

Fourth Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
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SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
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SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Morris-Macdonald School Division

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The RCMP investigation of allegations of criminal activity in the former Morris-Macdonald School Division has been completed and has found no evidence to substantiate criminal charges.

In the wake of the Auditor General's 2001 report, the provincial government fired the board of trustees of the former Morris-Macdonald School Division. As a result, residents were without an elected board for nearly a year.

The RCMP investigation and the firing of the board have irreparably tarnished the reputations of many citizens in the former Morris-Macdonald School Division.

When the provincial government insisted that the school division reimburse the Province for the overpayment of funds, the government-appointed trustee of the school division increased local ratepayers' school taxes by 28 percent to be implemented each year for four consecutive years.

This action imposed a significant burden on farmers and other faultless citizens in the former Morris-Macdonald School Division. To date, \$1.4 million has been paid out of the citizens' pockets for actions as the RCMP have recently acknowledged were not criminal in nature.

Residents of the former Morris-Macdonald School Division are angered and frustrated by the provincial government's lack of acknowledgement of its mistake, refusal to apologize to those involved and failure to reimburse the additional tax dollars that blameless citizens have been forced to pay.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the provincial government to consider apologizing to citizens of the former Morris-Macdonald School Division for firing the school board, launching a criminal investigation and tarnishing their reputation.

To request that the provincial government consider reimbursing blameless Morris-Macdonald citizens who have paid the Province \$1.4 million in additional school taxes over the last three years.

This is signed by Joanne Zoppa, Chris Richardson, Lynda Tunny and many, many others.

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

Grandparents' Access to Grandchildren

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

It is important to recognize and respect the special relationship that exists between grandparents and grandchildren.

Maintaining an existing, healthy relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild is in the best interest of the child. Grandparents play a critical role in the social and emotional development of their grandchildren. This relationship is vital to promote the intergenerational exchange of culture and heritage, fostering a well-rounded self-identity for the child.

In the event of divorce, death of a parent or other life-changing incident, a relationship can be severed without consent of the grandparent or the grandchild. It should be a priority of the provincial government to provide grandparents with the means to obtain reasonable access to their grandchildren.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) and the Premier (Mr. Doer) to consider amending legislation to improve the process by which grandparents can obtain reasonable access to their grandchildren.

Signed by Lisa Bilcowski, Cathy Woychyshyn, Kelly Collen and many, many others.

* (13:35)

Civil Service Employees–Neepawa

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislature Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Eleven immediate positions with Manitoba Conservation Lands Branch are being moved out of Neepawa.

Removal of these positions will severely impact the local economy with potentially 33 adults and children leaving the community.

Removal of these positions will be detrimental to revitalizing the rural and surrounding communities of Neepawa.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider stopping the removal of these positions from our community, and to consider utilizing current technology in order to maintain these positions in their existing location.

Signed by Maxine Nagorski, Allan Prado, Sandy Loewen and many, many others.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Eleven immediate positions with Manitoba Conservation Lands Branch, as of April 1, 2006, Crown Lands and Property Special Operating Agency, are being moved out of Neepawa.

Removal of these positions will severely impact the local economy with potentially 33 adults and children leaving the community.

Removal of these positions will be detrimental to revitalizing the rural and surrounding communities of Neepawa.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider stopping the removal of these positions from our community, and to consider utilizing current technology, ie: Land Management Services existing satellite sub-office in Dauphin, Manitoba, in order to maintain these positions in their existing location.

Signed Kerry Turner, John Neufeld, Anne Neufeld and many others.

OlyWest Hog Processing Plant

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba government, along with the OlyWest consortium, promoted the development of a mega hog factory within the city of Winnipeg without proper consideration of rural alternatives for the site.

Concerns arising from the hog factory include noxious odours, traffic and road impact, water supply, waste water treatment, decline in property values, cost to taxpayers and proximity to the city's clean drinking water aqueduct.

Many Manitobans believe this decision represents poor judgment on behalf of the provincial government.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to immediately cancel its plans to support the construction of the OlyWest hog plant and rendering factory near any urban residential area.

Signed by Skyler Berman, Cory Brass, Blake Runhuist and many others.

Crocus Investment Fund

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The government needs to uncover the whole truth as to what ultimately led to over 33,000 Crocus shareholders to lose tens of millions of dollars.

The provincial auditor's report, the Manitoba Securities Commission's investigation, the RCMP investigation and the involvement of our courts, collectively, will not answer the questions that must be answered in regards to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

Manitobans need to know why the government ignored the many warnings that could have saved the Crocus Investment Fund.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his NDP government to co-operate in uncovering the truth in why the government did not act on what it knew and to consider calling a public inquiry on the Crocus Fund fiasco.

Signed, Mr. Speaker, by R. Dolenuck, M. Dolenuck, T. Pritchard and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to table a Report to the Legislative Assembly by the pension Commissioner, Michael D. Werier, dated June 7, 2006.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the 2004-2005 Annual Report for the Centre culturel franco-manitobain.

I would also like to table the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 annual reports for the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation.

* (13:40)

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the following reports: Red River College Annual Financial Report 2004-2005, Assiniboine Community College Annual Report 2004-2005, University College of the North Annual Report 2004-2005 and the Manitoba Student Aid Program Annual Report 2004-2005.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from Westdale Junior High 90 Grade 9 students under the direction of Mrs. Caroline Josephson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bill 11 Amendments

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Some weeks ago the government introduced, with its trademark fanfare, Bill 11, ostensibly to use revenues from Manitoba Hydro to subsidize the use of natural gas.

At the time, we pointed out that the government was talking out of both sides of their mouth. Kyoto protocol on the one hand, while encouraging the burning of non-renewable resources on the other. Given the criticism that this bill attracted, the government now appears to have had a change of heart with amendments introduced at second reading.

My question to the government is: Originally the bill was intended to encourage the burning of natural gas. Now it appears with these amendments that it is designed to encourage the burning of ratepayers' funds. What is the purpose of these amendments to Bill 11, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, the bill was introduced at a time when natural gas prices, of which 200,000-plus Manitobans are reliant on in the wintertime for their heating, were facing a potential increase of 44 percent. It was a short-term sunset bill that did not subsidize and was only to be used for energy efficiency.

In fact, we clarified that because members opposite, in their usual hysteria approach to anything that has to do with hydro or energy; we clarified it so that they could not send out the kinds of letters that they were sending out, talking about the kinds of things we were talking about and showing that there is a difference when you manage a Hydro corporation and have the profits that we had, versus selling off a telephone system that the member opposite helped to do.

Mr. McFadyen: It is a government that continues to treat Manitoba Hydro as its private, political piggybank. First, it subsidized greenhouse gas production and now it seems to set up a slush fund to achieve some, as yet undefined, political goals of the government.

Why is the government pursuing legislation to provide a political slush fund when the corporation's

debt to equity ratio is still far too high, unacceptably high, and they are using those funds to set up a political slush fund? Why?

Mr. Chomiak: The Hydro debt equity ratio has, in fact, gone down, Mr. Speaker. If we continue to have the positive years and positive management of Hydro that we have had, the debt equity ratio will be much better than when members opposite were in power.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be part of a government that the David Suzuki Foundation has said is the best on climate Kyoto in Canada, and which *Newsweek Magazine* rated Manitoba as the top regional government on climate change in the entire world. I am very proud of the government that started those initiatives in 1999, continues to grow them and continues to be a world leader in dealing with energy efficiency, particularly because we are a province that has potential growth for our Hydro export revenue so that Manitoba can again.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the amendments introduced and tabled by the government to Bill 11 put the power in the hands of the minister to establish the size of this political slush fund. It is a recipe for blatant political manipulation and interference.

The other ill-advised effort on the part of the government through these amendments is to highjack the public examination of rate increases through the PUB by bypassing the PUB with a backroom piece of legislation that allows the minister, in the privacy of his or her office, to set the size of the political slush fund.

Why is the minister cutting out the public process? Why are they using legislation to bypass and disregard the Public Utilities Board?

*(13:45)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, first off, the PUB is the party that suggested in the first place at its hearing in October that we be more aggressive in meeting these DSM targets, that is demand side.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, KAP suggested a fund. The inner city residents, education residents, asked for a fund to assist in dealing with energy changes and demand-side energy, particularly, because the federal government has pulled out of the energy programs. We are waiting for new programs in the fall. This is one-time bridge funding, subject to the PUB.

I will take the example of what we are doing on energy efficiency which was ninth in the country and is now No. 1 in the country, versus taking the Crown corporation like the MTS, when he was working on MTS and it was on his Web site, and selling off the entire asset. Manitobans have had a 60 percent increase in prices since.

Manitoba Hydro Export Revenues

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): In 2004, the PUB asked the Province to stop taking money from Hydro's coffers until it decreased its debt, a debt, Mr. Speaker, that has gone from \$7 billion to almost \$9 billion today.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Hydro: Is he bypassing the Public Utilities Board because he is afraid, once again, that the Public Utilities Board will tell him to keep his hands off Hydro export revenues, money that they should be using to pay down their debt?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of the Manitoba Hydro Act): The short answer to the question is: No.

The answer, as I indicated to the member at committee when we went and had presentations from KAP, who said, you should have a fund for energy efficiency; from the inner city residents who said, you should have a fund for energy efficiency; and from those presenters who said, you should have a fund for energy efficiency, particularly in light of the federal cutting of its program on energy efficiency, Mr. Speaker.

The debt to equity ratio has gone down, Mr. Speaker, and it is projected to be down to its 75:25 percent target as per the last Hydro report. So the debt to equity ratio has gone down.

The difference is, Mr. Speaker, we are building Hydro, we are not selling it.

Mrs. Mitchelson: In reference to taking further draws from Manitoba Hydro, the minister from Hydro; back in 2004, this minister's predecessor said, and I quote: It is unlikely to the point of absurdity that we would do such a thing in the face of the current situation. We know we had a huge problem last year. We know we have rate increases. It would be pretty imprudent of us in the short run to say, well, we have a huge increase, let us take it. That would be silly in terms of policy. Mr. Speaker, that

was in 2004 after the Public Utilities Board chastised this government.

Mr. Speaker, how can this minister now propose to take more money from Hydro, a move that his predecessor called absurd?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, not one cent is coming from Hydro to the Province of Manitoba. Hydro is setting up a fund with specific legislative category on energy efficiency which, at Hydro's direction and would be under Hydro's control, to deal with energy efficiency at a time when all Canadians know—*[interjection]*

Go to the gas pump. Have members not filled up their cars with gas? Have they not seen the price of natural gas go up? Have they not seen Hydro Québec rates go up 7 percent? Have they not seen the rates go up in Toronto 30 percent? And Edmonton, 40 percent? We have been able to have the lowest electrical rates in the country and still have export revenue and still make money.

Contrast that with taking the private corporation like MTS and selling it to their broker friends. That is the difference. They want to sell off Hydro for their broker friends. We want to keep it for all Manitobans.

*(13:50)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro is not setting up this fund. They are being directed by this government and this minister to set up the fund.

Mr. Speaker, during the cost of service hearing before the Public Utilities Board last month, a Hydro official said that, and I quote, the importance of achieving the 75:25 ratio and having an adequate level of equity cannot be overstated. He went on to say, given this circumstance it could be argued that there should be no sharing of export revenue until target equity levels have been obtained.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: How can he ignore the advice of Manitoba Hydro officials and force Hydro to create another slush fund? Will he not now come to his senses and withdraw the bill?

Mr. Chomiak: The PUB that sets rates asked Hydro to be more aggressive in energy management. That is a key, Mr. Speaker, all provinces are doing it, every jurisdiction is doing it. In fact, Ontario is subsidizing industrial rates.

We can do both. We can build Hydro for the future so that Manitobans can keep their electrical

prices low, which we are doing. And, Mr. Speaker, we could also be energy efficient to both help the economy and to help the environment, unlike the pattern of practice before, not one dam built, not one kilometre of transmission line built. I might add we are bringing down the debt equity ratio and could have it down to 75:25 in a couple of years.

Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between the political parties. They are this mothball party; we are the build Hydro for all Manitobans party.

Health Care System Emergency Services

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, a CIHI report that was released today shows that Manitoba is the second-biggest spender in health care in the country. I would like to ask the Minister of Health: With all of that spending, why are our ERs in such crisis and why is patient safety being put at risk?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased with the fact that we are in fact able to reduce waiting lists. We have reduced them to historically low levels in areas of cancer and heart. They are coming down quickly in hips and knees.

We do have, as every province in Canada, a challenge in regard to our ERs, but they are open. We are now pleased that Rivers is re-opened, Deloraine is open, Boissevain is open. We have made progress in Arborg and Ashern. We will continue to make sure that Manitobans have available to them the emergency care that they deserve and need. We will strengthen our system and we will bring down our waiting list. We can walk and chew gum at the same time, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Driedger: If the minister was more aware of what was happening, he would see that Seven Oaks emergency was almost closed because of a lack of physicians. Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is the second-biggest spender in health care in Canada. We are also rated dead last in health care in Canada, and we have a disaster waiting to happen in our Winnipeg community ERs.

I would like to ask this Minister of Health: Will we see rotating closures in our Winnipeg emergencies throughout this summer?

Mr. Sale: I would just remind the member opposite that she represents the party that wanted to close Seven Oaks Hospital completely and, Mr. Speaker, close Misericordia acute care hospital, 308 beds. We

did not close Misericordia. We are not closing Seven Oaks Hospital. Our emergency rooms are open in the city of Winnipeg. Last summer there was a challenge. The summer before there was a challenge. They stayed open; they will stay open this summer.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, this summer there is going to be a 42 percent vacancy rate of doctors in our community hospitals and what we have in front of us is growing from a crisis to a disaster. It is just going to be a matter of which hospital and when. I would like to ask the minister, knowing that this crisis is getting worse, we are heading to a disaster if he is saying there is not going to be closures of any of our ERs. What is he going to do to ensure patient safety in these hospitals? Because I can tell you as a nurse, patient safety is going to be at risk.

* (13:55)

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, as we have always done in the summertime, we have sat down with our officials. We have sat down with the Manitoba Medical Association, we have sat down with the ER docs, we have sat down with our staffs at the various emergency departments, the seven, or eight, I guess, emergency areas in our city, two urgent care and six hospitals. We have looked at the problem. We have allocated resources and we are managing the problem, as we always do every summer, every holiday period.

