



Third Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky, Hon.	Inkster	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, 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.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PENNER, Jim	Steinbach	P.C.
PITURA, Frank	Morris	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Joy	Fort Garry	P.C.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 17, 2002

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Transcona-Springfield School Division

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Gladys Hayward Williams, Catharina De Meyer, Dave Kumhyr 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.

Universities Property Tax

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Louise Lemoine, Jenny Lawe, Louise Friesen and others praying that the Government of Manitoba consider ensuring that local property and education taxes do not rise as a result of the offloading of provincial responsibilities onto the city of Winnipeg, the city of Brandon, Fort Garry, Assiniboine South, Winnipeg One, St. Boniface and St. Vital school divisions.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Transcona-Springfield School Division

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: 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.

Mr. Speaker: Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees; Ministerial Statements

and Tabling of Reports; Notices of Motions—Order.

Is the honourable minister getting up on a ministerial statement?

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): I have a ministerial—

Mr. Speaker: Well, I have already gone beyond. Is it the will of the House to revert back to Ministerial Statements and Tabling of Reports? *[Agreed]*

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. Flood waters from local runoff crested through much of southeastern Manitoba over the weekend and declines were seen in some areas. While the Roseau River is one area that experienced a slight decline, a second crest is expected to move along the Roseau from the United States, arriving in Manitoba in approximately one week. The water levels being experienced 25 miles upstream from Manitoba in Ross, Minnesota, are 50 percent higher than the previous records set there in the 1950s. This should provide some indication of the volume of water we will have to deal with in the upcoming weeks.

Although we are not expecting further rises in the Red River, Rat River and Joubert Creek, it is clear that southeast Manitoba's flood season is far from over. The provincial government is continuing to work with the communities and local governments to assist people who have been affected by the flooding. We are working in close conjunction with local governments to provide resources in dealing with flood waters. We are also co-ordinating assistance efforts by the many agencies that have come forward to help. We have held community meetings in Vassar, La Broquerie and Vita, and understanding how stressful these situations can

be we will continue to work with residents, providing them with current information as quickly as possible.

* (13:35)

While the decline of water levels in some areas has helped in keeping roads open, a number of provincial highways remain closed. I have tabled these details for the information of the House.

Mr. Speaker, flood waters of this magnitude need to be treated with caution and an incident where a boat capsized yesterday near St. Malo is a painful reminder of that. Fast moving and cold rivers need to be respected and navigated very carefully at all times, particularly when rivers are elevated and unpredictable. I hope all Manitobans will take this as a reminder of the need for caution whenever we approach the water.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I thank the honourable minister for the statement he has made today.

Many of the communities in southeast Manitoba and indeed some parts of central Manitoba have experienced a very dramatic event. Much of the damage that has been caused is now becoming very evident. There are huge crop losses that are very evident directly south of the city of Winnipeg in the Emerson, Ridgeville and Altona east areas, Rosenfeld, the communities which I visited this morning. There is huge damage that has been caused because of, in some instances, man-made structures, government-built dikes, dams and waterways that cannot be accessed by this water.

I believe there will have to be inordinate measures taken in order to ensure the survival of many of these farmers. Dairy farms have been flooded, cattle have been moved. So far we think that there has not been a loss of life, although the unfortunate incident the minister has addressed, one of the young people that was in the boat has yet to be accounted for. We hope that the youngster will be found alive and well.

Many of the experiences that we have seen in the last week might well be repeated next

week or this coming week when the crest from Minnesota appears. As the minister has indicated, large amounts of waters are still to come down the Roseau River, and we hope that the Gardenton dike will be maintained. Significant effort has been made to reinforce that area, but again untold damages have been done, and it is the time of year when reseeding is simply not a possibility anymore. The season is too late for that.

So I hope that the ministers, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his Cabinet, will make some significant considerations as to how to mitigate the damages that have been caused by this extraordinary event.

* (13:40)

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: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Was there a no?

An Honourable Member: The Government said no.

Mr. Speaker: I will try it again. Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Okay, leave has been denied.

When I ask for leave of the House, would you please say it loud enough so I can hear, because we are hearing yes and we are hearing no at the same time.

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

from Calvin Christian School 45 Grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Ken Symanski. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson).

Also in the public gallery we have from Shore Elementary School 54 Grade 5 students under the direction of Mrs. Pat LeClair, Mrs. Resa Ostrove, Mrs. Sandy Rosenberg, Mrs. Maylene Ludwig. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson).

Also in the public gallery, we have with us today the Springfield School's Parent Council. These are the visitors or the guests of the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Agriculture

Federal Compensation Package

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, a few short weeks ago, we asked on this side of the House and the other side of the House, we negotiated and talked about an all-party agreement to approach the federal government on the basis of the economic hurt that our agriculture community was feeling because of the U.S. farm trade bill that was introduced by the President of the United States.

I have participated personally in all-party meetings in Regina and Saskatoon. Of course, we are looking for solutions to a problem that is very serious, and members opposite, I believe, recognize the hurt that our agriculture community has been put under because of the U.S. farm bill.

Over the weekend the Finance Minister, Mr. Manley, has stated that they are looking at a package of \$1.3 billion to look at the economic hurt. However, I wonder if I could ask the Premier if he has had any discussion with the Minister of Finance or any minister of the

government, the Prime Minister, anybody at all, with respect to what our farmers might expect with respect to opportunities with this U.S. farm trade bill, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that four Cabinet ministers were at the meeting of two weeks ago. Three were at the meeting, and one was on the conference call. There have been a lot of media reports about the various components of a program. There have been discussions of various forms of agricultural programs that are alleged to happen or not happen. There was a rumour last week that it was going to be announced on Thursday. The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) had discussions with the federal Minister of Agriculture on Friday of last week.

* (13:45)

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, this Premier likes to tell this House and Manitobans about the special relationship that he has with the federal government. He talked about that during the election campaign. Unfortunately, when asked questions that farmers in Manitoba are being hurt because of what the Americans have done, because this Premier who has had opportunity to sit down with the Prime Minister appears to be less willing to do that. Rather than stand up for farmers, he is out of town somewhere.

So the question I am asking clearly is: On a very serious issue, what has the Premier said to the Prime Minister of Canada with respect to what is happening to support our farmers in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Doer: If going to Vassar, Manitoba, is out of town, shame on the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, waiting for two weeks and doing nothing, I say shame on that Premier.

Manitoba farmers are being devastated and all I would like to ask the Premier is: Regardless of what the federal government is talking about, the Premier talks about media reports, something is happening. We know what is not happening,

and that is there is nothing happening on behalf of the agriculture community of Manitoba.

I would simply ask the Premier: Is he willing to share in a provincial-federal relations 60-40 split? Is that something he would be considering to look at on behalf of the farmers of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Doer: We are now right at the fundamental issue here. The Leader of the Opposition who did not take a position last year when we were in a program, goes to a meeting, agrees with all other provinces to have 100% federal funding, and then he is undermining his own position in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. Shame on him.

R.M.s of Stuartburn and Franklin Culvert Installation

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): During this last week we have spent an inordinate amount of time—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Mr. Jack Penner: During this last week we have spent an inordinate amount of time dealing with flood waters and flood mitigation measures trying to satisfy the needs of municipalities, municipal and community leaders and, indeed, the individuals that are affected by this flood.

I want to ask the Minister of Conservation whether he will tell this House if he ordered the opening of a water storage area that was built in 1940 and the installation of a culvert in a water retention dam between the R.M.s of Stuartburn and Franklin on sections 24-3-5 east?

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I do not have the detailed information that he is looking for with respect to that project. I know of it, but I do not have the immediate details as to what happened, particularly in the last little while.

Mr. Jack Penner: Could the minister tell this House whether he last week, Friday, visited that site?

* (13:50)

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Speaker, further to the other question, I would just like to advise the member that I will, immediately after Question Period, look into getting a response to his question that he put forth.

Secondly, last week staff visited the flooded area, and also last Thursday the Premier (Mr. Doer) and others visited the area. The meeting was held in Vassar. I was supposed to visit the area I believe it was on Wednesday, the day that I took ill, so unfortunately I was not able to visit it. But I believe the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton) and the Minister of Ag and Food (Ms. Wowchuk) visited that area that day, the day that I was not able to go. I understand some other visits are being contemplated and hopefully I will be able to take advantage of one of those.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I would like to ask the minister then: Who ordered the staff of the Department of Conservation to install a 30-inch culvert in a provincial water retention area that was established in 1940 and has been in operation since then? Who ordered the installation of the pipe?

Mr. Lathlin: As I indicated earlier to the member, I am prepared to take that question under advisement. But let me also indicate to the member that the way—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind all honourable ministers, when taking a question under advisement, *Beauchesne* is very clear that when the minister takes it under advisement that is the end of the answer.

School Divisions Operating Budgets

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education today provides 59.2 percent of the operating funds for school divisions, the lowest percentage of support in modern times. I would like to table a document from *The Manitoba Teacher* that shows the historical funding given to school divisions.

My question: How is it that this minister, who treats elected trustees with disdain, how is it that he feels he needs the power to micromanage school divisions during this amalgamation period, given that he is providing less than 60 percent of their operating budget?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): I respect the Member for Minnedosa as an éminence grise of this House, but he is sadly mistaken in the level of support provided to the public schools in the province of Manitoba. Provincial taxpayers support 76 cents on every dollar that is invested in the public school system in the province of Manitoba, 100 percent of the capital costs for new school infrastructures and communities across the province, something that members opposite withdrew support from at historic levels during their time in office.

A hundred percent of the education property tax credit is something that members opposite cut during their time in office and reduced support to provincial property taxpayers, Mr. Speaker, 100 percent of the cost of the employers' share of the pension plans for educators. The member should make his factual statements correct.

Mr. Gilleshammer: I would like to table a letter that he wrote to the chairs of school boards and all other players in the education system, where on page 2 it says: In addition, the Province provides 59.2 percent to support the ongoing operating costs of school divisions. Perhaps he has forgotten that.

My question to the minister is: How does he feel he can micromanage these school divisions when he is providing less than 60 percent of their operating funds?

Mr. Caldwell: It is interesting to note in the second question the member retreats from his first question. As I said in response to the first question, provincial taxpayers, those who we are responsible for in this House, support the public school system 76 cents on every dollar. I am certain at least those on this side of this House place a great deal of value on the support the provincial taxpayers provide to the public school system in this province. Provincial taxpayers do their share.

* (13:55)

Amalgamation Costs

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): I refer the minister to his own letter. Will this minister, who says he feels threatened by school trustees, confirm that much of Bill 14 was crafted the way it was because school trustees pointed out to him there would be significant cost to amalgamation?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, the members opposite seem not to like administrative caps. They seem not to like the fact that Manitobans are demanding transparency for public dollars expended on the education system. They seem not to like the fact that we on this side of the House are seeking accountability and responsibility for provincial taxpayer dollars.

Those on this side of the House view public education as an investment in the future of our province, not a cost, as members opposite are so fond of referring to. We also believe in supporting investment in the public school system at historic levels in terms of capital infrastructure, in terms of operating support, and perhaps most galling of all to members opposite in terms of providing relief to taxpayers who were gouged through the 1990s by members opposite.

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

Amalgamation—Phase in

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): The Norrie report, which was two years in the making and which included widespread consultation with the public and all interested stakeholders, recommended the amalgamation be rolled out in an orderly way over a three-year period, including putting the regulations in place in year one, followed up by urban amalgamation in year two and rural amalgamation in year three.

Was the minister aware of this recommendation and the complexity of the job he is trying to ram through in a matter of a few months?

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, it is passing strange that members opposite who sat through the 1990s and sat on the Norrie report with no action are now saying there is somehow a hasty process in place.

All Manitobans, save perhaps members opposite, note this is a discussion that is going on in this province since 1993. While other provinces across Canada took action on this issue in the 1990s, members opposite did nothing.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Was the minister aware of Mr. Norrie's comments, page 157, that it would be physically impossible to approach changes simultaneously considering the resources available to accomplish the change and the magnitude of the job?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, the Norrie report was a very instructive report and a very valuable report, something I certainly referred to very carefully during this process and had a great deal of respect for, more respect than the members opposite who put it on a shelf and I had to get copies brought into my office. It was not even in the minister's office when I arrived there.

The members opposite during the 1990s withdrew over \$130 million worth of funding support to the public school system of our province. They cut education property tax support to taxpayers throughout the province. This Government has restored support, indeed enhanced it by tens of millions of dollars to taxpayers, invested in historic levels in terms of capital infrastructure improvement and operating improvement to the tune of over a billion dollars. We are partners with our trustees, with our parents and with our communities.

Operating Budgets

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Would the minister confirm that he contributes 59.2 percent to the operating costs of school divisions?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I contribute my tax share gladly like all other Manitobans. I do not contribute personally anything, however members opposite think.

The people of Manitoba provide 76 cents on every dollar through provincial tax support for the public education system of our province.

**Winnipeg Police Service
Internet Crime Unit**

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, 391 days ago when the Minister of Justice announced his cyber tip line, which we still wait for, the minister stated, and I quote: We feel we could do more at the provincial level to prevent the exploitation of children through the Internet.

Now Manitobans discover that the Doer government is failing to provide the resources to ensure a permanent unit of specially trained officers is set up to handle the issue of Internet child pornography.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister advise why he is failing to follow the advice of Manitoba's police agencies and create a permanent unit?

* (14:00)

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the last time the honourable member quoted an anonymous source from the police department, she was not only wrong, but in fact the position was contrary to that of Winnipeg Police Service.

I have met with the chief of police from Winnipeg Police Service on this matter, and in terms of a permanent unit, Mr. Speaker, I was advised of two things: No. 1, that the current joint operation that is ongoing was time limited, it was a police operation; and, second of all, that child pornography issues will continue to be investigated. Neither the RCMP nor the Winnipeg Police Service has advised the department either that a lack of resources is having any impact on their ability to investigate these serious matters.

Mrs. Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is an important safety issue. The Internet unit has seized over 500 000 images that portray children as young as six months being sexually assaulted. The minister's cyber tip line will result in additional strain on police resources.

Why is he compounding the issue by refusing to commit to a long-term funding strategy for the Internet unit?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, the member should know other than that. Manitoba, of course, took a lead in making sure there was a new law, which was proclaimed last week we are pleased to say, to criminalize Internet luring for the first time in this country.

Many Manitobans had a role in getting that new Criminal Code provision put in place. As well, we have been working with Child Find and established the Child On-Line Protection Committee which was what was announced 391 days ago. The cyber tip line is being set up by Child Find Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, today, I am pleased to confirm that under this Government there will be new enhanced resources going to the Winnipeg Police Service, the details of which will be made known shortly.

Mrs. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of this country's largest collections of child pornography was seized, thanks to the specialized unit.

Why is the minister failing to do everything he can do and commit to Manitobans in making sure that there is a permanent unit of this sort set up in this province?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, the member is making these comments on the basis of an anonymous source. Operational issues, in terms of how the police wish to organize themselves, is a matter that is best left with the expertise in our police forces.

I note that the RCMP are currently in the process of establishing a permanent four-person technical crimes unit, and I understand that the Winnipeg Police Service is undergoing some reorganization and may well consider the experience of the joint organization.

But I might remind members of the House that this Government sponsored a bill in this House, as well, under The Highway Traffic Act, to allow the flowing of new resources as a result of photo enforcement legislation, which can be available for policing and safety purposes.

So, Mr. Speaker, under this Government there are resources unseen in the history of this province that are flowing as a result of this Government.

Health Sciences Centre Epilepsy Treatment

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, for many years there has been a vision that the Health Sciences Centre would be a major centre for neuroscience. A critical part of this effort is physicians and surgeons who can care for patients with seizures or epilepsy. Presently at the Health Sciences Centre, there are no adult epileptologists and there are no surgeons who can operate on patients with epilepsy.

I ask the Minister of Health: Why has the reality fallen so far from the promise? Why are patients with epilepsy in Manitoba being treated like second- or third-class citizens?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, patients are not being treated as second- or third-class citizens.

Mr. Gerrard: My supplementary: I ask what the minister of Family Services is doing to improve awareness of epilepsy and to help those who have epilepsy to find employment when for many reasons there appears to be much more difficulty than they should be having in Manitoba, as people like Mary Anne Kerek will attest to, she being in the gallery today to listen to your response.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Earlier this year I had the opportunity to meet with the Manitoba society and with their staff and to assure them of our support in making it better understood in the public as to how valuable people with epilepsy can be as workers, how the new medical, both surgical and drug treatments, are effective at controlling epilepsy.

As Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities, I will continue to work to ensure that Manitoba employers, including our Government, have a very strong program of looking for new staff people among that population, including those with epilepsy.

Mr. Gerrard: Many would wish it were so.

