

Fourth Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 18, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 39—The Court of Queen's Bench Small Claims Practices Amendment Act

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 39, The Court of Queen's Bench Small Claims Practices Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le recouvrement des petites créances à la Cour du Banc de la Reine, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, this bill increases citizen access to justice by upping the claim limit to \$10,000 for small claims court, our own people's court.

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

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No?

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Bill 41—The Pharmaceutical Act

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 41, The Pharmaceutical Act; Loi sur les pharmacies, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, this bill will improve patient safety, accountability from the College of Pharmacists now. It will deal with issues in the Pharmacare audit and the matter of a role of

pharmacists expanding to include the prescribing of diagnostic tests and, within their scope of practice, appropriate drugs.

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

An Honourable Member: No.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

PETITIONS

Grandparents' Access to Grandchildren

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) and the Premier (Mr. Doer)

to consider amending legislation to improve the process by which grandparents can obtain reasonable access to their grandchildren.

This petition signed by G. McLaughlin, Wendy MacLennan, Honey Snedden and many, many others.

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

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

This petition is signed by Helyne Bannerman, Diane Robertson and Laura Crawley.

*(13:35)

Child Welfare Services

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) have the

responsibility to provide safety, care and protection to children in care in Manitoba.

Thirty-one children have died since 2001 while in care of the Province or shortly after being released from care. Last year nine children died, the highest number recorded.

Little Phoenix Sinclair died in June of 2005, but her death went unnoticed for nine months even though she had extensive involvement with Child and Family Services beginning at birth.

Manitobans want to know how the system could fail little Phoenix Sinclair and the other 31 children.

Manitobans want assurances that no other children will fall through the cracks of the child welfare system.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider calling a public inquiry into all aspects of the delivery of child welfare services throughout Manitoba.

This is signed by Hayley Sobeski, Mike Waddell, Goy Sengnang and many others.

Funding for New Cancer Drugs

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death of Manitobans.

Families are often forced to watch their loved ones suffer the devastating consequences of this disease for long periods of time.

New drugs such as Erbitux, Avastin, Zevalin, Rituxan, Herceptin and Eloxatin have been found to work well and offer new hope to those suffering from various forms of cancer.

Unfortunately, these innovative new treatments are often costly and remain unfunded under Manitoba's provincial health care system.

Consequently, patients and their families are often forced to make the difficult choice between

paying for the treatment themselves or going without.

CancerCare Manitoba has asked for an additional \$12 million for its budget to help provide these leading-edge treatments and drugs for Manitobans.

Several other provinces have already approved these drugs and are providing them to their residents at present time.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba and the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) to consider providing CancerCare Manitoba with the appropriate funding necessary so they may provide leading-edge care for patients in the same manner as other provinces.

To request the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Health to consider accelerating the process by which new cancer treatment drugs are approved so that more Manitobans are able to be treated in the most effective manner possible.

Submitted on behalf of Kathy Blackburn, Heather Dyker, Carol Janzen and many, many others.

OlyWest Hog Processing Plant

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by A. Bernardin, R. Desrosiers, Nick Ten and many, many others.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development

Second Report

Ms. Marilyn Brick (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Second Report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Second Report.

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings:

Your committee met on Wednesday, May 17, 2006, at 6 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration:

Bill 21 – The Public Health Act/Loi sur la santé publique

Bill 36 – The Youth Drug Stabilization (Support for Parents) Act/Loi sur la stabilisation des mineurs toxicomanes (aide aux parents)

Committee Membership:

*Mr. Aglugub
Ms. Brick (Chairperson)
Mr. Dewar
Mrs. Driedger
Mr. Dyck
Mr. Faurshou
Mr. Goertzen
Mr. Nevakshonoff
Hon. Ms. Oswald
Hon. Mr. Sale
Mr. Santos*

Your committee elected Mr. Aglugub as the Vice-Chairperson.

Public Presentations:

Your committee heard one presentation on Bill 21 – The Public Health Act/Loi sur la santé publique, from the following individual:

Elizabeth Wood, Private Citizen

Your committee heard three presentations on Bill 6 – The Youth Drug Stabilization (Support for Parents) Act/Loi sur la stabilisation des mineurs toxicomanes (aide aux parents), from the following individuals and/or organizations:

Carole Johnson, Private Citizen

Father Fred Olds, St. Raphael Centre

Laura Goossen, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba

Bills Considered and Reported:

Bill 21 – The Public Health Act/Loi sur la santé publique

Your committee agreed to report this bill, with the following amendment:

THAT the following be added after Clause 112(1)(h) of the Bill:

(h.1) governing the procedures for obtaining apprehension orders under section 47, and warrants under sections 83 and 85;

Bill 36 – The Youth Drug Stabilization (Support for Parents) Act/Loi sur la stabilisation des mineurs toxicomanes (aide aux parents)

Your committee agreed to report this bill, with the following amendment:

THAT Clause 26 of the Bill be replaced with the following:

Coming into force

26 This Act comes into force on November 1, 2006.

Ms. Brick: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

* (13:40)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Captain Nichola Goddard

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I have a statement for the House, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the death of a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan stationed in Shilo, Manitoba. I rise today to speak on behalf of Manitobans to commemorate the life of Captain Nichola Goddard of Shilo, Manitoba.

Captain Goddard was serving as a forward artillery observer helping to target the artillery guns by observing where the shells fell. She was a member of the A Battery 1st Royal Canadian Horse Artillery based at Shilo and serving with the 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry in Afghanistan.

On behalf of Manitobans and this House, I extend our deepest condolences to her husband, Jason Beam, her parents and her family. I would like to indicate to her family and all Canada's service personnel and women Manitoba's gratitude for her efforts.

Mr. Speaker, after other members have made their statements, I would ask that this House join with me in a moment of silence to recognize Captain Nichola Goddard.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Premier for that statement. I think it is an appropriate tribute and expression of the condolences that all members of this House, regardless of party, would like to extend to the family and friends of Captain Goddard.

This is an important mission that she was engaged in. We all know that there is a genuine effort going on with our forces in Afghanistan to bring stability and human rights to that troubled part of the world. We also know that with stability in that region, in our interconnected world it brings about better life for others in that region which improvements have an impact right here in North America.

So the work that she was doing, along with her other comrades, is important and appreciated. We would honour all Canadian soldiers fighting to improve the situation in Afghanistan and indeed anywhere in the world in which they are engaged.

The men and women who have put their lives and their health on the line for us so that we have the right to partake in these sorts of debates here in Manitoba is something that is difficult to appreciate too much.

So, while words from public figures would never, I think, suffice to bring consolation to a family in these circumstances, I think it is incumbent on us to express our gratitude to the family and friends of Captain Goddard for the sacrifice that she has made on behalf of all of us. I share the Premier's desire that we have a moment of silence in this House to recognize that sacrifice.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I request leave to speak to the Premier's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? [*Agreed*]

* (13:45)

Mr. Gerrard: I join colleagues in the Legislature in mourning the death of Nichola Goddard and extending sympathy and condolences to family members, Jason Beam, friends and relatives of Nichola.

I read with great interest and much emotion the letters which had been written by Nichola Goddard shortly before her death from her serving in Afghanistan. What an incredible experience she was having and what a contribution that she was making. It was difficult in some ways but, on the other hand, her pride and her speaking so positively about the Afghani forces and the policemen there, what they are trying to do, certainly brought home the need to ensure that our soldiers are supported in their efforts to improve conditions for people who are on the other side of the world for us, in one sense, but very close to us in another, because there are many who have come from Afghanistan and are now living in Manitoba.

So we weep for Nichola Goddard. We show sympathy for her family, and we continue to be resolute in our determination to help others in a manner that she has shown us how we can. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for a moment of silence? [*Agreed*]

Please rise for a moment of silence.

A moment of silence was observed.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today a delegation from Russia visiting Manitoba as part of the Canada-Russian Northern Development Partnership Program. These visitors are the guests of the honourable Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin).

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

Also in the public gallery we have with us today 22 students from St. Paul's Collegiate in Elie, Manitoba. These students are under the direction of Kim Earl, and are the guests of the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Crocus Investment Fund Premier's Awareness

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Premier and his government have now had the provincial Auditor's report into the Crocus scandal for exactly a year. That report establishes beyond any doubt that officials in the Premier's government knew in 2002 that there were serious problems at the Crocus Fund.

Whether or not the Premier saw the e-mail that is referred to in that report, my question to the Premier is this: Is it the Premier's position that he knew nothing about the problems at Crocus back in 2002, that he was totally oblivious in spite of the fact that his officials knew about the problems and it was a topic actively discussed within his government?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member mentions e-mails. The Auditor General's report said the government had e-mails on this issue. The Auditor General clarified very clearly that the e-mail never went to a deputy minister let alone a minister.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has not answered the question once again. We have, by our count, between questions from myself and questions put to the Premier by the Member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Murray), it is now 151 questions, 5 of which were answered directly, 146 of which have been completely evaded.

So let me ask the question again to the Premier. Setting aside the fact that there are many ways that information reaches the Premier other than by e-mail, I would assume, and I have sat in many meetings with the Premier where he receives verbal briefings. I know that is the way that information is transmitted to a Premier in normal circumstances. So, forgetting about the e-mail for just a second, will the Premier indicate to the House clearly with a yes or no answer, did he have any—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (13:50)

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it should not be difficult. It is within the personal knowledge of the Premier who does not need to rely, he does not need to refer to the provincial Auditor. This is something he will know directly. I know the Premier's credibility is so low that he has to refer to the provincial Auditor in his responses, because if he were to give a direct reply then obviously he is acknowledging that we cannot take that reply to the bank.

So let me ask the question directly to the Premier. In spite of the fact his officials have been established to have known that there were severe problems at Crocus as early as 2002, is it the Premier's position that he was completely oblivious to the problems at Crocus from 2002 to 2005, in spite of the fact that they were being actively discussed within his own government?

