



Third Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

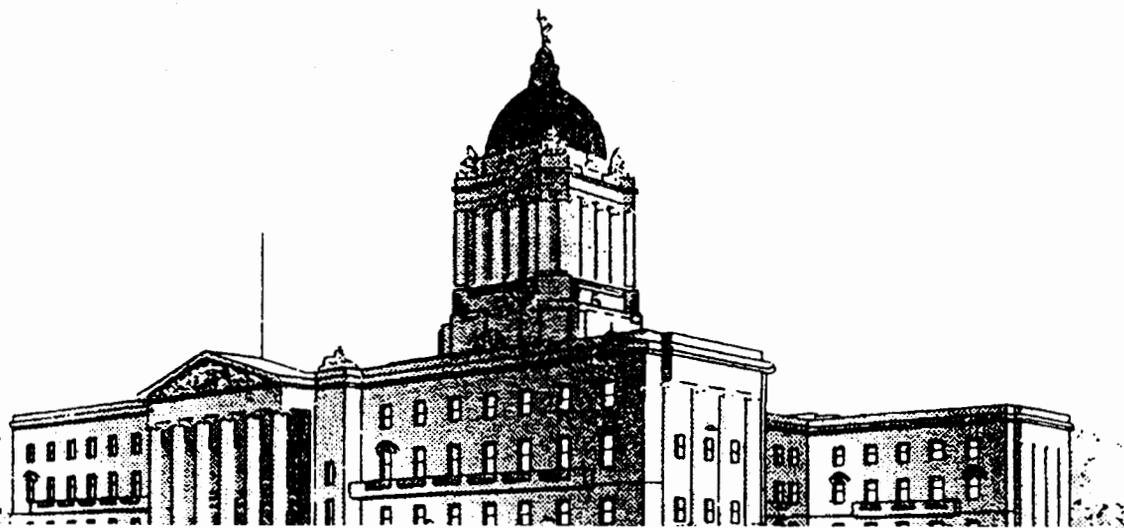
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*



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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.
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ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky, Hon.	Inkster	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
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CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
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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.
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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.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
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MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
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MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
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PENNER, Jim	Steinbach	P.C.
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REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
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SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
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TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 4, 2002

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Transcona-Springfield School Division

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

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Transcona-Springfield School Division

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

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. The 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.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 49—The Purchase of Winnipeg Hydro Act

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Friesen), that leave be given to introduce Bill 49, The Purchase of Winnipeg Hydro Act; Loi sur l'achat de Winnipeg Hydro, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Administrator, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House. I would like to table the Administrator's message.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We will have to ask the honourable minister to get another seconder,

because the honourable Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs was not in her seat when the motion was moved.

Mr. Selinger: I will change that then to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Attorney General (Mr. Mackintosh), that leave be given to introduce Bill 49, The Purchase of Winnipeg Hydro Act, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Administrator, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House and his message has been tabled.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the acquisition of Winnipeg Hydro by Manitoba Hydro will lead to a more streamlined and efficient energy company which increases the chances of economic development in Manitoba and will allow for maximization of export revenue opportunities while ensuring that Hydro rates remain the lowest in North America.

The sale will also provide the City of Winnipeg with a stable revenue stream and will give Winnipeg Hydro customers access to savings through Manitoba Hydro initiatives such as its Power Smart program. In addition, within five years, a new downtown Hydro building will also benefit Winnipeg and all of Manitoba. As well, the interests of employees in the new merged utility have been protected by this legislation.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from the Lions Manor 18 visitors under the direction of Mrs. Sherry Harris. These visitors are located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Friesen).

Also in the public gallery we have from Australia Kjell Andersson, Benjie Flores, Miggy

Flores, Joakim Flores, Chelsea Marie Flores-Andersson, and from Winnipeg we have Mae Uson, Chibu Uson, Anna Uson and Mikey Uson. These visitors are the guests of the honourable Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub).

* (13:35)

Also in the Speaker's Gallery we have Pam, James, William and Amanda Hadfield from Richmond Hill, Ontario, and also Syl Wowchuk from Cowan, Manitoba. These guests are here on behalf of the honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk).

Also I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Ottawa Rev. Peter Hobbs, his daughters, Hannah, Rachel and Mary Hobbs, and niece, Lisa Francis. These visitors are the guests of the honourable Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Health Care Support Workers Labour Dispute—Contingency Plan

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, 10 000 health care workers, support workers who provide services in more than 80 hospitals, clinics and personal care homes throughout Manitoba are the backbone of our health care system, as has been referenced even by the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak).

Mr. Speaker, keeping these people and looking after our loved ones is a job they do, whether it is cooking, maintaining cleaning supplies, providing clerical support and obviously maintaining equipment and buildings.

Ninety-nine percent of these health care workers have voted—89, I am sorry. Mr. Speaker, 89 percent of these health care workers have voted to go on strike. Can the Premier tell Manitoba families and patients who perhaps are waiting in corridors what is his contingency plan if these 10 000 health care workers go on strike?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I find it passing strange that the Leader of the Opposition would talk about the health care workers and support staff who are working in the kitchens of Manitoba when many of them came down to this Legislature a few years ago and pleaded with the former government not to transfer their jobs to Markham, Ontario, and have frozen food from Markham, Ontario. His crocodile tears ring hollow with members on this side.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious situation. There is an impasse at the bargaining table. We will use every means at our disposal to reach a settlement at the bargaining table using every means possible to bridge the gap, but there is a gap and we will try to close it in the usual collective bargaining way. We have a contingency plan in place and members opposite do not have to ask the questions. It is under the existing legislation.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about 10 000 health care workers who have voted 89 percent in favour of the strike. It is clear what we have seen from the Doer government time and time again is trying to come in at the eleventh hour. Meanwhile, families and patients, those people are held with disregard on the basis that there is no contingency plan.

I ask the Premier simply: On behalf of families, patients who are wondering what is going on, what is his contingency plan?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I remember three emergency ward strikes that took place under the former government. Collective bargaining is not collective acquiescence. This is a tough situation. We have a responsibility to respect the people we are negotiating with. We respect the role they are playing in providing services to health care patients. At the same time, recruitment and retention and the balance for the taxpayers must be considered.

Collective bargaining is not collective acquiescence. We will be respectful. We will attempt to negotiate a settlement at the table, but we do have a contingency plan in place and it is consistent and pursuant to the existing act in the Legislature.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is brought to my attention that the last time health care support workers went on strike was in the eighties. I think that is something that member should remember.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (13:40)

Mr. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Government's contingency plan involve closing hospital beds and cancelling surgeries?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite does not have his facts straight. Home care went on strike for literally weeks because the Tories tried to privatize it. That was in 1996 or 1997. Health care support staff were on strike at the Tache nursing home and many other nursing homes in Manitoba. I am surprised the member opposite does not know that. That strike went on for weeks and weeks. We met with the families, in Opposition, dealing with their loved ones.

Obviously, our goal is to get a settlement at the table. If we do not, we have a contingency plan in place. The contingency plan that is in place is under the existing Essential Services Act of Manitoba.

Health Care Support Workers Labour Dispute—Contingency Plan

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Hospitals, personal care homes and community health centres are all going to be affected if there is a strike by the health care support workers.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health what his contingency plan will be if the nurses refuse to cross the picket line of the health care support workers.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Charleswood just asked a question. I hope all members will have the courtesy for her to be allowed to hear the answer. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as occurred during the recent nurses' negotiations which we successfully concluded and as occurred during the doctors' negotiations which we successfully concluded and as occurs in every single exigency and every single occurrence across the system, contingency plans are obviously put in place to protect patient care.

With respect to nurses, I can tell members opposite we did not and will not do what members opposite did and eliminate 1000 nursing jobs, as they did when they were in office.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health: What will happen to all of the elderly patients in the personal care homes if there is a strike? Because right now most of that patient care is delivered by the health care aides, and if the health care aides go on strike I would like to ask this minister: What is his plan for caring for these elderly people?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as I recall, during the course of members opposites' tenure in government they gave those same workers a minus 2 percent. As I recall, there was a home care strike that lasted several weeks when members opposite were in government. As I recall, there was a personal care home strike that lasted weeks when members opposite were in government.

We intend to deal with respect with the workers. We intend to work with them. We intend to continue negotiations with them.

Mrs. Driedger: I would like to ask this Minister of Health how he is going to ensure patient care and patient safety, because the last time maintenance workers went on strike in this province the Health Sciences Centre had to discharge 50 percent of their patients. Is that what we can expect if there is a strike now, that patient surgeries will be cancelled, that patients will be discharged from the hospital and our waiting lists are going to be exacerbated? Is that his idea of a contingency plan?

* (13:45)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier response, we have contingency plans

in place. We had them in place during the course of the nurses' negotiations, during the course of the doctors' negotiations and, of course, we have them in place.

Members opposite did not have a very successful record of negotiating with health care workers. In fact, their record was deplorable. They tried to privatize those services. They gave a minus 2 to those very same workers.

Mr. Speaker, we are trying to treat them with respect and trying to deal with the gap between their demands, what we can afford and how we can best utilize that in the interests of all patients for patient care in Manitoba.

Gimli Rail Line Status

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) has stated Cando and the CPR are still negotiating the deal. Once again the Labour Minister does not know the details, that without an exception from her legislation, which is Bill 18, the two sides have said they have nothing to talk about.