Surgical Procedures Delays

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My supplementary to the Minister of Health: Why, I

ask the minister, do citizens like Barb Buchan, who is in the gallery today, have to wait for more than three years for vital surgical procedures? Surely no one in Manitoba should have to wait three years for a surgical procedure that is necessary.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as members opposite know, since we have come into office we have systematically had to deal with a series of, as the president of the MMA said, the dark ages of the 1990s with respect to systematically going through list after list, program after program. In some cases we have achieved and we are beyond capacity, the best in the country. In some cases we are still working on it, but I do note, according to the last and most up-to-date report, we have more specialists per capita than any other province in western Canada, including Alberta, including British Columbia, including Saskatchewan. We are continuing to work at areas where we have difficulty. That is why we have a specialist recruitment program we put in place to bring specialists here to Manitoba and, net, we have had more specialists here in the last year.

Chiropractic Care Coverage Reduction

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, while in opposition the Minister of Health supported chiropractic coverage for children and women, but in this last Budget the minister cut off chiropractic coverage for children altogether and he decreased coverage for everybody else.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health if he could please explain to Manitobans why he is refusing to listen to the 48 000 Manitobans who have signed protest letters against his chiropractic cuts.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as I have said on many occasions in this Chamber, we looked at the overall Budget. When members opposite said we were not paying nurses enough, even though they had laid off so many nurses, we came in and we tried to accommodate and deal with the nurses. I think we had a good settlement. We did the same thing with doctors. Right across the field we had to make judgments in terms of how we allocate resources.

One of the good things, one of the positive things is we are still covering chiropractic. We did not do as members opposite did when they were government and cut back the number of visits from 15 to 12. We also continued to expand a multi-range of other kinds of programs but were able to keep programs for chiropractic plus provide expanded coverage in a whole variety of other health services, something that was lacking during the 1990s. As the president of the MMA said, the dark ages of the 1990s.

Kildonan Constituency Office Fax Machine Operation

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask this Minister of Health to explain why he is not listening to his own constituents, as I understand that his constituency fax machine was turned off last week. He is preventing his own constituents from faxing these protest letters to him. How can he not listen to his own constituents?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I want the Member for Charleswood to know that we listened to Manitobans when we set up the physician referral line, which was not evident. We listened to Manitoba when we had the nurses' settlement. We did not have to force nurses to protest here at the Legislature, as they had to do during the dark ages of the 1990s. We listened to Manitobans when we put in place the first PACT program that was rejected by members opposite year after year. We listened to Manitobans when we did not close the largest hospital in the history of the province as members opposite did when they closed Misericordia Hospital. We listened to Manitobans when we put in place our rural physician program, something promised by members opposite for decades but never put in place. We listened to Manitobans when we expanded nurses' training.

* (14:10)

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

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 417:

Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and not provoke debate. I am sure the minister clearly heard the question on whether or not his fax machine was turned off.

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

Mr. Chomiak: I believe in the question the member asked whether or not we were listening, I wanted to point out, and I think most Manitobans know, we have been listening to Manitobans since the day we took office.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he does have a point of order. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all honourable ministers, *Beauchesne* 417: Answers should deal with the matter that is raised.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable minister has about 13 seconds, if you wish to use it. Have you completed the answer?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to work with Manitobans and listen to Manitobans as we continue to develop and improve the health system from the dark ages of the 1990s.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister did not answer the question that was asked, and I would like to repeat the question for him. Can he please explain why he is not listening to his own constituents who are trying to fax him their protest letters? I have been led to believe that he has turned his fax machine off, and he is not the only member across the way who has turned their fax machines off.

Mr. Chomiak: Let me understand this correctly. The Member for Charleswood who thinks she was elected in 1998, or maybe 1999, but she is not sure when she was elected, as she told Canadian Press, is asking me whether or not I went to my constituency office last week and turned off my fax machine.

If that is the question, if that is the overriding health issue of the day that concerns

the Member for Charleswood, I know how much she is concerned about that. No, Mr. Speaker, I did not turn off my machine.

**Workers Compensation
Investment—True North Project**

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): My question is to the Minister of Labour. In response to questions last week with regard to the Government's involvement in the investment Workers Compensation made in True North, the minister said and I quote: The Workers Compensation Board made the investment without any interference or discussion at all or influence.

Yet, when we asked for documents under Freedom of Information with respect to the True North project, we found that there were four documents that went to the Minister of Labour, one document went to the Premier (Mr. Doer), yet the Government refused access to these documents because they said it was because of Cabinet confidentiality.

My question to the minister is this: Can the Minister of Labour confirm that the issue was a matter of discussion by the Cabinet which in the Government's own words was the reason for them denying access to these documents?

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I would like to table a letter dated May 31 of this year, which I believe is about 18 days ago. It was addressed to the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) and copied to the critic for the Official Opposition, the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), and in that letter it states: "Decisions are made by the Investment Committee without any direction or interference from government." It was signed by the chair of the Workers Compensation Board, Wally Fox-Decent.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is not Mr. Fox-Decent who is at issue here. It is the minister.

My question to the minister is: Why would she deny access to these documents that went from the Workers Compensation Board to her and to the Premier (Mr. Doer), which had to do

with investment of Workers Compensation money in True North, if there was no government interference?

Mr. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I assume by now that the member has received the tabled letter which was dated to him May 31, or copied to him, and I would like to quote: "On behalf of the investment committee, I would like to invite you"—that is, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray)—"and any other members of your caucus who may be interested to attend a briefing which we would arrange at your convenience. If you are interested and available, please call me."

Obviously, the Opposition, from the Leader on down, were not interested in talking with the chair of the Workers Compensation Board.

Mr. Derkach: Sad case, what a sad case.

On a new question, Mr. Speaker. What a sad day it is in this province—

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

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour had her knuckles rapped when she tried to make an investment from MPI into the universities of this province. She got caught. She had to reverse her decision. Now she has meddled in the Workers Compensation Board.

Documents exist which the Government has denied access to because of Cabinet confidentiality. Mr. Speaker, if there was no interference by this Government in directing the Workers Compensation Board to invest in True North, then why is access to these documents being denied?

Ms. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, from the question that the member just asked, I would infer that he is calling into question the veracity of the chair of the Workers Compensation Board, Professor Wally Fox-Decent, who said in his letter of May 31, and I quote again: "Decisions are made by the Investment Committee without any direction or interference from government."

Is he calling into question the veracity and the integrity of Professor Wally Fox-Decent, and

if he is, let him say so instead of just implying it?

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

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

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, on May 10—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind all honourable members, there are members that rise on a point of order and ask me to make a ruling on a certain issue, whether someone breaks the rules or uses unparliamentary language, and you ask me to make a ruling and I have to be able to hear the person who has the floor if you expect me to make a ruling. I would ask the full co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Derkach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On July 1, Workers Compensation rates are going up. On May 10, this Premier of our province promised that Manitobans would not be on the hook for any cost overruns or operating losses of the new downtown arena. That was the words of the Premier. Yet, we learn that the Workers Compensation money is going to do what? Is going to shore up operating deficits and it is going to look after cost overruns by the project.

Who is telling the truth here? Is it the Premier, or is it in fact the documents of the Workers Compensation investment, Mr. Speaker?

* (14:20)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I believe the decision on rates and the consultation on rates took place in the fall of 2001, if I am not mistaken, and for their effective date, that was established by the board of directors of Workers Comp. The separate decision from the investment committee has already been well explained by Professor Fox-Decent, a person who has chaired the Workers Compensation Board under the previous government and remains, with our confidence, as chair of the Workers Compensation Board under this Government.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, on a new question to the Premier.

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

Mr. Derkach: The Premier said, on May 10, 2001, Manitobans—he did not say ratepayers, he did not say taxpayers, he said Manitobans—would not be on the hook for any cost overruns or operating losses of the new downtown arena. Today we learn that we are now, the ratepayers of the Workers Compensation Board, the employers, are on the hook for cost overruns and for operating deficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, who are we to believe, the Premier or in fact the documents that we have secured through the Freedom of Information?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the term sheets and all the documents subsequent to the term sheet have been very consistent on the issue of responsibility for cost overruns. They have been tabled in this House, and members opposite have had full access to those from May of 2001 on. Secondly, I believe Workers Compensation fund has over \$800 million of investments. I could go through a number of them if the member opposite wants, but they make those decisions outside of this Legislature.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that the credit unions used their own due diligence, and under their own due diligence came to the conclusion, these are credit unions in Manitoba and in Saskatchewan, their investment committees came to the conclusion that this was a worthy investment, and their executives have proceeded with that.

The bottom line is members opposite are against the new entertainment centre. They might meet with Mr. Chipman and tell him the opposite. They are against downtown re-development, as the minister has pointed out.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I know leaders' latitude is permitted, but leaders' latitude should also be within the constraints of telling the truth.

This side of the House has not opposed the downtown arena. What we oppose is the Premier not telling the truth to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, there is a resolution in this House to support the new arena; members opposite voted against it. That is the truth, nothing but the truth, so help this House.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Russell, he does not have a point of order. I would like to remind all honourable members in the Chamber that each and every member is an honourable member, and when bringing forward information, it is facts, as far as the Chair is concerned, because all members are honourable members. I would ask each and every member to treat each other as that.

Workers Compensation Investment—True North Project

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour, responsible for the Workers Compensation Board.

Can she tell this House and all Manitobans if any portion of the \$7.5 million has flowed to the True North project?

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Turtle Mountain was not copied on the May 31 letter that was sent by Professor Wally Fox-Decent to the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) and the critic for the Workers Compensation Board, the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach). I would have thought on an issue they have continued to raise in the House they might have actually read their mail, discussed it and taken advantage.

Why would the Opposition not have taken advantage of the offer, the very generous offer of the chair of the Workers Compensation Board to meet with any member of the caucus of the

Official Opposition? It did not have to be the Leader of the Official Opposition. It did not have to be the critic. It could have been the de facto in reality leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler). Any one of them could have taken advantage of this invitation to meet with the chair of the Workers Compensation Board, and they chose not to.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

River East Youth Clubs

Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the good work the East Kildonan Kiwanis Club is doing in the schools of the River East School Division. The East Kildonan Kiwanis Club has started eight youth clubs to teach youths all about community service and good citizenship. There are Kiwanis kids clubs at Lord Wolseley and Springfield Heights elementary schools; builder clubs at John Henderson, Valley Gardens, Robert Andrews and Chief Peguis junior highs; and key clubs at River East and Miles Macdonell collegiates. The eight clubs involve 300 students in the River East School Division.

These youth clubs have been involved in many community projects, such as raising money for a variety of charities, befriending a child with disabilities, working at Winnipeg Harvest, making dog biscuits for the animal shelter, planting flowers at Concordia Hospital, participating in Remembrance Day ceremonies, collecting money for the victims of September 11, collecting postage stamps for OXFAM and organizing a Christmas dinner for 300 people in the inner city. These are just a few of the many projects they are doing in the community.

Mr. Speaker, the driving force behind these youth clubs is Al Rouse, who is a long-time member of the East Kildonan Kiwanis Club. Al Rouse is not only known for his many years of service with the Kiwanis but is also known for his service as a trustee of the River East School Division and is an active member of the local legion. Al Rouse believes in community service and wants youth to develop leadership skills and

be responsible citizens in the community. Through these youth clubs students have learned to serve others and have grown in character and become better citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the youths and especially the East Kildonan Kiwanis Club for their good work in the community.

Make A Difference Community Award

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, just like the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) was careful about taking a stranded child home while he was driving his daughter home from school 13 years ago and was criticized for it, today I want to honour and congratulate Abe and Maria Wiebe of Niverville for doing the same thing, being recent recipients of the 2002 Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Community Award for the Eastman Region.

First launched in 2001 in recognition of the International Year of Volunteers, the Make a Difference Community Awards recognize individuals throughout Manitoba for their contribution to the community through voluntary services.

Since 1995, the Wiebes have been driving children and families from rural areas into Winnipeg for therapy appointments or to visit family members admitted to a city hospital. To date, they have transported 107 children and driven over 160 000 kilometres while volunteering their time and incurring fuel costs related to this service.

The Wiebes are committed to making the car rides as enjoyable as possible for children. They have equipped their vehicles with a variety of toys, books and comics, and are prepared to make stops for ice cream or other treats. They also promote a relaxed atmosphere by encouraging dialogue between themselves and their passengers. As a result, they have developed close relationships with many of the individuals for which they provide this service.

* (14:30)

I am sure all the families the Wiebes have helped over the years would join me now in

thanking them for the many good deeds they have performed. They are truly deserving of the 2002 Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Community Award, and I congratulate them for it, as we would any member who understands rural transportation and helping kids.

Windsor Park Collegiate

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the great work being done at Windsor Park Collegiate in St. Boniface School Division to help students make the transition from school to work. The entire school, all subject areas and teachers are now incorporating this focus into the school by developing employability skills portfolios. These are consciously chosen samples of work, awards and other memorabilia that highlight the students' experience, skills and abilities, an emphasis on helping students prepare for job interviews and career choices.

I was fortunate to be invited on June 6 to participate in a massive undertaking of exit interviews for the graduating class. It was like show and tell for the grads. Students, staff and community member panels interviewed graduates to show off their portfolios, themselves, their academics, personal management and teamwork.

I think there is a huge benefit to this program, particularly ensuring students identify their goals and can draw from their background to demonstrate their assets. The students are now very advanced in interviews. These grads know what they know. They are leaving school realizing what they have gotten out of their senior years, and because the employability skills portfolios start at Senior One students as early as in Grade 9 are planning for their transition from school to work.

Congratulations to Wilf Teichroeb and Allen Snowdon from the Windsor Park Collegiate School Transition-to-Work Committee plus all of the staff and administrators in the school division and the community team interviewers. Most of all, congratulations to the students who were wonderful and gave me a lot of confidence that our future is in very capable hands.

Oak Park Raiders

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the Oak Park Raiders high school fastball team competed June 7 and 8 in the high school provincial fastball playoffs held in Pilot Mound. Congratulations to Oak Park for winning gold at this event. The last time that Oak Park won the gold medal at this event was seven years ago when current Olympic pitcher, Sandy Newsham, was part of the Oak Park team.

Oak Park also had three players named to the all-star team. Katie Rosentreter as pitcher and Elisa Proutt and Holly Kitchen as outfielders. Also winning player of the game awards during the weekend were Alyssa Vandale, Katie Rosentreter and Elisa Proutt.

Congratulations to the coaches, Bob Turner and his daughter Tracy Turner. Bob and Tracy have been involved for many years in fastball in the province with the Lightning organization. Bob has been an instructor at Oak Park High School as is the team manager, Dave Staren. This high school in the constituency of Charleswood develops many excellent sport teams as well as excelling in academics and the arts.

This accomplishment will earn them the Order of Sports Excellence from the Province of Manitoba. The Raiders fastball team has had an amazing season, going undefeated through regular season play, conference playoffs and provincial playoffs. They played a total of 16 games, scoring 121 runs. During the provincials they scored 38 runs and had 14 runs scored against them.

Once again, I would like to congratulate all of the players and coaches for an outstanding season. To everybody at Oak Park, thank you for instilling such a winning spirit in our students.

Philippine Heritage Week

Mr. Conrad Santos (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, this past Sunday, June 15, 2002, 11 a.m., the Philippine community hosted and invited representatives of the federal, provincial and city levels of government to participate and contribute to the program ceremony at the site of the future Philippine centre to mark the climax of Philippine Heritage Week 2002 and to break

ground for the new centre at the currently vacant lot near 765 Keewatin Street.

Many notable guests were joined by friends of the Philippine community from all cultural backgrounds. The tributes were made to those who served in leadership positions in the Philippine community during the more than decade-long effort to realize the common dream of having a cultural centre. Among those who paid tribute were the federal Minister of Veterans Affairs and Science and Technology; the provincial Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Barrett), representing the Premier (Mr. Doer) of the province; and the city councillor for Kildonan, representing the mayor.

The honorary consul also spoke on behalf of the Philippine government and the chairperson of the Philippine Centre Commission acknowledged the donors and contributors of the centre's fundraising campaign.

Among the honoured guests were the members of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, Winnipeg North, the MLAs for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub), Burrows (Mr. Martindale), Inkster (Ms. Barrett), River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and Wellington. Also present were the councillors for River Heights and Point Douglas and the chairperson of the Clean Environment Commission of Manitoba. The City of Winnipeg provided a tent and public washroom facilities for the convenience of the attending public.

Mr. Speaker, this MLA for Wellington would like to thank all those who attended the event as well as those who worked so hard to see this dream now in the inception of the process of becoming a reality.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Would you please call debate on second reading of Bill 14.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

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

Mr. Speaker: Resumed 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 Lakeside (Mr. Enns), who has five minutes remaining.

