding to deal with 100% funding of the U.S. government to states like North Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, Iowa and South Dakota. It is a 100% federal subsidy from the U.S. government.

Already, in Manitoba, for example, the federal government takes 40 million. We give a \$40-million benefit on tax treatment for PST. This was done by members opposite and kept by members on this side, \$40 million alone on gas treatment for agricultural producers. The federal government takes and vacuums that \$40 million out of Manitoba. It is time we are united together in calling on a national treatment.

Mr. Jack Penner: The Prime Minister has said the new program will be contingent on the provinces participating. Will this Province of Manitoba participate?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I have to say that I am very proud of the way our Government participates in support for agriculture in this province, but I would ask the member to be very careful in what he is saying. He has a habit of breaking rank.

We have been all standing together saying that this is a federal responsibility. Mr. Speaker, there is 100% responsibility of the federal government to provide the bridge financing because of the U.S. farm bill. Farm organizations have called for that. Ministers across the country, western premiers have called for that. It appears that now the critic for the Opposition is saying: Do not bother calling for 100 percent. If the federal government says put money in, put money in.

We are standing united that the federal government has the responsibility of addressing the trade injury because of the U.S. farm bill.

Health Care System Environmental Illness Treatment

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health said one thing to people when he was in opposition and he is saying quite the opposite now that he is the Minister of Health, Manitoba's own Jekyll and Hyde.

* (14:00)

I would like to ask this minister if he could explain why he has refused to help Margaret Tatlock, who has an extremely serious chemical sensitivity, when in opposition he asked the Province to fund her on compassionate grounds and in fact said, and I quote: The cost would not be that great for Manitoba and we could be a leader.

Does his word not mean anything to him anymore?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I am tempted to refer to other literary characters, Mr. Speaker, but I will resist the temptation.

With respect to the particular individual, that individual did attend and was paid for treatment

by the Province of Manitoba in Dallas. We also asked for a review by a physician adviser to Manitoba Health. We also undertook to have it reviewed by another physician with respect to the applicability. I also have met with that particular individual to discuss these issues.

Chiropractic Care Coverage Reduction

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Can the Minister of Health explain why he moved chiropractic coverage from children when in opposition he advocated for it because it improved access to care for children? Are women and families not important to him anymore as he espoused when he was in opposition?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the chiropractic decision, as I have answered on many, many occasions in this Chamber, it was a decision we did not want to take, but we did not do what members opposite did which was cut three visits for everybody across the board when they were in office with respect to chiropractic coverage.

I will hold up our record for things we have done with women and children in this province to the 11 years of neglect anytime, anyplace, anywhere.

Midwifery Program Funding

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I would like to ask this Minister of Health to explain why he is refusing to fund the midwifery program in two rural areas of Manitoba. He has put the program in crisis and it is on the verge of collapse, yet in opposition he said, and I quote: Midwifery enhances the women's choice, control and dignity.

Does his word not mean anything to him anymore now that he is in Government?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, that is why when we came to office there were zero midwives working in Manitoba under program, zero. Members had 11 years to do it and they did zero in 11 years. I am very proud of the fact we proclaimed an act and we

had 26 positions funded, for the first time in the history of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, if you compare 11 years of neglect, 11 years of firing, 11 years of losing doctors and nurses to 2.5 years of progress, we will argue anytime, anyplace, anywhere.

Victoria Hospital Minister's Contact

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Hallway medicine is alive and well at the Victoria Hospital, except for one day back in May when the minister came to make a visit.

Could the minister inform the House if he or his staff contacted the Victoria Hospital staff to clear the ER hospitals and eliminate the numbering system in the hallways so that the minister could attend or he would refuse to attend that day?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for St. Norbert just asked a question that is very, very important to him and his constituents. He should have the right to be able to hear the answer. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact we have announced and put money into an expansion of the Victoria Hospital. It was on the books when members opposite were government and they refused to put that program forward. When we were there and had the pleasure, together with the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the board, of announcing the expansion at Victoria Hospital, we took a step.

In addition, with respect to the hallways, CIHI, the only organization that reviewed it, said that we had done better than any other organization in the country.

Mr. Laurendeau: Mr. Speaker, I will make this question very simple. Can the minister confirm that he or his office contacted the Victoria

Hospital to clear out the ER hospital beds that are in the hallways and remove the numbering system before he would attend?

Mr. Chomiak: I can confirm that the day I was sworn in as Minister of Health I visited Grace Hospital, I visited Victoria Hospital and I visited all the hospitals to check out the hallway situation. I can confirm that. When the Premier and I visited the hospitals around Christmastime, we looked, unannounced, at the hallways. When we visited those centres, we realized that, as I had said, CIHI had said we had done the best job in the country about hallway medicine.

We did the expansion at Victoria because it was a lingering difficulty that had occurred when members opposite closed the largest hospital in the history of Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, when they closed Misericordia, pressure went on Victoria. That is why we put in the capital project at Victoria Hospital.

Mr. Laurendeau: Mr. Speaker, I have visited the Victoria Hospital with this Premier (Mr. Doer) in the past as well, but my question to the minister is: Is it his policy to contact the hospital for them to clear the hallways prior to his coming, for the media not to be able to reflect it away from his announcements, or is it his policy now to be if you cannot see it, it does not matter, or out of sight, out of mind?

Mr. Chomiak: No, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care System Tuberculosis Treatment

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yesterday I was surprised that the Minister of Health was unaware of concerns over the availability of beds in the provincial facility for treating patients with tuberculosis at the D.A. Stewart Centre. I was even more surprised to hear the minister suggest that access to care at the provincial D.A. Stewart Centre was primarily a federal issue.

I ask the minister today: What is the minister doing to ensure that all Manitobans will have access to rapid treatment for the diagnosis and care for tuberculosis instead of having to wait for weeks, as in the case of the individual from Cross Lake?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I was reacting yesterday to a specific issue raised by the Member for River Heights regarding a particular individual the member had raised. I have dealt with the member on other constituency issues where he has been wrong, and I want to make sure that the facts are correct before—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfair to cast aspersions without putting specific details.

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

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order. There are several examples I could illustrate of the member providing information on the record that was in fact inaccurate, talking about a program that was cut several years ago, dealing with other issues relating to particular programs.

Mr. Speaker: Order. 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. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 417: Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and not provoke debate.

Mr. Speaker, all too often this minister takes his cheap shots over the bow.

* (14:10)

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

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, on the same point of order.

Mr. Speaker: I will give you a second chance, but be brief.

An Honourable Member: You have already spoken.

Mr. Gerrard: That is correct, but the minister essentially has accused me of lying, and I think that is unparliamentary.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can only deal with one point of order at a time.

First of all, on the first point of order raised by the honourable Member for River Heights, it is not a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader had raised 417, which was a different point of order. Then the honourable Member for River Heights raised another point of order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can only deal with one point of order at a time. That is our rules. I have dealt with the first one. Now I will go to the honourable Official Opposition House Leader if he wants me to deal with the 417.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a new point of order.

Mr. Laurendeau: When I rose to speak, I was speaking to the member's point of order. So it was on the first point of order. I was only assisting the member in quoting *Beauchesne* so that you would have a reference to deal with.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable member for that clarification. Now, the honourable Member for River Heights, are you up on a new point of order?

Mr. Gerrard: No. I was just clarifying the position on the first point of order.

Mr. Speaker: So there is no point of order. Okay.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, to conclude his comments.

Mr. Chomiak: As I was indicating in my response, when the member raised a specific constituent, one individual case, I indicated I would review the situation. I understand the member dropped a letter off in my office shortly before Question Period yesterday or shortly after Question Period yesterday with respect to the individual.

So the member I think ought to provide the right information, and we will provide the appropriate response to the member, which is what we always do in this Chamber and has been the practice and the pattern.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Why has his tuberculosis control strategy, the provincial one, been such a failure? Why has Newfoundland been able in the last decade to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis by more than 80 percent while the incidence of tuberculosis in this province has remained almost unchanged, essentially one of the highest in Canada?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I would welcome the assistance of the member opposite in talking to Ottawa and making sure they fill their requirements with respect to dealing with First Nations communities, and we will be there and we will be prepared to work on that, as we have.

In fact, we have put in place a number of initiatives. We have opened dialysis on First Nations communities, not done before, not necessarily a provincial responsibility, but we did it to provide and treat people. We will do anything we can to treat and help people, but we need the assistance of Ottawa, who have pulled out of the field in so many areas.

Mr. Gerrard: It is strange that the minister does not realize the tuberculosis control strategy is provincial.

I ask the minister: Why is Manitoba virtually alone of all provinces in being unable to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis in the last 14 years?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, we have spent a lot of energy and time in the last two and a half years cleaning up from eleven years of neglect,

eleven years of doctors leaving, nurses leaving, eleven years of cut programs, eleven years of—

An Honourable Member: People know it, too.

Mr. Chomiak: People know that, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared to compare our record of two and a half years to the eleven years, as I indicated earlier, any time and any place, with respect to our record in health care.

On a number of fronts, *Maclean's* this week, previous announcements, CIHI reports, Manitoba is recognized as making a number of advancements and a number of improvements. The fact that we have reversed the trends of doctors and we are reversing the trend of nurses testifies to those changes and those improvements in the culture and the climate of health care in Manitoba.

Bill 14 Debate Delay

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, after putting up only three speakers in five weeks and then ringing the bells and refusing to speak on Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act, the Official Opposition are now speaking against reducing administrative costs and delaying passing this bill to committee to hear input from the public.

Can the Minister of Education tell us what stakeholders are telling him about advancing this bill?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Burrows for his question. Of course, I am hearing from many, many stakeholders urging us to move this bill to committee so that the public can be heard on it.

Mr. Speaker, I quote from a recent letter from Mr. Len Schieman, the chair of the Rhineland School Division from the Member for Emerson's (Mr. Jack Penner) constituency. Mr. Schieman, whom I have tremendous respect for, writes: We are writing to express a concern that enabling legislation for school division amalgamation will not be in place by July 1 if Bill 14 continues to move through the House at its

current pace. While we respect that all proposed legislation needs to be 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 amalgamating school divisions to ensure that enabling legislation is in place for July 1.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite are doing a disservice to children in this province by filibustering, delaying and obstructing the movement of this bill.

Workers Compensation Investment—True North Project

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Well, Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that we have just heard from the same minister who, when asked why he does not answer questions in the House by an important arm's length agency of this Government, said: It is Question Period, it is not answer period.

My question is to the minister of the Workers Compensation Board. On May 16, the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett), when referring to the Workers Compensation Board's involvement in the True North project, said, and I quote: It is a line of credit. It is not an investment.

I would ask the minister whether or not she still holds true to that statement she made in this House.

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister charged with the administration of The Workers Compensation Act): Mr. Speaker, it is a line of credit, a second line of credit, and it has been vetted through the investment committee of the Workers Compensation Board.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the minister did not answer the question that I asked her. She said it is a line of credit, not an investment.

Instead of having True North repay the principal and the interest on the \$7.5-million line of credit that the Workers Compensation Board extended to the project, the Workers Compensation Board will get \$2 million worth of limited partnership units in the project.

Now, Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain whether or not this is an investment?

Ms. Barrett: The investment committee of the Workers Compensation Board made the decision after due diligence to agree to the \$7.5-million line of credit. I trust the investment committee of the arm's-length Workers Compensation Board, who made the decision after due diligence. Without discussing the issue with the Government at all, I take the investment committee of the Workers Compensation Board, who says that it is a good investment.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, on a new question.

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

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the minister said in this House: This is a line of credit. It is not an investment.

Yet we see that the Workers Compensation Board is going to receive \$2 million of limited partnership units in the True North project.

* (14:20)

Now I ask the minister again: How is this not an investment in the project and only a line of credit?

Ms. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, does the member think the investment committee decision of the Workers Compensation Board was the wrong decision to make?

This investment committee has made its decision after due diligence and has decided they are prepared to participate to the extent of a \$7.5-million line of credit. If the member does not believe in the investment committee of the Workers Compensation Board, we do.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, on a new question.

