

Second Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	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.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, 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.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
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MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
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ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
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ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
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SELBY, Erin	Southdale	N.D.P.
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STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	Elmwood	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 1, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

**Hard Surfacing Unpaved Portion—
Provincial Road 340**

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition.

All Manitobans deserve access to well-maintained rural highways as this is critical to both motorist safety and to commerce.

Provincial Highway 340 is a well-utilized road.

Heavy vehicles from potato and livestock operations, agricultural-related businesses, Hutterite colonies and the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon use this road.

Vehicles from Canadian Forces Base Shilo also travel this busy road.

Commuter traffic from Wawanesa, Stockton, Nesbitt and surrounding farms to Shilo and Brandon is common on this road.

Provincial Road 340 is an alternate route for many motorists travelling to Brandon coming off Provincial Highway 2 east and to Winnipeg via the Trans-Canada Highway No. 1. An upgrade to this road would ease the traffic congestion on Provincial Highway 10.

Access to the Criddle-Vane Homestead Provincial Park would be greatly enhanced if this road were improved.

The hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of Provincial Highway 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa would address the last few neglected kilometres of this road and increase the safety of motorists who travel on it.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider hard

surfacing of the unpaved portion of Highway 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa.

This petition is signed by Herman Heinrichs, Ray Street, Dennise Davis 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.

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Laverne Lovatt, Brian Duff, Jean Motheral and many, many others.

**Hard Surfacing Unpaved Portion—
Provincial Road 340**

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition.

All Manitobans deserve access to well-maintained rural highways as this is critical to both motorist safety and to commerce.

Provincial Road 340 is a well-utilized road.

Heavy vehicles from potato and livestock operations, agricultural-related businesses, Hutterite colonies and the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon use this road.

Vehicles from Canadian Forces Base Shilo also travel this busy road.

Commuter traffic from Wawanesa, Stockton, Nesbitt and surrounding farms to Shilo and Brandon is common on this road.

PR 340 is an alternate route for many motorists travelling to Brandon coming off PTH 2 east and to Winnipeg via the Trans-Canada Highway. An upgrade to this road would ease the traffic congestion on PTH 10.

Access to the Criddle-Vane Homestead Provincial Park would be greatly enhanced if this road were improved.

The hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of PR 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa would address the last few neglected kilometres of this road and increase the safety of motorists who travel on it.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of PR 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa.

This petition is signed by Debbie Fleming, Jim Cullen, Terry Dubyts and many, many others.

Education Funding

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Historically, the Province of Manitoba has received funding for education by the assessment of property that generates taxes. This unfair tax is only applied to selected property owners in certain areas and confines.

Property-based school tax is becoming an ever-increasing burden without acknowledging the owner's income or owner's ability to pay.

The provincial sales tax was instituted for the purpose of funding education. However, monies

generated by this tax are being placed in general revenues.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) consider removing education funding by school tax or education levies from all property in Manitoba.

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth consider finding a more equitable method of funding education, such as general revenue, following the constitutional funding of education by the Province of Manitoba.

This, Mr. Speaker, is signed by Diana Werner, Nancy Peters, G.H. Lawson and many, many other Manitobans.

Recovery Strategy—Manitoba Farmers

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition.

Several regions of Manitoba have been hit by repeated heavy rains since spring of 2008.

This has created serious challenges for farmers, including hay and straw shortages, damage to bales, forages and pastures, barns and corrals, crop losses and lost inputs, among others.

The excess moisture has also caused other problems, including the flooding of homes and outbuildings, sewage backups and septic field saturation.

Local governments have been hit with road washouts and other infrastructure damage.

People affected by the excess moisture and flooding are very concerned that the provincial government has not responded quickly enough and that they are being left to deal with the disaster on their own.

There is a fear that without a comprehensive strategy to address these challenges there will be serious and lasting economic consequences in the affected regions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider developing a comprehensive recovery strategy aimed at addressing both the immediate and the long-term

effects of this year's excessive moisture conditions and flooding.

To urge the provincial government to consider examining all types of programming to help producers recover from this disaster, including emergency one-time programs, as well as improvements to crop insurance programs to address its shortfalls.

To urge the provincial government to consider addressing shortcomings with drainage and the processing of drainage permits.

This petition is signed by Edna Rempel, Tannis Zolan, Irene Zaeluski and many, many others.

* (13:40)

Community Police Offices

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:

In the 2007 provincial election, the NDP clearly stated that making communities safer was a priority.

The NDP government did nothing to prevent the McPhillips Street Community Police Office and others from closing.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) to consider the important role that community police offices can play in making our communities safer.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by Teresita Reyes, Marvin Reyes, Ernesto Reyes and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the Family Services and Housing Annual Report, the Disabilities Issues Office Annual Report and the Social Services Appeal Board Annual Report '07-08.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the '07-08 Manitoba Finance Annual Report.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I'd like

to table the 2007-2008 Annual Reports for Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives and the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bill 38 Withdrawal

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitobans approaching retirement were, in the thousands, dealt a serious blow with the collapse of the Crocus Fund authored by this NDP government. Today, many of those same Manitobans are reeling as markets throughout the United States show a great deal of volatility. We know Manitobans are concerned about their jobs, their incomes and their standard of living, Mr. Speaker, as costs are rising around them.

Now, one of the things that investors and those who are looking at investing in things like Manitoba bonds considered when they made the decision to invest in Manitoba was our ground-breaking 1995 balanced budget law that was cited by bond-rating agencies. It was cited by private investors as a reason to invest in Manitoba and gave them confidence that this was a place of sound financial management.

Now, after this last election, the government is going back on their promise. They're scrapping the balanced budget law with Bill 38. They're sending a signal of reckless overspending, a return to the era of deficits, debts and rising taxes.

In this period of uncertainty and concern on the part of Manitobans, will the Premier continue down this path of recklessness or will he withdraw Bill 38 and send a message that Manitoba continues to be a place of sound financial management?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the co-investments made by the former government cost the Crocus Fund \$35 million. It's well documented in the receiver's report.

Mr. Speaker, the member also will know that, after the so-called ground-breaking balanced budget legislation where half the debt was off the books, in 1998 and 1999 there was a ground-breaking report from the Auditor General that said that the government was not in compliance with proper accounting and he couldn't attest to the validity of the provincial books.

That is ground-breaking, Mr. Speaker. It's never happened before in the history of Manitoba, and I

daresay if it ever happened with an NDP government, there would be World War II starts headlines in the local media. But, of course, the members opposite just brush that kind of analysis off like a foreign object on their suit.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Yes, let me deal with reckless because today—[interjection] Well, the member opposite, you know, he's got the Earl's cheer here, but let me talk about reckless, Mr. Speaker.

Let me talk about reckless. A reckless behaviour, Mr. Speaker, is when a person goes on the radio and says that he is going to have his caucus vote against the tax increment financing, and he says he's going to do so because of the building of a football stadium.

First of all, he's so reckless that he's obviously not read the proposal from Mr. Asper, which, quite frankly, surprises me. He's so reckless to say that that is going to cost taxpayers and school boards money, Mr. Speaker, because the existing stadium—and he should know this as the former chief of staff of Mayor Katz—pays no taxes to the Winnipeg School Division No. 1 and it pays no taxes to the City of Winnipeg.

When Mr. Asper develops that football stadium land, in fact it will go from a parking lot and a football stadium to revenue for the school board and the municipality. So the only reckless person in this House is the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Manitoba Hydro Power Line Cancellation of Government Funding

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): He makes the point that we were making this morning on the radio. His Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) talks about wanting to get into creative financing. He wants to bet money up front on rising property values down the road, Mr. Speaker. It's that reckless, creative financing that got the United States to where it is.

It's what caused them to invest in distilleries, Maple Leaf distilleries. The Premier at the announcement: We're going to put investors' money into a distillery. That's the sort of recklessness that Manitobans can't live with in this era of volatility.

I want to ask the Premier, since he's not going to withdraw Bill 38, since he confirmed with his answer

that we're going back to the era of deficits and debt because he wouldn't respond to the question, that we're going back to the era of deficits and debt since he's not going to withdraw Bill 38, will he change the position he's taken on the reckless \$640 million plus that's going to be wasted on the hydro line, \$640 million plus wasted as hydro rates are going up by 5 percent, hitting working families, hitting seniors.

Will he take the opportunity today to send a signal of sound financial management and cancel that reckless waste of \$640 million of Manitobans' money?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): The transmission line produces some \$20 billion in revenue over the next number of years. I know members opposite, when they criticized, recklessly, Limestone, they only included the capital costs; they never included the revenue. I know that's Conservative thinking. That's why we had criticisms from the Auditor General because you actually have to look at revenue and expenditure to find out how much money you're going to make. I know members opposite have never done that before.

Mr. Speaker, right now, the existing stadium, it's got nothing to do with rising property values. The existing stadium—and he would know as the former chief of staff of the mayor of the City of Winnipeg—pays nothing in property taxes to the school board and the municipality, nothing.

So, if you take a nothing revenue property and turn it into a revenue property for commercial development—and I'm surprised he has made his statements on CJOB without reading Mr. Asper's proposal—Mr. Speaker, you go from nothing to something much more positive.

Mr. Speaker, he is misleading the people of Manitoba. I'd like to have him apologize for putting that false information on the table. He's insulting Mr. Asper and he's insulting the intelligence of all Winnipeggers.

Waste-Water Treatment Plants (Winnipeg) Cancellation of Government Funding

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, since he won't withdraw Bill 38 and he won't cancel the \$640 million in waste on the hydro plan, and he's already wasted \$23 million on nitrogen removal on the North End water treatment plant, and we know \$31 million has already been spent on nutrient removal facilities at

the West End plant—so we know at least \$23 million down the drain in order to make Lake Winnipeg worse. We know that it could be as high as \$54 million down the drain in order to make Lake Winnipeg worse according to the scientists.

If he won't withdraw Bill 38 and keep his promise to balance the budget, if he won't cancel his plan to waste \$640 million, will he at least have a meeting today with the City of Winnipeg and cancel his plans to waste hundreds of millions more, doubling water rates for the people of the city of Winnipeg, when they can't afford it, with a plan that's going to make Lake Winnipeg worse according to the scientists.

Will he have that meeting today and cancel that wasteful NDP project, Mr. Speaker?

*(13:50)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Schindler, one scientist whom I respect, has also criticized the member opposite for taking—I think he called politicians that want to build a transmission line down the east side invertebrates, some other kind of language from his article.

We are not ordering anybody to do anything. The Clean Environment Commission has said that ammonia which represents the majority of costs, phosphorus which represents the second amount of costs and nitrogen be removed. That is consistent with what's happened in Calgary, Regina, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker. We will not tell the Clean Environment Commission what evidence from scientists—who will be presenting to that Clean Environment Commission—they will use and they will license.

Mr. Speaker, the mayor of the City of Winnipeg received a report dealing with enterprise zones for the inland port, and they talked about a deferred taxation payment mechanism to have incentives to develop businesses for the new inland port facility. In meeting with Mr. Lorenc and meeting with many others, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, trucking companies, the Airports Authority, they all recommended that we proceed provincially with tax increment financing for the inland port.

The Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) has talked about the great economic advantage of an inland port. Right now we have tumbleweeds blowing through part of that area that's going to be developed. What have you got against business?

When times are tough, it's time to be predictable. Move ahead, Mr. Speaker.

Football Stadium Government Funding Proposals

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, with that pro-business speech, he should have run for the Conservatives in River Heights when he had the chance. He would have been a great member of the Conservative Party. But the fact is that what he does, what his actions consist of, aren't in line with what he says in his rhetoric. He's not going to withdraw Bill 38. He's not going to cancel the plans to waste hundreds of millions of dollars.

We said this morning let's pass Bill 47, the inland port bill. Let's pass it today. We're ready to get it done today. Let's get the inland port going for Manitobans. We're six months behind. We can't afford to waste any more time, Mr. Speaker, with rhetoric and speeches from the Premier. Let's get Bill 47 passed and get it done.

I want to ask the Premier, though, he has made reference now to the football stadium proposal. I also said this morning that we support a \$100-million private investment with \$20 million in provincial funding and \$15 million in federal funding. We support it if that's what's involved in the deal.

He's made reference to the proposal. Are there any other terms of that proposal respecting this \$135-million project that he wants to disclose to the House since he's raised the issue of that proposal, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, thank you very much. I guess it's one ringy-dingy, two ringy-dingies. The Leader of the Opposition got his phone call after he went on CJOB this morning that said, you know, why are you saying to all the people of Manitoba that tax increment financing is tied to the stadium?

Obviously you can't read or you want to mislead. What is it, Mr. Speaker? I would like the member to apologize because it was never part of the football stadium proposal. I'm glad he got a phone call to wise him up after he hasn't read the document. Will he apologize to the members of this House for the misinformation he put on the record this morning?

Mr. McFadyen: That was one of the better diversions that we've heard in this House for a while. I want to ask the Premier to try again. The public details disclosed to date: \$100 million in private

investment, a direct contribution of \$20 million from the Province, \$15 million from the federal government.

Can the Premier confirm today that no other taxpayer dollars and no other risk to taxpayers, including money that could have gone to school boards or for other purposes, is on the table in these discussions?

Mr. Doer: I can confirm today that what the Leader of the Opposition said this morning on the radio was wrong, wrong, wrong. Three places it was wrong, factually wrong, about the football stadium. I notice that he mentioned the football stadium over and over and over again, about diverting funds from schools and teachers—oh, he cares so much about schools and teachers, Mr. Speaker—into a football stadium. He goes on to say it in three different places.

I would like the member opposite to say right now that he misled people this morning. There is no money in tax increment financing for the proposal that Mr. Asper made. He was wrong to say that this morning. He was wrong to tie it to the bill that's before the Legislature, Bill 46. Would he now admit that he is wrong and apologize not only to, perhaps, Mr. Asper, which he may or may not have done this morning, but to the people of Manitoba?

