

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	Ind.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 10, 2014

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 49—The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby), that Bill 49, The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, this bill amends the Manitoba Public Insurance act in order to strengthen the personal injury protection plan, protect ratepayers against fraudulent claims and allows for the creation of a low-interest winter tire loan program. The proposed amendments will also expand coverage for catastrophically injured Manitobans, as well as increase death benefits for collision fatalities and extend coverage to temporary workers.

The legislation will allow Manitoba Public Insurance to continue to provide excellent service, strengthen road safety initiatives and keep Manitobans' car insurance rates the lowest in Canada.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Any further introduction of bills?

Bill 206—The Cyberbullying Prevention Act

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I move, seconded by the member from Steinbach, that Bill 206, The Cyberbullying Prevention Act; Loi sur la prévention de la cyberintimidation, now be read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to reintroduce Bill 206, The Cyberbullying Prevention Act. This act is a step in returning power to young

people and others who have lost power as a result of cyberbullying.

Under the legislation, those who are victims of cyberbullying would be able to obtain protection orders against those who are bullying them. Youth as young as 16 would be able to apply for this protection without parental involvement. It would also allow law enforcement officials to seize computers, cellphones and other instruments that are being used in the act of cyberbullying.

The legislation also establishes a separate civil tort to allow damages to be awarded to an individual who suffers damages as a result of cyberbullying. It also places an onus on parents and those in care of minors to act when they are aware of a minor in their care is engaging in cyberbullying.

This legislation brings together parental involvement, police ability and power for youth. It's a significant problem, cyberbullying is. It requires a significant response. The NDP have failed to provide that response, so we have done so on behalf of all Manitobans and youth—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I understand the honourable member's interest in providing an explanation, but we're to be very brief when we provide that. There'll be plenty of time, I'm sure, in the House for a debate on the bill itself. So I thank the honourable member for the introduction.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

**Provincial Sales Tax Increase—
Cross-Border Shopping**

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the reasons for this petition are as follows:

(1) Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders,

including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn, Virden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morden–Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita, Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Foxwarren, Roblin and many others.

(2) Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax are 5 per cent, and in Minnesota retail sales tax is 6 per cent.

(3) The retail sales tax is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as compared to Manitoba.

(4) The differential in tax rates creates a disincentive for Manitoba consumers to shop locally to purchase their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To acknowledge that the increase in the PST significantly encourages cross-border shopping and puts additional strain on the retail sector, especially for those businesses located close to Manitoba's provincial borders.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoba consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

And this petition is signed by M. Friesen, S. Wiens, D. Harder and many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: In keeping with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they're deemed to have been received by the House.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase– Reversal and Referendum Rights

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And this is the background to this petition.

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1, 2013.

The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the government broke the law failing to address the referendum requirement before imposing the PST increase on Manitoban families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases to the PST.

And this petition has been signed by C. Kehler, M. Shellenberg, T. Nathren and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase– Effects on Manitoba Economy

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) The Premier of Manitoba is on record calling the idea of a hike in the PST ridiculous.

(2) Economists calculate that the PST hike has cost the average family \$437 more in taxes after only six months.

(3) Seventy-five per cent of all–of small businesses in Manitoba agree that the provincial taxes are discouraging them from growing their businesses.

(4) The Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association estimates that a 1 per cent increase in the PST will result in a loss of–to the economy of \$42 million and threaten hundreds of jobs in that sector.

(5) Partly due to the PST, overall taxes on new investment in Manitoba recently stood at 26.3 per cent whereas the Alberta rate was 16.2 per cent and the Ontario rate was 17.9 per cent, according to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce.

The–(6) the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce are concerned that the PST hike will make an already uncompetitive tax framework even more unattractive to job creators in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse the job-killing PST increase.

To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to reject or approve any increases to the PST through a referendum.

And this petition is signed by M. Foster, C. Westphal, G. Simpson and many more fine Manitobans.

Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in northeast region of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

* (13:40)

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by C. Holigroski, J. Lloyd, S. Fiola and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Reversal and Referendum Rights

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the government broke the law failing to address the referendum requirement before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoba families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases on the PST.

This petition is signed by T. Ripcik, K. Yaschyshyn, K. Dubé and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions? Seeing none, committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the loge to my left where we have Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, who is a former member for St. Norbert.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

And also, seated in the public gallery we have with us today recipients of the 2013-2014 Celebration of Excellence in Teaching Awards, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Employment Rate Manitoba Numbers

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Just a short time ago we were shocked and saddened to hear of the passing of former Finance minister Jim Flaherty, and we just wanted to, on behalf of all members of this House, pass on our sincere condolences to his friends and family on this tragic loss.

Mr. Speaker, I—there is a culture within this NDP government of playing fast and loose with the facts, and, in fact, just three days ago in this House, the Premier said, and I quote, "the number of people working in Manitoba is at a historic high," end quote.

Yet the facts tell a very different story. In fact, according to the government's own report, the number of people working in Manitoba has declined 2,100 since February of this year.

Why does the minister continue to mislead Manitobans when it comes to jobs in Manitoba? And will he apologize for misleading Manitobans again?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I do want to acknowledge the untimely passing of Minister Flaherty, former minister of Finance both at the federal level as well as at the provincial level in Ontario.

I did have a relationship with Jim. I worked with him when he was minister of Finance in Ontario, and we worked around the table together. I also worked with him when he was minister of Finance at the federal level.

I want to acknowledge that he pioneered a special plan to put resources aside for persons with disabilities in trust funds and savings funds. He also moved on the working income tax benefit program in Manitoba to give more support for working families that needed extra income. And he also was very involved in addressing the income trust issue and preserving the tax base for the benefit of all Canadians.

So it is very unfortunate that he passed. He provided a great public service, and I only wish he had more time with his family since his retirement so very recently.

I'm going to suggest that we take a moment of silence for the passing of Minister Flaherty.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to observe a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

Mr. Speaker: Thank honourable members.

The honourable First Minister, to conclude.

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for the question.

Manitoba retains the third lowest unemployment rate in Canada. It has been consistently second or third since the recession started in 2008.

Last year, while the rest of Canada lost manufacturing jobs, we saw a gain in manufacturing jobs in Manitoba. It went up 1.1 per cent while it went down 2.9 in the rest of Canada.

We have a solid program in front of us for jobs and economic growth going forward: 58,900 jobs over the next five years, a \$6-billion lift in the economy, very significant investment in infrastructure which will increase the productivity of the Manitoba economy, and every dollar we invest will generate \$1.16 in benefits.

So jobs and economy is very important, and we do want to retain and continue to expand the labour force in Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's nothing to celebrate when the unemployment rate in this province is up almost 12 per cent over last year. It's nothing to celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier said just three days ago in this House, and I quote, "the number of people working in Manitoba is at a historic high."

Well, it's just false information. Not only have the numbers declined by 2,100 since February, but they've also declined by almost 8,300 since last year. A decline since last year cannot mean that we are at a historic high.

The Premier has misled Manitobans. Will he apologize for doing that today?

Mr. Selinger: In 2013 we had more people in Manitoba working ever in the history of the province, and we continue to attract more people to Manitoba. Our immigration story is very strong. We're attracting over 13,000 people to the province.

We are exceeding—we are seeing expansion in job opportunities for Boeing, for New Flyer, for Canada Goose, for Behlen Industries and Winpak,

and we have other announcements coming forward with other industries expanding or increasing their jobs in Manitoba. Good jobs are important. Good infrastructure jobs are important.

Young people need opportunities in Manitoba. That's why we're strengthening our skills agenda. We're committing towards 75,000 more skilled workers in the province over the next eight years, and we're retooling all our apprenticeship credits to provide for that and, for the first time ever, providing an additional bonus for anybody that hires a new apprentice.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, these are the Province's own numbers. In fact, they come from a document called—and an organization called the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, the government's own numbers. This is not a right-wing think tank.

Now, either the Premier doesn't know what his own numbers are in the province of Manitoba—and if that's the case he should just admit that today and take the meeting—take the question as notice—or he's misleading Manitobans again.

* (13:50)

So will he admit that he put false information on the record in this House, and will he apologize to the Manitobans that he misled?

Mr. Selinger: As I said, in 2013 we had a historic number of people working in Manitoba. We have a historic number of people living in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and we continue to attract more people to live and work in Manitoba, and as we do that we will continue to grow our economy.

Our skills agenda will skill up another 75,000 people. Our infrastructure agenda will lift the economy by \$6 billion over the next five years. It'll provide 58,900 new jobs.

Recently, New Flyer Industries signed a new contract with the City of Atlanta to build 89 new buses. It is the largest bus manufacturer in North America. We have very solid plans to continue to expand our economy for steady economic growth to continue to provide job opportunities for people.

And, Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the work the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics has done, because it's them that has said we lost 18,000 people on the last census, and that needs to be corrected at the federal level.

High School Teachers Employment Levels

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, all across our province school boards are being forced to hike taxes on already overtaxed Manitoba families. These tax hikes are happening because this Minister of Education is underfunding education.

This Minister of Education likes to give credit to himself whenever things are good, which is quite rarely, but then when something goes wrong he tends to blame other people.

Mr. Speaker, will this new Minister of Education do the right thing today and apologizing for firing at least 11 teachers and blaming school divisions for his shortfalls?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I thank the member for the question.

Of course, our government is committed to adding 75,000 new jobs to the labour force by 2020. We've endeavoured to develop a skills agenda, and at the core of that agenda is education.

That's why we continue to fund education at the rate of economic growth or better every year since we were elected. That constitutes multiple millions, hundreds of millions of dollars since we were first elected. We're putting money into classrooms and we hire teachers. We've hired 213 more teachers in the small-class-size initiative alone.

When it comes to our government, we believe in education and we invest in it.

Minister of Education and Advanced Learning Government Record

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): So there again, Mr. Speaker, he's taking the credit for hiring teachers but yet not taking the blame for firing teachers.

In Advanced Education Estimates in 2012, the former minister of Advanced Education and Literacy said that the initial budget for the new Student Aid online system which started at \$12 million was then \$14.3 million. Not long after, she admitted it would be actually around \$15 million.

This new Minister of Education hasn't done any better and isn't able to get the program up and running either, and Manitoba taxpayers are out \$15.5 million with nothing in return. The Minister of Education has lost control.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when will this minister apologize for losing control of his new portfolio and disrespecting hard-working Manitoba families?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Again, I thank the member for the question.

The inalienable fact of the matter is that were the member to apply for a student loan today, he would be well served by that and he would be able to go on, invest in his education and complete his degree.

Mr. Speaker, our record on post-secondary education is second to none in the country. We've increased funding by 2.5 per cent to universities this year. We've increased funding to colleges by 2 per cent this year. It's among the best in the country, and in addition we have among the lowest tuition rates in Canada as well.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, trust is very important to all Manitobans. This new Education Minister ran in the last election promising to his constituents he would not raise taxes. He has now fired at least 11 teachers, spent \$15.5 million on a student financial aid program which isn't working. He is in charge of our education system.

How can Manitobans trust this Education Minister?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans can trust our government because our record speaks for itself. We invest in classrooms. We hire teachers. We make sure that our students are safe and secure in their environments. And once they're done the K-to-12 system, then they go on to a post-secondary system that is well financed with great quality education that accessible and affordable for all Manitobans.

I don't need to remind the member that when his leader was a member of the leader—in the government in the 1990s, he cut funding to education almost every year and they laid off 700 teachers.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans understand where we stand. They have no idea where they stand.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Just one moment.

The level is starting to go up in the Chamber here. I understand all the members have passionately held views; I appreciate that, but please keep the noise level down a little bit, please.

EMS Helicopter Services Helipad Access

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): A helicopter EMS is an important service in saving lives. It's just too bad the NDP botched the introduction of this service by rushing into the program before the last election and didn't get all their ducks in a row.

Dr. Wheeler was very critical of this government for the lack of heliports, which is an important part of patient safety.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell Manitobans how the absence of helipads is affecting safe patient care.

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): The member is right; air ambulance service is front-line service for many Manitobans and particularly in rural Manitoba. We know that having a highly skilled team that can get to a patient as quickly as possible can make all the difference in that patient's life.

We certainly saw in 2009 and 2011 the good work that STARS did when they were here helping us during the floods. They were able to get to places where there were no roads, where there was no other way to reach someone, where you couldn't drive an ambulance, where you couldn't land a jet. They were 'aver' to transport just over 50 patients in the floods of 2011 alone, some very serious cases. It's why we decided to go with STARS; it's why we decided to move forward with this life-saving service.

And it's also why we're working now to bring STARS back to full service, Mr. Speaker. As you know, right now they are there for scene service, for emergency service—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health seems to have a lot of trouble answering basic questions. She didn't even touch on the answer to the question that was posed.

Dr. Wheeler pointed out the dangers caused by having to move patients from hospital to ambulance to helicopter to ambulance to hospital. It's a known fact that the more times a critically ill patient is moved, the greater the danger of something going wrong.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us: Is there a plan in place to build helipads in all southern Manitoba hospitals?

Ms. Selby: I will like to remind the member that, of course, STARS themselves have said they accept all the recommendations on the Wheeler report and have been very eager to get to work to address patient safety to make sure we're providing the best care we possibly can.

It's why we've brought together the Clinical Oversight Panel under the direction of Dr. Brian Postl. That panel is looking at a patient-guided focus on how we can do a number of things to improve our service to make sure we are providing the best service for all Manitobans, but particularly knowing that rural Manitoba counts on it.

They are looking at things like training, accreditation and dispatch, and that is why STARS is at the table, it's why EMS is at the table, it's why Manitoba Health is there, to bring together experts in the field, to talk about how we can do the best service we can right across Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister again didn't even touch on the question, and we're really beginning to have a serious questioning of her ability to handle this file and these questions and understand what is even going on in her own department.

Mr. Speaker, without helipads at St. Boniface and Health Sciences Centre, valuable time is lost in a patient transfer.

We'd like to ask the Minister of Health today to tell us when the Health Sciences Centre helipad will be ready and if a helipad is in the works for St. Boniface hospital.

Those are really simple and basic questions, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask her to focus her answers on those questions.

* (14:00)

Ms. Selby: I think the member knows full well that we are building a helipad at Health Sciences Centre. It will have direct access to pediatric and trauma care. And the member may not be aware that there was a fire there not long ago, and that did slow down construction, but it is back on track.

We didn't want to wait to bid helipads before we brought this life-serving service into Manitoba. It's why we continued the service with STARS. We know many, many families have benefited from being able to have this quick access to the highly trained medical team that they have.

And we will be relying on the Clinical Oversight Panel under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl to tell us exactly what we can do to not only return to full service of STARS but to make sure we are providing the best emergency-care service right across the province.

ER Services (Virден) Physician Departure

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virден): This week I found out that Virден has lost one of its doctors back in February. It's going to lose another doctor later this month.

Virден and area has been booming thanks to the hard-working people of the oil and agriculture industries.

How is this minister going to ensure the safety of my constituents in this growing community keeps losing its doctors under her watch?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): We know that Manitobans want and deserve high-quality care close to home. And, certainly, the people of Virден, we know they have a busy ER and they definitely need to have the doctors there.

And it's why we're going to continue working with the region, working with the community. The funding is there. We're always working on recruiting.

We do have two physicians who have moved to another region of the province. We know that does only leave three physicians to cover the Virден ER. We do need to make sure that we're putting patient safety first, but we know that that is a busy area.

We know those doctors are committed to Virден and that is why that they have committed to keeping the ER open during the busiest times over the weekend. We will be working with the community to make sure that they know exactly when that is, and that's being worked out right now.

But we will definitely keep working to continue to bring more doctors, 'af' we have been doing since we've been in government.

Mr. Pivniuk: I also was told that we're losing our doctor later this month. The local emergency room could be closed in two weeks for two days per week.

I have the—as we have the high-risk industries in our riding, the emergency room's being closed for two days, the safety of our people in our community could be at risk. We're also heading to the summer months, and all the traffic that's happen—that flows

on the Trans-Canada Highway, that's a really big concern for us and for the doctors in the hospital.