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

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I want to quote the minister's response again on another issue. When asked about the Government's involvement in

this project, she said, and I quote, and she said it today: It was a decision that was taken by the investment committee of the Workers Compensation Board without any interference or discussion at all or influence with the Workers Compensation Board.

Mr. Speaker, through our requests for freedom of information, at least five documents requiring the Workers Compensation Board involvement in the True North project exist. Four of these documents were sent to the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett). One was sent to the Premier (Mr. Doer). Access to these documents has been denied due to Cabinet confidentiality.

Now I want to ask the Minister of Labour again: Is this not an indication of the Government's involvement in directing Workers Compensation Board to invest the \$7.5 million in True North?

Ms. Barrett: No.

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

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, we have asked this minister time and again about the \$7.5 million, which has been put at risk. Rates are going up on July 1, the first time in 10 years that rates are going up.

Mr. Speaker, this minister through her involvement has forced the Workers Compensation Board to put \$7.5 million of Workers Compensation money at risk, and she maintains that it is not an investment but a line of credit. I want to ask her: Why is she putting Workers Compensation dollars at risk in this way?

Ms. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the rates for the Workers Compensation Board were established far in advance of the decision on the investment committee to put \$7.5 million as a second line of credit to the True North. The Government had no involvement in the process or the decision of the Workers Compensation Board investment committee to do that.

I might add that even with the change that will take place in—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the answer in case the minister breaches a rule of the House. I cannot hear a thing. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Ms. Barrett: I would never knowingly breach a rule of the House, but I appreciate that.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, even with the rate change for employers that was announced a little while ago by the Workers Compensation Board, we still have the lowest rates for workers compensation in the country, instead of the province of Alberta—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 417, the minister should not provoke debate. Are they going to continue to raid every Crown corporation until we are not the lowest in the country?

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): No point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are dealing with a point of order. That is a very serious matter. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please. The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, we understand why the other side would feel provoked if indeed under this Government we have the lowest WCB rates in the country. They would feel that way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Turtle

Mountain, it is not a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable minister to conclude. You have about 11 seconds left.

Ms. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to suggest this line of questioning says that the Conservatives are not interested in developing downtown Winnipeg, and we are.

True North Complex Exclusivity Clause

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, in regard to the True North project, the master funding agreement is available on the Web, we now know the Government has granted exclusive negotiation and development rights at the expense of all communities outside the city of Winnipeg, that no construction or negotiation towards construction can occur within 100 kilometres of the city of Winnipeg. This right has been given away by this Premier. I would like to ask the Premier why he would sign an agreement such as this that gives this exclusive right for the next 25 years without any consultation with anyone outside the city of Winnipeg.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I have answered that question before, on specific requests and specific projects. Every example outside of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In every example that has been raised to us, we have sent back letters of assurance. I have sent some letters and I will bring them to the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would note, because the clause deals with public money, that just a couple of weeks ago we reversed the withdrawal of support to the Keystone Centre, a plan to withdraw all the support from the Keystone Centre. We believe in building downtown Winnipeg, and we will build other centres across Manitoba. Stay tuned.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for Oral Questions has expired. We will now move to Members' Statements.

* (14:30)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

National Public Service Week

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the House that this week, June 10 to 14 is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If members want to have a conversation, you can do it in the hallway or in the loges. I cannot hear. Once again, I have to remind members I cannot hear the member that has the floor.

Ms. Korzeniowski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to advise the House that this week, June 10 to 14, is National Public Service Week in Canada. Here, in Manitoba, staff of all three orders of government have once again worked together to develop activities for the week designed to bring attention to the important and excellent work of our public servants. Activities will be taking place in many communities around Manitoba.

Public Service Week became a reality in 1992 when Bill C-328 was passed in the House of Commons to recognize the value of the services rendered by public servants from all jurisdictions. The act designated the third week of June as National Public Service Week. Premier Gary Doer has proclaimed this week as Public Service Week in the province of Manitoba.

Representatives from each order of government and various unions have taken the lead in co-ordinating their efforts to show appreciation to our employees for the many outstanding contributions they make in providing service to citizens.

Learning events, open houses, blood donor clinics, barbecues, sporting events and many

other activities will mark this week around our province. As well, awards ceremonies are taking place recognizing the work of particular individuals and groups. At the provincial level, the week culminates with the Manitoba Public Service Excellence Awards luncheon.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all award recipients in all orders of government and to thank all public servants for the outstanding work they do for our province and our country every day. I know that all members of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly join me in celebrating the excellent work of our public service.

Manitoba Hydro Profits

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, it has been Spiderman that has been all the rage on movie screens across the province this spring, but here at the Manitoba Legislature we have been able to witness the actions of our own comic book character. He is not a superhero exactly, but he does show super speed in spending the money of the tax and ratepayers of Manitoba. He is the million dollar man.

Unlike Spiderman, our million dollar man does not have a secret identity. Million dollar man is none other than our Premier (Mr. Doer), a Premier whose government is draining almost a million dollars a day from Manitoba Hydro through the dividend and interest he is requiring the Crown corporation to pay to cover his super spending; a million dollars a day, or \$1,347 in just the two minutes it will take me to deliver this statement.

Million dollar man, along with his sidekick, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)—or perhaps we should give him a catchy name as well, Robin. We might spell that r-o-b-b-i-n Manitoba Hydro, or how about just hydro boy? Clearly million dollar man and hydro boy do have a super power. True, they cannot fly or swing from the top of the Legislature on a web, but what they can do is super spend. In fact, their super spending has been so extreme as to require this Manitoba Hydro dividend to balance last year's books. As hydro boy might say, and I quote: holy disappearing money, mister million dollar man. Perhaps the people of Manitoba would have been better off electing Spiderman.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before recognizing the honourable Member for Dauphin-Roblin, I would like to remind all honourable members, when making a reference to other honourable members it is by constituency or ministers by their titles.

Roblin, Manitoba

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin-Roblin): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a very progressive town in my constituency, the town of Roblin. On May 31 in Hamilton, Ontario, at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the town of Roblin received the FCM-CH2M Hill sustainable community award for excellence in municipal service delivery that has contributed to sustainable community development. This company is an environmental service firm that offers solutions in the areas of water, environment, energy, telecommunications, transportation and other industrial processes.

Mr. Speaker, the town of Roblin has been recognized for its leadership in waste water, having constructed an engineered wetland system and developed a hybrid poplar plantation to complement its effluent immigration system. Together, this results in a comprehensive treatment of municipal and residential sewage in an environmentally sustainable manner. It is one of the only systems of its kind in Canada and sets a new standard in provincial waste water management with its zero discharge capability.

On behalf of all members, I wish to congratulate Mayor Lorne Boguski, the Roblin town councillors, staff and employees of the town of Roblin and the residents of Roblin in earning this national recognition. They have done our Parkland area proud.

I ask all members to join me in encouraging all Roblinites to keep up the good work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Portage Collegiate Institute

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the Portage Collegiate

Institute track and field team who recently won the Rural Provincial Track and Field Championship in Brandon held May 31 through June 1, 2002.

I would like to congratulate the team members: Phillip Insisienmay, Chris Caister, Brian Cleaver, Daniel Narvey and Benson Stobie for their outstanding achievement. I would also like to congratulate the coaches: Mark Diboll, Carol Fast and Al Patterson for their guidance, support and encouragement provided to the Portage Collegiate Institute's track and field team. Mr. Speaker, might I also add that this is the second time in the last four years that they have won the provincial championship. Each member of the team and their coaches should be very proud of their accomplishments.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of attending the ceremony in which the Manitoba Sports Excellence Awards of Merit were presented. The track and field team also won the right to hang the rural provincial track and field first-place banner in their gymnasium as a reminder of their achievement.

Sport can be a powerful and positive influence on a young person's life. Along with the obvious benefits of being in good health, sports teaches the value of hard work, builds confidence and instills discipline.

I hope that all my colleagues of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly can join me in congratulating the Portage Collegiate Institute track and field team on their provincial championship award. I also hope my colleagues will support the young people in their own constituencies who are becoming better individuals through their commitment to physical activity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:40)

École Leila North Community School

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, it was my great pleasure on May 30 to attend and greet the crowd at the 10th anniversary of École Leila North Community School. That evening they held a spectacular event called A Celebration of Living and Learning.

During the evening from 4:30 until 8 p.m., a variety of events occurred at various locations throughout the school. The special attraction included woodworking demonstrations, art displays, a food court, archival displays, a tea room, a silent auction and rooms for class reunions. The main events of the evening were the big band performance and opening ceremonies followed by a talent show, the novice band and a fashion show. All of these events were held in the school gymnasium.

I watched and thoroughly enjoyed the fashion show which was hosted by Zita DeSousa and Shalane Guiboche. The staff co-ordinators responsible were Kimberly Zealand, Chris Chene, Nicole Kerbrat and Mélanie Hinse. It was an excellent show, Mr. Speaker.

I was happy to see that so many businesses, companies and organizations contributed their support to the night's celebration.

I would like to thank all the students, teachers and support staff and other volunteers who worked so hard to make this a truly memorable night. I would like to extend my best wishes and thanks to the school's principal, Alfred Wiebe, for providing leadership and a job well done.

The great work put in by hundreds of the students and staff really paid off. I congratulate École Leila North Community School on 10 years of success and wish them many decades more of great school memories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections will meet on Wednesday, June 19, at 6:30, to consider the 2002 report of the Judicial Compensation Committee.

Would you canvass the House to determine if there is leave to sit after private members' hour today until 10 p.m. to deal with Bill 14?

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections will meet on Wednesday, June 19, at 6:30 p.m., to consider the 2002 report of the Judicial Compensation Committee.

Also, is there agreement to sit from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. to continue debating Bill 14? Is there agreement?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: There is no agreement.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, would you please—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Could the members that are having a conversation please do it in the hallway or in the loge. We are trying to deal with House business, and he is trying to announce the House business for the day. I cannot even hear what bills he is announcing. I would ask the cooperation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, would you please call debate on second reading on Bill 14.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

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

Mr. Speaker: Continuing on from this morning, we will resume debate on second reading of Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act (Public Schools Act Amended), and the proposed motion of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer), who has 18 minutes remaining.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I appreciate the opportunity to be able to continue my remarks on Bill 14. Before I get into my discussion, I want to say that I take exception to the remark in the question from the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) brought to the Minister of Education just a few minutes ago, where he talked about administration costs would be reduced if they amalgamate. I think this is ridiculous. It is so

wrong. I do not know where they get their idea from, but Dictator Drew says—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would have to ask the honourable member from Gimli to withdraw that last comment.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will withdraw that comment.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable Member for Gimli.

The honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, are you up on a point of order? The honourable Member for Gimli has the floor.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to carry on with my remarks on Bill 14. When I suggested that the Member for Burrows, in his question, says that they are going to reduce costs, well, I would think that he should know better. I think that the government of the NDP, including the Minister of Education, should know better. In all the studies that we have done, we looked at amalgamations between some Interlake constituencies, Lakeshore and Evergreen, and they looked at it very carefully. In the end result, because this was one that was recommended by the Norrie Commission, the end result was there would be no saving, not any saving whatsoever. In fact, in the end result, it would cost the taxpayer more. Your school taxes would go up because it would cost more for these divisions to operate singly than it would for them to operate the way they are. So if there is no savings and if there are no advantages to amalgamations, why amalgamate? Just for the sake of change? Why change for the sake of change? There is no point to it.

All we want to do is provide the best possible education for our students. That is what the divisions should be charged with, and that is what the trustees are elected for. So, for the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) to get up with a statement like that and a question, I think he has no idea of what it costs to run a school division. He has never been on a school board. He has never served the public in any kind of capacity other than as some—

An Honourable Member: Behind the pulpit.

Mr. Helwer: Whatever, but he has no experience in serving the public, so he does not know what a school trustee really, really does or understands.

On Bill 14, one of the letters to the editor says what a dangerous precedent; voters in Springfield, Morris-Macdonald challenge the provincial decision and request a right to be heard, and the Government responds not by listening, Mr. Speaker, but by bringing in legislation which limits their ability to even question what goes on. The minister wants to dictate to the divisions how they should run their divisions. That is not possible. We live in a democratic society. We live in Canada and Manitoba where the trustees who are elected should have to serve the people who elected them. That is the ratepayers and that is the people of the particular school division.