Can the Minister of Labour tell us exactly which Manitoba short-line companies, other than Cando Contracting, have approached the CPR regarding taking possession of that very economically important rail line to Gimli?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): The situation of Cando and CPR and the Gimli line is one that is very important. Negotiations are continuing with Cando and CPR. Consultations have occurred over the last few days this week with all parties. I can assure members we are in constant contact with the principals, including Mr. Gord Peters, CPR and the distillery in Gimli.

I do want to indicate the process is underway, that we see a possible solution and are pleased all members are at the table.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, since the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) has no answers, will the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Ashton) finally set the Minister of Labour straight and let her know that the only option CPR is really looking

at now that the Cando deal has collapsed is abandoning the Gimli line north of Selkirk?

Ms. Mihychuk: I would like to set the record straight and indicate to the public and members across the House the deal is not over. In fact, we are working with Cando to find a solution in this case which has a viable, strong future.

Mr. Helwer: Will the Minister of Transportation maybe answer the question that I asked the Premier (Mr. Doer) last week that he would not answer? How much additional highway upgrading and maintenance funding will be required for Highways 8 and 9, given that rail service to these major Interlake businesses will no longer be available as a result of the Minister of Labour's bungling?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): It is actually nice to get a highways question in the House. I want to reinforce and to quote Yogi Berra: it ain't over till it's over, in terms of the rail line. I know my colleague the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines is working on that. But I also want to stress again, I would suggest the member perhaps look around the Interlake, including on Highway 8, that we have done a lot in the last two and a half years. In fact, it is a banner year for construction for highways in the Interlake this year.

* (13:50)

Short-line Railways Impact of Labour Legislation

Mr. David Faurchou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, the ministers are refusing to answer the questions. Last week, the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) refused to answer the questions in regard to Bill 18, which she pushed through the House here two years ago and about the negative effects this legislation is having on industries here in the province of Manitoba, and when the Doer government has stopped the expansion of an employee-owned company that is the No. 1 employed transportation company in Manitoba as recognized by the Transportation Minister (Mr. Ashton). Will the Minister of Labour now finally answer the question that clause 58.1 is the only clause in Bill 18 that is causing all of this concern?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): Again, I would like to reiterate that this is an opportunity for Manitoba. This is a situation where there are a number of situations that have to be clarified and a solution to be found.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government that wants to work with all partners and has, over a long record of success. And we intend to make this a positive situation with Cando, CP and Gimli. So, the situation is not over, it is in progress and we are working with all members to find a solution.

Labour Relations Act Amendments

Mr. David Faurchou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I want to, once again, pose my question to the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett) because it is obvious that she has not explained to her colleagues what Bill 18 has done to the short-line railway industry here in Manitoba. I want to ask the Minister of Labour: Will she amend The Labour Relations Act and remove 58.1 from labour legislation?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): Mr. Speaker, the Opposition seems to want to hang their hat on an issue which is not the crucial issue. We believe—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to reiterate that the negotiations are ongoing, that all partners to the deal continue to work to find a satisfactory solution given the framework present. The members opposite wish to make this a killed deal and hang their hat on a political agenda. It is not the situation in this case.

Short-line Railways Impact of Labour Legislation

Mr. David Faurchou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, obviously the minister is ill-informed. I want to ask the minister to realize that the company involved in this deal, Cando Contracting, is an employee-owned company and this legislation has stopped this employee-owned—

* (13:55)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hate to interrupt in the middle, but one of the rules we have is in the public gallery there is to be no filming. I would ask the gentleman up there to please put that camera down. That is a rule we have for all visitors. Thank you for your co-operation.

I am sorry, I apologize to the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie. I will give you the opportunity to start right over again with your question. Not with a question, but with your second supplementary question.

Mr. Faurschou: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Understanding that the minister is ill-informed, I will pose the question. Essentially there is no negotiating taking place at this point in time. In fact, Bill 18—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I know the member is leaving us hanging with his question, Mr. Speaker, but you gave him extra time. Would you please remind him that a supplementary question requires no preamble?

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, he does have a point of order. But I will take some responsibility for repeating of the question because I stopped him in mid-flight. I would ask the honourable member to please put his question.

* * *

Mr. Faurschou: My question to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines: Does she realize that Bill 18 is responsible for this impasse and that she is jeopardizing numerous jobs because the legislation is forcing Cando to unionize?

Ms. Mihychuk: Again, I would like to inform members that negotiations and discussions with

the principals of Cando are ongoing. Unless members opposite are Gord Peters, I can assure them that from the ministerial office my information is accurate. Members opposite are not in my office. I find it quite incredible and presumptuous of the members opposite to know what negotiations are going on. Are they actually implying that they want the deal to collapse?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. You know, when I have to overshout the members, I think we are having a problem with decorum in here. I have asked for order a few times. I had no response, and I had to even shout. So I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please. We have guests in the gallery, we have the viewing public, and I think we have a proud tradition to uphold. I would ask all honourable members, please, for your full co-operation.

Ms. Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, again I would like to indicate that all members are continuing to work on this situation with the rail line. If it disappoints the member's political agenda I am very sorry, but in fact we are working to a positive solution.

Short-line Railways Impact of Labour Legislation

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I understand why this Government would be embarrassed with the results of Bill 18 in this case. The future of the Seagram's plant in Gimli, the community's major employer, is jeopardized. If the Gimli rail line is abandoned and hundreds of jobs are at risk and the impact of Seagram's leaving Gimli would be much larger in that community than if say, for example, MCI left Winnipeg, yet this Premier will not lift a finger. If this took place inside the Perimeter Highway, the Premier could not act fast enough. But because it is taking place outside the Perimeter he cannot be bothered.

I want to ask the Premier: Why the double-standard?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I find the divisive nature of the Conservative Party and the critics opposite to be incredible. First, they ask questions that are pro-labour and then they

go to questions that are anti-rights before the Labour Board. Now they are asking questions about inside the Perimeter Highway and outside the Perimeter Highway. I have to remind members opposite that we had to pick up the mess that was made after the sale of McKenzie Seeds in Brandon. We treated McKenzie Seeds with the same respect as we did MCI, no thanks to members opposite. We do not look at Manitoba inside the Perimeter and outside the Perimeter like this leader and this critic does. We look at all Manitobans together, and that is what we are doing.

* (14:00)

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, this is incredible. Does the Premier not see what his decision has done to companies like Cando? His legislation, Bill 18, has stopped them from expanding and now the Crocus Fund, an important investor in this employee-owned company is wavering because Cando has been stopped from expanding. The Government is determined to kill this rural industry.

Will the Premier do the right thing and repeal Bill 18?

Mr. Doer: Again, to continue on, there was no program in place for rural doctors' offices in rural Manitoba when we came into office. There is a rural doctors' office now in Winkler. When we came into office, the Isobord plant had lost over \$20 million of taxpayers' money. We put that program back together again outside of the city of Winnipeg. When we came into office, Mr. Speaker, there was nothing on ethanol development in Manitoba. Now there is action for ethanol development in Manitoba, and we are treating the plant in Gimli with the same respect and priority as all those other matters.

Mr. Maguire: I ask the Premier, who seems willing to kill the expansion of short lines and hundreds of jobs in Manitoba to protect four, I repeat, four unionized positions, I ask him again: Will this Premier do the responsible thing and repeal Bill 18?

Mr. Doer: We are working with the Canadian Pacific Railway, with the communities. We are working and will continue to work with short-

line railways, we are working with all kinds of opportunities in short line when the major carriers abandon routes or look at alternatives for those routes.

Mr. Speaker, it would remind members opposite, when they were presented with the option of equalizing hydro rates for farm families living on the farm, they said no. This Government said yes. I need no advice from the member opposite about treating people in rural Manitoba in a fair and equitable way.

Sustainable Development Procurement Goals

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, under The Sustainable Development Act, it says that Cabinet shall establish provincial sustainable development procurement goals and require that organizational action plans be created to meet these goals. I recognize that the Minister of Conservation tabled Manitoba's sustainable development financial management guidelines a year ago, but this does not provide procurement goals specifically. Today I ask the Minister of Conservation why there has been a delay in providing specific procurement goals and when the minister will table a list of the goals and the action plan.

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): I thank the member for the question and indicate to him that that work he was referring to is ongoing currently. The work is being done and once the work has been completed I will be reporting back to the House here as to what direction we are going to be taking.

Financial Management Guidelines

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My supplementary to the Minister of Conservation, I ask: Can the minister report on the progress in the following section of his financial management guidelines which say, and I quote: That all Government of Manitoba departments shall work toward consultations with local authorities, school divisions, colleges, regional health authorities, before these entities adopt and integrate financial management guidelines into their respective manuals and procedures? I ask the minister for an update.

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I can indicate to the member that, again, that work is ongoing. There are timeframes under which we have to complete the work, and we are working right now to complete that work within the time that has been described.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary. I ask the Minister of Conservation what progress he is making on clause (b), which requires that there is an insurance that all Government of Manitoba departments—I think that the minister is not aware of his guidelines. I would like to table them so he has them.

I ask the minister what progress he is making on clause (b) to ensure that all Manitoba government departments, including the Department of Education, have full cost-accounting of all their policies, programs and activities.