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind all of us and even those justices who might be listening in some courtrooms that this, of course, after all, is the highest court in the land, in the province, right here in this Chamber, that we in fact on Bill 14 are acting with unanimity. We agree with the First Minister (Mr. Doer). We agree with the Deputy Premier (Ms. Friesen) in the Opposition. We agree with the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell). Let us just remind us all what the First Minister said about Bill 14: There will be "no forced amalgamations. It is not the Manitoba way." The Conservative Party agrees with that statement. That is our position. So we are as one on this issue.

The Deputy Premier has said, and she is referring to the reports that she has studied that are consistent in finding potential cost increases and few or no savings if the Government proceeds with amalgamation. Few communities see benefits in that 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 would result in greater bureaucracy, a loss of autonomy, and increased taxes. That is what the Deputy Premier said, and we agree with her. We agree with her. Right. We are in total unanimity with her on this.

And what did the minister himself say just a short little while ago, on October 1, 2001? He said: Our preference has always been that boards make the decisions to amalgamate themselves, as some indeed have.

Mr. Speaker, that is our position. It happens to be in total concurrence with the position that has been expressed publicly by the Premier, by the Deputy Premier, by the Minister of Education. The fact that they have now flip-flopped and that we are now no longer supposed to believe those words is not our fault. We believed them to be true when they said it. We

believe our position to be the correct one, and we are acting on behalf of the taxpayers of Manitoba.

* (14:40)

Mrs. Louise Dacquay (Seine River): I, too, want to put some comments on the record regarding Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act. In my opinion this bill has nothing to do with modernization. It has everything to do with the heavy hand of the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell).

There are several issues in this bill that cause many people serious consideration. The fact that this Government and this minister continue to say that there will be significant cost savings is extremely unreasonable. Nowhere have they been able to prove that. In fact, in all of the meetings that I have been in attendance at, every school division that has been forced to amalgamate to date has indicated that it is costing them significant millions of dollars. St. Boniface, St. Vital, their best guesstimate, and it is only an estimate and a guesstimate, because they have not yet had any negotiations with relation to the harmonization of wages, have indicated that this will cost the taxpayers in St. Boniface, St. Vital a minimum of \$2.1 million. Additionally, there has already been additional cost. This forced amalgamation exercise has cost all taxpayers in those two divisions in particular several thousand dollars.

The trustees that were asked to sit on the amalgamation committees from the two divisions have been receiving, because of this very onerous task and assignment over and beyond their regular responsibilities as trustees, have been given additional salaries, if that is what you prefer to call it, or stipends for every day of meetings that they have relative to the amalgamation process. Nowhere has anybody mentioned how much that has cost, but, from my sources, they tell me several tens of thousands of dollars. They are meeting continually, and they say that the work involved has been horrendous. I do not regret any one of those trustees being paid extra dollars to do this extra, unnecessary work because they were forced into amalgamation.

The voluntary amalgamation of Norwood and St. Boniface costs hundreds of thousands of

dollars, and these forced amalgamations are costing considerably more, well into the millions. The bill does not address exclusively amalgamation, and several school divisions and several parents have indicated that the whole process is flawed. It has been flawed since day one. The lack of process has been severely criticized, and we in opposition do not like the way this was handled.

The minister keeps saying that there were several public meetings. The public meetings were held when the Norrie report was taken, not since this Government became government, and several years have lapsed. The real reason our government did not proceed with amalgamating school boards beyond voluntary amalgamations was because in the Norrie report there was no evidence that this amalgamation would indeed save any dollars. I think the members opposite are going to have great difficulty justifying all of these increased costs, and I am not sure why they would even proceed when everything to date indicates that there are no savings, there will be no savings, there will indeed be severe increased costs.

The public consultation process, as I indicated, was not followed. That is a requirement of The Public Schools Act. There was a six-month time lag between the amalgamation announcement and the enabling legislation, and the regulations preceded the legislation. Anybody that knows about the due process knows that the bill and its contents are usually enacted, and then the regulations are drawn up. We are in receipt of several pieces of communication from many of the divisions involved in the amalgamation, in the forced amalgamation, as well as the Manitoba Association of School Trustees. The most recent communications all indicate that Bill 14 does not deal only with the amalgamation; it is much more far-reaching, and one of the biggest concerns that has been expressed is the fact that the autonomy of local boards is being taken over by the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell).

This fall, we will be going through the process of electing new school boards through the democratic process, and several changes are being made to the existing boundaries in terms of some of these amalgamated school divisions.

Everybody knows elections are extremely expensive. Elections cost taxpayers money, and why would we go through that process of electing new trustees with responsibility and not give them the autonomy to look after the school matters in their local areas?

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The decision-making authority in the minister's office, as identified in Bill 14, really does put the local community in jeopardy. People elect trustees to look after their concerns and manage the local autonomy, the local affairs of the school board and to ensure that the dollars are being spent wisely and that their taxes are not unnecessarily escalating. They have access to their direct local trustees, whereas with the proposed legislation, it is very difficult now to get meetings with the Minister of Education. Some of the parents in my area definitely have experienced that.

In fact, when they wanted to meet with the minister over the potential closing of Mountbatten School and some of the regulations that in their view were not being followed through in terms of the guidelines, it took them several months. In fact, finally, he was embarrassed into meeting with them when the parents came to the Legislative Assembly, and several serious, hard questions were asked during Question Period. On the part of myself and my colleagues, we demanded that the minister meet with them, and he reluctantly agreed to meet immediately following Question Period. So I cannot see how, with the minister wanting to assume all this responsibility, the local people will be better served. In most instances, when they want to meet with their local school boards, all they need do is pick up the phone.

There are also several questions concerning the fact that the minister is denying the rights of local school divisions when it comes to the law. The minister continues to indicate that everything was lawfully done. Well, we beg to differ with that. In fact, there are currently two school divisions before the courts to express their concern about violations made by the minister before this legislation, just with

contraventions of regulations concerned in The Public Schools Act.

* (14:50)

Also, the bill will now protect our current Government and the minister from any court decision, and, in fact, it gives the Government immunity. Why? Why would a government need protection from judicial scrutiny? Why would a government need to silence the right of any Manitoban to challenge them in court? Every Manitoban is justifiably concerned about this action and about this section of the bill.

The centralizing of the decision-making authority in the minister's office, as I indicated earlier, definitely will be at the expense of the local community and will not allow the local community to have input into educational matters. Also, by removing the Board of Revision, there will be no appeal process for parents and parent advisory groups and school divisions that have concerns about any actions of the minister. His word will be the final authority. This is really excessive and in most instances unprecedented.

There are several concerns regarding this forced amalgamation in the St. Boniface-St. Vital area. Numerous schools, one in particular in St. Boniface is filled to capacity. The minister has indicated that he will not be prepared to assist the parents in that division by building or affixing any portables to the existing school. The school is far too small for the community. There is ongoing development in the community, and now we get moved to the cost factor once again.

The proposal now is that the students who are currently attending the Island Lakes school be transported to other schools in other parts of the current St. Boniface School Division. Well, school transportation, as we all know, is an extremely costly venture, and to transfer those students from their own community across Bishop Grandin, which is for all intents and purposes more than just a city street and more than just a commuter street, it is more like a highway, is irresponsible, and transportation costs will definitely increase.

There are also many schools in south St. Vital that are filled to capacity. Once again, that

area of the city is also experiencing ongoing development and growth. For the most part, it is first-time homeowners and very young families who are moving into that area, and if they have to be transported from the extreme south part of St. Vital to either St. Boniface or to old St. Vital, once again there will be costs. The costs of transporting students by bus is very costly.

The minister continues to indicate that the reason they are doing this is to save money. In fact, when they first indicated that they were going to be proceeding with forced amalgamation, the figure of \$10.1 million was banded about. Well, so far, if you add up all the projected increased costs by the divisions that have been forced to amalgamate, the costs surpass those savings.

There are many, many questions regarding the fact that no one can understand how they can continue to state that there will be savings. Everything to date is evidence that it is costing the taxpayers money, as I indicated earlier.

The Assiniboine South School Division No. 3 just sent out a letter dated June 14. Once again, they are disputing that the minister should have the autonomy that this bill gives him, because they say that the provincial government does not even fund to the same percentage that is raised by the local division. It says the funding ratio of Assiniboine South's budgeted expenditures is 53 percent through special levy versus 46 percent from provincial funding. They are also extremely concerned that the local school boards are best able to make decisions regarding educational and budgetary issues because they consult continually with the local community and they listen to the people. They take their budget briefs out to the people. They have several public meetings, and those meetings are, I know in St. Vital, extremely well attended. I have been at several myself, and people have an opportunity to ask questions, put their comments forward so that they can then be reviewed by the local school board.

Beyond the fact that the minister wants to assume responsibility for the decision-making authority, also with regard to the budgets, and also wants to assume responsibility for the program and service delivery at the local level,

once again, this will have an impact on the local influence and involvement by the community in shaping educational opportunities for its students and once again will shift the focus of accountability from elected school boards to the Minister of Education.

I think more and more parents now are beginning to realize that this piece of legislation could be really detrimental to the proper functioning of the school boards in their area. I received a call the other day from a parent who had read this legislation, and one of her major concerns, beyond giving the Minister of Education so much authority, was the removal of the reference board. She could not understand why there would be no appeal process available. Having worked on the potential closure of the Mountbatten School, there was an appeal process available for those parents, and they exercised that right and used that process.

The minister does not seem to share the same concerns as the general public, and why this current Government has done a complete flip-flop in terms of amalgamation is mind-boggling. Both the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Deputy Premier (Ms. Friesen) indicated that they would not support the amalgamation of school boards, and particularly force school boards. When the Norrie Commission was approved and Bill Norrie went forward with his committee to listen to the people, there were several criticisms by the then-opposition. They have moved completely away from that and gone now to forced amalgamations.

* (15:00)

Some divisions have very willingly voluntarily amalgamated, and we have no problem with voluntary amalgamation. They sit down; they work out all of the issues that surround them. I have to give the local school divisions that have moved towards voluntary amalgamation full credit because they recognize that some of them have schools closing on an ongoing basis and that the divisions are not big enough to support being an entity unto themselves. That is far different from forced amalgamation.

The deadline that the minister has imposed of July 1, nobody knows where that July 1 date

initiated other than in the minister's mind, I assume. He does not need this legislation to be able to have school boards amalgamate. There is a provision currently in The Public Schools Act whereby, under section 5, the minister may merge or amalgamate or dissolve school divisions or school districts. That is referred to the Board of Reference, which is established by the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council. The hearings of the Board of Reference are public hearings. Once again, there have been no public hearings. The pending election of new school trustees will have a major impact on a number of the divisions where they have been forced to amalgamate. Previously, St. Vital School Division had seven trustees who ran at large. Now they will be running under the ward system, complete with members and residents from the St. Boniface area.

Another questionable clause in the bill concerns the appointment of an arbitrator to resolve any disputes between divisions undergoing the amalgamation process. Once again, this arbitrator is not selected. He is appointed by the minister. The individual divisions have no input at all. Once again, the power would provide the minister with a great amount of influence on the outcome of the arbitration.

Premier Gary Doer, in 2001, met with MAST. The honourable First Minister met with [interjection]—I think I can say Premier Doer. I mean, Premier Filmon was referenced several times when I was Speaker. But I said Premier Gary Doer.

Premier Doer indicated at the MAST convention that they would not force amalgamation, that it is not the Manitoba way. But we know then that was only a lot of glowing words. It had nothing to do with practicality. Even the minister himself is on record as saying that his preference, our preference, referring to the current Government, has always been that boards make the decisions to amalgamate themselves. Why is he introducing this legislation and why is he trying to force this legislation through before there has been adequate public input?

The Manitoba Association of School Trustees do not oppose amalgamation, but they have serious, serious concerns about this current

legislation, Bill 14. The time line and the lack of defined process to guide amalgamation efforts have created tremendous stress and enormous workloads for divisional administrators and trustees. Once again, this is at a time of the year when they are exceedingly busy with graduating classes, hiring of new staff, the receiving of notices of teachers retiring or moving elsewhere. The amalgamation process is just continually adding to that stress and huge, huge workloads.

They also take exception and question to the language of various clauses within Bill 14. They say it is open-ended, ambiguous, and subject to interpretation. The transition period is undefined. There is no apparent congruence of time lines between Bill 14 and regulation 61. There is no limitation on the effective duration of any regulation made by the minister with regard to transitional issues.

* (15:10)

I know the trustees in the St. Vital School Division are very concerned about this legislation and also have several reservations regarding the forced amalgamation. They were working co-operatively with other divisions. They had started to do central buying with Winnipeg 1. Fort Garry School Division, I believe, was also involved in that because they saw that as an effective, cost-saving measure. But they do not see forced amalgamation as being very cost effective.

I have already highlighted some of the increased costs that are already evident and the concerns of the projections by St. Boniface and St. Vital divisions, and they have not even sat down to negotiations. Their best guess at this point in time is \$2.1 million. That also does not include all of the increased costs that there will be required for transportation. Many of these students will have to be bused and probably bused several miles. Those have not yet been factored into their projected increased costs.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

This act also does not outline the role and the authority of the interim boards. Those interim boards have been up and functioning and meeting for several months now. Basically since

the minister made his announcement last November those boards started meeting almost immediately. This void leaves the school boards uncertain of the legality of some of the actions they have already taken in order to implement the amalgamations with which they have been charged. Some boards also will have to incur substantial legal and administrative costs as the result of clarity in this legislation. It does not answer the important questions about key dates in the amalgamation process. I have mentioned the fact that the deletion of the Board of Reference is a concern. The right of appeal that currently exists would become a right to judicial review which looks at only the process by which a decision is reached, rather than substance of the decision itself.

One of the biggest, biggest concerns is the role of the minister in the day-to-day operations of the school boards. The minister would have the authority to impose caps on administrative costs. I think if we are electing responsible people then they should be held accountable because that is the only avenue that residents have available for them to make changes with their local boards is at election time.

So, if you do not afford them the right to become accountable for their decisions and have the minister make all those decisions on their behalf, then why are we going through the process of electing these boards? Legislation also gives the minister the authority to require revisions to the budgets of amalgamating school boards in accordance with his directives for a total of three years following amalgamation. The time lines also are a major concern because the Government announces the funding to the local divisions, and then there is a very finite time line within which those individual boards have to prepare their budgets and have them prepared and submitted to the minister's office.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

As we all know, regulations in legislation are not subject to the same public scrutiny as is new legislation which is open to debate in this Legislature and then again at the committee stage.

I think what the minister had hoped is that this bill would be a slam-dunk and that people

would not become aware of several of the concerns that have been raised by the amalgamating school divisions and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, but more and more people daily are picking up the phone and expressing their concerns and the fact that I think there will be several people come out.

We are not in any big hurry to proceed to push this legislation through because it is bad legislation. The rights of citizens to be heard are in jeopardy. The minister has indicated that there have been exceptions made in some of these forced amalgamation school divisions in terms of the amount of money that the Province is willing to come forward with to help in this process. As an example, in the St. Boniface-St. Vital amalgamation, I indicated earlier that it is going to cost \$2.1 million this year alone. That is one year. That excludes the cost of harmonizing all of those contracts, and the money from the Province works out to only \$245,000.

River East and Transcona will receive \$950,000 over three years, but the division there estimates that it is going to cost \$2 million just to harmonize the teacher contracts. I do not have the figure here in front of me for Assiniboine South, but not one of these divisions has indicated that there will definitely not be increased costs. So the fact that the minister continues to promote this bill on the promise that there will be substantive savings to the taxpayers is erroneous to say the least. Both the First Minister (Mr. Doer) and the minister have used the amount of \$10 million, but if you add up all the additional costs, and most of these projected increases are just administrative costs, have nothing to do with the harmonization of salaries, that already exceeds the \$10.1 million in proposed savings by the minister. *[interjection]*

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand I have approximately two minutes left, so I will quickly summarize by saying I have a lot more information that I would have liked to have put on the record and by saying that this is not good legislation. It is not good for the constituents that I represent in St. Vital division, and it is not good legislation for taxpayers throughout Manitoba. I definitely will not be supporting this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased this afternoon to stand and speak to the amendment that we introduced on Bill 14, and I would just like to read into the record again the amendment because I think it is very critical as we debate this legislation that Manitobans know that on this side of the House, as members of the Progressive Conservative caucus, we are deeply disturbed about the process that has been followed by the Government and this minister in amalgamation of school divisions.