So, Mr. Speaker, we do not have a big problem with amalgamations where they are voluntary, where divisions want to work together and get together. That is great. That is terrific, but we do not want to give this minister any kind of power that he can go and dictate to the divisions what they should do and how they should operate their divisions. Whether it would come to limiting their administration or whether it be the number of trustees, that should not be a concern of the minister, and he should not have any say in that regard.

You know, I have been around for many years in municipal politics and in provincial politics now throughout the Interlake and one thing and another, and school divisions serve a very useful purpose. One thing he says, again, that they should have consultations. Well, I have served on many councils and dealt with many school divisions, and they always consult and they will continue, I am sure. So they certainly have a role to play in how things should work in Manitoba.

Something else about Bill 14, it does not outline the role and authority of the interim boards that were described in the minister's announcement in November, and because of the lack of the minister's clarity, some boards have or will incur substantial legal and administrative

costs. So there is not going to be any saving in a lot of these cases. It is going to cost them more. Again, it is just an indication that the minister, when he put forth this legislation, it was not well thought out and it was not well designed and does not serve the people of Manitoba.

* (14:50)

In fact, we agree with the Manitoba Association of School Trustees' position that Bill 14 fails to provide school boards with the legal framework that they require to fulfil the responsibilities with which they have been charged regarding amalgamation. So, Mr. Speaker, there is another factor. The Manitoba Association of School Trustees says divisions cannot fulfil their responsibilities under that kind of legislation. So there are many, many problems with this.

Bill 14, again, fails to answer important questions about key dates in the amalgamation process. It gives the minister broad regulatory powers in regard to school division amalgamation, including ordering the revision of a division budget and imposing caps on administration costs.

The legislation also fundamentally alters the relationship between the school boards and the Government by centralizing the decision-making authority in the minister's office. I think this is terrible. This is taking away the power of the trustees. These trustees are elected by local citizens, Mr. Speaker, by the taxpayers of our province, and we put our trust in them that they set the agenda for education for our children.

Why would someone from the Government come along, as in this case where the minister says he wants to centralize the decision making in the minister's office? There, again, that is one of the reasons why we cannot agree to Bill 14, and we will do everything in our power to try to delay this as much as possible because of the fact that everything in here says the minister should do this, the minister should control that. Well, that is not possible. We have school divisions that have the power to tax. They have the power to raise money. They are elected by the people of a particular school division, therefore they should be able to make the decisions

that govern that particular school division to educate our children in the best possible way.

If the parents or the property owners feel that the school division, the trustees are not doing a good job, there are elections every three or four years. There is an opportunity to change the trustees, elect new trustees. You have that power. Elect the people you want to act on your behalf. These trustees are charged with the responsibility. They have the power to tax on a special levy. They have the power to set the agenda, to set the curriculum for the school. They should have the power. Therefore the minister should not be able to centralize decision making in his office.

In Bill 14 again, it will expand the role of the minister in the day-to-day operations of the school boards. It will take away Manitobans' right to appeal decisions made by the Board of Reference. I spoke about the board earlier in my speech, saying that there is need for the Board of Reference. The people who are elected or appointed to the board are citizens who have a responsibility, who understand the education process. So I think there is a role to play for the Board of Reference.

In many cases whereby division boundaries or things of that nature come about, I think those are the kinds of decisions that have to be decided by local people in a local environment and by people who are involved with the Board of Revision. They have the experience, and they would be able to do a good job.

Again on Bill 14, the Minister of Education's (Mr. Caldwell) amalgamation process has been flawed right from the outset. While numerous Manitobans have raised concerns and questions over the process, in every instance the minister has failed to provide answers and has ignored the concerns of parents and elected trustees. There again, this is just an example of where the minister is going to get too much power under Bill 14.

There is one other clause in Bill 14 where it also has a moratorium on school closures. Well, there again he is interfering with the local decisions. Mr. Speaker, sometimes decisions like this, whether it be on closures or whatever, can

best be made by a local school board because they know how many students they have in each area. The people know what they can put up with as far as transportation, how far they can go.

So these kinds of decisions on school closures are best made by local school divisions and not have to be dictated by the minister. He also says that they must not close the school in the fiscal year of amalgamation or the next two years unless school divisions in which the school was located before amalgamation identify the schools that are candidates for potential closing before November 1, 2001, and provided a report to the parents and residents in the area served by the school on the impact of the closing.

I do not know if there are any particular closings in any of the divisions that are being forced to amalgamate by this minister. I think this is being dictatorial again by dictating to the divisions how they should operate. There again, when he is interfering with what they should do with school closures, he is really interfering with their budgetary matters. He is telling them they have to spend on certain items or whatever. Pretty soon he is going to dictate the type of curriculum that the school division is going to have to have. Who knows what comes next? How much power does he want? Who knows what he is going to be able to do after Bill 14?

We think that the decisions for running the school divisions, for coming up with the programs, the curriculum, whether it be sports programs or whatever, has to be done at a local level. These divisions I know in my area have done an excellent job. We have excellent school trustees that work hard, and we have excellent teachers that work hard too, that provide an excellent education for our students. What is going to happen if the minister wants to dictate what should be done in all these divisions and dictate how the divisions should operate and dictate what the board can do and cannot do? Who is going to run for re-election of a school board if you have no power? Why would you want to be a school trustee if you have no power? It does not make sense.

I do not know why he does not understand that taking this power away from the divisions

what effect this is going to have on our local school system. It is going to deteriorate to the point where we will not have any school divisions. He is going to have to take over all the schools and all the divisions. That would be a real detriment to Manitoba. That is not the Manitoba way, that is for sure.

* (15:00)

Mr. Speaker, I believe my time is getting short, but I will just have a couple more comments to put on the record. I guess I just want to talk about again the importance of education, how important education is to all of us, to our families and our parents and one thing and another. When I first started school I started in a small one-room school and moved up to a larger school and newer schools. Over the years, I can honestly say that in Manitoba and in our area of Manitoba we have had an excellent education process. I think our education system in Manitoba is one of the best in Canada. It serves our area very well, especially in the area that I represent now in the Interlake area of the Evergreen School Division and Lord Selkirk School Division. Both are very well-run divisions and certainly do a good job.

With that, I will end my remarks, but I certainly do not agree with Bill 14 and will not be voting for Bill 14. I will vote for the amendment but against the bill. So, with that, I will end my remarks.

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): It is a pleasure to be able to speak to some of the comments made by members opposite in this debate further to their amendment on this particular matter, the amendment which essentially calls for yet more consultation and one would say yet more dithering on the amendment which calls for more consultation and, as I suggested, more dithering, on the issue of modernizing schools system in the province of Manitoba.

This process, as all Manitobans know, was one that began in 1993-94 with the Norrie Commission and I refer to my autographed copy of the Norrie report again. Some of the recommendations contained within the Norrie report, the first one of which was, and I quote: The

Commission recommends that the minister and the Department of Education and Training adopt a strong leadership role in articulating a vision for the future and establishing education policy for the province of Manitoba. Indeed, that is a challenge that members opposite, when they were in government chose not to rise to, not to take on. It was a challenge that they retreated from and today, in 2002, they continue to retreat from as members in opposition now.

Mr. Speaker, the second recommendation of the Norrie report, and I quote again: The Commission recommends a governance of public education by boards, publicly elected school trustees be reaffirmed. Indeed, that is what we are doing in a very fundamental way with this legislation. Bill 14 is a piece of legislation that has been developed in an atmosphere of consultation and partnership with school divisions in the province. We have voluntary amalgamations taking place in a number of constituencies of members opposite.

I read into the record during Question Period today, a letter from Mr. Len Schieman, the chair of the Boundary School Division. Mr. Schieman is a man whom I have considerable respect for, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Schieman instructs and advises his MLA, the MLA for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner) to move passage of this legislation expeditiously and certainly before July 1—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that members opposite are not serious about debating this bill. I appreciate that members opposite are being obstructionist and not following advice from elected trustees in the province of Manitoba who are seeking speedy resolution of this bill and speedy passage of this bill. The day before yesterday I referenced letters from Agassiz School Division. Agassiz School Division, of course, is the division represented by the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) who has become the de facto leader of the Opposition in this discussion. He seems to be running the party.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Fort Whyte on a point of order?

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, I see the member from Radisson is using a cell phone in the Chamber. We all know that is against the rules of this Chamber, and I would ask you please to call her to order.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Fort Whyte, on his point of order. He does have a point of order. Cell phones, electronic equipment, are not allowed in the Chamber. So I would ask the honourable member to shut her phone off.

* * *

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the honourable member have the phone off?

An Honourable Member: Yes, the phone is off.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable member.

Mr. Caldwell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy that the Member for Fort Whyte was paying attention to what is occurring in the House because this is an important debate. I am pleased that, perhaps, the members opposite will listen to the third recommendation in the Norrie report which this Government is also adhering to, in stark contrast to members opposite when they were in office.

I quote again: The commission recommends that school boards be elected on the basis of a ward system. That is an integral aspect of Bill 14. Ward systems provide for a level of engagement at a local level that is unavailable in large systems. So, while members opposite obstruct and delay and obfuscate and put amendments forward to thwart the will of trustees who are working diligently to move forward on amalgamation, we on this side of the House are informed by almost a decade-old report that members opposite determined, in their wisdom or lack of, not to move forward with, not to proceed with, but rather, after spending nearly a million dollars on the effort, to shelve. It took a change in government to finally bring forth legislation on an item of business that virtually every province in the country has moved forth on in the 1990s, but, in Manitoba,

of course, the 1990s were a very dark decade in this province. There was no action in this province on school division modernization at a time when other provinces were moving forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that is looking forward rather than looking backward, is being proactive rather than being reactive, is exercising leadership as Mr. Norrie called for in his report, as opposed to exercising Chicken Little, the sky is falling sort of philosophy that members opposite have made a trademark of the Tory party over the last number of decades.

Manitobans are seeking greater public accountability and responsibility in the public school system. After seeing the massive provincial offloading that occurred during the 1990s, the retreat from public education that took place in the 1990s, the withdrawal of over \$130 million of provincial funding to the public school system, \$130 million that was directly put onto the property tax bill of ratepayers in Boissevain, Russell, Minnedosa, Souris, Killarney, and other communities throughout the province of Manitoba. Members opposite, the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) sat in a government that made decisions that taxed his property owners in Turtle Mountain, in Boissevain and Killarney. The Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer) was part of a government that withdrew over a hundred million dollars from provincial funding support to the public school system, and taxpayers in Minnedosa and Souris, Deloraine, had to pick up those bills that local school divisions were forced to absorb because of the Filmon Tories' retreat from the public school system.

* (15:10)

Mr. Speaker, today, in Manitoba, Manitobans are seeking greater public accountability and responsibility in the public school system. The modernization of our school system, as contained in Bill 14, is long overdue in Manitoba and, as I said, has long taken effect in the other provinces throughout Canada. Indeed, as I have stated a number of times here, it is a process begun a decade ago in 1993, '94 with the Norrie report.

It is also instructive to know that the provincial taxpayer contributes 76 cents of every dollar to Manitoba's public school system. Local trustees collect 24 cents of every dollar. Save perhaps for the honourable members opposite, all Manitobans seek greater responsibility and public accountability for education dollars. Indeed it is in the public interest that public scrutiny take place concerning the expenditure of public dollars. We are responsible on this side of the House, if not the other side of the House, to all Manitobans on this matter. We will not shirk our responsibility as a government to be accountable for the expenditure of public dollars and to provide greater opportunities for public scrutiny of those tax dollars.