How is this minister going to ensure the safety of our constituents?

Ms. Selby: The member is right. It is concerning to be down two doctors in this particular area. We know it is a busy area. Two doctors in Virden have decided to relocate to another area of Manitoba and that's why we are working to make sure we find support for those three remaining doctors.

Those doctors are very committed to the area. They know how important it is to have emergency room service. Because of patient safety, we are not going to be able to keep it open at all times, but the doctors have recommended that we keep it open during the time that is the busiest over the weekend. They're working that out right now.

And, of course, we are still recruiting. It's why we're training more doctors. It's why we're recruiting more doctors. And we've had a good track record on bringing more doctors to Manitoba, and we'll keep doing that for Virden too.

Mr. Piwniuk: But we're losing 2,200 doctors to other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, Virden is the last full-time ER in our Arthur-Virden riding. Every other hospital in the region is now sharing ER services between communities.

This minister has pledged to Manitobans all access to health care regardless of where they live, yet many of my constituents are almost hour and a half from Brandon who will be having to be transported on dangerous roads like we talked about yesterday.

Why is this Minister of Health breaking the promise to providing access to family doctors in my constituents and in—for Manitobans?

Ms. Selby: I'll say again, the funding is there and we will keep recruiting for those doctors. We believe that ERs should be open, and we're going to keep working to get it open as we have done in other communities.

But I do have to be very clear. We have a net gain in Manitoba of 562 more doctors working in the province than there were in 1999, including 120 more doctors working in rural Manitoba.

We know Manitobans want more doctors. It's why we're training more doctors. It's why we're

committed to hiring 200 more doctors and 50 more physician's assistants.

This year alone we've already brought in more than 61 additional doctors, and we are committed to having everyone who wants one in Manitoba to have a family doctor by 2015.

Provincial Parks Cottage Fee Increases

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): This NDP government continues to spin its fairy tale that the tens of thousands of Manitobans who access cottages on Crown lands are freeloaders diverting scarce tax dollars from health and education so that we can subsidize their Lotto 6/49 lifestyles. Actually, it sounds more like today's NDP and their tax vote subsidy, but I don't mean to digress.

Can the minister explain why he continues to be selective in his use of numbers by ignoring cottage park passes—something that this NDP government imposed on them, by the way, just to access their property—chief-place-of-residence levies and the like to when he arrives at his \$1.7-million cottage revenue numbers as opposed to the more accurate number of \$6.3 million?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard a lot of numbers there. I did see some numbers, as well, on the weekend in the paper, and unfortunately the service-fee number was double counted.

But, Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite. They worship Uncle Stephen in Ottawa and what they do there, and I know they want to emulate and duplicate what Ottawa does and they want to bring that message back here.

I'll just remind the member, as I sit down, that Riding Mountain National Park, a cottager there at the lakefront is paying \$5,000 in fees each year. At Falcon Lake it's \$800, in Manitoba in a provincial park. In Nopiming last year they paid \$375. Does that member think that that is fair, and is it fair for taxpayers to be subsidizing those park cottages?

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, is it fair for taxpayers to be subsidizing today's NDP?

The NDP tells cottagers that if they can't afford the tax increases—which in itself is an admission that the 750 per cent increase is unaffordable for many of those on fixed incomes—that they can simply delay it as long as they turn the keys over to the government.

Perhaps the member of Flin Flon didn't misspeak when he suggested, and I quote, we need to take those cabins out of our parks.

Can the minister for this—can the minister table for this House a list of, quote, those cabins his government has publicly stated need to be removed from our provincial parks so at least they can contact a moving company as opposed to finding the MLA from Flin Flon throwing their goods on the sidewalk?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, I won't deal with the member's vivid imagination.

But to the very contrary, this side of the House is actually making it possible for even more Manitobans to have cottaging opportunities in our parks and, in fact, more cottaging opportunities overall. I think 1,300 cottage lots have been made available to Manitobans for the great opportunity to cottage.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's important that we continue to support cottaging in Manitoba inside parks and outside of parks. It's a great dream of Manitobans. It's part of the soul of families. It's part of the soul of our parks, and we have to make sure that it's both financially and environmentally sustainable, and that's why we have to move towards fair funding.

Mr. Martin: That dream that the minister talks about is quickly becoming a pipe dream for many cottage owners.

Mr. Speaker, the minister and the NDP point to an information dump on the Conservation website, and from what I hear from cottage owners, dump is an appropriate term given the value of the information. So while this government is tripping all over itself in an attempt to overwhelm people with data, cottagers are left wondering why previous years' information remains hidden.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister advise cottagers why legal action appears to be their only recourse to deal with a government whose fiscal ineptitude has been dumped on cottagers?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to just say to the member—and I trust that the member came back in here today with some dirt under his fingernails—and I just want to just—I want to maybe ask him if he could explain to farmers who pay fair market value for their Crown land leases why they should pay for their land and for a cottager in the park. Perhaps he could explain to first-time home

buyers who are paying for their first home why they're also subsidizing second homes in parks.

Mr. Speaker, we have to have fair funding. And the transparency, the online availability of information is far beyond anything the Conservatives did when they introduced new fees for park cottagers.

Outstanding Warrants Driver's Licence Renewals

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, according to police, there are 30,000 outstanding warrants in Manitoba.

* (14:10)

In 2010 we asked the NDP government to remove taxpayer-funded payments and privileges for those who refuse to deal with their outstanding warrants, because why should taxpayers fund those who are avoiding the law? Reluctantly, after 18 months, the NDP agreed and passed legislation in 2011.

Part of the legislation would've prevented those with outstanding warrants from renewing their driver's licence.

Can the minister update the House: How many of those with outstanding warrants have not been able to renew their driver's licences?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Certainly, we've taken steps to deal with individuals who don't listen to court orders and who don't show up when they're supposed to in court.

That's why I was very pleased that, working with the Winnipeg Police Service and with the RCMP, we created an integrated Warrant Enforcement Unit consisting of seven officers. So far, that dedicated unit, working in connection with other police services, has been able to execute more than 2,000 warrants and has actually brought 1,400 people into custody.

It is a matter of priorities, and I'm very pleased that this unit is prioritizing those individuals who pose the greatest risk on our streets to public safety. They're out there every day, as well as our other officers, doing their things to make our communities safer.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly doesn't want to answer the question, so let me give the answer for him.

This legislation was passed three years ago and it's yet to be proclaimed. That's why there hasn't been one driver's licence that's actually been withheld from an outstanding warrant, Mr. Speaker. For three years, that portion of the legislation has sat on this minister's desk and gathered dust and gone unproclaimed, despite him saying that it was important.

Another part of that legislation was to ensure that taxpayer-funded payments didn't go to those who had outstanding warrants and wouldn't deal with them in court.

How many outstanding—or how many taxpayer-funded payments have been withheld from those who have outstanding warrants in the last three years?

Mr. Swan: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we can talk about priorities. The member for Steinbach can rant and rave about a handful of cases.

We have quietly and effectively put into place and we voted for resources to make sure that we have police offices that are out there dedicated to getting the most dangerous offenders off of our streets.

Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Steinbach doesn't like to talk about the fact that he's voted against those additional resources, just as he's voted against every additional police officer. He's voted against every additional Crown attorney. He's voted against every additional correctional officer to keep our streets safe.

Our priority, Mr. Speaker, is building safer communities. They are paying results, thanks to the work of our police, the work of our Crown attorneys and the strength of our communities.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I voted for the legislation, then he wouldn't proclaim it.

Mr. Speaker, we've been advised by justice officials that, as of March of this year, there've only been two cases in three years of taxpayer-funded benefits being withheld from those who are avoiding the law with outstanding warrants.

There are 30,000 outstanding warrants in Manitoba, yet none have had their driver's licence privileges removed and only two have had taxpayers' benefits withheld. That's an enforcement rate of 0.00006 per cent. When this legislation was passed three years ago, the minister said it was an important part of cracking down on outstanding warrants.

Does the minister consider an enforcement rate of 0.00006 per cent a success?

Mr. Swan: Well, I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the member for Steinbach, who voted against resources for the Warrant Enforcement Unit, considers 1,400 offenders being taken into custody a rate of 100 per cent. I wonder how he can reconcile that with voting against those resources.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of priorities. The member for Steinbach is very, very good at picking away at this and picking away at that. We have invested in police, we've invested in Crown attorneys, we've invested in better resources for police so they, working with correctional officers and with probation officers, keep our streets safe.

The member doesn't want to talk about that. He won't talk about the 700 homes and apartments that have been closed thanks to The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. The member opposite knows that his party's view was that people should go and bring individual lawsuits against gang members. We've decided to have a comprehensive program with the Public Safety Investigations unit.

It's all a matter of priorities. I know where ours are: they're on the side of Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

I think it's time for me to help members out a little bit here. In past sessions, I've indicated to members that I very much believe in a respectful workplace and I've asked for the co-operation of honourable members many times in past sessions of this Legislature to be respectful to one another here.

I understand that there's strongly held views on both sides of the House, and I appreciate that and I know that's of great value to this institution. But I'm asking for honourable members' co-operation to keep the level down and to allow members to both ask questions and to answer questions. So I'm asking for that co-operation.

Child-Care Space Availability Post-Secondary Institutions

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): At the University of Manitoba today, child-care and early childhood education spaces are remarkably few and far between. There are only 128 spaces for an estimated 3,200 parents. Students say getting a child-care space is so infrequent, it's like winning the lottery.

Students should not have to gamble with their lives and the lives of their children. Child-care services should be core services at post-secondary education institutions.

I ask: When will the Premier make integrated child care and early childhood education a core service at all post-secondary education institutions so it's available to all parents who are students who need it?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We've expanded the number of daycare spaces or spots for children in Manitoba from 12 to 28 thousand. And every year we've done that, the member from River Heights has voted against that in the budget.

We've put more money into expanding child care in this budget and we will continue to find ways to build not only new daycare centres—every new school we build in Manitoba has a daycare in it. We have daycares located on campuses or very close to campuses. We're also building, for the first time ever, housing for families so they can co-locate close to where they're going to school.

And so we are taking a comprehensive approach to providing supports to young people, people that are maybe young parents, want to go to school, get their education upgraded, get the skills they need to work. We're going to provide them supports.

If he has a real interest in this, I would only ask that, for once, before he leaves this Chamber, he vote for a budget that expands daycare.

Mr. Gerrard: The fact is that the Premier and his NDP government have made child care and early childhood education at post-secondary education institutions difficult to access.

At Red River College, this has meant some students have had to take their children to class with them because they can't get access to daycare. While getting to college early may seem like a good idea to the Premier, age three, four and five is hardly an age when a child is college-ready. Surely the child would do better in an integrated child-care and early childhood education program while the parent is attending classes.

What is the Premier's plan to address the dire lack of child-care and early childhood education spaces for post-secondary education students right now?

Mr. Selinger: As I've said, we're expanding daycare for working families all across this province. Many

working families have a member or are themselves going to school at a post-secondary institution, and we want daycare to be available for these people as well as they upgrade their skills so they can make an even stronger contribution to our economy.

We have gone from 12 to 28 thousand spaces. We've put—for the first time ever, we actually have a program that finances and pays for new daycare centres in Manitoba. For the first time ever, we have a program that requires daycares to be built as part of every new school we build in Manitoba.

And in spite of the fact that everybody on the other side of the House has voted against this every single year, including the member opposite, we've been very clear that Manitobans need access to good quality early childhood learning. That prepares those young people for school. Early childhood development is also a very important investment we're making in this province.

We've also reduced class sizes in the K-to-3 area so that the average class size is—class size is about 20 students, and that has resulted in another 250 teachers being hired.

We want to invest in young children and families so that they can have success and get the good jobs that they deserve in—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Gerrard: Monsieur le Président, il existe maintenant aucune garderie pour les enfants à l'Université de Saint-Boniface et aucune place pour les jeunes enfants des étudiants. En fait, le Manitoba manque de garderies et de places pour les enfants des parents francophones qui sont étudiants à cette université.

Je demande au premier ministre à quel temps dans l'avenir sera-t-il une garderie avec assez de places à l'Université de Saint-Boniface.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, there is currently no child-care centre at the Université de Saint-Boniface, and no spaces for the students' young children. In fact, Manitoba lacks child-care centres and spaces for the children of Francophone parents who are students at that university.

I am asking the Premier at what point in the future will there be a child-care centre with enough spaces at the Université de Saint-Boniface.

* (14:20)

Mr. Selinger: Dans la circonscription de Saint-Boniface, il y a un programme maintenant d'avoir une nouvelle garderie à l'École Taché, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de ce voisinage. Et dans ce voisinage, c'est cinq minutes de l'Université de Saint-Boniface, la première université en français dans l'Ouest du Canada, un projet de loi nous avons mis en place. Il y a l'École Précieux-Sang, une énorme garderie. Plus que 100 enfants sont là. Beaucoup de personnes prennent—qui amènent leurs enfants à cette garderie sont des étudiants à l'Université de Saint-Boniface.

Il y a beaucoup des options pour les parents à Saint-Boniface, pour les étudiants à Saint-Boniface, et nous avons mis, dans ce budget, plus de ressources pour une expansion des garderies ici dans la province de Manitoba, et aussi les garderies en français.

Si le membre veut avoir plus de places pour les enfants en français, en anglais ou dans les autres langues, il doit voter pour le budget. Il n'a jamais fait ça. C'est déplorable, Monsieur le Président.

Translation

In the constituency of St. Boniface, there is now a program to have a new child-care centre at École Taché for the first time in the history of this neighbourhood. And in this neighbourhood, which is five minutes away from the Université de Saint-Boniface, western Canada's first French-language university, because of legislation we put into place. There is École Précieux-Sang with a huge child-care centre. Over 100 children attend that centre. Many of the people who take their children to that child-care centre are students at the Université de Saint-Boniface.

There are many options for parents and for students in St. Boniface, and we have included more resources in this budget for the expansion of child-care centres here in the province of Manitoba, including French-language child-care centres.

If the member wants more child-care spaces in French, in English or in other languages, he must vote for the budget. He has never done that. It is deplorable, Mr. Speaker.

Affordable and Social Housing New Funding Announcement

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): This morning I got to host an announcement in my community, and it occurred to me as this was happening that I was

doing something that no member of the opposition has ever done, nor is it something that they ever likely going to do, and even the ones who used to sit in the Filmon era never took the time to do what we did together this morning.

You know what that was? We announced new affordable housing projects. Oh, and with their atrocious draconian cuts of \$500 million to the budget, suffice to say they will never ever look after our society's most vulnerable people.

I'd like to ask the minister to educate them on how exactly to run this province.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I was very pleased to join my colleague the MLA from Wolseley today, who did a stellar job hosting this event where we had a number of community advocates, a number of different partners who have been part of our plan, which was announced in 2009 by my predecessor, the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) right now, to deliver on 1,500 social housing units and 1,500 affordable housing units. And, Mr. Speaker, today we achieved that benchmark.

So I'm very pleased that that announcement took place today, and that announcement included \$7.6 million to develop a housing complex with the Clubhouse of Winnipeg, and this a program that will assist people who are coping with mental illness. And it will be beautiful homes, which I am very proud to say it has been a great journey with the great work of the people in Manitoba Housing and Community Development, particularly Karen Ryan.

And that's the first part—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time has expired.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Treatment Wait-List Reduction Update

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): In a 2011 election promise, the NDP government committed to eliminate the wait times—the wait-list for applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA therapy, for children with autism.

Let's review the status of that commitment. Now we have 64 children on the wait-list. By this fall we expect to have 90 children on the wait-list. This is reprehensible and the families and children with autism are suffering.

Will the minister commit to eliminate the wait-list as was promised?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I can tell you that our government is incredibly committed to supporting people with the diagnosis of autism through all the phases of life. We have made investments in community living. We've made investments to support them at St. Amant with ABA, but we've also made extreme investments in education. We are working with families, we're working with professional groups, and we are making a difference.

On world autism day I was very proud to announce another two outreach workers for autism that will be in the Parkland region; that is going to make a difference. That is going to provide services to the children as well as to the families. In addition, we announced \$622,000 to St. Amant to provide supports to families along—while we're—while they're supporting themselves by supporting their children.

