



Third Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**

**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report  
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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Thirty-Seventh Legislature**

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ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 9, 2002

The House met at 10 a.m.

## PRAYERS

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

## GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

## House Business

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, could you please adjourn debate on Bill 14, and then following discussions with the House Leader, if there is time permitting, we will be calling existing legislation this morning. The intent would be to call the Supply Motion this afternoon.

## DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Resume debate on second reading, on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell), Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act (Public Schools Act Amended), standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer). Stand? Is there agreement for the bill to stand?

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Speaker:** No? Leave has been denied.

## Point of Order

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

**Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Official Opposition House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, is the Government now saying that we cannot stand the bill in the member's name? We have not had the time to do a full review of this act. The minister has just spoken on the bill. We are

saying that we would like it to stand so he has an opportunity, and here we are being refused by Government today to allow this bill to stand.

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, the comments from this side of the House were not to allow the member to stand, but we have indicated we have speakers who are prepared to speak, including the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett).

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we can resolve this by agreeing to allow it to remain standing in the Member for Minnedosa's name and then proceed to debate on this bill from other members.

So I just want to make it clear we were not saying that the member opposite should not have the opportunity to stand the bill.

**Mr. Speaker:** The process is I will ask once more if it is the will of the House to leave it standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa, and then we will need leave in order for members to speak. *[interjection]* No? Okay, you do not need leave.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there agreement for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer)? *[Agreed]*

Now members to speak.

**Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak for a few minutes on Bill 14, The Public Schools Modernization Act. I would like to focus at least my first comments on the word in the title "modernization."

Mr. Speaker, I believe it has been a long time since school division boundaries were actually changed. As we all know, there are currently 54 school divisions in the province. When amalgamation is complete, this number

will be reduced to 38, a reduction in total of 17. The modernization acknowledges that since the 1960s we have had changes in the population configurations, we have had changes in communications abilities.

As I mentioned I think in an earlier speech, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) and myself are members of the Gestetner generation. Perhaps, the Member for Lakeside is a member of the pen-and-quill generation, but not only has office technology changed from the fountain pen and filling the ink in the fountain pen from a bottle on the school table, which I remember, but to now where we have very modern technology to write with. Often we do not even have writing utensils; we have blackberries and blueberries.

**An Honourable Member:** I still use the feather.

**Ms. Barrett:** The Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) still uses a feather. This is good. We need to reflect and honour our heritage and our history.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, things have changed in the last 40 years. We need to recognize that. We need to ensure that how we configure our school divisions reflects the current situation in the province and also that our basic goal is to provide for a high-quality education for every child in the province of Manitoba from nursery school, where it is available, through Senior 4.

One of the techniques that we can do today, given the fact that we are in the 21st century with all the changes that have taken place, we looked at the fact that we need not have 54 school divisions, one of which had slightly over 200 students, with all of the administrative panoply of services and positions that a school division has. That is one example. There are other examples of the amalgamation process that can show as well that we are looking at the geography, we are looking at the history, we are looking at the local conditions, we are looking at what we can do today in making these decisions to amalgamate.

Our plan is based on the fact that not only do we need to modernize the services that we deliver and how we deliver services to students and the families and all of the citizens of the

province of Manitoba, but we need to look at efficient use of school funding.

We believe, and I am very confident that the outcome of our amalgamation process will prove that you can gain efficiencies through this amalgamation process. Mr. Speaker, you gain efficiencies while not only maintaining, but actually enhancing the services that can be provided to students.

We want to focus first and foremost on the students in the classroom. That must be and is the major basic fundamental principle of a school system, and everything else should reflect and enhance that basic proposition and that basic proposal, that basic principle. Why do we need to ensure that we have a modern school system, that we have a modern delivery service system, that we recognize these changes that have taken place over the last number of decades? Why? Because only through that efficient use of resources can we ensure that every child has the quality of education they have a right to, and we have to ensure that because, to use a very trite but actually very accurate phrase, our children are our future.

\* (10:10)

If we do not provide, to the best of our ability, the resources focussed where they need to be focussed in the schools, in the classrooms, in supporting teachers and students, then we are not doing the job that we must do to train and educate the next generation to be good citizens. I think the concept of citizenship is something that we have to be very cognizant of. You can have book learning, which is incredibly important, book learning, computer learning, but without a good classroom composition, without the facilities there to ensure that students have what they need, they are not going to have the capability or the opportunity to have the best possible education.

That means that you need to have a school division that is of a size to be able to provide not just the basics, which are critical, but also the enhancements that make the school experience one that allows as many students to participate in as much of the life of the school and the community as they possibly can, to make sure

that they have the opportunity to participate in art, in music, in sports, in all of those things that enhance and make for a well-rounded educational experience.

We are also concerned with the long-term financial viability of the school divisions and our school system. We believe, and I am confident that the amalgamation process as is outlined in Bill 14 will enhance that. You cannot have a good solid educational foundation without a good solid fiscal foundation and financial foundation. We believe that the amalgamation process, as is undertaken in Bill 14, is designed to achieve those financial as well as educational benefits.

We are not just putting this out into the void. We have been working for months and months with school divisions, with school trustees, with school administrators, to ensure that the process is as smooth as it possibly can be. This Government believes in consultation, it believes in partnership, it believes in figuring out how you can look at each situation, not just to plug it into a particular hole but to ensure that it meets the local requirements, so that students throughout this province can have the kind of quality education they deserve and have the right to.

We are looking at administrative targets that will ensure that the maximum amount of resources, human and financial, are focussed on the school classroom and those attendant activities that provide for a well-rounded educational process. We will continue to work with the school divisions, with teachers' groups, with school trustees, with administrators, with financial officers, with parents, with the community at large, because we all have a vested interest, a deep and abiding interest in the education of our students, in the education of our children as a whole.

We believe that this bill, as it is implemented, will provide for that kind of high-quality classroom- and education-focussed attention that we feel is incredibly important for the children of today and the children of tomorrow. We believe that this is a modernization bill that will enhance the quality of education for every student in our province. I am very proud to have been a part of this process.

In concluding my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that it has been a pleasure to work with the Department of Education, the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), Cabinet and caucus colleagues in preparing this piece of legislation which I highly recommend to the House. Thank you.

**Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin-Roblin):** It is indeed a pleasure to rise today and put a few comments on the record on this very important piece of legislation that our Minister of Education and Training has brought forth for debate in this House.

It is already producing some interesting flailing on behalf of members opposite. I have only been here since 1995. That is just a short seven years, but I do not remember any other time when a party has voted against a bill on first reading, voted against the actual discussion of a bill coming before a House. *[interjection]* It tells me something all right. The Member for Morris (Mr. Pitura) says that tells you something. Well, it sure does tell me something. It tells me that the folks across the way are afraid to debate this bill in the House on behalf of the people of Manitoba. When you vote against on first reading of this bill, that speaks volumes as to the commitment to education on behalf of the people across the way.

Mr. Speaker, if you had a problem with your vehicle, if your car was not working properly, would you take that car to a mechanic who does not know anything about fuel-injected engines? You would not. If you have got a modern car, you would not take it to a mechanic who only understands cars from the 1960s. You would not take it to a mechanic that did not keep himself up to date on the latest in developments in the automotive world. You would not do that. Why do we do that to our schools?

Mr. Speaker, would you take your children to a doctor today in the modern world, in the 21st century, would you take your child to a doctor who has not read a single medical journal since 1960? I do not think any responsible parent would do that. Would you take your child to a doctor who is in the dark ages in medicine, who has not kept up with the latest in research, who

has not gained anything through the experience of practising medicine? Would you take your child to that doctor? I would not. I hope the members opposite would not. We would take our child to a doctor who has kept up with the latest in modern medicine, latest in modern equipment, the latest in modern practices, somebody who has kept up with the modern world. Why do we not do that for our schools?

Would you enrol your student in a classroom where the teacher still teaches the same way the teacher taught in 1960? Would you take your child to a school that has not progressed since the 1960s? Would you take your child to a school that has a workroom with Gestetners and Dick and Jane books on the shelves without a single computer anywhere to be found in the school, a school in which the principal encourages teachers to teach like it was in the 1960s? I would hope not.