Something that was glaringly obvious was the lack of consultation and the lack of discussion with Manitobans. So I do want to just read into the record again the amendment that I will be speaking to. It says:

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

this House declines to give second reading to Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act, until such time as the Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell) undertakes meaningful consultations with all affected stakeholders within Manitoba's education system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, therein lies our reason for lack of support for this piece of legislation. The Minister of Education has done absolutely no consultation with the taxpayers in the province of Manitoba around these forced changes, forced amalgamation changes to school divisions throughout the province.

* (15:20)

We all know that the issue of education is an extremely important one and, certainly, being the second largest budget expenditure for the Province of Manitoba, it is critical that we try to deliver that public education system in the most meaningful way, most efficient and most effective, putting the students of Manitoba first.

Back in 1994, we commissioned Bill Norrie to do a review of the boundaries throughout the province of Manitoba, recognizing and realizing that there might be some changes that might need to be made in order to provide the most

efficient and effective service in our education system and that changes in boundaries might play a role in better delivery of service to the students in Manitoba.

We received the report from Bill Norrie after considerable public consultation. They travelled throughout the province. They listened to Manitobans. They had formal presentations and briefs presented to them and ultimately came to the conclusion that, yes, boundaries could be changed, that possibly there should be fewer school divisions, and they drew out a map of what they saw based on public consultation and presentations that were made to them on what those boundaries could possibly look like. We, as the government of the day, received that report and gave it extremely serious consideration. There was a lot of discussion, and we listened, too, to what Manitobans had to say.

But the ultimate test of accepting or rejecting that report at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was the test of what impact the boundary changes would have on the students in the province of Manitoba. We came to the conclusion that, in fact, nothing that was in that report could indicate that the quality of education for our students would be any better, in fact, there may be significant disruptions in our education system through amalgamation, and that there would be no cost savings. There was a clear sense that amalgamation would not save money. In fact, it would increase the costs of providing education in the province of Manitoba.

Those were two of the criteria that we used to base our decision not to move forward on boundary amalgamations. We defended and we justified that, and we know that we had support for that decision from the then opposition, the members of the New Democratic Party who sat in opposition at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that the then-critic of Education, now the Deputy Premier of the province of Manitoba, spoke and sent out a news release back in March of 1996. The news release from the New Democratic opposition of the day with bold headlines said: Boundary revisions will not save money.

I quote directly from the Deputy Premier at that time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are words

out of her mouth, not mine. She said, and I quote: 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 re-organization, 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. That is the end of the quote.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what on earth would have made her change her mind from her days in opposition to the time when she became the Deputy Premier of this province of Manitoba? Does her word mean absolutely nothing? Is it okay for her to speak out of one side of her mouth while in opposition, and then by some great revelation when she becomes a minister in the Government of the province of Manitoba, and I know that she does hang her head when we raise this issue in the Legislature.

I have not heard her speak publicly to justify her change in position and the flip-flop that she has undertaken. It will be very interesting to hear her justification. She seems to be hiding somewhat from the issue today. I am not sure that I hear sound applause from the Deputy Premier (Ms. Friesen) when the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) stands up to try to defend the ill-conceived approach that he has taken to boundary changes and amalgamations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen the height of poor process and poor decision making when we look at the amalgamation of school boundaries as we have seen announced by the Government today.

We saw the Premier (Mr. Doer) back in, well, it was just in the spring of 2001, when he spoke to the Manitoba Association of School Trustees. I happened to be there to listen to the Premier's address to school trustees. You know, he stood up and with fire and brimstone talked about the wonderful things that his Government was doing. I heard him state very loudly and clearly and unequivocally, as did many others, all of those that were present at the convention, he said, I quote: There will be "no forced amalgamations. It is not the Manitoba way."

Well, that was in the spring of 2001. In that very same year, come November, we have a

Premier and the Minister of Education that make an announcement that completely reverses and completely discredits the First Minister of the province of Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a premier who has completely reversed and has told a completely different story now to the trustees and to the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba. I am not sure I have heard the First Minister's rationale for the decision to flip-flop, to change his opinion. I would venture to guess that he would be quite ashamed to stand before the Manitoba Association of School Trustees in the future at any time. Is his word not his bond?

This is not like the Deputy Premier saying one thing in opposition and changing her mind in government. This is the Premier of the province of Manitoba saying one thing as Premier in the spring and another thing as Premier in the fall. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot believe that he can call himself a leader. I cannot believe that his caucus can sit on that side of the House and support leadership that says one thing in the spring and another thing in the fall. I believe you must have some difficulty in trying to figure out where your leader and your Premier might come from tomorrow.

* (15:30)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am somewhat questioning why members of the government side of the House are not standing up and speaking to this amendment. They talk very often about the wonderful communication and consultation and dialogue that they have with members and taxpayers throughout our province of Manitoba. Yet, when they have done absolutely no consultation, we have a Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) who can stand in this House and say that Manitobans were consulted in 1994 with the Norrie report and that is good enough. They were consulted eight years ago under a different government, and that justifies his public consultation with the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba on amalgamation of school divisions. I say shame. That does not fly with Manitobans. It does not fly with Manitoba taxpayers. They know all too well that the cost savings and the spin that he puts on amalgamation of school divisions is wrong. They will see as their taxes increase, if school taxes increase year after year as a direct

result of this announcement of amalgamation, they will understand the lack of the ability of this Government to make decisions and to manage, and specifically to manage the taxpayers' dollars.

We have seen several school divisions throughout the province of Manitoba indicate that it is going to cost more money, not less, to amalgamate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We realized that when we did our analysis of the Norrie report. If we could not guarantee that there were not going to be increases in the cost of education without any significant results in the quality of education, then it was not what we wanted to move on.

We were not prepared to force that amalgamation, but we were prepared to work with school divisions that voluntarily determined that they wanted to amalgamate because they had talked to their taxpayers. They had talked to the families that had children going to schools, and they came to a conclusion that they could amalgamate their services and provide a better quality of education in a more accountable fashion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we agreed with that, and we worked with and provided incentives to those school divisions that were prepared to work together.

We felt, yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, like the Premier said that that was the Manitoba way, that we would not force anything from on high on the students and the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba. But we have seen all too well what this Minister of Education is prepared to do. He talks a great line about we will not be a heavy-handed government that takes a top-down approach. Well, what is this legislation except for a top-down approach with a Minister of Education that decrees from on high that you will amalgamate and you will like it? Well, Manitobans do not like it. They do not like the attitude of this Government, and they do not like what they have been forced to do.

This announcement was made back in November. If this minister had any plan or was organized in any way, he could have ensured that those amalgamations happened under the present legislation that exists today. There is no need for this legislation to move forward or to be rushed through in this House the way this

minister is moving. He could have gone through the board of reference process. He could have held public consultations and talked to Manitobans, and school divisions could have been amalgamated by now, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, did he do that? No. What he did was chose to wait until May.

People should understand what the process in this Legislature is. There is not any piece of legislation that is controversial that passes this House in a month or two. I have never seen that happen since 1986, when I was first elected to this Legislature. Sure, there are pieces of legislation that are not controversial that move very swiftly through the Legislature, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, tradition has it that there are months and months of debate on any legislation that is controversial. It is not just rammed through while—*[interjection]*

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Sale) from his seat chirps about MTS, and I want him to try to remember that the bill to privatize MTS was in front of this Legislature for months. It was introduced in the spring. Members of the opposition of the day had a chance to go out and discuss the legislation with Manitobans. It came back. It had several days of debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was not rammed through the House in five or six weeks like the Minister of Family Services would like to believe. There was significant time to debate it. The opposition of the day did not like the legislation, but ultimately it passed. We are not prepared to have a minister who is ill-prepared, who has completely circumvented any process or any proper process to ram a piece of legislation through like Bill 14, which is significant to the taxpayers and to the students in the province of Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all know that from time to time there are reviews of electoral boundaries. There are reviews of the federal electoral boundaries. There are provincial electoral reviews and city of Winnipeg reviews. They are a mandated, legislated process. We know by personal experience that the provincial boundaries are reviewed on a 10-year basis. It is legislated. There is a process set down. There is

an independent body that draws the boundaries. There are public hearings that happen when those boundaries are submitted and a review is done. Ultimately, through an act of this Legislature, those boundaries are changed.

I think many of us, I know the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns), I know even in my 16-year term in this Legislature I have seen my boundaries change three times. That is because communities grow or communities get smaller and circumstances change, but there is some fairness and there is some equity to that process. We saw absolutely none of that with the introduction of the boundaries from the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell).

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no rhyme or reason. There is no rationale. There is no plan. There is no process. The only process we can see was a process where in the wee hours of the night or on the weekend behind closed doors either in the Premier's office or the Minister of Education's office, boundaries were drawn, but there was no consideration given to fairness or equity or size of boundaries. I talk about the city of Winnipeg specifically because I see my own school division, River East School Division, which was the second largest school division in the city of Winnipeg, amalgamated with Transcona when Seven Oaks School Division right across the river was left alone with half the size or less than half the size of River East School Division.

* (15:40)

I say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what consultation was there with the ratepayers in the River East School Division when they are going to have to bear the costs of that amalgamation on their property tax bills? I know that I have teachers that live in my constituency in River East who work in the Seven Oaks School Division. I have talked to them, and it is a bit of a joke. They have said, gosh, I wonder why Seven Oaks School Division was left alone.

It must be because they have friends in high places. That is the scuttlebutt. That is the word out there on the street. I want members on the government side of the House to tell me today how they can justify and how they can sleep with themselves at night.

Well, the Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub) might have been in the minister's office when those boundaries were drawn, but I want to tell you that the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg) could not have been there because he represents River East School Division, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, obviously, he did not have a chance to put his two cents in or maybe River East would have been spared as Seven Oaks was.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, obviously there are some members on that side of the House that get preferential treatment and have the Minister of Education's ear. Would be the member from St. James—

An Honourable Member: The people from River East love it; they want it.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hear the member from Rossmere from his seat indicating that the people of River East love it; they want it. I guess he is saying to me today then that they want increased education taxes because that is exactly what they are going to get when this bill passes.

An Honourable Member: Voted against that in '99.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, well, it is unfortunate that the Member for Rossmere does not have the ear of the Minister of Education, and I will not miss any single opportunity to remind the citizens of the River East School Division, which include citizens that live in the MLA for Rossmere's constituency, when their taxes go up, it is a direct result of forced amalgamation that his Minister of Education and his Premier (Mr. Doer) condoned without even consulting with him because, if they had consulted with him and said, well, we are not going to touch Seven Oaks School Division because we do not want their education taxes to go up, but we are going to amalgamate River East and the taxpayers, the ratepayers in the constituency of Rossmere are going to have to pay along with the other constituencies in that catchment area, are going to have to pay \$2 million more. But that is okay, Member for Rossmere, your taxpayers can afford that. Seven Oaks cannot, but your taxpayers can afford that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the constituents of River East and the ratepayers in the constituency of River East come to understand and to realize what it is going to mean to their pocketbooks, they are not going to feel like the Member for Rossmere has said, that they want this and they want amalgamation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so we have seen a process which is unequal, which has not allowed—

An Honourable Member: Unfair.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, it is extremely unfair when you increase the size of the second largest school division in the city of Winnipeg and you leave several others untouched. There is no understanding or no process that was followed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and quite frankly we do not need this legislation to move ahead with amalgamated school divisions. The minister has the ability under the legislation that properly exists. All he has to do is consult with Manitobans, but rather than spend the time talking to Manitobans, he prefers to bring in a piece of legislation with a top-down, heavy-handed approach that says you will obey and you will amalgamate, without that consultation.

What this amendment does is put in place a consultative process so Manitobans can determine and decide whether they want to move ahead with the program or the amalgamation that this Minister of Education and this Government has determined.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we just have to look at the taxpayers in the Transcona-Springfield School Division who were treated with a very heavy hand by this Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they believe that they should, as taxpayers, have the ability to challenge this Government and this minister on their decisions. As we speak today, I hope that the Department of Education has not asked this matter to be delayed in the courts, because the people of Springfield were to have their day in court today.

But what this legislation does without any consultation with those taxpayers in Springfield

School Division is take away their right to challenge this Government in court for the decisions that they have made. That is the main thrust of this legislation. It is the hidden agenda that this Government has that this minister and this Government would condone taking away the taxpayers' right to challenge a decision that they believe is wrongheaded.

An Honourable Member: A point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Member for Russell has to wait until he is recognized before he speaks.

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am so impressed with the words that the member from River East is putting on the record that I think it would be wise if the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) were here to hear them. It is unfortunate that the Minister of Education, who continues to talk about the importance of this bill, does not see it important enough to stay around the House when the speeches on this bill are being made so that he could inform himself about what is important about this bill and why the Opposition is having difficulty in supporting the Government, because indeed they have taken another approach on this bill. First, the Premier said that it was not the Manitoba way, and now they are forcing amalgamation.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask: Where is the Minister of Education, and why is he not here to listen to these words?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to express my extreme concern that the member would get up on a point of order and interrupt the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), his own member. I would suggest that if the member wishes to participate in debate, he might want to have the patience to wait for the Member for River East to complete her remarks.

I would also suggest to members opposite that it is highly irregular but somewhat predictable that the member is rising on a

supposed point of order and then breaks our rules in raising a point of order. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would suggest that you rule on the point of order, indicating clearly it was not a point of order, and ask the member not to interrupt the Member for River East in her speech. We would like to hear the Member for River East.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May I remind all members to observe the rules of the House.

* * *

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I certainly do not need to be defended by members of the government side of the House. You may not believe that my colleague had a point of order, but he certainly had a significant point. I find it very disrespectful that the Minister of Education cannot sit and listen to debate. I believe I have been straightforward and that I have significant points to make and I would—*[interjection]*

Well, thanks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I would appreciate a little bit of respect from members opposite as I put my thoughts on the record. *[interjection]* Well, the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Sale) can be extremely obnoxious from his seat. Time and time again we hear the kind of quotes—I have not heard him stand up and speak on this amendment that allows consultation with Manitobans, with Manitoba taxpayers, but he sits and he chirps from his seat. He should be ashamed of himself. I wish he could rise above that kind of behaviour and listen with some respect to the comments that are put on the record.

* (15:50)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only are the taxpayers in the Transcona-Springfield School Division not being able to voice their opinion and have their day in court, but what about the taxpayers in Morris-Macdonald School Division? *[interjection]* Well, the Minister of Family Services says they took off with \$4 million. Which taxpayer in Morris-Macdonald School Division put \$4 million in their jeans? Was there any taxpayer—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hear the Minister of Family Services from his seat say that the

taxpayers of Morris-Macdonald School Division absconded with \$4 million. I want to know which taxpayer in Morris-Macdonald School Division put one penny in their pockets as a result of what happened in Morris-Macdonald School Division? I also want to ask the Minister of Family Services how many of his friends put money in their pockets with wrong enrolment figures that were presented to Morris-Macdonald School Division?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that many friends of the New Democratic Party had their hands in the cookie jar, and the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) will not talk about this. We know that the Minister of Education and the Premier will not talk about this issue because it is under RCMP investigation.

Well, why is an RCMP investigation good enough to prevent them from going after their friends, but it is not good enough to prevent them from asking the taxpayers of Morris-Macdonald to dig into their pockets and pay back money which not one of them put in their own pockets? Where is the double standard? If there is a RCMP investigation ongoing, that RCMP investigation should protect the taxpayers as well as the Orlikows and the Cowans and the friends of the New Democratic Party, friends of the Minister of Family Services, whom he wants to protect, but the taxpayers, the innocent taxpayers of Morris-Macdonald School Division are being asked to pay \$2.5 million back, and they are being charged thousands of dollars by this Government and this Minister of Education without their day in court.

What does Bill 14 do? Bill 14 takes away from them their right to go to court and to have their day in court to justify the reason why they should not have to dig into their pockets in order for the friends of the New Democratic Party and the New Democratic government to keep the money in their pockets that they got as a result of inaccurate or overstated enrolment figures in the adult education program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see two different standards here, one for the taxpayers who, through no fault of their own as ratepayers in Morris-Macdonald School Division, see a bill of

\$2.5 million that they are being asked to pay back by the heavy hand of this Minister of Education and his trustee that he has put in place, when his friends, the Orlikows and the Cowans, have put money into their pockets. They are protected by an RCMP investigation. Well, I see very much a double standard. I see very much a top-down, heavy-handed approach to school division amalgamation that went through no process and something that we are not going to rush through this House.

The minister could, if he wanted to, under the legislation that presently exists, amalgamate school divisions. We are going to ensure that we debate fully and we talk to Manitobans and tell them that our approach is the Manitoba way. Our approach is to consult with Manitobans, and our approach is to ensure that Manitoba taxpayers know that their education taxes are going to increase as a direct result of this Government's heavy-handed approach to school board amalgamation. I will be supporting this amendment, and I am hoping every member on the government side of the House will stand up and put their thoughts on the record and tell Manitobans why they did not consult.