They get up and cry wolf. They cry hysteria. They talk about patient safety. We manage the problem. Our patients are safe. Our ERs are open. Our doctors and nurses provide wonderful care, and those are the stories I get back from Manitobans every day.

Westman Regional Laboratory Technologist Shortage

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): What does the Minister of Health have to say to his good friend, MGEU president, Mr. Olfert, who says in a letter that I received today, and I will table the letter if the minister so wants. Mr. Olfert quotes: The medical laboratory technologists of Westman Regional Laboratory are very disappointed in remarks made by the honourable member of Health in recent weeks.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Olfert is referring, among other things, to the minister's repeated assertion that the lab is not short-staffed. Those are Mr. Olfert's words, not mine.

Is the minister finally willing to acknowledge the technologist shortage at the Westman Lab is reality?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Well, the numbers that I have already prepared and shared with the members opposite show that we have hired to date 152 more technologists than were in the system in 1999. We restarted the training programs that side of the House cancelled when they were in government. The vacancies that occur at Westman Lab, the seven technology vacancies, are filled with return-of-service grads who have just graduated from the course at Red River College that they cancelled and we reinstated.

I have great affection for Mr. Olfert, but I just remind all of us that collective bargaining is underway, and I am not about to collective bargain through this Legislature or through the media.

Mrs. Rowat: I am just wondering if these are the numbers that he is using, are from December 31, 2005, or are more current.

One of the potential grads that he is speaking of has sort of looked at this \$8,500 incentive but is actually going to Alberta to apply for a job, so, Mr. Speaker, this minister is way off base.

Mr. Olfert said that it has been common knowledge for years that Westman Lab in Brandon suffers from a severe staff shortage forcing current staff to work mandatory overtime to cover vacant shifts, and that since 2000, Westman Lab has lost 50 technologists. He also states that 40 percent of the lab technologists are eligible to retire in the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask the exact same question Mr. Olfert asked in his letter. Why is the minister seemingly unaware of these issues?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, we are hardly unaware of the issues. We came into government and found that the previous government had cancelled \$7 million in necessary improvements to the Westman Lab. We are doing it. We found the previous government had cancelled the training programs for technologists. We reinstated them. So, yes, there are still challenges in our technology area, but 152 more technologists today than in 1999 and quite a few more than there would have been if that program had stayed closed, which was their plan.

Finally, how in the world were they going to deal with any of the issues that they get up daily and talk about when they promised 1 percent in the 2003

election to cover health care needs? They have no credibility.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, we are looking for a long-term strategy from this Minister of Health. When he said that he is hiring more technicians, he is not. He is not hiring more technologists. He is not. They are being trained and they are leaving the province to find employment elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's friend, Mr. Olfert, has said, and I quote again: It is time for the Minister of Health to get his facts straight and finally to address the longstanding staffing problems at rural Manitoba's main laboratory.

Will the Minister of Health stop playing with the numbers and acknowledge the technologist shortage, or is he saying that Mr. Olfert, DSM and the technologists are wrong, Mr. Speaker?

* (14:00)

Mr. Sale: Well, I think that it will be very useful to have the records show that now, today, this being Wednesday, the Conservatives want to spend considerably more money on health care. I think it was Tuesday when they were talking about too much money being spent on health care, Mr. Speaker.

The original definition of a windshield wiper fits very well over there. It is a flip and a flop every day, and the vision does not get any clearer when you are a Conservative. It just gets cloudier and cloudier.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we put the program back. We have hired 152 more, we filled the vacancies at the lab, we are putting \$7 million in to rebuild it which they cancelled. What is their problem with understanding that?

Children in Care Premier Apology Request

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier (Mr. Doer) stated that the 31 children who died while in care or shortly after being released from care were not homicides. He said and I quote: "The 31 number tied to homicides is inaccurate." The *Winnipeg Free Press* represented this total on March 18, 2006, based on information from the Chief Medical Examiner which I would like to table today.

I would like to give this Premier the opportunity to correct the record, apologize to the families of these children, to this House, to the Chief Medical

Examiner, to the *Winnipeg Free Press* and to all Manitobans.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Deputy Premier): Mr. Speaker, when you have a child death, any number of child deaths, it is an unacceptable number. It is always one too many deaths. The members opposite continue to talk about the number of deaths that there have been under this administration. I want to share with the member opposite, in case she is not aware, some statistics that go back to 1999, 1998, 1997. In 1999, under section 10 cases, there were 69 deaths. In 1998, there were 72 deaths. In 1997, there were 69 deaths.

The members opposite talk—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Child Welfare System Public Inquiry

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Well, Mr. Speaker, if she is talking about reported deaths in children in care in section 10, she should know that in 2002 this government changed the reporting requirements to one year after post-care instead of two. We are not talking the same thing at all.

Of the 31 homicide deaths of children in care under this Premier's watch, nine occurred under this present minister in 2005, the highest recorded. In the terms of reference of the internal review received under Freedom of Information, again that is how we have to get the information, we learned how the department will examine the circumstances surrounding the death of Phoenix Sinclair and the other children that died.

While we respect the work of the people doing that internal review, we need to get right to the facts. We need a public inquiry. Will the minister ask the Premier (Mr. Doer) to call it today?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Deputy Premier): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, any death is unacceptable and we should not be playing politics with the death of children who are in care. The member opposite continues to play politics and does not want to accept the fact that there are reviews going on and there is an investigation going on to all of these deaths. I would ask her to bring it to the proper level here and let the officials, the people in charge, the Children's Advocate, the Ombudsman and the outside expertise do their work and bring some dignity to this rather than trying to lower the standards.

Mrs. Taillieu: We do respect the work that the people are doing in the internal reviews. What we do not respect is this government and the way they are treating the deaths of children in the child welfare system. This Premier did not even know how many children died as a result of homicide. That is proof that this child welfare system is not a priority for this government, Mr. Speaker, and the protection of children should be the highest priority of any government.

I would like to ask the Minister of Family Services to prove to Manitobans that protection of children is of the highest priority and ask the Premier to call a public inquiry into the delivery of child welfare in this province.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Within a week of the situation of such concern, I called two reviews; one external dealing with caseloads, one internal with a section 4.

Now when there were concerns about caseloads during the 1990s, and caseloads were 45 to 80, and there was no support as reflected in Judge Gregoire's report, I would like to see the member opposite table the press release as to how the former minister was dealing with it. It will be a long search because she did not issue a press release. Her response to Winnipeg Child and Family Services when they raised this issue? She sent them packing saying it was not her responsibility. She was not willing to work with them. The protection of the children are very important to this government which is why we have two reviews underway, and we are taking it very seriously.

Water Quality Regulations Re-evaluation

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, in committee this week we heard from numerous Manitobans on water quality issues. They have clearly indicated that regulations should be developed using common sense and be based on sound science. The regulations proposed under The Water Protection Act clearly do not meet these criteria.

Will the Minister of Water Stewardship please now re-evaluate his position on these particular regulations?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, it has been increasingly obvious that the approach of members opposite on

terms of policy is to go back to the 1990s with such winning policies as curtailing public sector wages, workfare and, dare I say, doing nothing in terms of water quality. Their leader on the campaign trail said he would scrap water regulations.

By the way, if he is referring to The Water Protection Act, it was actually passed unanimously by members of this Legislature. The one difference is we believed in it and we are consulting with Manitobans. We will protect water quality. We are not going to go back to the 1990s when they did nothing.

Mr. Cullen: The minister has obviously refused to listen during his much-touted consultations. If he had, he would have recognized the widespread objections to his plans proposed under the water quality management zone regulations. In fact, 18 agricultural commodity groups have opposed the direction this minister has taken under these proposed regulations.

When is the minister going to start listening to the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Ashton: Speaking back to the 1990s, 10 years ago as we speak, how many consultations did they have when they sold off MTS? Zero. We have had 35 meetings on the water quality management zones, and I want to tell members opposite that many Manitobans came forward in those meetings and said, yes, they wanted to see some changes in the particular regulations. But, Mr. Speaker, they recognized that we are protecting water quality.

There is a choice for Manitobans. It is back to the 1990s under the Tories, a do-nothing period in terms of water, or it is a government that does care about our water regulations and when it passes an act it implements them. We brought in water quality management zones. They voted for them, but we are going to put them in place.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the minister has had this position paper, signed by 18 of Manitoba's agricultural groups, in his possession for over a month. This document outlines 11 issues that they want addressed. There is considerable, and certainly out in Manitoba in terms of the implications of these regulations he has put forward. The minister claims to be consulting. Why is he refusing to listen to these 18 organizations that have put forward their names on this document?

Mr. Ashton: I know I have said this before, I will say it again. The C in PC certainly did not stand for

consult when they were in government in the 1990s. We make no apology for having no less than 35 public meetings. What you do when you have consultations, you look at the results and you do listen.

Well, let us make one thing very clear. The do-nothing Tories would do nothing to protect water quality whether it be Lake Winnipeg or lakes, rivers and streams throughout the province. We must move forward to protect water quality. We will listen to Manitobans but we will not be like the Tories, the do-nothing party of the nineties. Water quality matters to Manitobans, and it is a top priority for this government.

* (14:10)

Emergency Room Physicians Recruitment and Training

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, we have a ludicrous situation in this province with a government spending millions of dollars on feel-good ads to cover up their own drastic shortcomings.

For days the Minister of Health, when asked about long waiting lists and problems in the emergency room, has blamed everybody else instead of taking responsibility. In more than six and a half years, there has been ample time to recruit and/or train emergency room physicians.

I ask the government: Why has the government done so poorly in recruiting emergency physicians and in training adequate numbers of residents through the residency program in emergency medicine?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, we have the same number of emergency-trained physicians as we had in 1999. We would like to have more. Canada has 500 certified specialists in trauma medicine, in emergency room medicine, 500. We have about 4 percent of the population, a little less. We have about 4 percent, 19 of the 500 specialists, so we are holding our own in that regard. Every province has a serious challenge in regard to training emergency room specialists. We have the same number we had in 1999.

This year we have five residency positions for emergency medicine, up from one or two when the previous government was in place. If you want to talk about accountability, Mr. Speaker, the single greatest lack of accountability was when the member

opposite sat and made cuts of \$7.5 billion in health and higher education.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health talks about five residency positions when there is a shortfall of 15 emergency room doctors, not even a third of what is needed and that is only recently as the minister himself says.

My question, it is no wonder that we are behind. The government had an opportunity to do something in 1999. The government goofed badly when it failed to dramatically increase the number of residency positions when it was first elected in 1999.

I ask the government: Why did the government not act in 1999 to dramatically increase the number of residency positions, because the government knew full well that there were critical needs in emergency medicine and there was a critical need to pay attention in the emergency departments?

Mr. Sale: Well, the government knew full well that there was an even more critical shortage of nurses, and this member opposite fought against the expansion of the nursing program, but my colleague, the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak), reinstated it in Manitoba. That program has led us to have 1,300 more nurses than we had in 1999. Yes, there were shortages in specialists when we came into government, because the enrolment in the medical college had been cut to 70 from 85. There were shortages in quite a number of areas.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we have 150 more specialists in Manitoba today than we had back in 1999, because we have been successful in recruiting specialists in a number of critical areas. Our neurology program and other programs we have in cancer and heart lead the nation.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health avoids the central issue, that is, the quality and the availability of critical emergency room services in this province. You know, there are today real concerns about some of the quality issues in emergencies, and we saw this with an individual who came twice and was turned away at an emergency room. Now, not speaking to the specific instance, but people have got—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, on a point of order?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, it is critical that a member of this House not put incorrect information on the record. The information is in the paper. The member attended at Grace Hospital twice and was treated twice. He was not refused treatment.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A dispute over the facts is not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River Heights, to continue with his question.

Mr. Gerrard: I did not say "got no service." What I said is that he was not able to get the quality of service which he probably should have had. This minister is not doing his job.

I ask the minister: When there is so much concern about the emergency room service, why he has done such a terrible job of making sure that emergency services were provided with high quality in this province?

Mr. Sale: Well, the member takes a false premise and then constructs his argument on a false premise.

Dr. Balachandra, whom I have a lot of confidence in, pointed out that when somebody is punched or hit in an area of their chest or chest cavity, they can sustain an injury that is life-threatening and cannot be easily diagnosed, Mr. Speaker. He said that in the paper. The member knows that. It is in the front page or the second section of the *Winnipeg Free Press* today.

He ought not to use a false premise to construct his argument. We are working in our ERs. We are providing more residency training. We have something like 47 more nurses in our ERs today than we had in 1999, because my colleague reinstated the registered nurses training program which he opposed. He has two points of view on every subject, whichever one is better for him today.

Family Centres Resources

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): The Minister of Family Services and Housing attended the annual general meeting of the Family Centre this past Monday where she announced an expansion of the Woodydell

model of family associates in housing complexes in Winnipeg.

I had an opportunity to attend a meeting with several residents in my area for developing such a centre on Plessis Road. I congratulate the minister for this particular project and her leadership in developing this model. Could she inform the House about these new sites and where these resources will be available?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): I was indeed happy to attend the AGM of the Family Centre to support this unique model. It is a partnership between Manitoba Housing, the Family Centre and the tenants of Manitoba Housing complexes.

I was very pleased to announce that what had been pilot project funding has become permanent for 565 St. Anne's and Woodydell, on St. Anne's, as well as to announce our expansion onto Plessis Road. I would just like to quote Marcel Baril, who is the executive director of the Family Centre, who said this program is helping them stand up, feel good about themselves, change their community, feel good about their community, support each other and feel safer. I am very pleased to be a part of this very positive initiative in Manitoba Housing.

Charleswood Family Resource Centre Closure

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear that the minister is pleased with the opening of two family resource centres, one in Transcona. I would like to ask her why she is closing, though, the one in Charleswood.

In the Manitoba Housing complex in Charleswood, at the Westgrove area, we have a very, very serious crack cocaine problem. We also have a lot of very, very serious family issues.

A teacher at one of the schools is so upset with the closure of this unit because of the high poverty needs in the area, the number of children that go to school hungry every day.