Thank you.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, not a single one of the government's policy commitments on autism made prior to the 2011 election has been met. Children are aging out of eligibility, families are suffering, and something needs to be done today.

The minister says they're working harder. She can maybe work a little harder yet and a whole lot faster.

Will the minister commit to eliminating the wait-list for ABA therapy as promised in the 2011 election, and will she do it today?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that we are standing side by side with parents. We are providing them with supports through the Family Services, through education and through community living. We are providing a variety of supports that help them with the development of their child, provides them with respite. We are working side by side.

On world autism day we announced another two outreach workers. That was one of those commitments we made. We have a five-year strategy called Thrive! And in that five-year strategy, we are committed to be working with families, providing them the supports that are necessary.

Mr. Speaker: I'm going to permit the final supplementary for the honourable member for Portage la Prairie due to my earlier intervention.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, worse yet, 25 children with autism have aged out of eligibility for ABA therapy, as it must be initiated before they are five years old.

The NDP's priorities are out of whack. Public subsidies for their political parties, loans for winter tires, doubling of hydro rates or raising and broadening the PST, all while kids with autism languish without needed therapies.

I'll ask again: Will this minister commit to working harder and working faster to eliminate the wait-list for ABA therapy as promised in the 2011 election?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I will provide the member with some facts.

Since 1999 we have increased the value of the supports by 800 per cent to people living with autism. That is providing supports to individuals that are in the ABA program.

But also looking at how do we provide other supports to individuals, that's through the autism outreach. We have made a commitment that while individuals are waiting for ABA that we will provide them with the outreach services that they need.

We are committed to that, and the \$622,000 that we announced on world autism day will continue to provide that necessary support to the families, but more importantly, to the children as they develop.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It's now time for members' statements.

Jane Couch—Principals of Music Award

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): As we celebrate Music Month this April, we must take time to reflect on the important role that music plays in our schools. Music allows students to be creative, inspires confidence and can be an important tool in the classroom.

At Stevenson-Britannia School in St. James, principal Jane Couch shares this philosophy and has become an incredible advocate for the use of music in education. Jane has been a strong supporter of the school's music program and has made choir available for every class at the primary and intermediate levels. In addition, Jane has increased the number of periods per six-day cycle that the music teacher sees each class. Students at Stevenson-Britannia are

encouraged to be active in the school's music programming and see music, singing and performing as an everyday activity.

Jane was recently named one of Canada's Principals of Music for 2013. This annual award, presented by the Coalition for Music Education, recognizes elementary, middle and secondary school principals across Canada who make music an integral part of the educational program for every student.

And although she does not currently play an instrument herself, Jane has fond memories of playing the flute and saxophone in junior high and high school, and she remembers the excitement and camaraderie of playing in a large band and that magical moment when all the individual parts would come together to create a brilliant composition. Jane's experience with music in her youth left a lasting impression. It shaped her belief in the power of music and inspires her to create the same opportunities for her students.

Mr. Speaker, the lessons we can learn from music are endless. It teaches us about rhythm and movement, about history and culture and provides us with an opportunity to express our creativity. I would like to thank Jane and educators across Manitoba for enriching students' lives by bringing music into our classrooms for the benefit of our children.

Thank you very much.

*(14:30)

Optimist Under 18 International Curling Championship

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): I rise today to congratulate Team Manitoba's female curling team who won gold at the Optimist under-18 international curling championship event in Langley, BC, on April the 6th, 2014.

Skip Brooke Friesen, third Katelyn Derksen, second Kelsey Sagert and lead Cali Hamm qualified for the Optimists when they won gold as Team Central at the recent 2014 Manitoba Winter Games in Morden-Stanley-Winkler.

The girls' team is based out of the Winkler Curling Club. Brooke, Katelyn and Cali are all from the Winkler area, while Kelsey Sagert is from Morden, and the team has been together for several years as—and coached by Ross Derksen.

The Winkler team had a rocky start at the championship, losing their first two games to Alberta and Minnesota. However, with extraordinary focus, determination and some key pep talks from their coach, they turned things around, won five straight. They beat teams from Yukon, Northwest Territories and Japan in round robin competition, advancing to the semi-finals where they beat out Saskatchewan. And in a riveting final against Ontario, which came down to an extra end, where team Manitoba had the hammer in an extra end it came down to a pressure final shot which Brooke made in a sort of double takeout, to use her own words. She made the shot. They won by a single point and became gold medal champions.

It's very special that family and friends who couldn't make it to BC met the girls at the Winnipeg airport upon their return to cheer and support these new champions.

Unfortunately, the girls are one year shy for the age limit to compete at the 2015 provincial Scotties Tournament of Hearts that will be held in their home city of Winkler. But they tell me they will be back.

I'm sure we will hear about these young women in what promises to be some very successful curling careers. Once again, congratulations book—Brooke, Katelyn, Kelsey and Cali. Manitoba is very proud of your gold medal win.

Safe and Affordable Housing in West Broadway

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, it is said a society should be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. While the opposition would destroy Manitoba's treasured social safety net with a desire to cut \$500 million from the budget and privatize medicare, our government continues to improve the lives of those in need.

This morning, in partnership with Clubhouse of Winnipeg and Fountain Springs Housing, we announced the creation of a new accessible and affordable \$7.6-million housing complex on Sherbrook Street in West Broadway. This project will convert a current parking lot into 26 one-bedroom and five two-bedroom suites for low- to moderate-income families who may be impacted by mental illness.

Fountain Springs Housing will be built right next door to Clubhouse of Winnipeg, a local community organization that helps people with mental-health needs find opportunities for employment and education.

I want to congratulate Michael Mercury from Clubhouse and Marty Dolin from Fountain Springs on this unique and exciting partnership, just the latest project to revitalize the dynamic south Sherbrook area.

I was also very pleased to host my colleague, the honourable Minister for Housing and Community Development, at the announcement. He informed the packed house that our government not only has met our commitment to build 1,500 affordable and 1,500 new social housing units in the past five years, but he also launched our new goal of a further 500 affordable units and 500 social units in the next three years.

Everyone deserves a safe place to call home. I am very happy to say that today we are making crucial progress in helping more Manitobans access the safe and affordable housing that they deserve.

Thank you very much.

Jellicoe LaFreniere

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Today I would like to take the opportunity to recognize Jellicoe LaFreniere, a local musician. Known for his infectious fiddling and his high-step jiggings, Mr. LaFreniere will be honoured next month when he is inducted posthumously into the Manitoba fiddlers hall of fame.

Mr. LaFreniere was born in 1917, the 13 of 18 children, and came from a musical family in the village of St. Ambroise to a French-Canadian parents. Mr. LaFreniere will—would learn the violin from his grandfather, Isdore Zastre, a Western Canadian Red River jig champion and Western Canadian fiddling champion going back to 1929.

Mr.—or Jellicoe once told the Brandon Sun, I was just a lucky guy who happened to have the right grandfather. He told me many times when I was growing up, Jellicoe I have no money to leave you, but if you want I can leave you the gifts of music and dance, and he certainly did that.

While working in his teens in a farm in the High Bluff area, Jellicoe LaFreniere took his grandfather's advice and would play at parties, steadily building his craft. In 1943, Mr. LaFreniere won the Western Canadian Red River jig title and was never again beaten in competition. In 1957, Mr. LaFreniere was invited by the Miller family, owners of the Miller Brewing Company in Milwaukee, where he played with legendary accordion musician

Frankie Yankovic, and eventually recorded an album with him.

During the Canadian centennial in 1967, Mr. LaFreniere was invited to represent Manitoba in Ottawa and played for Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Mr. LaFreniere was also invited to play for prime ministers Lester Pearson, John Diefenbaker and Jean Chrétien. But perhaps his most important audience happened later that year when he played for the royal family at Island Park in Portage la Prairie.

Not only was Mr. LaFreniere a well-respected performer, he was also a mentor for young artists.

After a long battle with lung cancer, Mr. LaFreniere died on May 13th, 1994, a day before his 77th birthday. But his contribution will be honoured by this induction ceremony taking place in Carman on April 27th. Mr. LaFreniere's oldest grandson, Dwayne LaFreniere, and great-grandson, Dustin LaFreniere, will be attending, something that would have made Jellicoe very proud.

All members should join me in recognizing the contribution by Jellicoe LaFreniere.

Don Skorupski

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize and thank the people who dedicate their careers to work and live here in Manitoba.

Today, I am pleased to celebrate the upcoming 60th anniversary, or 60 years of craftsmanship, if you will, of one such dedicated individual, Mr. Don Skorupski, the pier builder for Dunnottar's iconic piers. Don Skorupski is a master craftsman in his village of Dunnottar and operates Dunnottar's piers. In addition to working hard in the construction industry, Mr. Skorupski undertakes many volunteer projects and is providing his exemplary service for many years, and hopefully many more to come.

Mr. Speaker, as a former history teacher, I hold a special place in my heart for those who work hard to preserve the heritage of their community. It takes a lot of hard work and artisanship to build a pier. In Dunnottar, where the piers must be taken down each winter and rebuilt each summer, the piers become a communal meeting space for friends, families and neighbours to enjoy one another's company while enjoying nature and fun in the sun.

Mr. Speaker, people who are familiar with the southwest shores of Lake Winnipeg will recognize

the area's famous piers, many of them built by Mr. Skorupski. In 2013, one of the area's piers worked on by Mr. Skorupski appeared on the government of Manitoba's home page, highlighting the Lake Winnipeg vista that one can enjoy from the pier. This year, Mr. Skorupski will tackle several projects so that locals and visitors can appreciate their landscape and appreciate the escape from the hustle and bustle of the city with a cool swim in Lake Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, the village of Dunnottar's public piers are examples of the culturally important landmarks that help to preserve our history and way of life. Thank you to Mr. Skorupski for all his hard work, and congratulations on 60 years in the business. His years of service are an inspiration to everyone who knows him.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, we'll move on to orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): Government business, Mr. Speaker. Could you please call second reading for bills 18, 34, 3, 31, 10, 37 and 33?

SECOND READINGS

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call bills for second reading in the following order: Bill 18, followed by bills 34, 3, 31, 10, Bill 37 and Bill 33.

Bill 18—The Business Practices Amendment Act (Improved Consumer Protection and Enforcement)

Mr. Speaker: We'll start with Bill 18, The Business Practices Amendment Act (Improved Consumer Protection and Enforcement).

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 18, The Business Practices Amendment Act (Improved Consumer Protection and Enforcement), be now read for a second time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to move the second reading on this bill, which will go a long way towards making sure Manitoba consumers know that they are protected from unfair business practices. We know how important this is to a healthy economy. Consumers must feel comfortable that businesses they deal with are treating them fairly and honestly. It's also important that businesses feel they are on a level playing field, with everyone following the rules set in place.

Consumer Protection Office has had a long history of receiving complaints about transactions that mislead and take advantage of vulnerable consumers. Unscrupulous businesses need to know that they will be held accountable for false or misleading statements and that they can't pressure consumers into making purchases.

* (14:40)

Mr. Speaker, this bill expands the meaning of taking advantage of a consumer under The Business Practices Act to include suppliers and businesses that put undue pressure on a consumer to enter into a transaction. For example, in the case where a supplier knew or should have ought to know that the consumer could not protect their own interest because of a physical or mental infirmity, illiteracy, age or an ability-inability, sorry-to understand the language of the consumer transaction, or the terms and conditions on which the consumer entered into the transaction were so harsh to the consumer as to be inequitable. These provisions will help to address unfair practices such as holding cash deposits as leverage to keep consumers at a place of business for hours and hours and hours or using aggressive and intimidating sales tactics to wear down consumers so they sign agreements.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also makes it unfair practice for a supplier to use its possession or control over a consumer's goods to pressure the consumer into renegotiating a term or condition of a consumer transaction. This would address the situation of a moving company that refuses to unload a consumer's belongings without additional payment over and above the agreed-upon price for the moving service. For example, a mover moves a person's belongings to the residence, they're ready to unload it, and then they hand the consumer a totally new bill with regard to it and totally changes the whole transaction, and meanwhile the person's products or goods are in the back of the truck and they're sitting in a house that's

empty. So this legislation will try to address that and hopefully will.

This bill expands the list of examples of misrepresentations or uses of exaggeration that are deemed unfair practices such as false representation as to the reason for a charge and false representation or exaggeration regarding benefits like bonuses or cashback that a consumer may get for helping a supplier to get new or potential consumers or customers. It is also important to make sure that the Consumer Protection Office has the necessary tools to enforce this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this is not only important for the consumers, but also for businesses. Good businesses who follow the rules should not have to be at a disadvantage for those businesses that do not. The bill proposes more flexible and responsive tools for the Consumer Protection Office to use to prevent and control unfair business practices in Manitoba. This includes giving the director of the Consumer Protection Office authority to order businesses to retract a false or deceptive representation in an advertisement, the ability to deal with an appeal of an order in a more timely manner, ability to inspect premises where an unfair business practice has been committed or to ensure that a business is complying with an order, autonomy to deal with orders and compliance more quickly and effectively. The bill also modernizes and clarifies some of the wording in the act to be fairer and easier to understand for businesses.

Mr. Speaker, we've had great feedback from both consumer and business stakeholders on this bill. Consumer groups are pleased to see consumer protections modernized to keep pace with current marketplace issues. Industry associations say the protections are fair, balanced and address issues they, too, have identified in our marketplace. Manitoba made a significant commitment to consumer protection with Let's Make a Better Deal five-year strategy.

We have addressed issues such as payday loans, cellphone bills, car advertisements and home warrantees. Now modernizing the language and processes of The Business Practices Act is yet another piece of that strategy. So far the opposition has consistently voted against protecting Manitoba to consumers and families. I look forward to them changing their minds and supporting this bill. This, after all, is good for business, good for consumers and good for Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry, just before I recognize the honourable member opposite, was it the minister's intention to have this bill referred to a committee of the House?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: It was. Okay. And we'll let the—honourable minister of culture tourism.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, I'd like the bill referred to a committee of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable minister.

The honourable Minister of Finance—*[interjection]* Okay. The honourable Minister of Finance, to speak to the bill?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): I'm going to ask the House's indulgence. I'm going to stray far from relevance, but I did just want to—on this day, appreciating the words of the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) and the First Minister—say as Finance Minister, what a sobering day it is to learn of the passing of Minister Jim Flaherty. Sobering on a political level but also a personal level, because I think when something like this happens, it does put into perspective for us that our time is short. Our time is not only short in public life, our time is short on earth, and I just want to say a few words about my appreciation for the short time that I was able to work with Minister Flaherty.

I don't—you know, he will be remembered for many things. One of the things that I will remember him for is his commitment to families with people—families who had children of people who had disabilities, because in his own family, it may not be known by everyone, he had triplet sons, and one of those sons did live with a disability, and that fuelled a lot of the things that he pursued in public life.

One of those things was bringing in the Registered Disability Savings Plan, which was a very innovative approach to help families save money so that as their children aged and went out on their own, they had some economic security. I remembered when I met Jim, and he wanted to talk about every—I am told, as Finance Minister, and I was no exception—that he reminded us of many things in terms of our responsibilities, but he was dogged about reminding us about our responsibilities to ensure that the Registered Disability Savings Plan could thrive in our provinces, that we made sure that we had made changes to the laws to allow that. And he sent probably three or four letters a year asking

what we had done lately to make sure that this was the case.

He was very committed to that, and I was reminded when I met him of the words of another parent of a child with a disability that said, you know, when you are a parent and your child lives with a disability, the thing that you pray for is that you live one day longer than they do. Because you want to ensure their future, and you worry—we all worry about our children's futures, but when your child lives with a disability you worry more. And I think that was, for him, what drove him to create the Registered Disability Savings Plan so that families had a mechanism to save money for their—for the future needs of their adult children when they were no longer able to be there to ensure those.