Mr. Doer: I think the member has not moved very far from Robson Hall's court exercise. He raises the question, he raises the issue of the e-mail, and then his first question is so pathetic, he sets aside the question of the e-mail in his second question. Then he does not want us to comment on the inadequacy of his question because, Mr. Speaker, he just then dismissed the Auditor General.

We stand by the Auditor General's report. We have implemented a number of recommendations in Bill 51. We have other recommendations of the Auditor General before the Legislature. The Auditor General had access to files, meetings, records. He was able to follow the money, unlike in the past, Mr. Speaker.

I can ask the same rhetorical question of the member opposite when he was briefing Mr. Filmon verbally. Did he warn him not to hire James Umlah? Did he warn him not to hire James Umlah in 1993?

Did he warn him not to pass this ambiguous legislation verbally in 1992? Yes or no?

Mr. McFadyen: I very much look forward to the opportunity for the Member for Concordia to ask questions. He seems to be gearing up for a move to this side of the House, and we certainly look forward to it, as do all Manitobans.

The Premier knows that, in both of my questions, I am asking him about something other than the e-mail, and he is very good at evasion. That was evasion No. 147 by our count.

Mr. Speaker, I was reading an article the other day and there was a reference to half answers, evasions and diversions. I thought the article must have been about the Premier in response to his questions about Crocus. It turns out that it was the closing submission in the Enron fraud trial. It was the prosecutor in the Enron fraud trial referring to the testimony of Mr. Skilling and Mr. Lay; evasions, half answers, personal attacks, innuendo, insults and innuendo. That is the approach of the Premier when it comes to answering questions about Crocus.

So let me try it one more time. The Premier seems to be trying to create the impression that for three years he was in la la land while his officials were talking about Crocus. Will the Premier advise the House and will he confirm what I think he is saying, which was, that for three years while his officials were actively discussing the problems at Crocus, he was in la la land?

Mr. Doer: Orders of the day.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

* (13:55)

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier, I think in response to that question, and that is direct reply No. 6 out of 153, so I congratulate the Premier for that very direct response. The Premier says he was not in la la land from 2002 to 2005. Will the Premier then confirm that he knew about the problems at Crocus as early as 2002?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report goes back to the inception of the fund. It goes back to 1992. It asserts that the original legislation had conflicting roles for the government in terms of the overview of this fund. It states that there was ambiguity between the social responsibilities of the fund and the rate of return. When we received that report, ironically we had already amended the

pension legislation to deal with rate of return, making it the primary consideration for pension funds in Manitoba prior to the Auditor General's report. When we received the Auditor General's report, we amended the ambiguous language that was contained in the 1992 document.

The member opposite has solicited Don Orchard to look at this fund and then given him terms of reference only to look after 1999. The legislation was brought in by the Conservatives, voted on by Mr. Orchard and Mr. Downey. You may want to ask them why they wrote the legislation to begin with.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about Enron. Well, he would know if he is following Enron that, of course, they were great contributors to the Republican Party, the kissing cousins of Tories.

Mr. McFadyen: You would never know it from that shameless sucking up to Mr. Giuliani that took place two weeks ago. You know, I referred the House earlier to the Premier's bid for the Republican nomination, but obviously that was part of the new New Democrat rebranding to the new new New Democrats, which I guess is underway.

I have noticed five different evasions, five standard evasions that the Premier has used in all of his answers to these questions. That evasion referring to the Auditor General's report is evasion No. 3, and to save the House time the Premier could maybe just indicate next time whether he wants to use evasion 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, and I will outline those for him in the next set of questions if he would like.

But, coming back to what is a very serious issue, Mr. Speaker, 33,000 Manitobans have lost millions of dollars. Many have had their retirement plans sacrificed or compromised as a result of the Crocus scandal. So it is not a laughing matter. It is not a matter for high jinks and for a bravura performance by the class clown.

So let me just put a direct question to the Premier.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I know the member opposite is new to the House, but he is not new to the legislative process.

Would you please, Mr. Speaker, remind the member opposite that members in this House are honourable, and all of us are honourable? I ask that you remind him that this is not a forum for rudeness.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think if you peruse Hansard, you will see that, in an earlier answer from the Premier, he used the word "pathetic." If he does not want to take it, then he should not be throwing it. I understand why he is sensitive, because he has a lot to hide. That is why he has to hide behind his House Leader.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on the same point of order.

Mr. McFadyen: I will withdraw the "class clown" comment, Mr. Speaker, on the basis that it is unparliamentary.

Mr. Speaker: I appreciate that. That should take care of the matter.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: You have concluded your comment? [*interjection*] You put the question.

* (14:00)

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite has decided to be the judge, jury and executioner in terms of how he will assess questions that are posed and questions that are answered. I would suggest that his premature arrogance about winning the next election better be very, very carefully guarded by the member opposite, because if the public sees the arrogance we see through eight days of questioning where he has already decided before the public has decided that we are going to be on the opposition side and he is going to be on the government side, I can tell the member opposite one thing. He can ask all his little moot court questions, but we are democrats. The public of Manitoba will be deciding who is elected and who is defeated, not the member opposite.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I share the Premier's commitment to democracy. We look forward to the next election campaign. We have some serious questions that we are looking for answers to. They are questions that impact on the lives, the savings,

the retirement plans of 33,000 Manitobans who are going to arrive at their own conclusions on the basis of the Premier's evasions and spin.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the question to the Premier. If it is the Premier's contention that he knew nothing about what was going on in terms of problems at Crocus from 2002 to 2005, then we have to assume that he was very badly served by his officials who were aware of the problems. So would the Premier please outline for the House what steps he has taken to hold these officials accountable for the very serious, negligent and irresponsible actions in not bringing these serious problems to the Premier's attention?

Mr. Doer: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, a couple of questions ago, basically condemned the Auditor General's report and said that I cannot use the Auditor General's report to reply to his questions. Well, the Auditor General does go through the history of the establishment of the Crocus Fund. It clearly identifies the original legislation as being inadequate.

He may want to ask that question of negligence to the former premier who he worked for, Mr. Speaker. It identifies that the original officers of Crocus were hired by the previous government, '92 and '93. Mr. Umlah was hired by the previous government.

I will have to be honest. I did not know that he had prior findings against him by the Manitoba investment dealers in the late '80s, before he was hired by the former government in the 1990s. I actually did not know that, because if I did I would have raised it as the opposition leader.

I find it passing strange that then he was put in charge of the Science Fund, named by the previous government, by Mr. Tweed. Maybe in opposition we should have known that. We did not know it. Maybe the media should have known it. I do not know. We did not know that at the time and, certainly, we have found out lots of stuff since.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to say is we are accountable and responsible for the decisions we made. The lawsuit, clearly, the member opposite says there is no material issues raised in the lawsuit prior to 1999. I suggest he is wrong on that. We certainly know that the Auditor General commented on the original legislation, the original hiring of staff. He said that the staff that were hired, the executive staff that were hired, did not have proper

qualifications. Those recommendations and records speak for themselves.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the final supplemental on this question.

Mr. Speaker: Order. You had one question, two supplementary questions already. If you are up, it will be on a new question.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Mr. McFadyen: On a new question related to accountability and leadership in this government, Mr. Speaker.

I note that the Premier on that answer used evasion No. 1, blame the previous government, even though his party supported the legislation that he now points out as having been faulty; and evasion No. 3, which is deflect to the provincial Auditor's report, even though he knows that the provincial Auditor has a narrow mandate and was focussed on issues that did not relate specifically to what happened in terms of the knowledge inside the government and the failure on the part of the government to act on that knowledge.

So he has used evasion Nos. 1 and 3. No. 5, which is my favourite, which is that we pass legislation strengthening the power of the provincial Auditor, which I refer to as the stop-us-before-we-kill-again legislation. It is just like the whistleblower legislation. You know, we will try and legislate some common sense into our government, legislate some good leadership. That is not how it works.

So let me ask of the Premier: Given that the Premier has done absolutely nothing, given that he has done absolutely nothing in the face of what he implies were errors on the part of his officials in not bringing information to his attention, why will the Premier not come clean? Why will he not admit what any reasonable person would assume in these circumstances, which is that he was aware of the problems at Crocus and simply chose to have his officials keep a lid on things. Is that not what really happened?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, again through his arrogance, misses a lot of the facts that came out last year from the Auditor General's report. We took responsibility for the findings of the

Auditor General's report. We will, ironically, have to take responsibility for eight years of the Filmon government in a lawsuit, and we will have to defend the actions of the legislation and of the former government. We took responsibility from day one when the Auditor General's report was tabled in this House.

We also took responsibility for bringing in legislation. We brought in Bill 51. What did that do? It clarified the ambiguity of the rate of return. It clarified the ambiguity of board of directors' members being named by the government and what their fiduciary responsibilities were. We eliminated that spot. We made it very clear.

We followed through on the recommendation of the Auditor General on the issue of promotion through the Industry Department and monitoring. The Auditor General said: a) It was attached to a political body in the 1990s; and b) It was moved to the Industry Department under our government. The Auditor General stated that that created, again, confusion on the roles of the Industry Department for its role of promotion of Industry and monitoring of the fund so we changed that monitoring function in legislation to the Department of Finance.

There are many recommendations that the Auditor General has made that we have followed. We take responsibility for giving the Auditor General, in 2001, the capacity to follow the money into any co-investment. We take responsibility and accountability for backing up the Auditor General when Crocus was not going to allow the Auditor General to review their files. We have supported the Auditor General and we are, according to the committee in December, the Auditor General says that the government has implemented most of the recommendations that were made by the Auditor General a year ago.

Mr. Speaker, that is what governments do when they get an Auditor General's report. They implement the recommendations. The words the member opposite puts in the public arena about staff and other people are not supported in the Auditor General's report.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I would just say in response to the point about staff, we did raise questions. I have raised questions about allegations made against government staff and have asked the

Premier whether he has looked into those. He does not want to answer any questions about whether he has examined those allegations.