I know that some members opposite do not feel particularly concerned about representing the best interests of their constituents. We have seen that repeatedly in the last two weeks in the Morris-Macdonald issue where \$2.5 million to \$4 million of Manitoba taxpayers' dollars were mismanaged in a grotesque way. Yet we have the member from Turtle Mountain, the member from Minnedosa, the member from Russell saying, oh, it does not matter if our taxpayers and our constituents are on the hook for these millions of dollars. We do not care about our local constituents. We do not care about our—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very difficult to hear. I would ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Mr. Caldwell: We do not care about the taxpayers in Boissevain. We do not care about the taxpayer in Melita or the taxpayer in Killarney or the taxpayer in Minnedosa. We do not care that there is \$2.5 million to \$4 million that has gone into a school division in ways that were deemed improper by the Auditor General. We have no concern for our constituents and representing the best interests of our constituents. We only have concern for desperately striving to make some political points in defending management practices in a school division far, far away from Boissevain or Killarney, far, far away from our constituencies. We do not care about our constituents and the interests of our constituents and the taxpayers' interests. We are only concerned about having a political sideshow that seeks to defend, for political

purposes, our interests in the constituency for the Member for Morris (Mr. Pitura). We do not care about the constituents in Minnedosa constituency, the constituents in Russell or the constituents in Turtle Mountain.

The modernization process that we are undertaking in the province of Manitoba right now, a process that is long overdue, is taking place in an environment of educational property tax relief for all Manitobans and all taxpayers. In contrast to members opposite, when they shifted a \$135 million tax burden to local property taxpayers throughout the 1990s is in stark contrast to this Government's record. First, we made available to all property taxpayers in the province, an increase in the education property tax credit, something that members opposite cut back on. Not only did they cut funds for the public school system, they took away property tax credits from Manitobans at the same time, punishing the taxpayers in Boissevain and Killarney, in Minnedosa and Russell, punishing them twice. Not only removing money from the school divisions' budgets but also reducing the education property tax credit. This Government, I am proud to say, has increased that property tax credit to \$400 for every homeowner in the province of Manitoba.

In this year's budget we made a 10% reduction to the ESL property tax, the Education Support Levy property tax, the first time in Manitoba history that such a reduction was made. For 11 years, members opposite sat on the government side of the House and cut funding to the public school system, undermined tax credits available to Manitobans and did nothing to reduce property taxes in the area that they had some control over, the Educational Support Levy. It took a change in government to provide greater tax credits to Manitobans, to provide greater investment in the public school system's operating, to provide greater investment in the public school system's capital and to reduce the Education Support Levy property tax that all Manitobans paid, the first reduction in history, and something not done by members opposite when they were in office for 11 long, hard, dark years in this province.

We on this side of the House are engaged in a partnership and shared responsibility with

school divisions across the province of Manitoba for providing quality public education to young Manitobans. We work in an atmosphere of respect with trustees. There are challenges in this area. There are great challenges, most of which are a result of the fact that the public school system is under tremendous stress from the over a hundred million dollars removed from that system during the 1990s and the pitifully weak record of investment in capital that all school divisions have had to confront with leaking roofs, failing mechanical systems, mold in walls, poor insulation systems, failing plumbing systems, failing electrical systems, concrete food pads coming away from walls.

We had years, year in and year out, where members opposite provided pitifully weak resources for capital infrastructure in our public school system, Mr. Speaker. Again, it took a change in government to begin rebuilding the infrastructure, the public school infrastructure in communities across our province, in Gimli, in Minnedosa, in Souris, in Virden, in Flin Flon, in communities throughout this province. It took a change in government to begin to redress the infrastructure deficit that members opposite left as their legacy to the public school system and to the young people of our province.

Mr. Speaker, as this debate has continued in this House—and I am pleased to see the members finally getting up to speak to this issue. You know, it took a couple of press releases challenging the members opposite to get up to speak to this important issue before they began to speak to it. The Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) got up early in the debate, and I give him credit for doing that, because he was up a couple of weeks before his colleagues. I give him credit for undertaking to speak on this matter when trustees across the province are seeking speedy passage of this bill by July 1, so that they can provide stability for the children in their school system, stability for their ratepayers and the parents who send children to the schools in the province of Manitoba.

We have read into the record the last three or four days, Mr. Speaker, letters from a number of school divisions represented by members opposite urging the Government and urging members opposite to move to speedy passage of

this bill for the sake of the children and for the sake of stability in the public school system. We had, as I said, from the new Sunrise School Division, currently Agassiz School Division, represented by the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), the de facto leader of the Opposition currently, from the Agassiz School Division, a letter urging us to move to expeditious passage of this from the area represented by the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

This afternoon, we read into Hansard a letter from the area represented by the Member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner), Mr. Speaker. There are members opposite who have school trustees who have been urging this Government and members opposite for speedy resolution, yet we continue to see in this House delays, obstructions, tactics that can only be described as reprehensible in terms of the stability of the public education system.

* (15:20)

Members opposite talked about, oh, this is a sudden, sudden change. Well, dear me, in 1993, in 1994, the Norrie report was tabled in this House, and members opposite chose to shelve it. They chose to spend nearly a million dollars and ignore the report. So 1993-94, '94-95, '95-96, '96-97, '97-98, '98-99, members opposite had almost a decade to respond to this report. As I said, it took a change in government to finally move ahead on a process that all other provinces in this country have long ago embarked upon and long ago completed, Mr. Speaker.

I know that my Premier (Mr. Doer) is fond of calling the members opposite Luddites, and they most certainly are Luddites. We are looking forward, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite are firmly rooted in the past and steadfastly marching towards yesterday, while this Government is building a future and looking towards the future and building a public education system that is going to be second to none in this country.

We believe in providing for educational excellence. We believe in investing in a capital infrastructure in our communities across the province of Manitoba, investing in our schools in communities across this province, investing in operating support, supporting teachers and

educators and the good work they do day in and day out in the classrooms of this province for young Manitobans, supporting trustees profoundly in seeking to take their advice and have this bill passed by July 1 while members opposite delay and dither.

But I guess I should not be surprised, I suppose, that members opposite are dithering on this. As I said, they had the Norrie report for half of their mandate and did nothing with it. *[interjection]* It sounds like dithering to me. My colleague the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) suggests it sounds like dithering, and it certainly does sound like dithering because that is exactly what it is.

It is unfortunate that the Opposition has been playing politics with this matter, Mr. Speaker. They have made their opposition to this legislation clear. We, on this side of the House, the Government side of the House, as well as trustees throughout the province of Manitoba, are asking them to put the interests of students and school divisions ahead of their own partisan interest, their political goals to somewhat disrupt the business of governing in this province.

It is time for all of us, Mr. Speaker, as school division after school division indicates, it is time for all of us to roll up our sleeves and get onto the work of improving public education for all students in the province of Manitoba. The Opposition is dithering and obstructing movement on this bill, and Manitobans see this on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, the provincial body, the association of all divisions in the province of Manitoba, passed a resolution at its convention this year. I will quote from the resolution, and the quote goes:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Manitoba Association of School Trustees urge the Government of Manitoba to take all reasonable steps to enact legislation such as school divisions and district amalgamations announced on November 8, 2001, will take effect on July 1, 2002.

They go on in their resolution, Mr. Speaker, to add a commentary, and I quote again:

Amalgamating school boards have been working toward amalgamation outcomes in accordance with the minister's November announcement. School boards are expecting legislation to be passed prior to July 1, 2002, so that interim boards can be established by that date. The lay of the necessary legislation to effect amalgamations and/or changes and the terms and conditions of amalgamations will place boards in an untenable position to deal with the major issues and decisions before them.

Members opposite have no respect for the trustees in the province of Manitoba, no respect for the elected officials, the locally elected officials in the area of Springfield, in the area of Lac du Bonnet, in the area of Emerson, in the area of Carman, where divisions are amalgamating and trustees have been working hard for, as Mr. Schieman says in his letter today, two years to build towards this new, improved set of school division boundaries in the province of Manitoba, boundaries that are structured to shift and direct resources from the boardrooms of the province to the classrooms of the province, amalgamations that are designed to provide greater program opportunities for students in Boissevain and in Minnedosa and in Killarney and in Russell, in divisions throughout the province of Manitoba, for students throughout the province of Manitoba to enhance the opportunities that young Manitobans have for accessing educational programs of excellence.

So boards throughout the province, in ridings throughout the province, have been diligently working to ensure the success of these initiatives. I refer to a number of the divisions, and I have referred to a number of the divisions represented by members opposite. The members opposite have chosen to ignore their trustees, the elected officials in those divisions and have chosen to be obstructionist and using delay tactics for political partisan purposes.

I see that the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurchou) is here, and I have a lot of respect for the Member for Portage la Prairie. I know our Government has been developing Portage at a rate that was never seen under the Filmon years. We have industry growing in Portage. In fact, in my own constituency of Brandon, I have many, many business people

and constituents who are envious of the work that we are doing for Portage in building Portage, something that was not done in the years where the Member for Portage la Prairie sat on the government side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the Portage *Daily Graphic*, a newspaper that I have considerable respect for, writes in an editorial, Bring on the Mergers: It is about time Manitoba school divisions get on with the job of seriously looking at the issue of amalgamation.

Mr. Speaker, you know I have family in Portage and I have been a long time reader of the Portage *Daily Graphic*, over the course of my lifetime, in my grandparents' home and the homes of my aunts and uncles and cousins in the constituency of the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou). I have a lot of respect for the Portage *Daily Graphic*. They, along with many other newspapers in the province, are absolutely right. The benefits are clearly apparent, and the Portage editorial saying bring on the mergers, concludes by saying, and I quote again: The time has come for the Government to show the fortitude to implement parts of or the entire Norrie Commission report in an effort to reduce bureaucracy and improve services for divisions too poor to offer much more than the basics throughout the province of Manitoba.

That is exactly what this legislation is designed to do, Mr. Speaker. It is designed to ship classes from boardrooms and put them into classrooms. It is designed to allow for broader program opportunities for young people in the province of Manitoba, to access programs of excellence in the schools throughout the province of Manitoba. It is designed, in a very fundamental sense, to provide additional and enhanced accountability for the expenditure of public dollars in our province—something that Manitobans greatly, greatly want and greatly value in a government. They want a government to be responsible and accountable for public dollars.

As I said earlier, 76 cents of every dollar expended in Manitoba's public schools system are provincial taxpayer dollars, a hundred percent of the capital cost, a hundred percent of the pensioners' assistance, a hundred percent of the employers' share of the pensions; 76 cents of

every dollar invested in public education is a dollar that is contributed by provincial taxpayers. Provincial taxpayers, Mr. Speaker, seek broader accountability for those millions of dollars.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, for the first time in Manitoba's history, this year, over \$1 billion of provincial taxpayers' resources were invested in the public school system. So, all through the province, Manitobans are urging its trustees, parents, students, communities, chambers of commerce—I will read from the Brandon Chamber of Commerce, my home community: On behalf of the Brandon Chamber of Commerce, writes Mr. Eric Dixon, president of the Chamber, I would like to extend our congratulations on your Government's implementation of change to the provincial school boards. The amalgamation of school boards from 57 to 37 sends a clear message that the focus in the education sector should be on education and not administration.

I am surprised, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshamner), and the Member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer), and the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed), and the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), and the Member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner), seem to be selling out the interest of their constituents, the interest of their students, and following the banner of the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), the de facto leader of the Tory party, as this debate continues. It is astonishing.

* (15:30)

So I will read again from the letter from the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Dixon writes: We applaud the Government's action as a first step in regard to our provincial education system. It is a strong signal that public institutions will be encouraged to focus resources on the delivery of services under your Government's administration. The Brandon Chamber of Commerce.

A condemnation of the management practices of the members opposite for 11 long years when they were in office.

I have sheaves of letters, of newspaper articles, of editorials, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, on a point of order.

Mr. David Faurichou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I do realize that there is no particular clause or rule book as it pertains to placing factual information upon the record. However, I do become concerned in regard to the relevancy of some of the member's comments this afternoon.

It is of grave concern to rural members that the member is citing particular communities that, effectively, will be constrained by government policy. For him to make reference that everything is sunshine and roses in the rural communities of Manitoba through Bill 14, that is not the case. I believe that relevancy to debate, specific to Bill 14, as to what this and the amendment is currently on the floor of this Chamber, I do not believe the minister is being relevant to that specific debate. I raise that rule this afternoon.