I would not, because do you know what has happened since the 1960s? There has been a whole lot of change happen. There has been a whole lot of improvement not only in the field of automotives, not only in the field of medicine but in the field of education. I was watching the hockey game last night, and, thinking about my speech today, I could not help but note the changes even to a simple thing like a hockey game. In 1960 goalies never wore masks. They have improved now. It is the 21st century. So has education. There were six teams when my Leafs last won the Stanley Cup in '67. We have grown since then. We have grown and we have grown, and we have improved and we have modernized, and we have gotten better and better. I invite members opposite to do the same. I invite members opposite to reach out and grab the 21st century and come along with us on this bill.

I think the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) should know better than anyone. When the Member for Lakeside taught in that one-room school, that was okay in the 1940s and the 1950s. That was okay in the 1960s, but it is definitely not okay for the 21st century, and I think deep down the members across know that. I think deep down the members across know that the modernization of our public schools administrative structures has to take place. I

think there are some over there who are contemplating coming with us into the 21st century with this bill. I would encourage them to do that.

\* (10:20)

We have to learn from our experiences, we have to learn from the research, and that experience and that research is telling us that we need to make sure that all our efforts in this Legislature are directed to the classrooms which will benefit the students the most. We on this side of the House have put into the public schools record levels of funding three years in a row. Not the old days, not days gone by when the best that the public schools could look for was a freeze in a pre-election budget on behalf of the previous government. Not those bad old days when there was cut after cut after cut, and we as teachers and superintendents and trustees had to administer those cuts that were signed off on the Tory government's Education Minister's desk. Those days are gone. We are moving on to the 21st century with modern public schools.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say some good things about the people in my area that have really shown leadership in the area of school amalgamations.

**An Honourable Member: Forced.**

**Mr. Struthers:** The Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) spouts off that they were forced. He should come up to our area sometime and take a look at what has actually happened, what is the reality in the 21st century in the Parkland area. He should talk to the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), who in his area has a voluntary amalgamation taking place between Pelly Trail—*[interjection]* The member just says he has one in his area. Why would he then shoot off from his desk about, oh, it is forced?

Mr. Speaker, in our area on November 8 we announced a directed amalgamation with parts of Duck Mountain School Division going into Frontier, parts of Duck Mountain School Division going into the Dauphin Ochre school area. After that occurred, the biggest part of our amalgamation in the Parkland area occurred voluntarily when the trustees from the

Intermountain School Division had the foresight to approach the Dauphin Ochre school area and say, let us sit down and talk about what makes sense for our children. They did that. Their talks were fruitful. They showed real leadership in the communities. They went to parents. They had meetings in each of their communities, and they formally approached and then voted unanimously to voluntarily amalgamate with the larger Dauphin Ochre, Duck Mountain area.

They have been working diligently ever since to make this a success. They are working diligently to make sure that they can meet the deadlines that are placed within this whole amalgamation plan that we have put forward. They have made some very good process in terms of setting up the new Mountain View School Division in terms of numbers of trustees for each community in the new Mountain View School Division. They have done some good work, some negotiations, some tough negotiations at times, but they have settled on an administrative structure that they can agree to with a review down the road, just to make sure it makes sense for their area. They have been working very hard in our area to make sure that this amalgamation is successful.

The other thing that is a strength of this legislation and this whole approach to amalgamation is that it allows for local people to reshuffle themselves into a structure that makes a lot more sense than the old structures, which were good back in the sixties but are out of touch now and need to be modernized. We have an opportunity as local people in our area now to evaluate what went right in the past and carry it forward, do away with some of the things that were not so productive, and change the way we deliver education locally to benefit kids in the classroom.

It does not make any sense from my perspective to continue to put more and more money into education if it is only going to be directed towards administrative costs. That is why we have provided a cap on administrative costs. Maybe members across the way think that administrative costs should continue to rise. Maybe that is the position of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray), but that is not my position. That was a position that was

acceptable back in the 1960s but not in the 21st century. Manitobans expect more than that.

We have set in our area an administrative level of 4.5 percent, and we have divisions now working very hard to make sure that they are within that 4.5 percent admin cap and that the bulk of that money will be transferred into classrooms to benefit the students. The other thing that I like about the approach that we have taken to amalgamation is that we have taken the approach that we need to enhance, we need to strengthen the role of parents and we need to include parents more in the education of their children.

We have done this in a number of ways. The one that I want to highlight in particular deals with the roles of parent advisory councils. I can tell you that parent advisory councils are absolutely critical in the success of a community school. Parent advisory councils keep the principal, the vice-principal, the teachers, the superintendent, keeps everybody up to date and in touch with what the needs of the community are, not just the needs within the local community, but the needs within the larger Manitoba community. I think the parent advisory councils have played a tremendous role in this over the last number of years, and we want to make sure that we enhance their ability to continue to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are other people who are chomping at the bit to speak a little bit about education and this bill today, so I just want to wrap up by reissuing the invite that I gave earlier to the members across the way. The structure that we are leaving behind was fine in the 1950s. It was okay in the 1960s. It began to lose touch as time has gone on. It is the year 2002. It is time we modernized again, as we have done in the past, as we have shown we have had the ability to do in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, previous governments, Conservative governments, Liberal governments, New Democrat governments have all, in the past, taken a very forward look at this amalgamation. We have all had our chance as Duff Roblin did, back in the 1960s, to move on and progress and to bring education forward. This is our opportunity as legislators to do that.

We have a chance to modernize our education system, to better it for all those involved but, in particular, the students who will be the main benefactors of this legislation.

So I invite members across the way to drag themselves up into the 21st century, to make sure that they do not fall behind the rest of us and the rest of the province, here in Manitoba. Get with it. Get into the 21st century. Let us modernize our education system once again. Thank you.

\* (10:30)

**Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Rossmere):** Mr. Speaker, I feel honoured to speak to The Public Schools Modernization Act. I would like to congratulate the Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell) for this very progressive step in education. I have been in education most of my life, and I am therefore delighted to put some comments on the record.

I began my teaching career in a one-room school. Today these small rural schools have been absorbed by larger school divisions. I enjoyed my years of teaching in a one-room school. The rural school played an important part or role in education on the Prairies. The one-room school was not only the educational institution on the Prairies but also the centre of the community for social activities. It was the centre of the community.

I attended a rural school for eight years and taught five years in a rural school, so I am very familiar with the role the one-room schools played in society. I enjoyed the one-room school. I become very nostalgic when I speak about the rural schools. I especially want to recognize some great trustees that I was responsible to in the first years of teaching. As I taught in the Homewood area, near Carman, some of the trustees that I remember are George Rempel, Jake Riedeger, Art Lass, Jack Swain, Raymond Findlay, Ben Dyck. These are just a few of the great trustees that I worked with as I was a teacher in the one-room school. I commend the work of all the trustees who served their community for many years in the field of education.

All these trustees knew that a new era was on the horizon. Times were changing, and schools had to meet the needs of society. All these trustees did not fight change. They did not fight amalgamation; they went with it.

Mr. Speaker, society is not static and we have to move on. The society changes, the school system has to change and to meet demands of the times and so, I might say, meet the demands of the 21st century, as the previous speaker has already said. Today, society and schools have new challenges in the 21st century. So we have to move on and bring about school division amalgamation. We have to modernize our school system.

A member of the Duff Roblin government brought about amalgamation or consolidation in 1959, in early 1960s, and I as a teacher, a young teacher then, supported that. This was a real progressive move for education and Duff Roblin's government is recognized for this step in education. I might point out that Duff Roblin faced some opposition and challenges to his modernization, his amalgamation of school divisions. He was prepared to move on despite some opposition. Today we look upon what Duff Roblin did as a progressive step, and I think the present school division amalgamation is also a progressive step for education and our youth. It is our youth that will benefit the most out of this bill.

School division amalgamation is well received in Rossmere. Educators, students, parents appreciate this move in education. As I go door-to-door or at the coffee shop, there is very positive support for amalgamation, and as I look across the way, people in Opposition are not denying that. They know it is there. A former superintendent met me just recently and he appreciated, he supported this move. I meet school principals, I meet trustees, I meet parents, teachers, they all support school board amalgamation. There is great support all over Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, all the way from Melita to Boissevain, Beausejour, Souris, Carman, Steinbach and communities all over Manitoba support amalgamation. There will be some opposition from across the Chamber, but I think it is most important to have the people of Manitoba supporting this change in education.