My comments are not in any way directed personally at Mr. Kostyra or anybody else. In fact, I think in many respects Mr. Kostyra has good judgment. Mr. Kostyra thought that Leonard Harapiak would have been a better leader for the NDP back when he was running for leader. But, Mr. Speaker, it is a measure of the Premier's generosity that he has brought Mr. Kostyra on to staff. I just want to ask the Premier—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: I know Mr. Harapiak, too, and I think he is a fine gentleman. On that point, Mr. Kostyra and I are united.

I just want to say to the Premier that we now have several examples of scandal, waste and incompetence in his government, Crocus being the most notable example. We have Hydra House, WCB, Aiyawin and Child and Family Services. Not a single person has been dismissed, demoted or disciplined as a result of these scandals, and, by contrast, the Premier has been all too willing to force people out of his government who have raised red flags or blown the whistle.

Will the Premier commit to the House today to stop protecting his friends, to stop shielding incompetence within his government? Will he commit to siding with the people of Manitoba so that regular Manitobans can benefit from good government for a change?

* (14:10)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the guttural statements of the member opposite are not worthy of a response.

Highway Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): The NDP government has budgeted significant amounts of money for highways, \$59 million of that which was not spent: not spent on roads, not spent on bridges, not spent on highways for Manitobans to use. We know this money is nowhere to be seen.

Can the minister tell us today: Where did the money go?

Did it go to Maple Leaf Distillers? Did it go to overspending on the floodway? On the sound stage

in Winnipeg? Or where did the money finally end up, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): I want, first of all, to congratulate the member on becoming the Transportation critic. Maybe he will think now about voting actually positively for a budget that has increased by \$29 million.

Now, having said that, Mr. Speaker, an unprecedented amount of money we put into transportation. It is regrettable, when I take a look at the front bench, the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), Arthur-Virden, Lac du Bonnet, all these members voted against a very, very positive budget to put \$29 million more. I will be going out to their constituencies and letting Manitobans know how they voted to put down a budget, an unprecedented amount of money put into transportation, including the critic from Emerson.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, \$59 million dollars lapsed, not spent on roads and highways and infrastructure.

Can the minister tell us today whether the money that was allocated and budgeted for this year in the highways budget, will that be spent on roads, highways and infrastructure this year?

Mr. Lemieux: You know, Mr. Speaker, we do have Estimates coming up, and we will be describing—we hope that we will be describing on how those dollars will be spent and where they will be allocated.

The last year, Mr. Speaker, that the previous Conservative government put together a budget, a pre-election budget I might add, \$173 million they had budgeted. We, as a government, in our budget this year have put together a \$257-million budget, an increase of \$83 million per year more, and those dollars will be spent.

Mr. Speaker, just to the point that the member was making. Last year we had a terrible summer with regard to construction. It was raining. We re-allocated dollars in mid-year, to allocate those dollars to other projects, the first time that has ever been done in the history of our province.

Simplot Plant (Portage la Prairie) Highway Access

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): The government across the way likes to talk a lot about budgeted figures, but when it comes to actually spent

dollars on the roadways of Manitoba they are completely embarrassed.

Mr. Speaker, again, this government likes to talk a lot about the Simplot plant in Portage la Prairie as an accomplishment, but they fail dismally when it comes to actions as it pertains to the Simplot plant in Portage la Prairie, whereby the raw product to be delivered to the Simplot plant in Portage has to be diverted either to the east or to the west, 40, 50, 60 kilometres out of the way, because this government refuses to spend \$7 million to improve Provincial Road 240, and right now Provincial Road 240 is in shambles.

I want to ask this government why they are so unwilling to spend the measly \$7 million on 240.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, we have a member from Portage la Prairie talking about \$7 million being measly. One day they come here asking us to cut, cut, cut spending. The next day they come here saying spend, spend, spend; \$7 million being just a measly amount.

You know, Mr. Speaker, every year we get over \$2 billion worth of requests for transportation, and we are allocating, as I pointed out, this year an unprecedented amount of money, new money, to transportation.

I ask members opposite to contact their friends in Ottawa and ask them about the billion dollars, over a billion dollars of money that has been taken out of this province in motive fuel tax since we became government in 1999 and only have put back into the province of Manitoba approximately \$70 million. Now that is terrible, that is measly; \$70 million back to Manitoba when they have taken out over a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. That is shameful. Go to your friends in Ottawa and get them to get on board with the new transportation agreement.

Mr. Faurshou: Mr. Speaker, this government saw Mr. J. R. Simplot invest over \$150 million in Manitoba, yet they are not willing to spend \$7 million so that the raw product, potatoes, can get to that plant. More than \$7 million was collected simply on taxes every year from the Simplot plant, yet these New Democrats, as they say they are really truly responsive to Manitoba's needs and wishes, need to recognize the fact of investing in the roadways of Manitoba. In fact, that is where the

\$59 million can be reinvested that they have already let lapse.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would point out to the member opposite that he would be aware that the Conservative Party of Manitoba said the Simplot potato processing plant would never ever be built in Manitoba under our government, and, of course, it is up and running today. It is an amazing success story, the largest potato processing plant in North America.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, our minister is putting more money into highways than previous governments and, yes, we are investing in our future.

Highway Infrastructure Funding

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Members opposite like to talk about the federal Conservatives and what they are doing in terms of infrastructure for the provinces. Well, they have agreed to increase the percentage of gas tax from 15 percent, that they give back to provinces, to 40 percent. That is what they are doing. What are you doing? Nothing.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government's Gas Tax Accountability Act of 2004 mandated the allocation of fuel taxes to highways and infrastructures. However, according to the government's own numbers, they have not followed their own legislation or their law.

According to their own numbers, total revenues and expenditures show surpluses to the provincial government's general treasury from all transportation sector revenues growing from \$11.95 million, when this government took office, to \$56.45 million, a difference of \$44.5 million in surplus.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when we are faced with an infrastructure deficit of more than \$4 billion in our province, why is the government refusing to fix our roads? Where has all the money gone?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. I will try to provide the answer.

You know, if the member opposite would like to take a look at a provincial map and make her way around the province, you will see where the money is going. Mr. Speaker, No. 1 highway going to Saskatchewan, we are twinning that highway to Saskatchewan. We are also twinning the northeast

Perimeter. We are doing Highway 59 south, and we made a three year commitment to look at Highway 75.

Now, just on that particular point, I know the critic made comments the other day about how he was not happy that I made comments about his lawn tractor, and move his lawn tractor out of the way. I understand he has a huge combine, a huge tractor. I do not know if this is a size issue, but I will say move your combine, move your tractor, move your automobiles because we are fixing Highway 75 going down south with many other projects in Manitoba and that is a fact.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to touch that size issue.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, considering this is Road Safety Week and considering the infrastructure deficit in our province has increased by more than \$2 billion since this government came to office, on the eve of one of the busiest weekends in Manitoba as families are preparing to get away for the weekend, the government sees fit to waste money on things like building sandwich factories, et cetera, yet refuses to be accountable for the safety of our children.

Mr. Speaker, why has this NDP government not followed its own Gas Tax Accountability Act and spent the revenues directly on fixing roads?

This is about the safety of our children, Mr. Speaker. Why are they not accountable for the safety of our children in this province?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, this certainly is a serious matter with regard to safety on our roads and that is one of our pillars upon which we build our transportation vision in this province.

I can tell you there are many initiatives in place that we have proceeded on that are making our roads safer, Mr. Speaker. But, as has been pointed out by the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) and others, you know, throughout the 1990s, the roads were run down to the point that they needed a lot of work, as well as the bridges and other infrastructure in our province.

We are making concerted efforts to address the bridges and the highways that have been run down, Mr. Speaker. I have to tell you when I make reference to the federal government, I have to give the minister of transportation, federally, an opportunity to come forward with a vision. I mentioned that over a billion dollars has been taken out of this province and they have only put back about \$70 million federally.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): The Premier and his office knew full well years ago, back in 2002, that there were serious problems with the Crocus Fund. He chose to ignore those problems. Mr. Speaker, 33,000-plus Crocus shareholders lost \$60-plus million.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has gone out of his way to call for a public inquiry. Today we see a Premier so desperate to prevent the public inquiry, he is prepared to put his legislative agenda up for sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is: Does he not believe that his legislative agenda is worth calling a public inquiry for? Is the Premier that scared of what is going to be uncovered in a public inquiry that he is prepared to sacrifice his legislative agenda?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we know that members opposite are more interested in stunts than truth. We recall their first day in office where we were in the middle of a BSE crisis and the only concern they had was where they were sitting in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have walked across the floor, handed a Big Mac to a Cabinet minister. They are proceeding to act in a way that may deal with bills, in one way or another. Obviously, the budget has passed. We will proceed in the public interest with legislation.

We will keep our word on the fixed session. Our word was given to all parties. After the Crocus Auditor General's report came out, we agreed to a timetable to do the public business in an orderly and logical way. Hopefully, it will allow people—in the old days, we used to have sessions where people had to come before public hearings and public committees in July and August. We are trying to do it in a way that respects the public. There will always be

issues that opposition parties disagree with the government on, but to allow for tactics to take away from the public right to present on legislation, I would be very worried about that.

Mr. Lamoureux: The Premier has to be careful when he talks about stunts, because I was here when he was in opposition on the MTS affair, Mr. Speaker, and I can recall lots of horror stories when it comes to stunts.

What the Liberal Party is interested in is the truth, Mr. Speaker. That is what we are interested in is the truth and the only way we are going to find out the truth is if there is a public inquiry. The Premier knows full well that the only way that the truth is going to be known is if there is a public inquiry.

My question specific to the Premier is he has got to take responsibility. His legislative agenda is going to be sacrificed today because this Premier refuses to call a public inquiry. That is the bottom line, Mr. Speaker. I do not have the financial resources like this Premier to put my political spin on it, but that is the reality. This Premier is sacrificing the legislative agenda of this Chamber because of his stubbornness in calling a public inquiry. Shame.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on his last supplementary question.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that says a bundle when the Premier does not even have the courage to stand up and answer the question. Why does this Premier not do the right thing?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Doer: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. A threat is not a question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Inkster, on the same point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe the Premier would stand up and make that sort of an assertion. The reality of it is the government answers questions that are put. If they choose not to answer the question, that speaks

volumes, and I did pose a question. The question was, so that the Premier would have understood, why was he prepared to sacrifice the legislative agenda because of his cowardly actions in not wanting to call for a public inquiry. That was the question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Members may have disagreements, but in the House, members will treat each other as honourable members.