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): I do appreciate the opportunity to put some words on the record. The members opposite are correct in their heckling across the way. In fact, the member from River East did pretty much say it all, but it bears repeating. It bears repeating because this is such a bad piece of legislation. This is a piece of legislation that is totally unnecessary. The minister could have accomplished exactly what he is trying to accomplish. Well, I should preface that. He could not accomplish everything. As a matter of fact, that is likely the most important reason for this bill being before the House, is that the minister could not accomplish school division amalgamations in the way that he had initially set out to.

His initial approach to it back in 1999 was, in fact, to follow the Manitoba way, which is not to impose any amalgamation on unwilling school boards, exactly as has been set out time and time again by the Premier, his leader who, again, has reiterated that it is not the Manitoba way to force amalgamations on unwilling partners. This minister has gone against that. Not

only has he flip-flopped on his own so-called beliefs, but he has also gone against the instructions, against the will of his leader, Premier Doer, and gone against the Manitoba way. I am appalled that we are in the position we are in, of being forced to debate this bill and these amendments in the Legislature.

* (16:00)

Of course, the amendment that we have put forward requests that the House declines to give second reading to the bill. With all due respect, I do not think it is fair to identify this bill with any form of modernization whatsoever. As a matter of fact, this is a retrogressive step. This is a step backwards. This is a bill, as the minister has been told from time to time by many, many people involved in the educational system, by school trustees, by their association, by parent councils, by teachers, by administrators, by citizens, that in fact this bill is simply an attempt by the minister to concentrate more power in the minister's hands and the hands of his department at the expense of duly elected officials. Worse than that, what I find most offensive about this bill, is the notion that, somehow, by passing a bill in this Legislature, the Government can stand up and declare that everything they have done, even though it might have been illegal, now all of a sudden becomes legal. All that, the only purpose of that clause in this bill is to deny the citizens of Manitoba due process, to deny them their day in court, as we have seen and, as a matter of fact, which is ongoing probably right at this very minute. I know that the case that is being brought forward by the Transcona-Springfield parents was in the courts this morning, was adjourned until two o'clock. I am assuming that arguments are still being presented to the judge. That court case is a very, very significant challenge to this minister and, in fact, to the actions that he has taken.

What is the response of this minister once he hears of these type of actions that are being taken on behalf of the school boards and on behalf of the children by concerned parents? He brings a bill before this Legislature which basically says it does not matter what the law is; I am above the law, and whatever I do, whether it is legal or not today, I will simply take before the House a bill that in fact makes it legal.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side of the House are not really surprised at this type of action, particularly coming from this minister. This is a government that considers themselves above the law. We have seen that time and time and time again since they have assumed office in 1999. In particular, this minister has shown complete disregard for the law, and was so noted, duly noted by the auditor in one of the first reports that the auditor brought before this House after his Government took office. In that auditor's report, he noted that the minister carried out activities which were in fact against the law, and not only did he carry them out, but he had the audacity to tell people that he could do what he wanted because he was simply going to change the law. It took the Auditor—the name of the office has now been changed to the Auditor General. It took the Auditor General to remind this minister and to take him to task, in his report, that this minister, nor any minister of the Crown is above the law. In fact, it is their responsibility to act within the confines of legislation, as it has been passed previously, and to act within the confines of the laws of this province and of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, once again, we see this Government presenting legislation to this House which in fact identifies quite clearly to all the citizens of Manitoba that this Government believes themselves above the law. I think that is despicable. We see it time and time again. It comes directly from the top with this Government.

We have seen that, in particular, with regard to the Hydro issue, where, in fact, the Government has decided that it will force Hydro to go out and borrow over \$500 million in order to pay for their \$288-million deficit. Once again, it is an act that completely goes against The Hydro Act, as it was envisioned by the forward-thinking legislators of the day, which brought that act into being. Once again, this Government says, well, there is a law, there is an act, but it does not have to apply to us. You know, we need to amalgamate school divisions. We need more money. We need. We need. Our needs are more important than the laws of the province of Manitoba.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope the minister will have the courage and show the proper

respect to the citizens of Manitoba and do the right thing, which is simply to withdraw this bill until it has gone through due process in the courts, until the parents of Transcona-Springfield have had their day in court. *[interjection]* The member says it is being dismissed. We will wait and hear. Maybe he has information on that that he needs to bring forward to this House, and I would encourage him to do so.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this bill, in addition to circumventing the law, is totally unnecessary. If the minister wants to change school division boundaries, the minister can do so. That is in the act as it exists. If he wants to do it, he can do it. He has as much admitted to that. He admitted to the parent advisory councils from Assiniboine South when he met with them that basically if he wanted to do it, he could do it anyway, and he did not need this bill. But he does not stand up in this House, in front of this forum, and say that, and I ask him why. Why would he say one thing outside this House and another thing in this House? Why would he say one thing to the parent advisory councils of Assiniboine South and then another thing?

That is not the only area where he has contradicted himself. This minister talks about consultation. He talks about money in the classroom. He talks about a lot of things that he is trying to spin that might fall out, in his perception, as a benefit of forced amalgamations of school divisions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, simply not true. In my area alone, the Fort Garry School Division and the Assiniboine South School Division are being forced against their will to amalgamate, and I must give them credit. I must give particular credit to the trustees and to the administrators of those two school divisions who have been forced into a situation which is of no benefit to anybody in our communities. It is certainly of no benefit to the children in the classroom. In fact, it will be a deterrent in terms of offering them more access and better services in the schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this minister does not even have the courtesy to go out in that region and hold consultations. He simply drops an edict—*[interjection]* Well, the minister says he was there last week. Yes, he was there last week,

but it was not for consultation because when the people of Assiniboine South asked him specifically to bring documentation that would show in some way, in any way, that there was going to be cost savings involved in the amalgamation, what was his response? His response was: Do not worry, I have reams and reams and boxes and boxes of paper that prove that amalgamation will, in fact, save the school divisions money.

If the minister wants to deny those comments in the House, then get up and do it right now. He knows he was there. He knows he made those comments. But under further questioning, when the minister was asked to produce some documents, to produce some information that would demonstrate in a clear and, in fact, in a calculated method how children were going to benefit, how more money would flow to the classroom, he, of course, refused. Oh, now, all of a sudden, the story changes. Now the minister says I have too much information. It would be too difficult to go through all those reams and reams of paper and all those boxes and all those files and all that supposed information that he says he has accumulated but which he will not share with anyone. I mean, that is his answer. His answer is, oh, no, it is too much for you.

* (16:10)

So we cannot consult. We cannot have an open discussion. What we can have is an edict from the Government, an edict that this minister thinks is somehow above the law.

That is not the Manitoba way. That is not the way to provide for a better education system for the children of our communities, for the children of our province. This bill, as has been identified by numerous school divisions is, quite frankly, on the one hand, nothing more than a power grab, and on the other hand, it is a way for the minister basically to cover himself and to say that anything that I have done that is illegal, now that we have passed this bill, is, in fact, legal.

Now, who in their right mind would need that type of covering in a piece of legislation unless they know full well that they have acted in some way, in some means, against the laws of

this province? *[interjection]* Well, reference is often made to other pieces of legislation which have been bungled in this House, and I will not digress too much into all the bungling that has taken place, but certainly there is one minister in particular and others who are well known for their bungling of legislation in this House and none more so than the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell).

This bill will come home to roost. There are many, many individuals in this province who are upset about the process or the lack of process that has been undertaken by this Government and, in particular, by this minister in regard to the forced amalgamation of a number of school divisions that is being done strictly for political purposes.

It is not being done for the benefit of our children. We know that. It is not being done as a matter of cost savings. We know that. So, then, we have to ask ourselves: Why is this legislation even before the House? Why has this minister decided to rush ahead with forced amalgamation, particularly in light of the fact that there are a number of school divisions who have worked co-operatively over the course of the last number of years, who have made the right decisions, whose trustees, as elected officials, have done what they are obliged to do, what they agreed to do when they were first elected, and that is to act in the best interests of the school children, to act in the best interests of the taxpayers, to act in the best interests of the individuals of their communities.

Where it has made sense to amalgamate, they have done so. Where it has not made sense, they have not. Instead of listening to that, instead of consulting around the province about that process, the minister has come forward with heavy-handed dictates, autocratic dictates, some of them quite likely outside the bounds of the laws as they are written in this province in order to meet his political needs.

That is the only reason for this amalgamation. Somewhere they must have done a poll, and, you know, quite likely when you spin the question out, are you in favour of amalgamating school divisions if it reduces administrative costs and reduces your taxes,

well, what is the answer going to be? The answer is going to be yes.

But that is totally irrelevant. It is like the question they asked on Hydro. How would you feel if we took some money out of Hydro and used it for the benefit of everybody in Manitoba? Of course, they come and tout how many Manitobans stood up and said, well, yeah, that is a good thing to do. They simply forgot to tell Manitobans that Manitoba Hydro has no money.

So, if they had done the right thing, if they had posed the right question in their poll and gone out to Manitobans and said, how do you feel about us going to Manitoba Hydro and forcing them to borrow \$288 million with an additional cost of \$276 million, bringing the total to \$564 million, how do you feel about us forcing Manitoba Hydro to go out and borrow money so that we can spend it, well, they know what the answer would have been. The answer would have been the same as the answer they got when they floated their idea of taking \$185 million out of the rainy day fund. Manitobans would have said no, just as Manitobans said no to this Government dipping into the rainy day fund for \$185 million and more, just as this province would have said no to forced amalgamation if this Government and if this minister had had the courage to go out and lay the facts before them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it is a tremendous tragedy that this Government is hiding on virtually every issue. This is a government that is afraid of public consultation. This is a government that is afraid to go out and talk to ordinary citizens of this province to find out what they really feel, but, most importantly, and, I think, most distasteful is this Government's inability to lay the facts out before the people of Manitoba so that they can make an intelligent decision.

This is a government that is so wrapped up in media spin, and we have seen evidence of that particularly in the past weeks. This is a government that is so wrapped up in political spin that they are afraid of the people of Manitoba. We see this on the education issue. We see it every day on the arena issue.

This is a government that is simply afraid to go out and consult. So the minister draws out the

Norrie report from 1993 and says, well, we had consultations. Well, news for the minister, Mr. Deputy Speaker, things change, times change. It was determined back in the early 1990s, it was determined by Mr. Norrie, who did a wonderful job on the report, that in fact, after this type of consultation, there really were not savings that would go into the classroom through any type of forced amalgamation. So the process was under way. School divisions were talking to school divisions. Trustees were talking to trustees. Where it made sense to amalgamate school divisions, that was done. In fact, that is in the works.

The minister does not need this legislation in order to allow those amalgamations to proceed. He can take his crayon out of a colouring pack he keeps in his desk and redraw the boundaries any time he chooses. He already has that ability. *[interjection]*

Well, there is some conjecture on what colour the lines might be, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think, with the minister, that is a moot point. He is just colouring for the sake of colouring. As one can tell from his attire today, I do not think he pays a whole lot of attention to colour. We will leave that for another day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the gall of this minister and of this Government to bring before this House another piece of legislation which is totally unnecessary and then, at the same time, to go out to Manitobans and, on the basis of nothing more than fear in terms of how the funding will work, in terms of what power the minister holds over various school divisions and again by going to their political allies throughout the province and saying, well, write me some letters, tell me that you need this legislation and then, you know, I can have someone from the back benches, one of my colleagues, stand up repeatedly and ask me to read the letter out, and that will make my point.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans understand the nuances. They know that that carries no weight. They know that these letters have either been coerced out of fear or have been cajoled out of friends and that in fact the minister probably spends more time trying to brief his colleagues on what questions to ask him

and what divisions to ask than he does spending on this legislation. I think that is unfortunate for everybody in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this legislation is not needed. That is why we have asked that the House decline to give second reading to Bill 14. We had asked the minister, before a vote is necessary, before it comes to that point in this House, that he just stand up and do the right thing and withdraw the bill—

* (16:20)

An Honourable Member: We will give him leave.

Mr. Loewen: We will give him leave, as members mention, any time, any day, any place. Oh, that is not him. I guess that is the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) that likes to spout that. Of course, he is wrong, too, but we will get that into discussion in some of his bills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to spend some time addressing the issue of the letters that the minister brings forward to this House on a routine basis, and they are a limited number. They are from friends or they have been driven out of fear, but they do not reflect the views of my constituents. I find it interesting that not once in this debate, not once during Question Period, not once when he has talked about amalgamation as a minister, has he brought forward any information from either the Fort Garry School Division or from the Assiniboine South School Division. He has those letters. He received his latest one probably on Friday or today from the Assiniboine South School Division. They clearly indicate, and they have indicated, as previous correspondence to the minister has indicated on numerous occasions, that the most galling feature of this minister's attempt to bring in this legislation has been his lack of consultation, his lack of planning and his lack of foresight in dealing with this issue.

They cannot understand who dreamed this up or why, because it certainly does not serve the people of either the Assiniboine South School Division or the Fort Garry School Division. To their credit, since the minister made the announcement of the forced amalgamation,

which I will remind him he initially in 1999 said he would not do, the minister told the Manitoba Association of School Trustees that it was not the Manitoba way and it would not be done. The Premier mentioned that and, as said, he referred to it time and time again. Instead, the administrators and the trustees and the Fort Garry and the Assiniboine South school divisions have been forced to work on this amalgamation scheme strictly to try and make some headway so that the minister can have his way on this issue.

If the minister was to refer to the correspondence from either the Fort Garry School Division or the Assiniboine South School Division, he would recognize very quickly the trustees and the citizens in those areas are definitely against this bill. They realize and they have understood from day one what this bill is all about. This bill is about a power grab by the minister, it is about a power grab by his department, and it has nothing to do with improving the education system. It has nothing to do with providing more resources for the classroom.

As a matter of fact, once again, I will go back to the meeting that the minister had with the Assiniboine South School Division, and when pressed and when questioned on what resources, what extra resources would be brought to the education system, what extra resources would benefit the children of Assiniboine South and Fort Garry school divisions, what was his response? Well, I will tell you what his response was. It was teachers are in the classrooms. So his only justification, his only reason for saying that more resources are going into the classroom is because when the two divisions bring their salary scales together, some teachers will get a raise in pay, and to the minister, the misguided thinking of the minister, this is somehow an addition of resources to the classroom.

Well, I have news for him. That is simply not the case. Teachers are there. The teachers are doing an excellent job. The teachers are pouring their hearts and souls into educating the children in those school divisions. He is not going to bring any extra resources to the schools, any extra resources to the children by increasing

teachers' salaries. But that is the narrowness of this minister's thinking, and that is going to be detrimental to the entire education system.

I am not surprised, for this is a minister, as we heard today in Question Period, that when he is talking to one group says, well, provincial funding is close to 60 percent—I think the number quoted was 59.6 percent—and when he wants to build a different story, he goes out and says, well, it is 76 percent. He is not adding any more resources that are of any value to children in the classroom, that are any more value to the education system. He is simply taking the property tax credit and adding it into the equation. I do not know, but the last time I looked at the property tax credit as a homeowner, that did not go into the schools. I did not go to a teacher, I did not buy any books, I did not buy any pencils. It went to property owners.

So, somehow, because he wants to put his spin on it, the minister is now out there saying, well, no, no, it is not the 59.2 percent that I said it was, now it is 76 percent, because, oh, yes, we added in the property tax credit and we increased it, and, by the way, we shifted it out of the Department of Finance's numbers into the Department of Education numbers. So now we can go out and say we are spending more than a billion dollars on education. Of course over \$175 million of it is a complete and utter fallacy to have any indication that that is going to better our schools, to better the education system for our children.

So, again, the minister, who not only considers himself above the law, is misrepresenting the facts as they have been put forward not only by the Manitoba Teachers' Society, but in particular by the school division, Winnipeg No. 1, who had to go so far, I might remind the minister, as to write a letter to the editor contradicting the minister's spin doctor's editorial piece in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. It was Winnipeg School Division No. 1 that responded to that op-ed piece that was written somewhere in the bowels of the minister's department and put out, I believe, under the guise that it was actually his thinking. It was Winnipeg No. 1 that had to come forward and remind not only the *Winnipeg Free Press*, not

only the minister, but in fact everybody in Manitoba that this Government's funding of education was actually less than 60 percent in spite of the minister's attempt to spin it.

Now, one would think if there is any school division that is going to stand up for the minister and his manipulating of the numbers, it would be Winnipeg No. 1. Somebody would think if there was anybody out there who was going to stand up for the minister in his manipulating of the numbers, it might be the Manitoba Teachers' Society. But they have both gone to great pains to demonstrate not only to educators but to the citizens of Manitoba that this minister is going to great lengths to attempt to mislead the people of Manitoba.