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Speaker, again, I think the member knows himself that there are timelines that have been set for the work to be completed. Work is ongoing right now, and once the work has been completed then I can report back to the House as to what direction we are going to be taking. But we have certain time frames under which we can do the work.

Ethanol Industry Development

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, ethanol has enormous potential for the environment and the economy, especially in rural areas.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Food describe Manitoba's ethanol potential and explain how the Government plans to capitalize on this potential?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend for raising a question that is a very important issue for rural Manitoba. When you look at other areas of the country where the ethanol industry has been developed, you can see that it leads to many jobs. It brings economic stability and jobs to rural communities. It

contributes to a cleaner environment for future generations, and I see this as a tremendous opportunity for the farming community, for rural communities, opportunities for the livestock industry and many other jobs.

I am only disappointed that the Opposition does not take this seriously and did not address it previously. We are addressing it, Mr. Speaker. We put in place a panel that is going to consult with rural Manitobans and urban Manitobans, people involved in the fuel industry, and find a way to ensure that this ethanol industry does grow in Manitoba and does bring economic activity and prosperity to rural Manitoba.

Health Care System Access to Surgery

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, last October it was brought to light that patients were waiting months and months in Winnipeg for minor surgery while the rural ORs were sitting empty. At that time, the Minister of Health indicated that he was putting a plan in place and that he would announce that plan soon.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health when he will release this plan, and what exactly does "soon" mean to this Minister of Health?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the member may not know it, but during the 1990s, the Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation did a study on repatriation of surgery from urban to rural Manitoba for the previous government that the previous government took and put on the shelf and did not implement.

* (14:10)

Mrs. Driedger: The minister certainly did not answer the question.

I would like to ask this Minister of Health: How long is he prepared to wait before he comes up with a plan? Certainly the longer he dawdles on this, the longer patients are waiting to have access to surgeries in Manitoba. When is his plan going to be brought forward?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, first off, I do not know if the member saw the latest report about

hips and knees across the country that said Manitoba had the No. 1, was best in the entire country. We all remember last year how members opposite flayed and went after our program for expanding surgeries and wanted to have everything privatized. So now they are coming back. I did indicate, in fact, we are going to be doing a surgical repatriation program in rural Manitoba and a surgical repatriation program in northern Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: I would like to ask the minister when he is prepared to release that plan. He did announce nine months ago he was going to have a plan for it and he was going to release it soon. Is he prepared today to release that plan so patients in Manitoba know when they can have quicker access to care?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, it will not be 11 years of cutting 1400 acute care beds that occurred over the last 11 years.

I announced the plan. I said we would be putting in place a surgical repatriation plan. We are very close to that announcement. I also announced, in addition, an area of the province members opposite may not be familiar with that is called northern Manitoba. We are also going to do a repatriation plan in that place that is called northern Manitoba. It will have surgery closer to home.

Manitoba Hydro Financial Statements

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in the history of Manitoba Hydro the Doer government is forcing the company to pay a dividend to help this Government cover its deficit financing. In fact, worse than that, they are forcing Manitoba Hydro to go out and borrow \$288 million in order to help them preserve their balanced budget.

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance if, during his meeting today at noon with the chairman of Manitoba Hydro and the president of Manitoba Hydro, he had the courtesy to ask them to present the financial statements that their board of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I wish this Government would take this issue a little more seriously.

I would ask the minister: During his meeting at noon today with the chairman of Manitoba Hydro and the president of Manitoba Hydro, did he have the courage to ask them to present to him the financial statement that was approved by Manitoba Hydro's board on June 13 which clearly shows that Manitoba Hydro does not have the cash to pay the dividend?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, there is an unconfirmed rumour going around that a tall man in a trench coat has been lurking in the halls of the Legislature checking out all the behaviour of the people coming in and out of the building.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): In *Beauchesne* 417 it says that answers to questions should deal with the matter raised. Mr. Speaker, between the giggling and the cheap shots that are going on from ministers of this Government that are taking a million dollars a day of Hydro revenue to balance their books and satisfy their spending spree, this Minister of Finance should be ashamed at the manner in which he stands up and reports to Manitobans about how he is milking their Manitoba Hydro to the tune of a million dollars a day. That kind of an answer is shameful.

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

Mr. Selinger: On that point of order, a question should be a question, not an expression of opinion, representation, argumentation or debate. We frequently get accusations from the Member for Fort Whyte. Very rarely do we get questions.

He may wish to lurk in the halls and check out on the activity of the people coming and

entering the building but I can tell you, when we came to deal with the Budget this year, we put in front of the Legislature the requirements we had to balance the Budget. We did not do it through the back door as the members opposite did to the water power rental agreement and not be accountable to the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

First of all, before I make a ruling, I would like to remind all honourable members that a point of order is not to be used for rebuttal or debate, back and forth. On the point of order raised, I would like to remind all honourable ministers that answers to questions should deal with the matter and not to provoke debate.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Finance, conclude your comment, please.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I reiterate my point. We put in front of the Legislature the measures that we thought necessary to balance the Budget this year and protect essential services in Manitoba as well as reduce debt and continue to make Manitoba an affordable place to live. Members opposite had a secret water power rental agreement from which they extracted money from Manitoba Hydro to pay for government priorities. We have been honest with the Legislature, unlike the members opposite.

Mr. Loewen: The truth be known, the minister doubled the water power rental agreement. He doubled the fee.

I would ask the minister if he expects Manitobans to believe that almost one month after the board of Manitoba Hydro passed their annual financial statement he has not seen it. Is he shirking his responsibility, or is he simply trying to hide the fact that they have not got the cash?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member from Fort Whyte has asked this question on several previous occasions. The standard practice for Manitoba Hydro is to make its annual report available on July 31. The record clearly shows that. They have done that every previous year,

either on July 30 or July 31. They plan to follow the same practice this year. The member opposite knows that, and he continues in his practice of misinforming and misleading the House.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Seniors

Ms. Linda Asper (Riel): Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to your attention an important discussion that took place at the federal-provincial-territorial meeting of ministers responsible for seniors in Toronto last week. As we recently heard in the House, elder abuse is a serious issue. The security of seniors is a priority of this Government. Building on a decade of collaborative initiatives, Canada's ministers continue to take a strong interest in addressing the concerns and needs of seniors.

During last week's meeting, considerable progress was made at the national level on several seniors' issues. Planning for an aging population, ministers agreed that the expanding aging population over the next few decades presents opportunities and challenges requiring new policies and services. Healthy aging and wellness, ministers reaffirmed their commitment to helping Canadians stay healthy and well. Family and formal caregiving to seniors, ministers value and recognize the very important role family, friends and neighbours play in taking care of seniors. Elder abuse, ministers recognize the need for public education and research on this topic.

* (14:20)

Manitoba continues to take a national leadership role in the area of elder abuse. Manitoba's Minister responsible for Seniors (Ms. McGifford) led the discussion on this topic. Manitoba's innovative strategy for enhancing seniors' safety and security was shared with the ministers. Manitoba's leadership resulted in a national consensus to perform a critical analysis on elder abuse. As chair of the national working group on safety and security for seniors,

Manitoba will be instrumental in this critical analysis process to allow effective strategies, initiatives and priority actions to be determined.

It is an important national concern. I am pleased to see the significant role our province is playing in improving the safety and security of our aging population.

United States of America

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, having just celebrated our 135th birthday a few days ago, it would be entirely appropriate for this House to recognize the 226th birthday of that great nation, that great friendly neighbour of ours, the Americans, the United States of America.

Despite all their problems and all their concerns, they are our true friends. They are the upholders of freedom in this world. They are there when needed by the hungry, by those in need. They are gracious in victory and they are possessed with tremendous will to improve the lot of all fellow men here on earth.

We are fortunate that we reside as their neighbours. We are fortunate in having them as our major trading partners and, Mr. Speaker, let us wish our friends to the south a very happy birthday on this July the 4th.

Anatomical Studies Memorial

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): I was sincerely honoured to represent the Premier (Mr. Doer) at the service of thanksgiving and committal for those who so graciously donated their bodies for anatomical studies. It was hosted on June 28 by the University of Manitoba's department of human anatomy and cell science of the Faculty of Medicine. The service was held at Brookside Cemetery at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago this year, the University of Manitoba and the Faculty of Medicine decided that a fitting way to end the study year was to recognize those who had willed their bodies to medical science. The purpose of this ceremony is to remind us that the deceased are first and foremost human beings and deserve to be afforded due recognition and

respect. It is also a chance for families and friends of the deceased to pay their last respects and tributes to the generosity of the deceased in giving to the service of humanity and the advancement of knowledge in the field of medical science.

The service was very moving. There were readings, prayers and blessings. Five clergy people of different religious groups officiated.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to list the names of those whose memory were honoured that day: Janis Bekeris, Fred Buchko, Mario Checkwitch, Agnes Beggs Christensen, John Earl Gray, Else Janssen, Grace Valentine King, Elizabeth Llewlyn McDonald, Nettie Nell McPherson, Marlene Gladys Frieda Medinski, Joseph Orville Nadeau, Edward Petrie, Anne Eleanor Tod, James Ogden Freeman Turner.

Altona Millennium Facility Plan

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to congratulate the people of the town of Altona and area for coming together to realize a dream. Four years ago, a local committee sowed the seeds of a millennium facility plan. This plan consisted of four main components: a new aquatic play park, a comprehensive trail system, a fund to assist local groups in the development of recreational facilities and a new exhibition centre.