Bill 46 Government Intent

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, he can stand up and denigrate the importance of schools and teachers if he likes in this House, as he just did. The fact is, and I'm surprised he hasn't read Bill 46. Bill 46 diverts money from schools and teachers and kids, money that otherwise would have gone to—*[interjection]*—well, read the bill—money that otherwise would have gone to schools and teachers and kids, into projects under that bill. What we're saying is it needs to be used in appropriate ways, not on projects that aren't within the core requirements of underdeveloped areas.

Will the Premier today apologize to schools and teachers and educators for introducing a bill that diverts money from schools and teachers into a slush fund controlled by his Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), the same Minister of Finance who drove Crocus into the ground just four years ago?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised now he's also taking on the City of Winnipeg and his former boss, the mayor of the City

of Winnipeg and council, because we've now got him admitting by omission that he made a factual error again on the stadium issue because it was not tied to TIF.

He hasn't apologized. I know he's never apologized in his life for making an error. You know, I've apologized in this House. I have apologized in this House because, you know, unlike the member opposite, I'm not infallible like he is, Mr. Speaker.

But, moving on, Mr. Speaker, the mayor of the City of Winnipeg and all his senior people have been involved in the inland port, and they have also been involved in the financing of a new rapid-transit proposal that's quite different than the previous proposal. The mayor of the City of Winnipeg, his councillors, a great number of people were supporting that proposal to take, again, undeveloped land, have housing around the hubs to help finance the capital cost of the rapid transit, spoke to the University of Manitoba. Then, after a period of time, after that capital's paid for, with the users paying the capital through the use of that project, that the money would then go to school boards and municipalities including the city of Winnipeg.

He is now opposed to rapid transit. He's now opposed to the proposal on the inland port. You know, we're busy. We have tough economic times, Mr. Speaker. We have tough issues to deal with, but we're busy building the future of Manitoba. He's busy knocking it down.

The National Job Fair & Training Expo Lack of Provincial Presence

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, The National Job Fair & Training Expo is happening in Toronto yesterday and today. There are over 170 exhibitors, over 10,000 job seekers from the greater Toronto area. Premier Brad Wall, Rob Norris, Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, are leading 50 companies looking for skilled labourers.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan): Given the shortage of skilled labourers in Manitoba, why is Manitoba absent from the job fair in Toronto? Why does Manitoba not have a presence or, better yet, leading a presence in Toronto?

* (14:00)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, every province in this country has gone through tough

times in different parts of their history. We know that things are tough in Ontario. As a Canadian, I think it's important to respect that fact. I think it's very important that we respect what's going on. I have met and I know the minister of industry and competitiveness and trade has met with companies that are quietly having unemployed people from other parts of the country, including Ontario, have career opportunities in Manitoba.

We know that from time to time people from Newfoundland and Labrador came to our mining communities. We know that from time to time people from other parts of Canada have come here. I think we know that people from Manitoba went to Fort McMurray.

I think it's very, very important in Canada—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, it's a job fair. People are looking for jobs. Nunavut, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Saskatchewan, as well as numerous Alberta cities all have a presence.

Now, I realize the Premier is busy in damage control with Health and Finance here, but why does the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade not get up, put his portfolio forward and get down there and represent Manitoba to bring skilled labourers to Manitoba who are looking for jobs?

Manitoba has jobs available. Why doesn't the minister take the initiative on his own, without the Premier, to be at this job fair?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Well, I'm not certain where the Member for Carman has been. Just earlier this week, of course, we celebrated Manitoba celebrating a population milestone of 1.2 million people.

Unlike the Province of Saskatchewan, the Province of Manitoba has been very successful at attracting skilled workers, not only from other provinces but from around the world, and due to that influx of workers, our businesses are doing very well.

It is true there are businesses looking for more workers, and we are working with those companies to make sure we increase apprenticeship. We, of course, in our Throne Speech and in our budget, put in more resources for apprenticeships in Manitoba. It's a shame, Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives and Liberals voted against that budget.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, I can see it now, Scott Smith standing on the gravel shoulder of the Trans-Canada Highway with his Friendly—no, pardon me, Spirited Energy sign, waving to these skilled workers. As they're hired in Ontario at the job fair, heading to Saskatchewan, Scott Smith is going to be trying to wave them down to stay in Manitoba.

Why doesn't this minister take a great opportunity like a job fair in Toronto where there are skilled labourers looking for employment? Why isn't he there? Why isn't he promoting Manitoba?

Mr. Swan: I'll say right now Scott Smith has done and will do a lot more for this province than the Member for Carman and any member on that side of the House. It's disappointing, maybe not surprising—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have a little decorum, please.

Mr. Swan: It's perhaps disappointing but not surprising, of course, that I'd hear the Member for Carman putting down the Spirited Energy campaign which was brought about—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just finished asking the House for a little co-operation, please. We have question period and the member has asked a question. Give the honourable minister a chance to respond. Let's have a little decorum.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Swan: Thank you Mr. Speaker. It was brought about by the efforts of our business community, and, again, just as the Premier (Mr. Doer) asked the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) why he doesn't like business in this province, I would ask the Member for Carman, why is he so negative about the good advice that we're getting from our business community here in Manitoba?

Pharmacare Deductible Increases Impact on Seniors

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day of Older Persons, and it's unfortunate that many Manitoba seniors do not have much to celebrate, thanks to this NDP government's mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, we have an NDP that is paying for its wasteful spending decisions on the strength of rising Pharmacare deductibles. This government has

raised Pharmacare deductibles for six out of the last seven years, a 34 percent jump. It now costs Manitoba seniors up to an additional \$384 per year to pay for their medicine.

How can the Minister responsible for Seniors boast about her record when she's forcing Manitoba seniors to choose between milk and medicine?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond and remind the member opposite of a couple of facts. First of all, the Canadian Institute for Health Information cites Manitoba has having the most comprehensive Pharmacare coverage in all of Canada.

Second of all, Mr. Speaker, I might remind members opposite that members of our society who are on income assistance or have other financial crisis don't pay a Pharmacare deductible in the first place.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, I might remind the member opposite that it was that member herself that suggested we should adopt a Pharmacare model like the one they have in the Maritimes, arguably the worst program in the country.

Mrs. Rowat: These are uncertain economic times. Many seniors are struggling financially just to get by and the stability of their savings and their financial future is uncertain. Yet this arrogant minister and this arrogant government continues with its policy—

Mr. Speaker: Order. All members in this House are honourable members. I ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw that comment.

This government continues with its policy of Pharmacare increases to finance wasteful spending such as their \$640-million-plus decision to run a longer and more wasteful transmission line down the west side.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is seniors have seen a 34 percent increase in drug costs in the past six years. To many seniors, this is a yearly increase of \$384.

Can the minister explain to Manitoba seniors why she is not advocating for them on this critical issue as she sits at the Cabinet table?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to inform the member opposite that, of course, the budget, the

2008 provincial budget, invests an additional \$3.7 million in Pharmacare. Again, we know that according to outside sources—this is not my opinion—we have the most comprehensive Pharmacare program in the country. We know that it brings the Pharmacare program total to \$280 million. That's more than triple of what it was in 1999. That's a 352 percent increase. We know that we want to continue to work with our seniors, but we don't want to have a Pharmacare program that discriminates on age and disease, like in the Maritimes.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, this is a 34 percent clawback to the seniors who are on a fixed income. The minister's answers do nothing to ease the fears of Manitoba seniors who simply cannot afford to pay for their medicines. These aren't frivolous expenses. These are costly medicines that are necessary for their health and their well-being.

Will the minister, today, on the International Day of Older Persons, pledge to Manitoba seniors that she'll stand up for them at the Cabinet table and end this practice of backdoor taxes on seniors, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Oswald: I'll take a third opportunity to explain to the member that, of course, Manitoba's Pharmacare program covers 100 percent of drug costs once the income-based deductible is reached regardless of somebody's age or regardless of their medical condition, Mr. Speaker. That's why provinces across the country are looking to Manitoba to try to adopt the policies that we have.

We know that we can continue to work on policies like we did with a new policy for generic drugs that enabled us to add many, many more drugs to our formulary, Mr. Speaker. We know that we can continue to work with all of our counterparts and, indeed, the member's federal cousins as we go forward for a national pharmaceutical strategy. We've seen some reluctance on the part of the federal government. We look forward to them working together with us on that.

*(14:10)

Disraeli Freeway Bridge Repair Options

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I want to inform the Premier (Mr. Doer) that there's no rapid transit in northeast Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker. This morning, I shared the frustration of many residents of northeast Winnipeg with the horrendous backlog of

traffic on the Disraeli Bridge when it was closed for only 25 minutes. We have—

An Honourable Member: Vote Maloway.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: He didn't get anything from you, did he? Nothing. No.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It took an extra 29 minutes, not nine minutes, to get downtown this morning. The closing of the Disraeli Bridge for 16 months is unacceptable.

I want to ask the Premier what discussions he's had with the mayor of the City of Winnipeg to have both levels of government working together to find some positive options and alternatives for northeast Winnipeg.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems to be reading some of the material from the former member for Elmwood, who has done a fine job campaigning in northeast Winnipeg, a fine job as an MLA, as well. But the member opposite may be a little bit late to this file notwithstanding the volume of her question. She certainly knows that we, in this particular case, are not involved with the design of the bridge. We are, obviously, involved with some of the cost-sharing of Winnipeg roads. In fact, the last two years, for the first time, we've been funding virtually 50 percent of the residential streets and bridge construction in the city of Winnipeg, something that never happened when members were opposite.

So I understand that the members opposite want to feign a new-found interest in northeast Winnipeg. It's phony. She should phone her city councillors and mayors. That's the signing authority in terms of this.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, but it's unfortunate that the Premier (Mr. Doer) didn't share a letter with his minister that I sent back at the beginning of July to him, which, by the way, I've had no acknowledgement or no response to. I sent a letter to the Premier and one to the mayor of the City of Winnipeg asking them to sit down together and find a solution for people in northeast Winnipeg that are going to be impacted by a 16-month closure of the Disraeli freeway. I will table that letter so that the minister will finally see the kind of activity that's

been going on and the frustration that residents of northeast Winnipeg are experiencing.

Will the minister now take a look at the waste and mismanagement that's happening right across government and ensure that the people in northeast Winnipeg get their fair share of support from this provincial government?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member opposite should perhaps take a lesson from the former member for Elmwood, Jim Maloway, who raised this with the mayor. The City of Winnipeg had full consultations and, in fact, raised the question as to why, when we have bridge projects, we manage the closure of lanes so as to minimize the disruption. In fact, the Minister responsible for Infrastructure does that.

I know, yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) tried to wade into federal politics. I'm sure the member is trying to get into federal politics as well. But, Mr. Speaker, my suggestion is if she's really serious about that, she'll actually follow the lead of the member for Elmwood who did raise this with the City on behalf of his constituents, on behalf of northeast Winnipeg, a far more constructive approach than the kinds of theatrics we're seeing from this member today.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, the member for Elmwood sat around the caucus table with the minister and the Premier and got no response from them. He had to leave and move on to federal politics because they wouldn't listen to the issues and concerns.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't an issue that the City of Winnipeg can solve on its own. It's going to require both levels of government working together to find a solution for the traffic problems in northeast Winnipeg when the Disraeli is closed for 16 months.

Mr. Speaker, will the government stand up today, stand up for people in northeast Winnipeg and work with the City to find a solution?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member opposite, who has come rather late to this file following the lead of the member for Elmwood, may wish to raise this matter perhaps at a forum of federal candidates, if the Conservative candidate does show up for that forum in northeast Winnipeg.

But, you know, we are working with the City in providing funding in terms of roads and bridges,

something they never did. We have a good working relationship with the City, Mr. Speaker, but the member for Elmwood, Jim Maloway, raised this issue with the mayor and the City Council. I suspect the member opposite—she can raise the volume all she wants but she's late to this issue.

Jim Maloway, the member for Elmwood, is speaking out in terms of northeast Winnipeg. I don't know about their candidate, but he seems to be quite visible. The Conservative Party seems to have a problem even showing up at forums in northeast Winnipeg. So don't lecture us about who speaks for northeast Winnipeg. It's New Democrats, federal and provincial.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank Harvest Donation—Traffic Control

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, several weeks ago the churches in Starbuck and Springstein held a worship service in a field along Highway 2 dedicating the harvest to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Leaders of the event contacted the RCMP to manage the traffic and parking.

They also contacted the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, and I wonder if he could tell this House today what he did to facilitate that church service.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, the details with regard to the question I'm certainly not privy to, but I certainly want to comment with regard to Highways 2 and 3 and the \$60 million that our department and the Province of Manitoba has put into that highway, in fixing up that particular highway with regard to safety issues on Highways 2 and 3, with regard to putting infrastructure improvements throughout the province not only on Highways 2 and 3, but we've been working very closely with the councils in that particular area of the province with regard to improvements overall.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell you what the minister did. He sent out a crew to erect temporary no parking signs along both sides of the highway to obstruct the service.

I ask the minister: Why did he purposely try to prevent people who were dedicating a donation of food to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank—why did he not offer to assist them? Why did he hinder that service, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly not going to second-guess the engineers and people in my department that are concerned about safety on our highways.

I know the member opposite would like to park her Lexus wherever she wants, but that's up to her, Mr. Speaker. Our engineers and our department are concerned about safety in the province. They made a decision to do that. I stand behind them, not like the member opposite.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very disappointed that the Premier (Mr. Doer) laughs at this issue, but I know that the people who were putting on this service were concerned about safety, and that's why they contacted the RCMP who offered to manage it. We know that there have been people that run, people that walk, people that have parades to support various causes that go down our highways, and those are managed in a very safe manner. This could have been too.

Mr. Speaker, other foodgrains harvests are now concerned that they will be targeted next because they put their fields along major highways because they want that public awareness. I want to ask this minister if it's the priority of his department—is it his priority to send staff and spend taxpayers' dollars to erect temporary no parking signs so that people who are dedicating food to the world Foodgrains Bank are thwarted in their services of dedicating food to the hungry of the world?