I also want to say I know one of the things he'll be remembered for, and rightfully so, was his steady leadership in this country through tremendous economic upheaval, and that leadership in putting in place things like stimulus funding, that leadership, I think, is responsible for the fact that Canada did weather the storm better than many countries, and also responsible for the fact that Canada has increasingly a stellar reputation in the world for the way that we ensure that our financial industry is regulated, the way that we ensure that the rights of consumers in that industry are protected.

So I just wanted to take this moment on this day to share those few thoughts. He was somebody who dedicated his life to public service. He was somebody who, like all of us, probably spent many, many nights away from home and away from his kids. It's worth noting that his wife is also in public life, and I'm sure today is a horrible day for their family. I think the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said it well, this is a tragedy that is compounded by the fact that he had just decided to move on from public life. I'm sure his family hoped, as he hoped, that that meant he would have more time with them.

And so on this day—we've already marked his passing with a moment of silence, but on this day I just wanted to say those few things. He is somebody who made a tremendous contribution to Canada. He is somebody who knew that his role as an elected person was to work in the best interests—what he believed were the best interests of Canadians. And he is somebody, in my brief experience with him, whom you never had to guess at what he was thinking or where he stood. He made it clear with few words, and he only needed a few words to make it clear. But

I certainly appreciated that short experience with him, and I hope today, as we all reflect on his life and his gifts to the people of Canada, that we also reflect on the fact that our time here is precious. Our time in this Chamber is precious, and those things that we can do to make a difference to make the lives of the people that elect us a little better, a little easier, that is our legacy, not the barbs and jabs that we throw each other—throw at each other through the day, but the things that we actually accomplish on behalf of people. He accomplished much, and I want to extend my condolences to his family for what must be an unimaginable loss today.

Thank you.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on the bill at this point?

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I move, seconded by the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 34—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed to call Bill 34, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products).

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), that Bill 34, the consumer protection—yes, Bill 34, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products), be read for a second time and referred to the committee of the House.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Sport, seconded by honourable Minister of Finance, that Bill 34, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products), be now read for a second time and be 'ferred' to a committee of this House.

And does the honourable minister have a message? I'll have the honourable Minister of Tourism and Culture read the message, please.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, thank you. I'm also tabling—yes, I'm tabling a recommendation, yes, from the Lieutenant Governor.

Mr. Speaker: I'll start over again.

It's moved by the honourable Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection (Mr. Lemieux), seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), that Bill 34, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products), be now read for a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Lemieux: Today we are building on our strong record of protecting consumers in the province and making sure that Manitobans know their rights under the law and that businesses follow fair practices. In Manitoba, the province's new types of high-cost credit such as lines of credit, loans, have recently emerged in the marketplace. These products are very costly, usually short-term in nature and offered outside of the regulated banks and credit unions. Consumer groups, regulated lenders and regulators have all expressed concern about the cost of these products to consumers as well as their effect on the marketplace.

In fact, the Public Utilities Board recommended regulation of these types of products following its tri-annual payday loans review. The recommendation is strongly supported by the Canadian Payday Loan Association and the consumers' coalition which is made up of the Consumers Association of Canada (Manitoba) Inc., Winnipeg Harvest, Community Financial Counselling Services.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will address existing emerging and evolving high-cost credit products in our marketplace. We want to ensure that consumers who are getting a loan are being treated fairly. Businesses offering high-cost credit products will be required to follow new rules and consumers will benefit from more openness and protection through these amendments. By doing this, we are making sure borrowers use—borrowers using these products have all the information they need when taking out a high-cost loan. We also ensure the Consumer Protection Office has the tools to deal with those lenders that do not comply with the rules. The high-cost credit products addressed in this bill include lines of credit, loans and other products that meet the criteria which will be set out in regulation.

Mr. Speaker, as these products evolve, much of the detail will be set out in regulation for a faster response to new and changing products. The provisions proposed in this bill do not apply to

regulated payday loans, or mortgages, or credit extended by banks or credit unions. This bill will require anyone offering a high-cost credit product to be licensed. The Consumer Protection Office will be responsible for licensing, just like it is currently responsible for licensing payday lenders. The Consumer Protection Office will be able to refuse a licence if the loan exceeds the maximum interest rate of 60 per cent set out in the Criminal Code. This approach has worked in other provinces, including Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia. Under the proposed amendments, anyone offering high-cost credit products must post signs at each business location explaining the cost, not to charge a fee or penalty for early repayment and to keep records of its high-cost credit products and agreements.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will also require lenders to provide specific information to consumers including the amount of funds available to the borrower and how they can access the funds; the cost of the high—sorry—the cost of the high-cost credit product; the interest rate and how it is calculated; the cost of each fee, charge or penalty and how it is applied; and the borrower's rights. The bill also requires lenders to give the borrower a reasonable time to review the disclosed information and the agreement. The lender must provide a copy of the completed agreement to the borrower at no cost. The bill also gives borrowers the right to cancel the agreement within 48 hours and the right to repay or partially repay without being charged a fee.

In another section of this bill, the Manitoba Payday Borrowers' Financial Literacy Fund is renamed the Manitoba Borrowers' Financial Literacy Fund. Currently, this fund is sustained by contributions from licensed payday lenders, high-cost credit granters will also be required to contribute. The fund will be put towards programs and activities promoting financial literacy for people who borrow from payday lenders and high-cost credit granters. The bill also brings the provisions for payday loans up to speed with the new high-cost credit part so that two parts are consistent. Mr. Speaker, the high-cost credit industry is rapidly evolving. These changes provide the authority needed to maintain oversight as new high-cost credit products enter the marketplace.

So far we have received much support for this bill. Gloria Desorcy, executive director of the Manitoba branch of the Consumers' Association of Canada, has said, the new rules will go a long way to help consumers comparison-shop for credit. The

requirement to have full and clear disclosure of the cost, terms and conditions of borrowing will help consumers make better decisions about credit. John Silver, the executive director of Community Financial Counselling Services, has said, we are pleased to see the Province moving so quickly on the PUB recommendation to regulate these types of products. We've seen people get into real trouble by not realizing just how much a small loan would really cost them and it can start a really serious debt spiral for them.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments continue our record as leaders in consumer protection. We have addressed car repairs, home warranties, cellphone contracts and more, and more is coming. We know that part of a healthy economy is ensuring consumers have confidence in the businesses that they work with.

I'm sorry to say the opposition again has repeatedly voted against our legislation. This past fall they stood with fly-by-night unlicensed construction companies when they refused to support warranties for new homes and they fought for the right of unethical car dealers to hide the true costs of a vehicle until after contracts are signed. I really look forward to them changing their tune on this bill, and I hope they will fully support it, Mr. Speaker, and it should be supported unanimously in *[inaudible]* consumer protection legislation in this House. Thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, for some in Manitoba living paycheque to paycheque is a reality. When a crisis occurs these Manitobans have not had the opportunity to save for emergencies and require extra income to overcome these hardships. Unfortunately, if these Manitobans have no other options, they must turn to high-interest loans, sometime without fully understanding what the arrangement actually entails. While high-cost credit solutions are not the first choice of Manitobans, it is regrettably the case that for some Manitobans it is the only option left to them due to the burden of high inflation, high taxation and low wage growth that ranks amongst the lowest in the entire country.

In Canada, under section 347 of the Criminal Code, it is considered to be a criminal offence to enter into an agree-arrangement or receive interest payments which would exceed 60 per cent, but there is nothing stopping providers from supplying high-interest products to individuals charging upwards of 40 to 50 per cent.

* (15:00)

Bill 34, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products), seeks to implement important amendments to help protect these vulnerable individuals in Manitoba when accessing high-cost credit products. Mr. Speaker this bill's amendments set out clear requirements for providers of high-cost credit products. In order to offer this line of credit, the provider must obtain a licence which currently providers do not need.

While the amendments set out in Bill 34 do not affect credit extended by banks, credit unions or payday loan vendors, it does set guidelines and conditions respecting the delivery and service of these products. Ultimately, it will help to protect and better inform the purchasing decisions of Manitobans.

These lenders will have to offer borrowers a comprehensive and transparent agreement in which details of their transactions are made clear, including interest rates, terms of payment and other important information Manitobans need to make informed decisions.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Bill 34 is that consumers will have the ability to terminate an agreement within 48 hours, allowing the consumer ample time to reconsider the agreement and ensure that it is in their best interest.

That having been said, it seems bizarre that this government doesn't practice what it preaches. When this NDP government attempts to improve transparency and help protect the vulnerable Manitobans, we are reminded of their words and actions which show the opposite. Where was the transparency during the last election when the NDP promised that there would be no new taxes? Where was the transparency during the last election when the NDP promised that raising the provincial sales tax was, and I quote, nonsense.

This government broke their promise to Manitobans and they broke the law with the same stroke of a pen. This is even more appalling now that we know they have studied raising the PST since well before the NDP got their last mandate, and that they were considering raising it to at least 9 per cent. How is this considered being truthful to Manitobans?

The PC Party has been calling on this government to raise the basic personal exemption to the national average. If the NDP care about helping vulnerable Manitobans, why have our calls fallen on

deaf ears? An additional \$200 may not seem like a lot for NDP Cabinet ministers, but for those that are struggling it could be a saving grace.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's tax hikes are hurting these vulnerable Manitobans who are forced into entering these high-cost interest products, who live paycheque to paycheque and are having to use food banks to help feed their children. How can Manitobans have confidence in anything that this government does or says when time and time again they have been caught and tangled in their own web of lies and deceit?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, while I would like to see a strong and vibrant economy in which no one needs to access high-cost credit products, we understand that sometimes Manitobans have no other choice.

It is unfortunate that Manitobans have been deceived by the tax-and-spend NDP promises which they never intend to keep. Surely, they must recognize the damaging effects of their illegal PST has had on the poor. Poverty advocates have made this very clear and it is no surprise that food bank use is found at record levels under this NDP government.

Bill 34 takes important steps to protect Manitobans when accessing high-cost credit and any steps that help safeguard the well-being and safety of Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, my only hope is that this government will take a page from their own book and offer Manitobans transparency and protection when fees are taxes are raised in this province by them.

The members of the NDP need to remember that it is the people of Manitoba that they report to and not themselves at the Cabinet room.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): It's certainly my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 34, which I think is an important piece of legislation before this House in this particular session, Mr. Speaker.

You know, this is a part of a whole package of regulations and consumer protection items that are coming before this House, Mr. Speaker, that I think move us forward as a province, move us forward in the context of all Canadian provinces who are also facing these challenges, and I think ultimately helps strengthen our economy and help give our consumers the confidence to go out into the marketplace to

support our economy and in the meantime to make their lives better here in Manitoba.

So I'm very proud to rise to speak a little bit to this particular bill and just to talk about how this particular industry has been, frankly, very tricky in terms of nailing down exactly what the regulations need to be to properly protect consumers. It's an evolving industry, Mr. Speaker. It's an industry where there are a number of different players, a number of different companies who are offering these services, and they're offering them in new ways, frankly—you know, they're not just bricks and mortar anymore. There are a number of different ways that people can access short-term loans, and it needs to fall on us as a government to ensure that consumers know what they're getting into, to know that they're going in eyes wide open and that they're being treated fairly and that they're able to access these products, they're able to get the support that they need but that they're also doing it so in a fair manner.

So this is an evolving industry, it's an evolving part of our economy and it's something that not just in Manitoba, but in other places in Canada that we've experienced these challenges. And we are working in Manitoba to come to a place where we can give people that confidence, but we're also doing it in conjunction with other jurisdictions across Manitoba. Sometimes the products are a line of credit, it could be a loan, it could be something very similar in nature, but they're very costly for the most part, Mr. Speaker, and they're generally short term for individuals. They're offered outside of the marketplace of regulated banks, so there needs to be some oversight and some guarantee to the consumer that they'll be treated fairly.

We've—Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that consumers who are getting a loan are just being treated fairly, that the rules that are out there will give them the full information—the full package of information of what exactly they're entering into, and that can be a number of things. It could be the total cost, it could be the payback period, it could be the interest rate, but all of these factors go into what individuals need as a consumer to be fully informed and know what they're getting into.

The proposed amendments in this bill, Mr. Speaker, offering—anyone offering high-cost credit products must display clear signage to explain those costs. They must make detailed disclosures about costs or fees before an agreement for the credit is

signed. They have to give the borrower a reasonable amount of time to review the disclosure information and the agreement and provide a copy of the completed agreement to the borrower at no cost. They can't charge a fee or a penalty for early repayment, and they have to be licensed and contribute to the Financial Literacy Fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, really what we're doing, and really is the nature of much of the legislation that we're bringing forward with regards to consumer protection, is to give consumers more information. It sounds like a simple idea, and I guess in some ways it is, but, as I said, this is really an emerging and an evolving industry. So it has proven to be tricky and it has proven to be something that we need to be diligent about, that we need to support the consumers out in the marketplace, and that's where the role of government can be so important and the role of this particular legislation.

Other consumer protection that we've had some success with, of course, in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, is a strong record on car repairs, on home warranties, other important issues that we're seeing come forward. Payday loans is simply one of those pieces of legislation that can really give consumers that confidence that can help build our economy, that can help Manitoba be an affordable and a good place to live for all Manitobans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to congratulate the minister for bringing Bill 34 into this House.

I'm very pleased that our government has a strong record of protecting consumers. We've been leaders in this country in consumer protection including with respect to car repairs, home warranties, payday loans, gift cards and cellphone contracts, and with this bill we'll continue to be at the forefront in Canada of protecting consumers.

* (15:10)

You know, Manitobans have a lot of confidence in our economy, and our consumer confidence indicates that we feel positive about our jobs, our homes, our incomes, and this translates into a healthy climate for business and, of course, stronger economic growth for the province of Manitoba. And, of course, we all participate in the economy in all different ways, whether we're buying or selling, whether we're trades who repair or lease goods or services. And, frankly, it's to benefit everybody that

we have rules in place in the marketplace that make sure things are fair, practical and respond to people's needs.

And customers and consumers must have confidence the companies they do business with will treat them fairly and treat them honestly. And businesses, of course, have to have confidence that the rules that regulate their operations are reasonable, don't stand in the way of innovation and put all competitors on an even playing field, which is why we've had so much co-operation in moving forward the consumer protection agenda from Manitoba businesses, who are very interested in making sure that people do get a fair deal.

And Manitoba has made a significant commitment to consumer protection. We introduced the Let's Make a Better Deal five-year strategy. We modernized the language and processes of The Business Practices Act consistent with that strategy. We've made it very clear, Mr. Speaker, that Manitobans with concerns or complaints about a business they've dealt with are always encouraged to come for help; they're encouraged to contact the Consumer Protection Office to receive information, advice and assistance.

And, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 moved that ahead. A consultation is now under way to hear Manitoban's concerns about misleading and unfair cable, Internet and phone promotions. Legislation now will guarantee the price you see is the price you pay for new automobiles. New legislation has now been introduced to address high-cost credit products. And, of course, we know buying and renovating homes can be among the most expensive things that Manitobans take on, and I'm very pleased that we're working to develop stronger consumer protection for home renovations and repairs.

Now, the opposition, when they've had their chance, they've repeatedly voted against legislation that protects Manitoban families from unscrupulous companies and unfair practices. I was surprised and I was shocked, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition actually stood with shady, fly-by-night, unlicensed construction companies, and against families, and against the many reputable, excellent, innovative homebuilders here in Manitoba when they refused to support warranties for new homes.

You know, it was the Progressive Conservative opposition that fought for the right of unethical car dealers to hide the true cost of a vehicle until after contracts are signed. And, of course, it was these

same Progressive Conservatives that even said they would consider eliminating rent controls. And, of course, this is the opposition, when we talk about giving Manitobans more opportunities to participate in the workplace, the same opposition that's opposed every single increase in the minimum wage since 1999.

Now, this bill furthers the consumer protection agenda and it does that by requiring businesses that offer high-cost credit products to follow new rules and to give consumers more openness and protection through these amendments. The bill, as the minister has said, adds a new part to The Consumer Protection Act to address existing, emerging and evolving high-cost credit products in our marketplace, and it's designed to protect consumers for obtaining credit from businesses that are effectively circumventing payday lending legislation.