On the point of order raised by the honourable First Minister, for the information of the House, questions are put to the government and the government may choose which ministers answer or not answer questions.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on his last supplementary question.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and as noted, the Premier chose not to answer the last question which I believe speaks volumes.

This Premier is trying to hide from the truth. He knows full well the only way that Manitobans are going to know his connections with this whole fiasco is through a public inquiry. He is prepared to do whatever it takes in order to prevent a public inquiry from taking place. I say, shame on this Premier. Shame on this New Democratic government.

My question, once again to this Premier is: Why are you going to sacrifice the legislative agenda of this Legislature because of your reluctance to call a public inquiry? That is not serving Manitobans. That is serving your own political selfish beliefs of wanting to get re-elected.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member yells and yells and has nothing new to ask. He did not even ask a question. I would point out that a few weeks ago he tabled an affidavit that asked a question: Did you know if there were any financial difficulties with Crocus prior to December 2004?

The member opposite, if he listened to the radio, read the newspaper or paid attention to anything would have known that the answer to the question was, of course, there was a devaluation of the shares in September of—*[interjection]* No, because member opposite does not, let me explain this to you. September is actually before December. So if I would have signed something, he asked me to sign something that is contrary to a press release that was

issued by Crocus. I will send the copy over to the member opposite. That is why noise and tactics do not make up for substance in this House.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Strategy

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Speaker, today is Commuter Challenge Day. The many members of the NDP caucus chose to get to work today on foot or by bicycle or by public transit. It is certainly a chance for all of us to take some steps to reduce greenhouse gases in Manitoba.

Now the issue of greenhouse gases and its relation to climate change is a serious one for many Manitobans. I hope members opposite will speak to their federal colleagues and educate them on this issue.

My question is for the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology. Can he inform the House and perhaps educate some of the members on the other side about some of the recent initiatives this government has undertaken to bring awareness on the issue of climate change and steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

* (14:30)

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): I just want to remind all members of the House that there are big measures all of us can take in programs, et cetera, but it is also very important that every Manitoban, every Canadian, everyone do their part to deal with climate change. Perhaps that is the best way of instructing and educating the public than any, Mr. Speaker.

To that end, again, we are having commuter challenge during Environment Week, June 4 to 10. In last year's challenge, more than 9,000 commuters from more than 200 workplaces and schools walked, cycled, car-pooled, rode the bus, travelling nearly 500,000 kilometres, preventing an estimated 100 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. Since 2000, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba commuter-challenge participants have logged nearly 2 million green kilometres and avoided creating over 400 tons of harmful emissions.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Fort Garry Skate Park

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to inform this Chamber about an exciting development that is happening for the community of

Fort Garry. Construction of a state-of-the-art outdoor skate park meant to service the entire Fort Garry area is set to begin next spring.

Skateboarding as a recreational pastime has exploded over the past number of years in its popularity with youth. It is important that youth have access to the type of facilities that encourage a healthy and active lifestyle and a full enjoyment of the sport for people of all ages. This \$400,000 park will provide the community with a recreation facility that can satisfy all of our community's needs.

However, this project would have not seen the light of day without the efforts of many Fort Garry residents and volunteer organizations. Leading the charge for the skate park was the Fort Garry Skate Park Committee which has organized public consultations, and, as well, youth have worked together to design the park. Their work in informing and involving the community at large about this project has created an unstoppable momentum. I am proud to say that their efforts along with support from the community has helped to secure funding from the City, Province and federal government that will ensure the skate park is a reality.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all the volunteers who have donated their time, the community members who have attended the meetings and the residents who supported this project for all their hard work. I would also like to thank the members of the Fort Garry Skate Park Committee. Grass-roots efforts such as these ensure the vitality of our communities as they continue to grow strong. Thank you.

Captain Nichola Goddard

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to honour the service and bravery of Captain Nichola Goddard whose life came to an end yesterday while serving her country in Afghanistan. Captain Goddard was with the 1st Royal Canadian Horse Artillery with the Canadian Forces Base Shilo.

Communities surrounding CFB Shilo are coming together to lend support to family, friends and comrades during this very difficult time. Captain Goddard's death will have far-reaching effects on all families whose loved ones are serving in the Canadian Forces.

Captain Goddard joined the armed forces immediately out of high school, demonstrating an undeniable commitment to her country and to

making the world a better place in which to live. In one of her letters home, she writes: There is nowhere else that I would rather be right now.

She has paid the ultimate price in her fight for peace and freedom.

Let us never forget the sacrifices our brave soldiers are making each and every day while many miles separate them from their loved ones.

On behalf of all members of the Legislative Assembly, I would like to extend my sincere condolences to her husband Jason, her family and to the many friends whose lives have been touched by Captain Nichola Goddard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Canada-Russia Partnership Agreement

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): It gives me great please to rise in the Chamber today to welcome to the Legislative Building and to our province a delegation from the Russian Federation, led by Senator Gennadi Dmitrievich Olienik. Senator Olienik is the chair of the Committee of the Northern Territories, Federal Assembly, the Parliament of Russia, the Council of the Federation.

Three major territories, Khanty-Mansiysk, Autonomous Okrug, Khabarovski Krai and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, are represented in the delegation. They are here as a result of the Canada-Russia Northern Development Partnership Agreement on a tour organized by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, compliments of a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency.

Between our two countries there is great potential for further co-operation, and the province of Manitoba is uniquely positioned to further this agenda by utilizing the Arctic bridge and the ports of Churchill and Murmansk, in northern Russia.

Areas where further co-operation is warranted include trade relations, environmental and ecological concerns, circumpolar affairs and, of course, Aboriginal issues. This is an area of special interest to me personally, Mr. Speaker, as I am of Russian ancestry, and also I have a degree in east European studies from Carleton University in Ottawa.

Since our government came to office in 1999, the pace of progress has accelerated as is evidenced by the two recent visits by Russian Ambassador Mamedov to our province in the past year. In conclusion, I personally welcome the delegation to

Manitoba, wish them success in their endeavours here and offer my assistance in any capacity in this regard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Highway Infrastructure

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Certainly, on behalf of the opposition, we also welcome the Russian delegation to Manitoba and welcome them to the Legislative Assembly.

I do want to speak momentarily about the condition of the highways in rural Manitoba. The Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) brought forward a very important resolution this morning concerning the state of affairs, and, unfortunately, the very sad state of affairs, of the highways in rural Manitoba.

The highway in particular that I am thinking of is Highway 2 which I have to travel back and forward to my constituency. Highway No. 2 going past the Starbuck area and the Morris constituency is certainly in dire need of repair. I see the province has taken the flashing road signs from 75 highway. They have now moved them over to No. 2 highway to warn people travelling on No. 2 that they have to slow down because of surface breaks.

I know my colleague from the Interlake was out to Killarney last week to an event there in Killarney, and he did have first-hand experience travelling over 23 highway. I think he now has a finer appreciation for the sad state of affairs of the highways in southern and western Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. Certainly No 23 and No. 5 is just a patchwork. It is just a constant patchwork on Highway No. 5 as well. The surface condition of those highways is just terrible. Obviously, we need some funding to go into the actual surface work and also the base work as well.

I want to just thank you very much for the opportunity to put a few words on the record in terms of the terrible state of roads we have in rural Manitoba. Thank you very much.

* (14:40)

St. James Rods Football Club

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, the St. James Rods football club is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. This non-profit organization is run completely by volunteers who exemplify community spirit and dedication in the St. James community. It is the oldest football

club in Manitoba and the longest continually operated minor football club in Canada.

The St. James Rods have been a dominating presence in the western Canadian football scene. In 1955, they were inducted into the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame for being the first Manitoba team to win a national championship.

The Rods have gained a reputation in professional football as a player-manufacturing company due to the club's contribution of more professional players than any other junior club in Canada. Forty-two Rods players have gone on to play professional football including Chris Walby and Paul Robson.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to make honourable mention of two honourable members from this Assembly that played with the St. James Rods, the former Member for St. Boniface, Larry Desjardins, and the current Member for Minto (Mr. Swan).

Today, the St. James Rods is a football club rich in history and community pride. Realizing the direct impact they have on youth, the coaches, managers, trainers and board members, who are all volunteers, have developed a focus on family values and positive role models. Through community outreach and team participation, members emphasize the importance of communication and of making sacrifices for one another. Now the name, Rods, stands as the team's motto: Respect, opportunity, determination and sportsmanship.

Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to see the St. James Rods thrive and expand. I was pleased to support them in securing a Community Places grant for 2005-2006. The money will go towards the construction of a new Rods clubhouse that will be able to accommodate the club's growing numbers.

Through the strong history and the bright future, it is an exciting time to be a member of the St. James Rods football club. I am very honoured, as MLA for St. James, to congratulate the club on 60 years of outstanding sports achievements. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you call second readings on these bills: 37, 35, 30, 31, and the rest is in order.

SECOND READINGS**Bill 37—The Labour-Sponsored Investment Funds Act, 2006 (Various Acts Amended)**

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 37, The Labour-Sponsored Investment Funds Act, 2006 (Various Acts Amended), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

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

Motion presented.

Mr. Rondeau: This act will make changes to The Income Tax Act, The Labour-Sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Act. These changes will establish a framework and standards for investing in, and the operations of labour-sponsored venture capital corporations that are second to none in Canada. Manitoba-registered, labour-sponsored venture capital corporations are governed by The Crocus Investment Fund Act and The Labour-Sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Act, The Income Tax Act and, secondarily, by The Corporations Act and The Securities Act.

On June 16, 2005, Bill 51, The Labour-Sponsored Investment Funds Act (Various Acts Amended), which amended The Crocus Investment Fund and the Labour-Sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Act, received Royal Assent.