I would ask the minister why they are closing this one particular family resource centre in Charleswood.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, just to clarify, these are two programs at 565 Woodydell and Plessis. We are looking for further expansion. If the member has concerns—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:20)

Ms. Melnick: It would be nice to be able to give an answer without—*[interjection]*

When there are concerns in public housing, I encourage all members to come forward with those concerns in writing. The department will work with these communities. They work with them. They work with Manitoba Housing throughout the province. She should make her concerns known to myself and we will be working with them. But, to look at a situation that is of concern, we have to know the information.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, her department knows the information. People in the complex have phoned her department. They have said drug use is so bad here we need these resources, we need help and can we move to another Manitoba Housing complex. Her department is saying, no, you will just move to another Manitoba Housing complex where the problem is the same, so you might as well stay where you are.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister if she is prepared to look into why they are closing this family centre in Charleswood. It has been open for years. There are a lot of children in that area that need it. There are a lot of parents in that area that need it. I would ask her if she would please look into it and try to find a way to keep it open. That area needs it.

Ms. Melnick: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, when there are issues raised in a particular complex, Manitoba Housing does work with the tenants. We have seen turnaround at 565 Woodydell. We look forward to more work in Plessis.

The Manitoba Housing department will work with individuals. We will work with the property managers program of safety. We work with Winnipeg Police Service. We work on issues of safety within individual units as well as the complex as a whole, and we will certainly be working with any group that comes forward with those concerns.

Again, if the Member for Charleswood has specific concerns, I encourage her to put it in writing.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, residents have contacted her department and I do not understand why she cannot understand this and do something.

People have now given up phoning. They have started to call me. I have brought the police in to my office to meet with residents from Manitoba Housing because her department is doing nothing. Crack cocaine dealers have shown up seven to eight times a day in this area and yet she is closing this family resource centre. Needles have been found in the playground next to the basketball hoop.

We have families that are here in distress. We have families that are scared to death to come forward and speak up. Yet she is asking, please put your name in writing, when they are phoning the department, and nothing is happening.

Will she commit today to look into this and keep that resource centre open in Charleswood?

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can commit today and any day that the department will work with any Manitoba Housing tenants or complexes that are having concerns.

It was in 2002 that we brought in, for the first time ever, a manager of security and loss prevention. There has been a security audit ongoing for the last number of years. There have been improvements to many complexes.

Again, I encourage the member to put in writing her concerns and certainly the department will be working with any group that is needing to be worked with around the issues of safety.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Forrest School Crosswalk

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to speak on a serious issue that concerns the safety of the children at the Forrest School within the Rolling River School Division and the questionable decision of the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux).

In September 2005, the minister was contacted by the superintendent of the Forrest School, within the Rolling River School Division, who requested that a solution be found to the issue of elementary students crossing Highway 10 in order to use the gymnasium at the high school. Highway 10 is a very busy transportation corridor, and although there is a school zone indicated for this section of road there have been several reports of vehicles passing one another in it. Furthermore, statistics indicate that

approximately 5,000 vehicles travel this route on a daily basis. This includes heavy truck traffic.

School representatives requested that a lighted crosswalk be established to allow students to traverse the highway. The minister's solution to this was to bus the children to the opposite side of the highway. The school representatives and parents considered the minister's idea ludicrous. He had effectively sloughed off the responsibility of the matter on to the school board and refuses to take a hand in ensuring the safety of the school children.

Many parents are objecting to the minister's so-called solution and have voiced their concern through a series of letters. I have over 30 letters outlining the views of parents on this issue, and I would like to table these for the House today, Mr. Speaker.

Given the volume of traffic on Highway 10 and the ongoing need to protect the children, it seems a small matter to install a crosswalk to ensure their safe passage. This minister is renowned in the House for withholding large portions of his Transportation budget. Surely his lapsed funding has room for so small a request, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the minister of highways to show some leadership, stop blaming others for his lack of solutions and provide safety for the children of Forrest school. Thank you.

Community Safety Forum

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, this April 25, I was pleased to sponsor a community forum on personal and public safety organized by residents of my constituency of St. Norbert at La Barriere Crossings School. With over 60 people in attendance, the St. Norbert Community Safety Coalition meeting discussed many ideas and action plans to help improve the safety of their homes and community.

Dave Lyons from the Winnipeg Police Department was the first speaker of the evening, and he did an excellent job providing information on home security and personal safety. Block Parents was represented by Tanya Comeault who provided a wealth of information on the need for a safety program and how successful it is in helping children. It provides them with a safe and easily recognizable location in the community, staffed by a friendly face, when they feel threatened on the street.

Riel Dion, from the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, shared important information about the

Citizens on Patrol Program which is a crime prevention program where community members act as extra eyes and ears for the local law enforcement. As a result of the work done that night, St. Norbert can now boast of a new community on patrol group in our area.

Mr. Speaker, it was my pleasure to assist in organizing this community forum. This event would not have been possible, however, without the participation of Karen MacDonald, Laureen Van Elwyk and Chris Rutkowski. I want to thank them for organizing the event and the child care, as well as ensuring the event was well publicized. I would also like to thank the staff at La Barriere Crossings School who provided the facility at no charge for this community event.

I would like to commend all the people who attended the event and thank the many volunteers and professionals in attendance who made presentations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

12th Manitoba Dragoons Cadet Corps

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, last night, I had the pleasure of acting as reviewing officer for the 12th Manitoba Dragoons Cadet Corps of Virden at their 52nd Annual Ceremonial Review. The annual review is an opportunity for the cadets to showcase their skills and receive awards for excellence by participating in a formal parade before the corps winds down for the summer.

The 12th Manitoba Dragoons pride themselves on their regimental affiliation. They are the only cadet corps in Canada to wear the insignia of the dragoons, which they adopted in 1994. This pride was evident last night as the cadets exhibited skill and self-discipline in drill and uniform standards. A number of cadets also received awards for their excellence in various elements of the cadet program.

I would like to thank the many sponsors of these awards which are a source of great pride and a symbol of accomplishments to the cadets themselves. Congratulations are due to all the award winners for their dedication to the program.

I was also pleased to be accompanied by retired Colonel Don Berry, who brought greetings to the annual review and presented the Army Cadet Service medals to a number of cadets. I also met with Commanding Officer Captain Tutthill and Deputy CO 2nd Lieutenant Craig Russell, as well as their staff.

The corps staff and volunteers provide invaluable leadership and mentorship to all of the cadets on a weekly basis. They are a dedicated bunch, and I would like to thank them for their efforts.

In closing, I would also like to recognize the four cadets recognized on the corps graduation honour roll: Chief Warrant Officer Mitch Bohrn, Warrant Officer Travis Langlois, Sergeant Treasure Sparks and Sergeant Alyssa Russell. On their 18th birthday, these cadets will be granted full legion membership, and I would like to thank Branch No. 8 of the Royal Canadian Legion for this special recognition.

The 12th Manitoba Dragoons are a group of dedicated and exemplary youth, and I was honoured to be their reviewing officer last night. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Scholars Night and Value of Education

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Recently, I was pleased to attend the 10th Annual Scholars' Night at the Manitoba Club. This night honours outstanding graduates who have earned the highest academic achievements in their programs of study at the University of Manitoba. The celebration was attended by many graduates, professors and instructors, parents, along with the President of the University of Manitoba, Dr. Szathmary; the Chancellor of the University of Manitoba, Bill Norrie; the Dean of the I. H. Asper School of Management, Dr. Glen Feltham; and many other distinguished guests.

I took great pride in addressing these scholars who will one day be the leaders and builders of our province and our country. I can identify with their hard work and dedication in achieving academic distinctions. My late father was a scholar of Sanskrit. I took the occasion to pass on a theme of his words of wisdom. I quote: Education is the most precious wealth that one can possess. Material things can be stolen or robbed, but knowledge and wisdom are gifts for life.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes this important value of post-secondary education. Since '99, we have maintained a 10 percent tuition reduction for students. This has led to an increase of a 30 percent increase enrolment in our post-secondary education institutions. Budget 2006 provides further investment with the largest funding increase to the universities and colleges by a three-

year commitment of \$60 million. We believe that investment in Manitoba's young people is an investment for the future of our province.

I would also like to congratulate the forthcoming graduates of all Manitoba schools and post-secondary institutions this year. I wish them well in their future endeavours and encourage them to use their academic skills to promote education and a love of learning as an important asset of a healthy society. Thank you.

* (14:30)

Emergency Room Shortages

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, a Winnipeg man was severely beaten last Friday morning near his Victor Street residence. He went to hospital twice, was discharged twice from hospital, and then later collapsed and died at his home on Sunday. This man, Dale Stephen Spencer was 48, is an unfortunate victim of circumstance perhaps, of problems perhaps, in our emergency rooms or elsewhere. We are all saddened by this death and wish that it had not happened.

Clearly, under circumstances where there is blunt trauma, there can be circumstances where it is a little bit more difficult to pick up medical problems. I know, for example, that a very good friend of mine and of the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), Mr. David Iftody, had blunt trauma to the abdomen and ended with a bleed, I believe, from his spleen and died, stressing the importance of being able to recognize the subsequent problems associated with severe blunt trauma.

But the concern that we all have here also extends to the problems within our emergency rooms, when you have a shortage of 15 emergency room doctors. Why do we have a residency training program with only five emergency residents? We need clearly not only to train physicians but to retain them, and that means having a really good environment within our emergency rooms, having things working well, being able to see people and treat illness quickly and to do it well.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bills

34, 42, 33, 41, 28 and 38, and then report stage bills in the order they appear?

Mr. Speaker: We will deal with bills in this order: 34, 42, 33, 41, 28 and 38. Then we will do report stage as listed on the Order Paper.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 34—The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on Bill 34, The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet, who has 19 minutes remaining.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I look forward to resuming debate on Bill 34. The principle of the bill, being whistle-blower legislation, certainly is supportable, but the point I made during the debate that I started yesterday was there does not appear to be any substantive content to the bill. That is our concern about this bill, but certainly the principle is supportable.

We would want to protect whistle-blowers across this province, whether they turn in members of government or otherwise, or they stop the waste that possibly is occurring throughout government. We want to ensure they have the support and they have the protection that is available to them to ensure that they do come forward, first of all, and, secondly, when they do come forward that something is actually done. We have to ensure that we have legislation to do both of those things, to encourage people to come forward and to have the ability not only after they come forward, but have the ability to be able to protect themselves from reprisals by government or others. So it is important that we introduce whistle-blower legislation. However, as I mentioned earlier, the legislation itself does have many, many shortcomings, but at this point I would hope that we would move it to committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk about The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, and to put a few words on the record with respect to this act.

Clearly, we need in this province whistle-blower protection, but we also need to make sure that it is adequate, that it serves the public interest and that it allows people who have felt intimidated by this government to be able to speak much more freely

about the improvements which they see are so clearly needed.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

We have some quite significant concerns with this act as it is designed. First of all, the act allows individuals to go to the Ombudsman, and in this light there needs to be a process whereby the Ombudsman can adequately report the concerns, the issues that are raised, if not reporting about the individuals themselves. Clearly, where there are problems within the Civil Service, we need to know something about the nature of those problems. Where there are problems that related to what happened with the Crocus Investment Fund, we need to make sure that we can allow individuals to come forward and talk about those. We are having a significant problem not only in these areas, but in the areas of, for example, the Child and Family Services.

We see this bill as a small step toward what we need to have, but we are concerned about what is also the potential to hide or to cover up problems because the ability to disclose to the public, the ability to disclose to MLAs, to the media is severely restricted under this act. That should not be the case. What should be the case is that there needs to be a broader opportunity for issues that can be publicly disclosed. In this, we see that all that can be publicly disclosed is where there is an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health and safety of persons or to the environments. We need to go much more than in terms of an imminent risk. We need to go to circumstances where there may be criminal actions, where there may be problems which are against the law of the land, and where individuals have concerns that actions being taken may be breaking the law.

* (14:40)

Certainly, in order to have good operating situations for civil servants and for the province, we need to have a more open style and type of government. We are dealing with a government which has chosen time after time to clamp down, to close up, to not hold a public inquiry. Those are the sorts of things that we need to be able to change in order to improve the nature and the quality of government, the nature and quality of participation of citizens in what is happening. Clearly, one of the concerns here is the intent, it would appear, on the part of this government to limit the protection when people talk publicly. I think that this is something

which is to be regretted, and certainly we would hope that the government would be open to some amendments which might make some changes in this area and make sure that there is a more open opportunity for reporting.

We are dealing at the moment with circumstances under The Child and Family Services Act where there are major problems, where people within Manitoba's Child and Family Services are feeling very much constrained by the situation, by the circumstances under which they are operating. Certainly, what is badly needed are improvements. We are not going to be able to get adequate improvements without a system which is much more open than we have here. There needs to be an ability where individuals have taken issues to the Ombudsman and to others that have not been able to get effective change that they can take these forward publicly. There has to be a time period in a way for people to be able to take issues publicly rather than being so fully restricted. Certainly, that is needed in terms of improving the openness, transparency, the workings of government and, done well, does not constrain or inhibit people from doing the very best that they can on a day-to-day basis.

We want to remove some of the fear that people have when they bring forward issues or the fear that they have in speaking out. I will give you, Madam Acting Speaker, an example. Just the other day I was at 170 Hendon, and there were people there who are afraid of coming forward with issues, afraid of bringing out the reality of the problems of living in a housing building operated by this government because this government has been a rather bad landlord. This government has had a housing building operated, and maybe many housing buildings operated, where there are problems with drugs, prostitution, violence, intimidation, and so on. People are afraid of speaking openly of these problems, bringing them to light so that in fact they can be dealt with and corrected.

It is time to change that, but this bill clearly does not go far enough, but certainly it is a small step. We see as one area where there is a significant shortfall here the area of not public government activities and the civil service but the broader community. We would like to be assured that this bill will apply to regional health authorities, universities, various other institutions where there are large amounts of government funding. We would like to be sure that in fact this—or I think it would be similarly related but a little different legislation—covers whistle-

blowing in the private sector. In the wake of what happened with Enron and what has happened in other corporations, it is time to have ways and means for people to bring forward issues in the private sector as well as in the public sector. It is time to have a more open style of government instead of having the kind of closed shop that we have seen for most of the last six and a half years under this government.

So, in talking about this bill, in providing some level of support for this bill to enable it to go to committee stage where we can get input from citizens, we are ready to express concerns. We are ready to look for improvements because we feel that substantial improvements are badly needed if this is going to move forward.