The amendments will also clarify provisions in the payday loans part of the act.

And finally, the Manitoba Payday Borrowers' Financial Literacy Fund is renamed the Manitoba Borrowers' Financial Literacy Fund, since high-cost credit granters will now also be required to pay into the fund in addition to payday lenders.

And it is necessary to provide people with different options. Unfortunately, not everybody has access to a bank or credit union. I know, representing the West End of Winnipeg, we have far fewer banks in our part of the province than we did once ago. But we need to give people alternatives.

I know that some provinces such as Quebec have maybe gone too far in trying to prevent other lenders from coming into place. We think there's a balance and we think by working with the industry and by listening to Manitobans and listening to consumers, we have struck the right balance with this bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, this is part of a very good program that we have in Manitoba for protecting consumers. I was very glad to see that the executive director of the Manitoba Branch of the Consumer Association of Canada is onsite. I was very glad to see the executive director of the Community Financial Counselling Services was prepared to be onsite to talk about the value of moving ahead with this law. But I'm also pleased that we listened to the Canada—the Canadian Payday Loan Association as well as the Consumers

Association of Canada in making sure we've got the right balance.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly going to be supporting this bill and I encourage every other member of this House to continue moving forward the consumer protection agenda in the province of Manitoba.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on Bill 34?

Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 34, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products).

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

Bill 3—The Witness Security Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed to call second reading of Bill 3, The Witness Security Amendment Act.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), that Bill 3, The Witness Security Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité des témoins, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), that Bill 3, The Witness Security Amendment Act, be now read for a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and I am tabling the message.

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, these amendments will enhance existing witness security legislation to give greater assistance to police and prosecutors, as well as improve the overall administration of justice in Manitoba.

Manitoba was the first province in Canada to create in legislation an independent process to provide security measures to witnesses in need of protection and their families. These witnesses require

protection because they are co-operating in the prosecution of serious criminal matters, including prosecutions of gang members and organized crime affecting the safety and security of Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, we're proud that, over time, The Witness Security Act has proven to be such a valuable tool to preserve public safety and the pursuit of justice. Many other provinces have used Manitoba's act as a model to enact their own legislation.

These amendments will further enhance the effective administration of the witness security program in Manitoba. They provide expanded resources to support witnesses who face serious threats or harm because of their co-operation as witnesses in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Speaker, since its inception, witnesses, victims, family members and others have received protective services under this program, often requiring relocation in Manitoba or across Canada. The witness security program provides specific types of funding and services to witnesses and their families, separate and apart from law enforcement agencies. These security measures are outlined in a security agreement, into which the protected person must enter before any benefits will be provided.

The amendments would formalize the position of witness security officers. Witness security officers assist the director in co-ordinating and delivering necessary services to protected witnesses. These individuals are employed by government and possess the expertise required to conduct this type of specialized work. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, these amendments also give peace officer status to witness security officers, while they're engaged in authorized duties assigned to them under the act. This status will confirm that staff with statutory authority and protection necessary to safely conduct their work.

The amendments also send a clear message that prohibited conduct will not be tolerated by participants enrolled in the program. The program provides funding and services to protected persons. Misconduct is treated very seriously.

It is a fact, Mr. Speaker, that many of the individuals who may be seeking benefits under the witness security program have them—made themselves, in various ways, targets, and may not have lived the best lives, and it is necessary that they follow the terms of the agreement.

Provisions currently exist to expel protected persons from this program for misconduct. However, these amendments provide the director with authority to immediately suspend the provision of funding and services to a protected person, pending an expulsion application. The director may suspend the payment of financial support to a protected person if, first, an application has been made to the person expelled from the program, based on the grounds set out in the act—for example, by engaging in conduct prohibited by their security agreement—and, second, if the director has reasonable grounds to believe that continued payment of the financial support would not be in the public interest. This suspension would be in place while the director applies to the assessment panel for a decision to expel the individual from the program. It would remain in effect until the assessment panel renders a decision.

*(15:20)

The protected person would be immediately advised of the nature of their misconduct and of the suspension. He or she would have an opportunity to make a written submission to the assessment panel with regard to the proposed expulsion.

These amendments create a balanced and fair process.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all members of this House agree that witness testimony in criminal prosecutions is a cornerstone of our legal system. The protection of witnesses in the prosecution of serious crimes, often committed by criminal organizations, is critical to public safety. A substantial number of protected persons in the witness security program are providing testimony in homicide cases. Unfortunately, the threat to witnesses, their immediate families, including children as well as their extended families, is significant.

And, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to give members of this House the wrong idea. The program has been very successful since it was established in 2002 and later enshrined in legislation. In the time the program has been operating, I understand that only two witnesses have ever failed to testify, to come to court to give the information they are supposed to. One of those had been expelled and one was no longer in the program. In fact, only four applications under this act have ever been rejected as unsuitable for admission over the lifetime of the program and, happily, only a handful of witnesses have ever been expelled from the program over its lifetime. One, the case where

the individual refused to testify; two, who provided testimony through—which resulted in a conviction, and two remain before the courts.

Again, the great majority of cases in which individuals enter the program involve homicides, conspiracy to commit murder or attempted murder and, again, the vast majority of them relate to organized crime and street gang prosecutions. And what is also very, very valuable, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps the most valuable thing, as of the last update I received, in every single matter where a witness in this program has testified a conviction has resulted. And there was one exception. There was an acquittal of one of multiple accused in a single homicide.

The program works. The program can give people confidence in the justice system. The program makes sure that important testimony is there as we continue to make Manitoba the most hostile place possible for organized crime.

I look forward to the support of the House to pass this bill. These amendments enhance a groundbreaking and effective program by providing additional resources and safeguards to protect the public interest. These enhancements will serve the citizens of Manitoba and, indeed, the administration of justice in our province. Thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I'd like to thank the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) for his warm applause. I might not enjoy all the comments, though I think we'll find more or less accord on this issue. Certainly, the principle of the legislation is something that we would support.

The issue of witness protection is one, I think, that often intrigues the public and it becomes a public issue only periodically, but—as it should only become a public issue only periodically as the whole nature of witness protection. But it is one that people often have questions about and how is it that somebody became a protected witness. It's often glamorized in movies. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you've seen those kinds of productions. I suspect that there's nothing glamorous about it though.

But it is an important part of our justice system where we need to have the evidence to ensure that there is a conviction on a particular crime, and in the cases where there's witness protection they're usually very serious crimes. And then we have to ensure for as long as need be after that, that the individual who provided that evidence by virtue of being witnesses is then protected.

And so I've talked to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) about this, and his staff, about how this might strengthen that regime. We have a couple of more questions that we'll look to have in the days ahead, and the bill might not proceed to committee today, but it will proceed to committee, I'm sure, relatively shortly, and some of those discussions can happen at that time.

But I do think it's important that we continually look to strengthen this part of the justice system. We know that people who are going into the witness protection program as protected witnesses, that they've often themselves come from difficult circumstances or sometimes criminal backgrounds, quite often from criminal backgrounds. And so it's a unique environment for an individual to be protected. Their lives are changing in many ways. They're changing, obviously, from an open and public perspective, but also changing in the way they conduct their lives. That causes, I'm sure, lots of challenges for those who are working with witnesses who are protected and secured witnesses.

I do know, of course, that within the witness protection program, and not speaking about any specific cases here in Manitoba, but there are documented cases where individuals who are within the witness protection program return to a life that they shouldn't be leading and they become difficult within the program. So there needs to be regulations and laws to ensure that both situations can be dealt with to ensure that an individual who is given testimony and who is going to be within a witness security program is, in fact, protected, but then also to ensure that where somebody who is in that program is conducting themselves in a way that is beyond the parameters of that program and certainly the agreed-upon parameters of that program, that there is a way to deal with that as well.

So this legislation, I think, is something that we want to consider and to look at and to ensure that it does all that it can to strengthen the justice system, and to both protect those who are within the secured custody of a witness protection program and to also ensure that where somebody is not hearing and keeping up their end of the bargain, as it were, Mr. Speaker, that there are ways to deal with that as well.

Giving additional authority to those who are working within the program where it seemed to be needed, I think, makes sense, Mr. Speaker. We know that there wouldn't be a great number of people that this would apply to, and I don't expect in my

discussions with the Attorney General that there would—that it would apply to a great number of people. Obviously, I understand that the numbers specifically on this are in some ways a matter of confidence, but I do think that we want to ensure that those who are working with those almost as case managers within the witness protection program have the ability, both the training and also the statutory ability, to do the job that they need to do.

So, with those few comments, I don't expect that we'll see this bill move to committee today, but I do expect that it will move to committee in relatively a short order in the days ahead, and further questions can happen at committee when that day happens, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 31—The Police Services Amendment Act
(Community Safety Officers)**

Mr. Speaker: I'll now proceed to call Bill 31, The Police Services Amendment Act (Community Safety Officers).

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 31, The Police Services Amendment Act (Community Safety Officers); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services de police (agents de sécurité communautaire), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Justice, seconded by the honourable Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, that Bill 31, The Police Services Amendment Act (Community Safety Officers), be now read for a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill and the message has been tabled.

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, this bill amends The Police Services Act to enable community safety officer programs to be developed in Manitoba municipalities. This bill sets out the framework required for this program.

As members have heard in the Throne Speech, the city of Thompson has been selected as the first municipality to launch this exciting public safety initiative. This community safety officer program will be a key addition to the public safety network we've created in Manitoba.

Furthermore, the bill has been designed to respond to the unique needs of communities across Manitoba, including not only our large, urban centres, but rural and northern communities as well.

Mr. Speaker, expanding policing and public safety resources has and continues to be a priority for our government. Since 1999, we've funded 290 additional police personnel positions across the province and we've increased funding to police services by over \$82 million.

The community safety officer program builds on our reputation for innovation, including the great success of the Winnipeg police cadet program. The cadet program was recently highlighted and recognized as the best practice at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which we were very proud to host right here in Winnipeg. These amendments allow each individual program developed under the act to be tailored to the needs identified by that particular community.

* (15:30)

Mr. Speaker, the bill outlines the purpose of community safety officers, or CSOs. CSOs will work with local police to enhance public safety. Their role will include undertaking crime prevention initiatives, assisting persons in need to connect with community resources and being a visible presence in the community.

Based on the objectives of each participating municipality, community safety officers may also enforce specific provincial statutes identified by regulation. In Winnipeg, for example, the Winnipeg police cadets are able to enforce provincial statutes including The Intoxicated Persons Detention Act, The Liquor Control Act and also have powers under The Highway Traffic Act for the purposes of directing traffic and securing accident scenes. I would expect that these would be the kinds of acts that different municipalities would want to have enforced by community safety officers, but there may be different situations across this great province and we'd be very pleased to work with communities to find the package that works best for that community.

And, if authorized, community safety officers can also assist the local police service with non-criminal matters in a wide range of very positive ways, including best practices to prevent crime from happening in the first place.

Each community safety officer program must be based on an agreement between the local policing authority—whether an RCMP detachment or a municipal police force—the municipality itself and the Manitoba government on the operation of the program. The agreement will include details on management, financing, direction and supervision of community safety officers, the relationship between the local policing authority and community safety officers and also how to deal with conduct complaints.

Community safety officers will be municipal employees under this act. Municipalities will appoint community safety officers and to ensure accountability they will be responsible for ensuring they perform their duties and exercise their powers in a proper manner. Municipalities will also be liable for the actions of the community safety officers. Rules outlining qualifications, training, duties, equipment and uniforms will be prescribed in regulations under the act.

Mr. Speaker, it's critical that the face of police services in public safety reflects the communities they serve. This principle is reflected in the bill. When appointing CSOs, or community safety officers, a municipality must take into account the diversity of the population of the municipality.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments in this bill expand in our government's commitment to enhance public safety for all Manitobans. Community safety officer programs uphold the fundamental principles enshrined in The Police Services Act and will be another innovative public safety initiative that's responsive to the needs of Manitoba communities.

In closing, I first of all respect Winnipeg's cadet program. I do want to acknowledge the work of the Winnipeg Police Service and also the participation and co-operation of the Winnipeg Police Association in allowing Winnipeg's cadet program to become the success that it is.

In—as we expand outside of the Perimeter with the community safety officer program, I also want to give a lot of credit to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police division D and, in particular, the assistant commissioner Kevin Brosseau, who has been a

tremendous partner as we move forward on working to find more ways to bring public safety and order to our communities.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that community safety officers will serve the needs of the communities they will be in. Certainly, they will be enforcing laws, but even more importantly they will be assisting people who may be in distress, who may be in difficulty to be connected to help and resources within our various systems. They will be out on the streets preventing things from happening, and by doing that they'll be building stronger and safer communities.

I look very forward to joining the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton) in his home community, in Thompson, as we roll out community safety officers. I know that Mayor Johnston has been a very strong proponent and I appreciate the work of the Thompson mayor and Thompson council in bringing this to this point.

So I certainly look forward to the support of the entire House in passing this important legislation so we can work towards implementation of a much-anticipated innovative and effective community safety officer program starting in Thompson, but certainly showing up in other communities across Manitoba.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I stand in support of the principle of this legislation, certainly the cadet program in Winnipeg is something that we believe has generally worked well, and in speaking with those who are involved both on the front lines and otherwise, with the Winnipeg Police Service—I think they believe that it's been a benefit in terms of utilizing their resources more effectively, Mr. Speaker, and more productively.

And so from that perspective we certainly support moves to expand that type of a model. I understand this is essentially the Winnipeg cadets program in a rural fashion, in a fashion outside the city of Winnipeg. The minister mentioned, of course, the city of Thompson, and I've had the opportunity in the past to speak to officials from Thompson who have great concern, of course, about public safety within their community. I've had many suggestions for this government, not all of them taken up, about how to improve safety both in the province more generally and in the city of Thompson, more specifically.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that this project and this program will be one that they could utilize to make their community safer, as I believe, of course, that they have the motivation, as that I believe all municipal officials do, to make their communities or their regions safer places to live. We do know, of course, that the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), when he was running for leadership, spoke about how crime was out of control under his government, and he was right, at that time. And it still is a problem, a considerable problem, in many areas. It's one of the few times that the member for Thompson and I agree on issues, of course. But he was absolutely right, that under his government, crime was, and in many ways still is, out of control.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say I've had the opportunity to speak to members of the RCMP, both in my region and outside of the region that I represent, and had the opportunity to speak to representatives of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. And this is the kind of thing that, for a long time, they had been hoping for, maybe not exactly in this form. There are always things that you could look to do differently. We might have those discussions at committee when this bill proceeds to committee in the days ahead.

But I do think that, you know, we do need to move forward with a—something that gives flexibility for municipalities to be able to engage, to have those with peace officer status or a status that is beyond what they're able to provide right now, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that not only are there municipal bylaws enforced, but certain aspects of provincial bylaws, whether they fall under The Highway Traffic Act, or The Liquor Control Act, can, in fact, be enforced as well. There are all sorts of questions, of course, around costs and liability, both of which I understand are going to be borne by the municipality, and those discussions, of course, can happen, as well, in the future.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

But, ultimately, I do think that having that flexibility for municipalities will be a benefit—will be a benefit—for those communities who are dealing with crime. And it's important to note that the issues that communities deal with outside the city of Winnipeg are not all homogeneous when it comes to the crime issue. I know in speaking with representatives from the community of Thompson in the past, their issues with crime are different than they are in the city of Steinbach. Now, both would

argue, I think, that they have issues and have problem with resources and trying to deal with those issues, but they're not the same issues. And so, there needs to be flexibility. And there needs to be some ability for municipalities to model their own sort of police units where they choose to do that. And this is one—extending the cadets program into rural Manitoba—where they'll be able to have that extension.

I do also want to echo the comments of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) in commending the RCMP in working on this initiative. And, speaking with representatives of the RCMP in my region many times over the last number of years, I'm always impressed at their ability and their willingness to work with others to ensure that they can enhance community safety. Often, we look at these things, and maybe for justifiable reasons, but there are times when things are seen to be territorial and we feel that certain entities within our policing system are holding onto a territorial nature of their own powers. But that's not been my experience in dealing with the RCMP, and certainly in my local area, more than willing to have co-operative experiences with the Citizens on Patrol, for example, with auxiliary officers, and to have them involved within their milieu in policing as the eyes and the ears.