This act addressed many, but not all, the recommendations made in the Auditor General's report. In response to the Auditor General's report, the government announced on May 31, 2005, the formation of an implementation team to analyze the Auditor General's recommendations and to present the government with its recommendations on implementation of them. The implementation team was asked to examine other legislative changes that may be required to reflect best practices for labour-sponsored venture capital corporations in Manitoba and across the country. The report of the implementation team was tabled by myself to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on December 8, 2005.

These changes of this legislation will evolve around four main themes. First, putting more power and control into the hands of the individual shareholders who have invested the majority of the

money in the fund, the Class A shareholder. Number two, it will improve the risk profile and possible returns for a labour-sponsored venture capital corporation. Number three, it simplifies and clarifies the operations of the labour-sponsored venture capital corporation and, four, by establishing a regime of monitoring compliance that is independent, thorough and fair to investors.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislative changes represent a win-win situation for investors, The Labour-Sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Act and the investee companies, as all parties will benefit. These changes will create a positive environment for the investments in private venture capital, and will result in economic growth and increasing the public confidence in labour-sponsored venture capital corporations.

I have offered briefings to the members opposite and would be pleased to discuss it. But the information has been provided to the Auditor General who says that this follows his recommendations. It also has gone through the normal processes, so people are supportive of this legislation and believe it will bring back confidence from the first legislation that was introduced in 1992 and then what happened last year in Bill 51. I hope it moves forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I do have quite a bit that I would like to be able to say about Bill 37.

Bill 37 is before us because of the provincial auditor's report and the government's response to the provincial auditor's report. It has been an issue that has become very hot inside the Legislature over the last number of months. In fact, one would ultimately argue that the government, the Premier (Mr. Doer) of our province, in particular, along with a few other ministers, were negligent in their responsibilities in not being able to provide or take the action necessary in order to protect the Crocus shareholders, and further, to just protecting Crocus shareholders, Manitobans as a whole.

The Crocus Fund has provided not only investment opportunities; it has provided jobs and many other things. One would ultimately argue, as I would, that had the government been on the ball a number of years back we would not be at this stage where we are today where there is this huge need for a public inquiry, Mr. Speaker. You know, I believe that as an MLA it is part of my responsibility to do

whatever it is that I can to ensure that the right thing is done in regard to the Crocus file.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there have been a lot of eyes watching this file, and it has been going on now for a good period of time. We have heard that the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), the Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau) talk about some of the things that have already happened on this file, whether it is the provincial auditor's report, whether it is the RCMP investigation, the Manitoba Securities Commission's investigation. Now we see the Law Courts are brought into this whole process and, at the end of the day, a lot is going to be known about what actually took place and what went wrong.

But we will never ever find out the real truth to the things that need to be known for the simple reason that, without a public inquiry, the likelihood of us getting the information that is necessary to be able to prevent things of this nature from happening in the future, just are not there. I think that that would be tragic. I also believe that there is a responsibility for us to uncover in terms of what sort of political corruption there might have been in regard to this file. We know that there are special relationships between the Premier and some of these people that are involved. We know that the government, different ministers and so forth, were aware of serious problems revolving the Crocus fund and decided not to take the necessary action that could have made a difference.

Mr. Speaker, I think that is very tragic because had the government taken action years back I suspect we would still have a Crocus Fund today. Ultimately, with the loss of the Crocus Investment Fund, what we are really doing is we are talking more than just that fund. Look at the impact it has had on ENSIS, another venture capital fund. What about the potential investors in future venture capital? It is very difficult to raise venture capital dollars at the best of times. But, when you see things that we have seen take place, it is going to become even that much more difficult. At the end of the day, as a result, we are going to lose out.

*(14:50)

You know, there are some things that I want to be able to address specifically in regard to this bill, Mr. Speaker, in regard to some of the comments and some of the feedback that we have provided. Where it really became a hot political issue, where it became really high in terms of the public agenda

with some of the problems was back in May of last year, and it was the release of the provincial auditor's report. We knew that there were some problems that were out there. We had a good sense of it, and some had a much better sense, i.e., ministers of the Crown.

One of the things, in reading through the Auditor General's report on the examination of the Crocus Investment Fund, I especially noted page 16, Mr. Speaker. I would like to quote from it, because it is relatively close to the bottom of the page. I quote right from the Auditor's Report: "In order to report to the Legislative Assembly on a timely basis, we limited the scope of our review to key issues within the objectives listed above. Given the complexities and breadth of CIF operations, not all areas were reviewed. Our work was performed at a level sufficient to support the conclusions and recommendations contained in this report."

You know, that tells me, Mr. Speaker, that if there would have been more time, if there would have been possibly additional resources, that the Auditor's office could even have found out more information. I think that is quite telling. The reason why I say it is quite telling is because I believe if you canvass the shareholders that you will very quickly get a sense that the shareholders not only want to see their investment back, they want to know in terms of what has taken place. As the Auditor General has said, even in his own report, there are some other things that are out there that we need to look at, but that even his office was not able to look at or investigate as thoroughly, maybe, as would have been beneficial for this Legislature.

Well, then we have the Manitoba Securities Commission, who has once again delayed the process, Mr. Speaker. Many would argue that by the time the Securities Commission gets the opportunity to deal with the Crocus fiasco, that the next provincial election could be over by then. Well, then we have the RCMP investigation that is taking place. There is absolutely no indication whatsoever, in terms of what specifically it is that they are looking into, nor is there any sort of indication in terms of when it is that we expect to receive something from that particular investigation.

Well, then you look at the courts. Now we have a government that is involved in a lawsuit. We are talking about a lawsuit that could ultimately cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of a couple hundred million dollars, Mr. Speaker. You know, the fear about the lawsuit that I have is that at some point

in time the Premier (Mr. Doer) is going to want to get some sort of out-of-court settlement. That is a concern because this Premier has had a track record of having an out-of-court settlement when he was Minister of Urban Affairs. That is an important issue to take note of because what I thought was interesting out of that out-of-court settlement that was done is two things. One, it was achieved just prior to the case going to court. This way nothing would have been made public. It is truly amazing from, what I understand, to what degree that settlement had disclosure clauses. A true cone of silence was put on that particular issue.

The Premier of today, then-Minister of Urban Affairs, Mr. Speaker, did not want the public to know what actually took place. Back then it was about people and allegations of preferential treatment being provided and so forth. But, you know, it just killed, it nipped it.

What I am thinking is that we will see—we know, the legislation is fine. We see, in principle, that this legislation comes from the provincial auditor's report and so forth, but we need to look at the broader issue that goes even beyond the legislation, and that is the issue of accountability. I do not sense that we are seeing very much accountability by this government, Mr. Speaker. That concerns me greatly.

That is why, when I look at the court case, what I could see happening is the government trying to settle, and a part of that settlement would be some sort of a cone of silence, once again, being put on in order to prevent Manitobans from knowing really what took place.

I do believe that there were some actions that did influence the government. To what degree? I do not know. What I do know is that there were relationships, there were donations, there were supporters, there were organizers, all of which were associated with this Premier and the New Democratic Party. There were significant ties. We have not been able to find out, nor will we find out with those other types of investigations that are happening around us. This legislation is not going to allow for Manitobans to find out what actually did take place, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I like to try as much as possible to put things in a way which is fairly straightforward and as simple as possible. That is the reason why the question I asked today to the Premier was that he and his office—and you noted, he did not

say no—I indicated, well, the Premier and his office knew back in 2002 that there were some problems with the Crocus Fund. Because he did not take action back then, as a direct result, 33,000-plus Crocus shareholders lose tens of millions of dollars. We know that to be factual. The Premier did not stand in his place and say, oh, no, no, no, I did not know back then, when I posed the question. He is very careful in terms of the answers that he gives.

Today, it was interesting to see he did not even want to answer one of the questions that was placed to him, a very legitimate question that was posed to the Premier. It is because, I believe, the Premier knows full well that a public inquiry is the only way in which we will know what actually had taken place, to what degree the Premier was, in fact, influenced inappropriately.

That concerns me. It concerns me greatly, to the degree in which I believe, as a member of the opposition, that it is our responsibility to do whatever we can, to use the tools that are available to us to ensure that the Premier does the right thing.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We believe the right thing in this case is to call for a public inquiry. Unless the Premier calls for a public inquiry, we are going to continue to do whatever, and use whatever tools we can to apply more pressure on the Premier to call that public inquiry. We know that if there is no pressure the Premier will ignore the issue of a public inquiry, and that is not healthy for the province of Manitoba.

* (15:00)

In fact, when we had the discussions, when my leader and I talked about it late last year, we had made the decision that we need to look at the operations of this Chamber and do what we can in terms of using rules to support trying to get the Premier to call a public inquiry because we believe that that was in the public's best interest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is what all of this is really and truly all about.

We believe, and here is the big difference, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we believe that it is in the public's best interest for a public inquiry, and in listening to the response from the government you will see that they believe that it is politically in their best interest not to have a public inquiry. You know, we want to put Manitobans ahead of the New Democratic Party, of those within those conflicts of interest, within those special relationships with the Premier and his

government. We believe that the public's interest is more important than those interests. So we are going to do whatever it is that we could, and we realize that we do not have the same resources that the government has in terms of spin doctors, in the abilities to go out into the different communities and put their spin on things. You know, the Premier could have had the budget passed, the Premier could have had more Estimates being debated to date or more questions and answers through Estimates. We could have been able to pass virtually the complete legislative agenda. The Premier knows that. The Premier needs to acknowledge that the reason why those things are not happening today is because the Premier has chosen to ignore the need for a call for the public inquiry.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, maybe if it was just the Liberal Party that was calling for a public inquiry, the Premier might have something to go on in terms of, well, that is just, you know, the Liberal Party, and on and on and on and on, just about the Liberal Party. But it goes far beyond the Manitoba Liberal Party. We believe, genuinely believe, that it is all sorts of Manitobans who want to see the public inquiry. We believe that the Crocus shareholders, in most part, want to see a public inquiry. We have witnessed, and I want to quote some of these, independent media outlets calling for a public inquiry into the Crocus fiasco. We have seen both opposition parties call for a public inquiry. We have seen former NDP Premier Ed Schreyer call for a public inquiry.