That is the most important thing. In a democracy, it is people that will call the shots in the end.

The Opposition had the Norrie report in the 1990s but did not move on it because they had fear of the political fallout. They did not have the political will to put it in. The Filmon government was not as progressive as the Roblin government and did not move on this important initiative in education.

Education is an important matter to this Government. This Government believes it is an investment in youths, investment in our society. A good education is very important to society and especially to the economy. Mr. Speaker, our investment in Red River College, in our universities, is an indication that this Government strongly believes that education is important in this changing world. It is important to the 21st century.

We have kept up funding equal to the growth rate of the economy, we have increased our property tax credit from \$250 to \$400, and we are also decreasing the educational special levy on property by 10 percent. The cuts of the 1990s are gone, and we are rebuilding our infrastructure that took a real beating in the 1990s.

I would like to now address some of the changes amalgamation will bring about, some of the structural changes. The current 54 school divisions will be reduced to 38 when amalgamation is complete. We will have reduced the total number of school divisions by 17, and 28 divisions are affected by amalgamation. Amalgamation reduces the total number of trustees by 100. We have reduced the maximum number of trustees in each division to 9 from 11. A minimum of 5 trustees is required.

Our amalgamation plan is balanced and modern and as a result shall not create a large upheaval within the public school system. In Rossmere, where I am, the people do not feel there is any upheaval. They realize that the education in the classroom will continue like before. We have taken a moderate approach with a reduction of about a third of divisions affected in all regions of the province.

Our Government is respectful of local history and communities while at the same time creating efficiencies with large divisions. Our approach has been, with few exceptions, to merge existing divisions rather than create new divisional boundary lines through the province.

Administrative costs have also been a concern for the Government. Amalgamation would limit redundancy and waste in administration and allocate more resources to our children. Tax money will move from the boardroom to the classroom. By creating larger school divisions, we help equalize resources and lessen inequities between divisions. Larger divisions generally have more resources for programs and services. Most divisional boundaries were created in the early 1960s when transportation and communication were much more difficult.

I would like to point out the goal of amalgamation. Amalgamation is to be done for educational reasons, to achieve greater equity in programming and to redirect resources to teaching and learning. The ultimate goal of amalgamation is simple: more resources for students. By reducing administrative costs, we provide greater resources to our province's children, and our children will benefit.

There will be benefits. Let me list some of these: more support generally available to schools for more diverse programming; more technology support; more support available for counselling service and clinicians; more flexibility in dividing students and resources between elementary, middle, and high school.

Larger divisions offer students a wider range of programs. Children will receive a higher quality of education as a result of the increased number of programs available. Examples include vocational studies, music and arts, computer and technology support, and more counselling and support for special needs.

Amalgamations are being done to benefit children. As a result of amalgamation there will be greater efficiencies. Let me point out some of these efficiencies. Our Government believes in the efficient use of school funding. Many neighbouring divisions are very similar in terms

of assessment levels, mill rates, taxes, and therefore pose no major challenge to amalgamation. Our plan respects local autonomy and the distance travelled by students. We are committed to implementing school division amalgamation with a minimum disruption to the system. Our amalgamation ensures the long-term financial viability of divisions.

Parent councils will remain. The role and response of parent councils will remain the same after amalgamation of school divisions. Parent councils have generally supported amalgamation. The parent councils are an important component of good schools, and we are developing new legislation and policies that will enhance the role of parents in our schools. We also have a three-year moratorium on school closures in amalgamated divisions that will be affected. Guidelines for closure beyond the three-year period are in place.

\* (10:40)

Mr. Speaker, the challenges that are being introduced through Bill 14 demonstrate the firm commitment of the Government to sustaining and strengthening our system of public school governance. While we believe that efficient board governance warrants the reduction in the number of school divisions and districts, our Government remains fully committed to retaining our traditions of locally elected boards of trustees who will continue to provide excellent local educational leadership.

The legislation will serve our students well by modernizing the confederation of Manitoba school divisions. It will lay a solid foundation for the educational success of our students of today and those who will enter our schools in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, we have been talking about school board amalgamations for the 1990s. We have talked the talk. We have had the Norrie report. There has been no movement. This Government walks the talk. We have proven that in many areas with Red River community college with our support with universities. We have delivered. This Government will deliver on school board amalgamation. Parents, teachers, taxpayers, the general public is waiting for us to

move on. The 21st century is here, and we must be in tune with the 21st century.

I must again commend the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) for this very progressive step in education. I commend him for his good work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity this morning to say a few words about The Public Schools Modernization Act brought forward by our Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Caldwell). This is a very important bill to the people of Manitoba, one that people have been consulted on extensively and one that is very timely in being brought forward.

In fact, some might even say that it should have been brought forward sooner, but since we have taken office, we have taken a lot of time to consult with people and given school boards ample opportunity to contribute their thoughts on this bill and are now moving forward with a bill that will reduce the current 54 school divisions to 38, when we are completed. This will have reduced the total number of school divisions by 17.

I have listened to other people talk about this bill, and I have to agree with the comments that are being put forward with others who have said this is just a natural progression. I think about the first amalgamation that took place in the sixties, and I remember that amalgamation very well, Mr. Speaker. I was at that time a young mother thinking about the education of my children, and I come from the community of Cowan where there were three schools, three small schools.

At one time these three small schools had many, many students in them. Many of them were full to capacity, but as the demographics changed and the number of people in the rural communities reduced and the size of families became smaller, the enrolment in these schools was down dramatically. However, the plan under the first amalgamation was to have the three schools in Cowan closed and have all of the students go to Minitonas and Swan River. Of course, I was concerned about my children

having to travel on a school bus that distance and was lobbying to have one school built in Cowan, so all of the students could have this one school and not have to travel great distances.

But, Mr. Speaker, my father was a school trustee at one of these schools, and he was more visionary than I was at that time. He said to me: Think about what you are asking for. You are asking for a school that will serve just a small number of students, and look at where the population is going, and do you want your children just to be in this small school and not have any options, or do you want them to go to a larger school where there are many more options for them? His advice to me was that we should really consider the larger school and not have a school in Cowan.

I thanked him for his view on that and for the steps that were taken, because my children then had the opportunity to attend a larger school. Yes, they travelled by bus, and, no, it did not hurt them to travel by bus. They learned very well how to catch their sleep on the bus or do their homework on the bus, but they got there. They had many more opportunities than they would have had in a small school.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, when the first amalgamation took place, there were two buses going from Cowan to Minitonas and then later on to Swan River. At this time, there is only one bus going from Cowan and it is not full. So that indicates again that populations are changing, and had we had the opportunity to have that school built in Cowan, it would not have worked and it would not have been positive for the children of the area.

So, Mr. Speaker, the changes that were made at that time were good changes, but it is time to move forward and bring forward a plan that is balanced, that is modern and will not create big upheavals in the public school system.

I think the bigger issue that creates upheaval in the public school system is the level of funding that is provided. I look back over the Tory years and the amount of funding that was provided and school boards having to live with zero and minus two and minus two funding. Then you have rural people, particularly the

farming community, talking about the special levy that they have to pay on their farmland. Well, that special levy went up an awful amount during the previous administration when they were cutting funding to public schools, and the local school boards had no option but to raise funds on a levy to the local taxpayer in order to maintain the system.

Now we hear the Opposition talking about removing the special levy on farmland and reducing taxation. They did not think very much about the amount of taxation that was levied on local residents when they reduced the funding at the level they did. But I am very proud of the work that our Government has done when raising the level of funding and making a commitment to public schools and supporting the public schools with the level of growth in this province, something that the previous government never considered.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about my constituency. Certainly there was a lot of consultation in part of my constituency in the Duck Mountain School Division on how amalgamation should take place, as there was with all school trustees. When the announcement was made on the amalgamation and the fact that Duck Mountain would be dissected into different divisions, there was concern in the division. I was also concerned that the school board that was in place did not take the opportunity to make suggestions about how the school division should be divided up. Then, when the minister made a decision on how that division should be divided up, there was certainly a lot of local concern. I did not blame parents one bit. I have to say that there was a little bit of mischief being played by a few people, where there was talk about school closures. Even though the announcement said there would not be school closures, there was a lot of fearmongering in the constituency.