* (14:20)

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, once again, I just want to repeat, I'm not going to second-guess the engineers or the safety people within my department, but I'll certainly look into the facts.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to conclude by saying Intergovernmental Affairs and the Department of Transportation and the government also provide many, many pilot vehicles for many non-profit organizations doing many fundraising activities throughout the province of Manitoba. We're very supportive of a lot of initiatives that take place, but we certainly don't take cheap shots with regard to staff that, in the best interests of the population of Manitoba [*inaudible*] safety in the province of Manitoba and the best interests of the population and people who are using our highways. We do not take

cheap shots at those staff and staffpersons with regard to safety overall on our highways.

But I'll be pleased to look into the facts and take a look at this issue a lot closer.

Auditor General Report Letter of Complaint Investigation

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, a former Cabinet minister, NDP Cabinet minister, made an inappropriate mistake that led ultimately to a CEO being fired. We knew the details of that blunder; 33,000-plus Crocus shareholders lost tens-of-millions of dollars.

In an audited report, we now know that there was a second incident where a CEO put in a letter of complaint, and yet the minister received insufficient action on behalf of the minister. It had something to do with the Department of Education.

I wonder if the Premier (Mr. Doer) would make it a commitment to address that particular mistake by whomever that Minister of Education was and be transparent and share it with the Legislature.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): We were in Public Accounts recently in regard to some of the issues that the member has raised, and we had an opportunity to answer a couple of questions that the MLA for Inkster had around the incident that occurred at the WCB.

We made it very, very clear, Mr. Speaker, to the MLA for Inkster that what occurred at the WCB was a personnel matter and that it was referred to the board. It was a matter that was dealt with at the board, and as far as we're concerned we acted in accordance with the legislation and with the law.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would request leave to finish my two supplementary questions.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave to finish his two supplementary questions?
[Agreed]

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would quote right from *Hansard*, and I posed the question to the provincial Auditor, and a response to me was, and I quote: "I don't know if it's been made public or not. I asked that question today as well when we were going over the report. It is, I believe, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) with regard to the teachers' retirement fund."

Mr. Speaker, something happened here where the minister made a mistake. The public should have a right to know what the blunder was.

Will the Premier (Mr. Doer) commit today to getting to the bottom of this particular issue and share with all members what minister made what blunder?

Ms. Allan: I would just like to remind the MLA for Inkster that we have put the most effective whistle-blower legislation in place in Canada, Mr. Speaker. There is a very, very serious mechanism in place for any individual in our civil service who has concerns. We feel very, very comfortable that we have acted prudently and in the best interests of our civil servants, and especially our civil servants as well as anyone who works in a Crown corporation. So we're very confident that we have legislation in place to protect those individuals.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I quote the Auditor's report: We are also aware of one other instance in which a former CEO's letter of complaint to a minister received insufficient action on the part of a minister.

When I posed the question, the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) was right in his assessment in asking, and I quote: I'm suggesting that the information be provided to all members of the committee. This is what the Member for Selkirk wanted because he, too, realized that this is an issue which all members need to be aware of.

My question to the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson): Will he make the commitment today to find out what this is and table and make sure all members of this Legislature are informed as to what went wrong, as the Member for Selkirk himself was hoping to see, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Allan: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind the member opposite that we have put the best legislation in place for whistle-blowers of any jurisdiction in Canada, and the only person in this House that should keep his commitment is the MLA for Inkster who said he'd resign and he didn't.

When is he going to keep his commitment to the public of Manitoba?

Mr. Speaker: As previously agreed, that ends question period, and we'll now move on to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Right to Know Week

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, it's Right to Know Week, and the Office of the Ombudsman; Canadian Association of Journalists; Manitoba Chapter, Canadian Taxpayers Federation; Manitoba Bar Association and the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba are hosting several speakers in Winnipeg to educate the public about their right to know how governments spend their tax dollars and how they arrive at these decisions.

It's public information, and the public has a right to know so they can hold governments to account.

Yet, here at the Manitoba Legislature, the NDP government is poised to pass Bill 31, The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, an act which moves Manitoba in the opposite direction, actually restricting access to public information.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP promised in 1999, 2003 and, again, in 2007 to appoint an independent privacy commissioner which would bring Manitoba in line with nine other jurisdictions in Canada. Instead, they have elected for a privacy adjudicator who will only be called at the request of the Ombudsman. This does nothing to increase the flow of public information or protect people's personal information. It's just another level of bureaucracy.

Under this legislation, Aboriginal people will be barred from accessing information that flows between the provincial government and First Nations governments. This has prompted the Canadian Taxpayers association to call the bill racist.

The bill also promotes sharing of information among government departments. Although this can be seen as efficiency, there is much potential for lack of privacy protections.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House want to congratulate those involved in Right to Know Week and their continued efforts to educate the public in their right to public information.

We also want to express our disappointment with the NDP government and their regressive legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Brandon Folk Music and Art Society

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Brandon Folk Music

and Art Society, Inc. and the good work the society does in enhancing the cultural life of our province.

Since 1985, Mr. Speaker, the society has been fulfilling the mandate prescribed under its articles of incorporation, to sponsor, promote and carry out folk music and art events for all ethnic and other groups in connection therewith and to give or arrange concerts or entertainments and all such matters relating to such events, concerts and arts gatherings.

With the 2008 Brandon Folk Music and Art Festival successfully concluded, the society is now preparing to host the 25th annual festival under the trees of the Provincial Exhibition Grounds in the Wheat City of Canada. Mr. Speaker, this quarter century of activity is a testament to both the tremendous commitment of numerous society directors throughout the years as well as the tremendous work of several hundred volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, the Brandon Folk Music and Art Society has a cultural vision that is broad and ambitious. This past year saw volunteer service from youth participating in the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges of Canada, SEVEC, joining together with the society's formidable local volunteer base.

The year to come holds great promise, not merely because of the 25th annual festival, but because exciting plans are being developed for the creation of a permanent multipurpose community performance and arts centre to be located in historic downtown Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, the Brandon Folk Music and Art Society is a long-standing force promoting cultural excellence in Manitoba. As the society reaches the quarter-century mark in its history, on behalf of the Province of Manitoba, I would like to commend the organization and wish it every success well into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(14:30)

International Day of Older Persons

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our Progressive Conservative caucus, I would like to recognize Manitoba seniors, whose contributions to our communities have been invaluable in the quality of life we all enjoy in Manitoba.

The United Nations recognizes today, October 1, as the International Day of Older Persons, which coincides with the designation of October as Seniors' and Elders' Month in Manitoba. Seniors have earned our respect. They deserve to be treated with dignity, with acceptance, with consideration for their rights. And they deserve to be treated fairly, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, this NDP government has been less than fair in its treatment of Manitoba seniors. As just one example, they've raised Pharmacare deductibles every year since 2002, except for last year during an election year, of course. Pharmacare deductibles have gone up a stunning 35 percent and that costs seniors up to an additional \$384 per year just to pay for their medicine. That's nothing more than a backdoor tax on the elderly and the sick.

Seniors face challenges when it comes to finding safe, affordable and appropriate housing. Those waiting to get into a personal care home face lengthy waiting lists, a risk to their health and well-being. Many Manitoba communities would love to have more supported housing made available to them, but this government is not providing these services in all areas of the province, and seniors worry that the health-care system will not be there for them when they need it. They're waiting weeks, months and, in some cases, years for appointments with specialists, diagnostic tests and surgeries. Almost every day I hear from seniors who are frustrated and angry that they simply can't access health care in the province when they've lived and worked and paid taxes all their lives.

Elder abuse, whether physical, emotional or financial is another issue that faces Manitoba seniors. We must respond to the allegations of elder abuse and neglect that exists right here in our province. Progressive Conservatives were leaders in this regard, raising awareness and educating the public on the signs of elder abuse and what concerned families and friends can do to help. Manitobans deserve more than lip-service paid to them on one day or one month of the year. They deserve to know that they won't have to choose between milk or medicine as a result of rising Pharmacare deductibles. They deserve to know that appropriate and affordable housing will be available to them as they age, and they deserve to know that the health-care system will be there for them when they need it. This government can and must do better for seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

L'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Monsieur le Président, aujourd'hui, j'ai le grand plaisir de me lever dans la Chambre et de partager avec mes honorables collègues le travail de l'APF. L'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie regroupe des parlementaires de 77 parlements ou organisations interparlementaires répartis sur les cinq continents. Son action vise principalement à promouvoir et à défendre la démocratie, l'État de droit, le respect des droits de la personne, le rayonnement international de la langue française et la diversité culturelle.

Le Manitoba est l'une des neuf provinces canadiennes représentées dans la Région Amérique de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, avec le Maine, la Louisiane et Haïti. Nos sections ont toutes en commun l'usage du français et nous favorisons les initiatives de toute nature qui assurent le rayonnement, à l'échelle du continent américain, de cette langue qui nous unit. Nous partageons les objectifs poursuivis par l'APF en ce qui a trait à la promotion de la démocratie, de l'État de droit et des droits de la personne dans l'espace francophone. De plus, par l'étude de questions culturelles, économiques et sociales d'intérêt commun, la Région Amérique favorise le dialogue entre les sections et renforce notre solidarité afin d'appuyer les communautés francophones sur le continent.

À l'occasion des 400 ans de la fondation de la ville de Québec, l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie a réuni son Assemblée plénière du 4 au 7 juillet 2008 à Québec, en partenariat avec l'Assemblée nationale du Québec. Pour les francophones d'Amérique, tout a commencé à Québec, aujourd'hui reconnue comme le berceau de la civilisation française en Amérique. Enfin, Monsieur le Président, je voudrais remercier nos hôtes à l'Assemblée nationale de leur hospitalité dans cet environnement tellement historique pendant que nous travaillions vers les objectifs de la communauté francophone globale. Merci, Monsieur le Président.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, today, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House and to share with my honourable colleagues the work of the APF. The Assembly of Francophone Parliamentarians brings together members of 77 parliaments or inter-parliamentary organizations distributed over the five continents. Its main goals are to promote and defend democracy, the Rule of law, the respect of human rights, the

international dissemination of the French language, and cultural diversity.

Manitoba is one of nine Canadian provinces represented in the American Region of the APF along with Maine, Louisiana and Haiti. Our sections all have in common the use of French and we support all initiatives which ensure the growth and development within the continent of this language which unites us. We share the larger ideals of the APF in the promotion of democracy, the Rule of law and of human rights in French-speaking jurisdictions. Moreover, by studying cultural, economic and social questions of common interest, the American Region facilitates the dialogue between the sections and reinforces our solidarity in support of French-speaking communities on the continent.

On the occasion of the 400 anniversary of the founding of Québec City, the APF hosted its Plenary Assembly from July 4 to 7, 2008, in Québec City, in partnership with the National Assembly of Québec. For the French-speaking people of North America, all started with Québec City, today recognized as the cradle of French civilization in North America. Lastly, I would like to thank our hosts within the National Assembly for their hospitality in such a rich historic environment while we worked towards the objectives of the global French-speaking community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Turtle Mountain Area World Heritage Site Designation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to salute the efforts of Chief Frank Brown of the Canupawakpa Dakota Nation, Tribal Chairman David Brien of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Band, Daniel Goodon of the Métis in Boissevain and James Ritchie, historical researcher from Boissevain. These four are presenting this week to the International Council on Monuments and Sites, a proposal that the Turtle Mountain area in southwestern Manitoba and northern North Dakota be given World Heritage status.

Turtle Mountain has been a centre for peace and trade for more than 10,000 years. The Dakota, the Chippewa and the Métis have all played important roles in the history of this region. It is appropriate that the unique and important history of the Turtle Mountain be recognized through a World Heritage designation.

Following the last ice age, Turtle Mountain was an isolated refuge surrounded by ice. As the ice

melted, trade corridors opened up between the Knife River flint deposits and the Turtle Mountain. So the Turtle Mountain became part of an important historic trade route which may have reached as far as northern Manitoba.

From what we now know, the Dakota people have historic association with the Turtle Mountain for many centuries, with the Chippewa and Métis also being involved with Turtle Mountain for a considerable length of time. Today the Turtle Mountain is an important location for many people of very diverse origins, who live in the region north or south of the Canada-U.S. border.

We all have an interest in the Turtle Mountain achieving World Heritage status. Let us hope that the proposal by Chief Frank Brown, Tribal Chairman David Brien, Daniel Goodon and James Ritchie is accepted and will move forward. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we could call report stage amendments for Bill 47, to be followed by concurrence and third reading on Bill 47, to be followed by debate on concurrence on Bill 31, to be followed by debate on second reading on Bill 46.

Mr. Speaker: Orders of the day will deal with the report stage amendments to Bill 47 and, when concluded, we'll deal with concurrence and third reading of Bill 47. Then we'll continue on to debate on concurrence of Bill 31, and then we'll deal with debate on Bill 46.

REPORT STAGE AMENDMENTS Bill 47—The CentrePort Canada Act

Mr. Speaker: Right now, I'm going to call amendment to Bill 47.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux),

THAT Bill 47 be amended in Clause 8 by adding the following after clause (d):

- (e) a person who
 - (i) owns land located in the inland port area,
 - (ii) is a partner in a partnership that owns land located in the inland port area, or

(iii) owns at least 5% of the total outstanding shares of a corporation that owns land located in the inland port area.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable Member for Inkster,

THAT Bill 47 be amended—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, in reading the legislation and as, indeed, I pointed out at second reading, one of the concerns we have with The CentrePort Canada Act as it's presently worded is that there is a huge loophole when it comes to addressing conflict of interest with regard to people who are landowners currently in this area.

Mr. Speaker, we recently have been through a lot of discussion about conflict of interest at the civic level, as you are all too aware I am sure. This measure is to protect both sides—the sellers and buyers of land in this area—making sure that the people who are appointed to the board themselves don't come in with conflict of interest.

We believe that there are plenty of high-quality reputable people who can serve on this board without having to appoint people who are landowners in this area, or who will have very clear conflicts of interest with regard to decisions around the CentrePort and the inland port development.

* (14:40)

Mr. Speaker, I believe when we are dealing with a public-appointed board like this, running the CentrePort board and corporation, that there is a higher standard than regular corporations when it comes to ethics and ethical behaviour, and that we cannot just accept what is a routine standard for an average private-sector corporation. Indeed, I am sure that following the events of the last couple of weeks on Wall Street and the Toronto Stock Exchange, that there may be others who come forward and suggest that there be better conflict of interest guidelines for corporations in the private sector and more generally.