Why does this happen? Why do we have all these people, individuals, groups and so forth calling for a public inquiry? Because, put simply, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government had an opportunity, the opportunity to save the Crocus Investment Fund, and it chose political interests over the public interest and turned a blind eye, put their head in the sand and did nothing. As a result, there will no longer be a Crocus Investment Fund, 33,000-plus Crocus investors have lost millions and Manitoba taxpayers have been shafted because this Premier and his government chose not to act when they knew that there were problems. We know that the government knew.

You know, there are things that have taken place since November that I think speak volumes. One of the more significant ones I thought was Pat Jacobsen. I have in my hand, and I believe this document was tabled in the past, it was a document that was a sworn affidavit by Pat Jacobsen. She had signed it in

December 6, 2005, and she is living in the province of British Columbia. I will just read the first sentence: I, Pat Jacobsen, of the city of Vancouver in the province of British Columbia—I underline this part here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, underline, I think this is a really important part—chief executive officer of Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, a significant individual who used to work with Workers Compensation, or for Workers Compensation here in the province of Manitoba, a well-respected civil servant, I would argue, even though I know that the Premier (Mr. Doer) takes exception when I say "civil servant" because it was Workers Compensation. The reality is that she was a very well-known, well-respected civil servant, or a worker for the Government of Manitoba.

This is what her affidavit says. [*interjection*]

The minister says relevance. You know, the bill that we are talking about is there because of the mistakes of this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is what led to this whole Crocus fiasco. If people would have been listening to Pat Jacobsen, if this government would have given her the time of the day and not had her fired, we would still have Crocus Fund today. You know, the Crocus shareholders would not have lost the millions of dollars and so forth.

Anyway, here is what Pat Jacobsen said in this affidavit, and it is on item 9, that I believe that had the government conducted an independent audit in 2001 of Workers Compensation Board, as I requested from the Minister responsible for Workers Compensation Board in 2001, both Crocus and the Workers Compensation Board would not have lost millions of dollars, and eight senior executives of the board would not have been fired in the subsequent years.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what happened to Pat Jacobsen? She brought this matter of problems to the attention of then-minister Becky Barrett, and what does Becky Barrett do with it? She gives it back to Pat's immediate supervisor, and then she is relieved of her responsibilities. I thought that was fairly blatant as a good example that the government knew and chose to ignore.

One could go into the provincial auditor's report. After all, that is why we have the legislation here right now, and you will see the provincial auditor, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and here—let me see if I can find it here. On page 1 in the report, and this comes right from the provincial auditor's report: "During the

course of our review, we noted several problems that should have alerted the Fund's Board, as well as the government officials responsible for monitoring the Fund, that a deeper review of the Fund's operations was warranted. Yet, insufficient attention was given to identifying, communicating, and addressing these problems."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, you have Pat Jacobsen, you have the report, there were individuals, there are e-mails, there are personal relationships—this government knew that there were problems. There is no doubt about that, and that is why we have to continue to push for a public inquiry.

We have seen individuals, and I made reference to the former premier, Ed Schreyer, and it was December 16, 2005, as he was reported in *The Winnipeg Sun*. The former NDP premier stated that the province should hold a public inquiry into the Crocus scandal. There was another article in the *Free Press* on December 17, again—I believe it was December 17—with Mr. Schreyer talking about the public inquiry or the need for a public inquiry.

*(15:10)

I have heard from numerous Crocus shareholders, saying that there is a need for a public inquiry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It goes far beyond that, and as I am speaking, I am trying to find an e-mail that was sent to me from a Crocus shareholder. Now, this particular shareholder wanted me to keep this in absolute confidence so I will not read it, but having said that, you know, we have had correspondence. We have had verbal discussion from individuals that want a public inquiry, that have been asking for a public inquiry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have introduced petitions calling for a public inquiry because individuals have wanted public inquiries; media, independent media outlets. I would like to quote a few of the independent media outlets. I tell you, there are quite a few of them so I can be fairly selective. I know I will not even have anywhere near as much time.

But this one was in *The Winnipeg Sun*, I guess, March 15: Opposition members at the Manitoba Legislature have been doing everything possible to try to force Premier Gary Doer to call a public inquiry into the Crocus scandal. Good. We think they should keep it up. The opposition Tories and the two Liberal members in the House joined forces last week issuing a rare joint press release demanding Doer call an inquiry into the scandal that fleeced

over 33,000 investors. The opposition has been frustrating the business of the government for over a week now, ringing the bells in the Legislature on a daily basis and using every possible tool to drive home the message that a public inquiry is the only way to go to get to the bottom of this mess.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it goes on and on. "Why not, Doer?" it states, with a question mark. If the Premier has nothing to hide, he should do the right thing and call a public inquiry. The public demands it. This is editorial comments.

Here is one from the *Brandon Sun*, and I am not going to have the time to read them all. "There's more disturbing evidence that more people could have lost their money through the albatross known as the Crocus Investment Fund. It turns out that the provincial NDP government seriously considered a plan that would have created a so-called 'superfund' worth hundreds of millions of dollars that would have invested government workers' pension funds in all sorts of high-risk ventures."

Well, it is interesting that the *Brandon Sun* would point this out, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We constantly hear the government denying, saying, no, no, no that is just not true and all this kind of stuff. Again, you know, this is the type of thing in which a public inquiry would be able to clear the air. I tell you, these are long editorials. I just wish I had more time.

It goes on: "These are the types of questions," and this is from the *Brandon Sun*," and for a date, March 27, '06. I quote: "These are the types of questions that only a public inquiry can answer. People like"—I cannot, this is a minister; I am only two minutes—like a minister inside this Chamber or former Industry Minister MaryAnn Mihychuk or Premier or "other government officials and Crocus board members need to explain to a judge and to a Manitoba public how these fragments of information, like separate pieces of puzzles scattered over a coffee table, all fit together."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are numerous editorials. We have had other independent media outlets calling for a public inquiry. Everyone wants a public inquiry, except for this Premier and the New Democrats that have a vested interest to hide the truth from Manitobans. The challenge from the Manitoba Liberal Party is to come clean, put Manitoba's interest first, call a public inquiry. If you have nothing to hide, call the public inquiry.

That is what we are challenging the government to do. The procedures and the things that we are doing inside this House is to apply more pressure on this government to do the right thing and call that public inquiry. Until they do that, we are going to continue to make sure that due diligence, as much as possible, is done on the many different pieces of legislation that are there, that we ensure that there are questions and answers through the Estimates and concurrence.

Ultimately, you know, it saddens me personally as a legislator that the Premier is going to sacrifice his legislative agenda because of time and not wanting to call a public inquiry. I find that that is unfortunate. It is about persons and people, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I sure wish I had more time. I do not know if I can ask for leave just to conclude my remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can I have leave just to conclude my remarks?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time has expired. No.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Sorry, the alternate rule.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): I ask the indulgence of the House for leave to revert back to the Tabling of Reports section of the House business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to present and table the Manitoba Transportation and Government Services Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for the years 2006-2007 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

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Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to talk for a few minutes on Bill 37,

The Labour-Sponsored Investment Funds Act, 2006 (Various Acts Amended).

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a bill which brings forward a large number of amendments. It shows that there were a large number of problems with the original legislation and with the amendments which this government has brought in since it has been in office that there are still lots of problems to fix up.

The original legislation, of course, was brought in under the Tories. We have heard repeatedly of the problems with that, and then since this government has been in office there have been repeated amendments to this legislation, but they still have not got it right, so we have to have a huge package of more amendments now. Clearly, you know, this government has a lot of trouble in getting legislation right. It keeps making changes, and there are more changes needed because they just cannot get a decent piece of legislation in the first place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would make the point that if this legislation as it is now passes without any changes, I suspect that it will not be long before we are back with need for more amendments. That is why we need to consider this legislation carefully. We need to make sure that we are looking at some areas of this legislation which I think need attention and need amendments.

Let us begin by a few words on the Crocus Investment Fund. For quite a number of years after its establishment in many ways the Crocus Investment Fund functioned almost as an extension of the government and government activities under the Tories and the NDP. The Tories had their own appointee on the board keeping an eye on Crocus. We have heard that from them. The NDP had their own appointment, but they tell us that they did not even pay attention to their own appointment now. We are still not sure why they had an appointee on the board. But we do know that the NDP had friends of theirs in the Manitoba Federation of Labour, some of whom—*[interjection]* Yes, we have union friends too, absolutely. But, the Manitoba Federation, some of the members on this board were known NDP members and very close associates of the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his Cabinet.

* (15:20)

So the Premier and his Cabinet clearly had very close links to decision making at the Crocus Investment Fund. We know that there were very close links and networks between what was

happening at the Crocus Investment Fund, what was happening at the Cabinet table, what has happening at the Workers Compensation Board and so on. Clearly, in many ways, it functioned as an extension of the economic planning, investing arm, economic development arm of the provincial government under the Tories and the NDP. There were, indeed, co-investments: the Crocus Investment Fund making investments and the Manitoba government lending money to the same corporations in order to try to stimulate economic growth.

Well, we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there have been some real problems. That, of course, is why we are hear today, that there were such huge problems that 33,000 Manitobans have lost more than \$60 million and that there is now a class action suit for losses which are estimated at something like \$200 million. Certainly, this is a huge level of problems that are there.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Well, let us have a look at this relationship between the Crocus Investment Fund and the government. The Tory and NDP ministers praised repeatedly the Crocus. Tories said good things about the Crocus. Indeed, the current Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), I believe, as recently as his budget of 2003, had very high praise for the Crocus Investment Fund.

The problem is that when the ministers of the Crown, say, praise the Crocus Investment Fund publicly like this, they are giving investors the impression that this is very closely linked to the government, as people believed, and that their money would be pretty safe, pretty much guaranteed. You would not have to ever consider huge losses. But, in fact, that is exactly what happened. We have losses of more than \$60 million and maybe much higher than that.