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

Mr. Caldwell: I believe we have a debate over the facts, but I will stand by the Portage *Daily Graphic* in their editorial saying bring on the mergers. I am surprised that the member opposite would be counter-indicating the interests of his own community.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, first of all, all information that is brought forward by members of this House the Chair has to take as factual, because all members are honourable members. The other information about relevancy to the amendment, I would ask all honourable members to stay relevant to the amendment that is brought forward. So, on the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, I would have to say it is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Faurichou: Mr. Speaker, may I just offer assistance to the Speaker? Perhaps the Speaker would offer up the exact text of the amendment so as to assist the minister in his remarks this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: I would be more than pleased to do that. The amendment reads

THAT all the words after the word "THAT" be deleted and the following substituted therefore:

this House declines to give Second Reading to Bill (No. 14) – The Public Schools Modernization Act (Public Schools Act Amended), until such time as the Minister of Education, Training and Youth undertakes meaningful consultations with all affected stakeholders within Manitoba's education system.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments in this regard and your reminding the House as to what the motion is that has been put forward by members opposite, the amendment of members opposite. Seeing that the foremost thing on my mind right now is your comments, Mr. Speaker, I will move on from the Portage *Daily Graphic's* urging to bring on the mergers and let that debate linger so that the member from Portage can reflect on it a little bit more.

But I will, as I said, given your review of the motion being debated, speak to the extensive consultations in this province that have taken place since 1993-94 on the issue of amalgamation, consultations that members opposite, after spending nearly a million dollars, chose to shelve. They chose not to proceed with the Norrie report when provinces throughout the country were proceeding on a path during the 1990s to redirect resources from board rooms to classrooms, to provide greater administrative efficiencies, so that education resources could be used for the purpose which they should be used; that is, to support classrooms in the provinces. That is true in Alberta and Ontario and, upon the passage of this bill in Manitoba, will be true here 10 years after most other provinces. But, then again, members opposite have a perspective of steadfastly marching towards the past.

We believe in being progressive on this side of the House, forward thinking. It is almost embarrassing that I am speaking about being forward thinking in this matter, because provinces around the country have done this a decade ago, and here, in Manitoba, it took a change in government and 10 years after the Norrie report to finally get this bill before the House and finally begin to get some administrative efficiencies and redirection of educational dollars from board rooms to classrooms. So, while other provinces were undertaking this exercise, in Manitoba, when members opposite were in government, they were shelving and sitting on the Norrie report and taking no action.

Here, today, in 2002, members opposite are still resolutely marching towards the past in this matter and delaying and dithering and ignoring the advice of trustees throughout the province of Manitoba and communities throughout the province of Manitoba and editorial writers throughout the province of Manitoba and chambers of commerce in the province of Manitoba. They are ignoring all that advice, Mr. Speaker, in their position not to proceed with the modernization of public schools in the province of Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, the amalgamations in this province are proceeding very, very well. Congratulations to school trustees and their staff, who are working very hard to modernize our system of education and are to be congratulated and praised. School divisions generally see this as an opportunity to improve their delivery of top quality programs to the students in their schools.

There is widespread public support for the Government's goal of improving educational opportunities for our children at the same time as achieving administrative efficiencies. I have referred very briefly to some of the material from throughout the province of Manitoba, from Portage, Brandon, the Rhineland School Division and elsewhere, Mr. Speaker.

Taxpayers, Mr. Speaker, in this province have the right to expect that their money is being used efficiently and effectively for the benefit of our children. We have taken a modern and balanced approach so as not to cause undue disruption in the classroom.

Our Government is showing leadership, unlike the previous government, who spent \$700,000 on the Norrie report and proceeded to do nothing about it. It sat on a shelf until September 1999, when the government changed, October, when we had a new Minister of Education and a new Premier in this province who dedicated themselves to being proactive on education agendas, being proactive on providing broad investment to the public school system and moving forward with legislation in a process that should have been taking place in this province in the early 1990s.

So there has been a great deal of public discussion and consultation since the Norrie report in 1994, which recommended a reduction in the number of school divisions. We already know in this House that the last major change to school division boundaries occurred in the late 1950s, before I was born, and proceeded into the early 1960s.

To review again, we are reducing the number of school divisions in the province by a third, from 54 to 37. That will free up tremendous resources, administrative resources for the classrooms of the province.

I have listened to a lot of the debate when I have been in the House, when I have been working in my office, when I have been meeting with Manitobans in my office, listening to the debate as it is taking place in this House. I have been disappointed to hear members opposite a number of times refer to my absence in the House, quite against the rules, as members opposite know. Last week we had a lot of bell ringing, when your decisions and your rulings were challenged, regrettably, because they were the right rulings. Members opposite know full well that the business of governing this province does not begin and end in this Chamber. It takes place in communities throughout the province and in ministers' offices in this building.

* (15:40)

Certainly, I have been paying a great deal of attention to the debate as it has taken place in this House over the last two weeks, Mr. Speaker, when members opposite start speaking to this issue, in fact, more precisely the last week when

members opposite start speaking to this after the press release challenging them to speak on it was issued from my office, members opposite seemed somehow fixated in this mode about savings, savings, savings. Education to members opposite is a cost. They do not see education as an investment. They do not see education as something that builds economic development for communities, that builds strong citizens in our province, that contributes to healthy communities. Members opposite talk about savings and cost. That is all they talk about, savings and cost. They do not have a clue about what it takes to invest in education and what it takes to build educational excellence and what it takes to partner with trustees and partner with communities in building quality educational programs and building educational excellence in this province. All they talk about are savings and cost.

Well, this legislation is designed to redirect resources from boardrooms to classrooms. It is designed to provide greater quality programs and program opportunities for young people in our classrooms in the province, Mr. Speaker.

It is designed to have accountability for public dollars, responsibility for the expenditure of those dollars, and it is a piece of legislation that this Government is very proud to be bringing forward, and, Mr. Speaker, it is a piece of legislation that Manitobans expected to be passed in the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, it took a change in government to bring it to this floor, to have this debate and to move it forward. I challenge members opposite to take the advice of the communities and trustees and parents that are urging them to move forward on this, and stop following the banner of the de facto leader of the Tory party, the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler).

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise and put a few comments on the record related to Bill 14.

Interesting to sit in the House right now and hear the first speaker of the NDP that will finally stand up and speak to the amendment. I do believe we have had 10 or 11 of us that have

been quite prepared in debating this issue. We have wondered why they have been so silent on the other side. So it is interesting that the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) is the first one up on this issue. It is a little bit disappointing, Mr. Speaker, that he did not quite stick to the issue itself around amalgamations and instead skirted around the issue trying to indicate that the consultations done in 1994 were somehow adequate to fulfil the need in addressing the issue of consultations around the bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, after hearing the last 40 minutes of a rant from the minister, I would like to put some information on the record indicating that, while the minister is leaving the impression that there is all of this mass support for the bill, in fact, we are hearing quite the contrary. In fact, I am meeting with my school board this evening because they have major concerns about this particular bill.

We have also seen a letter from the Fort Garry School Division who have made some very strong statements in opposition to Bill 14. So I do not understand, Mr. Speaker, where this minister is getting all of his mass support when in fact we are certainly seeing quite the opposite of that. In fact, the more people that hear about this particular bill and what is contained within it, we are certainly finding there is a change in tone out there amongst the general public.

It is very interesting, Mr. Speaker, to see them trying to defend these consultations that are very old, and certainly, in that period of time, the fact is things change. There have been a lot of changes in demographics in areas as school division sizes, numbers. There have been voluntary amalgamations in that period of time. So to go back and rely on something that old is really somewhat irresponsible, I think, because it is really not directing their attention to what is relevant today.

To hear the minister talking so often about his autographed copy of the Norrie report is quite amusing because he must not have talked to his colleagues to find out that in opposition they were in strong opposition to this particular report. Now, all of a sudden, there has either been an epiphany on that side or something that

has happened because they have certainly done a complete turnaround on this issue.

The Norrie report, Mr. Speaker, did not support forced amalgamations. The Norrie report certainly did not find that there would be a savings with amalgamations. The Norrie report did not find any sound information that would support that education, the quality of education would be improved.

It was interesting that certainly the Member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) at the time recognized and supported those comments made in the Norrie report. In fact, she issued a news release on March 17, 1996, and I would just like to quote from that particular news release from the Member for Wolseley who said: The reports are very consistent in finding potential cost increases and few or no savings if the Government proceeds with amalgamation. Few communities see benefits in the reorganization, and, in fact, rural communities are concerned about the potential destructive impact on their quality of life. In Winnipeg, people worry that these new divisions would result in greater bureaucracy, a loss of autonomy and increased taxes.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, increased taxes are definitely what we are going to be seeing in the Assiniboine South School Division, and I will make a further, more in-depth reference to that later on in my speech, but, certainly, at the time, the Member for Wolseley was accurate. We are seeing a loss of autonomy amongst the school boards. We are going to be seeing increased taxes. I certainly support her position back then.

I am very curious as to why her position would have been changed or whether there was not enough clout around the Cabinet table to address this issue. For some reason we are seeing it ramrodded through the NDP caucus, when in fact they were in opposition to it back in their days of opposition. In fact, the current Deputy Minister, Mr. Ben Levin, at the time, in a written presentation to the Norrie Commission on school boundaries, March 8, 1994, indicated, and I quote: Changing boundaries will neither save significant amounts of money, nor improve students' learning experience, but will involve substantial costs in time and energy.

* (15:50)

I really have to wonder how Mr. Levin has changed his tune, whether it was arm-twisting by his minister or arm-twisting by the Premier of this province, because certainly with his experience, I would have expected there to be more respect for his opinion and more adherence to what he would have to say. So it is interesting that this is getting ramrodded through this Government when there was such strong, incredible opposition to it back then.

This bill is really about squelching democracy, as we have seen. As I said, as more people become much more familiar with the contents of this bill, they will see that there are aspects of their democracy that are absolutely being squelched. It is about taking away the rights of individuals to have their day in court. That is one of the more offensive aspects to this particular bill. That individuals, that human rights, that people's right to have a say in court about issues in this province are being taken away from them I believe is very undemocratic. You know, we are seeing issues like this happen with this Government. I am sure that once Manitobans are much more aware of this, they will take much more offence to a bill like this.

This bill also serves to move certain decision-making authority from elected local school boards and centralize it with the Minister of Education. Again, this is affecting the democratic processes where people elect their school board trustees. These are people that work hard in their communities to become elected. They go out there with a platform. They work hard trying to convince people to vote for them. People vote for them, expecting them to work on their behalf. Now what we have is a government that is coming in there and starting to take away some of that decision-making authority that has been placed upon local elected school boards.

Mr. Speaker, these proposed changes are very significant. I mean, who best understands the circumstances and the considerations which bear on these decisions. A government sitting here on Broadway, the Minister of Education, who may not be going out into the local areas—a minister is busy with his own duties. How can

we really expect the kind of decision making that should occur to occur when one is so far removed from the people, the people that have the concerns, the people that are asking for decisions, from the elected school boards themselves, and have a government minister starting to interfere and take away the rights of those people to their local decision making?

This legislation allows the Minister of Education, who is quite removed from the schools, to impose arbitrary and limitless decisions on the local school divisions, decisions which may not necessarily be in the best interests of the students. It is very, very concerning that a minister would have the ability to arbitrarily oppose decisions without any consultation with the public and without any accountability for what he is doing; that he can actually go in and arbitrarily make decisions on the local school divisions, decisions then that the local school divisions have to live with, where they have no recourse anymore to address what the Minister of Education has actually come in and done, decisions which may not necessarily be in the best interests of the students.

To top this off, the minister is really not accountable for the budgets that he can actually go into the various school divisions and he can actually tamper with their budget. They do not have any ability to say anything because this minister can arbitrarily go in and tell them that he wants to tamper with their school division budgets, but he accepts no responsibility, and there is no accountability for the kinds of decisions he could make on school division budgets. If he wants to make a budget change, there is no requirement or obligation for him to consult with the school board or the community or even to explain the rationale for any budget change. Where in the world would anybody accept this kind of legislation that would allow a minister this kind of authority and take away the democratic right at the local level?