On June 24, I had the pleasure of attending a sod-turning ceremony for one of the components of the millennium facility plan, Altona's new exhibition centre. Altona's mayor, Ed Klassen, along with the R.M. of Rhineland Reeve John Falk, community fundraising chairman, Menno Friesen, and two young people representing the future users of the exhibition centre plunged a spade into the earth to mark the official beginning of the construction phase.

More important than the act of digging though is the symbolism of the millennium facility plan itself. Firstly, it sends a signal that Altona and area residents are committed to the ongoing development of the region. They are making a \$3.99-million investment in facilities that will serve the region for decades to come. Secondly, this sod turning is important because

it represents what people can achieve by working together.

Since the project was first discussed in 1998, hundreds of hours of time and effort have been invested in seeing the project through to its fruition. Municipal, provincial and federal officials supported by countless individuals in the community recognized the vision and worked together to get the project to the construction stage. What is important here is the spirit of strong community can make anything happen. As a result of their efforts, the community will become a better place for the current residents and the future generations to live and grow. I congratulate the town of Altona, the surrounding community and all those who participated in the development of this plan.

Hamilton House

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): Good day, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a wonderful building located at 475 Hamilton, affectionately known as Hamilton House. It is a non-profit apartment building whose mandate is to provide affordable, comfortable housing for seniors. This building was built 25 years ago in June. It was built by the Greater Winnipeg Senior Citizen Non-Profit Housing Corporation, which also has another building on Pembina Highway. It is run by a volunteer board of directors and executive that plan activities and make decisions based on the two buildings. The board is chosen one year from Hamilton House and one from the other. It is 92 units and some space for maintenance staff. It also contains a beauty salon, kitchen and a lounge.

On the 25th anniversary tea, at which I was privileged to attend and pour tea, they gave honour for the original tenants that were in the building when it was built as a seniors residence 25 years ago. Alice Matheson, Doris Blood, Paul Wolanik [*phonetic*] and Lillian Brousseau [*phonetic*] were in attendance and were honoured. They are wonderful residents who really make it a great place.

There are lots of social activities going on. There is a Christmas dinner, concerts, annual teas, great games in the lounge, coffee breaks, where a lot of the participants are from throughout the building. They have a great time.

There are cards, puzzles, all sorts of speakers. They also participated in the trip to the Golden Boy that the honourable Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) and I sponsored. A number of people went on the excursion.

It is a vibrant building. It is a great place to live. It is a great place, with lots of friends. It is a wonderful place. I would like to congratulate the people who serve on the executive and board and who live in Hamilton House for making it a wonderful part of Assiniboia.

* (14:30)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the honourable Government House Leader, I would like to seek the agreement of the House to ensure that the report stage amendments of the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer) are considered by the House, even though the distribution of the amendments was not completed prior to the order for report stage being called today.

If agreement is given, the amendments would be considered after the agreements that were distributed prior to 10 a.m. Is there agreement? [*Agreed*]

We will now go to the Government House Leader.

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you canvass the House to determine, if necessary, if there is leave to deal with Bill 14 report stage or third reading, whatever is before the House at adjournment today, this evening at 6:30?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to deal with report stage and third reading of Bill 14 at 6:30 this evening? Is there agreement? No? There is no agreement.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, if Bill 14 is not dispensed with this afternoon, would you also canvass the House to determine if there is leave

to sit tomorrow to deal with Bill 13, Thursday hours.

Mr. Speaker: If the House does not dispense with Bill 14—

An Honourable Member: He said 13.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, did you say Bill 13 or Bill 14?

Mr. Mackintosh: Bill 14.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement that, if we are not concluded with Bill 14 today, we would sit tomorrow to deal on Thursday's hours, to sit on Friday using Thursday's hours to deal with Bill 14? Is there agreement?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. There is no agreement.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, would you canvass the House to see if there is leave to waive private members' hour this afternoon?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to waive private members' hour this afternoon?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No agreement. There is no agreement.

Mr. Mackintosh: My understanding was that there was an interest in that, Mr. Speaker. Would you please call report stage on Bill 14?

REPORT STAGE

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

Mr. Speaker: The proposed amendment to Bill 14, we are calling now Bill 14, the amendment to Bill 14 that was moved by the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and is standing in the name of the honourable Member for Morris (Mr. Pitura), who has 15 minutes remaining.

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): I will attempt to conclude some of the comments that I started out with earlier this morning.

The area that I was discussing this morning was in the area of transportation and the inability of this Government to bring forth an analysis of the costs or the savings that would be associated in the area of the amalgamation of school divisions. I was in the process of discussing the transportation, and, again, the Government has not brought forth the cost analysis as to whether transportation systems within an amalgamated school division will be more costly or less costly under the new system.

So, from that standpoint, Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ with the minister because of the increased driving distances, the increased cost of fuel and the collective agreements that often will occur. Between two school divisions, there is often a differential between collective agreements, and these collective agreements would have to be brought up to the same level.

Another area, Mr. Speaker, where the Government really has failed to bring forth any kind of cost analysis, cost-benefit analysis, is the areas of programs and the courses that are offered, the number of course offerings that would be brought about, for example, with the break-up of the Springfield-Transcona School Division with Springfield going over to the Agassiz School Division and Transcona going over to River East. Will the courses that are offered to the students in Springfield now require those students to now take those courses in the Agassiz School Division at another location which, of course, will increase the amount of travel time for the students and also in terms of increasing your costs?

So, concerning the courses that are offered to students, the question is, Mr. Speaker, if courses are going to be offered across the width and the breadth of these new amalgamated school divisions, will it be up to the students to move to where the courses are offered, or will it be up to the teachers to deliver the courses at different locations?

That has, in itself, some cost implications for an amalgamated school division. I would beg to differ again with the minister that these will be increased costs and not savings as the minister has touted or redirected dollars that the minister has indicated.

Probably what is more important in this whole process, and the reason why it is

important, I believe, for this House to adopt this amendment, is the fact that under the collective bargaining process between two school divisions with two teaching staffs where each one of those teachers' associations has bargained individually with its school division, now under an amalgamated school division this collective agreement will have to be brought together and harmonized between the two school divisions.

The minister has on record said that this does not necessarily mean that harmonization will result in an increase in collective agreement costs because he says it is up to each individual school division to bargain with their employees, and therefore they should be able to strike some sort of an agreement that will not result in a cost increase. But I would venture to say that, if you have a collective agreement process where the teachers' association with one school division is receiving considerably more money on average than in another school division, it would be the harmonization that would result in the increase in staff and salaries to the level of the highest paid group within the school divisions. You would not see the opposite occur where the highest paid would actually take a decrease in salary. I concur with that. That is the way that harmonization should work in terms of moving up to the highest level because indeed what you want to create is the most benefits for the staff that are working within the school division.

The other area, too, is the area of custodial staff, people who look after the buildings, prepare the buildings, make sure that the facilities there are clean and can be used by the students and the teaching staff so that the students can learn and so that the teachers can teach. Again, under these agreements each school division will have different agreements with its staff, whether it be in terms of salaries, whether it be in terms of the other benefits that may be attached to the collective agreement process. These collective agreements have to be harmonized. I would argue that if they are going to be harmonized, they are going to be harmonized at the highest level of the two, so there are not going to be any cost savings there or even money left to redirect.

* (14:40)

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe it is very important that the minister take a look at this

amendment and ask the House to approve this amendment so that he has to present to this Assembly a cost-benefit analysis for the formation, continuation, amalgamation or dissolution effected by the regulation that he has produced in the regulations passed separately.

You look at what other people have said about the amalgamation process, and when you have the Government talking about what a great cost-saving measure amalgamation will be in terms of the redirected dollars that might be available, here are members of the Government, right now the Deputy Minister of Education for the minister, Dr. Ben Levin, on March 8, 1994, in a submission to the Norrie Commission said, and I quote: Changing boundaries will neither save significant amounts of money nor improve students' learning experiences but will involve substantial costs in time and energy.

Why would the Government not listen to that statement coming from the minister's own deputy a mere eight years ago? Eight years ago he said that. And they said that things do not change that quickly because they are using the Norrie report. So why do they not consider the comments made by the Deputy Minister of Education?

Also, on March 27, 1996, the Education critic at that time, the Member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), said, and I quote: The reports are very consistent in finding potential cost increase and few or no savings if the Government proceeds with amalgamation. Few communities see benefits in the reorganization and in fact rural communities are concerned about the potential destructive impact on their quality of life. In Winnipeg, people worry these new divisions would result in greater bureaucracy, a loss of autonomy and increased taxes.

That is the quotation from the Member for Wolseley, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who is talking about the costs that are associated with amalgamation, about the impacts these would have on the quality of life and that it would eventually end up as increased taxes for the taxpayer. Again, it supports our arguments we have had with Bill 14 with respect to the bill is not required, that it is going to have a very negative impact on those it is affecting.

We have also heard, Mr. Speaker, that St. Boniface School Division is talking about \$2.1 million extra money that is going to be required for amalgamation. The River East School Division is talking about an increase of \$2 million in order to be able to afford amalgamation. Then my colleague from Tuxedo, earlier today, talked about the increased costs that Assiniboine South and Fort Garry school divisions will be incurring when they amalgamate as one division.