So I've spent some time with Citizens on Patrol. In our region, there's a number of different community-led organizations like that in the southeast, and I've had the opportunity to visit a few of them and spend a few evenings with the Citizens on Patrol in the city of Steinbach. And the police value them, and they work with them. There are obviously parameters that are set up for that, the sort of things that those who are working as a cop under the Citizens on Patrol Program can do, and they can't do certain things. They're intended to be the eyes and ears. They've got to report things to the police as they see them. And those are valuable things.

* (15:40)

Auxiliary officers that often go with the RCMP, in the case as it is in Steinbach, are also valuable entities. They are an attachment to the community that sometimes RCMP officers don't have the opportunity to do, because, within the RCMP context, there's a lot of movement within that organization. As people take on different posts, they have the opportunity to be in a community for often a limited period of time and then they move on.

Auxiliary officers can give some more of that stability.

It'll be interesting to see—and the minister and I spoke about this when we were doing the briefing on this bill—whether or not this program will be similar to the cadets program where we'd see a lot of young people going into the cadets program with the hope to ultimately one day be full-fledged members of the Winnipeg Police Service and whether or not, in fact, that'd be a similar kind of experience with this community officer program. I think that there certainly is going to be a number of individuals who might look at that as an opportunity.

I think it's also an opportunity for greater stability and to have people who are there longer term than often in the RCMP context when a person—or when the municipality doesn't have their own municipal force, when they're relying on a contracted service with the RCMP. So I think that there's going to be a good opportunity there as well.

My hope is that this will relieve some of the frustration that we've heard from different municipalities and the ability to get their bylaw officers, as they call them, up to a status that they need to within their community. There's been some frustration in the city of Steinbach around that for a number of years and the ability to ensure that their bylaw officer could do the sort of things that one would expect in the third largest city in the province of Manitoba. Also, in speaking with the Rural Municipality of Hanover, that's been an issue as well.

And so I've talked to and contacted those within the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. They believe this is a step in the right direction. I suspect there are things that could be done in the future that would enhance it, that would make it even stronger.

But it's a—it's a slow step. It's been a long time in getting here. There was—I remember in my early days in this House—not as many days as the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) but still longer ago than I sometimes imagine—there was a debate about bylaw enforcement and organizations who were doing bylaw enforcement and some of the challenges around that in the—in Manitoba and the validity of tickets, and we had frustration expressed by different municipalities. And that debate has continued on, maybe not with the same intensity, but there—that debate has continued on since those many years ago, and it's led us, I think, to this point.

So my hope was, of course, that this will help to not meet the needs of all the municipalities, but perhaps alleviate some of the stress on the policing regime that we have in different municipalities, in the city of Thompson, as sort of the first model to roll out, but in other municipalities as well. And I also hope that the government will continue to look at the needs of mainline policing and the—and stream policing within communities.

I know in just talking not too long ago to the local Steinbach RCMP detachment, again going through the numbers in terms of the number of calls that they are responding to and the number of charges that are laid coming out of the Steinbach RCMP detachment, it's—I wouldn't want to call it exponential growth, but it's significant growth. As the community grows in size and population, it's inevitable, not always the most welcome portion of—or part of growth that you want to see in a community, but it's an inevitable part of growth that you do get more actions on the criminal and the civil side and we see more issues around property damage, and we certainly see more cases of higher end crimes like robberies, things that were foreign to me when I was growing up in the community of Steinbach, but with growth and with change, those things happen.

But you have to respond to that as well, and I don't believe that the Steinbach RCMP has been added an officer for a very many years, and I would certainly hope that—there is, I know, deliberation at this time about officers going and being—additional officers being added to the rural RCMP complement. I certainly hope that the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) will recognize the need in these growing communities, and look to his colleague from Dawson Trail to express that need as well. He's certainly well aware of the growth and the issues that come with that growth, and I would hope that he'll add his voice to mine when the time comes, when it comes to that particular detachment and the need around that, because all of us in the southeast benefit from strong policing, and we benefit from strong policing out of a regional centre like the community of Steinbach, which, ultimately, polices—the rural detachment polices the vast majority of the southeast, and it can be a very long time before responses can come. Too often very serious situations, not just responding to traffic accidents which can be serious in and of themselves, but other serious situations. They can be domestic issues. They can be other criminal matters. So I would certainly hope that the

member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) and I could add our voices together in a spirit of bipartisanship to look for those resources for that detachment in the growing area there.

So I look forward to this legislation going to committee. We're prepared to see it move to committee today. I suspect there are other members of the House who would like to speak to it as well, but we're prepared to at least pass—sorry—this stage of the legislative process. I don't think the—our esteemed Madam Clerk was concerned we might be sitting in committee tonight. I'm just not suggesting that, but I prepare to see this move past this legislative process and stage and go forward into committee at the appropriate scheduled time.

With those words, I look forward to hearing the comments of other colleagues and others in this House.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): First of all, I want to put on the record, I want to thank the Minister for Justice for his work on this issue. This is an issue that has been of concern in my community for a number of years, and it really comes down to the fact that my community, the City of Thompson, took the initiative, a very significant initiative, to address what was seen as a gap in terms of policing in our community through bylaw enforcement officers.

We clearly identified right from the start there were some questions in terms of the legal framework they were operating under. I want to put on the record, by the way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I fully supported our mayor, Tim Johnston, and city council in that effort. Took the time to talk the bylaw enforcement officers, saw first-hand the kind of work they were doing, and I want to give the members here a bit of a sense of that to understand why this bill is so important.

But I do want to note that this was a priority concern for our city council. They met with our Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), they met with the Department of Justice, and I want to put on the record my thanks on behalf of my community to the Minister of Justice for listening to the people of Thompson, listening to the City of Thompson in bringing this legislation forward.

I do what to say as well, too, that I think it's a model we've seen in Winnipeg with police cadets. It's a model that could be applied not just in Thompson, but many other communities throughout

the province. And I want to give you some sense of what it can do and to some degree what was being done through the bylaw enforcement officers without this kind of framework, but what can be done in an even better way with police cadets with this kind of framework.

I first of all want to stress, by the way, the degree to which is not just about law enforcement. I mean, obviously this is The Police Services Amendment Act, but it talks—and I think this title is very appropriate—it talks about community safety officers. And I want to put on the record that that is not just perhaps the way some people might traditionally see it, some sense of protecting citizens against crime—well, it does have a role. It doesn't replace the RCMP. It does deal with minor offences; it does deal with non-Criminal Code offences. But I want to stress it also—and I saw this first-hand—this provides a framework for dealing with many people who are victimized, many people who are dealing with addictions issues, many people who are often in a very difficult situation.

But what I saw first-hand with the bylaw enforcement officers is the degree to which they established a connection with people, in many cases, people with addictions issues; some cases of people who are, certainly for a period of time, homeless; people that in many cases would be drinking alcohol in a public location, various other items that are certainly offences under the liquor act, might offend aspects of municipal bylaws. But what is particularly important is the degree to which, in many cases, they were able to limit the kind of harm that people could put themselves in themselves, and recognize, by the way, that in many cases much of the crime, for example, in our downtown area was often people that had addictions issues, homeless people who were, themselves, were victims—were victims—of violence.

* (15:50)

And I've had the experience, by the way, of knowing many of the people that might traditionally be seen in Thompson as being homeless, who often come from a community where they do have a home and have a family and when I know them for their life in their community. And I know first-hand people that, when they've come to Thompson, they'd been caught in a cycle of substance or alcohol abuse, and I've seen them be victimized. I've seen them be the victims of robbery, of assault. And one of the key elements that we're looking at with the police—public

service officer or the community safety officers—is the degree to which they can intervene before that: stop the consumption of alcohol in a public place, stop what might lead to an escalation from a small dispute into an assault, and in many cases prevent much more serious situations. So this is not only about dealing with public disorder when it happens. It's also about preventing more serious situations.

I do want to put on the record that this is not the only response that our government has put in place. I was very pleased with the degree to which we have moved significantly to deal with addictions issues in northern Manitoba. The AFM facility, a brand new facility put in place just a number of years ago. And I do want to put on the record that John Donovan just retired as the executive director of AFM in Thompson, and he was certainly a visionary in bringing that. But we also announced—and I look to the member for Assiniboine who was a key part of this—we also announced a very significant aspect that's been added to AFM, and that is essentially an in-facility detox facility. And that's important, because anyone that deals with addictions will tell you that what you need is for people to stabilize, to get off the substance they're addicted to and be able to move towards treatment. We put in place a detox facility, and I want to put on the record that there were many people that really pushed for this, certainly with our city council, one of whom was Oswald Sawh, who was actually just recognized for his role as a volunteer, but as a city councillor—and subsequently now he's no longer on city council—a strong voice for a detox facility. We have put it in place.

I want to stress as well that we have a further continuum of what we have identified as being the important issue here. Part of this, by the way—and anyone that's, well, deals with many of these issues will tell you, one of the key issues is a sense that people may have of not having hope in terms of the future. I've had many discussions with people involved in policing. One person that I've had tremendous discussions with—she's now a former police officer—Lois Cormier. She actually worked in the schools, police in the schools program. She worked closely with youth, many at-risk youth, many youth that were getting into difficulties. And you know one thing I've always said, and it certainly is our philosophy as a government, you know what, there are very few kids out there that are bad kids. There may be kids that get involved in bad situations, maybe do things that may be a problem.

But a lot of cases it—the root cause is often that lack of support, that social support, some cases family support, the lack of, and some—many cases the community support. We have to be there to work with them, and that's part of any solution in terms of crime.

Any solution that only deals with crime after it happens is to my mind only a partial solution. That's not our view as a government. It's probably one of the things that distinguishes us from members opposite, and I know the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), you know, he has to make up a statement to try and suggest him and I agree on something. I got to tell you, I'm not very hopeful we're going to agree on very much. A couple of days ago—and I've got the headline here, Province pours millions into southeast roads. We actually announced \$7 million of highway improvements in Steinbach, and he disagrees with that actually. He doesn't even agree with investments in his own community.

But I want to say that the member opposite, you know, there's not one person that doesn't feel that any crime—that one incident of crime is too much. But the difference between our side of the House and members opposite, is the degree to which they have one-dimensional approach, you know, a lot of tough talk. I'm not always sure it's followed up in practice, in terms of a real impact on crime—a lot of tough talk. But on this side of the House, we see it as a broad spectrum. What percentage of people that are in our penitentiaries, that are going through our justice system, have addictions or mental-health issues? It's a very significant part. I talk to people in the policing side, people in the court system, people in the probation system, I would say it's ranging upwards of 70 to 80 per cent, perhaps even more. So you've got to have not only treatment for that, you've got to get in, as the community safety officers can do, and enforce liquor regulations and stop harm that can occur on our streets. Yes, it's about harm reduction, and intervene before things escalate into more significant criminal situations.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

You know, yes, we have to deal with the reality, in my own community, and communities across the province, in terms of gangs. It's why, again, our government is taking the toughest stand of any government in the country when it comes to our gang—the gangs that exist. And I want to commend again, our Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan). Having seen what can happen, and, you know, it hits home

when you're an MLA for a community, when you live in a community, where you see people that you know, their kids, involved in what were essentially gang turf wars, and people killed—friends of mine, their kids killed, people that I watched grow up. Over what? Over the drug trade. And I say I'm proud to stand with our Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) and this government in taking a tough stand.

But that's where you really have to recognize that's, again, only part of it. Where do those gangs—where do they prey off? They prey off young people who feel they don't have any hope. And in my mind, when we're doing things like building a UCN campus and providing UCN programming, and developing the economy in my community—and when I say developing the economy, Keeyask and Conawapa and the Hydro developments, many of the other resource developments that are out there. And when I see the work that's going on in communities like Tataskweyak and, I know, you know, the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) was critical of the Keeyask Centre; it's actually being built.

You know, I do say to the members opposite, by the way, once in a while, one of them does show up in the North. I think they must take a wrong turn. I say to the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), I did say when I went to Steinbach, that it was worth the trip. I know it's a shorter trip. I know, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm not sure how many times the member for Steinbach has been in Thompson. By the way, I'm not sure if he's ever been in Thompson. He has been once?

An Honourable Member: Twice

Mr. Ashton: Twice, he's been in twice. You know, I've been in Steinbach many times and I do think it's important for all of us to get out and travel this province.

I am proud, by the way—I was really proud the other day to visit in the Tim Hortons in Steinbach. We got a great reception from people in the community. It's a fine community. I've spent a lot of time and I've been really honoured as minister to travel around the province. And you know, I've got to say to the member for Steinbach and members opposite, when you do that, you get some real sense of some of the perspective that people have.

I was very impressed, by the way, by the very progressive leadership in Steinbach. I have to put on the record, it's been a real pleasure to work with Mayor Goertzen. He has really moved forward many

files in his city. And I think one of the reasons why Steinbach is growing the degree it is, is because of the leadership coming from that community. And, I think, sometimes, by the way, we should give credit to that. Once in a while it might be nice if the member for Steinbach actually gave credit to the fact that it's been under our provincial government's 14 years that there's been growth in Steinbach. That's an absolute record.

But the point I'm referring to here is, a lot of those unique community dynamics that are out there, are best reflected in the ability of our municipalities to have, as is the case with this legislation, their own approach.

I look forward to the day in which this is passed, and I appreciate the opposition is going to be moving this forward. I think that's going to be very well received. Because with this particular initiative, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I do believe it will make a significant difference. It'll build on the work of the bylaw enforcement officers. It'll build on the work of our community. It'll provide the additional supports to deal with these kind of situations. It'll get people into reduced harm situations. I'll also get people connected with the help they need, with many of the social problems that are underlying this.

* (16:00)

And I do want to say that it, again, is a key part of our perspective as a government, is—it—you know, we don't just talk tough—we don't just talk, actually, we walk the walk. We support those—and we are supporting here. They'll get out and go onto our streets and help make a big difference in people's lives.

So I not only support this, I want to put this forward as a model of what our government is all about: working with communities, listening to communities and, in this case, bringing forward a significant new initiative that will not only benefit the city of Thompson—probably we will be the first community to benefit—it'll benefit, I believe, in time, communities throughout rural and northern Manitoba.

And let's, as we pass this legislation, dedicate ourselves, I believe, to—[interjection] Yes, and I'll tell you what I did say when it comes to crime. Any kind of crime is unacceptable. There are victims of crime, and, to my mind, those who are involved in crime, in many cases, are victims of many aspects, many social issues as well. The key thing is to get

them help, and particularly with our young people the key thing is to minimize any impacts that can happen before they get out of hand. And the key thing is to have a community-based policing system that allows the RCMP to focus in on their responsibilities. I know this is fully supported by the RCMP, developed with their participation.

But the RCMP needs to be dealing with the major crimes—the major crimes in my community, the unsolved murders that we're dealing with, the major crimes in terms of the gangs that are preying off the addictions of people in northern Manitoba. You know what? The bottom line is this is all about supporting, yes, our municipalities. It's also, though, allowing the RCMP in my community to do their job, and a fine job that they do. I've always had a lot of respect for the RCMP, not just, by the way, in terms of the—their role as a force in the North, but the degree to which they have many fine individuals, many I've got to know on a personal basis, who are very dedicated, and I know they support this.

So, in conclusion, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, again, as MLA for Thompson, thank you to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), thank you to all my colleagues. This is important to our community, and it's not just about Thompson, it's about Manitoba and it's about our vision for dealing with these issues, which is a vision that looks at all of the elements, not just tough talk on crime, but tough action both on crime and on the causes of crime because that's what the New Democratic Party is all about.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, you know, this bill, which provides for the role and the appointment of community service officers in municipalities, is a typical NDP bill in that it takes an idea which could be potentially quite a good idea but unfortunately doesn't put the kind of framework that you need to make sure that this program is going to work well and doesn't put in place the evaluation and outcome measures that would be important to make sure it's actually working when it starts.