So, Madam Acting Speaker, there are many things that are driving legislation of this sort. Clearly, one of those is the real need for a Crocus inquiry for an understanding of what happened and for efforts to change the way that this government has been working. Clearly, we need to set a future pattern for how to attract and build venture capital in industry, the private sector in this province. The government sadly is going far too far in trying to cover up and trying to squelch and suppress efforts to have a public inquiry.

We regret that, but we see this as one small tentative step, and we are ready to support it going to committee stage. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Acting Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill 34. I think that Bill 34, in principle, is a positive bill, even though as my leader as talked about, there are a lot of concerns in terms of just to what degree this whistle-blower legislation is going to be as effective as Manitobans would like to see whistle-blower legislation.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

In fact, I think what we would recognize is that this legislation actually falls short of what we believe is in the public's best interest to ensure that there is protection of those individuals who have the integrity to be able to come forward in a situation which ultimately is in the best interests of the broader population.

That is why in one sense Bill 34 does address in part the issue, but in the much bigger way it could have been so much better. I would anticipate that there is even a very good likelihood that there will be

some amendments brought forward to this piece of legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in hopes that the government will see its errors and recognize the need to make the changes that will, in fact, make it a better piece of legislation.

There is this mindset that is out there, and the government tries to come across as if it is addressing an issue by saying that it has brought in whistle-blower legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In fact, if you even go to the title of the bill as printed, Bill 34, The Public Interest Disclosure Act, well, for a great deal of our population that particular explanation is not as popular as being able to say whistle-blower legislation. People understand and appreciate when someone says whistle-blower legislation as to what it is and what it is about. What I see is the government has recognized that there is a public appetite for whistle-blower legislation, and, as a result of that appetite, the government has brought forward this bill.

*(14:50)

This bill is flawed. This bill could have been a whole lot better to ensure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is that much more teeth to the whole concept of whistle-blowing. But, unfortunately, the government has not seen the merit of bringing in more comprehensive legislation that would allow for and encourage more people to do the right thing and bring to the appropriate attention of the person who is going to be able to be most effective at being able to address the issue that that particular whistle-blower might want to raise, and that causes a great deal of concern. One has to ask the question why it is the government has taken that route. I suspect it has more to do again with the political spin of wanting to look as if they are being tough and they are wanting to address negligence, whether it is in the Crown corporations, arm's-length groups, government agencies, government departments, by saying that we brought in whistle-blower legislation.

Well, I would have much preferred to see whistle-blower legislation with a lot more strength, with more teeth that would have enabled and encouraged more people to be able to feel comfortable in coming forward. I say that because I do believe that if you look at the government's record in dealing with important issues you will see that they have indeed been negligent. The one that I think that I would be negligent in if I did not refer to in speaking to this bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would be

the whole Pat Jacobsen affair and what had taken place there.

So I would like to put a few words on the record in regard to Ms. Pat Jacobsen. Ms. Pat Jacobsen is an individual that came to our province and started working for Workers Compensation a number of years back. She came to Manitoba with incredible credentials, had a lot to offer. Quite often you will see advertising of how well Workers Compensation is doing, and that in itself is somewhat debatable, I guess, if you talk to some of the individuals going through the appeal process of Workers Compensation. They will tell you it is not going all that well, but the individual that kind of headed this whole area and had the support of the government and the board was Pat Jacobsen.

Best I can tell is that Ms. Jacobsen administered the government's and the board's policy in regard to Workers Compensation. The mistake that she had made was a number of years ago she raised concerns in regard to Mr. Wally Fox-Decent. She had raised those concerns to the person that she felt would have been most appropriate in terms of being able to deal with conflicts of interest in regard to Workers Compensation and Crocus.

Well, the letter that was drafted to the then-minister, Becky Barrett, pointed out some concerns. Ultimately, if the government would have dealt with those concerns, there could have been a number of changes done at Workers Compensation along with the potential of millions of dollars that were lost through the whole Crocus fiasco could have been saved, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But what actually took place was that the then-Minister of Labour indicated that, well, she has no interest in this and she just passed the letter on to Wally Fox-Decent and the Workers Compensation board. It was shortly thereafter that Ms. Jacobsen found herself looking for another job.

Fortunately for her, because of her credentials, it did not take long for her to find something. I understand now that she is running transit out in Vancouver and doing an admirable job as a top-end civil servant over there. It is interesting in terms of how the government has responded to this issue. When we have raised the issue of Pat Jacobsen and the manner in which she was treated by this government, it is amazing how this government stands by Becky Barrett and the actions that she had taken against Ms. Jacobsen. That is why one has to really question is this government's heart in

protecting whistle-blowers or potential whistle-blowers, because, if you look at what happened with Pat Jacobsen, the conclusion I believe that most Manitobans would come to would be, no, they are not, the reason being that when we raised the issue of Pat Jacobsen, the now-Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan), when I raised it in Question Period, what she had to say was, well, Workers Compensation is arm's-length. It has nothing to do with us. We do not want anything to do with Workers Compensation when it comes to the hiring or firing, that this is a board.

She does not mention in terms of who appoints the board or the fact of the matter is that Workers Compensation is under the jurisdiction of the Province of Manitoba. They just do not want anything to do with it. When you approach the government on the issue of—well, Pat Jacobsen wrote a letter to the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Labour gave it to the employer of Pat Jacobsen and then was relieved of her responsibilities, the response, then, that the government gets is, well, we would have done the same thing. There is no acknowledgement that Becky Barrett made a mistake there.

How does that contrast to the public perception? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had discussions, whether it is on radio, whether it is one-on-one, whether it is in other public forums in regard to Ms. Pat Jacobsen and the way in which she was dealt with. What I saw is that the public is way offside with the government's position in dealing with Pat Jacobsen and the ignorance of this government in not acknowledging that there was a mistake here.

I do not understand why it is that this government, and in particular the Minister of Labour and the Premier (Mr. Doer) of our province, cannot talk to any other Manitoban and put the facts on the table and try to justify to them that in what happened there, that there was nothing wrong with what took place. I believe, and I believe a vast majority of Manitobans, would support that what happened to Pat Jacobsen was not appropriate and that the government and the minister were wrong in doing what she did, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Further to that, it was interesting, it was back on December 6, 2005, that Ms. Jacobsen had written a letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an affidavit from the province of British Columbia which she made under oath, and it lists a number of issues. I know this document has been tabled before, but I want to make

reference to No. 9. This is what Pat Jacobsen said under oath, and I quote: I believe that had the government conducted an independent audit in 2001 of Workers Compensation Board, as I requested from the Minister responsible for Workers Compensation Board in 2001, both Crocus and the Workers Compensation Board would not have lost millions of dollars and eight senior executives of the board would not have been fired in the subsequent year. End of quote.

* (15:00)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a very, very serious allegation that has been put against this government, and the government's response is they put their hands in the air and they say, who cares. They do not care. Here is an individual with incredible credentials. Here is an issue that has dealt with millions upon millions of dollars, over 33,000 Crocus shareholders, thousands of injured workers, and the official response from this government is, who cares. This government does not care. I say shame on this government.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I cannot believe that a government of this sort of a background, on paper, would take that sort of an attitude in regard to an issue of this nature. Where was the Status of Women's minister on this issue? Where is the Minister responsible for Labour? Where is the Premier (Mr. Doer) or the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) on this critical issue of what has taken place? When you bring in a bill that deals with whistle-blower legislation, I would like to think that the government would talk about why it is that we need more Pat Jacobsens and what it is and how this bill is going to deal with people like Pat Jacobsen into the future. It is questionable whether or not Pat Jacobsen would have even had benefited with this bill.

So, if one can argue that Pat Jacobsen would not have benefited with this particular bill, then what benefit is this bill to Manitobans? If the government would have been obligated, or if this legislation would have been there back in 2001, would Pat Jacobsen have been covered? I do not believe to the degree that it would have prevented her from having ultimately to leave Workers Compensation, and that is why we say this legislation is in need of amendments.

There is a need for change on this bill, Mr. Speaker. If the government really wanted to do a

service for the province, what it should do is have this bill go to committee and encourage individuals to contribute during the committee stage as to what could be done to make this bill even that much better, that much healthier so that civil servants and others would feel comfortable in reporting on issues that are of critical interest for all Manitobans when it comes to neglect or gross neglect that they see and that they observe, that they do not have to be in fear of losing their job because they did the right thing by bringing it to the government's attention. That is what should have happened. That is what we should be seeing, but that is not the priority of this government, unfortunately.

What we have witnessed over the last little while is a government that sees its own legislation, wants it passed so that ultimately, in the next provincial election, they can go around and they can say, well, we brought in whistle-blower legislation. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to add one word to that. They brought in flawed whistle-blower legislation.

If they had credibility on this issue I believe that they would be open to amendments, they would be open to having feedback from the public. It is one of those bills that they should be encouraging people to participate, to offer ideas and thoughts because obviously, and I know that the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) likes to talk about, well, who did you consult with, who did you consult with? I do not believe they consulted with anyone outside of their own spin doctors, outside of their own election readiness committee because I believe, that, had they consulted with individuals who wanted to see strong whistle-blower legislation, we would not be seeing this bill. There would be a bill that would be far more effective, far more reaching out to protect the interests of a lot more people. We would have seen legislation that would have indeed protected individuals like Pat Jacobsen.

Mr. Speaker, I had indicated that we wanted to see this bill passed to the committee stage, and at this point in time I will conclude my remarks in favour of it actually being passed unless of course there are others who want to speak to the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded—*[interjection]* Leave—

Mr. Speaker: Are there any other speakers? Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 34, The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act.

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

SECOND READINGS

Bill 42—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 42, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2006; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2006 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: I am pleased to present for second reading Bill 42, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. Bill 42 enacts the tax reductions announced in the 2006 budget which I had the pleasure of delivering to the people of Manitoba and to the Assembly on March 6. It also includes several other measures which I will highlight.

The 2006 budget reflects the advice and suggestions received during our pre-budget consultations held throughout Manitoba. This budget continues to meet and exceed commitments that we made to Manitobans. We are implementing a sound fiscal plan. Budget '06 invests in Manitobans' priorities of health care, education, social services while delivering sustainable tax relief. This is the seventh consecutive budget that our government has provided tax relief for Manitobans. These tax decreases amount to total annual savings of over \$600 million for both individuals and businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I would first like to direct the members' attention to Part 5 of Bill 42 which amends The Income Tax Act. This section introduces nearly \$100 million in new personal property and business tax reductions to Manitobans. Combined with the elimination of the education support levy on residential property which is detailed in Part 9 of this bill, Budget '06 increases the total annual personal and property tax relief provided to Manitobans to a whopping \$472 million since 1999. Budget '06

reduces the personal income tax, middle bracket rate, from 13.5 to 13 percent and increases the basic personal amount by \$100 to \$7,834, both effective for 2007 and later years.

Our government wishes to promote investments by Manitobans in Manitoba businesses. Bill 42 takes two important steps in this direction. First, building upon the recommendations made by the Crocus Investment Fund implementation team, amendments made last year and further improvements being introduced this year in Bill 37 respecting the governance and reporting requirements for Manitoba labour-sponsored funds, I am pleased to announce that investors in newly registered funds will be eligible for a higher contribution limit, \$12,000 versus \$5,000.

Second, we are complementing federal changes to the dividend tax credit as presented in the federal government's May 2 budget. Now there will be two dividend tax credits for individual shareholders: a credit of 4.87 percent on dividends received from private Canadian-controlled corporations with income under the small business limit and a new higher credit of 11 percent on dividends paid by publicly traded corporations and those private corporations whose taxable income exceeds the small business limit. These changes will result in a more balanced tax treatment between corporations and income trusts.

We are introducing an adoption expenses tax credit similar to the federal credit. Part 5 of this bill will also exclude the federal universal child care benefit from family income when calculating Manitoba refundable personal and property tax credits.

We are making the odour control tax credit available to individual farmers in addition to corporations. Farmers will be able to use the credit to offset not only Manitoba income taxes but also their farmland property taxes. The credit will be extended for three years in order to further promote investments in the control of odour from organic waste.

*(15:10)

The co-op education tax credit introduced in 2003 will now be available to all employers, charities, non-profits and other employers who may not pay income tax but employ a co-operative education student will now benefit from this credit. However, our government not only wishes to

encourage students to gain valuable workplace experience in Manitoba, but we want to promote the retention of these graduates in Manitoba. Accordingly, we will expand the tax credit to include not only co-operative education students but graduates of these programs.

Our government is committed to offering a competitive business cost environment including taxes. The general corporate income tax rate will be reduced to 14.5 percent on January 1, 2006, and to 14 percent on January 1, 2007. The small business corporate income tax rate will also be reduced from 4.5 percent to 3 percent on January 1, 2007. This is a 67 percent decrease in the small business rate since 1999.

Since Budget 2005, the Canadian dollar has continued to strengthen against the U.S. dollar affecting Manitoba's manufacturing sector. To support our province's largest industry, Budget 2006 extends the manufacturing investment tax credit by three years to June 30, 2009, and increases the refundable portion of the tax credit from 20 percent to 35 percent.

Bill 42 also makes technical amendments to The Income Tax Act to permit the flow-through of various tax credits where a corporation is a member of a multi-tiered partnership. This will ensure that corporations will be able to access our tax credits regardless of the way they choose to organize their businesses.

In total, this bill introduces \$17 million in new tax decreases for Manitoba businesses. Combined with the reductions implemented since 1999, our government has reduced the tax burden for Manitoba business by an enormous \$146 million.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the members' attention to other parts of Bill 42. Part 1 of Bill 42 amends The Corporation Capital Tax Act to increase the deduction from \$5 million to \$10 million for fiscal years commencing after January 1, '07. Part 2 of Bill 42 amends the regulation-making power under The Environment Act to enable the Province to recover hearing costs from proponents of a planned project that may have any impact on the environment. Part 3 amends The Financial Administration Act to better align provisions with the government's accounting policies.

With the government's commitment to fully implement accrual accounting, the legislative authority for appropriations needs to recognize not

only cash payments recorded in a year but also non-cash expenses such as amortization and accruals consistent with the main Estimates of Expenditure. In addition, the act has been updated for recent accounting policy changes related to accounting for inventory and long-term liabilities.