Mr. Speaker, we have told the Government this, that under The Public Schools Act as it now stands, the minister has the authority to bring about an amalgamation between two school divisions or three school divisions, no matter. The process is already there under The Public Schools Act. So the question has to be put: Why would this Government want to bring in this bill, Bill 14, when amalgamation is available under the present act? One has to ask that question.

If you take a look at some of the clauses in Bill 14, what it does is it allows the Government to obtain a greater amount of power, centralizing that power within the minister's office, giving the minister control over the amalgamated school divisions' administrative costs, over the entire budget for the school division, although I understand the Government has come forward and made some amendments to this effect to reduce the amount of time the minister has control over the school division budget from three years to one year. I would suggest if the Government sees fit to back off from three years to one year, why do they not back off completely? There is no reason for the Government and the minister to maintain or have control over a school division's budget.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Government wants to see this Bill 14 go through so that the minister can have an increased amount of power. There is also a section in that act which says everything the minister has done will be now considered lawful. I believe that is an area this Government is probably the most nervous about in getting this legislation passed, to create that which was unlawful to now be lawful under this legislation.

It would also give the minister the power to not hear any kind of Board of Reference statement with respect to boundaries between

two amalgamated school divisions. It will shut down that democratic process for this Board of Reference to take place or for anybody to challenge the minister.

Overall, this amendment to this legislation is a critical amendment. It does ask and demand of the Government and of the minister that, before amalgamation takes place between school divisions—I do not think it is an unfair question to ask—the minister provide a cost-benefit analysis for the amalgamating school divisions in order for them to be able to progress forward and to become one. I think that, if they had that information, they would be much more willing to voluntarily amalgamate. They would have probably rushed to do this process under the existing act.

With those few comments, I do want to summarize by saying that this amendment is important, should be supported by this House, the entire House, both the government side and I know that our side will be supporting it. If the minister entertains a moral obligation and a professional obligation to make this process work, then he would certainly accept the fact that we should have a support for this amendment. With those few comments, I will pass it on to my other colleagues.

Mr. David Faurichou (Portage la Prairie): I truly appreciate the opportunity to enter into debate regarding the amendment that is before us this afternoon to Bill 14, which has been moved by the Member for River Heights and seconded by the Member for Minnedosa.

Before I get into the specifics of my commentary regarding the amendment, I want to state unequivocally the disgust that I have as a member of this Manitoba Legislative Assembly towards the continued requests for additional sitting hours of this Assembly to debate this bill when this Assembly was not recalled until April 22 of this year.

As a member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, I believe that it is incumbent upon the Government to call this Assembly back in a timely fashion with regard to the legislation that the Government will be presenting before this Assembly. For this Assembly not to be called

back by the Government, when the Government recognizes the pieces of legislation that it wants to put before the Assembly for debate and then asks us to extend our sitting hours when it is April 22 of this year before we come back to this House, we could very easily, because we were only in recess on 48 hours' notice, two days' notice, have been called back into sitting by the Government in perhaps January, February, March, or even the first part of April. If, in fact, the legislation the Government knew at that time and believed to be important enough to ask for extended sitting hours now, why then did we not come back to the Legislative Assembly before April 22? Obviously, this Government is not very well organized, does not understand the legislation that they are placing before this House for debate, because they do not comprehend the obvious discussion and debate that pieces of legislation will entail.

* (14:50)

The next point that I want to address at this juncture is the number of amendments that I have at my place here this afternoon which this Assembly is being asked to consider. The Government itself recognizes that this legislation is ill written, because they have presented an amendment as well as we on this side of the House and the Member for River Heights.

I believe that this legislation, if it is, in fact, necessary, which I do not believe it is, why are we being faced with so many amendments? It is obvious that the legislation is not ready to be passed into law. I believe that perhaps this legislation should be removed from the order paper and taken back to the drawing board. Bill 14, as presented to this House, The Public Schools Modernization Act, is, in fact, not a modernization of our Public Schools Act at all.

As I had commented earlier, Bill 14 is not necessary. It is recognized even by the judicial system within our province as not being necessary. When the court entertained a submission from parents of the Transcona-Springfield School Division to ask the court to study the situation this Bill 14 is supposedly there to address, the court dismissed the application, stating there was no situation to be addressed. Therefore the call by the Government to address the topic of amalgamation is not necessary because legislation already exists and therefore

makes Bill 14 something other than paper for the recycling bin.

In any event, the Government is attempting to place before this Assembly a bill that is obviously in need of significant amendments, as we now have at our station 11 amendments to be considered at this juncture. We are into the third and final debate. I have not a long tenure here in the Assembly, but I believe we would have to look a long, long way into the history books to see this type of activity at this stage regarding any piece of legislation by any government.

Mr. Speaker, specific to the amendment we have before us this afternoon, it is calling upon the Government to amend Bill 14 with the specific language, as I will quote from the amendment that modification of section 12.2(2): "Before making a regulation under subsection (1), the minister must table in the Legislative Assembly a cost-benefit analysis of the formation, continuation, amalgamation or dissolution effected by the regulation under section 7."

The long and the short of it is, it is specific to the minister's comments in the Legislative Assembly where he has stated this legislation will save the taxpayers of Manitoba money. All this amendment is asking for is to see documented proof of what the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) has stated repeatedly in the House under questioning and debate of this bill.

We ask that this amendment be supported, which I would believe all members of the Assembly are favourable to, because it is a very responsible amendment asking that reports be provided to state this amalgamation of school divisions caused by this legislation will have a cost benefit to the taxpayers of Manitoba. At the very outset, the preamble the minister had in this Assembly made a statement this was a legislation that would benefit the taxpayers of Manitoba. This amendment today is just asking that documentation be provided that backs up the minister's own statements.

I look to the various members on the government side of the House that they will support this amendment because it is, in fact,

supporting what the minister has already stated. That way, I believe, everyone should be able to see this amendment pass through this House, because it is strictly in support of the Minister of Education's own comments in that regard.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in regard to other amendments, I believe I will have the opportunity to speak briefly when they come forward, but I do want to state once again that I do not believe that Bill 14 is necessary. We have demonstrated in the past that amalgamation is taking place. It is taking place between school divisions because they are causing the amalgamation to take effect through negotiation and recognizing that there are benefits through amalgamation. But these benefits have to be ones that are analyzed. That is what this amendment is asking for, only that the amalgamation be based upon firm and accurate well-researched figures.

This amendment should therefore be supported by all members of the House because I believe that as elected representatives of our various constituencies, it is our responsibility to safeguard the very hard-earned tax dollars that are entrusted to us by our constituents, that they are spent in the most wise fashion. So, therefore, we should not cause legislation to pass through this House unless each and everyone of us is satisfied that it will serve that specific purpose and does indeed provide for a benefit to those Manitobans who are paying the taxes.

Mr. Speaker, when school boards amalgamate—and I do have a little background, as stated previously, serving on the Portage la Prairie School Board for almost 15 years, understanding the importance as a trustee that we are entrusted not only with the providing of education to the next generation of Manitobans, but we are also entrusted by our electors to safeguard the tax dollars which we collect through property taxes, that they are spent in the most cost-effective manner, because that is what it means to be a trustee. We are entrusted with the resources through taxation, and we are entrusted by the parents of the young people within the school division to provide an education that will enable them to take on life's challenges in their future.

* (15:00)

So, Mr. Speaker, understanding that train of thought, as a school trustee, I personally participated in the Norrie report that has been mentioned on numerous occasions as the foundation to Bill 14. The Portage la Prairie School Division was analyzed by the Norrie Commission. Its final report recognized the synergies of a school division the size of Portage la Prairie, that if extended into a larger geographic area would assist ratepayers and students in the Cartier municipality, recognizing that the school division known as White Horse Plain, would effectively be parceled into other school divisions and cease to exist.

That was part of the Norrie report. Having that report tabled and providing the basis for discussions, the Portage la Prairie School Division did indeed meet with trustees of the White Horse Plain School Division. We did examine some of the benefits that would occur if we had a closer working relationship or perhaps amalgamated a portion, in whole or in part, of the White Horse Plain School Division. But, Mr. Speaker, upon deeper analysis, we found that there was not a significant cost benefit to those in the area of discussion.

So we did not as a school division proceed because we recognized, what the report perhaps did not, that the different programs that were available as well as the economic travel within the area was more to the east than it was to the west. In other words, the area in and around Elie on the Trans-Canada Highway, those residents were more inclined to travel east than they were to travel west to Portage la Prairie. Their economic activity was more closely related to St. Francis Xavier, Headingley, and ultimately Winnipeg than it was to go to Oakville, Portage la Prairie. So understanding the mood of the residents in and around Elie, as they say, the progress towards annexing that area into the Portage la Prairie School Division did not take place, also too, as I have mentioned, the programming.

However, what we did do, on the eastern boundaries of Portage la Prairie School Division, we did open our door and have reciprocal agreement with White Horse Plain that those individuals who wanted to take their schooling in the Portage la Prairie School Division would enter into our school division without any

impediment. As I will cite, some school divisions ask for cash payments to recognize the additional costs for schooling an out-of-division student, but Portage la Prairie School Division entered into an agreement with White Horse Plain, as well as the Pine Creek School Division on the western side, where we did not charge each other an entrance fee. So we continued on with that status for many, many years.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We found that there were a number that did want to come to Portage la Prairie, but also, there were some individuals that were on the eastern boundary of Portage la Prairie who found that they would like to travel into the White Horse Plain School Division, especially those that were at the northern boundary that were looking at schooling residents of St. Ambroise, also looked to St. Laurent as their desired school for their young people. So I do believe that the negotiation does take place more adequately at the local level because that is the mandate given to locally elected officials.