So I believe that this is a timely amendment, a worthwhile amendment and that it is, indeed, a necessary amendment if we are going to start the CentrePort board corporation off on the right footing. Certainly, the last thing that we need is for this board to get embroiled in the sort of discussion which is

headlining the *Free Press* and other newspapers in this province for the last several weeks in terms of land deals at the city level. This is to protect people on both sides. The reason for putting conflict of interest guidelines now, you know, is to make sure that that kind of situation can never arise because we will have acted to prevent it ahead of time.

This is an acknowledgement, Mr. Speaker, that we are putting in place, with this amendment, some pretty restrictive—in terms of ownership—guidelines. The act already has some other restrictions, but I believe that, given the importance of this corporation to Manitoba, the importance of getting it off on the right foot and not embroiling it in controversies that we don't need, that it's important to have this kind of legislation, this kind of amendment. If the government feels that there are some details here that they would like to change a little bit, then we're certainly willing to listen and ask for leave of all members to put that in place and address it.

It think this is too important to be left to, for example, some regulations which may be drafted in the future or to the average corporate standard. Certainly, in this case, we all agree, I believe, that this is a very important and significant initiative. We just want to make sure that it gets off on the right foot, that the initiative gets going without any problems over conflicts of interest which could cloud the start or the ongoing work of a very important initiative in Manitoba.

I think that this is the time to close this kind of a loophole. I ask all members to join the Liberal Party in supporting this amendment to make sure that we address, right up-front, concerns over conflict of interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, let me say first of all, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say to the Member for River Heights that I thank and I appreciate his support on CentrePort Canada and this legislation, and as well as to the opposition and to the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) as well, and also to my critic in the Conservative Party.

Let me just say, first of all, conflict of interest is an important concern, and we know, and I realize, that the member opposite is raising this in the very best interests of trying to make CentrePort Canada a better corporation and to improve the legislation. So,

first of all, I just want to say that, because I know his heart is in the right place with regard to this issue.

So I thank him for that, but, regrettably, we won't be able to support his amendment because, even though it is an important issue and we understand and we believe this to be true, that consistent with good corporate governance, the conflict-of-interest concern is going to be addressed through by-laws. The legislation requires the board to establish a by-law that will address the conflict of interest issues. So it will be a comprehensive by-law that will address the conflict of interest concerns that extend far beyond the amendment being proposed. So, therefore, we will respect the principles of good corporate governance, Mr. Speaker. We know that members in this Chamber realize the importance of getting this board put in place so Manitobans can count on this board to put forward Manitoba's best interest with regard to trade and transportation. It's truly important that we move on.

So, again, I just want to thank the member for raising issues, because I know he wants to try and he's attempting to make the legislation better. But, in this particular case, we can't support this amendment because the conflict of interest is going to be dealt with through this legislation and through what we're proposing. Thank you.

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

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, wanted to put a few words on the record in regard to the amendment.

Mr. Speaker, we are concerned in the sense that the Liberal Party has recognized the importance of CentrePort. We have accommodated, as much as possible, its passage, whether it's through second reading, the committee stage, now we go into third reading. We want to see the bill itself receive Royal Assent.

The Leader of the Liberal Party has brought forward an amendment that we believe would enhance the strength of CentrePort. In today's day and age, there is a great deal of emphasis on making sure, not only in real terms but perception-wise, the potential conflicts of interest are being dealt with. That's, in essence, what this amendment is doing. It's a fairly simple amendment to understand. We're surprised that the government doesn't recognize the value.

As the Leader of the Liberal Party has pointed out, if we take a look at what's been happening in the

City of Winnipeg, both sides can benefit by an amendment of this nature. Suffice to say, by the government not supporting the amendment, we would put them on notice that we will be watching very closely as to what is happening, and the appointments. If, in fact, anything does come out of this, the government's ultimately going to have to take responsibility for not acting on an initiative that could have made the legislation even that much stronger in terms of strength, and ultimately, been a benefit to future board members or individuals that were questioning whether or not they might be able to be on the board.

So it's unfortunate—we support the CentrePort, and that's the reason why, as I say, we've gone out of our way to accommodate its rapid passage through the Legislature.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to see the vote on the amendment.

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

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the amendment moved by the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

An Honourable Member: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the amendment, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

An Honourable Member: On division.

Mr. Speaker: On division.

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 47—The CentrePort Canada Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada

Act; Loi sur la Société CentrePort Canada, as amended and reported from the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: Speakers?

* (14:50)

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I want to put a few things on the record in regard to Bill 47. First of all, I want to thank the minister for allowing the amendment to go forward to include Rosser on the first directors' list. I think that's significant co-operation on behalf of the government in order to ensure that all people are at the table in order to be represented. I know the Liberals just brought forward a motion in regard to increasing that. There are five positions over and above the nine that are listed in Bill 47. Hopefully, the Liberal Party will have some input into encouraging people to let their names stand on this very significant piece of legislation.

I also want to congratulate Chris Lorenc, Barry Rempel, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and others who went above and beyond the call of duty in regard to seeing that CentrePort actually becomes reality.

Also, I want to bring special thanks to Jack Penner, the MLA from Emerson, and the work that he did in meeting with various sectors, those people that are involved in providing information and seed for the growth of CentrePort.

I want to come back to what Chris Lorenc had talked about on the inland port in his recent *Heavy News* equipment release. It talks about, inland port by definition requires the ability to bring the four modes of transportation, rail, air, marine and road, together to support trade.

This week's announcement on the creation of CentrePort Canada builds upon Winnipeg's unique transportation assets. We're the only city in western Canada where the two major Canadian railways, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, and an American railway, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and OmniTRAX, serving the north and Port of Churchill, all converge. The only other city in Canada in which both CN and CP are within its urban limits is Montreal.

We have three of the top 10 national trucking companies headquartered in Winnipeg, supporting

roughly 33,000 jobs and contributing \$1.2 billion to Manitoba's GDP.

James Richardson International Airport is one of the few in Canada operating 24/7, the third busiest cargo airport in Canada, 17th busiest in North America and the largest in Canada by number of dedicated cargo carriers, with air cargo increasing by 55 percent between 2002 and 2007.

In addition, we have a deep-sea water port in Churchill where it connects Russia and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Churchill is western Canada's closest seaport to northern eastern Europe.

Also, the studies that went on in the mayor's trade council adopted by City Council in March of this past year all point to a real but sensitive time opportunity positioning Winnipeg as one of Canada's gateways to global trade, an asset to the nation, located in our province.

The Premier (Mr. Doer), the Mayor of Winnipeg, Reeve of Rosser, together with business community leaders worked over the summer to advance this vision and create CentrePort Canada which will manage the operations in marketing the 20,000 acre inland port around the James Richardson Airport.

This has significant impact to the province as a whole. We see this as an opportunity not only for the city of Winnipeg, but also those suburban areas that connect around the city. When we look at communities like Headingley, communities like Rosser, Grosse Isle, Warren, Teulon, Stonewall, Stony Mountain and others that will have a large trading area within that, in which we are going to be looking for skilled labour. We'll be looking for those people that are going to make a significant contribution and seeing that we have the workforce in place and also the infrastructure in place to ensure that we do have, not only the people but the infrastructure as well.

I was at part of the announcement when they announced Highway 221, the expansion of Inkster Boulevard out to the Perimeter. That was a significant announcement, but certainly I want to go on record as supporting that. We fought very hard in order to get that done, not only with the government, the federal government. Vic Toews was also there for the announcement. We also want to make sure that this does go forward.

When we look at the map that's been provided, there will be a short detour in result of that. So

they're taking it down Sturgeon Road rather than out to the Perimeter and creating a new cul-de-sac at that particular point. We want to ensure that the amount of traffic that's going down that particular highway will be done in a safe and convenient way, not only for those commuters but those truckers and the freight who want to be able to get out in a timely manner.

We know that the trucking industry has been very much in favour. In fact, yesterday, at the organizational meetings, we had breakfast yesterday morning at which the trucking industry was there, along with many other hotel operators. In fact, the Hilton was there, who has a hotel at the Winnipeg Airport, and a number of others and they're very excited. I can tell you from first-hand experience in talking to these people, you can feel the excitement. They are certainly hoping and cheering us on in anything they can do to help this become a reality.

I know that the people who have volunteered their hours that have gone into this particular initiative so far certainly have to be commended for their work and the time that they've put in to seeing this become a reality. We have an opportunity here in Manitoba to become a leader. We have an opportunity to become a have province, and with this initiative we certainly will be lobbying our federal counterparts.

We talk about Regina and Edmonton as the other alternatives. We don't look at them as another alternative. We look at them as one of our partners to ensure that Winnipeg is the CentrePort. We have the opportunity to bring the freight from the west, from the east and down to our trading partners and up to Churchill and into those other countries that are so viably important to us in regard to our trade and our partners when it comes to ensuring that we have a very strong and stable economy here in Manitoba.

I want to also put on the record in regard to my particular municipality in my riding, Rosser. This has a significant impact in regard to their tax base. It's very important that they're at the table and as I said in my earlier comments, we're certainly pleased to see that they have been taken back from being off the list and on the list. It was certainly an oversight that's been fixed and we know that they'll do a great job. In fact, I know there have been discussions going on at the point in time in having somebody appointed to that other than the reeve of the municipality, Mrs. Alice Bourgouin, who's done just an outstanding job in ensuring that Rosser's voice was heard.

When I met with them just some two weeks ago after Bill 47 was introduced, their concern was that they were allowed to be at the table and certainly they have demonstrated that and the government's demonstrated that, so we're very pleased about that particular opportunity. Also the council is very concerned about the TIF bill and the impact that that's going to have on this particular piece of legislation, Bill 47. So we will be watching that bill. We want to make sure that the legislation is the legislation that we need to be focussed on.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

We will ensure that not only the TIF bill is in a way that's going to be conducive for all Manitobans, but we want to make sure that Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada Act, gets passed. We certainly made that very clear earlier today and we're certainly going to ensure that we move it through in a very timely manner.

So, with those few short words, I know there are a number of my other colleagues that want to speak on this before it goes on to the final vote. So thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Madam Acting Speaker, I'm so pleased to be able to stand and put a few comments on the record with respect to Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada bill.

As the Premier (Mr. Doer) took great glee in mentioning during question period that I have spoken quite glowingly about this piece of legislation for any number of reasons, the first one being I believe very strongly in this province. I believe that there are certain opportunities that we have in this province, that we should take advantage of them and this is certainly one of them. This is an opportunity that we have to grasp and this cannot be an opportunity that we can afford to lose, Madam Acting Speaker.

The second reason is that my party and my leader have been very active in trying to push forward this initiative to the point where we had to drag, kicking and screaming, the government of the day. So this legislation could have been before this House quite a while ago had the NDP government actually seen the advantage of this piece of legislation. So having it here sooner—having it here now is very important. It could have been sooner but later is probably as good as anything. There are a couple of concerns, not about the concept, not about CentrePort Canada, not about the opportunity that it affords us. I have concerns more so from the

government's side in their ability to drive it forward, and certainly their desire to drive it forward because there are a couple of ideological issues within this piece of legislation, Madam Acting Speaker.

* (15:00)

This is all about business, and we know that the NDP government doesn't particularly like business. They don't particularly like seeing private enterprise. They don't like to see entrepreneurs actually making and taking a risk with their own capital with the understanding that if there's a profit, that's not a bad thing.

Profits are not bad. The NDP, for the most part, who have never had any business experience, certainly can't understand that and recognize that. So I have a bit of a concern that there's going to be a real drive and a real driving force of this NDP government to assist in CentrePort Canada.

I have another serious concern, not about the opportunity, not about the potential that this has for Manitoba, but again it's a concern as to whether there's a real desire on behalf of government to implement what's necessary to make this work. I would speak of the requirement for a free trade zone.

Now this is a concept that perhaps members on the government side can't get their heads around for a couple of reasons. No. 1 is that they cringe whenever you talk about free trade. We know that the position of the Premier was one of negative. He didn't like free trade then; he doesn't like free trade now. The unions that support this government are not fans of free trade. They weren't fans of free trade then; they aren't fans of free trade now.

So, when you're going to make a philosophical shift from something, you're going to have to embrace it. I'm not so sure that this government really is prepared to embrace it. They have to; there's no question. A free trade zone is absolutely vital to the implementation of CentrePort Canada. It has to happen. There's not one in Canada right now. This will be a first. This will be a one-off, actually. There's only one jurisdiction that's going to be able to accommodate a free trade zone which is required for this opportunity and it's required for the federal government to be a partner.

Now that's another concern I have, Madam Acting Speaker, that this government, this Premier, the minister responsible have not been at the table with the federal government. Other jurisdictions have. We know and we fear the competition that's

there right now, currently in place. We fear, I fear the competition that's ahead of us currently, and that competition comes from Saskatchewan and that competition comes from Alberta.

We know that the Saskatchewan politicians have been at the table with the federal politicians. We know that the Albertan politicians have been at the table with the federal politicians. We have been nowhere in sight and that's wrong. They have, in fact, been negligent in putting forward their better position for Manitoba than what has Saskatchewan and Alberta.

That's scary because, again, this is an opportunity that we can't afford to lose. This is an opportunity that we can't possibly lose because this is Manitoba's future, and I'm concerned that this government doesn't quite see it in the same light as what I do, what my leader does and what we do on this side of the House.

There's another concern that I have, not with CentrePort Canada, because we've recognized that that's absolutely vital. The concern again is with the desire of this government to put the necessary resources in place to help fund the infrastructure for CentrePort Canada. Nowhere has the Premier, nowhere has the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), nowhere has the Minister of Competitiveness, Industry and Trade (Mr. Swan) stood up and said, we're going to be a full partner. In fact, there's nothing in the legislation that speaks to that.

But they can waste over \$600 million on a hydro transmission line on the west side of the province. They can waste it. They can absolutely waste over \$600 million on a transmission line, but I haven't heard one single word as to the kind of infrastructure investment that they're going to make with respect to CentrePort Canada.