Well, people invested. People invested because the government was saying good things. We can think back. There was a long period where the government included forms within the mail. It went out with their paycheques, forms to sign up to Crocus Investment Fund, forms to allow deductions from their paycheques in order to contribute to the Crocus Investment Fund. The practice, of course, started with the Tories and then continued for a number of years by the NDP. It was giving the message to people who were employees of government that this was sort of like a government-sponsored investment program, that there was some

sort of an inherent suggestion that there was a government guarantee that their investments would be fine.

Certainly, I have talked to people, including people, interestingly enough, who worked in the Hansard office who heard and transcribed the words of various ministers of Finance and actually took them seriously. This is a problem of credibility, when the Minister of Finance says one thing and you can no longer take it seriously. But, of course, people did not know that back then and they actually took the Minister of Finance's word seriously, and they made investments on the basis of the Minister of Finance's word. Well, that is part of the reason why we need an inquiry into this Crocus Investment Fund situation, the Crocus Investment Fund scandal. There was lots of money that was lost. But, clearly, there are lots of links, and I have just gone into some of them between Crocus and the government.

The NDP had their own union people out selling Crocus Investment Fund shares. I know because I have talked to people who were there. There were halls filled in Thompson. Union reps went out and said, look, this is investing in your province, in your government, this is motherhood, you should be investing in Crocus. Well, a lot of people believed and they made investments and they have lost a lot of money. Then what happened when you believe, you know, the NDP representatives in terms of investment policy and you do not realize that many of these people who were in the unions, who were marketing these shares, had not been fully trained as financial advisors, had only gotten short-term training, instead of the in-depth training that one would normally expect for financial advisors.

Of course, the ministers of the Crown never mentioned, never mentioned until there was a virtual collapse of the Crocus Fund, a big devaluation of the value and the assets in the Crocus Fund—the ministers and the Premier (Mr. Doer) never mentioned that this might be a risky investment, that you could actually lose some money. They only acknowledged this when things started to go downhill, and, clearly, all the things that were said before were high praise for Crocus.

There was never adequate warning from this government that this was a high-risk investment, so that people would have been much more cautious in investing. They would not have put their money so quickly into the Crocus Investment Fund if the government representatives and the ministers had

actually been going around in a responsible way and saying, this is a high-risk investment. I have talked to financial advisers who say you should not have more than 5 or 10 percent of your investments in such a high-risk investment. Well, that is not the advice that was being given at the time. That is part of the reason why we need an inquiry into the Crocus Investment Fund, these close links between the government and the Crocus Investment Fund, the misleading messages that were coming out of both the Conservative and NDP governments. This clearly needs a public inquiry.

There are certain elements of this bill—let me talk about some of the elements of this bill because they are worthy of some discussion and amendment. There is a move to a little bit more democracy, that the majority of the board will be elected by Class A shareholders. Clearly, this should have been there right from the start. There was not a democratic process when this was set up. There was not for six and a half years under this government, in spite of a number of amendments, a democratic process for electing board members, and as a result, you had people appointed who were insiders, who were insiders within government, civil servants, or insiders within the union. This resulted in the fact that there was not adequate expertise in terms of investment expertise, and, clearly, things without adequate expertise in terms of accountability of the whole process. Things went very badly off the rails. Things deteriorated and there are huge losses to 33,000 average Manitobans.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, there have been major problems. There need to be major changes but we, of course, have to ask why these major changes were not made as soon as the NDP came into power. But, no, they waited until we have had revision after revision, and we are still revising and we still have a huge number of revisions which shows the extent to which there continue to be problems.

Now, I want to talk for a moment about one aspect of this legislation. This legislation provides for an independent administrator. Let us ask the question: Is this so-called independent administrator really independent? Well, when we look at the legislation, we find out that the independent administrator is appointed by the minister. Well, that might be all right, but it would probably be better to be appointed by the Legislative Assembly, and then it could have input from all political parties.

But to be appointed by the minister, first of all, we suspect right away that this is going to be some friend of the minister, somebody who will be able to talk directly to the minister because they have known the minister and give inside information here and not be somebody who is truly independent. Well, I mean, the concern here is that the government is saying, well, we are going to have an independent administrator, but not only is this person, he or she, appointed by the minister, but this person reports directly to the minister, is responsible to the minister, is not very independent, and as you will see in a moment, there are a lot more concerns about the independence of this person.

*(15:30)

If you are going to have somebody who is independent, you make sure that they really are independent, that the length of their term is a reasonable length of period. But what happens? Where is the length of the term? The length of the term is set by the minister.

I mean, we could give the minister a little bit of, you know, perhaps, leeway. Maybe the minister will appoint somebody for five or seven years, the length or period that the Auditor would, we hope. But, at least, if that was the minister's intent, it should have been in the act, right. *[interjection]* Yes, I think there is a whole bunch of amendments, you just wait.

Now, the next thing is that you have this so-called independent administrator. Okay, listen to this. Not only is this person appointed by the minister, reports to the minister, has their length of serving term set by the minister, but this person is dependent on the minister for clerical and administrative support. The minister decides whether this person has clerical or administrative support. This is hardly independent when the various details of the activity of this so-called independent administrator are all set by the minister.

But it gets better. Let me go through these details. This so-called independent administrator is appointed by the minister, reports to the minister, has a length of term set by the minister; presumably, the minister can yank this person if the minister does not like the decisions of the so-called independent administrator; this person is dependent on their clerical and administrative support for the minister. So the minister can say to this person, well, we will not give you any support if we do not like what you do.

Now, just a minute, there is another clause here. The remuneration and the expenses of this so-called independent administrator are set by the minister. You have an independent person, separate from the minister, whose expenses and remuneration are set by the minister. Is this really independent, we have to ask. Is this person going to be independent when he or she is appointed by the minister, reports to the minister, is dependent on the minister for the length of term, is dependent on the minister for clerical and administrative support, is dependent on the minister for even his remuneration and expenses?

Just a minute, there is more. Section 15(3): One of the jobs of this independent administrator is actually the assessment or the reassessment of penalties by the administrator. This has to do with the activities of the labour-sponsored venture capital fund. It may be, if the activities are not in line with the minister's thinking or whatever, that there would be penalties, assessment of penalties, or these penalties could be not only assessed but they can be reassessed after the independent administrator has gone back and talked to the minister.

But listen to this. Listen to this. This so-called independent administrator does not really have the ability to assess or reassess these penalties because the decisions of the administrator are subject to review and change by the minister. Why do you have an independent administrator when he is appointed by the minister, reports to the minister, is dependent on the minister for a length of term, clerical and administrative support, remuneration and expenses? Even the activities of the independent administrator are subject to review and change by the minister.

I think that, when we finish this discussion and this bill goes to committee, we suggest that the minister just look—[*interjection*] Yes, maybe look up the word "independent." Maybe the minister wants to rethink this position. Is this just another bureaucrat that the government wants to put in place to be able to fund? What is this person really going to do? This independent administrator cannot even buy a paper clip without the minister's approval.

An Honourable Member: But he is independent. Right?

Mr. Gerrard: That is right. I mean, this is very interesting legislation. Even though the independent administrator cannot buy a paper clip without the administrator's approval, even then the independent administrator makes decisions and those decisions can then be subject to change by the minister after

the minister has talked to his cronies. Right? You know, after the minister has consulted with his cronies, he is going to then make changes. So this is an unusual series of clauses to talk about having an independent administrator, and then setting it up so this is about as dependent as you possibly can be on the minister.

There is a serious issue, and one hopes that at committee stage this will be explored carefully because we know that right now there is a proposal from GrowthWorks to take over the Crocus Investment Fund. There are issues in this bill which are relevant to what may or may not happen with this takeover whether, in fact, the various parties and, indeed, the shareholders will vote to approve or not to approve. Is this a good thing? Well, I think it is important that the shareholders have the deciding say in this decision. The fact of the matter here is that they need to have input. But, at committee stage, we want to make sure that there is adequate opportunity for people to have input. Is in fact this legislation going to set the right framework for things to continue? Will this legislation set the right framework so that, if Crocus shareholders deem that it would be smart for a takeover by GrowthWorks, that would proceed in a reasonable fashion?

Has the government left too many uncertainties? We have already heard this concern in this legislation, that it will make it difficult to make a good decision one way or another, and it will make it more difficult for shareholders to make a good decision. Are there facts of this legislation which the minister, the powers that the minister might use to block a decision which was voted on by the shareholders because of some aspect of the legislation? We want to make sure that this legislation is fair, that it allows for this possibility, and in a way that is fair to shareholders, fair to the government, fair to GrowthWorks, fair to the Crocus Investment Fund investors and provides the best possibility.

* (15:40)

We, in our party, wanted to make sure that Manitoba grows, that whatever is there that the opportunities for investment, the potential for solid investment is there but that it be made in an accountable fashion. Clearly, the reason we have this legislation is that things went very badly off the rails, that a lot of people have lost a lot of money because the Crocus Investment Fund and the way it was being managed went very badly off the rails. We are here making these changes now because there was an

opportunity back in 2001-2002 when there were indications of concerns at Crocus Investment Fund.

You know, we talk a lot about e-mails in here, but the reality is that the former MLA for Fort Whyte spoke openly about this. There was an adequate opportunity for the government to recognize that there were some concerns out there, to make sure that they looked into this carefully. From what we know, the government, instead of doing their thorough investigation then, instead of making the changes to the legislation then, that, in fact, what happened was that the government actually made some changes to the legislation which created bigger difficulties.

There were rules, a 10-percent rule, that not more than 10 percent of the funds should be invested in a given entity. It was very clear that that 10-percent rule was actually broken, and that was just as clear a signal to this government that the Crocus Investment Fund was breaking the law. There was something drastically wrong, that the government, instead of looking into what was wrong, why things were going horribly bad, what the government did was said, oh, well, do not worry, we will change the legislation so that you are no longer acting illegally. My goodness, what a shock. What a shocking situation.