When it comes to the ministerial level, the provincial level, to make decisions without that first-hand knowledge and understanding and not having the opportunity to look and communicate with the individuals that are going to be affected, and I understand the minister is responsible for hundreds of thousands of school children, and it is not possible for him to do that. So I ask him to effectively withdraw Bill 14 because these decisions are best served to all those concerned at the local level. The students and the ratepayers, both have a vested interest to make their system the most effective it can be because they are the ones that have first-hand cause to want to have the system that best serves them, as I have stated in the past.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words I will leave my comments. I ask that this specific amendment be passed, but, regardless, I do believe that Bill 14 serves no useful purpose.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It is my unfortunate pleasure, I guess, to have to stand in the House today to speak to this particular amendment, because, of course, if the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), who is the Minister of Education, had really looked at the

present school act, of course, we know and understand that this bill was not required in the first place if, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I put a large if on that, amalgamation was his only concern in Manitoba.

I understand that the issue that we are talking about at this point is the \$10-million saving that the amendment that we are speaking to, to Bill 14, has come forward and that this area is one of great concern to all Manitobans, not just to the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, parent advisory councils, or in fact the parents and students of Manitoba. It is a concern to everyone, because if you have to legislate a \$10-million saving in the manner that the minister has, then was there really a saving to be had I think is the question that you have to ask.

Of course, many of my colleagues have spoken on this legislation in the House before these amendments have come forward. I would just like to put on the record that I had the opportunity of attending the Association of Manitoba Municipalities meetings and some of them in the country and will use this and the few other opportunities that arise on Bill 14 to speak to this issue on behalf of my constituents in Arthur-Virden. But it is very clear that if there were these kinds of savings to be had in the bill and that the minister had other artificial deadlines and issues that he was hoping to put forward in this bill that he could have done all of these things in amalgamation under the present schools act in Manitoba without bringing forth Bill 14.

* (15:10)

The theory that you can amalgamate districts and areas and have savings is laudable. I would applaud that kind of a move, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But in actual fact this minister has forced Manitoba school boards, only those who are under amalgamation, to do their budgeting, a number of other areas, but to come forth with the budgets that they have, put them on his desk, and then he will tell them whether or not they really meet the criteria to save the \$10 million that we have got in Manitoba that he announced publicly that he would save over this process that he is putting Manitobans through.

Now, there were a whole host of ways in which school boards could have been encouraged to come together in Manitoba. I would dare say that other ministers, in looking at a number of areas of concern in Manitoba that have been voiced over the last few years as well, could well take a lesson from the poor process that has been put up to amalgamate these boards in Manitoba. It is one thing to put a stick over them and tell them that they are going to amalgamate. It is another one to say, and, by golly, you are going to save \$10 million because I say you are. I do not think that you are going to get those kinds of savings from merely cutting the number of trustees in half or more in some areas, albeit there are jurisdictions that have indicated to me they are satisfied with doing that. I know in some areas it has caused pretty great dissension in the process.

I think they have succumbed, if you will, in some cases to the minister's edict in this bill and indicated, yes, we will comply; we will be responsible in upholding Manitoba laws and we will comply, but for those who have had some concerns in those areas, and there were many, if not every area of the province that was forced to amalgamate, then there has always been a recourse to have some kind of appeal process put in place or some kind of a mechanism for those who have concerns on the process, how they are being asked to not comply but being told to comply. There has always been that appeal process in Manitoba law, Manitoba legislation that would allow them to do that.

This minister, in his legislation under Bill 14, has basically indicated: We will negate your right to court appearances, or for us in our department under that act to have to comply with the judge's decision on any kind of a dispute a division may have with the minister's decision, or this Government's decision, I should say, because I do not think the Minister of Education did this on his own. I think he had full concurrence of his Premier (Mr. Doer), maybe not all of his colleagues. *[interjection]* Could have. I think this little process was cooked up between the minister, at least, and the Premier, if, in fact, the Premier did not tell him this is what he should do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou),

my colleague, has just indicated he would ask the minister to withdraw this bill, as I have in Question Period today just challenged the Premier to withdraw Bill 18, which was not required under that particular legislation as well to discourage expansion of business in Manitoba. I cannot make any remarks about the Minister of Education's presence or whereabouts, but I certainly know he will be listening. I know he is listening to me in this House as I speak and give him encouragement on these bills to decide, as all of my colleagues of course are listening to this important presentation as well in the House today. There are only a few members of the Government today who are a little jealous of the fact they have to maybe actually be here and listen to me give this kind of encouragement to the minister to withdraw Bill 14.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if there had been some mechanism, if there had been some carrot, if there really was \$10-million worth of savings to be had in this process, then why would the minister not utilize some of those funds in a mechanism to help and to encourage the continuing volunteer process we had going under the Filmon government in Manitoba? There were a number of examples of school boards that had shared, well, certainly some of them had actually combined school divisions. There are many, many examples of shared services that were ongoing under the previous government's management of the education process in Manitoba.

In fact, education was a huge part of the Budget in Manitoba, and always has been, probably second to Health, to which my colleagues in the Legislature before were spending and trying to encourage better health care by having the highest spending per capita in Manitoba. Our education system is not far behind, was not far behind. We applaud the idea of trying to encourage savings where savings can be made; but, when you have to put a stick over people and force them to put their books on your table as the minister and micromanage the school boards of Manitoba and the education system that we have to make sure that they comply with a ministerial edict. Well, I am almost lost for words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, almost I say, because you know, as the Premier would have said before on this bill, that is not the Manitoba way.

Those were the words of the Premier last fall when this bill was introduced, but he changed his mind along the way, and, of course, the Government is allowed to do that. This Premier has changed his mind on many issues. Say one thing, do another, and I guess that will be probably what he is known for the most at the end of this term of his Government.

Today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to put a few words on the record on behalf of the citizens of the area that I live in, the area that I represent. Of course, I represent all of the area of Antler River School Division and a portion of the Souris Valley Division in southwest Manitoba, but I also have a portion of Turtle Mountain and Fort Labosse, and some of my remarks will be addressed to them as well.

Of course, the Government in their wisdom decided not to do the same thing as they did with health care regions and go from Lyleton to Gladstone and everything south of Riding Mountain to become one health region, leaving out of course the central regional centre of Brandon and leaving it an island unto itself.

But in the area of education, they saw that it was fit to only amalgamate Antler River and Souris Valley. It is rather ironic to me that if you are going to go through this process and one of your criteria in the bill is thou shalt not have any fewer than 2000 students per division in Manitoba, that you would amalgamate these two and they still only have 1700.

So my point is, if they were actually following the Norrie report for which there was some concern amongst my colleagues who felt that there were not these kinds of savings in this \$10-million area to proceed with that in a forced kind of manner, why did this Government put the brakes on and contradict their moves in relation to how they treat education on one hand and how they treat health on the other hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The citizens of southwest Manitoba, to them it is very obvious that this Government took a look at the other divisions and, for some particular reasons that are unbeknownst to most of us and most of the citizens of southwest Manitoba, they chose to leave Turtle Mountain by itself, did not even combine it with any of the areas to the east, and Fort Labosse by itself in

the Virden, Reston, Elkhorn, Oak Lake area, in that region of the province, and left them to their own means in that region as well.

* (15:20)

Because you are combining Antler River and Souris Valley, that does leave some concern amongst others to say that if they are going to go through all of this process of amalgamation to try and save a few dollars, then is this just the beginning of what this Government is going to do to us? Are they going to put us through all these hoops, make us jump through all these hoops and climb all these ladders to slide back down again and start this process all over if, in fact, they decide to make another change before the next election, or if they are successful in the next election, after the next election, you know?

I mean, this is what is on the minds of people in rural Manitoba, in all areas of Manitoba. They are just going to make us duplicate all this administration all over again and go through all those hoops all over again, spend more money to further amalgamate divisions who thought perhaps this Government might be more inclusive in their decision.

Well, they did not have anything against coming together if there had been some incentive, as I said earlier, to do that. But this Government's edict of saying we are going to provide better courses and more courses for students—the course has been thrown out the window with some of the decisions they made in Springfield, Transcona and those areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I do not think that they are even guaranteeing that divisions that have all of the courses that they have today will have those after amalgamation is over, and, of course, that is the case. We have seen, actually, the people of some regions of this province take the Government to task and take them to court even on some of the processes that they feel strongly about, and with quite good reason. They feel that they have been left out of these kinds of decisions.

So, when you, dare I say, undermine the concerns of students and children in this

province, never mind parent advisory councils and school boards in Manitoba, by not sitting down and consulting with them in this process and just bringing it in as legislation with a hammer to say that you are going to do this, it is certainly a concern to me as the member for the area under question here in amalgamation, and it is a concern to all of the rest of the citizens on the periphery of the new Southwest Horizon School Division that has been so aptly named in our area.