That is unfortunate because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of school amalgamation is one that needs to be taken seriously by everybody in Manitoba. We need to work, as the previous government started to with commissioning of the Norrie report, towards ensuring that those scarce resources that we have in our province are, in fact, directed as much as possible into the classroom for the benefit of the children of this province.

* (16:30)

I think everybody in the province would agree that that is a laudable goal. If, in fact, that is what the Doer government wants to do, then they should get out and talk about the facts, get out and consult with citizens, get out and consult with school trustees and start to build a process that will see some type of reasonable amalgamation within school divisions where it makes sense.

I am appalled that this minister and this Government, under the leadership of Premier Gary Doer, has decided not to do that and, in fact, has done exactly the opposite. They have done it by edict, in spite of promising Manitobans, in spite of promising educators that they would not.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

A significant issue to both school divisions that are represented in my constituency is the fact that the Government is simply wrong on

fact, simply wrong on the numbers. The minister can talk all he wants about savings of \$10 million, about additional resources to the classroom. *[interjection]* The minister says, from his desk, I never said that. Well, if the minister never said that, perhaps he would like to stand on his feet right now and indicate to Manitobans that he does not think there will be \$10 million saved through amalgamation, because I have heard him time and time again stand up in this House and spout that fictitious number. So, if he wants to chirp from his seat, if he wants to disagree with that, have the courage to stand up now, put the truth on the record, then go out and explain that to Manitobans. That is not unlike this minister who through this whole debate we have seen bounce from pillar to post, say one thing to one group, say another thing to another group.

An Honourable Member: Do you want to give me leave?

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, the minister is asking if we will give him leave. We will give him leave to stand up now. We will give him leave to withdraw this bill. We will give him leave to do the right thing. Just indicate that you are going to stand up and do that, and we will be glad to give you leave. *[interjection]*

The Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) now also wants to indicate—I guess she is trying to distance herself from this bill and ensure that the public understands that she is not bungling this one. This one is being bungled by a different minister. If she wants to put that position on the record, that is fine, too. I think what she is indicating clearly to this House and to the people of Manitoba is that the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) is on his own on this one. In fact, if the minister wants to go out and bungle this bill on his own, then she is perfectly satisfied to let him go and do it.

But, Mr. Speaker, the point that both school divisions have made over and over and over without success, I might add to this minister, is that this forced amalgamation is going to add costs. It is going to be more expensive to run the Fort Garry School Division. It is going to be more expensive to run the Assiniboine South School Division, and where is this minister on

that? He says point blank to the parents advisory committee that he has documented evidence in his office, reams of evidence in boxes back in his office that there will be financial savings and that the results might somehow lead to lower taxes, but when pressed on that very issue by those same people, what is his response? There is too much information. I cannot go back to my office and pull out specifics because there is just too much information there. I mean, what a joke.

The Assiniboine South School Division has identified that at a minimum the amalgamation—and the minister has this in writing, so if he wants to stand up in this House and read information on the record, he should have the courage to stand up with what the Assiniboine South School Division has sent him, and that is that the minimum one-time and ongoing cost of amalgamation will be \$800,000 per year, \$800,000. This, Mr. Speaker, is the minimum.

In fact, the costs could be far, far greater. In addition to that cost of amalgamation of \$800,000, there is an estimated additional annual cost of \$750,000 per year. If the minister wants documentation about that, the minister should ask the school division for that documentation. They will not tell him that they have reams and reams of paper back in the office that they cannot give. They will tell him directly, and they will give him specific information on these additional costs. So I would ask the minister the next time he is meeting with a parent advisory council, as a matter of fact, the next time he is meeting with anybody from the school division, that he bring that issue forward.

I see that my time on speaking to this amendment is drawing to a close. There is much more to say on this bill. The members across the way seem somewhat disappointed that my time is drawing to an end. I know they want to hear more. But I would like to allay their fears and tell them there will be many more amendments, there will be lots more opportunity to put the facts on the record. In fact, there will be opportunity if any of them choose to speak to put information on the record. There will be opportunity, lots of opportunity for the Minister of Education to go out in the community to consult not only with the trustees, not only with the administrators, but with the parents of the

children whose education is being hurt by this minister's edict.

So I would ask the minister to take note of that, to go out, hold some public consultations in Fort Garry, hold some public consultations in Assiniboine South. Listen to people. Come to them prepared to answer questions, not like he did in Transcona-Springfield, where he simply said, oh, I am not here to answer, I am just here to listen, and of course never got back with an answer. Come to Fort Garry and listen to the people of Fort Garry. Come to Assiniboine South, listen to the people of Lindenwoods and Charleswood, and be prepared to give them some answers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be more.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride to stand today and take a piece out of the honourable minister today for what he is calling legislation that is necessary. I can see that Theresa did not choose the tie today either. The colors do not match.

We have had a number of concerns about this legislation since it came forward. The honourable minister has made his stance and said that he has brought forward a lot of these recommendations because of the Norrie report. But if the minister had looked carefully at the Norrie report, he would have seen that there were some time lines and time frames set out by Mr. Norrie in bringing forward the amalgamations which he said were necessary within the report.

Mr. Speaker, just a year ago the honourable First Minister (Mr. Doer) assured school trustees that there would be no forced amalgamation, that this is not the Manitoba way. How can this minister challenge his own First Minister? His own First Minister said just last year that there would be no forced amalgamation. Yet, what does this minister do? He sends out his backbenchers with their crayons to help him design and draw lines around the areas that would not affect him in his re-election or any of his colleagues.

Within my constituency I have two school divisions. As referenced by the Minister of Education, I have got the best school division in

all of Manitoba, according to him, Seine River. It is a model school division, Mr. Speaker. It operates very well and everything works very well within it. But it also incorporates part of the city and the urban. That has been for as long as I have been in the community, and that is all my life. As a matter of fact, it has been Seine River all the way back to when I first started elementary school in the constituency.

* (16:40)

The Minister of Education was facing two possible court actions. I understand that one has now ended in the courts in favour of the minister. I guess the minister should be proud of that, that he won the case, but I think when you read the judgment on why the minister won, it is because there is no amalgamation at this time. All there is is a memo and an edict by a minister who told school trustees: You must start now or you will no longer be school trustees.

Mr. Speaker, this is a minister that can fire boards at will. This is a minister who, if he does not have his way, takes away the candy. Here is a minister who turns around and says it will be done my way and no other way. He is passing legislation that is not even necessary today. He is passing legislation today that, if he would have taken the time and done it right, he would not need this legislation if he had sent it through the proper process, but, no, this minister wanted to make sure that he could draw the lines where he wanted them seen, and he could then turn around and make sure that nothing could be challenged. Why else would he put in this act that he cannot be challenged on amalgamation?

Mr. Speaker, that is why that case was lost today, because the amalgamation had not proceeded. But once it does proceed with this bill, not the regular system, but this bill, they still will not have it right because Manitobans' rights have been stomped on by this minister. He has taken away their right to take them to court. That is not the Manitoba way, as his First Minister (Mr. Doer) would say.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard from my constituency from a number of school trustees that we have to do some review on some of the areas of the bill, and I will be meeting with them on the 20th to do that review. I will be bringing

back further concerns that I am sure I will be able to put on the floor when we get back to the main motion sometime in July or August.

Mr. Speaker, I got an interesting letter today that was sent to the minister. I want to take the time to put this on the record because I think it is important that MAST position be read into the record.

It says: Thank you for taking the time to meet with MAST representatives on June 4, 2002, to discuss the proposed Bill 14 and the report of the Commission on Class Size and Composition. As explained to you, MAST and its member school boards have some serious concerns about the amalgamation to process and Bill 14 now before the Legislature. Briefly, these are as follows:

1. The compressed time line and lack of defined process to guide amalgamation efforts have created tremendous stress and enormous workloads for divisional administrators and trustees. To minimize the difficulties and understate the resource demands of the amalgamation process is to deny the complexity and ignore the reality of what government-mandated amalgamations have meant to staff, to trustees, to parents and to communities across the province.

2. School boards' call for speedy passage of amalgamation legislation arises from the logistical imperatives of the restructuring process and cannot be construed as support or agreement with the Government's decision and approach to school boards consolidation in Manitoba.

3. The scope of Bill 14 extends far beyond the current round of school divisions/districts amalgamations in Manitoba. Provisions of a bill will, in effect, transfer from school boards to minister significant decision-making authority with regard to budgets and to program and service delivery at the local level. In so doing, Bill 14 effectively reduces local influence and involvement by the community in shaping educational opportunities for students and shifts the focus of accountability from elected school boards to the Minister of Education.

4. The language of various clauses within Bill 14 is open-ended, ambiguous and subject to

interpretation. The transition period for amalgamation divisions/districts is undefined. There is no apparent congruence of time lines between Bill 14 and regulation 61/2002 and there is no limitation on the effective duration of any regulation made by the minister with regard to the transitional issues.

5. Government has stated repeatedly that the Manitoba School Division District Boundaries Review Commission, 1994, conducted under the chair of William Norrie constitutes the public review and consultation for amalgamation required by the existing section 7(2) of The Public Schools Act. The Public Schools Act as currently written contains the necessary mechanisms and process to effect the amalgamation announced by the Government subject to any such review. It follows, therefore, that for purposes of amalgamation, Bill 14 is redundant and unnecessary.

Mr. Speaker, those are not my words. Those are the words from MAST.

Mr. Speaker, why is this minister putting information on the record that he knows is being said because he is forcing people to say it? Why does this minister continue to threaten people?

Here is a minister who took some pot shots at the program which we put in place for adult education. I challenge this minister to come out to the St. Norbert Foundation and see the good that the adult education has done for the system there. I challenge this minister to come out and say that it was wrong for us to put in place the funding for these programs, because I have seen the success. I have seen the success of the programs, and I have seen the success that we have had with the people that have attended them. I think it is wrong for this minister to challenge or take pot shots at a program that was highly necessary and very well used within my community. But I digress, Mr. Speaker.

Why are we asking for this bill to be looked at by the public? Well, as we are sitting here right now and discussing it, there are new issues coming forward every day. The school trustees, the parents and Manitobans are finally trying to see the sneaky side of this First Minister (Mr. Doer). He is trying to bring this bill forward and

hoping that the public never really caught on to what he was doing. He was hoping that the public would not see what he had in this bill and what rights it gave him into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I understand, by speaking to the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Ashton) at a committee hearing, that he did not think that some of the powers that this minister is asking for are necessary, because we offered the same powers to that minister, and he said no. He said we do not need those types of powers. It is up to the people to make those decisions.

I would like the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) to possibly take a second thought and maybe have a little meeting with the Minister of Transportation and have a little chat about how much power he gives himself and his colleagues in Cabinet. I know that the honourable Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers), I do believe he was out on the task force actually doing this review. He was one of those pushing the Crayola across the line saying, no, we will leave this Turtle River out, but we will bring this in.

I think the funniest part was when they drew the line through the Springfield-Transcona one. They drew the line, and they made sure that all the taxation ended up in Transcona. What does the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) do? He stands up in the House and says: It is about time those rural people get a piece of what they have been getting.

Talk about vengeful. That is what this legislation was for. It was called get even. They do not know how to vote. Let us nail them. You notice that they did not do it in their ridings as strongly, but the ridings that were Tory blue, did you see what they did? They used a green crayon, and they went around it. They said: Let us get them. Let us make them pay. So this is what you call let-us-get-even legislation. We are seeing that, Mr. Speaker, because we saw the screw-the-Tory tax when they passed it before. They turned around, and they passed that last year or the year before. It was their own youth that said it. It was the president of their youth association that said that is how they felt as NDPers.

It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, as we move along and we see how this Government treats

Manitobans with no respect and no consultation. All we are asking with this amendment is for the minister to go out and listen to the people. They are starting to speak to you, Mr. Minister. You are starting to get those letters. We only hope that you are going to take the time to study these letters. We are going to make sure you have time, Mr. Minister. We are going to make sure you have a lot of opportunity to review each and every letter very carefully.

* (16:50)

We want to make sure that there is proper structure when it gets to the committee, and I think we will be asking the minister to guarantee us before this ever gets to committee that he does not use the tactic of going around the clock to tire the people out, because we are going to want to make sure that this minister hears everybody. *[interjection]* And the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) touts up from her seat: Like we did in MTS. I am not referring to MTS. I am referring to this bill. If the Minister of Labour wants to revert to doing everything we did in the past, Mr. Speaker, so be it. But this Minister of Labour should be very careful because I remember, just after she passed legislation last year, she went out in the halls and was referring to her legislation totally wrong. She was making comments that did not refer to her legislation. So I mean this is the wrong minister to be touting from her chair. I do not think she has read this bill yet. We will find out when she gets up to speak if she has, but even if she did read it, I do not think she would understand it. So it will be interesting because—I think the minister wants to say something. I will just stop for a second.

An Honourable Member: I am disappointed in that personal attack.

Mr. Laurendeau: I am only taking back what you give out, Becky.

An Honourable Member: Stick to the bill.

Mr. Laurendeau: I was sticking to the bill, but, you know, if she is going to heckle, she is going to get it back. *[interjection]* Well, they have not yet, but she is getting close. No, I have got total respect for the Minister of Labour, and if I have said anything to offend the minister, I would apologize, Mr. Speaker, because I do respect her for who she is as a person.

Now back to the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell). Let us get back to more fertile ground, as we are speaking about a minister who uses his cold, hard tax to go out and just fire school boards at will and then make sure that he can turn around and control all the spending of school divisions.

It is interesting. Here is a minister who is going to make amalgamation happen, then he is going to take control and make sure that nobody can spend any money unless he approves it in the end.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not want this minister controlling the education system in my community and starting to decide which programs we will or will not have for extracurricular events or extra projects within our community. We want to have and continue to have one of the most excellent systems in all of Canada right in our Fort Garry School Division. FRC is known and gets the top grades when they go the universities across Canada, because we have a system that works and it works well. We have had a good set of school trustees who have been there for a fair period of time. We respect what they have done.

Mr. Speaker, even the Norrie report stated there were no major savings when you did the revisions on this. So it is interesting when you look at it. He says, well, we need it because of the Norrie report. Yet he does not even do what the Norrie report is recommending, and that is taking your time and doing it over a three-year process. If he did it as the Norrie report was recommending it, he would not have to have this legislation. So why would this minister bring forward legislation to amalgamate if it is not necessary? If it was not politically motivated, it would not be necessary. What is the rush for this minister to get it through? Is he afraid of the flak? Is he afraid of hearing from the people?

He keeps saying that, well, the Norrie report has been there since '95. The minister is correct. We reviewed the Norrie report back when we were in government, and we took the Norrie report very seriously. Mr. Norrie said there was no great savings and there was no great potential for improvement within the school divisions if the amalgamation was put forward. So we

agreed that we would allow the amalgamations to proceed where it was voluntary, as the First Minister (Mr. Doer) stated last year, because it was the First Minister last year who referred to it that it would be voluntary. So why would this Government need protection from the judiciary's scrutiny? Why would this Government need to silence the rights of Manitobans to challenge them in court?

When this Government begins limiting fundamental rights of individual citizens, cutting off legal avenues, and ruling by decree, it can be the slippery slope. That is where we are heading. Every time a government takes this type of action, you are heading a little further on to that slippery slope. Too many decisions are going to be made by this minister. If this minister is moving into this direction, maybe he should just eliminate all the school divisions and go under his authority and do what he wants. That seems to be the direction he is headed, and if that is the direction he is headed, why does he not just say it and do it? He has got the power, at least he thinks he does. We will find out if he has the power, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to passing this bill, because we are going to see that this bill is well debated over and over and over again. We want to make sure that this minister listens and hears what has to be said by Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, in some cases, the letters that we are receiving are from separate school divisions, and, yes, we have received the ones that the minister read. I think there were three or four of them. I think it was four.

An Honourable Member: Got a couple more today, Marcel.

Mr. Laurendeau: Are we up to six now? Thank you, Mr. Minister, but we have more on the other side who are against it. I think MAST was very clear about that when they spoke of why those letters are coming. As they said, that should not be construed as support for this minister's bill. This is fear. It is fear on behalf of the school trustees because they know what this minister can do.

This minister has shown how he can fire trustees at will. This minister has shown that by passing legislation, he can make it so they

cannot challenge him in the future. He has shown that whatever he wants to have happen, he can get it through his Cabinet colleagues, and they will all believe in him.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is fear out there of this minister. There is fear that he is going to continue to push upon the people of Manitoba his edict and not listen to Manitobans. So we ask him to just listen up. We are asking him to go out to the people with the plans for amalgamation. Let us take a serious look at what he is doing. Let us take a look at why this legislation is even necessary. Why would this minister want to force upon the people of Manitoba another legislative package that is not needed?