I have to commend our Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) for coming out and talking to people. We met with divisions; we held public meetings; we heard the concerns of people, Mr. Speaker. Then we made decisions based on that. In the Duck Mountain division, there was concern about Pine River and Ethelbert being separated, concern about the

Ethelbert School, again, a lot of politics in that one about closure of the school when there was no plan to close the school.

\* (10:50)

You know, the school boards in our divisions are visionary, the school boards of Dauphin Ochre, the school boards of Duck Mountain, and the school boards of Inter-Mountain. Duck Mountain and Dauphin Ochre were supposed to be amalgamating. Inter-Mountain saw this as a real opportunity and said we want to be part of this. We want to amalgamate into this division, and the divisions worked together and have now got a plan in place. The new division is going to be called Mountainview School Division.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I am hearing from the school divisions is that they want this legislation passed. I have had calls from school trustees who have said, you know, this legislation that is before the House now is very important to us. In fact, I had the calls before the legislation was before the House. The trustees wanted to know when the legislation would be passed because they need it in order to proceed with their plans.

So I would urge the members opposite to give this bill full scrutiny but also think about what school trustees are asking for, and school trustees are asking that this legislation to modernize The Public Schools Act, the school divisions, be brought forward. So that is my message to the Opposition now. Look at it carefully, give it your scrutiny, think about what this means for your constituents and for mine, and let us move forward.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at the amalgamation, as I said, we will be reducing the number of school divisions by 17. The amalgamation also reduces the number of trustees by 100, and this will depend on the school divisions because we are reducing the maximum number of trustees in each division to 9 from 11, which it is now, and a minimum of 5 trustees will be required. This applies to all divisions regardless of whether or not they are amalgamating.

Within this legislation, Mr. Speaker, the school divisions will have the responsibility of

determining their own boundaries. However, it must be done in a way that ensures fair representation by population and recognizing specific geographic conditions and communities of interest. I look at this and I think that this is a very important part of the legislation to ensure that when the boundaries of wards are being drawn, that that is taken into consideration because one of the concerns that was raised when we were having the discussion was could it be that all the trustees would come from one larger centre and then not have real representation on the boards for those more remote areas, so that I think is a very, very positive step.

One of the things that will result from this amalgamation, Mr. Speaker, is that it will eliminate redundancy and will reduce administration costs. When you reduce administration costs, this means that the resources are going to be there for children not for administration. Ultimately, that is what we are here for and that is what this legislation is about, is how can we increase the educational opportunities for children? How can we get more money into the education system?

Mr. Speaker, I have indicated to you that we are committed to funding public school education. We have increased the amount of funds that were provided for education dramatically over what was provided by the previous administration. Now we are looking at how we can further reduce administration costs, as we had done in other areas, and target the funds to where they are most needed.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is a very important aspect of this because ultimately amalgamation is being done for educational achievement, to achieve greater equity in programming and to redirect resources to teaching and to learning. Anytime we can direct resources to learning, then that is a plus for the students.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to visit many schools in the division in the province, in my constituency and in other constituencies. I have to tell you that I have seen a great inequity in what some divisions are able

to provide for students and what other divisions have been able provide. I think about the area of technology. Modern technology, the computer system and communicating through technology is a very important tool that we have and something that our students need, our young people need as they move into the world of employment after they have completed their school, but this will allow us to have more support for technology and divisions to have more support.

There will be more support available for counselling services and clinicians. Mr. Speaker, there will be more flexibility in dividing students and resources between elementary and middle and high school. There will be more diverse jobs and advanced opportunities for teachers and principals, therefore a stronger recruiting and retention appeal, and that is important too, that we have a stable teaching community out there that our students can count on.

Ultimately, this is also about offering a wider range of programs for our students. Again, when I look at what is happening in some of the divisions and what is offered in some compared to some of the less affluent divisions, they are not able to offer many of the programs. They are not able to offer vocational studies or music or art. Some of the computer programs are not at the standard where they are in other divisions, and certainly counselling and support for special needs children is less available in some divisions than others.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important and timely act that we are bringing forward. As I say, the previous administration did look at this. They commissioned the Norrie report. Where they had recommendations on how amalgamation could be handled to improve education for children, they chose to ignore that report. When we came into office, we decided that this was an important issue, and the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) involved the school trustees and asked them to bring forward recommendations and put documents out for them to review.

We have made a decision, a decision that is being well received by most, in most parts of the province. School trustees are working because

they believe that this is in the best interest of children, and that is what this is about. This is about children and improving opportunities for children. Our Government believes in the effective use of school funding. Many neighbouring divisions are very similar in terms of assessment level, mill rates, taxation and, therefore, pose no major challenges in amalgamation. The plan that we have put forward respects local autonomy and the distance the children were travelling, the distance students will travel. We are committed to implementing school division amalgamation with a minimum of disruption to the system. We believe that amalgamation ensures the long-term financial viability of the divisions.

So as I look at this, I believe that this is a very good move, and I want to commend our Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) who has dedicated many, many hours to this bill, has met with countless numbers of people, those who had legitimate concerns, those who do not have legitimate concerns. He is prepared to work with them, and I know that, in the end, this is going to be a benefit for the students.

\* (11:00)

There has been discussion on school closures. In my constituency, we have heard about school closures. There is a three-year moratorium on school closures in amalgamated divisions. Guidelines for closures beyond the three-year period are also in place, but we know there has always been a way to close schools. School divisions can and could make a decision to close schools, and there was a process to go through. We have put a moratorium in place for now, and when a division, a school board makes a decision that they want to close a school, there is a process that they can go through, and that will be in place.

I have to say before I close that when I talk to people in my constituency, people are very happy with what we have done with funding for education. People are very happy with the property tax credits that we have put in place. In the last two years, all our government has increased property tax credits from \$150, bringing the credit to \$400.

Now, members opposite talk about the high taxation. They never want to talk about what they did to farmers. They do not want to talk about the fact that they raise the portioning on farmland that caused farmers to pay a higher rate of taxation. We reduced that. They do not want to talk about the fact that there is a property tax credit that now puts more money into people's hands. They do not want to talk about the fact that we provided \$47 million in new operating funds for school divisions in the past two years.

So there are many steps we have taken to fund and improve the quality of education. There are steps. This is the next step in the process, and I look forward to working with people in my constituency to ensure that this amalgamation goes forward, but I want to close by giving credit to the Minister of Education for his work, but in my constituency giving credit to the school trustees for recognizing the importance of this, for grasping it and moving forward to ensure that it is in place. I look to the Opposition to move this legislation forward as has been requested by school trustees. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak on Bill 14, The Public School Modernization Act. I would like to begin by asking some questions. The first one is: What is this debate all about? I think this debate is really about moving forward versus defending the status quo. I would not want to be in the position of the Official Opposition and try to defend the status quo on this one. I think that is a very unenviable position to be in.

I have some questions for my colleagues. I think the answers will delineate the differences between the Government and the Official Opposition.

The first question is: Is school board amalgamation about our Government moving forward? Yes. Let us try that again. Is the school board amalgamation about our Government moving forward? Yes. Is our Government in favour of modernization? Yes. Is our Government looking to the future? Yes. Is our Government's approach balanced? Yes. Is our

Government in favour of efficiency? Yes. Is our Government in favour of saving money? Yes.

And what about the Official Opposition? What about the Official Opposition? Are they in favour of moving forward? No. Are they in favour of the status quo? Are they in favour of the status quo, which has not changed since the early 1960s? Does the Official Opposition want to move forward? No. Does the Official Opposition want to modernize? No. Does the Official Opposition want to move towards the future? No. Is the Official Opposition in favour of efficiency? No. Does the Official Opposition want to get out of the past? No. Does the Official Opposition want to stay, and are they stuck in the mud? Yes.

We have had the answers. We can see there is a clear difference here between the Government, which wants to move forward in a progressive way on school board amalgamation, and the Official Opposition, which are defending the status quo and stuck in the past, stuck in the mud, do not want to change. It will be very interesting to listen to their speeches whenever they get up the courage to put up speakers on this bill, which they have not done yet, because I do not know how you defend the status quo and say, well, the situation regarding the number of school divisions in Manitoba in the early 1960s is acceptable today in 2002. Perhaps the Member for Lakeside will provide some wisdom on why the early 1960s are better than our plan for the year 2002.