Of course, it has raised some concerns. These are very responsible people, and they have put forward the idea of putting their words together, trying to meet this July 1 date that really was not mentioned in the bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and trying to conform—conform is the only word I can find—to the edict of this minister. If that is how this Government thinks that they can continue to deal with issues in rural Manitoba, then I think it goes along the lines of what we have seen with the debates on agriculture in this House and certainly the debate that we had on Bill 18 in the House today in Question Period and the lack of responsibility taken by this Government in how they look at issues outside of the Perimeter Highway. In fact, I think that should be a concern for all of the citizens inside the Perimeter, as well, because this impacts all of the people of Manitoba.

I am very proud that I have become part of a body in the Legislature in Manitoba, of a party that respects the views of all Manitobans and respects the rights of all citizens in this province to have the opportunity for a sound education for their children and to work co-operatively with others to put forth the kinds of courses, programs and programming, services, transportation and educational training for the many thousands of sound teachers that we have in this province who try to do their best on a daily basis to meet the high standards of education that our students need and require and hopefully are getting in the province of Manitoba.

But to be undermined by a Minister of Education who has come forward in the manner that he has to force this kind of legislation on the people of Manitoba, that is why I stand in this House today to support the amendment that this minister has before him and that is being dealt with in this House today.

I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I will close my remarks by reiterating the words of the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou) by asking this minister to reconsider and withdraw Bill 14. Thank you.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): It is most unfortunate that we find ourselves today still debating Bill 14, when we have raised what, I believe, are so many legitimate issues in this Legislature about why Bill 14 was unnecessary, which then leads into what I would characterize as very nearly an abuse of authority by this Government in terms of the regulatory control that the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) is seeking over budgets, and secondly, his save harmless clause in the bill that would seem to say, as we have pointed out so many times in this Chamber, that the Government is, in fact, seeking authority to push through their version of amalgamation in this province.

It would seem that their version of amalgamation, while they like to point to the Norrie report as the basis upon which they are saying that there has been public discussion and there has been public review, the fact is that they are, I think, headed down the road which trustees, in many respects, will be quite unhappy with, and that road is the one that says, to use the Scottish vernacular, the one who pays the piper calls the tune.

In education in this province, obviously the authority for education and the framework for education has always rested with the provincial government, but it was the local trustees who provide the leadership at the local level within the framework as set down for what is appropriate public education in this province.

I just happened to be thumbing through the Ombudsman's report, and this is the 2000 annual report.

An Honourable Member: A little light reading, eh?

Mr. Cummings: A little light reading in Question Period when the answers become repetitive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to quote from this: The Ombudsman recognizes that schools and school divisions are governed by elected

trustees and that the Department of Education would not become involved in complaints.

Now, he was talking in direct reference to a complaint, but several analogies are listed as you go through the relationship of a publicly elected and responsible school board and the ratepayers within the particular school division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a number of amendments here and we are speaking to, of course, the one that was introduced earlier today that talks about the responsibility for the budgets within the school divisions. Speaking specifically to that amendment, I have to say that my frustration is getting a little bit higher every day as I continue to see the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) and this Government—on this particular issue, the Minister of Education speaks for the Government apparently, and if that analogy is true, then this Government is putting into motion a series of decisions on education that I think have the potential to shake to the roots many of the principles and many of the concerns that elected trustees and parents across this province particularly have always felt were above criticism and reproach. One is, do you have the right as a local taxpayer to speak directly to the body that is taxing you, in this case, the local school board, or do you have an opportunity to then become involved politically, if you wish, to influence that school board and thereby influence the educational opportunity for your children and your neighbour's children?

* (15:30)

Now, these are very simplistic and basic tenets of governance of education in this province, as far as I am concerned, and the Government is coming perilously close to thumbing its nose at those principles and tenets, as I see the way they are approaching this, because to put in place, without it being a blanket regulatory process where governments, for example, might be in difficult financial times and they would have to say to all school boards: We are unable to provide increased funding, therefore the pain will be evenly distributed.

In other words, the provincial government provides a leadership role as well as through its funding role, but now what we see here is the minister and particularly his Premier (Mr. Doer), have made a lot of comments about they are

doing this reorganization and this amalgamation because they believe that there are savings.

Well, I sat in committee last week, I guess it was, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and listened to the presentations, and certainly there were many people, mainly I would say members of the teaching fraternity, who came out and said: There are savings here, and we support this bill. But no one, including the minister or the Premier have been able to demonstrate that those savings are in any way significant, nor are they able to point to where there might be significant changes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would be the first one to acknowledge and to defend the comment that came out of the Norrie report which said, if there are going to be savings wrought out of this enacting of recommendations those savings must go back into the classroom.

They did acknowledge upfront in that report, where they talked about a complete reorganization of the educational boundaries in this province, they did say the savings were not significant, but where they were available, where there were savings available, they should be recognized as being required to go back into the educational opportunity in the province.

Now I would be quite prepared to say when I became involved in education politics through a local school board one of the reasons I wanted to get involved was I wanted to know what was driving the taxation load I was seeing growing on my business, on my farm. I also, of course, had a significant interest in the educational opportunity for my family, but the bottom line was there has always been controversy about the raising of funds for educational purposes, who has the responsibility, whether it be local, how big their portion should be.

Everyone knows that portion has grown as the percentage of provincial support has shrunk. It has reflected a direct relationship actually. What I find very disappointing in this whole debate and the reason I feel compelled to comment on this amendment where it reflects on the board and the budgets of the school divisions is we do hear many times people do not show enough interest to go out and talk to the local

school board and understand why educational costs are what they are. On the other hand, in my experience, the opportunity for direct local input and for common-sense decision making is held very dearly by the vast majority of the public and the ratepayers out there who want to see good education but they want to see it delivered efficiently.

With the introduction of this bill, the minister appears to be seeking the authority to prove to his colleagues there really will be some savings, but what he is doing is saying to the school divisions: We do not trust you to manage your budgets under this time of change. We do not trust you to make good educational decisions. We do not trust you to set a reasonable mill rate. Besides, my reputation is on the line, the reputation of my Premier (Mr. Doer) is on the line. There must be \$10-million worth of savings out there somewhere.

To say there is and to wish there would be will not make it happen. No one in this administration, no one on the ground, if you will, in terms of educational delivery has been able to point to the savings that can be driven from the system by this amalgamation.

An amalgamation itself is not the problem. The problem is it is not being approached in a reasonable and thoughtful manner. As many of us have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the boundaries in many cases look like the crayon drawings of the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell). In many cases the issues around shared services the minister says will now provide the security to, well, particularly in Springfield and Agassiz, that their shared services agreement is going to provide the security those parents believe they need for the education of their children and now they will have availability of appropriate classes and programs. That very business of shared services was going on, I hate to admit it, but 25, 30 years ago. That principle of shared services between school divisions was being put forward because of the value and the cost. Costs for providing services were driving school divisions to work closer and closer together.

There always has been a frustration about whether or not we have too many administrative

people relative to the number of students. As I recall, the Norrie report indicated that on a cost-per-student basis, Winnipeg 1 had a very low administration cost, but with all respect to Winnipeg 1, I do not think that there are very many areas of this province that want to re-enact a school division that has the diversity and all of the demands that Winnipeg 1 has on it, because there are indeed geographic and other needs that specific school divisions have that other ones do not have.

I can point to the area that I represent. There are demands for French language services and French immersion and the DSFM to be provided services within part of my division.

There are other areas where there is a vast area of community pasture that does not provide much of a tax base but neither does it provide much in terms of a population base. So you have a fringe of a population, part of a school division that in many cases does not have a direct link or relationship to where the management of that school division is coming from. That may be historical in how it first happened.

It may be, as I have been told by those who believe they understand what happened, that that is an example of where from the original—well, people refer to it as amalgamation. It was not amalgamation. It was bringing together of a large number of small, and, in many cases, one-room classroom schools, bringing them together so that more intense and more opportunity for varied educational programs could occur.

Amalgamation today means something different. Although there are changes in population, there are situations where it is really the amalgamation is not about school closure, amalgamation is about shared services, the ability for students in large measure across this province to have access to programs that are equivalent, that they will have the opportunity to partake in all manner of programs, that perhaps their current school division simply and the structure that they are being financed under does not have the ability to provide for them.

* (15:40)

I have not met very many trustees or administrators who will say I come from school

division X, and, you know, it is a lousy place. I mean, that just does not happen. Every school division and administration and schools are doing their very best with what is available to them in terms of finances, technology and facilities.

What I find so offensive, going beyond just the financing aspect of the amendment that we have in front of us, is that people believe that under voluntary amalgamation there were school divisions out there, a significant number of them, who saw synergies—there is that word again—symmetrical opportunities to where they could share services, where they could provide increased service to their division within enhanced financial wherewithal because perhaps they were able to join with a division that had a better tax base.

You know, amalgamation should have also been able to react to the description that I just gave of a school division where there is oftentimes more symmetry between neighbouring school divisions and parts of existing school divisions than there might be in the way they are currently structured. That makes sense, and that is what is missing in many respects about what the Government is currently putting forward.

To have this Government try to use the big hammer in terms of Bill 14 to make it happen and to justify that they think there are \$10-million worth of savings in this approach, use the hammer on these school divisions to prove that they were right, strikes me as having the potential for a backlash that this Government would not look forward to.