That concerns me because whether they want some other level of government to pay for their infrastructure improvements, whether they want just simply the federal government to pay, which is probably what they'll do because they always look to federal government to bail out their financial mishandling of issues and development. So I have a concern. There are some unknowns with respect to this government as to whether they can make this opportunity work.

Now let's talk about the opportunity itself. CentrePort Canada should be in Manitoba. We have all of the natural advantages. I cannot stress that: we

have the natural advantages. We have the two rail lines that are identified here in the city of Winnipeg. We have rubber-tire opportunities both east, west, south, and we don't necessarily have to go that far north. We have air services here, Madam Acting Speaker, that can service the globe. We can do it on a 24-hour basis, and we can service the globe.

Now what CentrePort Canada is, it's a free trade zone where industry will come into this area where goods and services from across the globe will come to CentrePort Canada. They will come and they will pass through a centre point, some of them moving on simply on a transportation basis, others moving on after additional assembly requirement, after additional manufacturing. This is an opportunity for jobs. This is an opportunity for transportation. This is an opportunity for the province of Manitoba to generate an awful lot of economic ability—not just Manitoba, not just Winnipeg. We've been told time and time and time again, this is not just Winnipeg and not just Manitoba. This is about the nation. This is Canadian in scope. This is national in scope. This is international in scope not only from North America, but from all other areas of the globe. This is a one-off. There are areas like this, Madam Acting Speaker, that are already very successful in the United States. We would be the first and only one to be located here in the country of Canada. We can't afford to lose the opportunity.

We can't afford to lose the opportunity, Madam Acting Speaker, because it is only once. The one comment that I heard that I have to share with this House, and it's the comment that we in fact should be taking forward with the debate on this legislation. The comment came from the initial individuals who were the proponents of CentrePort Canada, and I share it with you now, and they said: this CentrePort Canada has the potential of making Manitoba a have province.

I know that members across the way aren't listening, but I wish they would because, quite frankly, there are too many Manitobans right now that are embarrassed with the knowledge that Manitoba is the only have-not province in western Canada. We depend totally on equalization and transfers from the federal government. We are the biggest squeegee kid in the country right now where we stand up and we beg the federal government to continue to fund the services that are being provided by this government—or the non-services that are being provided by this government. This will make Manitoba a have province. I don't think they want to

be a have province for some reason, Madam Acting Speaker. But this, in fact, would give us the opportunity. I've shown you some of the concerns that I have with this government driving this particular initiative. I only wish that the government will stand up, make some ideological changes in their beliefs and push this as being the necessary economic advantage that Manitoba can see as being its future.

Madam Acting Speaker, we will, in fact, vote in favour of this piece of legislation because it's right, absolutely right. Our concern is that the wrong party is going to be driving it. They have to put their own investment in place. They have to make sure that the free trade zone is going to be accepted and acceptable by them ideologically. They have to make sure that labour is onside and they have to make sure that they're prepared to compete with other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan and Alberta.

What I've seen, Madam Acting Speaker, is lethargy. What I've seen is people sitting there saying somebody else will help us all the time. When people and this government are constantly handed money from another government, another level of government, they have no desire to get out of that mode of have not. They have no desire to get out of that mode and that is wrong. So we'll give them the benefit of the doubt. We'll give them the opportunity in CentrePort Canada, put their money where it should be—into infrastructure on this particular project. They should be making the investment on behalf of Manitobans on this project, not on some wasteful west-side transmission line that they've got some boondoggle going there. We'll give them the chance to do this right, and they are going to be given the chance.

* (15:10)

All I can say, on behalf of Manitobans, is: Don't fail us; make sure this works. If it doesn't work, we will put it right back at their feet, a socialist government that doesn't believe in business. Change your ideals. Change your ideology and make this work. Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): The honourable Member for Ste. Rose—Russell. Sorry.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I've been away for a few days, but I didn't think it was quite that long.

I'm pleased to stand, Madam Acting Speaker, today to address Bill 47. Once again, we see a

government that is somewhat out of control in terms of understanding what their agenda should be.

If this government had wanted to pass this legislation properly, they would have had it on the table a long time ago, giving the opportunity for the outside interest groups to be able to examine the bill, to be able to respond to it and to be able on a timely basis to put their support behind it.

But, Madam Acting Speaker, this government, as is becoming a habitual thing with them, introduces legislation on the spur of a moment and then expects the Legislature to pass that legislation in a matter of a couple of weeks or days.

Although we're talking on Bill 47, I mention, by example, Bill 48, which the government would desperately like to get through before the end of this session, yet no one out there in the public has had a chance to scrutinize the bill and to examine it.

Now, with regard to Bill 47, we have a bill that promotes CentrePort; it promotes the concept and the reality of a CentrePort, if you like, for our province. Now there are other jurisdictions that are competing for this, and they are well ahead of Manitoba in terms of when they started.

Manitoba has a unique advantage and that is we've got a committee, I think, of people who are very aggressive in their approach and have a good understanding of why it is that Manitoba should be chosen as the location for CentrePort. In their estimation, we probably should have—if the playing field were level—our position geographically and the fact that we've got a transportation hub in this city anyway should give us an advantage to secure that inland port.

Madam Acting Speaker, it's going to take the government to start actively promoting Manitoba's site as the site for the inland port. The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) is saying they have been doing it, but I remember, in the dying weeks of the spring session when we addressed this with the government, the Premier of the day responded in a way which showed that the government had no idea of what they were supposed to be doing with the inland port.

When the leader of our party asked a question of the Premier about what it was his government was doing to attract the inland port, there were no answers from the Premier. There were no responses that would indicate that he had any idea about what

the advantages of an inland port in Manitoba would have.

Madam Acting Speaker, we have seen this from this government before but, nevertheless, the private sector has taken the ball that the Premier dropped, has picked it up and are running with it. I think all of us are behind the effort. I think all of us are behind the team that has been put together to promote and to ensure that we secure the port.

The critic for Agriculture stood in his place a few minutes ago and talked about the leadership of the group that is leading the initiative. I think that they have a very good chance of presenting to those who are going to be making the decision in the end, a plan that puts Manitoba first.

Madam Acting Speaker, I know we talk a lot about this being a Winnipeg initiative but, indeed, it puts Manitoba on the map. It's larger than Manitoba, because it gives an opportunity for Manitoba to become the hub, the centre, for an inland port for this country. Traditionally, Winnipeg has been that hub for transportation. We used to have 14, I believe it was 14, trucking firms located here in Manitoba, in Winnipeg. I think we're down to about seven now, but, indeed, Winnipeg has always been known as the ideal location for a hub of distribution of goods, distribution of products and indeed a transportation hub.

Now, in this proposal we see the four modes of transportation that are incorporated into a hub where we can distribute the products that flow through this country in an effective manner. A lot of the goods are moving east to west. If you were to look at what's happening with our railways north of the Great Lakes, we are perhaps a country that's got a problem in terms of seeing those railway beds rebuilt, because they are not being maintained properly. If, in fact, we don't secure that inland port, we could see a break in the transportation network across this country, sort of the lifeline of transportation that we have east to west in this country, and that would be tragic for not only Manitoba but for this country.

Madam Acting Speaker, if we are going to see Manitoba and Canada grow in the future, we have to have an initiative like this come to fruition, come to reality. I think the government plays a big part in being not only a partner in this but being a lead in the initiative, ensuring that the Premier (Mr. Doer) of the province is viewed as the individual who is out front and centre on this initiative right from the beginning, right to its end. It is up to this Premier to show the

leadership that this government should have on behalf of the people of this province in bringing this initiative to Manitoba.

I know that other jurisdictions, Alberta and Saskatchewan, have their premiers out front and centre on this initiative, and it is time that our Premier got on board, became much more aggressive than he has been in the past on this initiative to ensure that Manitoba has every advantage of seeing this inland port concept come to our province and give us the boost in this city that we need. Madam Acting Speaker, Manitoba, by comparison to Saskatchewan cities and Alberta cities, is falling behind because we have a government that doesn't understand the whole concept of what drives the economy. If you were to look at what's happening in Alberta and in Saskatchewan today, Manitoba is becoming the poor sister province to these two provinces, and we shouldn't be, because we have equal resources in this province, but we have a government that hasn't really harnessed those resources to the advantage of the people that live in this province.

Madam Acting Speaker, I think CentrePort and the concept of the inland port is one way in which we can perhaps bring back some of that advantage that is so natural to our province, so natural to our city and one that we should rightly have, and promote and secure for the benefit of the people, not only here in Manitoba, but indeed throughout Canada as well.

With those few remarks, Madam Acting Speaker, I just wanted to indicate that this is a bill we wish would have come sooner; nevertheless, it is one that is necessary if Manitoba is to progress and to move forward. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Acting Speaker, I rise to indicate that Manitoba Liberals are supportive of this initiative. It is a plus for Winnipeg, a plus for Rosser, a plus for rural Manitoba, a plus for all Manitoba.

But, that being said, it is important that we get the details right, that this initiative gets off to a strong start, that it doesn't get embroiled in charges and countercharges over conflicts of interest, that it doesn't start getting involved in initiatives which may be great for somebody in the CentrePort area, but causes a lot of damage to a business that exists and currently operates somewhere else in Manitoba.

* (15:20)

So I say to the NDP and to Manitobans that Liberals will be watching this development very closely. We will be ready to bring issues forward and to discuss concerns. We will be open to watching very carefully to see that this initiative proceeds in the best possible way with the highest possible quality of ethical and other standards.

I must admit, Madam Acting Speaker, that we were very disappointed that, with all the government's hoopla on this bill, there was not a single presenter at committee stage to speak to the importance of this bill, to discuss how the corporation will operate, what the expectations are in terms of outcomes, and to talk about the details and analyze this bill in considerable depth. It is a very important bill, as we all agree, and in that respect, it was very disappointing to have a committee where there were zero presenters. That shows that the government was not doing its job in making sure that there were people coming out to present and discuss and analyze this bill, as is a normal circumstance. It is an initial sign of concern over this legislation, that it is proceeding without the usual comments and debate and an analytical look at committee stage.

We are also disappointed that the government did not support our amendment to prevent untoward conflict of interest with respect to land and buying and selling of land in the inland port area. It is, unfortunately, a sad example of the failure of the NDP to think ahead and prevent problems over conflicts of interest. We've had too many examples in recent days where things could have been set up better to prevent conflict of interest and to make sure that things were not only done well, but were seen to be done well, whether we're talking at the civic level or at the national or international corporate level. It is very important that we have set up this with the highest possible standards to make sure that this proceeds in the best possible way in the best interests of all Manitobans.

Our amendment was to protect the integrity of CentrePort and its board of directors because we want this high a standard, and we're sad that the NDP did not push for the high standards which we believe should have been achieved. That being said, Madam Acting Speaker, we see this as a significant economic opportunity, a job-creating opportunity, a forward-looking opportunity, one that we should be moving on. I look forward to this bill passing to this board and CentrePort and the inland port and a free trade area being implemented. There are a lot of steps ahead before we achieve the goal that we

would all like. We just want to make sure that those steps are done with the highest possible standards in the best possible way for all Manitobans. Thank you.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'm pleased to speak on Bill 47, which establishes the governance structure for CentrePort and the inland port, and I want to say that we support this bill. We believe that it is one of many steps that are going to have to be taken by government in partnership with others in order to bring to reality the establishment of an inland port in Manitoba.

Much credit for the momentum that has built up around this project has to be given to Chris Lorenc and the other members of the mayor's advisory council, who prepared the report that was presented to City Council back in February of this year, that recommended the establishment of an inland port for Manitoba.

Madam Acting Speaker, the members of that committee looked at the historic and geographic situation. They certainly took into account the fact that we're ideally positioned in the centre of North America to create such an opportunity to generate jobs and opportunities for Manitobans, and, indeed, for all western Canadians, as has been pointed out by members of all parties. Here in Winnipeg, we are at the intersection of three different railways: CN, CP and Burlington, which runs north-south. We have a major international airport under redevelopment. Thanks and congratulations to Barry Rempel and the Winnipeg Airports Authority and all those from all levels of government who've been involved in moving that redevelopment of the Winnipeg International Airport to be renamed the James Richardson International Airport, for their efforts in bringing that about.

We also know that the highway network that runs through Winnipeg and Manitoba is certainly in need of upgrades and a significant amount of investment, and all of those routes that flow out from Winnipeg are in need of that investment. Some steps are being taken in that regard, and certainly there's more work to be done in that area. But, for all of these reasons, we are ideally positioned for an inland port. Those who understand the economics of inland ports point to the fact that the current ports along the west coast of Canada, in particular, on the Pacific coast are congested, they are expensive, they are slow and inconvenient for many who are attempting to ship goods through those ports.

So we have an opportunity here in Manitoba to take advantage of that and encourage more air, train and road traffic to come into Manitoba to bring raw materials into the province, to add value to those materials through manufacturing and value-added activities right here in the province, and ultimately be a place for the distribution of final products to end-markets within North America.

So it's a great opportunity to increase our position and it certainly does build on a vision for Manitoba that I think has been around for many decades. We were once known as the gateway to the west. Madam Acting Speaker, there was a view that Manitoba would be the Chicago of the North at one time in our history and, because of a variety of developments, disappointingly, we're not where I think some of the early civic and provincial leaders had hoped we would be at this stage. But we certainly have an opportunity to start to take bold steps forward with the establishment of an inland port.

So congratulations to all those involved. We, as is well known, have been critical of the government in not moving more quickly on this initiative. We hope that that criticism is being viewed as constructive criticism that has helped produce some movement that may not have occurred otherwise, as is our responsibility in opposition. So we're disappointed that we're six months, at least, behind where we think we should be. We are concerned about the fact that Alberta is moving very aggressively, that the minister, one of the lead political ministers in Alberta has announced a grant to port Edmonton to study the economics of an inland port in that province. That was announced many months ago and that province and the City of Edmonton are moving very aggressively and very swiftly, in partnership with private business, in order to try to capture some of the opportunities arising from the congestion on the Pacific ports.