We currently have 54 school divisions, which will be reduced to 38 when amalgamation is complete. We will have reduced the total number of divisions by 17. The amalgamation reduces the total number of trustees by a hundred, depending on school board decisions. We have reduced the maximum number of trustees in each division from 9 to 11. A minimum of 5 trustees is required. This applies to all divisions regardless of whether they are amalgamated or not.

The Member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) asks if I have any more questions. Well, my basic question is: Are you in favour of the status quo? The answer is yes. Are we in favour of moving forward? Yes. You are stuck

in the past. We are in favour of moving forward. I am looking forward to your speeches so that we can hear you defend the status quo. It will not be easy. But we support our Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), who is a progressive, forward-looking guy who is taking us into the future when the Official Opposition is stuck in the mud, stuck in the past and defending the status quo. That is what this debate is all about, a forward-looking government and a forward-looking minister.

**An Honourable Member:** Drew, he thinks you are forward looking now.

**Mr. Martindale:** He is.

Our amalgamation plan is balanced and moderate. As a result, it will not create large upheaval within the public school system. We have taken a moderate approach with a reduction of about a third of divisions affected in all regions of the province. Our Government is respectful of local history and communities while at the same time creating new efficiencies with larger divisions. Our approach has been, with few exceptions, to merge existing divisions rather than create new divisional boundary lines throughout the province. Mr. Speaker, amalgamation will eliminate redundancies and waste in administration and allocate more resources to our children. I have heard our minister say this several times that really this is about improving the quality of education for children, putting more resources in the classroom.

By creating larger school divisions we help equalize resources and lessen inequities between divisions. Larger divisions generally have more resources for programs and services. Most divisional boundaries were created in the early 1960s when transportation and communications were much more difficult.

What is the goal of amalgamation? Amalgamations are being done for educational reasons to achieve greater equity in programming and to redirect resources to teaching and learning. The ultimate goal of amalgamation is simple: more resources for more students. Mr. Speaker, by reducing administrative costs, we provide greater resources to our province's children.

What are the benefits? There are quite a few benefits to doing this. More support generally will be available to schools for more diverse programming. There will be more technological support. There will be more support available for counselling services and clinicians. There will be more flexibility in dividing students and resources between elementary, middle school and high schools, more diverse job and advancement opportunities for teachers and principals therefore a stronger recruitment and retention appeal. Larger divisions will be able to offer students a wider range of programs. Children will receive a higher quality education as a result of the increased number of programs available. Examples include vocational studies, music and arts, computer and technological support and more counselling and supports for special needs children.

\* (11:10)

How will amalgamation affect children? Amalgamations are being done to benefit children. Mr. Speaker, the amalgamation of Manitoba's school divisions has been initiated to ensure we can provide the best education possible to our children. The process of amalgamation will create greater equity in programming and provide more resources to teaching and learning.

What about efficiencies? Earlier I pointed out that we are in favour of efficiency. Apparently the Official Opposition is opposed to efficiency. Our Government believes in the efficient use of school funding. Many neighbouring divisions are very similar in terms of assessment levels, mill rates and taxes and therefore pose no major challenge to amalgamation. I would like to point out that many divisions have voluntarily amalgamated. They did not wait. They took the initiative. Even before the initiative of our Government many divisions were voluntarily sharing services and programs through entirely voluntary agreements before amalgamation was even announced.

Amalgamations ensure the long-term financial viability of divisions. Our plan respects local autonomy and distances travelled by students. We are committed to implementing school division amalgamations with a minimum

of disruption to the system. Amalgamations ensure that divisions have an enrolment base that is capable of providing good quality programming and educational and clinical resources. Mr. Speaker, with limits on administrative costs, more resources are available to educational programming.

What about the costs? School boards will also have the opportunity to review their operations and look for efficiencies that will benefit students. Our Government will continue to work with divisions to ensure that maximum resources are devoted to educational purposes. Administrative costs will be minimized and remain as low as possible. Educational costs will be phased in over a number of years. We created administrative cost targets and will shift resources from the administration to the classroom. The Department of Education will continue to work with divisions to ensure administrative costs are low and classroom resources are the priority.

What about decision-making authority? We have ensured that school boards will continue to make decisions regarding administrative and other costs such as transportation, maintenance, purchasing, allowances, staff development and many other administrative areas. No board will lose its decision-making power.

What about taxes? How will taxes be affected by amalgamation? Divisions being combined have similar assessment-per-people levels, mill rates and taxation. The property tax of most Manitobans has decreased in the last two years with our Government's increased tax credit of \$150, bringing the credit to \$400. I think this is one of the best things that our Government has done for property taxpayers. I know that it is especially popular in the inner city because property taxes, it could be argued, are a regressive form of taxation, at least in relation to income tax, which is generally considered progressive.

In other words with income tax, the more money you earn, the more money you are taxed. With property tax, it is based on the assessment of homes. So two people could be living side by side, in identical homes, and have vastly different incomes. For example, in my

constituency, about 19 percent of the residents of Burrows are senior citizens, so you could have somebody on a fixed income, that is pension income, living in a house that is assessed at say \$60,000 in Burrows constituency and someone living right next door, maybe two incomes, maybe earning \$80,000 a year and paying identical property taxes.

When you give a tax credit to low-income people or seniors or people on fixed incomes, it is a much greater benefit to those low-income people than to higher-income people. So this property tax credit increase of \$150, bringing it to a total of \$400, is very popular with many, many people, especially seniors and people on fixed incomes, including a great many people in Burrows constituency.

We have provided \$47 million in new operating funds for school divisions in the last two years. Property tax levels in the coming years will depend on decisions made at the local level with respect to efficiencies gained by amalgamation and other factors such as programs and services offered. As the new boards achieve efficiencies, tax pressures will be reduced in the long-term. It is expected that local school trustees will continue to manage taxpayers' dollars in an efficient and responsible manner.

What about school funding? Because of our province's school division funding formula, the principles of that formula are consistent, regardless of the shape or size of school divisions. Amalgamations improve the financial viability of certain divisions.

What about the role of parent councils? The role and responsibility of parent councils will remain the same after the amalgamation of school divisions. Mr. Speaker, parent councils are an important component of good schools, and we will be developing new legislation and policies that will enhance the role of parents in our schools. I look forward to that legislation because I attended parent council meetings at Ralph Brown School for nine years and at Isaac Newton Junior High for six years and then Sisler High School for six years because we had two children in the school system that were three years apart.



We ended up attending parent council meetings for something like 18 years. In fact, when our daughter graduated from high school, my wife said that she felt like she was graduating because she had been going to monthly parent council meetings for 18 years. So I know a lot about parent councils. I do think there is a need to, if not clarify their roles, maybe even give them more rights and responsibilities because, quite frankly, the attendance at some parent councils has been disappointing, to say the least. For example, at Sisler High School, a school of 1600 students, you go to a parent council meeting, and there are three parents. I think that is very disappointing. I think the only way to change that is to give them more input and more responsibility, more power, to put it bluntly.

You know, there are some good things that have happened. For example, when I was on the parent council of Ralph Brown School, the school division—and, I think, probably the Member for Minto (Ms. Mihychuk) was a trustee at that time—authorized a new school for Ralph Brown School.

The parent council actually consulted with the architect, Dudley Thompson, and we made suggestions. He took those suggestions, and he incorporated them into the design of a building. For example, most schools have a flat roof, right. I said, since this school has the English-Ukrainian bilingual program, let us take some traditional designs from the Ukraine, like the thatched-roof house, and see if we can incorporate that in the design, and he did. So it has a curved roof and not a flat roof.

So it is kind of neat to drive down McGregor and see that school and say, oh, I suggested that particular part of the design, and it was actually incorporated in the school. *[interjection]* Maybe parent councils should do budgets. Well, that would be really giving them meaningful input. One of the current areas of input that they are supposed to have is in the selection of school principals, and I think that is very important. I have been part of meetings with school superintendents who have consulted with a parent council, in this case at Isaac Newton School, and said, well, you know these are the people who are available. This is

probably the person we are going to pick, and this is the short list. The problem now is that there is a deadline for teachers and principals to resign, but it is not nearly early enough in the school year. I believe the date is in May. I could be wrong, but I think it is in May.