Mr. Speaker, if you want to amalgamate, there are ways to do it without the legislation. The minister has the power, but he does not want to be challenged because he does not want somebody else to come back and say, well, we are going to change that, the minister was wrong. That is something this minister does not want to hear. He does not want to hear that he was wrong, because he feels the breath from Dauphin-Roblin coming down the back of his neck. He knows that his replacement is coming. He knows that he is in for a short-lived career in this department. He knows that the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) will be a great Minister of Education in the future. He knows that when he gets moved, it is probably going to be outside of Cabinet because there will not be another portfolio for him.

So, Mr. Speaker, he is pushing hard. He is pushing really hard to see that this legislation can be his mark on life. Let me tell you, this is not the mark I would want on my life. I would not want the mark that I had forced Manitobans to amalgamate, especially after my leader had said: That is not the Manitoba way. It is not the Manitoba way.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we continue on, there are a lot of issues within this bill that should have concerns for Manitobans. We believe it is our job as the Opposition to make sure that we critique this bill very well. We will be taking the time to do exactly that. I will be meeting with my school board on the 20th to do a more

substantial review of the bill. I will continue speaking on this tomorrow, because I do believe my time is starting to run out.

An Honourable Member: Keep going.

Mr. Laurendeau: Keep going? Oh, look at that. We are going to get leave yet. So, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 18 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., I will move to Private Members' Business. We will move to Proposed Resolutions.

An Honourable Member: Six o'clock.

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

An Honourable Member: Sure.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? Okay. So we will move to Proposed Resolution 16, Combatting Elder Abuse.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Res. 16—Combatting Elder Abuse

* (17:00)

Mrs. Louise Dacquay (Seine River): I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), Resolution 16,

WHEREAS elder abuse is a major concern to all Manitoba citizens; and

WHEREAS older adults can be victimized by spouses, caregivers, family members and strangers alike; and

WHEREAS elder abuse can take many different forms, whether it be the misuse of medication, neglect, emotional, physical, psychological, or financial abuse; and

WHEREAS a national survey revealed that four percent of the Canadian population 65 years of age or older living in private dwellings experienced at least one type of abuse; and

WHEREAS victims who are abused by members of their own family often suffer severe emotional stress in addition to the physical, psychological, or financial abuse; and

WHEREAS, because the population of many countries is aging, it is expected that this crime will grow in incidence; and

WHEREAS the victims of elder abuse, for a number of reasons, often choose not to tell anyone about their problems; and

WHEREAS victims of elder abuse often feel that they would rather suffer with fear and pain than with the embarrassment or the guilt associated with acknowledging they have been abused; and

WHEREAS being silent or ignoring abuse will not stop it from happening again; and

WHEREAS victims of elder abuse need to be informed that this type of conduct on their person is a crime that needs to be reported and stopped; and

WHEREAS by educating community professionals on how to respond to abuse complaints, the effectiveness of available supports in the community for the abused elderly is enhanced; and

WHEREAS the provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick each have an adult protection program in place to provide assistance or protection intervention to vulnerable adults unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect; and

WHEREAS it is the right of senior citizens to be safe, secure and free from being harmed; and

WHEREAS community awareness and education about elder abuse is needed to allow elderly Manitobans who are suffering from

abuse to feel safe in telling others that they are being abused.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider providing Manitobans with a comprehensive public awareness and educational program that will create better awareness about elder abuse, help identify how elder abuse can be prevented and encourage older adults suffering abuse to seek assistance.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Dacquay: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a very serious matter. Elder abuse involves acts of commission and acts of omission. Abuse by commission means something was done to cause another harm. Abuse by omission refers to not doing something necessary for another's survival and/or health.

Elder abuse can take on many forms, including physical, financial, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect.

A national survey revealed that approximately 98 000, or four percent, of older adults living in private dwellings in Canada reported being abused. Considering that research studies show us that three out of four incidents of elder abuse go unreported, the number of elderly people being abused is disturbingly high. As our population ages it is all too likely that there will be a corresponding increase in the incidence of elder abuse.

Mr. Speaker, a Manitoba study suggests that instances of elder abuse break down as follows. Financial abuse is the most common form of elder abuse. That has been reported in 40 percent of the cases. They are a favourite target of cons or extortionists.

Mental cruelty is the next most common form of elder abuse. It represents 38 percent. That includes humiliation, harassment, intimidation and social isolation.

Physical abuse is reported in 23 percent of the cases. This includes rough handling or restricting the movement of elders.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to touch briefly on some of the signs of abuse, recognizing the problem is critical. Victims of abuse will often try to hide their abuse, chalking up their lack of well-being to ill health or an accident. Possible signs of physical abuse are pretty obvious. They include cuts, lacerations, any injury which has not been properly cared for, poor skin condition or loss of weight. Some signs of psychological or emotional abuse can include helplessness, hesitation to talk openly, implausible stories, confusion or disorientation, anger, fear, withdrawal, depression, denial or agitation.

Possible indicators of financial abuse can include unusual or inappropriate activity in bank accounts, signatures on cheques that do not resemble the older person's signature or signed when an older person cannot write, power of attorney given or recent changes or creation of a will when the person is incapable of making such decisions, numerous unpaid bills, overdue rent when someone else is supposed to be paying the bills for a dependent elder and missing personal belongings such as art, silverware or jewellery.

Possible signs of neglect by a caregiver can include health and safety hazards in the elder's living environment, rashes and open sores, the elder being inadequately clothed, the elder being malnourished or dehydrated or the elder having an untreated medical condition.

Mr. Speaker, it is troublesome to think about why such terrible things are happening to our seniors. The abuse takes place regardless of the victim's financial situation, their state of health or their racial, religious and ethnocultural background. Like spousal or child abuse, elder abuse now crosses all boundaries and leaves scores of victims in its wake.

Mr. Speaker, elder abuse is simply unacceptable, and more must be done to educate the public about this heinous practice. More often than not, it often involves criminal activity, and it must be reported and stopped. Sadly, either due to fear or a lack of understanding of their rights, many victims of elder abuse neglect to inform anyone of incidents that are clearly abusive. Instead, the victims often suffer in

silence. Oftentimes, victims fear retaliation or punishment, abandonment or rejection by the abuser or other family members, shame, placement in an institution or ruining the life of a reported family member.

Victims of elder abuse must be reassured that such things will not happen and that it is okay for them to involve the police or other authorities in order to stop their suffering. A comprehensive public awareness and educational program about the causes, frequency, indication and preventative actions of elder abuse will benefit all sectors of our population. The provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick each have an adult protection program in place to provide help or protection intervention to vulnerable adults unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect. The Canadian Department of Justice maintains a Web site with frequently asked questions about elder abuse, including how to recognize it and how to try to help the victims of abuse.

* (17:10)

Many efforts to combat elder abuse are done at the grassroots level. The province next to us, Ontario, has the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. This is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to the prevention of elder abuse and neglect. Its mandate is to educate professionals and lay persons about elder abuse and neglect, promote information sharing among professionals and advocates in the field of elder abuse, develop educational and training programs about elder abuse prevention and intervention for people working with the elderly and to offer services and support to victims of elder abuse and neglect.

National and state governments in the United States are also actively pursuing programming related to elder abuse. For example, the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging leads an ongoing effort to ensure elder abuse on issues such as abuse and fraud. The National Centre on Elder Abuse serves as a clearinghouse for research and information related to elder abuse. The more we know about these wrongful acts, the easier it will be to put a stop to them if they are happening to someone we know and to prevent them from happening perhaps to ourselves in our senior years.

It is my sincere hope that we can raise the level of awareness about this issue in Manitoba so that we can reduce the incidence of the abuse. I would strongly encourage all members of this House to speak out against elder abuse and to support this resolution.

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education): I certainly welcome the opportunity to rise today and respond to the member opposite and to join with the member opposite on this extremely important matter.

I agree, as she has described it in her remarks, that it is an extremely important matter. I want to thank her for sharing with the House her remarks and her ideas and her concerns. I do thank the member.

Some of us might remember that originally this resolution was to go forth earlier, but it was delayed. It was kind of interesting because the day that it was originally planned, by coincidence or synchronicity if you will, I had just returned from the annual meeting of Age & Opportunity, which is an agency funded by government, an agency which offers abuse services to seniors.

In fact, I was joined there by the member from Southdale, and we, I think, enjoyed ourselves very much watching seniors line dance and sing and have a generally good time. I see the member feels very positively about it. The point that I wanted to make is that Age & Opportunity does offer the services that the member has talked about, and we are very pleased to fund it.

I also want to take this opportunity to tell the House that, later this month, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers for seniors are going to meet in Toronto for their biannual meeting. The last meeting was September 1999. The next meeting had been scheduled for September 12, 2001, so I think members in the House can understand why that meeting was delayed. It is going to be held in the very near future. I thought that the House would be interested in knowing that Manitoba has been invited to do a presentation on safety and security for seniors. I will look forward to doing that presentation, especially as a person who has been long committed to anti-violence, especially when it comes to violence against women and

domestic violence. I have worked in this capacity many times in the past, and I have a personal commitment, as the member does. This Government, of course, has a political commitment, as did the former government, to end all forms of violence against seniors.

In perusing the member's resolution, I wanted to make a couple of comments before I move on to my main remarks on some of the WHEREASes.

The sixth WHEREAS, "WHEREAS, because the population of many countries is aging, it is expected that this crime will grow in incidence," that may be the case, but perhaps it will not be the case. I know that all members of the House hope that will not be the case. I like to think that our current aging population is perhaps more empowered and a little bit more aware than my mother's generation, for example, was. I like to think that seniors groups, seniors organizations, governments, the general climate of the times has allowed some seniors to name abuse as a crime whereas in the past it might not have been recognized as such. I know that the member discussed this issue. I like to think too that society has undergone education and learning and even enlightenment, and so I hope that the incidences of abuse will not increase as the numbers of seniors increase. Perhaps more of us are aware of our behaviour and this can be stopped.

I also wanted to make a remark on the ninth WHEREAS: "WHEREAS being silenced or ignoring abuse will not stop it from happening again." I think this is very important and certainly a very important part of abuse, whether it be seniors, whether it be women, whether it be children. It is, of course, the basis of the feminist movement, and in this context, I wanted to quote the feminist poet, Audre Lorde, who said: "When we don't speak our minds, our silence is heard as consent and used against us." Audre Lorde, who unfortunately died from breast cancer a few years ago, believed that if we are silent, our silence is interpreted as a sign that nothing is wrong. Sometimes it is even seen as complicity and sometimes it is seen as acquiescence.

In the case of the elderly who can be isolated by virtue of location, language, or even

their capacities, all of these can make it much more difficult. There is, of course, an increased societal obligation to protect and advocate, and there is, of course, I think, an accompanied increased chance that abuse will be ignored or pass undetected.

This morning I was speaking with members from the department of the Seniors Directorate in preparation for the meetings that I spoke about earlier. They were talking about the fact that when one form of abuse occurs, there often are multiple forms of abuse. So we certainly have a responsibility, and I might add while I am up speaking that this was one of the reasons that the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) a couple of years ago brought in The Protection for Persons in Care Act. It is one of the reasons that I feel a particular obligation to protecting senior citizens just as the Minister of Health has recognized his obligation. Breaking the silence does not only mean speaking. Actions are another degree and I cited the Minister of Health's actions, and, of course, there are multiple instances in which this Government has shown its commitment.

Perhaps when we have finished with some of the current business before the House, then we will resume the Estimates process. Then I would invite members opposite to attend the Estimates of the Seniors Directorate and to hear of some of the excellent work that has been done by this department. Later today I hope to delineate some of the work that the department has been doing.

* (17:20)

Now the other WHEREAS I wanted to make reference to was the 10th WHEREAS: "WHEREAS victims of elder abuse need to be informed that this type of conduct on their person is a crime that needs to be reported and stopped." Certainly, there has been a concerted effort, I think, Mr. Speaker, from many quarters. I remember as long ago as 1988 that there was an elder abuse centre begun. It was supported by government. It was supported by the United Way. I remember then a very capable person named Penny Yellen leading up the seniors' abuse initiative. So I think we owe her a great deal for her struggle on behalf of seniors.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I really do want to thank the Member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay) for bringing her resolution forward and for her remarks. As the minister responsible, I am in complete agreement that elder abuse is a serious problem, and I wish to put on the record that our Government has been and will continue to be committed to initiatives that prevent this kind of abuse.

I thought this commitment was quite clear this year in Treasury Board's decision with the Minister of Finance's Budget. A decision was made to make permanent two positions in the Seniors Directorate that had previously been temporary. These two positions are targeted toward this issue, towards abuse. So I think that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) did his part and recognized the importance of making these positions permanent.

As the member has said, Canadian statistics indicate four percent of seniors in Canada are abused, but people in my department say given the profile of seniors, given the fact that many of our seniors—and I do not have a number; I do not know whether to say many or some—are isolated by virtue of some of the things I alluded to earlier, their language, their physical capacities, I am told that experts speculate that the number is probably much higher than four percent and probably as high as nine and perhaps more. In Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, that means an estimated 6000 or more seniors are abuse victims every year.

Abuse is commonly defined or recognized to include physical, psychological, emotional abuse, financial abuse and neglect. I want to make the point, Mr. Speaker, that all forms of abuse are taken seriously by this Government. Though physical abuse might seem to be the most traumatic and obvious, suffering is suffering whether it be emotional abuse or whether it be financial abuse or whether it be neglect. Suffering is suffering, and we certainly recognize it as such.

Elder abuse, of course, Mr. Speaker, is not an isolated issue. It is affected by many other seniors' issues including issues like housing, transportation, care giving, addiction, age discrimination and even financial programs. This Government recognizes the need for a co-ordinated, multidisciplinary response to elder

abuse at both the community and the regional levels and has been working co-operatively with other departments and outside agencies to address the issue.

I think this is a really important point, Mr. Speaker. Just as Healthy Child Manitoba, for example, brings together many departments, so must an effective response to the abuse of seniors require interdepartmental government initiative and also community effort.

* (17:30)

It was in I believe 1998-99 under the previous government that Treasury Board authorized the Seniors Directorate to begin piloting an elder abuse initiative and provided funds for two term staff positions, the two that have now been made permanent. I know that the member opposite will be very pleased to hear that these positions have been made permanent because it allows the Seniors Directorate to provide long-term leadership to the elder abuse initiative in Manitoba. It is a sign of commitment to this particular issue.

As well, the Seniors Directorate has been developing a concerted, multidisciplinary approach to addressing elder abuse. Some of the key components of our strategy include an elder abuse consultant. I am told by the department and by other members, community people that the person that we have hired is one of the best in the province. We are very proud of the work that she is doing. A Seniors Abuse Line co-ordinator, the Seniors Abuse Line itself, Mr. Speaker, education and awareness programs—we have also been developing community-based responses and monitoring teams, which are very, very important initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I see that my light is flashing, and I want to say that I make these points. I would like to have had the opportunity to provide more details, but unfortunately time is not going to allow me to do that. I will have the opportunity, I am sure, in my Estimates. My point here is that the services and education that the member advocates for are being worked on, are in place. They are being guided by dedicated staff and by staff who have a very strong commitment to seniors in this province. I am

certainly proud of the work they have been doing. Perhaps some of my colleagues, who I know want to speak to this resolution, will have the opportunity to make some of the other points.

Let me just end, Mr. Speaker, by saying that seniors are among our most vulnerable of people, and traditionally seniors are respected. Their lives are honoured and celebrated in many, many cultures. When seniors are not loved by their children and when seniors are not loved by their grandchildren, it is a very sad situation. In this province, we know that at least four percent of our seniors, and perhaps as much as nine percent, live in these very unhappy conditions. They are the victims of abuse.

I have always thought that the measure of civility in a society, Mr. Speaker, is the way we treat our most vulnerable groups. I might just say so, we are being measured here.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I am also delighted to rise and speak to this issue, which has been near and dear to my heart, having worked in the field of psycho-geriatrics for years, which happens to be probably our most vulnerable of elders. Probably as I am nearing that age myself—

An Honourable Member: Seniordom.

Ms. Korzeniowski: Seniordom, thank you. I am delighted that it has been recognized as a serious problem, that the honourable Member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay) has indicated. My biggest problem is that I am wondering, having worked in the field, I guess the honourable Minister for Seniors has so eloquently spoken about what we are doing, and I do not know if that is aging. I tend to talk about the past a lot. I guess I am wondering where the Opposition was when this problem was identified. I know it was identified and brought to their attention when I was working in the field, because it was a source of considerable frustration to me.