Mr. Speaker, new standards for financial statement presentation that require the recognition of assets held for resale, such as inventory, to be reflected as a financial asset impacts the government's accounting for cottage lot inventory and sales. Also, new public-sector accounting standards require that government recognize liabilities in its financial statements when it is obligated, or likely obligated, to pay future amounts to settle a current obligation. This change impacts the government's accounting for environmental liabilities and other obligations that meet the liability recognition criteria outlined in the public-sector accounting handbook.

Parts 4 and 7 amend The Gasoline Tax Act and The Motive Fuel Tax Act to expand the exemption for fuel used in commercial logging operations.

Part 8 of Bill 42 amends The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act to provide further property tax relief for farmers by increasing the farmland school tax rebate from 50 percent to 60 percent for 2006 and following years. Many farmers rent land and a number of landowners have expressed an interest in allowing renters of farmland to qualify for the rebate. Accordingly, legislation is being introduced that will allow for the assignment of the rebate by a landlord to a farmer tenant.

In 2002, our government made a commitment to phase out the residential education support levy. We gradually reduced the levy from 2002 to 2005. Part 9 of this bill amends The Public Schools Act to eliminate this levy on residential property, fulfilling our commitment.

Part 10 makes several changes to The Retail Sales Tax Act. First, the exemption for diabetic supplies has expanded to include lancets, lancing devices and blood glucose monitors and meters. Second, as part of our action to develop a clean energy alternative to fossil fuels, Manitoba-produced biofuel that is sold in Manitoba as biodiesel will be exempt from the sales tax. In addition, to the extent that we cannot not remove completely the use of fossil fuels in our daily lives, our government is interested in supporting the development of this

industry in Manitoba and minimize our dependence on imports.

The current record-breaking growth in oil and gas exploration in Manitoba is being supported in Bill 42 by providing a sales tax exemption on drilling or well-serving rigs and geophysical survey equipment used for oil and gas exploration or development in Manitoba.

Finally, The Retail Sales Tax Act is amended to provide the sales tax refund available on the purchase of a mobile, modular or ready-to-move home as a point of sale exemption. Part 11 of Bill 42 amends The Tax Administration and Miscellaneous Taxes Act to authorize Manitoba to enter into tax administration agreements with Manitoba First Nations that choose to levy their own sales and commodity taxes. This complements changes in the federal budget that will provide broader taxation authority for Manitoba First Nations.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 42 outlines several provisions in greater detail than what has been discussed during the budget debate and Estimates process. I encourage the members to refer to the committee notes and to consider this bill carefully. Thank you.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to put a few words on the record, a few brief remarks with respect to Bill 42 that was presented by the Minister of Finance.

We, of course, I would like to put it clearly on the record, voted against the '06-07 budget for a couple of very, very good reasons. First of all, this government had a responsibility to clear the air on Crocus and the Crocus scandal and they chose not to do it, in spite of the fact that their fingerprints were all over it. The political interference was all over the Crocus scandal and that is one very good reason why we voted against this budget.

The second, of course, is the fact that this government has a history—it has a long history—of spending money without results. I think the record speaks for itself, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the amount of spending that this government had over the last seven years and no results to show for it. So those are two very, very good reasons why we would have voted against the budget. But, with respect to this bill, this bill in fact deals essentially with the tax cuts that were announced in the budget. We certainly would support the principle of this bill. Before he pats himself too much on the back, I would remind

the minister that the cost to these tax cuts that are implemented in Bill 42 in 2007 are much higher than they are in 2006.

Most of those tax cuts that he is talking about take effect January 1, 2007. The cost to the Treasury of the tax cuts that the minister has indicated that he is implementing in the budget are minimal in 2006. So, to a certain extent, in terms of patting himself on the back, I would say that he has made Manitoba less competitive in 2006. Other budgets in other provinces across this country have done substantially more in 2006 than we have.

He introduces a budget, instead of introducing tax cuts that are meaningful today to Manitobans, he prefers instead to wait until 2007, 2008, perhaps 2009. I merely have to point to the explanatory notes on Bill 42 to get the point across when I look at the corporation capital tax for fiscal years beginning after January 1, 2007, when I look at The Income Tax Act reducing the middle income tax bracket for 2007, not for 2006, Mr. Speaker. When I look at the same explanatory note it says that we are increasing the basic personal exemption by \$100 in 2007, not 2006. We have among the highest personal exemption, or the lowest personal exemption, I should say, in Canada and clearly more has to be done to keep more money into the hands of Manitobans.

It is not the case of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) not cutting taxes. We acknowledge that he has made some inroads in terms of cutting taxes, but he has not cut them fast enough. He has not kept up with other Canadian provinces across this country.

*(15:20)

When I look at some of the other explanatory notes it indicates that the general corporate tax rate goes to 14.5 percent in this year. That is the first I have heard of a tax cut in 2006 and then he talks about 2007. When we talked about the small business tax rate, he is cutting in 2007; in a 2006 budget he is cutting next year. So in reality there are very little tax cuts available for Manitobans in 2006. The tax competitive issue is, first and foremost, an issue of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. They want tax cuts now because other provinces are cutting taxes now. They are not cutting taxes in 2007, 2008, 2009. They are doing it now. Because we are not doing it now, we are not remaining competitive with other provinces.

How do we stack up with other provinces? We are always two years and about three or four steps behind. We are losing our competitive advantage that we had, if we had any at all.

Clearly, what we are doing is ensuring that more young people, more young families are going to leave Manitoba. They are going to continue to go to Alberta, as they have done in the past, and this minister is responsible for that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, it is a good opportunity for me to be able to express a few thoughts in regard to the budgetary policy of this government and what this government has been attempting to do and how they try to put spins on things and mislead the public.

Mr. Speaker, there are certain aspects to this bill that I find, or the whole budget process I have found quite interesting. You know, shortly after the budget was first introduced, we saw this \$100,000-plus out on the TVs and radio and newspaper ads, talking and giving glowing marks about this government. Then, in reality, at the end of the day you spend \$8 billion. You better spend some of that money wisely. There are bound to be some good things to be said.

If you take a look at their most recent promo campaign on health care, they are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars again, brochures to every household, television advertising. They even get the NHL hockey commercials in there, I understand, Mr. Speaker. They spare no cost, no cost. They realize it is not coming out of their own personal pockets; it is coming out of the taxpayers'. They abuse those tax dollars and send out the propaganda. They have plenty of spin doctors that are out there to try to say how wonderful things are and in some areas the economy is doing well, and so forth.

Even in health care one might be able to argue that there are some things that are going well, but when you look at the bottom line, and that is something which I like to be able to do, Mr. Speaker, to look at the bottom line as to what is actually happening, and what I find is that this government has more to do with spin than anything else.

It is interesting that it was not that long ago that the provincial auditor caught the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and this government misinforming Manitobans, misleading Manitobans. All we have to do is take a look at the provincial auditors. So, when the Minister of Finance says rubbish, he knows full

well that is not the case. The provincial auditor clearly indicated that we had a deficit, several hundred millions of dollars in deficit in the year 2004. I believe it was 2004, Mr. Speaker, in that budget. What do this Minister of Finance and the Premier (Mr. Doer) go around telling Manitobans? That we have a surplus, we have a \$17-million, I believe, surplus back then. So you have the reality and you have the spin.

Mr. Speaker, this government has made an art of spin. They talk about how wonderful things are. You know, if you listen to what the government says you would think that the province of Manitoba was doing far superior than any other province in Canada. They invest a million-plus dollars in political spin. It is not like they have enough in terms of the other opportunities that they have through their own MLAs and circulating of materials to put spin. They go far beyond that in putting a spin that is not reflective of reality. They were caught doing that by the provincial auditor. They know because the provincial auditor's office is an independent office of this Legislature, that in fact they got caught with their hands in the cookie jar, as the saying is often quoted.

Well, what about this particular bill in this budget? Well, one can talk about the greatest expenditure which is that of health care. How is the government doing in managing health care when health care makes up such a significant percentage of this budget? How are they actually doing in reality? Reality is, Mr. Speaker, we are probably, if not at the top, very close to the top on a per capita of spending on health care in the country. Yet we are at the other end in terms of the quality of service that is being delivered, and that is no reflection on the nurses and doctors and other health care providers. They have very limited resources that they are actually working with, that they are expected to work with.

Mr. Speaker, while other provinces have seen more merit in terms of providing care at the grass roots level, at the bedside, this government has grown an empire. That empire is better known as the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. They have invested millions, tens of millions of dollars into bureaucracy, while lineups and people are sitting in emergency wards not being tended to in a timely fashion. They are not meeting the public's expectations of quality service. It is not because of the health care providers. It is because this government has made an intentional decision over the last number of years to fund bureaucracy as opposed to the health care bedside services. We are

not talking about a few million dollars, we are talking about tens of millions of dollars, well into the hundred-plus millions of dollars.

So it is a question of how effective is the government spending on health care when you pose a question on health and you say, what about this? It could be the emergency services. It could be a waiting list. The Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) has his standard list of answers that he goes to, and most of those answers are actually cited in that promo piece that has been circulated to all Manitobans, and he will list off well, we have cut waiting lists here, here and here, and avoids answering the question that has actually been placed to him directly, Mr. Speaker, but rather just looks at ways in which he can pat the government on the back and try to give the impression that health care is actually improving in the province of Manitoba.

Most Manitobans do not believe that health care is better today than it was in 1999. I do believe that to be the case because I have canvassed my constituents on this issue, Mr. Speaker. I think that what we need to do is to see far more co-operation amongst different levels of government, different political parties, to start taking a more apolitical approach at dealing with health care issues. Why is it that there are certain areas that we have not moved more aggressively on: issues like nurse practitioners, issues like emergency doctors in our services, issues like supporting our RNs, BNs and LPNs and all the other health care professions, our health aides?

Why is it today we still refuse to be aggressive in addressing the credentials that immigrants bring to our province, especially in the health care field? This government has failed at being able to recognize the credentials in a very real way that would have seen these people practising medicine, that would see them providing care at the bedside to individuals who are in need of that care, Mr. Speaker. Why does the government continue to fail in these substantial issues that have to be addressed? Because they are more interested in feeding that bureaucracy, in playing in areas in which that has very, very little result when you start talking about the size of that bureaucracy.

*(15:30)

I would go as far to say that we need to overhaul, replace, get rid of. There needs to be a change of the way in which we are administering health care. The greatest threat to health care in the province of Manitoba is a government that ignores

the need for change and the managing of that change. This government has done worse than that. They have actually invested more and more into paper than, as far as I am concerned, into that real care. That causes a great deal of concern on my part.

So, if the government wants to say that I voted against the budget so that means I oppose X millions of dollars going towards this and I oppose X millions of dollars going towards that, Mr. Speaker, I am voting against this budget because I believe that the government is not doing the type of job that it could be doing, and I am talking about the overall expenditure of this government. That is what it is that I disagree with.

That is dealing with the issue of health care. Mr. Speaker, one could go on in terms of just the level of taxation. You know, it is interesting, if you look back to '98-99, the last Progressive Conservative budget, you will recall that the New Democratic Party voted in favour of that budget. I believe I am the only one who is currently inside the Chamber who did not vote in favour of that budget, but this New Democratic government voted in favour of that budget.

What did they vote in favour of? Well, they had voted in favour of individual income tax of \$1.48 billion. Where is that today? Today, in the '06-07 budget forecast, \$2.4 billion. That is about \$524 million more than this government has achieved through individual income tax that is now going into general revenues. If you want to talk about squandered opportunities, this government has squandered opportunities. When you get that sort of an increase in individual income tax, you have not dealt with the issue in an appropriate way of education tax, as an example.

From virtually since I was first elected in 1988, people across this province have talked about the education tax that is on their property bills. In fact, I had one individual who wanted to do a petition. I had written up a petition, and this individual took it upon himself, indicated that I would circulate the petition. I would like to table this one, and, maybe just prior to tabling it, I would like to read it on the record.

It was: To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. The background of this petition is as follows: 1. At one time the school portion of the property tax bill was much lower than the municipal portion. 2. Today the school tax portion is greater than the municipal portion of our property tax bills. 3. That funding public education should not be so

dependent on property taxes. We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: 1. To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider the need to establish a time frame that will seek to put in place a formula that will reduce the amount of school tax on property. 2. That any formula developed would ensure that as a minimum at least 80 percent of the total cost of funding kindergarten to Grade 12 would come from provincial general revenues.

That was signed by a number of Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, but because it is out of order I was not able to present it, and I know that there is yet another petition that is actually out in the constituency that I represent trying to deal with the property tax issue.

There are people who feel very passionately that we should not be having education tax on our property tax, and I think, in particular, this petition talks about at the very least acknowledge and set up a time frame where we can see in a very tangible way property tax being reduced.

What the Province has done, and I will give the Province some credit, they have addressed the provincial levy portion, and I think that is a positive thing. What we would like to be able to see is some sort of a strategic time line that is going to see the education tax dealt with on the property tax bill. What this particular petition refers to is that as a minimum 80 percent of the funding of public education should come from general revenues. There are some who would even ultimately argue it should be more than that, Mr. Speaker.

So, when you talk about that '98-99 last PC budget that they voted for to the '06-07 budget that we are talking about today and the amount of personal income tax that has been generated, in excess of about half a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, could not more of that money have dealt with the issue of the inequities on the whole property tax issue?

What about retail sales tax? Retail sales tax in '98-99 was \$846 million. Today, in this budget, we are talking \$1.244 billion, hundreds of millions of dollars more in retail sales tax that has actually been created. Again, it is the issue of priorities. What is the government doing with those extra revenues? I will just finish listing off the ones that I have made a note of.

Manitoba Lotteries, from \$227 million to \$267 million. Remember, Mr. Speaker, when this government was in opposition and its thoughts and

opinions and comments in regard to gambling problems and the social impact that it is having. What have they done to alleviate some of those concerns? I say that tongue-in-cheek because I do not believe that they have done anything. Sure, they might have done some token things, increased a bit of funding over here in order to provide a little bit more counselling and so forth, but they have not addressed the real issues, the real social costs of gambling in the province of Manitoba. Yet in opposition they talked at length about those social problems. When I talk about social problems, you are talking about everything from suicides as a direct result of gaming to family break-ups to bankruptcies to individuals who are actually in jail because of gambling problems. So we are paying for it in another way.