It is a, you know, typical, superficial approach to a problem by the NDP without going into the details to make sure that it works adequately. Let's take an example. You know, we've put in place a framework for having community service—safety officers. We—the bill provides for terms of agreement, which deals with all sorts of aspects of the program but doesn't deal with whether people who are employed in this program have to be screened for such basic things as

whether they've had child abuse checks or whether they've had police record checks.

I think that, you know, we're dealing with safety, but we're also dealing with people and we're dealing with children and we're dealing with vulnerable people who may have addictions or mental illnesses, and we're not doing even the basic background record check that you would expect. There's not even a provision in this bill to make sure that's included in the agreement. And, you know, what kind of a—you know, a bill is this which misses some really essential elements?

Let's move on to look at training. In this case, there is a provision here that the minister may make regulations respecting community safety or officer programs, including regulations respecting the ongoing training of community safety officers. Well, normally you would have some training before you have people acting as community safety officers, and so one would have thought that there would be provision and requirement for some level of training or experience before individuals are appointed in this position or requirement that there be training before people put in—on the front lines and put in positions where there are responsibilities but also risks.

Now, there is a provision that a person must receive some training on crime prevention but we have just heard the minister, the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), talking at great length about how this program will have community safety officers dealing with people with addictions, dealing with people with mental health issues and trying to prevent crime.

And nowhere in here have we any requirement for training, of understanding addictions and dealing with people with addictions or dealing with people with mental health issues. For example, how many times in the last several years has it come up that people in, you know, providing safety in communities haven't had sufficient training in dealing with people with addictions and mental health and yet it's not even in this bill. I don't know what the member for Thompson is trying to suggest in supporting these roles without actually providing that there would be the training that one would expect.

Thirdly, if you've got people who are on the front lines of safety issues in Thompson and other places and as, you know, has already been alluded to, Thompson is an area where there have been very significant problems with gangs and with safety

issues. And if you're going to put people on the front lines, they're going to be dealing with emergencies of various sorts. There needs to be some sort of protocol for people who are community safety officers dealing with emergencies, you know, what are their responsibilities clearly, what role should they have, what should they not be doing. You know, this is pretty important, in terms of making sure that there is adequate delineation of the roles and responsibilities of the community safety officers.

It's not in here in the provisions to make sure it's, you know, laid out—are not precise enough that we are really assured that this sort of material is going to be there to make sure that we're, you know, handling things in the best way, in providing a program which is going to work, and not a program which is itself going to get into trouble and add to risks. There is not provision in here, and there should have been, for ongoing assessment evaluation of this program. Putting in place a, you know, program for community safety officers, great, but let's make sure that we're moving quickly to have a really good assessment of this, as it is moving out so that we're doing good things and not making a lot of mistakes.

In the past, this government has been known for making a lot of mistakes, even when they have good ideas. And so, I mean, I think this is a concern here. There are no provisions here for an ongoing check on what the costs are on this program. Surely, Mr. Speaker, you know, in an age where we need to be very concerned about the fiscal responsibility and probably never more so than with the current government who has been, you know, spending without looking at the cost effectiveness of what it's doing, spending without evaluating on an ongoing basis what the costs are and whether this is working in a cost-effective way.

* (16:10)

And here we have again an example of an NDP government not setting out in place an approach that will assure us that there's going to be a rigorous, ongoing assessment of the program, the costs of the program and, of course, the benefits where it's saving costs. But unless we've got this right put into the program how it's going to be done, we know from previous experience that this NDP government is not likely to do it.

Putting people on the front lines as community safety officers and putting them in emergency and potentially difficult situations where you're dealing with people who are—have been drinking a lot,

people who have been—have mental health and addictions issues, you know, this is not just as simple as hiring somebody with no experience and putting them out on the street and hope that it's going to work. You want to make sure that we're managing the risks, that you're screening people so that you're not putting people who have anger problems and so on out on the street in difficult situations and creating more risks than you're solving.

One of the problems in other centres where there've been community safety officers has been a—you know, an issue of what one might call scope creep. And here what we're talking about is that many other jurisdictions have found that the community service—safety officer program is set up and then, in not very much time, it's operating—no longer operating with its—within its defined parameters. And so, before you know it, because you don't have things set out carefully in terms of what people's roles and responsibilities are, what their training is, that you have not only scope creep but I would suggest that there is risk creep because you're putting people in situations where they don't have the adequate training to deal with them well and these are potentially dangerous and very serious situations which require people with significant skills. They need clearly to be working with police officers, but they may need to be working with paramedics and firefighters in dealing with situations.

And so, you know, this is an important role, we hope that it's going to work very well, but, you know, this is typical NDP stuff that they haven't set out the parameters very well and this bill could have been a whole lot better than it is.

So I hope that is if—as it proceeds through second reading and that the NDP will bringing forth some amendments to improve this bill and to ensure a—give us some assurance that it's indeed going to be a workable, practical and effective bill. Thank you.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 31 today following the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and the—my colleague, the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), who made some very, very valid and important points.

And I want to say at the outset that I think all parties in this Legislature actually want to do what works and what is actually established as best practice. So the question then becomes why doesn't that actually happen in real life.

For example, some 25 years ago in the United States we had Ronald Reagan as the President and he adopted a three-strikes-and-you're-out policy which really ended up developing into a private prison system in the United States—corporate prisons—and what happened, Mr. Speaker? We loaded—they loaded the prisons with people to the point where the jurisdictions—the states like Texas and the Carolinas—couldn't afford the system anymore. And that's the way Conservatives in this country—particularly Mike Harris in Ontario and other Conservative governments—have followed as well.

And the reality is that all Reagan had to do at the time was to study best practices across the world and he would have discovered that in Europe—in countries in Europe, the crime rate is actually fairly low. The murder rate is actually low, and they did not set up private prisons and corporatize, privatize the prison system.

So, after 25 years, the Americans themselves have discovered that this three-strikes-and-you're-out policy doesn't work. Even Newt Gingrich, before he declared and ran for president of the—for the Republican nomination a couple of years ago, even he came around to the view that what they were doing in Texas and what they were doing in the Carolinas with the drug courts and changing their approach to crime was not only getting results, was lowering the crime rate, but was saving them huge amounts of money in prisons.

So while all this was happening and Newt Gingrich was becoming a progressive on this issue, you know, what was happening in Canada? You had a federal government that was totally ignoring what was happening in the world, the bad example of the United States with increasing crime and increasing costs versus Europe with lower costs and lower crime, and what did they do? They decided to follow an outdated Republican mode in the United States and build more prisons in Canada.

And also they did some other things that were, I think, regressive. For example, they closed down the prison farms. We had, I think it was, six prison farms across Canada, one of them being in Kingston, and by all accounts this was a very, very good system for people in prison to get close to, you know, caring for animals, farm animals, taking care of the dairy, producing milk with the dairy cows on the prison farm. Well, what happened? At the end of the day, they sold off the lands and they shut down these farms. Now, how is that helping to rehabilitate

people and keep them out of prison rather than having them come back in?

So I think that, you know, any government of any stripe has to be less ideological and more committed to looking at what actually works and what is actually a best practice and not just say, oh, because, you know, the NDP tried it here or the Liberals tried it there, well, you know, we're not Liberals, we're not NDP, we're not going to do it. I think you have to look at what's best practice.

And a really good example of best practice was the auto suppression theft program here in Manitoba, and has since been followed by other jurisdictions. But we had, during the Filmon government, the Filmon years, we had increasing levels of car theft, and it was becoming an epidemic. And there were people that wanted—I remember Kevin Lamoureux, when he was here, he wanted to set up bait cars, and the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) wanted the bait car program. I mean, at least they were looking at other options. But what we did here in Manitoba, what the NDP did, was they ended up adopting a concept that actually worked. They set up the gang suppression system, and they also had immobilizers—the requirement for immobilizers installed in cars. They gave MPIC credits for doing that, and guess what happened, Mr. Speaker? We saw results, and now we have very, very low auto thefts in Canada as a result. And other provinces, at least a couple of years ago, were looking at Manitoba, what Manitoba had done, and were looking at following our system. And the best practice is there.

You—all you have to do is look at Europe, look at countries in Europe and look at their statistics on murder rates, on crime rates, and you will get a much better idea of where to go following that system than looking at the American system. I'm not saying you just disregard totally everything in the American system, but certainly you should be looking at a worldwide view on this, and I don't think that the Conservatives are looking at that at all. As a matter of fact, they call themselves tough on crime, but the reality is that the reality doesn't bear out their tough-on-crime moniker.

* (16:20)

Now, in Manitoba, we have a first—now, on February 24th of this year, we announced for the first time in North America the Hells Motorcycle—Hells Angels Motorcycle Club has been listed as a criminal organization, eliminating the need to repeatedly prove this designation in the enforcement of

provincial laws. And we note that other jurisdictions are already looking at our legislation. Now, let's assume for a moment that the Conservatives really are tough on crime. Then why, Mr. Speaker, do we have all these Conservative governments out there who haven't figured this one out yet? You know, they say the NDP is not tough on crime. Well, here is an example where we're leaders. We're leaders in the world leaders in this particular area.

And so this is something that we—you know, it's a moving target. Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) knows this very well, that whatever laws, you know, Manitoba or any other jurisdiction brings in, you have—the criminal element is able to hire expensive lawyers and challenge those laws. So it's a really a cat-and-mouse game with the goalpost moving throughout the years. So we can have a good system today, but it's got to be monitored, it's got to be updated, because the criminals have a lot of resources, and they know how to defeat the system.

But we never saw this from the Conservatives. In all the years they were the government, we never saw initiatives like this. We lobbied the federal government to make laws to eliminate the two-for-one remand credits, cracked down on gun crimes, created an offence for using the Internet for purposes of luring children, and other options that we, this NDP government, lobbied the federal government to bring in.

So don't ever believe for a moment that an NDP government can't be tough on crime. But we're not only tough on crime, but we're smart on crime.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on Bill 31? Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question before the House is second reading of Bill 31, The Police Services Amendment Act (Community Safety Officers).

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

Bill 10—The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed to call Bill 10, The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Amendment Act.

Hon. Erna Braun (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Jobs and the Economy, that Bill 10,

The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la prévention des incendies et les interventions d'urgence, now be read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Braun: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak again in respect to The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Amendment Act. This bill will strengthen the act's penalty provisions in effort to help with enforcement of the act and its main regulation, which is the Manitoba Fire Code.

Manitoba's Office of the Fire Commissioner has primary responsibility for administration of the act, while municipalities and other local authorities are responsible for the majority of fire code enforcement across the province. The amendments contained in this bill will significantly increase maximum penalties for offences under the act, as well as bring in the ability for the Fire Commissioner to issue administrative penalties in cases of non-compliance with an order issued by the Office of the Fire Commissioner or a local authority.

Currently, maximum penalties under the act for first offences are only \$1,000 for an individual and \$5,000 for a corporation. This bill significantly raises those fines to \$125,000 for non-compliance for an individual and \$250,000 for a corporation. If an individual is found to be in non-compliance a second time, the fines are raised from \$10,000 to \$250,000. If a corporation is found to be in non-compliance a second time, the fines are raised from \$25,000 to \$500,000. Manitoba will be the second province in Canada to raise its maximum corporate fines to \$500,000, following Alberta. It is expected that these changes will improve compliance with the act and regulations and ensure that orders are obeyed in a timely manner. And, with the ability to lay administrative penalties, the Office of the Fire Commissioner and local authorities will be able to enforce compliance without the lengthy process of a conviction or maximum fines.

As we all know, fires can have devastating consequences. Given the purpose of the Manitoba Fire Code is to reduce the likelihood of fires and to mitigate the damages when they do occur, improving compliance with the fire code's requirements can help save lives and property. We have consulted with the major stakeholders that have enforcement responsibilities under the act including the Winnipeg fire and paramedic service, the Brandon fire

department and the Thompson fire department, as well as the Manitoba Association of Fire Chiefs and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, all of whom are in support of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on this bill?

Is the House ready for the question?

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I move, seconded by the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 37—The Public Schools Amendment Act
(Connecting Schools to the Internet)**

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Mr. Bjornson), that Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Connecting Schools to the Internet), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Allum: I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Connecting Schools to the Internet). This bill allows school divisions to partner to bring broadband Internet into schools.

Rural and northern communities often have difficulty in getting reliable access to high-speed Internet, and this means that there are many people in Manitoba that do not get to benefit from the connectedness that the Internet brings to our province. As more and more businesses move services online, it means that there are some people that may miss out on an important job or other opportunities because they were simply unable to access the information they needed.

This accessibility issue is a problem for many reasons, but when schools are unable to get reliable access to high-speed Internet, it means that there are students in our schools that are not getting these benefits. Increasingly, people engage and connect online; information is shared and ideas flow. Colleges and universities offer courses online, and there is a wealth of information that is available at the click of a button. It is important that our students can get engaged online and have access to tools, resources and knowledge to help them learn and

grow and help them get access to resources and information to get a good job here in Manitoba.

Bill 37 is about helping connect those students to this online world by ensuring that school divisions are able to enter into economical, cost-effective partnerships to bring broadband to their schools and students. Specifically, it amends The Public Schools Act to allow school boards to enter into cost-sharing agreements for the installation of fibre optic networks, broadband, to establish or improve a school's connectivity to the Internet.

I think it is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that, under the bill, school boards will be required to give priority to partnerships with other public bodies. This means the school divisions will have to look to partner with other school divisions or with their local rural municipality or a Crown corporation or band council first to make sure that the public need and public interest is being served first. Since the concern of bringing broadband into rural and northern communities is a community one, this makes sure that all the players in the region are talking to each other so that the best price and the best service can be provided without redundancy.

* (16:30)

And we know that in some cases the school division may not be able to find a public partner for a particular school or there is a good deal to be made if several public partners get together with a private body to lay fibre optic into their community. Where it makes sense and where it is cost-effective and where it is right for the school divisions, students and the community partnerships can be formed. And make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, this isn't about getting into bad partnerships and putting TVs and advertising into classrooms like some have tried in the past. These plans will have to make sense, and they will have to be approved by the department. This is about bringing Internet to students, not making a buck on the backs of students.

And speaking of bringing Internet to students, at the dawn of the information technology age, the PCs sold MTS, taking away a public company with a mandate to serve the public interest. They rammed through legislation authorizing sale for less than market value, and the Leader of the Opposition personally voted in favour of privatizing MTS. This move hurt Manitoba families who say those rates are now going through the roof, almost doubling in cost, and it ensured that the people of Manitoba would have to wait for private companies to find a solid

business case to bring the Internet to rural and northern Manitoba.

Our government believes that all students should have access to the highest quality education, and this is one more tool we are giving to school divisions to help students thrive and live to their full potential. Reliable broadband Internet connectivity is essential for the 21st century classroom. It connects students to new ways of learning and gives them access to seemingly limitless resources and information. Internet access in our schools provides for a more equitable learning environment for students regardless of their geography, and it helps sustain and support rural and remote communities.

Nothing is more important to our children's ability to get a good job than a good education. Our government's commitment to add 75,000 workers to the labour force by 2020 starts with ensuring every child can get quality education and training opportunities. In these uncertain economic times, investing in education is a priority that ensures steady growth and good jobs in Manitoba.

We're focused on the things that matter most to families, like investing in education and students and building schools. Our commitment to education means more schools, more teachers, better communication with parents, and more focus on teaching students the skills they need to take advantage of the many opportunities Manitoba has to offer.

Since 1999, our government has invested nearly \$1 billion in capital to new schools, to renovate classrooms, gyms, science labs and shop classes. We are building and expanding schools in Amber Trails, Thompson, St. Boniface, Waverley Heights, Brandon, Steinbach, Sage Creek and Waverley West. I'm proud to say a brand new school just opened in Winkler, and we are spending over \$15 million to renovate and build 28 classrooms—new classrooms—in divisions across the province to help with smaller classes.