For instance, I am wondering where you were when the honourable Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak), the then-critic for the Opposition, had brought forward the bill for the protection of persons in care, which is, in my

mind, one of the most important, significant bills that have been passed in the protection of the elderly. I know that the staff of the Seniors Directorate, even then, had brought forward a few suggestions, recommendations that were ignored, that have been addressed since we have come to power. I happen to know that because, like I said, it was a tremendous frustration for me working in the system when I knew these problems existed. I knew that they were identified, and they were not being addressed.

I guess, because I worked in health, I would probably like to focus the most on the bill for protections of people in care, because I know the most about it. There were several things that bothered me. I happened to work in both the institutions, in-patient and I worked in the community and I went out and did assessments in nursing homes, so I have a fairly well-rounded idea of what was going on. In addition, I sat on the board of Alzheimer's and heard the complaints coming from family there. So I like to think I have a fairly good idea of what the general public and not just my own opinions were.

I do remember, in 1990, particularly, the standards in the nursing homes were quite atrocious. I think we are all familiar with the Holiday Haven episode, in '97 I believe it was, that really initiated this whole investigation. But I do remember discussing the standards, and I believe I remember the Throne Speech in 1990, there was a promise of addressing these standards and it just never seemed to happen. I do remember a lot of the family members telling me, complaining consistently, and I guess one of the biggest things that this bill did, the legislation creates a formal process for reporting, investigating and resolving allegations in suspicions of abuse in health care settings. The act itself protects employees from retribution for bringing incidents to the attention of authorities.

It also protects employees from malicious reporting. I can speak to that personally. I did speak to it actually when I spoke to the act, and I think it bears repeating. I would just like to reiterate a letter that was written by a health care professional, who happened to be a social worker who worked at one of the homes that was being investigated.

I would like to read it into the record. It is a quote: My only regret is not reporting this information years ago. I must admit, though, that I was afraid of losing my job and never working again in Manitoba. As well, I had reported incidents in the past to the administrator and met with her and other staff with several of the same concerns for the welfare of the residents and this information was totally disregarded. As a matter of fact, I was told by the administrator to stop monitoring things from my office. I realize now that it is important to reveal what I have seen and heard. God willing, neither you nor I will have to worry about family's and friends' health care in long-term facilities. I will sleep better knowing that I have shared the truth as I know it with you.

The other, I guess it is so broad, I hardly know where to start, but I suppose what occurs to me is that, at the time, the previous government was the greatest perpetrator in elder abuse just in the firing of 1000 nurses. The implications of that firing, I do not think many people are totally aware of because it just had such a domino effect on the kind of lack of service, the lack of trained nurses, the lack of appropriate skills that allowed proper care to be given to the patients. I do not limit it to people in health care facilities because, as I said, I worked in out-patient and a lot of people were just coming in for either temporary respite or assessments and going back into the community and were followed up in the community. So my comments are not limited to people in the health care institutions.

I guess one of the other in terms of the staffing that came to mind was because so many were lacking the appropriate training, that created problems that maybe would not have been. For instance, with medications that were not duly recognized, there are people that suffered pain. There was a pain study done at Deer Lodge Centre, as a matter of fact, that showed that many, many of the patients were suffering pain unnecessarily simply due to a lack of identification or a misinterpretation and were denied the appropriate kind of care they needed.

So one of the other recommendations at the time that the Seniors Directorate had recommended, that was ignored, that we have now done, is made an amendment to the

snowbirds pharmaceutical prescription administration. I guess that would be called almost an abuse, not an abuse, it would be a discrimination by not allowing people, the elders to go down to the southern warm places where they would be healthier, psychologically and physically healthier. That has now been extended to allow people to do that. That recommendation came when the previous government was in power, and it was ignored. It was one of the first things brought to our attention and has been, I am delighted to say, recommended.

The other frustrations for me at the time, I was working with a considerable number of Alzheimer's patients, was trying to advocate, along with the society, to have Aricept accepted. I went through the frustration of having it go three times before the government, and, coincidentally, it just was accepted by the government to be paid just before the election.

An Honourable Member: And you think there was a coincidence?

Ms. Korzeniowski: I think, I do not know, it just seemed to me, it seemed kind of—*[interjection]* Yes, yes.

I would like to tell you about the kind of abuse that puts people through. There is one family that comes to mind. They were paying over \$400 a prescription and could ill afford it. It was constantly putting people in the position of having to either allow—and the drug did not work for everyone but, upon assessment and trial, could extend, improve, bring back a quality of life and extend the person's quality of life for years. This one particular family, it was amazing. It had brought the man back from being totally unintelligible to a functioning father and husband and grandfather again. They were facing financial ruin. What a choice to make. Do you want to have your loved one have their quality of life extended? Do you want to have to go into financial ruin so that the physical life that you would be able to lead with them was no longer, I guess, as worth what they were trying to save it for?

While we are speaking of Alzheimer's, I would like to mention that there is such an increase in Manitoba. At the time, in 1999, there were 15 000 Alzheimer's victims, 1 in 13 over

65 that would develop the disease; 50 to 90 percent are in personal care homes. These statistics are misleading because many of the frail elderly are still at home.

* (17:40)

I think these again are our most vulnerable because they cannot speak for themselves. I think all the more reason that our Protection for Persons in Care Act allows for people to identify and address the kinds of abuses that are noticed when they are coming in for, say, a respite or an assessment and go home. So it does cover more than just while they are in an institution. It does allow follow-up in their home.

Rest assured it is not limited to staff. Certainly family members, whether inadvertently or deliberately, take advantage of their elder parents or relatives or friends or associates that they are taking care of. The cognitively impaired are particularly susceptible to this kind of abuse. This bill has allowed—*[interjection]* Oh, I am sorry. Jeepers, I just wanted to mention, I see my time is almost up. I would like to mention the one other act that has just recently come through, that avoids the kind of fraud that people are capable of, is the reverse mortgage act that was just passed by our Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Smith) that prevents strangers from taking advantage of people. I had a couple that were dealing with both parents having Alzheimer's being taken advantage of by these kinds of people.

So, once again, I have trouble with the fact that it is not recognized. I cannot support this because our Government is not recognized as having done the kinds of things they have. I think, if the wording were just changed to THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba congratulate the provincial Government in providing Manitobans with comprehensive public awareness and educational programs that create better awareness about elder abuse, et cetera, that I could support this resolution, but, in its present state, the implied lack of action keeps me from accepting it.

Again, I applaud the member for bringing it to attention, and I applaud our Government for the incredible work that has been done since we have come to power. I think I speak for all of

Manitobans who have been at the risk of having this abuse happen to them in whatever form. Thank you very much.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay) for her resolution on elder abuse. This is an important topic, and I appreciate the opportunity to address it.

What is our Government doing in this area? The Seniors Directorate has recognized the importance of the issue of elder abuse through its elder abuse initiative. Two term FTEs are allocated to the initiative, including the seniors abuse line co-ordinator and an elder abuse consultant. The Seniors Directorate is developing a concerted, multidisciplinary approach to addressing elder abuse. Key components of the strategy include an elder abuse consultant, a seniors abuse line co-ordinator, the seniors abuse line, education and awareness, and the development of community-based response and monitoring teams.

The Seniors Directorate promotes public awareness of elder abuse through the distribution of the pamphlet *Respect our Seniors* and the poster *EXPECT RESPECT—You've earned it* to seniors organizations and resource councils throughout Manitoba. To date, approximately 20 000 pamphlets have been distributed. I believe this is a poster that members of the Legislature received, and, when I receive posters like this, I put them in the window of my constituency office. I believe this is one that was there for quite a while.

In 2000, the Seniors Directorate and Manitoba Health formed a partnership in preparation for the introduction of The Protection for Persons in Care Act. This act protects adults living in personal care homes, in hospitals, from physical, sexual, mental, emotional and financial abuse at the hands of family members, acquaintances or caregivers. The act was passed in the spring of 2001, and the directorate now assists Manitoba Health in delivering education regarding this new legislation.

Under the legislation, those working in health facilities have a duty to report suspected abuse or the likelihood of abuse to the Protection

for Persons in Care office. Concerned citizens who suspect an abusive situation may contact the office, which is located at 300 Carlton Street. There is also a toll-free number. I would like to point out that this is similar to child welfare legislation, where there is an obligation for people who suspect neglect or abuse to report.

The legislation creates a formal process for reporting, investigating and resolving allegations and suspicions of abuse in health care settings. The act itself protects employees from retribution for bringing incidents to the attention of authorities. It also protects employees from malicious reporting.

The reporting process is straightforward. Concerned citizens can call the Protection for Persons in Care office. The complaint will be assessed and checked. Under the law, an independent investigator will have the right to enter locations where a complaint has been made and gather information. Facility operators must comply with any direction given to protect a patient during the investigation. The investigator must complete their report within 30 days.

I think the members here will recall that there were several incidents of abuse in seniors facilities, and the result, I believe, was this legislation, because people were concerned that these situations existed and that they could reoccur. Following an investigation, criminal wrongdoing can be referred to the police and allegations of professional misconduct, and professional misconduct can be referred to a professional licensing body. Individuals who contravene the act can be fined up to \$20,000, and corporations found to be in violation of the legislation can face fines of up to \$30,000. Operators of personal care homes and hospitals must maintain a reasonable level of safety and protect patients from abuse.

In response to an investigation, the facility operator may be directed to take specific actions to protect patients from abuse. Operators are required to comply with any ministerial directions and provide a report on the action taken. In addition, the Manitoba Council on Aging recognizes elder abuse as an important issue and supports the direction of the Minister responsible for Seniors and the Manitoba

Seniors Directorate have undertaken through the elder abuse initiative.

The elder abuse consultant hired by the Seniors Directorate will assume a lead role in the further development of the following components of the Manitoba strategy. Education and awareness about elder abuse targeted to Manitoba seniors, professionals who work with older adults and the general public, the purpose of this education and awareness is to educate these groups about what elder abuse is, indicators of abuse, prevention of elder abuse, the role of the professional in responding and intervening and what government and community supports are available for information and assistance, the development of community-based response in monitoring teams to ensure that services and supports are co-ordinated and available as close to the abused older person as possible. These response units encompass the support of individuals from many disciplines, including home care, law enforcement, psycho-geriatrics, seniors organizations and resource councils, health care, financial institutions, law, clergy, housing, emergency shelters, community organizations and government.

The Seniors Abuse Line. Increased education and awareness will ensure that abused seniors have access to supports that will end their silence. An essential component of this access includes the Seniors Abuse Line as a first point of contact where seniors, their families, professionals and the public have access to appropriate and accurate information about elder abuse. There is also federal, provincial and territorial collaboration.

Ministers responsible for Seniors have identified elder abuse as a priority issue. Resources are being considered on a national level for research, including the development of an inventory of programs, policies and legislation to address elder abuse. Elder abuse is one of six major issues to be discussed at the federal-provincial-territorial meeting for ministers responsible for seniors planned for June 2002.

I would also like to put on the record some involvement that I have had with seniors that is very instructive when it comes to elder abuse.

One day I received a phone call, as a member of the Legislature, from one of my constituents. She was concerned about a friend of hers who is elderly. She was taking food every day, hot meals, to this person, but she was very concerned because this lady had not been out of bed for three days, and she was having trouble climbing over snow banks in order to gain access to the house. She phoned me and said, you know, I am very, very concerned about this elderly friend of mine. She has a daughter, but the daughter is not looking after her.

I immediately phoned Home Care and asked them to do a home visit and assessment. Once the Home Care staff got there within a very short period of time, they immediately called an ambulance and sent her to Seven Oaks Hospital. She almost died because of dehydration. She was in intensive care for a long time and then a long time convalescing in Seven Oaks Hospital and then was transferred to Holy Family Nursing Home.

* (17:50)

I was told that the investigation included the possibility of laying criminal fraud charges against the daughter, who was not looking after her mother in any way but coming every month to pick up her old age pension cheques. So we know that elder abuse occurs in the community and that it can be very, very serious. This example that I am citing is an example of how family members can and do abuse seniors in their own family.

The other incident in which I was peripherally involved was being a power of attorney for a senior, and then, when she died, I was an executor for her estate. I was aware that she had a will, that she had a copy in her safety deposit box and that the lawyer had a typed copy of this will. However, she had friends who were looking after her. I would have to say that, for the most part, they were doing a good job looking after her. But, when she died and we cleaned out the house, we found a holograph will, or a handwritten will. We took it to the lawyer, and then we had to make a decision. Were we going to include this when the will was probated and put it in front of a judge and say is this a valid will?

Well, the lawyer and I suspected that this had been dictated, and that this senior, who was about 90 years old when she died, had help in writing this will, that someone had told her what to write, and that she had written it down in her own handwriting. Fortunately, it was garbled and it was not clear, and she was not completely in control of all her faculties at that time. So the other executor basically backed down and did not insist that it go before a judge. It was a good thing because, basically, it left the entire estate to this individual who, we think, was coaching her and helping her to write a new will, a different will than the one at her lawyer's office.

So that was a very interesting and educational experience. In this case, it was a family friend who, the lawyer and I thought, was trying to defraud her and basically change her intentions of her previously written will.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I am going to conclude. But I would like to reiterate that this is an important topic, that this affects a lot of people in our constituencies. From time to time, we can be involved in a very positive way with individuals who may be victimized by elder abuse. Thank you.

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to put a few brief comments on the record on this private member's resolution.

I am going to speak in particular about the third WHEREAS, which states: "WHEREAS elder abuse can take many different forms, whether it be the misuse of medication, neglect, emotional, physical, psychological, or financial abuse." I am going to speak in particular about financial abuse, and I am taking that phrase "financial abuse" in a slightly different context than, I think, others have mentioned. That is truly a scourge for many elderly people when family or other people take advantage of them and, in some cases, their life savings have been destroyed, et cetera. Those are extreme cases, and we hope that they are becoming less and less prevalent.

Mr. Speaker, when I read the resolution and I looked at who had brought forward the resolution, the delicious irony just flew out at

me. I could not help myself. I asked to be able to put a few words on the record, because I do not think any other member of the Legislature having their name attached to a resolution that deals with financial abuse of the elderly would have gotten my attention to the extent that this had.

Mr. Speaker, we all in this Chamber know that the member who brought forward this, the Member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay), in 1996, was the Speaker of the House, and we all know what happened in November of 1996 in the Legislature. Those of us who care about parliamentary procedure, who care about it not just as a sort of an internal, inside-the-beltway concept, but who believe that a thousand years of parliamentary rule should not be overthrown at a moment's whim, were terribly upset and devastated by the actions of the former Speaker of the House. We all know what happened in November, and those of us who participated in that process will never, ever forget the shame that occurred, the shame that was put onto the Speaker's position in this House, in November of 1996.

So, when the former Speaker brings forward a resolution that talks about financial abuse of the elderly, I could not stop from speaking because the outcome of that terrible, awful debacle, the destruction of the parliamentary procedure, a thousand years of parliamentary rule in this Chamber that was visited upon the people of Manitoba, and the institution of Parliament in this Chamber by the Member for Seine River was not the only thing that was dreadful about that process. But guess what, Mr. Speaker?

Because of the actions of the former government and most particularly the actions of the former Speaker, the Telephone System was sold. It was privatized.

Mr. Speaker, there is where the financial abuse of the elderly takes place, in my mind. How much has an average phone bill gone up? A 65% increase on a regular telephone bill.

A telephone is seen as an essential service to people. What other group is, in many ways, more tied to the telephone than the elderly, who are many of them in their homes, who cannot

afford to go out much, whose lifeline is the telephone, and not only social lifeline and family lifeline but, in many cases, literal lifeline? If you do not have a telephone, you cannot call 911, now, can you? You cannot call MedicAlert. You cannot call your family. You cannot call your friends.

The actions of the former government led by the actions of the former Speaker in this House have led to the financial abuse of elderly when it comes to the 65% average increase in the telephone rates for the province of Manitoba, people in Manitoba, people in rural and northern Manitoba. Some people do not like the truth.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I am here to put on the record the truth about one element of the behaviour and the actions of the former government in dealing with a hugely important and critical element for the financial and social and quality of life, well-being for seniors and elders in this province as changes that the former government instituted have helped make those financial, emotional and social health of elders much more difficult to achieve.

So it is very interesting and deliciously ironic, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, that the Member for Seine River, a major player in the debacle that led to the privatization of the Telephone System and the 65% average increase in the phone bill, has the temerity to bring in a private member's resolution into this House that discusses financial abuse of the elderly. Mr. Speaker, I think that it is a symptom of the disdain that the Opposition has for the political process, the parliamentary process that this resolution with this phrase in it came into being.

Let us talk about financial abuse of the elders, but let us expand it to something that virtually every single elder person has to deal with in this province.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 17, 2002

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