We are in a competitive marketplace in a competitive position, not just internationally, but within Canada and within North America. We're concerned that we're behind in the race to establish an inland port, but we are pleased to see the action that's being taken presently and we certainly encourage everybody to continue to move forward as quickly as practically possible to create the framework for an inland port.

As has been mentioned by Chris Lorenc and many others, an inland port will be measured and its

success will be determined based on how much private investment there is, how many companies decide that this is a good place to establish warehouses and factories and logistics operations and companies that are involved in trade and transportation, manufacturing and value-added activities. Madam Acting Speaker, the job of the government is to create the framework and the environment for those investments to take place, and this bill is one small step in that direction toward creating that framework.

* (15:30)

Further steps need to be taken at the federal level, the establishment of a free trade zone in the area that has been identified within the bill is going to be essential to creating the draw and the incentive for companies to make that investment. We have encouraged the federal government to make that designation within federal legislation.

We believe that the federal government recognizes the natural inherent advantages of Winnipeg and Manitoba as a place for an inland port, and we certainly will look forward to seeing some vigorous lobbying on the part of the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the government toward that end. We know that when the political will has been there certainly the Premier and members of Cabinet have been prepared to travel to Ottawa to make the pitch on behalf of Manitoba.

We certainly know that there was a delegation that went with respect to the virology lab. There have been delegations on a range of other issues, including the delegation to press for changes to the Criminal Code which occurred last year. If there's a similar degree of political will on the part of the Premier on this issue, we would expect there would be a major push for Manitoba to achieve this objective on behalf of the people of our province.

If successful, we know that this is going to be a great legacy for future generations, that this is an investment and an opportunity that will pay dividends for many generations yet to come. It will generate revenue and income that can be invested in areas like health care, education and other public services that are important to Manitobans. It will create jobs, raise incomes and result in a higher standard of living and lower taxes for Manitobans as more and more people come to the province to take advantage of the opportunities that are being provided.

So we know that there has been very little in the way of significant private investment in Manitoba over the last nine years. There has been a lot in the way of government spending in Manitoba over that time period. There has been a lot of money expended on the projects such as the floodway project, which is a good project provided that the engineering advice is followed.

We know that the relocation of the Hydro building, the building of a new building for the bureaucracy of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, these are the major investments and projects taking place in Manitoba today. They are all government projects, essentially taking money from the federal government or from Manitoba taxpayers and directing it into projects. It certainly creates some activity in the areas where those projects are taking place, but this is not a recipe for long-term sustainability. Private investment and innovation in the economy are the things that form the underpinning of the economy, and those are the activities that spin off taxes that can be used to support social programs.

We think an inland port has the potential to create that sort of an atmosphere for investment and so, Madam Acting Speaker, we look at this bill as an incremental step. It's late in coming. It is incremental, but it is a good step and we support it. We don't think that the bill is necessarily perfect, but we think that it's close enough that we would rather see it passed than to see it delayed in any way through amendments that could improve the bill but which could also serve to slow down its passage.

So we are prepared to support this bill in recognition of the fact that it is a small and modest step in the right direction, that many other things need to happen. Much more energetic leadership needs to be shown by the government in bringing this project to fruition, and much more needs to be done in terms of creating a private investment environment in Manitoba that's attractive to those who want to come here and build our province. Simply spending government dollars and tax dollars in and of itself is not an economic strategy. It is a process of spending tax dollars in a way that can produce public benefits, but, ultimately, doesn't add to the tax base and the long-term economic prosperity of the province.

So we support the bill. We look for more leadership and more energy from the government going forward on it. We congratulate those who have

done so much to bring it to fruition—Chris Lorenc. We congratulate Barry Rempel and many others who have done so much and showed such vision and energy to keep this issue at the forefront of the public agenda, and also those—Mayor Katz and those on City Council, who have put this at or near the top of their list of priorities for Winnipeg and Manitoba. This is going to require the efforts of all levels of government. It's going to require the faith of the business community and those who are looking at places to invest. It's certainly going to require a broader action on the part of the government to encourage private investment. Certainly, we worry about the tax rates in Manitoba currently. The federal Finance Minister and Department commented that we have the second worst environment in Canada for private investment, and that is obviously a concern. These are other issues that need to be addressed in other debates.

So we support this bill, Madam Acting Speaker, and look forward to seeing it passed, and also hope for much more action to ensure that investors have confidence in Manitoba, including maintaining balanced budgets, reducing taxes and better uncompetitive taxes, and building the infrastructure and the platforms that are required to move us forward.

Finally, Madam Acting Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and thank for his energy and leadership, Art Mauro, who has also been involved as a very articulate and energetic advocate for the inland port; somebody who has, I think, provided great advice to politicians of all stripes in Manitoba and has done much to promote this project in addition to the many other ways he's contributed to our province. So we support the bill, look forward to its passage and much more action in the days, weeks, years and decades to come. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Are there any more speakers on concurrence and third reading of Bill 47?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): The question before the House is the motion to pass the third reading and concurrence of the CentrePort Canada.

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

DEBATE ON CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 31—The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): The next item we have before the House is debate on concurrence and third reading of the proposed motion of the honourable Minister for Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport (Mr. Robinson) on Bill 31, The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act.

What is the will of the House?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I would like to put some words on the record regarding Bill 31, and speak to the work that the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) has done on this issue, the issue of privacy legislation and the need for stronger legislation than what is being presented by this government.

This week is the Right to Know Week and the Office of the Ombudsman, the Canadian Association of Journalists, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Manitoba Bar Association, the Provincial Council of Women, are hosting several speakers in Winnipeg to educate the public about the right to know, the right to know how government spends their tax dollars and how those decisions are arrived to. I think that these sessions are great. It's public information and the public has a right to know exactly how government accounts for the dollars that are being spent.

On the flip side of that, the Manitoba Legislature has this Bill 31, which, I think, moves Manitoba in the opposite direction and actually restricts access to public information.

What is interesting, during the 1999, the 2003 and 2007 elections, the NDP had promised to appoint an independent privacy commissioner which would bring Manitoba in line with nine other jurisdictions in Canada. Instead of electing a privacy commissioner, they have decided to put forward a privacy adjudicator. This privacy adjudicator would only be called forward at the request of the Ombudsman. So you're actually cutting out the opportunity for citizens, the taxpayers of Manitoba, to have direct access to this adjudicator. This does nothing to increase the flow of public information, nor protect people's personal information. It's just another level of bureaucracy before heading to court.

* (15:40)

I think that what has happened over the last few months is we've had a government that has refused to listen to third-party concerns. We have a government that has failed to listen to the opposition's efforts to make this legislation stronger.

The amendments that were put forward by the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) would provide great substance to this bill. I think that it's concerning when the Member for Morris has brought these issues forward through meetings with the minister or through staff of the minister and there doesn't seem to be a willingness to take these amendments serious.

I think it's concerning when the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Robinson) stands up in the House and indicates that he's not quite sure about certain aspects of the legislation. That certainly raises red flags to me, and it does certainly raise red flags to a number of individuals out there, who are paying close attention to this piece of legislation and are looking for leadership from this government on privacy legislation.

As I said earlier, we on this side of the House have participated in meetings with several third-party individuals who have concerns about the government's approach to Bill 31. Our caucus has met with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Provincial Council of Women and the Mother of Red Nations this fall to discuss the bill along with the concerns that they've raised regarding issues with this bill.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the Provincial Council of Women both were in agreement that the bill should be pulled at all costs and supported our efforts to have the hoist motion accepted and supported on Bill 31.

Madam Acting Speaker, in discussions with Mother of Red Nations, they indicated they were upset with the fact that they, the biggest and largest representative of Aboriginal women's interests in Manitoba, were not meaningfully consulted as part of the bill development and offered that, if the minister would hoist the bill for six months, MORN would invest him to meet with the membership in November at their annual general assembly.

The minister did not support this offer or this suggestion so, unfortunately, there was a missed opportunity as far as I'm concerned with the government showing true consultation and interest in learning more about ways to make this bill stronger.

While MORN is not technically against the bill in principle, they did feel there should have been better consultation, so both government and MORN could have shared their ideas and shared with each other where FIPPA law should be going in this province and also to ensure the protection for Aboriginal women was in place.

The three parties formed a coalition to push for the bill to withdraw and be re-introduced after amendments to increase transparency, as opposed to reducing it. We support their efforts and we support their intent to make this bill stronger.

We also met with a privacy expert, Brian Bowman, who provided some analysis of the bill, which we feel had credence to making this bill stronger and also provided some really good suggestions on how to do that, but also provided some really strong, red flags on how poorly developed this privacy bill, Bill 31, is.

He indicated extreme disappointment that there was no interest by this government to bring in a privacy commissioner, that the privacy adjudicator was good enough as the government felt. What Brian Bowman indicated, the privacy adjudicator would be nothing more than a junior Ombudsman. I think that there's an opportunity to give somebody a role within government who would provide a strong voice for privacy law and privacy issues. I think what this privacy adjudicator will be is just another, you know, another level of bureaucracy to an overly bureaucratic system already. We see more and more challenges with individuals to get information from this government, and I think that this bill will further delay the release of information.

There's nothing here with regard to private-sector information protection. I think that the government had an opportunity to support the Member for Morris's bill, Bill 216, which addressed a lot of those issues and a lot of those points. I think that Bill 31 has completely missed the point on the need for private-sector information protection, and I think that, you know, that's another missed opportunity and, again, another reason why this bill is not going to be representative of the interests of all Manitobans.

I'd also like to share a few points on the government's record with regard to freedom of information release of information. The FIPPA annual report was recently released and, as in previous reports, it continues to reveal the culture of secrecy that is prevalent in this current government, a

situation that is getting worse instead of better and I think this legislation will only support the secrecy culture. Only 55 percent of FIPPA requests were responded to within the 30-day window prescribed in the legislation. I think that is a real concern, 55 percent isn't a record to be proud of, and I think that this government should be working harder at making sure that Manitobans get the information that they're requesting.

Nearly 60 percent of FIPPA requests last year were denied, either in whole or in part, proving that the NDP government here were focussing on refusing requests instead of granting them. Some departments were worse than that average and that's very concerning. The Department of Labour, only 26 percent of their requests were fully granted; the Department of Agriculture, only 25 percent; the Department of Education, 5.5 percent; and Culture, the department in charge of FIPPA enforcement, was only 33 percent. And the worst offender of all was Water Stewardship, at 5 percent.

So I guess my question is, why should Manitobans even bother to file requests when in some departments there's only a 5 percent chance of getting your request responded to? I think that this type of information is telling, Madam Acting Speaker, it's telling me that the government is comfortable with their culture of secrecy. They're comfortable with not responding to Manitobans' need for information and I think that it's very concerning that the government has refused to look at amendments which would strengthen Bill 31 to ensure that these percentages that I have just shared with you would be reduced into a better light, and those percentages would provide better results than are demonstrated.

I think, for the first time ever, last year, the government had to be taken to court to ensure the release of public information. The Family Services Department refused to comply with FIPPA and has had to be taken to court to ensure the release of public information. This is after the Premier (Mr. Doer) boasted in the House that he didn't believe that there was one case out there that has gone to court and that we've always complied with the legislation. Well, I think that rang fairly hollow this year, Madam Acting Speaker, when actually there is a case now before the courts. So the government should pay heed and actually pay attention to exactly how Bill 31 is going to make things even more difficult for Manitobans to receive information.

* (15:50)

The privacy adjudicator role, this is not a privacy commissioner, and I think that that has to be clearly stated. It is not a privacy commissioner. Again, we need the privacy commissioner for the obvious reasons. We need a commissioner with teeth, not a privacy adjudicator with dentures, as was said by the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), which, I think, gives a clear indication of the difference between the two roles.

The NDP have indicated that this is a one-of-a-kind privacy officer. Well, that's true. It's an adjudicator. It's not a commissioner. It is something that not a lot of other provinces would go toward supporting. I think that we should be looking at what is best for Manitobans. We should be looking at a commissioner who would be there as a support directly for Manitobans and not having a position where only the Ombudsman can refer cases or situations to the adjudicator. This doesn't provide a free flow of information or support for Manitobans.

So I guess, in closing, I would like to say that the final position that the PC caucus has taken against Bill 31 is based entirely on the facts that we've shared in the House over the past few months. I have shared a few of those very serious concerns that we have with this legislation. I've shared the serious concerns that third parties have shared with this legislation. I think we believe that, instead of increasing transparency, the bill is designed to censor information. Installing a toothless privacy adjudicator instead of a real privacy commissioner is a step backwards, and it puts up roadblocks between the public and access to information.

I'm extremely disappointed that this government and this minister failed to see some really strong amendments that would have made this a very, very strong and supportive bill in Manitoba, but, unfortunately, we cannot support that. Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport): Madam Acting Speaker, allow me to say a few words prior to the bill going any further in this Chamber.

First of all, contrary to the words spoken by the Member for Minnedosa—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Excuse me for a moment. With the indulgence of the House, we have something we need to clarify.

The honourable Minister for Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport, to resume his debate.

Mr. Robinson: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. As I was starting to say, I want to just say a few words as well. I want to commend the work that the members for Minnedosa and Morris have done with respect to Bill 31. I know that they're committed to this piece of legislation as I am, even though we may disagree on certain points.

I want to say that I believe that we have strengthened access rights and increased privacy protection by introducing the new information and privacy adjudicator. Madam Acting Speaker, we may disagree on terminology, but I believe overall we have strength in that.

I also want to focus on the powers of the people who handle complaints and issues under FIPPA, rather than dwelling on their names. I want to also underline the strengths of the new model and remove any misunderstanding.

In Manitoba, we have an independent officer who listens to concerns from the public, investigates complaints, works towards a reasonable resolution and comments publicly on access and privacy matters. That independent officer is an Ombudsman here in the province of Manitoba and, when we look at ways to strengthen the role of the Ombudsman's office, we want to build a made-in-Manitoba product.

We wanted to build on an office that has had 10 years of experience in handling requests under this legislation that we're improving on—FIPPA—resolving 95 percent of the cases without a formal recommendation. So we focussed on the one power that the Ombudsman does not have: the power to make binding orders. That is what you see in this bill.