After we have seen the performance by this Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), after we have seen actually the performance of many of the members on that side of the House, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Health Minister (Mr. Chomiak), where we are finding it is becoming extremely difficult to trust any of their words

with the misinformation, with the way they are handling the affairs of the Government, and now we are going to allow this minister to go in and change a budget arbitrarily with no obligation to consult the school board, no obligation to consult the community or even to have to explain what he is doing in making his budget change. Mr. Speaker, that really is quite unconscionable and extremely difficult to support in the bill. I do not think if the public realized that these pieces were in this legislation that they would readily support it.

I think people had thought initially that voluntary amalgamations would be one thing, and nobody is really opposed to voluntary amalgamations if voluntary amalgamations can actually save money and improve the quality of education. It would be hard to argue against that, but, Mr. Speaker, that is not the evidence that is before us, and that is certainly not all that is in the bill. If anybody thought that this was an innocuous bill, they are quite mistaken in that. I do not believe for one minute that the people of Charleswood would be agreeable to this autocratic, dictatorial and undemocratic piece of legislation.

So once this Government ruins Hydro, once this Government bankrupts Hydro, does this then give the minister the right to go in and start messing with school division budgets? What if he is going to take all the money away from Hydro and he has to find some more money? Does this allow him to go in and tinker with school division budgets? Does this allow him to hold back then arbitrarily, without consultation, without any accountability because his Premier says I want to keep more money from education; let them raise their own taxes in the area and I want some of that money because I am running out of Hydro money. Does this give him that authority then to do that? I think that this legislation allows that to happen. This Government is so anxious to find sources of money that this is one of those backdoor methods that they are using to find those extra sources of money. I really find that quite objectionable and quite unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, in this bill there is definitely a shift of authority from local school boards to the minister. That is becoming very, very clear. The

only logical conclusion to which a responsible person can come is that this legislation is politically motivated. There is really no other conclusion that one can come to. This bill would allow the minister to tailor the budget of amalgamating boards to suit the political ends of this Government. It allows them to tinker with budgets, and they should not have the ability to arbitrarily go into a school division and start tinkering with those budgets and not be accountable and not have to consult with the public. So not only did they not consult with the public now in preparation of this bill, they are actually avoiding any future public consultations with citizens down the road which will give them an ability to do whatever they want as a government.

I had a phone call from a constituent the other day who says this is really sounding totalitarian, and she is very, very offended. I think as more citizens become more aware of what is contained in this bill, they will become more and more offended themselves.

Should the Government not be pursuing ends which serve to enhance the quality of education for students? Should that not be what this is all about? Should we not be more concerned about enhancing the quality of education for our children? Should we not be more concerned about making the most responsible and sensible use of tax dollars? Should we not be more concerned about having decisions made by those who know the circumstances the best? To have somebody so far removed from a school division making decisions is offensive to the communities and to the decision making that is their right.

I can see why the Doer government did not want to take these issues out for public consultation. Once you spend more time looking into this bill, once you take it apart clause by clause, it is not an innocuous little bill that just generally talks about voluntary amalgamation and what a good thing that might be. In fact, the minister just made reference to MAST and said that they did pass a resolution, but when they passed that resolution the Premier at that time was saying he would not force amalgamation. It was not the Manitoba way. He misrepresented himself. He misled them.

* (16:00)

So the Minister of Education can stand up here and the Minister of Education can crow about, oh, MAST supported what he was doing in a resolution. Well, MAST at that time did not know about Bill 14. MAST at that time wanted to believe the Premier that he would keep his word and not force amalgamations.

Just today, Mr. Speaker, in Question Period I even asked the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) about keeping his word. We found that he has certainly changed his tune from when he was in opposition in three different instances that I brought up today.

There is certainly a lack of trust in our believing what this Government is saying. I think MAST is going to find that as well and other school divisions are going to find that and the general public is going to find that, that this is a government whose word is becoming very, very much harder to trust, because they say one thing and then they are doing the other.

What really is the Manitoba way? When MAST made that statement and passed their resolution, I do not think they expected to be blindsided by this Government with Bill 14. I think they felt free at the time to pass their resolution. They had some degree of trust in the Government. They did not expect Bill 14 at the time. They did not expect this blindside from this Government. They expected a premier of a province to keep his word. We certainly see that now that they have become very informed about this particular bill they are not supporting it.

So, while the minister might like to stand up here and rant and rave till he was red in the face like he was today, the fact of it is, Mr. Speaker, he is going to have a lot more convincing to do and ranting to do before people are going to buy into the fact that this is a good bill, because this is an undemocratic bill. This is a bill about squelching democracy in this province. It is taking away the rights of the little man to go to court and have his day in court.

As I said just earlier, I can see why the Doer government would not want to take this issue out for public consultation. I mean, what would they

have to tell Manitobans? They would have to tell Manitobans that the Minister of Education and the Premier are on a power grab. They would have to tell the people in the consultations that they were into micromanagement. They would have to say that the Minister of Education is on a power grab and into micromanagement, but that is not unlike what is happening with the Minister of Health. So maybe that is something that is happening throughout this Doer government.

If they went out to talk to the public, Mr. Speaker, they would have to tell them that they want to have easy access to new dollars. I think what you could very easily see with the kind of changes in this legislation is there might be a little opportunity for the Government to take money from Peter to pay Paul or in this case take money from education to pay for the Doer government's exorbitant spending habits. What a sneaky and slick way to try to get at money when you are desperate.

So they are going to drain Hydro. They are going to bankrupt Hydro. They are going to get into WCB. They will probably go back to Autopac at some point. Mr. Speaker, now that we are all tuned in a little bit more to what they are doing to Crown corporations, we are certainly expecting them to try to find different avenues to find money down the road. This seems so innocuous, but certainly, once one starts to think about what is happening with it, it is certainly not innocuous anymore. I think it really is a sign of a desperate government.

Mr. Speaker, if the Doer government had consulted with Manitobans, they would have to tell them that they have lost their right to appeal to the courts, to the court awards made by the Board of Reference, because Bill 14 proposes changes to the Board of Reference that will substantially reduce the voice of communities and school boards about education matters within the board's purview. That really is probably one of the most offensive parts to this bill, and it is a very disturbing aspect to this bill. I think Manitobans will find that particularly objectionable.

I can see why the NDP government is trying to rush this bill through, because the longer it is out there in debate, the more people are finding

out what is in the bill. The longer it is out there, there is more information being given out to the public. As the public is becoming more and more aware, we are starting to see a ground swell of opposition to this bill. So no wonder they are in here trying to, oh, force closure, force debate, and interesting that they are trying to force debate, and yet they are not here speaking to the amendment. So I certainly hope, Mr. Speaker, that we will see, if they are truly committed to debating, that after me there will be somebody from the government side that will actually stand up and put their money where their mouth is and speak to the amendment, because this is part of the debate on this issue.

Certainly, if they want to show that they are credible about their request for a debate, then I would certainly expect that they would be up speaking to the amendment, which is just as important as any other aspect of debate. We could certainly see that they may try not to do that, and they want to hurry up and get this through, they want to speed it up, because, as I said, the longer it is in debate, the more people are learning about it and the more people are becoming disturbed about it. So they are trying to get into a bit of damage control right now.

Certainly, the minister is taking credit for the debate that is going on right now, because he issued a few news releases. Well, we issued one, too, after the minister did not even have the decency to be here and listen to the debate. So we put out a news release, and then he occasionally did come to hear some of us. I hope he is paying attention to what is being said, but, certainly, if he wants to issue news releases demanding debate, then, for credibility's sake, they should be standing along with us in speaking to this amendment because that is as significant a part of the debate as anything else. It is about public consultations.

They refuse to get into public consultations in addressing Bill 14, and now they are trying to put into the legislation that public consultations do not have to happen later on either, that the minister can just go in and make budget changes, budget changes that affect our taxes, budget changes that affect taxpayers of this province, and with watching what this NDP government is doing with our taxpayer dollars, this is certainly

getting a lot of people a little bit stirred up. By adding a clause in there that gives him that kind of authority, I think is going to stir up a lot of people, Mr. Speaker.

They prevented debate in the very first place by not taking it out to the public for consultations. So they really do not have much credibility in saying there were consultations. The fact that the Minister of Education is referring to consultations back from 1994 is actually quite humorous. I mean, just think about it. If we were the ones that were trying to say that when we were in government, they would have had a field day with it, Mr. Speaker. There is not doubt about that, and yet here they are trying to present themselves credibly as indicating that consultations that occurred 10 years ago are still relevant today.

Well, that really is quite ridiculous. Anything that happened in terms of consultations—and there was a lot of effort put in in the early nineties that was absolutely no credit to this Government—we in government had been the ones that went out and did the consultations, knowing full well the value of consultations and the value of listening to Manitobans. They are the taxpayers that are funding all this, and they, as the taxpayers, have a right to know. I hope that the debate will go on for a while so that more and more Manitobans do have an opportunity to become much more informed about what is actually in this legislation because I think they will be quite offended by many clauses within this.

The Government wanted to prevent widespread public consultations, I think, at this time. They wanted, instead, to hurry up with the debate in the House, get this into committee, and guess when committee will likely be? It is likely going to be in the heat of the summer. Committee might start at six or eight in the evening. Who is around in July and August? Who is around when they might force this to go for 12 hours straight? They know full well that those kinds of public consultations will not attract near the attention as if they had gone out and done a wide-sweeping public consultation amongst the public. They know full well what they have done in avoiding a larger public consultation. They know full well that when they take this to

committee what they are going to have in committee are probably smaller numbers. They are going to have people away on holidays. It is going to be 90 degrees outside. We are going to be sitting at four o'clock in the morning. Yes, that is consultation NDP style.

* (16:10)

I do not think that was a very all-encompassing opinion sought from Manitobans. I think it has really short-changed Manitobans who did not have an opportunity, many of whom have children in school, and everybody who is a taxpayer should have had that opportunity closer to home in what would have been real consultations. If they had real consultations, if they did take it to the people, if they did go into the communities, then they would be told. They would have to tell the public that normal consultation process that school divisions go through with their communities to set their budgets will be seriously undermined by this legislation. No wonder they want to hide that from Manitobans. What Manitoban is going to accept the fact that they do not have this right to speak up when their school divisions have these more widespread consultations when they are setting their budgets.

In fact, my particular school board goes to a lot of trouble to inform our community about what is happening at the time they are setting their budget. They make sure that everybody is informed. With this legislation, the minister can come in and just make a change arbitrarily. He does not even have to let people know. Where in the world would anybody get that accountability, or get that kind of authority given to them without the accountability that one would expect should go with it. That is really not a democratic way for any government to behave. Very dictatorial. Very autocratic and I think would be very unacceptable to the people of Manitoba.

If they went out and did public consultations, they would have to tell people that this legislation will undermine the authority and accountability of duly elected school trustees. Mr. Speaker, do you think that would be very popular if they went into a community and had these public consultations and then had to tell everybody that this legislation undermines the

authority and accountability of duly elected school trustees? Can you imagine how our school trustees must be feeling? This is a very undemocratic move, this piece of legislation, but it is certainly in keeping with the vein of this particular bill and in keeping what we have seen in terms of how the NDP are doing business.

If there were public consultations, they would have to go out and tell people that Bill 14, if passed, will fundamentally and permanently alter the relationship between school boards and the provincial government at the expense of local control of education. When you add all of that up, it becomes very obvious why this Government did not go out and do public consultations like they should have done, like the Norrie Commission did, because they would have had to tell people that their rights were being taken away from them, that this bill was not very democratic at all, that it was set up in a dictatorial style. I suspect they realized that there would be a major public backlash about the bill at that time. So they are trying to bury that. They are trying to push it through the Legislature without the full debate that it deserves and that the public deserves access to.

Mr. Speaker, I can certainly understand why they might be a little bit intimidated by the fact of a public backlash to what they are trying to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 14 proposes a significant transfer of decision-making authority from locally elected school boards to the provincial government. I know that the Fort Garry School Division, the Assiniboine South School Division, MAST, are all opposed to several aspects—*[interjection]* They are opposed to aspects of this bill. They are absolutely opposed to aspects of this bill. *[interjection]*

A member from the opposite side said they were not opposed to amalgamation. Nobody has ever said they are opposed to voluntary amalgamation if it could prove that there was a savings of dollars and an improvement in education. This Government, Mr. Speaker, has not been able to prove that. The Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) is running around telling people there will be a \$10-million saving. He cannot prove it. People have stood in this House

and asked him time and time again, where is his savings of \$10 million? Where did he get it from?