I think our record speaks for itself, and this is in stark contrast to the Conservatives who cut or froze Manitoba's education budget for years, cutting almost \$50 million from the budget. This led to the loss of 700 teachers, and we know that fewer teachers means larger classes and the undermining of our student education. And now the PC plan is to cut over \$500 million across the board. This plan to say no more—no to Manitobans means that new schools will not get built. It means that teachers will not be hired. It means that classes will not get smaller. It

means that our students—our children—will not get the quality education they deserve.

Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act, will give school divisions the tools they need to bring broadband into our classrooms. It will help school divisions partner with other school divisions, with municipalities and other public bodies to help ensure that all students will be able to benefit from the knowledge and opportunities that the Internet can bring. I encourage all members to support this important legislation and to help grow our economy, help our students get the skills and education they need to get good jobs and raise a family right here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate?

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It is my pleasure to put a few words on the record for Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act. Under Bill 37, school boards can enter into cost-sharing agreements to establish or improve Internet services in their own schools.

This bill encourages school boards to give priority to partnering with other public bodies. Mr. Speaker, the Internet has become a vital part of the education system. Teachers use resources from the Internet to aid their lesson plans, and students access the Internet for help with homework on a day-to-day basis. With improved Internet access in schools, there is virtually no limit to what students can learn. I am inspired by the many stories I've heard from teachers who are using the Internet to help their students learn challenging material, again, on a day-to-day basis. The Internet connects people. It can connect students to other students across Canada and internationally, giving students the opportunity to gain from others' knowledge and experiences.

Students at the post-secondary level are used to having vast library resources to do research for papers, projects and class presentations. Connecting schools to the Internet will enable secondary students to access far more material, allowing for a more diverse look at any given subject. The Internet is a critical tool for research at the post-secondary level. That makes it important for teachers at the secondary level to incorporate Internet usage into their lesson plans and show students how to use the Internet to and for project research and papers, Mr. Speaker.

While the Internet does a lot for students, there are also benefits for parents, teachers and all

stakeholders. For newcomers to Manitoba the interactive learning that the Internet provides can help students and parents with little or no English skills to learn English. The Internet also allows for more individual teaching techniques, which have proven to be a major factor in student achievement. Also, the Internet enables administrators and teachers to spend less time on administration and record-keeping. This would also give them more time to spend with their students. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, there are many benefits to connecting students to the Internet in various schools. But, in many parts of Manitoba, students do not have access to the Internet. In rural, remote and northern communities, Internet access is more difficult to come by, and it can be challenging for schools to offer this valuable resource to students.

This proposed legislation amends The Public Schools Act in order to allow school boards to enter into cost-sharing agreements to build or enhance Internet service to schools. The legislative amendments would grant the Department of Education and Advanced Learning the authority to review and approve proposals from school divisions to enter into cost-sharing partnerships with public or private organizations. School boards would give first priority to partnering with another public entity such as another school division, a Crown corporation, a band council or a municipality to help share the cost of broadband access before pursuing a partnership with a private organization. This bill aims to create the conditions for providing students with better access to digital learning resources especially in rural, northern and remote communities in Manitoba.

What is concerning here is the fact that the bill concentrates more power in the hands of the new Minister of Education. We are already seeing the Minister of Education blaming school boards for property school tax hikes forced on them because of the policies of the Minister of Education. This is creating an adversarial relationship between the government and school boards. This government is treating school boards like the enemy instead of working collaboratively with them to protect and strengthen education for Manitoba children.

This aggressive and adversarial approach is not going to improve education in Manitoba; it is only going to worsen it. Something we have already seen under this NDP government. School boards are being forced to make cutbacks and hike taxes on Manitoba families, all because of this NDP government's failure to protect education. This minister is firing

teachers and damaging the education system. Why would we want to give more power to this minister and this government considering how poorly they have managed the education so far, Mr. Speaker?

The PC Party believes in creating a better education system for all Manitobans. We acknowledge that this bill has some good features and, as well, many supporters in regards to various school divisions. Connecting students to the Internet is just one step in the right direction, but there's much more to be done to improve our education system. To improve our education system, we need to trust and empower local decision makers instead of concentrating power in the hands of this NDP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(16:40)

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): I appreciate the remarks from the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) in acknowledging that there's a—some very good aspects to this bill. I think it's an excellent bill, myself.

Probably going to be a little bit more restrained. I don't know if the members opposite are planning to support this bill or not. I hope they are. We—the member suggested that the Internet is something that is very valuable and needed in a modern classroom and in a modern educational environment. So I'm a bit loath to address some of the partisan remarks he made about the minister and about our government and about our policies, broadly speaking. So I'm a little loath to get into partisanship for—the reason is I'm not exactly sure how they're going to vote, although I'm pretty convinced that this bill will pass, given the mandate of the government.

So, with that in mind, I will talk for a few minutes here about my experience as the minister of Education and Training in this province and the absence of the people of Manitoba to be able to provide Internet services into remote rural, particularly, communities, northern communities—the absence of a policy lever to do that, that was the direct result of the buying and selling by the Charleswood-Tuxedo family compact of the Manitoba Telephone System.

And I would invite Manitobans to take a look at the board of directors of the Manitoba telephone system over the last number of years and the principals involved in the selling of that asset, once

owned by the people of Manitoba, an asset that would have been a tremendous tool for the people of Manitoba to have today as we're discussing this bill and would have been a tremendous asset for the people to have had when I was minister of Education and we were trying to connect rural schools and northern schools in rural communities and northern schools in northern communities to the Internet and to high-speed telecommunications.

That was removed. That was removed from the toolbox of Manitobans by members opposite, by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for—I—he used to come from Portage, I don't even know what he represents—Fort Whyte, you know, who was around the Cabinet table when the Charleswood-Tuxedo family compact sold the Manitoba Telephone System to themselves, thereby removing, as a policy tool, the Manitoba telephone system to deliver Internet telecommunications services to rural Manitoba.

Incidentally, rural Manitoba, who—the members are very fond of swaggering into coffee shops, as the former premier used to say in this House, Mr. Doer—Ambassador Doer—swagger into the coffee shops and say how well they represent Manitobans and how well they represent the people of Deloraine and Virden and Lac du Bonnet, and Reston and Pipestone and Minnedosa in my neck of the woods.

But every rural community who the members opposite and the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), when he sat around the Cabinet table, abandoned—and not only abandoned, but actually drove a stake right into their hearts in terms of being able to connect to high-speed telecommunications and the Internet, so that the very policy tool and the very Crown corporation that could have actually improved lives in rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba—improved the lives of children in the public schools in rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba—that policy tool and that Crown corporation was taken away and bought and sold by the Charleswood-Tuxedo family compact in this province.

So, you know, we do have, in fact, a necessity in Manitoba, and in all Manitobans, after losing that very valuable Crown corporation—obviously, very valuable—their stock prices went from 13 dollars to 40 dollars in—overnight, creating instant millionaires amongst the friends and families of members opposite and instant paupers amongst the rest of Manitoba in terms of this particular Crown. And the

legacy of that sale continues today by the very fact that we're having this discussion in this House, because we no longer have the capacity in the province of Manitoba to deliver high-speed Internet telecommunications into remote, rural and—not even remote, rural and northern communities.

So, I mean, there was, as I said, there was, you know, some kind words, if not action but words, put on the record by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko). But I think, you know, it's a—there's no substitute for veracity and reality and history when talking about high-speed Internet telecommunications in the province of Manitoba. There's no greater object lesson and no greater thing that can be remembered by the people of the province of Manitoba that members opposite and the Leader, the member from Fort Whyte, when they had the hands on the levers of power in those dark days that they had it, and they continue today with their \$500-million cut proposed this very year by members opposite. Nothing's really changed. They haven't seen a Crown that they wouldn't want to sell off to themselves, or buy for themselves, depending on what side of the transaction they're on—buyer or seller, it's the same people involved.

So the people of Manitoba have been done a very historic and grave disservice, obviously, by the sell-off of the Manitoba Telephone System and the very vehicle that could provide these services to rural and northern communities.

And it is—it's very—it's a very sad day. The sad day about the sell-off of MTS will continue for decades, because the impacts of that sale and purchase by the Charleswood-Tuxedo family compact was—is a historic event. It will have negative consequences for Manitoba for decades to come. Two decades—almost two decades after that sale, we're dealing with negative—some of the negative consequences of it right now, which is, again, the inability of the government of the day to access and utilize a Crown corporation to provide a public service to the people of the province of Manitoba.

You know, a large irony—I mean, there's an irony and also a tragedy involved with, again, the stock prices increasing 400 times in the matter of days, in fact, when the sale took place. It was so grossly undervalued before its sale and then reached its market price in the weeks and months after that sale, as I said, creating instant millionaires in the process amongst the buyers and sellers of the Manitoba

Telephone System which was a pretty close shop, in fact.

The removal of the public policy tool, really, is one of the greatest tragedies in this province's history. It was a great boon to those who made a windfall profit off of that buy and sale amongst each other. It was a great boon to those who profited tremendously by the fire sale of a Crown corporation, the Manitoba Telephone System. But, you know, it's more than that; it also speaks to—and I remember when we came into office in '99, one of the first things that we did, the Premier is the Finance minister who delivered 10 consecutive balanced budgets, a record that never before achieved in this province—certainly not by members opposite when they were selling off the telephone system to try and balance the books that they were managing at the time.

The sell-off of MTS wasn't only a windfall profit for the people who bought, and, again, I encourage people to take a look at the boards of directors of Manitoba Telephone System over the last 20 years. And there will be a lot of names familiar from this Chamber and the members opposite's party, the Conservative Party of Manitoba, and the relationship between the political party and the owners of the corporation, Manitoba Telephone System. But not only was there windfall profits made, it's also a glaring example of the myth of sound business practices and sound management. Imagine an Internet telecommunications company at the dawn of the telecommunications age, at the dawn of the Internet age, at a time when telecommunications is the—probably one of the, if not the largest, amongst the single largest most important cultural changes, economic drivers in history, which is undertaking a transformation of the—global society right now as we speak with Internet telecommunications firms and IT start-ups and IT successes like all the Facebooks and the Amazons and the LinkedIns and the Microsofts of the world. Imagine selling off that asset at the dawn of the 'telecommunications' age, selling off what was the patrimony of Manitobans, a Crown corporation that was established, a global player, with the infrastructure second to none, a world-class Crown corporation that the people of Manitoba owned and the people of Manitoba benefited from and the people of Manitoba would've benefited from today in linking up the rural and northern communities, rural and northern schools.

* (16:50)

Imagine somebody in this Chamber whose business is the Province of Manitoba, and whose responsibility is to the people of Manitoba, imagine the—well, you don't have to imagine, it's a fact. What does that say about people who are responsible in this province and managing the affairs of this province, selling this telecommunications company at the dawn of the Internet telecommunications age at a fire-sale price to themselves and making immediate windfall profits, making instant millionaires? The Jaguar dealership never had it so good. Again, to paraphrase our former colleague here, Gary Doer, Ambassador Doer, the Jaguar dealerships never had it so good, and the people of Manitoba never had it so bad, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Manitoba took it in the neck when members opposite and the Leader of the Opposition had the reins of power. And today, almost 20 years later, that legacy of that sell-off, that legacy of the utter—

An Honourable Member: Selling out.

Mr. Caldwell: You know, I'm, you know—

An Honourable Member: Of Manitobans.

Mr. Caldwell: Selling out of Manitobans, selling off the asset that could actually deliver the service to Manitobans. *[interjection]* And, Mr. Speaker, members opposite are chirping right now. There's quite a few rural members over there that will swagger into the coffee shops and tell their constituents about how well they represent their constituents. They sold out their constituents. They sold out their constituents five ways to Friday when they sold off the Manitoba Telephone System at the dawn of the 'telecommunications' age, and—*[interjection]*

My colleague says I should pass it on to another speaker right now. I think I've said enough. Mr. Speaker, I will be standing with our government, supporting this bill, and I will be reminding Manitobans to my dying breath just what sort of people the Conservative Party of Manitoba bring to this table in representing the interests of Manitoba. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, with great relief, I move, seconded by the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 33—The Apprenticeship Employment Opportunities Act (Public Works Contracts)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed to call Bill 33, The Apprenticeship Employment Opportunities Act (Public Works Contracts).

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum), that Bill 33, The Apprenticeship Employment Opportunities Act (Public Works Contracts); Loi sur les occasions d'apprentissage en milieu de travail (marchés de travaux publics), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Oswald: To remind the House, this act does indeed require the government and any public sector body designated in the regulations to develop and implement an apprenticeship policy. Under an apprenticeship policy, only contractors who employ apprentices or who have done so within the period specified by the policy will qualify for public works contracts. An authority must also ensure that its public works contracts contain a commitment by the contractor to employ apprentices during the time the contractor performs the work.

So, Mr. Speaker, we certainly do know that Bill 33 is going to focus on engaging companies and businesses—*[interjection]*—this is much better than the crickets—who haven't typically been involved in training 'apprentishes' and providing more opportunity for good jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we know that we have a very ambitious infrastructure agenda before us: \$5.5 billion over the coming years, which, of course, will result in 58,900 jobs for Manitobans. It's going to help boost our economy. But we know that when

we speak to members in industry that they themselves say that they have an intense need to have more availability of opportunity for apprentices to pursue their craft.

And, by bringing Bill 33 forward, we know that we're going to be able to have a very solid beginning in taking an existing policy and bringing it into legislation beginning with government and public works contracts. We know, as we expand the scope of this legislation, it will be done so only with consultation so that we can ensure that these industries and various sectors of our society that all have a genuine interest in offering more opportunities for apprentices to seek to pursue their craft and to pursue developing their skills in a trade will have more opportunities. We know that we have a great ability to expand the number of businesses in Manitoba that can offer opportunities for apprentices.

We want to continue to work them, but we also believe it's important for government to do its part, Mr. Speaker, which is why we're bringing this legislation forward, and I look forward to the support of all members of this House.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), the debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

* * *

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, could you canvass the House to see if there's agreement to call it 5 o'clock?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement of the House to call it 5 p.m.? *[Agreed]*

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 10, 2014

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	Members' Statements
Introduction of Bills	Jane Couch—Principals of Music Award Crothers 1821
Bill 49—The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act Swan 1809	Optimist Under 18 International Curling Championship Friesen 1822
Bill 206—The Cyberbullying Prevention Act Ewasko 1809	Safe and Affordable Housing in West Broadway Altemeyer 1822
Petitions	Jellicoe LaFreniere Wishart 1823
Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping Friesen 1809	Don Skorupski Bjornson 1823
Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Reversal and Referendum Rights Graydon 1810 Smook 1811	
Provincial Sales Tax increase— Effects on Manitoba Economy Pedersen 1810	
Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability Ewasko 1811	
Oral Questions	
Employment Rate Stefanson; Selinger 1812	
High School Teachers Ewasko; Allum 1813	
Minister of Education and Advanced Learning Ewasko; Allum 1813	
EMS Helicopter Services Driedger; Selby 1814	
ER Services (Virden) Piwniuk; Selby 1815	
Provincial Parks Martin; Mackintosh 1816	
Outstanding Warrants Goertzen; Swan 1817	
Child-Care Space Availability Gerrard; Selinger 1818	
Affordable and Social Housing Altemeyer; Bjornson 1820	
Applied Behaviour Analysis Treatment Wishart; Irvin-Ross 1820	
	ORDERS OF THE DAY <i>(Continued)</i>
	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS
	Second Readings
	Bill 18—The Business Practices Amendment Act (Improved Consumer Protection and Enforcement) Lemieux 1824 Howard 1825
	Bill 34—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (High-Cost Credit Products) Lemieux 1826 Schuler 1828 Wiebe 1829 Swan 1830
	Bill 3—The Witness Security Amendment Act Swan 1831 Goertzen 1833
	Bill 31—The Police Services Amendment Act (Community Safety Officers) Swan 1834 Goertzen 1835 Ashton 1838 Gerrard 1841 Maloway 1842
	Bill 10—The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Amendment Act Braun 1844

Bill 37–The Public Schools Amendment Act
(Connecting Schools to the Internet)

Allum	1845
Ewasko	1846
Caldwell	1847

Bill 33–The Apprenticeship Employment
Opportunities Act (Public Works Contracts)

Oswald	1850
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