We've introduced a new independent officer with the power to issue binding orders to conclude a few difficult cases that cannot be resolved by the usual process. We believe that, by establishing an order-making information and privacy adjudicator, we have done more than introduce stronger rights of access privacy under FIPPA for Manitobans.

We have, I believe, as well substantially increased the transparency and accountability of government and we have put ourselves under the scrutiny of an independent officer who can make binding orders to release information or take steps to further protect the privacy of individuals.

We think that the approach we have taken is sound and we think the new independent officer will work well. We think that when we look again at this legislation, as we will be required to do so in the time ahead, we will find that Manitoba has benefited from the provisions that we have introduced.

I want to address a couple points that have continuously been raised by members opposite. First of all, let me make it very clear that our government remains committed to supporting the inherent right to Aboriginal self-government of Aboriginal people, first and foremost. Madam Acting Speaker, we've also introduced amendments to Bill 31 that recognize Aboriginal First Nations, the band councils, that they perform government functions that are very similar to other orders of government such as municipalities. So we have given information, provided by Aboriginal band councils, the same protections as information provided by other orders of government.

Accountability around Child and Family Services' records and VLT revenues will not be affected, because these amendments are about supporting the inherent right to Aboriginal self-government, not lessening Child and Family Services' responsibilities under FIPPA or reducing the natural disclosures required by other legislation and policy. We believe that this is a step in the right direction.

Also, we have moved—and I think this is substantial—that we have also shortened the period for which Cabinet records are closed, moving it from 30 to 20 years.

I want to address a couple of issues that have been raised, as well, by members opposite. I want to point out that, first of all, the number of access requests to departments and government agencies continues to rise. Between 1998 and 2007, the average number of requests was 1,178. Last year, we received almost double that average; 2,532 requests were received. The majority of these requests were granted in full or in part.

* (16:00)

In 2007, access was completely denied for only 10 percent of all applications to departments and government agencies. In 25 percent of these cases, no records existed or the request was deemed to be repetitive. The most common reason for not releasing information was also the protection of personal information. So I'm pleased to see that departments and government agencies are applying

FIPPA correctly when making decisions about what information to release to applicants.

The Ombudsman's annual report concluded that public bodies made the right decisions in more than 80 percent of the cases, and this is the most difficult area of FIPPA. It's important to note that people responsible for FIPPA in the public bodies are getting this done right. Also, let me say, Madam Acting Speaker, members opposite have made reference to groups like the Provincial Council of Women, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, which I had the opportunity of meeting with in days gone by. In fact, in the last month or two, I had the opportunity of hearing them out. I've also had the opportunity of hearing them during committee stage when this bill went before that body, and certainly, some of the recommendations that they made were taken very seriously by this government. I want to say that I believe their input was very valuable.

The issue is that this bill will no doubt come up again. It will be revamped as we are doing it now. We haven't visited this bill in some time, but we are now 10 years after it was first introduced in the Manitoba Legislature.

I know that the Mother of Red Nations, friends of mine, and I've had dealings with the Mother of Red Nations for a number of years now. The Mother of Red Nations is a provincial territorial organization that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal women, particularly in the southern part of Manitoba, not all of Manitoba because I understand that there's another group that represents the issues and advances and advocates on behalf of northern Aboriginal women.

But, certainly, Rita Emerson and the group down at the Mother of Red Nations should have been advised about what has occurred with respect to the bill itself here in the Manitoba Legislature through its membership with the Provincial Council of Women. Elizabeth Fleming, who has written articles about this particular bill, is very well aware and very well advised about what this government has done.

Mr. Brian Bowman, who, I'm told, is an expert in this area of work as well, he and I have had conversations over the telephone, and I've asked him if I could call him in times where I may need advice on certain issues relating to this matter. He gave me his word that he would be. I also listened to Mr. Colin Craig, from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, who I had the occasion of meeting with in our office here in the Manitoba Legislature, and certainly, we will continue to listen to their advice.

Solange Garson, Diana Traverse, members of the Mother of Red Nations, I know, have specific issues with respect to their First Nations, their home bands, if you will. I know that these issues will continue to be there for some time to come, and I committed to working with these people on addressing some of these issues with their home reserve. In the case of Solange Garson, with her home reserve the Opaskwayak Cree Nation or Split Lake, and also Diana Traverse on her reserve, the Dakota Tipi First Nation, I'm committed to working with them.

Further, Madam Acting Speaker, I also committed to working with Bev Jacobs, the national president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, and she and I have had a good working relationship for the past several years now on addressing issues of common interest with this government and the organization that she represents on behalf of Aboriginal women across the country. I committed to the Mother of Red Nations, that organization being their national group, that I would be in touch with them.

Certainly, I believe that the NWAC is very well aware that they have to communicate with the current leaders that are running for national office right now. I know that Bev Jacobs is doing that, currently, to address those very issues that people like Solange Garson and Diana Traverse and others have in the province of Manitoba, with respect to, perhaps, mistreatment from the First Nations they feel they're receiving. I did commit to doing that as well.

I want to also say, Madam Acting Speaker, Bill 31 increases government openness and transparency, and I know members in this House will not agree on that, but we have enshrined in law the government's practice of disclosing ministers' expenses on-line. This is something that we began doing. This proactive release of information is in keeping with the free on-line access to Orders-in-Council and public accounts. As part of our ongoing efforts, we have recently made ministers' out-of-province travel expenses available also on-line. We're continuing to move forward with making more information routinely available.

So, with that, Madam Acting Speaker, I'd like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity of speaking further on Bill 31, and I look forward to its speedy passage.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Acting Speaker, I want to put a few words on the record before the passage of this bill. This is a bill in principle that the Liberal Party's indicated that we support. There's always more that we could see done to a bill of this nature that would enhance it and make it better. Suffice to say that the principle, we see it as a step forward.

Having said that, I did want to make one reference, and that was in regard to the minister's response to a question yesterday when he seemed to take exception to the fact that there was a cost to having this particular bill. If I look at, and quote the minister directly from *Hansard* yesterday, he indicated, and I quote: In the first six months of this year, Madam Acting Speaker, 278 of the 57 percent of all FIPPA requests came from the opposition, the media and interest groups, and responding to these 278 requests, has a cost to taxpayers of this province, \$33,000.

Well, Madam Acting Speaker, the biggest concern I have with those particular comments is that the minister needs to recognize that there is a cost to accountability, a cost to democracy, and having the ability to ask for information in hopes of receiving information is critically important to all members of this Chamber as, indeed, in the public's best interest.

I would use an example of today in question period where I asked a very specific question about an audited report, where the Auditor said that there was a minister, referring to the possibility of it being the Minister of Education, and that minister was given a very important piece of information, Madam Acting Speaker. We don't know what that information was. All we know is that the minister made poor judgment after receiving that letter. So I think that it's imperative that we try to get a better understanding of it.

Now I posed the question, and quite often what we see inside the Chamber is a minister that totally ignores the importance of the issue and chooses to answer the question in such a fashion that it's a no answer. Some ministers take great pride in the fact that they can actually stand up and not provide an answer to the question and completely be out of tune, out of reality in terms of the question that is being put forward. That's an example of the question that I had asked and how the minister chose to answer the question today in question period.

Well, Madam Acting Speaker, having access through freedom of information and putting forward

a request quite often helps facilitate members being able to get answers and quite often many of those requests that the Minister of Culture and Heritage (Mr. Robinson) is talking about stem from frustration of members inside this Chamber not being able to get direct answers to the questions that they put forward.

* (16:10)

So, if the minister's sole purpose is to try to reduce the costs of some of these freedom of information requests, one of the things he might want to consider doing is, in the caucus meeting, explain to his ministers why don't we answer some of the questions that are being posed to us in hopes that members of the opposition or members of the media wouldn't be filing as many requests for information. I give that to the minister only because I think that he is somewhat concerned about the cost factor, but, further, I would suggest that the minister recognize that there is a cost to ensuring accountability. That's why we have things like the Ombudsman's office and the Auditor's office and so forth, because we recognize the value.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair.

The value of having a successful program that allows for freedom of information requests to be answered is overwhelming and, today, the NDP might be in government, but there will be a day when they're not going to be in government, and they're going to want to have access through freedom of information. Much like the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) made reference to the percentages of response—and I was amazed by the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), I believe it was 5 percent. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that's just not acceptable. The minister needs to come clean as to why it is that other departments are able to hit such a higher percentage of a return, and she has failed to do so. That's why I say we see this legislation as a step forward, but there is so much more that still can be done, and it would be interesting to see some of the comparisons as to how we are doing relative to other departments, or other—departments, other governments across Canada. For those ministers that choose not to respect the importance of freedom of information, I suggest that they should be talking to some of their colleagues and try to set targets and aim for those targets.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I'm pleased to have a few moments to put some comments on the record about this.

I have to think back to when the NDP were in government, and I recall in that period of time how they howled—before they got into government—how they howled in opposition about the issue of freedom of information and about the problems they felt were present at the time in accessing information and how they felt it should be much more open. It's so interesting to see now how they've clamped down so egregiously in providing information not only to us here in opposition, but to the media as well, and to the public.

My experience in the last nine years in opposition is that it is incredibly difficult to get information from this government. They do not like to give it out very freely at all, and they stand in here on numerous occasions and complain about the number of requests that came in—but I would indicate that if they were more willing to provide information instead of making everybody jump through hoops to get it, the number of freedom of information requests that come in would not be nearly as high as they are.

They're increasing year after year and there's a reason for that, is because this government is doing everything in its power to hold back information. They make us jump through hoops to try to get information and Health is a perfect example. I don't know how often I've ever gotten anything in 30 days. It has always, always been stretched out to 60 days. There's a reason for it.

I think they hope that an issue will die down, they hope there's not enough information provided to anybody so that they don't have to be held accountable for all of their mismanagement in a lot of issues. I know that ministers of Health have gleefully stood in this House and denigrated questions that have been asked and said, well, you don't know your facts when, in fact, thankfully, there has been the ability to get information through freedom of information. Otherwise, I can see this government just having a heyday without being held accountable.

They've certainly proven themselves over the last nine years not to be committed to accountability or transparency, and Health is only one example. We see it in Child and Family Services as well, where there is everything done in their power to keep information from the public. It becomes very, very

easy for them, then, to avoid accountability by keeping information away from people.

We see it in the House every day in their dismissive attitude when questions are asked, where we are as an opposition put down for the questions we're asked. We're laughed at, even though some of the questions may have come from Manitobans. In fact, this government makes fun of a lot of the questions we have. They've been very dismissive in the information we bring forward and they laugh, they say: This is question period; it's not answer period.

That kind of attitude prevails right through this government, right through every department, and it goes right into freedom of information legislation. It is so typical of the spin we've been seeing from this government in trying to manage their message, and now they're going this one dramatic step further to manage their spin.

What they're doing is trying everything in their power not to be accountable and not to be transparent to Manitobans. By creating what they call a privacy adjudicator, such a watered-down version of what other provinces and governments have committed across the country, this government is just showing their stripes in how they handle all of these issues.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot support this legislation. There are numerous, numerous reasons that we cannot support it. It's so disappointing to see this kind of behaviour from a government that, over many years in opposition, made such a big noise about all of this and then now they have stooped to this low in terms of reinforcing their position to not be accountable and not to be transparent. Thank you.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for River Heights. I just want to make sure that I get a matter of House business on the Order Paper.

On House business, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to announce the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet on Wednesday, October 8, at 7 p.m., to consider the following: Auditor General's Report, Review of the Workers Compensation Board, dated January 2006; Auditor General's Report, Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007; Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007: 1, 2, 3 and 4.

As well, Madam Deputy Speaker, the following witnesses are being asked to appear before the committee: on the Workers Compensation Board Report, the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan); Mr. Jeff Parr, Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration; Doug Sexsmith, President and CEO of Workers Compensation Board; and on the report of Public Accounts and the Public Accounts Volumes, Ms. Diane Gray, Deputy Minister of Finance.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet on Wednesday, October 8, at 7 p.m., to consider the following: the Auditor General's Report, Review of the Workers Compensation Board dated January 2006; the Auditor General's Report, Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ending March 31, 2007; Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007, Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

As well, the following witnesses are being asked to appear before the committee: on the WC Report, the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration; Mr. Jeff Parr, Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration; and Doug Sexsmith, President and CEO of the Workers Compensation Board; on the report of the Public Accounts and the Public Accounts Volumes, Ms. Diane Gray, Deputy Minister of Finance.

* * *

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to put a few comments on the record. We recognize that this piece of legislation could be much improved in the long run, needs to be much improved over what it is, but we also recognize that there are some improvements and that we would like to implement it as soon as possible, so we can benefit from those.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

* (16:20)

We want to and hope that the minister will keep to his word and meet with people in the Aboriginal community and bring back some amendments in the spring that will improve it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 31.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: A recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Order. The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 31, The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act.

* (16:30)

Division

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

Yeas

Allan, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Brick, Caldwell, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Gerrard, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lamoureux, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Marcelino, Martindale, McGifford, Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Reid, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Wowchuk.

Nays

Borotsik, Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Dyck, Eichler, Faurshou, Goertzen, Hawranik, McFadyen, Mitchelson, Pedersen, Rowat, Taillieu.

Madam Deputy Clerk (Bev Bosiak): Yeas 34, Nays 14.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS**Bill 46—The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act**

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on second reading of Bill 46, The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire).

What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, it won't. It won't remain. Order. I'll redo this. Order, please.

We'll resume debate on second reading of Bill 46, The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden, who has 15 minutes remaining.

What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, that's been denied. Do we have speakers?

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): We appreciate the opportunity to put some words on the record with respect to Bill 46, with respect to tax increment financing and community revitalization.

We know that this bill was introduced on the very last day of our sitting in the spring session earlier this year, and at the time, was touted as the cure and the panacea that was going to allow any number of projects to proceed in Manitoba.

It's a piece of legislation that the government, for nine years, didn't occur to them to introduce, but, suddenly, on the last day of the spring session last year, felt that it was needed in order to spur development here in Manitoba.

We think that there are some good elements of tax increment financing if it's done properly. Certainly, the experience in other places has been that it can help achieve development in underdeveloped areas where it has been used in the past.