The Member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) earlier on indicated there would be no savings. The Deputy Minister of Education said there would be no savings. The NDP opposed this in opposition because they said there would be no savings and no improvement in the quality of education. Now for some reason, with the epiphany that must have happened somewhere along the line, they seem to think now that there might be \$10 million in savings. Where? As a government they have a responsibility to put that information on the record. How can they ask for people to support legislation when they cannot even back up their numbers? Where did he get the \$10 million from? His deputy said earlier that there would be no savings. Now they have somehow miraculously found \$10 million.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have looked at the costs in my particular school division, and I would just like to put some of that information on the record at this point in time. In fact, in Assiniboine South School Division, there is a potential one-time and ongoing amalgamation cost of \$800,000. There is a potential for additional recurring annual costs of \$750,000 due to harmonization of salaries, benefits and working conditions. There is going to be a higher transportation cost of \$25,000 due to the elimination of fees for Grades 4 to 6 students who are eligible due to distance who are not required to pay a fee in Fort Garry.

The Fort Garry School Division to which we are being amalgamated forcefully has higher per-pupil costs, so that in 2001-2002 the per-pupil cost of Assiniboine South School Division was \$7,108. Fort Garry's costs were \$7,201. The difference is \$93 per pupil. If our costs in Assiniboine South School Division rise to that level times 6000 students, the increase, Mr. Speaker, is going to be \$558,000 per year.

Mr. Speaker, Assiniboine South School Division recently spent \$400,000 to implement two new computer systems. Neither of these are being used in Fort Garry. So now they are going to have to consider a new system at additional cost. This is all going to impact the taxpayers of

Charleswood. For the minister to run around and indicate, oh, there is going to be \$10-million savings, but he cannot point to it, he sure is not going to put the savings into Charleswood because in Charleswood our taxes are going to go up because of this.

Mr. Speaker, due to another poor choice by this Government to forgive property taxes payable by the University of Manitoba, we are going to have to join Fort Garry in making up that amount by going to our taxpayers, and, when fully implemented, the impact on a special levy for Fort Garry taxpayers is expected to be in excess of 9 percent, which is now going to have to be shared by the Assiniboine South taxpayers.

Local property taxes will rise by 1.4 percent next year due to the provision for amalgamation cost. Where is this saving my constituents in Charleswood any money, Mr. Speaker? It is not. Increases in other layers of administration due to a larger division size, which would be only partially offset by reductions in trustees and senior administration, is certainly another area of concern.

Another major concern, too, in my area is: How will our Council of Presidents' organization continue to operate under a '33 school model with approximately 70 members participating in interactive discussions on policy issues? The Council of Presidents for my area has been highly recognized for their parental involvement in the school division. In fact, they are almost the best in the province. Now, what is going to happen to the Council of Presidents? You are taking away another effective voice of our parents in being involved in education for our children.

* (16:20)

What we still do not know are the costs of termination contracts. Mr. Speaker, amounts for buyout clauses of personnel are, as of yet, unknown.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the impact of forced amalgamation on Charleswood, the taxpayers in Charleswood are going to have to absorb a lot of these costs. Our taxes are going up. We are not going to see a savings of money

by this forced amalgamation of our school division, but it is not unlike what the Norrie report said, because they suggested, too, that savings of dollars would be minimal, at best, and most likely you would not see any.

So, where is the minister finding these \$10 million that he likes to talk about and then cannot prove? Certainly, as a Minister of Education, he should be in a position of having, when he is making a major decision like he is doing with forced amalgamation, to tell us where that \$10 million of savings is going to be seen, because it sure is not going to be seen for the taxpayers of Charleswood.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the school trustees who believe that educational and budgetary decisions must be made following extensive community consultation and with a high degree of understanding of the local community. Local school boards are in a much better position to do that than having the authority rest with this Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell).

Once Manitobans learn that Bill 14 does more than just alter a few boundary lines, they will be incensed, and that, certainly, takes us into a whole other area, Mr. Speaker, in terms of how these boundary lines were even decided upon in the first place. But, unfortunately, I have run out of time and I cannot get into how the boundary lines might have been drawn with multicoloured crayons that the minister has in his crayon box. I would really be interested to know how those lines were put together.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Government is trying to bamboozle Manitobans with this legislation. I think they are trying to bamboozle Manitobans by letting them think that they are going to save more money, but as this debate goes on, as public consultations, even if they have to be informal now, as they continue to proceed out there, Manitobans are going to become very, very aware that this bill is about squelching democracy in this province, and I think Manitobans are going to be very incensed about that, in today's day and age.

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): I am privileged to add a few comments to this particular bill. I find it an amazing piece of legislation. My friends

opposite, who often like to position themselves as anti-American, have come up with an American-style bill, and that is what this is. I am going to take a little while to explain it. It surprises me that these, my socialist friends, who do not like free trade, who do not like trade with the U.S. to begin with, who do not even like the Americans to begin with, would tailor a piece of legislation so much in the Yankee style. That is really what our objection to this bill is, believe it or not.

I will explain it in a little while. See, in the American system, which is much more responsive to the individual needs of individual states and special interest groups, they knew how to play the game very well, and, over the years they perfected the system. I want to use a particular example.

I can recall we always get very nervous here in Manitoba when the relatively small state of North Dakota gets the U.S. Congress to pass an omnibus expropriation bill, that is a money bill, enough monies to further such projects like the Garrison Diversion or the ones that they are going to pass very shortly for an outlet to Devils Lake that would start bringing water into the Hudson Bay territory, and we wonder how is that possible.

I will tell you how it works in the American system. The big players, the big states, New York faces a serious drought problem and needs 50 million, 100 million, 200 million, I do not know what, to expand their waterworks, and they had enough political clout to bring it to the attention of the American Congress. The state of California, from point of time to time, with a population bigger than all of Canada, has a lot of political clout in the U.S. Congress, so they bring forward a water measure bill to the attention of the American Congress.

Mr. Speaker, under the American system, the two little senators, the state of North Dakota that has less of a population than Manitoba has, have as much power as the senators from California or from New York. So they managed to tack onto the bill what they want. They want \$22 million to dig a little bigger ditch out of Devils Lake, onto the bill that is going to look after the problems that New York has or

California has. The state of Montana does its thing and the other states, and, before you know it, tacked onto most American bills, American style of legislation, is a lot of stuff that the original proponents of the bill did not really want.

The big city of New York, with 10 million people, needed to resolve its water drinking problem. That was the reason for the bill, but tacked to it, the way the American system works, it was able, for states like North Dakota, to get their little favourite special interest things tacked onto it, and that is what is wrong with Bill 14.

If the issue was amalgamation, then let us strip the bill, let us strip the bill from everything but the amalgamation issue. You might be surprised how fast it would pass through this House, but that is not the issue here. The issue is they have a totally bigger agenda than what is being publicly stated, and that is what we have been trying to bring to their attention. To begin with, it is a cover-up bill for this Government. They know they have been put on notice that a number of Manitoba citizens feel deeply grieved with this bill, and they want to test the validity of the bill in our court system.

Well, Mr. Speaker, surely that is a given. That is a right that all Manitobans should freely enjoy, and, quite frankly, it should not take Her Majesty's loyal and most obedient Official Opposition to ensure that right is in fact there. It should not, but, with this Government, it is the case, and that is a tragedy. That is a tragedy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me also say my friend from Elmwood reminds me that this is not really a big-ticket item. You know, Mr. Speaker, he is right. I mean, it does not impact at all on myself and my constituency or my friend, the member from the Interlake, and he is my friend, despite, you know—I want to retract.

The other day, I am sometimes prone to be moved by the emotion of the time to saying things that I really do not mean, I referred to him as being a Neanderthal type or something like that. I do want to apologize. I will put it on the public record. I want to apologize. His ideas are Neanderthal, but he himself, of course, is a fine,

upstanding, honourable member of this Legislature, and I am pleased to serve in the House with him.

But I am being distracted. What I was trying to say is that in the case of the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), the case of the Member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer), the case of the Member for Lakeside, this bill has no impact. Our boundaries are not touched at all. For many people in the province, their boundaries are not being touched by it. In some cases where the amalgamations are of concern, however, they are real. I cannot understand why this Government is drawing the line in the sand to stand or fall on this particular issue. Let me remind you the issue is not amalgamation. The issue is not a matter of school board amalgamation.

* (16:30)

Secondly, I am surprised that they are prepared to expend so much political currency on this issue. I am prepared to acknowledge most Manitobans, you know what, most Conservative supporters, will acknowledge that the current Premier that we have, Leader of the New Democratic Party, is largely responsible for them being there. He has, as a popular leader, led them to government. Why would they now be prepared, on this bill, to discredit him, to debase him and to expend, as I said, this kind of political currency? He said, and we have said it over and over again, and the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) has just reminded us of it again, he said there will be no forced amalgamations. It is not the Manitoba way. Mr. Speaker, now that is not a politically ambiguous statement.

Sometimes we politicians have the ability of saying yes when really we mean no, or, you know, sometimes being somewhat ambiguous about what we really mean, whether we want to not fully disclose our intentions, particularly in this politically correct age and era that we are in. We have to be very circumspect sometimes about what we say and what we do. But this does not fall under any one of those descriptions. This is a clearly understood transparent promise made by the First Minister of this Province that this bill would never see the light of day. That is what it is all about.

Let me repeat. This is what the Premier said, and again, as I said in an earlier contribution to this bill, we are sometimes caught off guard in some of the scrums that take place when we are surrounded by media and microphones are pushed into our faces and we have not had time to fully think about what we are saying. No, this statement made by the First Minister was obviously made in a prepared speech in front of a selected audience who had a very good reason to listen carefully because they have a vested interest in the matter of education, and they had every reason to believe him. He said there will be no forced amalgamations. It is not the Manitoba way.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Other statements, you know, it is worthwhile just to read some of these statements that have been made and that are on the record. The Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) himself, in reference to it: I am not inclined to impose anything. I am really not. Quotation from Minister Drew Caldwell, *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 22, 1999. In the absence of good-faith discussions, it tells me, decisions would have to be made in the minister's office. The school board boundaries are a creation of the provincial government at the end of the day.

Oh, now, that is starting to be ambiguous, is it not? I mean, on the one hand, he wants to impose; on the other hand, he acknowledges that discussions have to be made, and decisions will be made in the minister's office.

Which is it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Is there supposed to be some autonomy with respect to the confidence that we have in our elected school trustees whom we elect in this province? If the whole issue is is there a continuing rationale for the very existence of school boards, well, that is another debate for another day. Let us have another bill brought before us.

I think we have ample reason to believe that we have had the services of extremely good people in helping to what I honestly believe, I will be in trouble with my colleague the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) on this one, but what I honestly believe is the most important

service that government provides, and that is the education of our young, of our children.

Certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other day when we heard from the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou) who has considerable experience in school boards, when he could put on the record here in this Chamber about how the division that he had experience with, indeed that he had some responsibility for, conducted themselves in providing for the education of the children in that division, then we have every reason to have confidence in what our school boards can do, have been doing and will do in the future.

So why then in this bill these extraordinary powers that the minister is demanding for himself? I mean, it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a power grab, a power grab of the first order. That again is reason for us to oppose this bill.

There is no rational reason for the minister to demand these kinds of powers. The minister that we heard from earlier on this afternoon talks about the fact that this is taking some time to develop, that we are holding up the passage of this bill. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is nothing that is urgent about this bill, absolutely nothing. Any school divisions or group of school divisions that want to change their boundaries, that want to amalgamate, can do it today, could do it yesterday, could do it five years ago, could do it eight years ago. They did not have to wait for a Norrie report. They did not have to wait for Bill 14. We have school divisions—and my colleague the Member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner) just proving it—that have voluntarily amalgamated without any requirement of this bill.