So the problem is that there is tremendous pressure to interview people and appoint them to schools before the end of June with very little time to do it. Quite frankly, I sympathize with the administrators because, in a large division like Winnipeg No. 1, you can have a large number of resignations and a large number of people moving from school to school, and I think there probably is a lack of time to consult with parent councils. If we could change that, if we could move the resignation date up, I think there could be more meaningful consultation with parent councils. That would be very much appreciated. I think it would provide a much more meaningful role for parents in the education of their children.

We know that where parents are involved in the education of their children, for example, where they volunteer in schools, their children do better academically. I think that is just a truism that, where parents are interested and involved in the school and attend their children's events, attend parent council meetings and attend parent-teacher interviews, their children do better academically. So the more involved we can get parents involved in schools, the better.

Finally, school closures. This is being raised as a red herring by the Opposition, but there is a three-year moratorium on school closures in amalgamated divisions, and guidelines for closures beyond the three-year period are in place. I think the provision about closures is in the bill. I am not absolutely positive on that, and we are speaking on principle at second reading. We are not supposed to refer to clause by clause anyway, but I think, if you look, you would find that in the bill.

So just to conclude, Mr. Speaker, this debate is really about a government that is progressive and forward-looking and a minister that is progressive and forward-looking, and we are moving ahead. We are taking school boards into this century. There has not been changes. There

has not been amalgamation since the early 1960s. The Official Opposition are stuck in the past. They want to keep us in the 1960s with the same number of divisions. They are going to defend the status quo. They are going to defend staying in the past, not changing, not moving forward.

I am looking forward to their speeches. I think they are going to have to be very creative in telling us why the number of divisions for the 1960s is acceptable in the year 2002. Well, I think we will probably hear, I do know, 25 speeches that are 40 minutes long at least once. It will be very interesting because they will probably be very repetitious, and they will all be using the same arguments about defending the status quo and staying in the past and staying in the—*[interjection]* Well, I thought the introduction of mine was a little bit different, a little more creative.

**An Honourable Member:** That was well rehearsed in caucus.

**Mr. Martindale:** No, that was entirely spontaneous. I wrote that since I came in the Chamber. The answers were quite obvious. They gave me the answers to some very obvious questions. I put the questions, they gave me the answers, but with those few remarks I will conclude my debate on this bill. Thank you.

\* (11:20)

**Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside):** Mr. Speaker, I am moved by the accolades that are being showered upon a government that I was privileged to be part of when, of course, not just an amalgamation but indeed an education revolution occurred in Manitoba. Unlike the soft and gentle approaches that are being taken by this bill, there were, of course, hundreds, thousands of school closures that had to be undertaken in the mid-1960s. That was the progressiveness of the Progressive Conservative government of the sixties. But despite that, this bill shows it all. They had to put in a bill, they have to appease the non-believers, if you like, with a promise that there will be no school closures, a moratorium for at least three years.

When the true amalgamations took place that created the existing system in 1948, the

whole system, of course, called upon thousands of schools, small, one-room schools, disappearing from the landscape, but it also points out the fundamental difference between a Conservative and a socialist, a New Democrat. Despite that herculean task, it was done at the request of the people.

In other words, ministers of Education were sent out, other ministers were sent out. I was a very young and junior minister. I was sent out to try to speak to the people, persuade the people that this was indeed a progressive measure. If there was to be some equity of educational opportunities in rural Manitoba, that growing disparity with what was available in the larger city schools, then this amalgamation into consolidated school districts, and the member from Rossmere knows, is well aware of what I speak, was an absolute necessity.

The Minister for Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) says she objected to it at that time, but her father was more progressive than she was. He acknowledged that, look, these small schools have to go if we want to be able to attract fully credited teachers into rural Manitoba. If we wanted to offer at least some of the choice that urban youngsters were getting in our urban centres, then this consolidation had to be done. But the difference, Mr. Speaker, between a Conservative and a NDPer is that we did not use the fist.

We did not make it mandatory. We went out there and asked the people: Do you want it? And they voted for it. They voted for it and it took, in some instances, six or seven years, but in every instance the people of Manitoba, the parents of Manitoba, had a chance to express their opinion.

So let us talk about who are the democrats. Let us talk about who are the true democrats in this instance. That is how amalgamation was put forward, which honourable members acknowledge in speech after speech. I appreciate that from the honourable member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg), from the honourable member, my good deskmate here, the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale). They do acknowledge that that was probably the most progressive step forward in education in the province of Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me come to the present, and they have great fun, they like to quote the Norrie report to us, which was commissioned by another Progressive government, the Filmon government, and what did the Norrie report say? The Norrie report, among other things, said what this bill proposes to do, that amalgamations should be encouraged and should indeed take place. They left a lot of things unsaid, like there are some who suggest—quite frankly, I am one of them—I would not mind seeing one school division in the city of Winnipeg. You know, in terms if you want to move in some radical ways, that is fine.

What honourable members do not read in the Norrie report, and we asked that principal question: Is this, in the final analysis, going to appreciably improve educational standards? That was the one question we asked. The second question we asked: Are there, in fact, substantial administrative savings to be had in the education system, those monies that could then be applied to the system itself? In both cases, former Mayor Norrie said no.

Read the Norrie report. He gave us no assurances that the quality of education would be in any way improved, and he gave us no assurances that there would be substantial savings in administrative costs. That is why the Filmon government—we did not reject the Norrie report. We did exactly what has happened and the last speaker, the member from Burrows, alluded to it. We said that report is out there; where it makes sense and where there is a consensus among neighbouring school divisions to amalgamate, amalgamate, and they have done that. They have done that without passage of bills, without carrots being hung over them, without threats being made against them, without the stick, and I applaud them, Mr. Speaker, and you know, more of that would occur.

But let us clearly put it on the record that that is the fundamental difference between a New Democrat and a Conservative. A Conservative believes in choice. A Conservative believes in letting the people decide. A New Democrat, a socialist, simply cannot get away from the need for mandatory compulsory legislation.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I was Minister of Highways on several occasions. I did not dispute the fact that the wearing of seat belts was a prudent measure, particularly for those, in terms of safety, in a vehicle. I was the minister that put the first signs up along Manitoba highways, "Seat belts save lives—please wear them." But I would not pass the compulsory legislation which that minister did. For another one, it took a New Democrat to come along and make it compulsory, and, again, it is just a small demonstration of the difference between them and us.

History will record it. We will find out as the school bill, tax bills start coming out in the next couple of weeks across the province. We will have an answer very shortly to one of the questions: Is this measure bringing about substantial property tax relief? We will find an answer to that. I am sure the residents of Fort Garry will find an answer to it, the residents of Transcona-Springfield will find an answer to it.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is the first test. We will just have to wait to see whether or not their approach to this whole matter is correct.

The second one is I just simply see no evidence of it. In fact, we have slidden backwards in terms of educational outputs. Mr. Speaker, they have removed those measures, those progressive measures that are being adopted throughout other jurisdictions about the need for doing some testing, some holding teachers, holding the system accountable for some outcomes in our schools.

So we introduced modest measures for testing those outcomes at I believe the Grade 3 level, the Grade 11 level, I am not quite certain. They were quick, bowing to the wishes of the unions, which they always are beholden to. The teachers, of course, do not like any concept of testing because, lo and behold, it might point out the fact that we have some poor teachers in the system. Under the union dictates, the union pressure, this Government quickly gave in to the Manitoba teachers' association's request to do away with any testing that would hold them accountable. That is understandable. It is no different. They react to those kinds of questions the same as they would react to Bernie Christophe's requests on some other labour

legislation. They knee-jerk, you know, jump to the command of organized labour. Of course, that is part and parcel of their whole being.

\* (11:30)

But I enjoy just putting on the record, to simply state that this bill allows us, and I welcome that, it allows my new colleague the member from Lac du Bonnet, it allows all of us to go out into our constituencies, not to rail against amalgamation, not at all. If the benefits of amalgamation are there and good, well, they are there for everybody to see. They do not need the big hand of government. They do not need a bill to make it compulsory.