Talk about lotteries, the other day I was talking about tobacco tax, and I indicated that we would be better off to surrender the tobacco tax because of the amount—a lot of people think that we make more tax on tobacco than we pay on health care because of tobacco-related diseases. That is just not the case. We pay far more money on the cost of tobacco-related diseases and having to deal with those than we actually collect in tobacco tax.

The same principle could apply for Manitoba Lotteries. More and more we are seeing that there is a huge cost to the gambling problems that have been associated with it. There really has not been a legitimate—what I would argue as a legitimate—consultation throughout the province dealing with some of those consequences because the government is more focussed on the revenue side than they are on the social cost of Manitoba Lotteries.

Gasoline tax has been somewhat stagnant, Mr. Speaker. You know, in '98-99, it was \$155 million. What we are predicting in this budget is \$155.3 million. I would like to comment on that particular point because again, you really have not seen any increase. Yet if you talk to Manitobans, what you will quite often hear is you will hear, well, the price of gas has gone up, meaning that the government benefits by it.

*(15:40)

There is one thing that always surprises me about, in particular, this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). I am going to have to go back to the Estimates, the Finance Estimates. You will see the relevance to what it is I am going to talk about on this when I make reference to the gasoline tax

because in the last Estimates with the Minister of Finance, I asked him questions in regard to the gas tax. That is not the first time I asked him the question in regard to the gas tax. I asked the minister to provide me some information in regard to the amount of tax that is applied to gasoline, and the minister was not—that was not the first time I asked the minister the question. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I had asked him on two previous occasions, months earlier, and in fact the minister, in one of those months earlier when I had posed the question, indicated that he would get me the information in regard to the gas tax. I waited and waited, never received anything from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) or his office.

Then, when I had the opportunity in Estimates, I raised the issue with him once again, and the Minister of Finance indicated, well, you know, that he could in essence get the information, but gave me the advice: Just read what it says on the pump; they all have that little sticker there that indicates how much gas tax that people are paying.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the Minister of Finance needs to put some gas in his own car. Maybe, if he saw the little stickers and he was doing the job that he is being paid to do, he would have a better appreciation of what the consumer is actually thinking. The little sticker that he made reference to is wrong. Those little stickers that we see at the gas pumps are wrong, and yet the advice that he gave me was to look at those stickers.

At the committee meeting, I gave the Minister of Finance the advice that those stickers are wrong, and maybe what we should be doing is asking our gas companies, Mr. Speaker, to put the right number on those stickers or do not have the stickers at all because it helps mislead Manitobans. I do not even think the Minister of Finance, in fairness to the Minister of Finance, realized it. That is the reason why, months prior, I asked the Minister of Finance to look into it.

Mr. Speaker, the minister, kind of tongue-in-cheek, indicated, well, you go and see; just look at the pump. Well, the pumps are wrong, and I asked the Minister of Finance, and the minister, jokingly—as I referenced it jokingly the other day when we were in the Finance Estimates—that, you know, it was interesting to hear the actual numbers. I had given the actual numbers, as was conveyed to me from the federal government and the provincial government. But I went out and did the work, even though the

Minister of Finance has a hundred times the resources that I have. I went out, I did the job, and my leader says it is probably closer to a thousand times the resources that I have. But I went out and I did the job, and I believe that the Minister of Finance should have done that.

We are not too late. Mr. Speaker, when I talk about this, I see another private member's bill in the possible making, and that private member's bill should maybe mandate our gas stations that, if they are going to put a label on the pump, that label better be accurate because, if it is not accurate, it is garbage and it is providing misinformation.

Maybe the Minister of Finance can prevent this particular private member's bill from coming forward by taking some action within his own department. I raise this issue because we have seen no increase in the taxes on gasoline.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there was another issue that I raised with the Minister of Finance in Estimates, and I say this issue because this is a very important issue to Manitobans. The Minister of Finance made a commitment to me to get this information. After we talked about the gasoline tax, he made a personal commitment to get me this information, and I am going to have to read Hansard. I think the time line might have already gone by because I was anxious for the Minister of Finance—I said to the Minister of Finance: How long is it going to take before I get the information? He said: Do not worry. I assure the Member for Inkster eight days or 10 days or something of this nature. He gave me his personal assurance.

So I am going to give him a reminder right now, because he is sitting in his seat, to review the assurance that he gave me during the Finance Estimates in regard to the Crocus Fund and amount of tax dollars that have gone toward the tax rebate portion of the Crocus investment. We as a Legislature approved a process that guaranteed those individuals tax benefits if they invested in the Crocus Fund. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is a very important number to know. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) gave me his word in committee that he would get me that number, and I am asking and appealing to the Minister of Finance to do what it is that he said to me in that committee and provide that information in a timely way.

As has been pointed out, the Minister of Finance has a great deal of staff compared to me, as one has pointed out, a thousand times the resources I have.

He knows what those numbers, and he can get those numbers. I ask the minister once again to provide me that number, Mr. Speaker. For those staff that I believe might even be listening, and I suspect there are, the Department of Finance staff that are indeed listening because we are debating the minister's bill, I would suggest that what they do is that they look at the Finance Estimates, and they will see the commitment that was provided. I am not 100 percent sure in terms of the actual number of days. I would not be surprised if we have already exceeded those days, but I will give the Minister of Finance the benefit of the doubt believing that he still might have more opportunity to find out.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that there are a number of things that we need to look at when we talk about taxes. The government likes to say that it has not increased taxes. In fact, in the opening remarks from the Minister of Finance, he talked about corporate tax breaks. I always enjoy hearing the Minister of Finance and the Premier (Mr. Doer) talk about corporate tax breaks and so forth because I listen to them, and then I listen to their federal leader, Mr. Jack Layton, condemning whether it is federal Liberals or federal Conservatives about corporate tax breaks. So I always find it interesting to listen about corporate tax breaks. The corporate tax breaks is an interesting way of approaching it. I know, we in the Liberal Party, my leader has talked about the payroll tax and how that has turned out to be a tax on jobs. Where is the government's commitment in dealing with that particular tax?

But, Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to be a little bit more transparent with Manitobans as to where it is that we are in fact increasing their taxes because they try to give the opinion that Manitobans are better under this administration because they have reduced their taxes. Well, I guess it is what it is that you might want to call a tax. Remember when they expanded the provincial sales tax to include other fees? Well, that is actually an increase in tax. When you take a look at the retail sales tax which increased by hundreds of millions of dollars, that is because, in part, now if you buy a house or you do other transactions in some of those service areas, you are paying more in taxes. That is a provincial sales tax increase by this government. That is the reality.

So you get those direct taxes that are talked about, and then you get maybe some of those indirect taxes, Mr. Speaker. Then you get the whole tax avoidance increases. Let me talk a little bit about both of those ones. I better make a note of tax

avoidance so that I do not forget to comment on that. So you have those hidden taxes. I will give a better definition of the tax avoidance right away, so, for the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), it will make a little bit more sense for him.

*(15:50)

Oh boy, only two minutes to go, Mr. Speaker, this is going to be really difficult. I will start off with tax avoidance because I know this is what the Member for Selkirk is interested in. When we talk about avoiding increasing taxes, there is another tax. It is called the ancillary fees that they charge for university students. They say they are going freeze tuitions in which they freeze the tuitions, and then it forces students to pay higher tax ancillary fees. Well, to those students, that means more money. So, in a way, they can say that, well, we have avoided a tax increase, yet they have generated another form of revenue, albeit for the university, in which they are not adequately resourcing and disallowing the tax freeze. That is what I mean when we talk about those tax avoidances.

When I talk about those indirect tax increases, Mr. Speaker, what about speeding tickets? You know, they say it is all about safety. Well, more and more we are seeing these tickets up and up in terms of cost and the government justifies it by saying it is all about safety. Well, I am beginning to believe, as many of my constituents, that it has a lot more to do with the generation of additional revenue for this government's appetite in spending than it is to do with safety.

That was, by the way, one of the other questions I had posed through the Minister of Finance to get some of those original fines back in '99. I suspect, Mr. Speaker, what you will find is that it will give even that much more credibility. There are many different ways in which the government has been able to increase overall government revenue, and it searches. You know, it is like one of those heat missiles. It is out there, it puts out that scan, and if it identifies a place to tax, it increases that tax. So it might not be on your personal income tax, but it is out there. The government seeks and finds and taxes. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak for a few minutes on Bill 42, the budget implementation act, and to talk about where there is clearly a need for better planning, better expenditure and better taxing. Sadly, this

government has not been doing the right sort of job when it comes down to that.

Let us start with the situation with respect to the Crocus Investment Fund. This is a situation where there were some \$75 million of provincial and federal government tax credits, which were allocated, but, in spite of the allocation of such expenditures and use of tax credits—some people call them tax expenditures—this government failed to do the appropriate due diligence.

We said at the end of last year, my colleague and I from Inkster, that we need to push for a public inquiry to get to the bottom of these problems and to make sure that we have a much better circumstance in the future where we are not wasting, losing not only \$75 million of taxpayers' dollars, but we are losing \$60 million-plus of money by 33,000 Manitoba investors.

Clearly, we should have had much better accountability than we had in this area, and this government, in spite of repeated requests, has failed to call what is needed, and that is the public inquiry, to provide the sort of accountability in terms of dollars that we would ordinarily have expected from a responsible government. It is sad that we have, instead of a responsible government, an irresponsible government which has not provided the kind of accountability that we should have had. It may be, and they can argue, that the Manitoba Securities Commission, the RCMP, the class action lawsuit will bring some details to light, but, you know, in spite of their claims to this effect, there has not been much brought to light in either one of these at this point. Certainly, that is further reason why we need the public inquiry, not only because it will be directed at the critical issues that need to be brought to light, but because there are major problems, clearly, which have been the fault of this government, which need to be clarified. We need to understand why on earth a government would have been presented with evidence that the Crocus Investment Fund was breaking the law in going over the 10 percent investment requirement, and, instead of taking the measures to enforce accountability and to make sure that the law was not broken in this province, what this government did was to change the law so that they okayed the breaking of the law.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if you have a government which does this, it makes a mockery of the law and raises concerns to all of us. That is, of course, part of the reason why we need that public inquiry. Let me

talk for a moment about one of the important, significant, erroneously enforced, allocated, initiated and maintained tax, the payroll tax. This, of course, is a tax on employment, a tax on companies hiring people, a tax on people to such an extent that it has driven many businesses out of this province. It has driven many businesses to make investments out of this province when they might have invested here, and it has provided a signal to companies that once you reach a certain size, then you should look seriously about moving people out of Manitoba because you are going to have this tax on employing more people here in Manitoba.

We in the Liberal Party see this as an erroneous tax, a tax that was implemented by the NDP and maintained to a large extent by the Conservatives, very little change, and certainly it is a tax which is detrimental to the prosperity of people here because what it does is drive people and employment out of Manitoba. We probably have lost far more revenue than we have gained through this tax because of all the people who have moved out, all the jobs that have been lost, all the dependants and family and members who would be here if they had not been moved out.

The estimate that I heard from a responsible businessman who looked at this very carefully is that Manitoba has probably lost in the order of hundreds of thousands of jobs because of this NDP approach to taxation. That is a lot of jobs and it is a lot of people. Indeed, when you look at it, it is a lot of tax revenue which might have been revenue in income tax and sales tax and various other taxes which has been lost because this government and its predecessors have driven jobs and people out of Manitoba, have put a tax on people.

I have, during the course of the last number of years, talked to a number of entrepreneurs who have had various dealings with this NDP government. Time and time again, they say, well, this government had an option. We brought issues to them and they did not listen. They did not understand the needs of entrepreneurs. They did not understand the need to build businesses. They did not understand the needs of primary wealth creation, the need to create an environment where entrepreneurs were encouraged instead of entrepreneurs being given negative signals from this government: Oh, no, we could not possibly assist you; we could not possibly change the environment. You know, it is a problem in this province, and it is one of the reasons why we have had a lot of jobs leaving.

Just to talk about one of the entrepreneurs that I talked to a number of years ago, quite a well-known entrepreneur, his name is Israel Asper, a former leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party. He looked at the situation under this NDP government, and, while this NDP government was in office, he told me that he had looked very carefully at buying, purchasing a major Canadian corporation and bringing it to Manitoba, bringing the jobs to Manitoba and bringing the head office to Manitoba. He and the people who were working with him looked very carefully at the economics of doing this, and they came to the sad and sorry conclusion that from an economic basis it just would not work because of the tax regime under this NDP government.

* (16:00)

A lot of jobs and opportunities in a similar fashion have not been taken up. Let us look, for an example, at one of the recent proposed economic opportunities. This is the siting of the OlyWest Hog Processing and Rendering Plant inside the city of Winnipeg. While we would very much like the processing and rendering plant and the jobs in Manitoba, it is just misguided to try and place this in the city of Winnipeg right beside a Vita Health plant, a Vita Health plant that provides quality health care products, essentially operating like a pharmaceutical company because of the quality standards that they have to have. Then what does this government do? They bring in a plant and say to the OlyWest people, locate just next door to the Vita Health plant.

The Vita Health plant is exactly the sort of plant that we should be building in this province, and the interesting thing is that they are dealing with vitamins and nutraceuticals and all sorts of health care products which we should be producing here. These are products which are good for agriculture in Manitoba because some of them come from agricultural products, and what is this government doing? Instead of supporting the production of high quality value-added products from agriculture, as we would hope, instead of treating Winnipeg and Winnipeg citizens sensibly like Brandon and Neepawa have been treated in the past, they are putting a hog processing and rendering plant and done everything that they could to put it right in the middle of Winnipeg.

When we inquired as to where the push to locate this in Winnipeg what we were told was that the—

An Honourable Member: Right from the top.

Mr. Gerrard: Absolutely, the government organized a meeting, provincial government organized a meeting in the basement of the Legislature and invited the City and said, we have this opportunity for you right in the city of Winnipeg, just so that we can cause problems and havoc for people in the city of Winnipeg and difficulties for Vita Health.

Well, you know the interesting thing is that the MLA for Radisson has brought out the fact that there are people who are ready to invest in high-quality industries and product development and so on in the St. Boniface Industrial Park, but they are not going to go there when this government is determined to put a hog processing and rendering plant right next door.