Tax increment financing has been in place in a lot of American jurisdictions for a very long time. It goes back to the 1950s in California and has been introduced at various points along the way in a variety of other jurisdictions, sometimes municipal governments, sometimes at the level of provinces and states and sometimes at the national level.

The intent of tax increment financing is to encourage development in areas that were developed, and wouldn't occur in the absence of that kind of legislation. The idea behind it, of course, is that projects could be funded up front using money that would eventually be repaid through the increased property tax revenues that would flow as a result of the development that is being initially funded.

The essential precondition to this sort of legislation working and making sense is that you have an area that is not generating property tax revenue or has been absolutely flat in terms of property tax revenue and value growth for an extended period of time. So the bill would have the effect, or the instrument would have the effect of spurring development where development would not otherwise occur, where maybe the economics of the area in question are such that there are insufficient incentives for private developers to make an investment in that area.

The way the bill is drafted, it could apply to the entire province of Manitoba. The message that the government is sending with that is that the entire province of Manitoba is a place where nobody wants to invest unless there is tax increment financing in place. Of course, I don't think that that's either true, and I don't think that we would want to send a signal that we require these sorts of extraordinary crutches in order to encourage private-sector developers to make a development in the province of Manitoba. So we support the principle when it's properly applied.

Where it has been used in other places such as Calgary, they have been very specific about the area covered by the by-law or the legislation in question. It's been very specific, because there's been a desire to avoid situations where, for political reasons, governments manipulated to divert money away from either municipalities or schools and into political slush funds to provide the government with an opportunity to make developments occur that wouldn't otherwise occur on the initiative of investors and private developers. So the idea in Calgary is that it's applied to very specific areas, using a municipal by-law that encourages

development in delineated areas that hadn't been areas where there had been a lot of development previously.

* (16:40)

In other cities, it's been put in place to encourage development in areas such as downtowns or abandoned industrial areas of urban centres where there hadn't been development for a very long period of time, and where it was felt necessary by governments to provide an extra government incentive for development in that area, which comes in the form of, essentially, a bet that property values would rise in the future if that development were to take place.

There are lots of cautionary tales around about the abuse and misuse of TIF financing in various projects. There are common examples of where projections were made about increases in value that didn't materialize, and there was a massive hangover of debt left when a development took place, and there wasn't the property tax revenue down the road in order to repay that debt. There have been examples in other jurisdictions of tens of millions of dollars being required for a financial bailout of developments that were done that hadn't been properly thought out and hadn't been properly planned by the proponents.

So we are concerned, given the track record of this government of manipulating and politically interfering with other venture capital funds like Crocus, that this is nothing more than a tool to be used by the government to achieve short-term objectives at the long-term expense of Manitoba taxpayers and young people in Manitoba, who are clearly looking for financial stability and good opportunities as they go forward, reasonable tax levels and prudent and sound financial management, as a place to make investments in homes and businesses and other things that will cause them to stay put in Manitoba.

So we have also seen examples, and there have been articles written by some very thoughtful people south of the border, where there's been a lot of experience with TIF legislation. One such article made reference to the fact that, by and large, and in very many examples, TIF legislation ended up being a very negative experience for taxpayers within those jurisdictions. They went on to cite example after example of places where taxpayers had been left holding the bag and picking up the bill where

politicians had wanted to rush ahead with a project but didn't have the courage to go to those taxpayers for either a tax increase or for consent before the project proceeded, and they were left holding the bag at the back end of the process after all the promises had been made and the ribbons had been cut. After the smoke cleared and the celebrations had died down, what they were left with was a disappointing outcome and projects that didn't generate the value increases in the revenue to repay the up-front cost.

So this is a very important bill because it creates a new weapon in the arsenal of financial mismanagement that the NDP government would want to add to their arsenal. We worry, of course, after nine years of experience with things like Crocus and investments in distilleries, investments in other enterprises that have gone bust under this government, that to add one more tool to the arsenal is reckless and irresponsible at this stage in the history of the province, particularly when you look at the example of what's happening south of the border. The American financial crisis that's underway today is a product of debt. It is a product of speculation, and it is a product of people who thought, unrealistically, that property values would continue to rise indefinitely into the future, and they incurred a whole pile of debt in anticipation of property values rising and the money being there to repay that debt. It was a reckless gamble undertaken by lots of people in the financial services industry. It was referred to and predicted by *The New York Times* in 1999, when they said that the pressure coming from the liberal Democrats in the United States on lenders to make available easy credit, created a situation where lots of people were betting that values would increase in the future sufficiently to be able to repay all the debt that was being built up.

We see today with this bill a smaller example of an initiative that the government will attempt to portray as being the answer to all of our problems. They will try to suggest that this bill will allow for any number of significant projects to proceed and that it's pain free. There's no risk. There's no money up front, no money down, no interest for however many years. That's the sort of deal that they're putting in front of taxpayers in Manitoba today. But the hard experience that is present in the United States shows that those sorts of offers and deals very often have strings attached. This bill has very many strings attached to it that taxpayers need to understand before we rush in this Legislature to passing it and handing the government this power.

Of particular concern is the fact that, as cities grow and as provinces grow, there's increasing pressure on school boards to meet the needs of their communities. They need to build new schools, hire teachers, outfit those schools and make sure that they can provide a first-rate education to the children of Manitoba. To do that, they need increasing streams of revenue. One of the things that school boards count on—and I think that we would think as healthy under the current structure of taxes in the province—is that, as there's development within their school division that brings with it more population, they will see some revenue stream coming off of that to build the schools and hire the teachers and do all the things they need to meet the educational needs of those children.

A great example of that is an example that we have in front of us today. The Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) has brought forward the example of what's happening to communities within the Pembina constituency that are growing communities. People are making investments. They're developing those communities. They're working hard. They're paying their taxes, and because of the great opportunities that have been created in those communities by their local MLA and by forward-thinking municipal governments, people are making investments and people are moving into the areas. That's putting pressure on the schools, and those schools need the revenue to be able to build, add on to their schools, hire teachers and make sure those kids have the same opportunity for a good education as children anywhere else in Manitoba.

If the government were to pass this bill and then to swoop in and say, okay, any new development in this area, we're going to take all the extra revenue that's coming off of it, because that's what they want to do under this bill. We're going to take all that revenue. We're going to put it into a fund, a slush fund, under the control of the provincial Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and that minister is going to use it in a variety of different ways that suit his political agenda. Mr. Speaker, that's not very comforting.

The people in the Pembina constituency, the Steinbach constituency or any number of other communities around the province where there is a need for investment in schools, in teachers and in a high-quality education. They don't like hearing ministers talk about, quote, unquote, creative financing, and they don't want to hear ministers get up in this government and say, trust us. Just pass the

bill and trust us. We'll come in, we'll take the money, and just trust us to spend the money properly.

We heard that story on Crocus, when the government said, trust us. Leave us alone. How dare you ask questions about our oversight of Crocus? We know what we're doing. Crocus is strong and we all know what happened there, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, today's question period in many ways was reminiscent of question periods of the past when members on this side of the House posed questions to the Premier (Mr. Doer) about sensitive financial issues and issues that were of concern to Manitobans around Crocus. He got up and demanded apologies. He expressed outrage that the members on this side of the House had the temerity to come in and ask him, the Premier of Manitoba, questions about his financial management. He was demanding apologies, threatening lawsuits and doing all kinds of things in order to back off opposition members who were asking tough questions and the right questions, as it turns out, now that we have the benefit of history to show that it was Progressive Conservative members of this House who were right on Crocus. They were right to ask the questions. They were right not to apologize. History has shown that it was the Premier on Manitoba and the NDP government who were wrong, who were engaged in cover-up mode, and who weren't coming clean with the people of Manitoba when those questions were being asked.

When we fast-forward a few years to today, when we ask questions, similar questions, are they creating another Crocus-like slush fund, the Premier's response is not to answer the question but to get up and demand apologies. It was like a rerun of the Crocus debate. If we rerun the tape, you would think that nothing had changed. It was almost like he was rerunning old tape from prior expressions of outrage and indignation in response to questions in the past, Mr. Speaker, and so we have been around the block with this Premier and this NDP government a couple of times before on these kinds of issues. We've heard their demands for apologies when we've asked tough questions and demanded answers.

* (16:50)

The fact is that Manitobans are not—are not—prepared to give this Premier and his NDP Cabinet a blank cheque any longer. Members of the opposition are not going to back off and refrain from asking the tough questions that we were sent here to ask. We are not going to be intimidated by the bully tactics

that are often employed by members of this government every time somebody asks questions on a touchy question.

We members of the opposition, are, in fact, heartened and encouraged when we get those kinds of responses from the Premier (Mr. Doer) because that is the best vindication that he's covering something up and trying to hide something from the taxpayers of Manitoba. Whenever the Premier demands an apology, that is a sure sign that he's engaged in some kind of a sneaky cover-up of some scheme that he's attempting to cook up in order to fool the taxpayers of Manitoba.

The fact is taxpayers won't be fooled again, Mr. Speaker. Members of the opposition will not back off from asking questions. The red flags went up today when we listened to the Premier's comments in the House and in the scrum. We know we're on the right track, and that is why we cannot support Bill 46 in its current form. It needs to be fundamentally rewritten in order to ensure that we have the controls in place, that the bill does what Manitobans expect it to do, that it doesn't take away from schools in the Pembina constituency, in the Steinbach constituency and Fort Whyte, or any other constituency in the province, including constituencies represented by members opposite which deserve the same consideration as every other constituency in Manitoba when it comes to schools and education.

We know the way that politics gets in the way, particularly under this NDP government, of school-funding decisions that, if you happen to be a school division that is run by a former campaign manager for NDP candidates, sometimes you get schools without even asking for them, Mr. Speaker. Schools arrived in a gift-wrapped package if you happen to be the former campaign manager for the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer), but everywhere else around the province today we have pressures on our school system. We have kids who are being bussed, kids who are in portable classrooms, who have to go outdoors in order to go to the washroom or use gym facilities, or do any number of other things that children in Manitoba in this day and age shouldn't have to do.

The other reality is that we know that up and down the east side of Lake Winnipeg in this province, Mr. Speaker, we have visited communities, First Nations communities, up and down the east side. In community after community we hear stories of families and community leaders telling us that in

order for their kids to get an education after junior high they have to leave their community. They have to either come to Winnipeg, many of them go to Riverton, and they end up, in some cases, being hundreds of miles away from their families in order to attend a high school in Winnipeg or in a community that is many hundreds of miles from their home community.

Now the gamblers opposite have built a casino on the east side of the lake. They haven't yet made it a priority to build a high school on the east side of the lake, Mr. Speaker. That, more than anything else, tells the tale of the priorities of this NDP government—the riverboat gamblers and their east-side casino haven't gotten around to building a high school. Bill 46 is more evidence of the riverboat gamblers from the NDP wanting to roll the dice on future property tax increases, create a political slush fund to be used by the government on short-term political priorities without taking into account the fact that we have needs within our education system throughout Manitoba and that the increased revenue that comes from development should first be going to school boards and only in very exceptional circumstances should be reapplied into other sorts of projects.

We are on the record as saying that there are other projects that are important, that need to be considered in the context of this debate, but let us not try to convince Manitobans that passing this bill has zero consequences for Manitoba schools. Let us not try to convince them that it has no consequences for Manitoba taxpayers. We need to be honest. There is no such thing as a free lunch, and the Premier and his government are attempting to characterize this as a way of getting things like rapid transit and an inland port for free. That's not the reality. It comes with a price tag as does everything. They need to be open and transparent and up front with Manitobans about what the cost is so that we can have an honest debate about what the priorities of the province are.

If they want to argue that casinos are higher priorities than the high schools, that's a debate we can and should have. Let's put all the cards on the table, have that debate, and, ultimately, the people of Manitoba will decide who they think has priorities that are closer and more in line with their priorities.

We have significant concerns with Bill 46. We see it as a Trojan horse for reckless, quote, unquote, creative financing schemes by the NDP, who have blown up the Crocus fund, and so they can't go there

for money any more. Their revenue streams are under some pressure these days because of the economic situations, and so what they're doing instead is passing a bill to repeal the balanced budget act to take us back to the days of deficits, debt, and rising taxes. They're using Bill 46 as a Trojan horse to enable them to engage in more gambling with taxpayers' money in order to advance what is a very political agenda.

To give credit where it's due, this is a very, very political government that is very good at public relations and media spin. But, as the *Free Press* commented, it is the dead-hand administration that really hasn't achieved anything of significance or lasting value in terms of its legacy for the people of Manitoba. So we think that create a framework of sound finances, of honest and open accounting and transparency when it comes to taxpayers' dollars, and have a clear, priority-setting mechanism in place that allows for debates to occur. But what is more important: a school on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, a school in the Pembina constituency, or any number of other projects that the NDP government wants to promote?

We can have a good debate about those issues in this House. Manitobans know that the government is not a bottomless pit of money. They know that eventually the piper has to be paid. They know that if the government wants to proceed with a rapid transit project, they're going to have to find a way of raising the \$90 million that was the glaring gap that was left in that announcement that was made a couple of weeks ago. There is a lot to be said for all of these projects, but it is a question of priority. It's a matter

of what we address first, second, third, fourth, and fifth, and so on. These things need to be addressed with a profound amount of consideration for Manitoba taxpayers and what their priorities are.

We say, let's have a debate about what those priorities are, but let's not put in place a smokescreen that allows the government to go out and try to sell taxpayers that they can do all of these things, and that there's no price to be paid down the road by the next generation of Manitobans, the very students who don't have classrooms, the very students who don't have schools, who are now going to be saddled, potentially, with more debt to pay off. That will be the legacy of this NDP government, when the next generation looks back at history, at the nine dark years of NDP maladministration, reckless overspending, deficits, debt, and a legacy of pursuing short-term, politically popular initiatives at the expense of the long-term well-being of the province of Manitoba.

Bill 46 is fundamentally flawed. It needs a complete rewrite. We have put forward some ideas that we believe ought to be considered as that fundamental rewrite takes place. We think that the public should be consulted before—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, it will remain standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), who has unlimited time.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 1, 2008

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>