Duff Roblin did not need it in the sixties. Duff Roblin is acknowledged by my friends opposite as having led this whole process. While Duff Roblin was doing that he also had time to create the University of Brandon. He had time to create the University of Winnipeg. He had time to create all our community colleges, Red River, Assiniboine, Brandon, Frontier College in the North. We had time for all of these things at a time, but we did that with consultation of the people, with support of the people.

If in some instances it did not happen overnight, in some instances—I think it was in your area, honourable member from Pembina, that was one of the last ones to voluntarily vote themselves into a consolidated district. As I said, when I joined the Duff Roblin administration in '66, they were just midway through there. Some of them had accepted amalgamation very quickly. Others held off.

I can remember going out as a young junior minister with the then-Minister of Education, the late George Johnson, former Lieutenant-Governor, and a well-respected Minister of Education in the Province of Manitoba; going out with Stewart McLean, the then-Member for Dauphin; going out to the halls and the schools in the countryside, convincing, speaking up, talking about the benefits of school consolidation. It was a massive effort on the part of not just the Ministry of Education, but the entire government, the entire Roblin government, to bring about these fundamental changes to

education that have by and large served us so well in this province.

It is entirely wrong for the Government to point to anybody on this side who opposes this bill as not under appropriate circumstances accepting the need or the benefits of further amalgamation. That has happened voluntarily, as I said earlier, in several instances, and will continue to happen over the next period of time when people are convinced of the genuine benefits of amalgamation, when they fully understand those benefits, and when they are satisfied that it will not compromise the quality of education in terms of distances that children have to travel on buses, and if it can be shown that it at least will provide some economic benefit and return in terms of lower overall school education taxes.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, I will look with interest when in a few weeks the first school divisions issue their tax notices. I will look with interest if those areas that are going to be covered by this bill when we reduce from the current 48 to the 30-some-odd, 37, 38 districts, whether or not those divisions already anticipating the substantial savings are, in fact, reducing their educational taxes by 10 percent or 15 percent. You know, I think that is a reasonable expectation on the part of property owners who are going to be impacted by this bill.

Of course, if at the end of the day that does not occur, and all we have created is somewhat larger bureaucracies and educational people, with attendant higher costs, I, for one, will be quite happy with the position that I have taken on this bill, the position that my party is taking on this bill and one that will be quite defensible on the hustings whenever the time comes for the next election.

**Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand today and put a few words on record in the House here on this important bill, this Bill 14. It is a bill that, quite frankly, I am very, very proud of. It is a bill that was introduced by a Minister of Education that cares about children, cares about families and cares about community.

As I listen to the history lesson from members opposite, as I look at all their smiling faces across from me now, the numbers of them sitting here looking and gazing and wondering exactly what this bill means and what this bill represents to Manitobans, I cannot help but think, after the last member's speech from Lakeside, it is like not going into the future. It is like going back to the past. It is like going back to a date that I was born, in 1959, that some of these changes were made last. That is what the member opposite from Lakeside often talks about is the past, in 1959 and 1960, and he has a great history.

The difference I see between this minister and this Government and the bill, The Public Schools Modernization Act, is a difference. The member opposite mentions the difference between his party and our party. Quite frankly, after the last speech that was given, it really reflects to Manitobans the difference between modernization and going back to the past.

Mr. Speaker, as we move ahead and as this minister and the Cabinet and our caucus move ahead with Manitobans in many areas, this is another example of the consultations that this Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) does with people out there.

It was interesting to hear the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) talk about consulting of Manitobans. You know, I am quite new to this House really, elected in 1999, and was out there during the consultations of MTS. I can tell you many of the people in my community remember all too well how the Member for Lakeside and many of the other members opposite consulted with Manitobans, consulted with my family and consulted with my community when they sold off one of the greatest assets that Manitoba had built up over a period of 75 years in this province.

Quite frankly, there was no consultation. It was a cash grab by the previous government to undervalue it, to sell it off, and then spend the money through some of the best economic years in this province; through years when the revenue was coming into this province—when money was flowing into this province. If they had any leg to stand on, it would have been selling that

corporation that Manitobans did not want them to sell, and at least investing that money. They talk about the billion-dollar promise that they had. There would have been a billion-dollar promise if they had not stifled all the members from this side in speaking to that bill throughout that time. They had allowed at least, after making the mistake of selling that corporation—if they had invested the money instead of raiding the funds and invested that money. We would have had well over a billion dollars in that fund today. But no, what did they do? They spent the money. They overspent through the best years of revenue in this province, and used the money from MTS.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) is right. There is a difference between this side and that side, and No. 1 is the consultation process. It was done by this minister, tirelessly, throughout the province of Manitoba working with not just labour, not just a business community and not just this member opposite that tries to pigeonhole different people like teachers as being a special interest group. Quite frankly, they are educators, and they are the people that deal with the children in these communities.

\* (11:40)

What this bill does is look at the classroom. It looks at the children in the classrooms and the educators, which are not a special interest group. They are very, very important people in our communities. They are people that deal with our children—or our children's education—and moving ahead in Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, the parents that have been consulted with, the municipalities and AMM that have been consulted with, the educators that have been consulted with, the school board and the trustees and the parent councils that have been consulted with. When you look back, and you look at the history lesson that the member opposite from Lakeside likes to flog on, he usually likes to direct his remarks back to the fifties and the sixties and the seventies, because in the 11 and 12 years that the members opposite were in power in the nineties, education went backwards back into the sixties that the member likes to speak lovingly of.

In the last three years, the Minister of Education on this side of the House has moved education again toward the standard that parents and teachers and myself as a parent want to see education moved to. There were 1700 different divisions back in the year that I was born, in 1959, and when they went through the amalgamation process, back in that day in 1959, they gained some efficiencies. That is what this bill is about. It is about gaining efficiencies for education. Not just a bottom line that the member opposite focusses on. That is important. The tax reductions are important. We have done that. It is something that the members opposite took away from Manitobans, quite frankly, throughout their term in government.

They never seem to mention that. They never seem to mention the property taxation that they increased on rural residents and farmers, going from a percentage of 27 to 30 percent. They never seem to talk about taking the \$150 away from Manitobans that they did, and we reinstated. It was important to Manitobans, was important to people out in the communities.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, as the members opposite like to flog their business sense to people on this side of the House, quite frankly, when I talk to people in the community—not only from my own, but throughout Manitoba—they see the differences. They see building in Manitoba. They see moving ahead in Manitoba, and they see the changes and the differences that are made for their children in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, the transformation that is being done now is unprecedented. We have had people in our area, and I know from the Minister of Education in the area that we come from, in the Brandon area, in southwestern Manitoba, we had a couple of amalgamations in the nineties. The only ones that were done. Throughout the rest of Canada, amalgamations were going on and the reduction was being done. The members opposite did not have the intestinal wherewithal to move with the rest of Canada, to move ahead, and move towards a process that is better for children and families and communities in the province of Manitoba. We have, and that is the difference between us and that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, we had a mutually agreed upon creation of the Prairie Spirit School Division that has worked extremely well, and the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) and I have both been out there. We have talked to folks in that community on the efficiencies that they have gained in their community. We have had amalgamations that have been brought on by many of the people in the province voluntarily to look at the efficiencies that this side of the House can see and the changes that need to be made.

I will just finish off quickly. I know we have other people who want to speak and some business to complete in the House.

There is a difference between that side of the House—the member of Lakeside is right—and this side of the House, and that difference is listening to communities, it is listening to parents, it is reacting, modernizing and moving ahead with legislation and having the guts to do it, instead of sitting on your hands and doing nothing. So, Mr. Speaker, yes, there is a difference. This is a good bill. This is modernization. This is moving Manitoba ahead.

**Mr. Speaker:** No more speakers?

**An Honourable Member:** No more speakers.

**Mr. Speaker:** When this matter is again before the House, it will remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer).

\* \* \*

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader):** Could you please call Bill 2, The Security Management Act?

**Bill 2—The Security Management (Various Acts Amended) Act**

**Mr. Speaker:** Resume debate on Second Reading, Bill 2, The Security Management (Various Acts Amended) Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith).

Is there a will of the House to leave it standing in the name of the honourable Member for Fort Garry? [*Agreed*]

**Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet):** I welcome this opportunity to debate Bill 2. Bill 2 I think is a very important bill in the sense that it is supposed to make people feel better about security. It also takes away many of the civil liberties that have been given to us by the federal Constitution. That is why the bill should receive a full and proper debate in the House.