There are plenty of opportunities to put this plant just outside of Winnipeg just like in Brandon or in Neepawa. You know it would be a good idea. It would be a win-win for everybody, but no, no, this government wants a lose-lose for everybody. A lose for the OlyWest and the companies involved because they are going to put them through extraordinarily difficult problems, a lot of tremendous amount of opposition. Instead of having this plant in place where there could be pretty smooth sailing where people want the plant, they would put this plant where it is going to cause a lot of problems and cause jobs and people in industries and businesses to move out.

Mr. Speaker, we are already losing some jobs and some tax revenue because of Vita Health who needs suppliers, and its suppliers desire to be located right next door to where Vita Health is, but the moment that they learn that the OlyWest plant was going to be right next door they say, hey, we are not moving there. That would be a big mistake. We have a government which really does not understand business and the environment and the needs of business and communities. So what has happened is that that company is not going to come here. They are not interested in coming to a place where there is an NDP government which does not understand the relationship between people and industries and the need to build up the high-tech industry base here and the need to put hog processing and rendering plants in appropriate places just like they are in Brandon and Neepawa.

You know, it is not surprising that this government is not in favour of rural economic development. We know that they do not really care about that sort of stuff, but what is surprising is that they are so determined to put this plant in the middle

of Winnipeg where it is going to cause so many problems for people in the community and where at the same time it is going to drive other jobs and businesses out.

Here we are. There could be a lot more tax revenue, more people, a better environment, but, no, that is not what this government is interested in. They really are looking at alternatives which are going to cause problems for people, which are going to drive businesses and industries out. Vita Health and quite a number of others are now looking at being elsewhere.

The problem basically is this. Look at Vita Health. It was a made-in-Manitoba company. It started from the grass roots, started from the bottom up, and they were looking, until this government came along with its terrible approach to businesses like Vita Health, they were looking, Vita Health was, at a fourfold expansion. That is probably more jobs than all of the jobs that would come in from OlyWest.

So here we are, a strange, oddball NDP government which really does not care about bringing those kinds of jobs in. What they want is to cause trouble for Vita Health and other businesses in that area by bringing in a hog processing and rendering plant when they could have so easily put this and made sure that the plant was outside of the city of Winnipeg rather than inside the city of Winnipeg. *[interjection]* Yes, you have to at least talk to the rural municipalities.

I asked this government whether they had talked to any of the R.M.s about the possibility—

An Honourable Member: I am sure they did.

Mr. Gerrard: No, they did not. They never even talked to the other rural municipalities, the leaders in rural municipalities around Winnipeg, even in spite of the fact that some of the rural municipalities would say, well, come and talk to us; we are interested. I talked to some reeves and they said, look, we have some good opportunities here. But no, no, they want to put this plant where it is going to cause a lot of trouble, where it is going to drive a lot of businesses out, and nobody understands why they would want to do that.

I hear that even the MLA for Transcona does not understand why his own government would be doing such terrible things. It is hard to understand how the MLA for Transcona can even be supporting his government. I would hope that the MLA for

Transcona would get up on this bill and talk about what a terrible job his government is doing in driving out businesses like Vita Health from his part of Winnipeg. It is shocking what his own government is doing, and, surely, surely, the MLA for Transcona would be prepared to stand up and say in this Chamber what he has said out in the community, and that is that he has a terrible government that he is part of, that they are doing shocking things to people in his community.

It is time that people understand the problems that this NDP government is causing for people in Transcona and Radisson and other parts of Winnipeg. It is not acceptable, and that is why we are standing up here and talking today on this budget implementation because there are some major problems with the approach of this government.

Not all that long ago, I believe it was a little over a year ago, I was involved, as were a number of the other members here, in a Healthy Kids task force. We did some analysis and made some fairly detailed suggestions in terms of what should be done for the health of children, suggestions, by the way, which would have provided for much better monitoring of outcomes, which could have saved a lot of taxpayer revenue, a lot of health care costs and, yet, this government really was not interested. There are a whole variety of recommendations, hundreds of millions of dollars of potential savings, and this government was not interested. What they wanted to do was to run fancy advertising campaigns to try and tell people that they were doing good things when they really were out to lunch with a lot of the things that they were trying to implement.

* (16:10)

We have seen that in what has happened with Child and Family Services, sadly, this year. Instead of protecting children and making sure that children have a really good environment to grow up in, what we have seen is the deaths of children like Phoenix Sinclair, Preston Martin, Heaven Traverse, and others. Very sad in terms of the effect on the families, very sad in terms of the future of people in communities, the stress, the people who have been very concerned about children in this province have felt they have been let down very, very badly by this government. Of course, they have put in place an external and an internal review, but the external review still does not have proper terms of reference and we have not only problems of children in care.

You know, I was reading just the other night that one of the major problems of crime is actually related to the poor environment provided for children in care. If you look after children and give children in care a good environment so they will grow up, you will have much less problem in terms of crime in the streets. The problem is that this government is not providing the right sort of environment for children when they are in care, and the result is that they are growing up and instead of contributing—not all, many are doing well, but there are far too many.

I am not sure that we have accurate statistics but the reference that I was looking at suggested not only was it a disproportionate number of children in care who get into criminal activity compared to the rest of the population, but when you look at the population of young people who get involved and in problems with the law, that it is a surprisingly high proportion who have been in care, under the care of this Province and of this NDP government. They have been such poor stewards, sadly speaking. The cost in our justice system is enormous, the increase in the justice system budget has been huge under this government, and we have all this extra expense and you wonder why taxes and payroll taxes are still there. Well, I mean the problem is that they do not understand how to run a province and how to run an economy, how to manage an economy from a provincial government perspective.

The reality is that we have huge extra costs compared with what we should have. We have big increases in children in the criminal justice system. We have problems of money being misused as we have seen under Hydra House, the Aiyawin Corporation; problems that we have been seeing in Manitoba Housing; the problems that we have seen in money being thrown at the Manitoba Development Centre rather than putting people in the communities; extra costs all the way along the line. When there is a choice, this government seems inevitably to take the higher cost, poorer quality choice rather than the higher quality and lower cost choice.

I guess they seem to feel that the market system, to which they are so opposed, which tends to provide lower cost and higher quality, that they want a public system and to have a public system which is of higher cost and lower quality. We can see this in what is happening with Manitoba Housing. You compare Manitoba Housing with similar apartment blocks, housing complexes, which are run by the private sector. I suspect that the difference from what

I have seen is enormous that the problem, in terms of a Manitoba Housing complex, is that the Manitoba Housing complex is inevitably run poorly. They have more problems with crime, more cost for police to look after this, more problems with drugs and prostitution. The extra costs to the whole system are enormous because people are not treated in the Manitoba Housing complex in a decent way. This whole system is based on not encouraging people to earn income who may have disabilities, but rather keeping them dependent.

We have seen, as I have talked about, children's health, the cost in relationship to poor health. When you have emergency rooms which are not staffed well, where you have not invested in the training of residents so that we do not have the appropriate staff and they have not created the environment where people want to stay, you inevitably have problems. Those problems add up to extra costs in the provincial government and, of course, extra attempts by this NDP government to put taxes up and so on.

The luck, in a sense of having increased transfers from the federal government, has enabled them to not increase taxes quite as much as they might have, but they have still increased a lot of taxes since they have been here. We have already seen that with additions to the PST and a variety of other places.

There is a need, of course, to look at infrastructure and how infrastructure, the highway system, is being managed. There was a 2020 report which I believe the MLA for Transcona was involved with, but very, very little in the way of follow-through. Many roads, sadly—go down south on Highway 75—are so bumpy and rickety that trucks are losing things from the back of the trucks because they are being bounced around so much.

The lost economy because trucks are avoiding Manitoba and not coming here, not going through here because of the poor quality of the roads; lost economy and lost taxes because of not maintaining drainage and water management systems adequately; loss to the economy because of poor approaches to the environment, major problems in Lake Winnipeg, Kissing Lake, fisheries on Lake Winnipegosis, Killarney Lake, the Seine River, which I was at recently; farm losses, considerably, because they have not managed the environment well, not understood that a lot of the economy is dependent on managing the environment well in today's world and where they are at the moment. They have done such a poor job of managing this that we lose

tremendously in terms of the economy, in terms of the tax base.

What they have done on the other side is to throw money at problems, with little accountability. We have seen that in Crocus; we have seen that in health care; we have seen that in education; we have seen that time and time and time again. This is a government which said it was going to, I think, end hallway medicine in a short period of time, six months with about \$15 million, but they have done such a bad job that their only recourse now is to spend millions and millions of dollars on feel-good ads to cover up the continuing problems which are there.

You know what? If the system was working well, you would not need these feel-good ads. You know, if the system was working well, you would not need these kinds of expenditures. But the only reason that they need these kinds of expenditures is to cover up the problems. The system is not working well and they seem to feel they have no other recourse than to try to cover this up with feel-good ads. In doing this, spending taxpayers' money, having higher taxes, and not being able to spend and invest revenues in ways that would really make a difference, there is the tragedy. The tragedy of having a system which is not working as well is that the money is not being spent wisely, and it is not going to some of the very valuable and important—*[interjection]*

There is lots, lots more to say, and that is because this government has done such a poor job in so many ways.

* (16:20)

Today we are faced with a whole lot of bills that should have gone through but have not gone through, things which should have been done which have not been done. That is typical of this government, sad to say, but that is the way that they operate. They do not have a good idea of what should be done. They could have got so much further ahead by calling an inquiry into the Crocus Investment Fund. We have brought forward lots and lots of good amendments, report stage amendments. We have worked very, very hard and, right now, we are not even sure. *[interjection]* No, we are looking forward to the rest of the Estimates, but the government has pulled back from being accountable, you know? The normal accountability and the normal numbers of hours of Estimates they do not seem to be interested in having. So they are doing all they can. They are

working very hard to escape being accountable. We at least are working hard trying to keep this government accountable. I have got to say that it is tough, because they sure work hard to sneak things through to cover up and to prevent real accountability and real liability. We have seen that time and time again.

They have introduced in this session bills which prevent accountability, which prevent liability of ministers and of many other individuals who are carrying out the orders of the ministers. This is perhaps one of the saddest things, that a government has to work so hard to escape accountability. They have worked very hard not to call a Crocus inquiry. They have worked very hard to put in lots of legislation.

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

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is Bill 42, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

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

Bill 33—The Northern Affairs Act

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), that The Northern Affairs Act be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Motion presented.

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present Bill 33 for second reading to the Chamber. This act has the same overall purpose as the original act. The original Northern Affairs Act dates back to 1974. Its purpose is to help recognize and administer communities in unorganized and northern territories in Manitoba, and it has seen only minor adjustments to its structure since it was passed.

Northern communities have changed greatly over the past 30 years, but the legislation that they fall under has not changed and is no longer appropriate in many areas. The existing legislation still refers, in some cases, to the former Municipal Act, which was changed a decade ago. Rewriting our act will allow us to incorporate the principles of municipal legislation in our own act with appropriate

modifications that will fulfil needs specific to northern and unorganized territories.

This bill follows extensive consultations in northern Manitoba that began in 2001. The department has listened carefully to what the communities had to say in this process. Mr. Speaker, the new legislation recognizes the three different types of Northern Affairs communities: settlements, unincorporated communities and incorporated communities. We have provided for the creation of a Northern Affairs consultation board, because we agreed that it is a good idea to maintain ongoing consultation, especially on important concerns such as community boundaries. The new act also contains provisions from The Municipal Council Conflict of Interest Act and revisions to the election process for communities in keeping with the process of municipalities.

The goal of this new act is to give Northern Affairs communities more power to determine their own future, a goal which I believe all members will support. Thank you.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I, too, rise and am honoured to speak to the government bill, Bill 33, which was introduced on April 11, and it replaces The Northern Affairs Act.

This act will bring into alignment the current Municipal Act and updates the powers and the functions of the minister and the communities in northern Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, the Northern Affairs Act has been comprehensively reviewed since it came into existence in 1974. I believe, as the minister touched on, there have been consultations and communities surveyed and consulted on this. There are a couple of areas that I think need to be brought to the attention of the minister, but, generally speaking, the bill gives communities the power to determine their own vision and economic prosperity in a lot of ways, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to working with the minister and the communities in northern Manitoba to work toward realizing a lot of their dreams and their wishes through becoming more autonomous in decision making.

The bill does give the minister a lot of power, Mr. Speaker, and it extends the power to include appeals, investigations, directions, dismissals, supervision, fees and delegation. I guess at the present time, we will let that stand, but, again, we want to ensure that communities do feel that they are

being listened to and respected in the decisions that they are wanting to make.

In the bill, there was an adoption segment that talked about The Conflict of Interest Act, and just knowing rural communities and smaller communities, this is often an issue of concern because so many communities have individuals who are related to each other or have interests that may put them into a conflict. So we raised that as a red flag during the consultations, and we encouraged the minister to really look at that and just ensure that the best interests of the community leaders and the citizens of the communities are taken into consideration.

I want to thank the minister for allowing Jeff Gordon, a director with his staff to provide the briefing for me on this bill. I think the work that he has put into this and the work that he has received from people from within his department has to be applauded, because they have worked in a proactive way to work towards empowering people. I think that so often we look at legislation that actually takes away the power of individuals through different means. I think this legislation does the opposite. It looks at empowering people and communities to move forward.

The minister spoke briefly about the community consultation board, and during Estimates and during the briefing, I indicated that I was a little bit concerned about the role and the make-up of the board and the lack of information that is being shared at this point on that. I am just indicating that this is really important for communities to move forward towards autonomy, towards making decisions in the best interests of their own communities. So I think that I will continue to work with the minister and his staff to ensure that community leaders do receive advice from qualified individuals who will be serving on that board. I understand that a lot of people who live in these communities have to travel a distance to consult and to be a part of a process. So we want to ensure that when these people come to a community consultation meeting with this board that they are being provided with good information, accurate information. I believe that that is the reason why we want to ensure that the people on this board do have those skills.

* (16:30)

I was pleased to see that one member from NACC will be on the board. I encourage that. I encourage the representation to represent the northern communities, and I have a sense that this

will happen. I look forward to learning more about the individuals who I am sure will be qualified to represent the interests of the commission.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I am going to just speak a little bit more about the board, a couple of more sentences on that. If the board is not mandated by the legislation to move toward self-government, then it is likely that movement towards municipal kind of incorporations will continue to move at a snail's pace. So that is kind of where I was getting at and will continue to push towards this, that we want to move this forward. We want to move it in a positive way and in an effective way. So we need to ensure that the board is established with people that will make sure that that happens.