You know, this is the interesting thing about the public. Politicians, when they forget how smart the public is, then tread with peril into areas such as Bill 14, because the public out there is looking at some of these boundaries and some of these changes. They are saying, well, that is interesting. I know a whole lot of other areas where some change—you know you look good there, member from Roblin-Russell—that they did not take the opportunity to use the knowledge that came from the Norrie report to put together common-sense changes in terms of amalgamation and changes that would have truly provided enhanced educational opportunity,

without providing and answering to what I believe is becoming increasingly obvious as a political agenda.

That political agenda seems to be that the Government wants to milk the cow that has written down the side of it: See how smart we are. We are following the Norrie report. We are going to amalgamate school divisions. They do not understand that those divisions who in fact were left out of this process are saying, so, if their logic makes sense in those other divisions, why did it not make sense in ours? Or, other examples of where school divisions have been usefully and willingly talking to other school divisions about amalgamations or shared services, and now all of a sudden they find out that that is not as easily achieved because of the amalgamation that is being forced forward.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with my time lapsing, I want to remind this Chamber that, if the minister is unwilling to justify the savings that are in his amalgamation, then he should not be passing this bill because he had the authority before. He still has the authority. He does not need to use the jackboots of Bill 14 to make it happen. Thank you.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to put a few words on the record on the amendment put forward by the honourable Mr. Gerrard. I believe that this deserves consideration of support and certainly I want to indicate to this Assembly my support to this amendment. I believe that Bill 14, as has been said many times over, is an attempt by the minister to demonstrate how authoritative a government can really be in forcing mergers and forcing amalgamation of an education system in this province of Manitoba.

I always find it interesting that, when you look at the geographics in this province, the NDP-held ridings have been left out of this whole merger process. People are starting to wonder about that, why that would be, whether that was purely a political consideration, not wanting to attempt to stir the waters, the political waters in that area, and whether the minister was actually instructed by the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his Cabinet to stay away from those areas when he did the merger.

I also find it very interesting that, in the case of the voluntary mergers, they were well on the way when the minister finally made the decision that he would force amalgamation, and that, in those areas, an attempt had been made by the school boards. I refer to my constituency because much of my constituency was involved in voluntary discussions between two school divisions that wanted to join forces and attempt to make the education system work better in their areas and to try and bring some economics to bear in the administration of an education system.

I found it interesting they had virtually agreed, the two school boards, that the Boundary School Division and the Rhineland School Division had basically agreed on all the principles they wanted enshrined in their new school division. Then, at the last minute, the minister threw into the mix the Consolidated School District of Sprague. Not that it in the long term will not fit. Initially the concerns expressed by the ratepayers and the school board in the Sprague area were fairly negative. However, they reconsidered that position and suggested to the ratepayers maybe they should try and proceed to negotiate or discuss with the Rhineland School Division and the Boundary School Division boards the possibility of the merger actually working for that area.

I have always suggested, as I previously said in this House, the Sprague area is a very unique part of Manitoba. It is fairly sparsely populated, a lot of forestry in that area, very little industrial development in that area, and many of the people want to keep that area as a so-called pristine area. *[interjection]* As the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) has just indicated, they have good water in that area. They do have a water development bottling operation there. As a matter of fact, there are two bottling operations in my constituency in that area, but the one has won a gold medal in the international marketplace for the quality of water in that area. I think that is indicative of the pristine way that whole area has been held.

Does that mean there has not been development such as livestock and others? No. It does not mean that at all. There has been significant forestry development there. A significant forestry industry existed there at one time. There has always been cattle on the farms

in that area. There has always been livestock produced in that area. There is a huge opportunity for the expansion of livestock, if it is done in an environmentally friendly way, as it can happen in that area, because there are huge tracts of land where nobody lives and no agriculture exists there now, or no livestock agriculture exists there now. There is real opportunity.

* (15:50)

However, the sparseness of the population leads the school board to have to deal with the matter of education in a different manner than most other areas of the province. I have often said maybe they should be involved in a different kind of a structural system, administrative system than normal school boards would be.

However, the decision to accede to the minister's will and merge with Rhineland and Boundary did in fact take place. All three boards have now agreed they would like to merge.

The minister has indicated, time and time again, this Bill 14 needed to be put in place before their merger could legally take place. That is really not the case. The case is if the minister would have accepted the voluntary process that had gone on in that area and would have said to them: We will engage the board of revision and bring your case before the Board of revision, it could have happened very quickly and they could have had their whole process in place months ago. It need not have waited for this Bill 14.

I think it was a fallacy for the minister to try and convince or persuade or even put forward the notion that they must wait until this bill was passed before their merger could take place. I think this amendment that is before us simply indicates that again. I honestly do not understand why the minister wants to do away with boards of revision. In any case, even though Bill 14 will pass, why do you need to do away with the boards of revision? The boards of revision have served as a very useful tool to school boards and school divisions and school districts for many, many years and were the vehicle that allowed the organized manner and transitional change that we have seen on a number of occasions. Some of

us are old enough to remember the consolidation of the school districts, first of all, and then the merging of those consolidated districts into a divisional process. The board of revision was always the tool that was used to be able to allow this to happen in an organized manner.

That this Government would want to do away with something that has traditionally and historically proved its effectiveness is a puzzle to everyone, including our side of this government.

Unless there is a deeper sort of intent in this bill that many of us have not seen, maybe it is the agenda of the NDP to further control the population in this province, the populace of this province. I suspect that really is what is at play here. I find it unfortunate that we would have a government that would want to force more control, take away the freedoms that we have enjoyed and held dear. Many rural people still do as many of the people in the city of Winnipeg and other urban centres do. They truly value their freedoms. This bill takes away many of those freedoms.

I suspect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you yourself and where you come from and the reason your people came to this country was to gain freedom. Yet you and your colleagues are participating now in the degeneration of the very word of our freedom. I would suggest that many of your colleagues and your party might in fact have those same doubts about this bill that we have and maybe have the same reservations about giving up the rights and freedoms that are being taken away under this bill. You, Sir, might have a significant problem in supporting this bill.

I would simply suggest to all the members of this House that this bill might be one where we might ask that everybody have the freedom to vote their conscience. I would truly ask that in the final vote on this bill that all of the members of this Legislature be given the right to stand freely in their place and vote their conscience and their wills on this bill and that the Whip in government be set aside and not be allowed to drive the backbenchers and many of the Cabinet ministers who, I think, feel similarly, that there are rights and freedoms that have been taken away under this bill.

I would think that there are other times when in fact this Government might want to allow the same freedoms of free votes on a number of other bills that they have brought forward that we will debate at another time. But one of them, very similarly, one I spoke to yesterday was, of course, the fertilizer and pesticides amendment act that was brought before this House, again taking away an individual's freedoms to make the decisions on their own property, in their own business to do what is necessary to be able to make a living off of those properties.

Similarly here, the actual exercise of budgeting, of a school board sitting down and deciding what expenditures they will want to incur, how much revenue they need to generate in their area to be able to allow them to do the expenditure required to give the child the education it needs, and the difference from one region to another in this province in that exercise is being taken away.

The minister says before you can pass a budget, you must give it to me. Where in this country or in this province have we ever seen that before? When has an education system ever been told that you must give us the budget first, and I will approve it, and then give it back to you and the school board to do my will. That, Sir, is probably why your people left the country they left. That is certainly the reason that my people left the socialistic country that they were living in previously and came to Canada, because in Canada they were given the rights and the freedom of choice, and these school boards are now being told by this Bill 14 that they no longer will have the right to make the final decision. The final decision will now be made by Big Brother government. It is Big Brother not only looking over their shoulder, but Big Brother sitting at the board table at the school board level and making the final decision for them and then saying to them now you can administer.

How unfortunate. How unfortunate that many of our people, many of our families came to a country where they never even thought that these kinds of rights and freedoms would have been taken away. Yet today I must stand in my place as a member of a Legislative Assembly governing the province of Manitoba and face a

government, chastise a government for removing a principle that is enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of this country by removing it in this province and removing it from our future generations and our children, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (16:00)

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is the proposed amendment to Bill 14 moved by the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), seconded by the Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer),

THAT Bill 14 be amended in section 10

(a) by renumbering the—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

—proposed section 12.2 as subsection 12.2(1);

(b) in the part of the proposed subsection 12.2(1) before clause (a), by adding ", subject to subsection (2), "after "may"; and

(c) by adding the following as proposed subsection 12.2(2):

Minister must table cost-benefit analysis
12.2(2) Before making a regulation under subsection (1), the minister must table in the Legislative Assembly a cost-benefit analysis of the formation, continuation, amalgamation or dissolution effected by the regulation under section 7.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those in favour, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair's thought is the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader): Yeas and Nays, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the amendment

THAT Bill 14 be amended in section 10—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Cummings, Dacquay, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Enns, Faurshou, Gerrard, Gilleshammer, Hawranik, Helwer, Laurendeau, Loewen, Maguire, Mitchelson, Murray, Penner (Emerson), Pitura, Reimer, Rocan, Schuler, Smith (Fort Garry), Tweed.

Nays

Aglugub, Allan, Ashton, Asper, Barrett, Caldwell, Cerilli, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Friesen, Jennissen, Korzeniowski, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Mihychuk, Nevakshonoff, Reid, Robinson, Rondeau, Sale, Santos, Schellenberg, Selinger, Smith (Brandon West), Struthers, Wowchuk.

Madam Deputy Clerk (Bev Bosiak): Yeas 23;
Nays 31.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

* * *

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 4, 2002

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