Many amendments are necessary to this bill and they are necessary to protect some of the civil liberties that are taken away. Full and proper debate, of course, is necessary to introduce some of those amendments to the bill, and the amendments that are, of course, necessary and required in that respect.

I can see some of the reasons why members opposite have introduced this bill. First of all, September 11 is still fresh in our minds. There is the disaster that happened in New York City with thousands of people being killed during that incident, and many thousands more being injured. As well, we have the highest crime rate in Canada, and people are feeling insecure. They are feeling vulnerable, and for that reason, that is why members opposite have introduced this bill.

But I really think that they are overreacting to those two types of situations. They are overreacting, they perceive it to be a crisis, and, of course, members opposite are, in fact, a crisis-oriented government, and one which seems to react every time there is a perceived crisis. Sometimes they react too quickly and I believe this is the case with this bill, that they have reacted too quickly, and they have not really thought it through properly. That is why we on this side of the House are going to be supporting many amendments with respect to that bill.

I cannot support, for that reason, the bill as it stands, and the amendments, I think, are necessary. I urge the members opposite to support any amendments that we, in fact, propose. There are a number of reasons why I cannot support it.

First of all, I believe that federal legislation has not really been determined as yet, and really the federal government has the primary responsibility over security in this country; not the province, the federal government does. The federal legislation is, as I understand it, currently

being introduced into parliament, and it has been withdrawn for a number of reasons. I believe that we cannot pass legislation before federal legislation occurs.

The federal legislation may require many amendments, and those amendments may be in conflict with this Bill 2. The current legislation as it proposed, if it is passed, I believe, is in conflict with this Bill 2. I do not think that we are in a position to be able to pass Bill 2 at this point.

Parts of this bill I may give qualified support to, and I might want to go through some of them. First of all, I believe that Bill 2 amends nine various acts that we have, in fact, existing in Manitoba. I think many of them should be introduced by other ministers, not by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh). I give you a few examples. The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Act, these amendments were produced to give the director power to order anyone who handles or disposes of dangerous goods or contaminants to develop and implement security measures. These are not amendments that need to be introduced by the Minister of Justice. I believe they should be introduced by the person who is best able to introduce those amendments, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Ashton).

Another part of this bill, I think, that should be introduced by another minister is The Pesticides and Fertilizers Control Act. They were key amendments to enhance security. In relation, crop dusting and other spraying equipment and certain pesticides and fertilizers, this is best introduced, I believe, by the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), not by the Minister of Justice. The Minister of Agriculture has the expertise to deal with these amendments, not the Minister of Justice.

\* (11:50)

Another important point, I think, is The Public Health Act. The Public Health Act amendments are introduced by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh). I believe that the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) should, in fact, be introducing those amendments.

The Public Health Act is an interesting one. It is an act that really has seen very little amendment, and it is 50 years of age. It is 50 years old. We need a proper amendment to The Public Health Act. We need a proper act. We need it to be totally revised and brought into the 21st century. These amendments do nothing for The Public Health Act. I think that as part of Bill 2, it should not be part of Bill 2.

There are parts of the bill that I would give qualified support to and other parts of the bill that, of course, I cannot support without amendments. First of all, with respect to giving qualified support, there are amendments that are introduced in Bill 2 with regard to The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. Those amendments, as I see them, strengthen the licensing requirements for security guards. It strengthens the standards for security guards and the education for security guards. I am fully in support of those amendments. They include increased standards, increased education requirements, and, of course, that results in increased and better service to Manitobans. That is all we are looking for. We are looking for better service to Manitobans.

The amendment also introduces a criminal records check for people who are private investigators and security guards. I think that is important because it increases public confidence in the administration of justice. That part of the bill I believe that I can support.

Another important part of the bill that I feel that I can support is the amendments to The Proceeds of Crime Registration Act. This amendment allows restraint orders to be made under the Criminal Code in respect of property belonging to or controlled by suspected terrorists and allows those properties to be registered in the Personal Property Registry. I can tell you that the Personal Property Registry is not a perfect system as compared to the Land Titles system in Winnipeg or in other areas in Manitoba.

The Land Titles system is what is regarded as a perfect system. It guarantees title. Someone who searches title to property under the Land Titles system is guaranteed that the person indicated on that title is the owner of the

property. Also, searching the encumbrances under the title you are guaranteed by the Province of Manitoba that those encumbrances, the mortgages, the liens, the caveats that are on that title are, in fact, on that title. It is guaranteed by the Province of Manitoba.

Not so with the Personal Property Registry system. The Personal Property Registry system does not, in fact, guarantee title. In order for an individual to find out whether a certain chattel or whether a certain item is owned by another individual, you do not go to the Personal Property Security Registry. You have to search that out through the current owner, the possessor of the property, to find out whether or not they, in fact, are the owner. You do that by means of requesting a bill of sale. So it is not a perfect system. It does not determine title.

The Personal Property Security Registry system also does not guarantee complete disclosure of encumbrances against chattels. That is important to note, because The Proceeds of Crime Registration Act will allow the restraint order that is in place to be registered in the Personal Property Registry. I think that is important because it gives notices to third-party purchasers. People who are interested in purchasing a car or a motor vehicle or a motorhome or a chattel can go to the Personal Property Registry to determine whether or not encumbrances are against that chattel, whether there is a restraint order against the chattel or whether money is owing against the chattel. That gives notice to third-party purchasers of real property, personal property.

It also gives notices to lenders. Lenders, before they put security on property they want to know that it is not encumbered. I believe that they will want to know whether or not the chattel is subject to a restraint order. This Proceeds of Crime Registration Act allows that process to continue. I am fully in support of that amendment.

Another amendment which I feel I can support are the amendments to The Manitoba Evidence Act. The Manitoba Evidence Act indicates that the amendments are to create a process to object to the disclosure of information before a court or administrative tribunal or



another body on the basis that a security interest or a public health interest needs to be protected. I agree with those provisions because at every step in that act where it is crucial a court is involved. A court makes decisions that I trust and respect, because I respect our judicial system. I respect the judges that administer the justice system.

In section 10.2(8) of that amendment, if I might read, it says: If the court concludes that disclosure would encroach upon a public protected interest, but the public interest in disclosure or the right to a fair trial of a person accused of an offence under provincial statute outweighs in importance the protected public interest, the court may authorize the disclosure.

In other words, if the disclosure encroaches on public interest, that the right to a fair trial outweighs that public interest, then a court may authorize that disclosure. I think that is very important. We need to ensure that a fair trial is protected because without it, it brings the administration of justice into disrepute. We need to protect our justice system and its sense of fairness. I believe that this provision ensures that there is a balance, and in spite of trying to protect public disclosure of information, a fair trial will be protected. For that reason, I believe that I can support the amendments to The Manitoba Evidence Act.

Another amendment which I feel that I can support is the amendment to the fire protections act. The fire protections act, the key amendments, include the broadening of the Fire Commissioner's role in responding to emergencies and also requires every local authority to file an annual report setting out the emergency response resources available to its area. I think that is important to support as well, particularly when we remember the train wreck in Firdale. We all heard about that disaster, and the possible consequences of that train wreck. Many fire departments from across the province, emergen-

cy response teams from across the province and police departments from across the province were called in, in response to that emergency. Really, in situations like that you need co-ordination from one particular person, and that, I believe, is the Fire Commissioner.

That is why I support the amendments of the fire protection act because I think that it provides for a co-ordinated response to emergencies, a co-ordinated response which is for the benefit of all Manitobans. So that is why I support those amendments.

There are certain parts of the bill, of course, which I cannot support, and I will go through them with you one at a time. Part 1, being The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Act amendments, is one part that I cannot support at this point without amendments. The amendments, as proposed, give the director the power to order anyone who handles or disposes of dangerous goods or contaminants—it gives the power to the director to develop and to implement security measures.

The important part of what I have just read in terms of what it does is the fact that it includes contaminants. What is the definition of a contaminant?

The definition of a contaminant, under the act, is very wide, in fact much too wide. It includes any solid, liquid, gas, waste, radiation that is foreign to or in excess of the natural constituents of the environment and that affects the natural, physical, chemical or biological quality of the environment—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 25 minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, we will recess and reconvene at 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Thursday, May 9, 2002**

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