So do not give me this nonsense. Do not give me this nonsense that this bill has anything to do with school boundaries. This bill has to do with a power grab by this minister. This bill has to do with a cover-up. This bill has to do with covering up and protecting themselves from possible court action.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am offended by this bill because this bill has nothing to do with education. This bill has nothing to do with our children. This bill has nothing to do with school

boundaries. This bill has everything to do with thwarting Manitoba citizens from due process and from holding the Government accountable in the courts of law. That is what this bill is about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you, of all people, whom I consider a student of man's motives and what motivates people, would appreciate and understand the deviousness of this particular bill.

Let me repeat again: If a school division, any school division, any number of school divisions, if our three school divisions in the Interlake chose to amalgamate and merge into one, there is nothing stopping them from doing it, absolutely nothing. The three divisions in the southeast corner of Manitoba did just that without this bill. So what is the need, what is the requirement for this bill? Unless, of course, there are other reasons, and there are other reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, unfortunately, which, understandingly, the Government does not want to talk about.

We know for certain, it is public knowledge, that a certain group of Manitoba citizens from the Springfield Transcona school division—*[interjection]*—okay, Springfield division, have serious grievances with the manner and way in which the forced amalgamation has taken place in that region. Their only recourse, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under our free and open system, our society that we have, you know, when a constituent can come to you as an MLA and has a grievance with what is happening, well, you try and solve it for them as best you can. If you cannot solve it, well then, what other course have they got? They will go to their minister. They will go to the Premier. If they cannot solve it, what other course do they have?

* (16:40)

Well, there are other recourses open to citizens. We are not a totalitarian state. We can take it to what we hope and, I believe, is, the impartiality of our judicial system. After all, we take great pains in setting up the impartiality of our judicial system. We put judges on pillars considerably higher than our own. I mean, they are there for life with good salaries, all so that

they will not be politically fearful of their jobs. They will come down with decisions that, in their learned minds—and we look for learned people, experienced people to sit in these positions of authority. They are, in the final analysis, the final arbitrator, the final judge in a serious dispute that an individual citizen, or a group of citizens, has with not just with each other as fellow citizens, as may be the case in a civil case, or as we have as a society against people who transgress our laws in a criminal case, but they also use the system, they also use it like what amounts to a kind of class action case when a group of people, in this case taxpaying parents in a school division, who feel aggrieved against what is being foisted on them by a willful minister, by a government that is not listening to them.

They may or may not lose their case, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The system may well decide that everything that the Government is doing, everything that this minister is doing, is appropriate and is in keeping with the law and rule in favour of the minister, rule in favour of the Government. That is fine. That ends the case.

What this bill does is they do not want to take that chance. They do not want a judge to hear the case, so they want to stomp on the rights of these people before that is given an airing that, in the minds of these fellow citizens, they deserve.

So that is what this bill is about. What has that got to do with amalgamation? Much less, what has that got to do with education? How does all of this, in any demonstrable way, improve the quality of education for our youngsters?

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, members opposite, they have had their fun, they do acknowledge that despite, you know, every once in a while it slips out. They like to refer to that period of time that we were in office, those 11 years, as a wasteland with respect to such social services as education or health. But it is surprising how they have to acknowledge.

If we were on the way to resolving some of our health problems, the important decisions were made in those 11 years, and not one of

them has been reversed, whether it is the Winnipeg health authority, whether it is the bringing together, in rural Manitoba and regional health districts, the large organization where we can more fine-tune the applications of dollars for services. The same thing happened in education. They have to acknowledge that the Tories, during those 11 years, did something about education. After all, they commissioned the Norrie report. That is right. We did. We commissioned the Norrie report. That, of course, was the first thing that we did that so differentiates us from them, because Mr. Norrie and his group went not just through Winnipeg, but throughout rural Manitoba, and met with the people. Public hearings in Portage la Prairie, in Stonewall, in Winkler, I do not know how many they had here in Winnipeg. That was the first thing they did before they ever wrote a report. This is all very strange to this group of people here. They really do not believe in consulting with people that they are ready to impose legislation on.

So Mr. Norrie came up with that report. I can remember. I was part of the Cabinet that received that report. We studied it, we looked at it, we debated it in our group. We asked a couple of very fundamental questions. Now, I believe they were important questions. They were valid then and they are valid today, and they are valid with respect to Bill 14. They were very straightforward questions. A straightforward question is: Are there real savings, demonstrable savings of public money involved, if we bring about the recommendations of amalgamation that the Norrie report spoke to? The answer was no.

Mr. Norrie—I do not know how long he took on that report, a year, 18 months in making that report—could not single out, could not put on paper, that by following these recommendations, no matter how well they read or even how socially attractive they were, could not point out for the government of the day that commissioned him that if you follow this report there will be an 8, 11, 12 or 14% savings of administration dollars that could be reinvested into the education system, into the classroom. That is not there in the Norrie report, and I challenge any member, including the ministry, including the First Minister (Mr. Doer), to show me the line and chapter where that is. That is not in the Norrie report. That was the No. 1 reason why the

Filmson government had every reason not to act on that report. Only one.

The second reason and, perhaps, even more important, the second one was: Could we be shown that these recommendations for super divisions or larger divisions would, again, in a demonstrable way, improve the outcomes of our education system? Would they improve the quality of our education system in the classroom? Again, the Norrie report comes out with a zero. They could not demonstrably show us or guarantee us that if we followed these recommendations there would be demonstrable improvements in our education, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to remind honourable members that the government that I was very privileged to be part of and proud to be part of and my colleagues were part of, we were very concerned about education. We had Education ministers that did some very real things about that, about the outcomes. We were concerned about what was happening in the classrooms. We introduced mandatory testing in the classrooms to find out, to give us some idea about where we were investing our money and what was coming out of the system. We challenged ourselves. We opened up the open boundary system to create a bit more competition within the system, where students had a choice to go back into the system.

These were innovative things that were being done in education, rather than just kow-towing to the union bosses. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they mean they are listening to education, they mean they listen to their teacher union bosses and give them their raises. That is all that this Government is concerned about. We were actually concerned about fundamentally looking at the curriculum, at things like testing. Why is it, despite the fact that we put more money into the system, that when we do national testing, or when we test internationally, we come out with failing grades? That is what we should be addressing ourselves to.

As a minister that has had the opportunity to be involved in departments other than social services department, I am generally concerned about the future of how we will maintain the broad spectrum of government services that we

all want in a balanced way. I am deeply concerned that, when I first came in this Legislature, Health Estimates, the cost of Health to government, was about 8 percent of the total revenue, today it is 40 percent. What do we do when it is 50 percent, 60 percent or 70 percent?

An Honourable Member: Sell it off, Harry.

Mr. Enns: Well, no. What do we do? I am just asking a question. Do we then, maybe, look at education and say that the public purse can only support education, say, K to 6 or K to 8 or something like that? Obviously, there is only one taxpayer. There is only one taxpayer, and, at some point in time, we tax ourselves out of existence, but that is a debate for another day.

The point that I was making is that the Norrie report, and one would think, this whole action that motivates Bill 14 is based on the recommendations of the Norrie report, that we would be hearing every day quotations from that report that showed us where the \$10-million savings is. Would you not think so? We would be hearing every day how this is going to directly improve the education opportunities of our children. We are not hearing any of that because I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have read the Norrie report, and it was discussed in our caucus and in our Cabinet when it was presented to us. It is a good report, and I am delighted that some school divisions have acted on that report and, in the Manitoba way, in the Conservative Manitoba way, have voluntarily agreed to come together. That is the Manitoba way.

* (16:50)

Those options are there for school divisions for as long as it takes. If the number of school divisions that are part of this greater city of Winnipeg should come together and decide, hey, let us merge into one big division, that would be their choice. It may or may not be the right choice, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as long as we entrust, as long as we have legislation that makes people responsible for these decisions, mainly our school trustees, then that is the way it ought to be, and that is the way it should be, not the way it is outlined in this bill that gives, as I said before, the minister extraordinary powers that

really have very little to do with the quality of education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe, as is all too often the case, all too many of the citizens of Manitoba that at one point or another are going to be impacted by the actions that will flow from passage of this bill will find out far too late that they have given up some very important rights that they had and have given up some very important autonomy that they had within their school division, and that they have given a particular Minister of Education far too much authority that really is uncalled for and for which there has not been a call for, and that is the other point.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Most legislation, after all, comes to us or is born, is put together because of a defined need that is either expressed by a group of citizens out there or by a government that sees that there is something basically and fundamentally wrong with a particular set of circumstances and want to change it. That is what brings legislation to this Chamber, but how do I explain the rationalization of this kind of forced mandatory amalgamation when it is so arbitrary?

You know, some of the very small school divisions that we had within our system are not touched at all. You would have thought that maybe, if the rationale was okay, let us get it all into larger units, the size of the kind we have in the Interlake—well, then, let us apply that across the province evenly, and do that, but that is not happening. It is not happening. We have a bit of cherry-picking going on here with respect to who is being amalgamated and who is not being amalgamated. That, of course, as my colleague the member from Springfield has amply put on the record, is particularly the case in his part of the province.

So our reasons for withholding the passage of this bill are many, and many of them stem, as I began my statements, from the very statements made by responsible ministers and premiers and the Premier (Mr. Doer) himself with respect to school amalgamation. I find, and again I repeat, but it is worthwhile to put on the record the comments by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the MLA for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen):

The reports are very consistent—and I quote her—in finding potential cost increases and few or no savings if the government proceeds with amalgamation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is not even from the *Free Press* or *The Sun* or something like that, which, one could claim, sometimes do not get the story right. This is from an NDP news release, March 27, an NDP news—no, you cannot blame this on the press. You cannot blame this on Chuck Adler. You cannot blame this on anybody. This is your own news release, Madam Minister.

She says: The reports are very consistent in finding potential cost increases and few or no savings if the Government proceeds with amalgamation. Few communities—you see, at that time, Mr. Speaker, she recognized that it is important to listen to what the communities have to say. Few communities see benefits in the reorganization. In fact, rural communities are concerned about the potential destructive impact on their quality of life. In Winnipeg, people worry that these new divisions will result in greater bureaucracy, a loss of autonomy, and increased taxes.

That could be a Conservative making a speech, instead of the Deputy Premier (Ms. Friesen) of the Government that is bringing in this legislation. Let me just repeat it; it is just too good: In Winnipeg people worry that these new divisions would result in greater bureaucracy, a loss of autonomy, and increased taxes—from an NDP news release by the now-Deputy Premier of this province.

A spokesperson for Minister Caldwell is quoted in the *Carman Valley Leader* on October 1, 2001, that is not long ago: Our preference has always been that the boards make the decisions to amalgamate themselves.

This is not a party spokesperson. This is not a—well, there are not too many Liberals to worry about. This is a spokesperson for your minister: Our preference has always been—I like the emphasis—that the boards make the decisions to amalgamate themselves.

MAST president, Don Dunnigan, is quoted in the MAST publication newsletter in the fall:

"In some circumstances, amalgamation would actually result in higher education costs rather than saving money."

Now these are the people that we entrust in running our school systems. What have we been saying? Or, at least, more importantly what has the Government not been saying? Why have they not been standing up here matching us speaker for speaker and showing us where the \$10 million in savings are going to be? They are no better at answering that question than answering the question from my friend from Fort Whyte about how you can borrow \$280 million without paying interest. I mean, where are they? Each case has to be considered on its own merits.

Quoting another chair of a school division, Scott Johnston from St. James-Assiniboia: The St. James-Assiniboia School Board is opposed to amalgamation. We certainly do not agree with Big Brother forcing anything down anyone's throat—*Winnipeg Free Press*.

Jean Oliver, chair of another school division, for my friend from Selkirk: The minister changes what he is saying every month and seems to have changed his mind on forced

amalgamation. That is this month, but we will have to see what next month brings.

With these kinds of statements on the public record, made by honourable members opposite, I just want to go back again. The Deputy Premier, who represents the NDP in this Government, said that people worry that these new divisions would result in greater bureaucracy, a loss of autonomy and increased taxes. That was said by them, not by us.

I will quote another chairman. Mr. Fred Colvin, Superintendent of the Midland School Division: The letter from the minister does not indicate really exactly what they want.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Six o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it six o'clock? [*Agreed*]

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 13, 2002

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