To establish a mandate for the board and all civil servants, some kind of preamble to the legislation is required. To articulate its purpose in a time-limited way would be helpful, Mr. Speaker. Again, that is to ensure that everything is moving in a forward manner and in an expedient manner to address community autonomy. It would be like a mission statement driving this department towards local self-government of all existing Northern Affairs communities.

Capacity building, Mr. Speaker, would be important to be included and looking at the options or the possibilities of amalgamating some communities to ensure that they are viable and can unite in common interests and issues and work towards providing a better quality for all its citizens whether it be infrastructure of water and sewer, housing infrastructure, education, health care, just common needs within a community. If you can have a couple of communities work together, sometimes that works well.

Mr. Speaker, I think this bill is key to the government's ability to strengthen communities and the autonomy of them. In closing, the social and economic well-being of northern communities is of the utmost importance for all members in this Legislature. So we will look forward to working with the communities, helping them address some of the challenges that they will be facing while they work through this process, and we encourage the minister to continue to take a leadership role in this. It is a fairly detailed bill, and we look forward to the civil servants that he has employed as experts to work with the communities. Again, we look for the improvements for economic sustainability for the individuals in northern Manitoba.

So I want to congratulate the government on this bill. We will have some challenges and some possible amendments to bring forward to strengthen the bill, but I think overall, Mr. Speaker, it is moving in the right direction.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk on The Northern Affairs Act, Bill 33. I would first like to compliment the minister for the fairly large amount of work that he and his staff have undertaken and for the effort that the minister has put into bringing this bill forward. Clearly, there is a need to modernize the approach by the provincial government to Northern Affairs communities and to facilitate the growth and the development of communities which come under the Northern Affairs grouping. I would like to compliment the minister for coming forward with a bill which will allow more communities to take more ownership, take more initiative, look after more of their affairs and have more of their ability to provide for development in the future for their community.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

As I have travelled, visited and talked to people in a variety of Northern Affairs communities, I have seen the desire for people in the communities to have more responsibilities, to be able to take more initiative, and, in some areas, to have better support from the provincial government.

I have visited, on a number of occasions, with people in Wabowden, for example, Reg Meade and others on the council. I have been to the school in Wabowden as part of the healthy children task force, and it is a community which has lots of potential, perhaps some new mining development even near there. People within the community are taking the initiative to build along the highway a log structure, and the log structure has a bar, a lunch area, a restaurant, a place for people to stay. It is very attractive in its design and, at the same time, talking to and learning about this building, it was clear to me that, with the logs and wood and timber and trees in that area, there was much more potential to build similar structures, and that such structures can probably be built at a much lower cost than some of the conventional homes and other buildings which have been done more in a style that has derived from how we have approached things in the south.

Indeed, I would suggest to the minister that he should be talking to people in Wabowden and the

council about opportunities to take this further, that there may be ways in which an effort can be supported in Wabowden to look at how you can take the log-building style and help many other communities at the same time. It is a style which, of course, goes back a long, long way, but a style where there is always room for improvement, and being able to have, in Wabowden, an effort which might enable people in the community to build on what has been achieved, to take things to the next level in terms of developing and building log homes and log structures, that this is the potential to create and develop major new industries in the North. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly would recommend that the minister undertake some discussions with people in Wabowden and look at what can be done, building on what has already been achieved. There is a lot of potential there in order to do this.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I would suggest to the minister that there is also, in the way the fisheries have been managed, in some of the lakes near Wabowden, there are some good examples of how traditional management of fisheries and management by the fisheries in a lake in the North can be built and developed in ways that are sustainable, making sure that the resource stays in good shape and that there are still plenty of fish to be harvested and to nourish the local economy.

I would like to talk to the minister a little bit about the times I have been in another community, in Sherridon. Clearly, in the community of Sherridon, which is at the end of a long road, which there are numerous complaints about, but one of the big points that I think it is important to emphasize to the minister when we are talking about a community like Sherridon is that Sherridon itself has been left with quite a big concern, a legacy, which is a most unfortunate legacy, of a huge mine tailing pile, and that this mine tailing pile has a lot of toxic metals: zinc, copper, cadmium, mercury and arsenic, and on and on. There is a need to look at a number of things in this community and help the community of Sherridon deal with these aspects.

* (16:40)

The report which was done for the minister did not actually measure or look at the health of people but looked at the level of some of these metals in rabbits and in berries and made some extrapolations. But I would suggest in my meetings with people in Sherridon that there were people who were living in homes and had concerns being adjacent to Camp

Lake, which is a lake which has been full of toxic metals, and they had some concerns about the potential for health and the environmental effects which should have been more properly looked at and more carefully looked at just to, at the very least, ensure that there is a base line in terms of the health of the people in Sherridon. I have raised this before and I will continue to raise it again.

But let us talk a little bit more about this tailings pile. Mr. Speaker, there has been an opportunity in the community of Sherridon for some time, and that opportunity is, first of all, to put in place whether it is cofferdams or other structures which will prevent the continued leaching of these toxic metals into Camp Lake and from Camp Lake into Kississing Lake because there clearly is a major problem. That problem is that these metals have gone out of the tailings pile and into Camp Lake and then through Camp Lake. There is quite a bit of water—I was there—flowing from Camp Lake into Kississing Lake last year, and taking these toxic metals out into Kississing Lake—which is a big, beautiful, wonderful lake—and causing a lot of trouble as the study which the minister is all too familiar with has shown. Around the shores of Kississing Lake for a long distance out from the discharge from Camp Lake there are no more invertebrates living.

Well, I mean, a lot of people may not know what invertebrates are but they are small organisms that may be molluscs or clams or a variety of other organisms, larvae, which live along the floor of the lake or along the edge of the lake on the shore, and these organisms are important food for fish, they are important food for birds. Although there was not a total absence of fish, there was really adequate evidence and concerns over the young fish, the fish at the time that were spawning and when they are developing. When you have these concerns about a wonderful lake which is built upon the ecology of invertebrates and the fish and which the local economy is built on this ecology then you are going to have problems if this problem is not addressed and cleaned up.

Think what you could do, I say to the minister, if you initiate a process which would not only isolate and stop the leaching but which would then start cleaning up the tailings pond. As the minister I am sure knows very well, that tailing pond over time has got more and more acid, that it is, I understand, similar to battery acid. Of course, when you have the tailings pile in water which has got a pH the

equivalent of battery acids, that battery acid will eat away at the metals and leach the metals even more, and you create a vicious cycle in which problems get worse and worse. Indeed the report which I think the minister is probably familiar with said that this problem would likely go on for centuries if there was no action taken, and I am sure that the minister does not want to be known for leaving behind a legacy of centuries of problems, that the minister would rather be known for helping to clean up these problems.

So there are things that can be done in terms of helping a community like Sherridon, and hopefully this bill will help in allowing and facilitating the development of some more cottage lots or building lots along the edge of Kississing Lake. I would hope that the clean-up would start on the tailings pond to provide people with local employment opportunities as well as a better environment. Mr. Speaker, there is an opportunity to do something economically here instead of letting it drift down and cause problems and cause a legacy where it is going to be a lot more difficult.

There is a historic lodge that was located in Sherridon along the shores of Camp Lake. Sadly, much of that lodge has now been moved and gone. There could have been a minister with a little more care for the history of the area but, you know, that happened. But that lodge which was on the shore of Camp Lake, clearly, one of the reasons why it was not attracting people was probably because Camp Lake is actually so polluted. If the minister had really been able to figure out a way to clean up some of the pollution, he could have reversed some of the deterioration in the local economy. Indeed, it could have helped some of the situation in the local economy.

So here we are, an opportunity in Sherridon, and I would suggest that these opportunities extend to a variety of other communities. Certainly, that is why I want to speak positively of the efforts that the minister has taken in this respect. I am sure the minister must be quite disappointed in the rest of his government that this bill was not given a top priority, that it was not much further along, that it is now at risk of possibly even not getting passed this session because his government gave it such a low priority, and that is sad.

You know, we often hear about governments not paying adequate attention to the North. Well, in my view, the North should have a much higher priority. This initiative which will help local communities

should have been one of the first bills instead of one of the last bills to achieve second reading.

As the Speaker has pointed out so often in this Chamber, as the Speaker has pointed out time and time again, it is the government which sets the agenda which says which bills are going to have a priority. We accept that; we have no choice. But the reality is that this government, for whatever reason, has decided that in this case to put the Northern Affairs bill, on which the minister has done so much work, right at the very bottom, or very close to the very, very bottom of all their priorities. That clearly is a big disappointment and a shame, in fact, that this bill was not given more priority.

That being said, I want to deal with certain aspects of the bill where I think there is a potential for improvement. The first area that I would like to talk about is, let us talk about water management structures. This bill deals with drains, that is reasonable and responsible, and culverts, but it should also have dealt with water management infrastructure in a broader sense. You know there may be occasions when it is necessary to build a small dam-like structure, a beaver dam-like structure to divert or hold back water or to make some changes that would improve situations for a local community, and that that structure and the water retention structure should have been treated like drains. There should have been provisions here to look equally at water retention structures as of drains.

* (16:50)

This is particularly important when we are dealing with agricultural areas of southern Manitoba. But there are clearly at the same time in the areas in the North, some areas where indeed there is a little bit of agricultural land but also areas like Sherridon, where there may be a potential important role for some water management structures in order to improve the water quality locally. I would suggest to the minister that, at committee stage or when this moves further, he ask his officials to look at this issue of water retention structures as well as drainage structures.

For too long the province and the provincial government and virtually everything it has done has focussed primarily on drainage but has not done what needs to be done in terms of water retention structures.

The beaver is an important animal in Manitoba and the beaver has been providing small dams all over the North, as the minister well knows. Well, we should follow the example of the beaver and understand that there is a role sometimes for small dams and that there should be measures in here that would govern the construction, the maintenance, and so on, of such small dams which may be important in managing water in the North, as they are in the south. Certainly, we should learn something from the beavers and understand and use and acknowledge that beavers have made an important contribution and that we should understand what they are teaching us, that this is something which we should be aware of, that we should look at and that we should incorporate in a Northern Affairs act some regulations, some abilities, some operational approaches relating to such structures.

Another area that I would like to talk about is the area which is dealing with communications. Clearly, one of the things that this bill provides is procedures for serving notices and other documents. What is interesting about this bill is that in the serving of notices and other documents, we have provision for I think it is personal delivery and mail delivery, but we do not have provision in these sections for electronic delivery.

Now, clearly, one understands that people in these communities do not necessarily have electronic communications capacity, but, Mr. Speaker, that is partly the fault of this government which has been there for six and a half years and has not put a priority on ensuring that people in all the Northern Affairs communities have electronic access in their communities and a place where they can receive messages even if it is not necessarily in their home, that such electronic communication in today's world should play a part.

But, clearly, we do not want the bill to follow the example of one of the other bills, The Fires Prevention bill, which said that when electronic communication is sent, it is deemed to have been received without even knowing if the person opened their e-mail and received it. What there needs to be here, as there, is electronic communication that is acceptable in terms of providing notice of orders, provided that there is an assurance that the individual has actually received the communication.

There should be provision in looking forward at how electronic communication in serving notices can be used. I know there are individuals up north who

do have e-mail and this could be done responsibly, provided that there is an assurance that the e-mail, the electronic communication, has actually been received, a requirement for in fact this to be determined. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I quite often receive e-mails which ask you: Have you received it; let me know.

This is now becoming fairly standard practice and can easily be incorporated into this process for ascertaining that an order has been delivered and received. In fact, it is sort of an anomaly that an order can be made for somebody in a Northern Affairs community electronically under The Fires Prevention Act and the person would be deemed to have received it, but under this act, you cannot get electronic communication for an order because the act only allows for paper and communication by somebody who actually goes to the door. So this act, there is a lot of good work that has been put in, but it could have been taken to the next step.

These matters, then, are ones which I wanted to bring to the attention of the minister. I believe that there are some very positive developments here. I want to credit the minister and the many others who, I am sure, have worked to produce this act that have been included. The consultation board, we hope that that is operating and will operate well.

The conflict of interest regulations—certainly what we would like if there are appointments that there be some legislative committee screening of appointments, as we have indicated, just to make sure that there are not circumstances where we just have all partisan party hacks appointed to boards, that we really have a board which is going to do the job that it needs to do. We want to make sure that the conflict of interest works in a northern environment as it is put down here, and that also is quite important.

So, with those comments, I will bring my remarks to a close and allow my colleague, the MLA for Inkster, to say a few words.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development

will meet on Monday, June 12, at 9 a.m., to deal with The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, June 12, at 9 a.m., to deal with the following bill: Bill 34, The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, to resume debate on Bill 33, The Northern Affairs Act.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Given that this is the first day in which the minister responsible has actually brought forward the bill for second reading, I thought that I would take the opportunity to address the bill.

But, you know, one of the things I like to do is to give compliments where it is necessary, and I would like to give a compliment to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), actually, who very quickly responded to an issue that I had raised during my discussion on Bill 42. I was really impressed with the response in regard to the issues that I had raised. So, let it be known, I do give compliments, Mr. Speaker.

Having said that, this particular bill addresses a very important issue, as the Leader of the Liberal Party has so eloquently pointed out, issues that are important to our northern communities. Mr. Speaker, with the exception of possibly some of the northern representatives, I suspect that it would be difficult to find an individual who has made such a hard focus on reaching out into rural northern communities, as my leader has done.

I can remember when they were talking about the flood, and the Devils Lake, and how the Premier (Mr. Doer) said that they have scientists that are above the water, below the water, under the water or on the water and doing all this investigation. They basically had everything all covered.

I know that my leader has been underground whether it is in the mines, whether it is flying high watching the water problems up north, and, most importantly, he has been on the ground in many different forms whether it is walking, whether it is on vehicle or whatever other way is possible in terms of trying to get a better sense of the needs of northern Manitoba. I think it is important to recognize that

fact, and I say that because in his remarks he commented a great deal about issues that the northern communities are facing.

I know the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) often asks, well, who are you consulting with? I can assure in particular that minister and the House—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Inkster will have 27 minutes remaining.

The time being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

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