The government, with all their analysis, all the people that they have as ministers who people thought were capable did, instead of using the expertise, instead of using even the information which we presumed that they had, kind of, inside because they had close friends there, they did not act in an appropriate way. They should have seen this request, this breaking of the law by the Crocus Investment Fund, and they should have looked into it instead of saying, we will change the law so that you are no longer breaking the law. I mean, that is an incredible kind of response by a government. If governments did this in other circumstances, what would happen, what would we say? Clearly, we all know that that is what happened here.

There were other big warnings, red flags, signs; the going to the Québec caisse populaire and arranging for a loan from the Québec fund. And the problem here is that this was a clear signal of major, major problems. The issue here is that instead of going and investigating and making sure that they were on top of it, this government said, okay, yes, you know the concern here is that the links between unions in Manitoba and in Québec may have actually

fostered this end run around the normal way of operating a labour-sponsored venture capital fund. Instead of sorting out the problem, instead of investigating it and making sure things were being looked after well, what the government did was got the fund into more and more trouble. So investors lost more and more money, and we have a terrible situation where 33,000 Manitobans have lost more than \$60 million, and have had as a group to file a class-action suit to try and recoup some of the investments when the government was not there and overseeing this properly.

Mr. Speaker, I will sum up. Basically, the situation here is that we have had an implementation team. That implementation team has looked at the labour-sponsored venture capital investment funds act. They have said that the job that this government has tried to do on a couple occasions in amending it is not good enough, that there need to be a whole lot more change because the government did not do this job properly. A number of these changes we are certainly supportive of to provide a greater level of democracy and accountability.

But, as I have said, one of these changes we, certainly, have some concerns about, and that is that we do not see the measures to provide for an independent administrator as they are framed in this legislation. I am not even sure that the implementation committee, in its report, would have recommended having a so-called independent administrator so dependent on the minister, even for purchasing paper clips.

So there is a problem in this section. Hopefully, the government will look carefully at this section and come back with a way of correcting this problem. Time and time again, as we have seen in the past, they have seen problems or have been shown problems; they have failed to correct them and things got worse. So what we saw in the past was these problems with the Crocus Investment Fund, the government not being on top of things, a lot of people using a lot of money. That, of course, is why we need this independent public inquiry to make sure that people know what happened and so we can have a better situation for the future. Thank you.

House Business

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: House business.

Mr. Goertzen: I would like to announce that the resolution to be debated during private members' hour next Thursday will be the Alzheimer's Strategy resolution by the Member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer).

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the resolution for next Thursday will be the resolution dealing with Alzheimer's brought by the honourable Member for Southdale.

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Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) that we adjourn debate.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 35—The Public Schools Finance Board
Amendment and The Public Schools
Amendment Act**

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines (Mr. Rondeau), that Bill 35, The Public Schools Finance Board Amendment and The Public Schools Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Commission des finances des écoles publiques et la Loi sur les écoles publiques, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Motion presented.

Mr. Bjornson: I am pleased to be reading for the second time Bill 35, The Public Schools Finance Board Amendment and The Public Schools Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Commission des finance des écoles publiques et la Loi sur les écoles publiques.

This amendment's purpose is in keeping with the modernization of the capital support program making it more efficient and more responsive in terms of the province's educational capital needs.

Some of the highlights of this bill include:

A restructuring of the board to consist of three deputy ministers with the Deputy Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth as the chair;

A new provision requiring the board to carry out an operating review every five years;

A requirement for the board to take into account the following when administering the capital program: curriculum and instructional needs, requirements for students with special needs, community use of schools and the role of school in local communities, health and safety, energy efficiency, sustainable design and construction, maintenance and renewal, and heritage preservation;

A provision requiring the board to submit an annual funding plan to the minister for approval and maintain a multiyear planning and project framework; and

A provision to increase accountability by requiring school divisions to receive board approval for land acquisitions.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that Bill 35, The Public Schools Finance Board Amendment and The Public Schools Amendment Act, will make the capital support program more effective and more responsive and, ultimately, more efficient. Thank you.

* (15:50)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill 35, The Public Schools Finance Board Amendment and The Public Schools Amendment Act.

This act, to put it briefly, provides for a very new and different type of Public Schools Finance Board. This will be a Public Schools Finance Board which consists solely and only of three deputy ministers. There will be no others on this board. One of the deputy ministers, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), will chair this board. So you have a board with a chair and two other deputy ministers.

Now, the interesting thing here is that in the design of this board, where you have votes, right, if you have agreement of the two regular members of the board, then what is going to happen is you will have a decision. If you have a disagreement, then it will be the Deputy Minister of Education who makes the decisions, all right? So the Deputy Minister of Education is clearly in major control of the decisions coming out of this committee.

This bill is really about central control of what happens with school buildings all over the province. Put the majority of the control in the hands of one person, the Deputy Minister of Education, reporting of course to the minister on exactly what happens with all the school buildings in the province.

This bill has been introduced in the name of increased accountability and increased transparency. Now, the accountability, it is really the Deputy Minister and the Minister of Education who make all the decisions, and the Minister of Education is really on, one might call, a power grab. Is that what it is?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Gerrard: A power trip: building an empire, wanting to make micro-managed decisions about capital spending all over the province. This is, you know, an interesting sort of circumstance. It, certainly, would function very, very differently from the current Public Schools Finance Board. Now, the current Public Schools Finance Board may not have been perfect, but there are some real issues, I would suggest to you, in the way that this is being constituted.

Let me go through some of these. One is increased transparency. Well, decisions being made by three deputy ministers, or fundamentally by a deputy minister and minister, we are never going to get access to papers which relate to how these decisions were made, what criteria were used and these sorts of facts. So this is a recipe for much less transparency. It is a recipe for closed, in-house, central-control government, rather than more transparent and open government. This minister talks one way and acts in a completely different way, on a power grab, anti-transparent, anti-open approach to government.

Now, this will be a pretty closed shop. It will be very difficult for members of the opposition to know what is going on and it will be much easier for the government to cover up problems. It is not good for democracy. We will have hidden decisions instead of open decisions.

Let us look at some of the provisions. This is an act which purports to provide new accountability provisions so that the Public Schools Finance Board—that is, the three deputy ministers—is required to consult regularly with school divisions. Now there are quite a lot of school divisions around the province, and one has to ask the question: Is it the optimum role for three deputy ministers to be running all over the province, using a lot of time consulting with school divisions, instead of running other aspects of their department? Have they not got anything better to do than to run all over the province on a regular basis every month or so consulting with the school divisions?

So we have a question here about, you know, what is an efficient government. What is an effective use of people's time? It may be that the deputy ministers might delegate this, but once they start delegating it, then the effective ability of the board to consult regularly is much less. Clearly, there is a significant issue here with whether the deputy ministers will have the time to adequately carry out these tasks.

I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that the problem here is that, if this passes, we will find that the three deputy ministers are unable to fulfil this clause adequately. They are unable to consult on a regular basis with all the school divisions in the province and, in fact, what we have done is to set up a straw board, as it were, and it will have much less accountability.

There is a requirement here and, not only must they consult with school divisions, they have to develop and maintain multiyear operating plans and capital plans, evaluate board policies and procedures, develop and adopt conflict-of-interest guidelines—now there is an interesting one, I will come back to it—and perform other duties, et cetera.

The real issue: Is this the right role for deputy ministers, and in fact are deputy ministers really going to have the time to do all this consulting and make sure it is done properly? If the decision is to be made by three deputy ministers, do you need this kind of board structure in the first place? Well, clearly we need to have good decisions, and there have been some positive things from the way the Public Schools Finance Board was formulated in the past, but this kind of revamping certainly opens up to problems into the future.

Now, this issue here of developing and adopting conflict-of-interest guidelines, well, the first thing that comes to mind is what happens when you have a board of three and one of them has a conflict of interest. You now have a board of two. What happens if you have two out of three who have a conflict of interest? Then you have one who is making the decision.

What are the conflicts of interest? Let us have a look at this. Conflict of interest might be dependent on where the board members were living. We know that with deputy ministers they probably, you know, for reasons that they have to spend a lot of time in Winnipeg, that disproportionately deputy ministers live in Winnipeg.

Next thing we know is that we have one really large school division in Winnipeg, Winnipeg School Division No. 1. Suppose that you have two deputy ministers that are living in School Division No. 1 and have children or grandchildren in School Division No. 1. All of a sudden they have a conflict on capital planning in School Division No. 1, and you have a board which is actually only one person. This is theoretical, but it is actually quite possible given the fact that deputy ministers are more likely to live in Winnipeg.

* (16:00)

So there are some issues here and some interesting questions about conflict of interest, how they are going to be dealt with, where people live, where their children and grandchildren and relatives' children go to schools, et cetera. So there are some issues in having such a small board and an in-house board in terms of how these conflict of interest situations will be worked out.

Now it raises, though, a larger question. We know that there are some significant differences inside Winnipeg and rural schools. Rural schools have to draw from much larger geographic areas, have to spend a lot on bussing. The minister himself knows that there are some real issues that have to be considered when you are looking at capital expenses in different parts of the province. If you have three deputy ministers, and my guess is that it would not be unlikely that you might end up with three deputy ministers from Winnipeg, well, you are not going to have the adequate rural representation here.

The whole design of this board looks to me like it is a setup for problems. Are the deputy ministers ever going to be in Waskada or Thompson or Flin Flon or other places, Snow Lake? You know there is an issue here about representation and understanding. If you have this board making decisions on all the capital expenditures in all the schools in the province, then it is important that you take into account what the knowledge base of that board is going to be, what their backgrounds are, what their understanding is. It is a potential for major problems if there is not adequate understanding of the needs of small schools as well as large schools, rural schools as well as big city schools and so on. So there are some major issues in the setup in the constitution of this board as envisaged under this act.

Now, I want to go on a little bit and talk about some of the other aspects of this legislation. It requires that the board consider a whole variety of

things: curriculum and instructional needs of programs, requirements of students with special needs, community use of schools, the roles of schools in their local communities, the influence of the design and maintenance of school buildings on the health and safety of students and other school users, energy efficiency, sustainable design in building practices, life-cycle costs of school buildings, the long term maintenance and renewal of school buildings and infrastructure, heritage preservation, geography of school catchment areas, the efficient use of school lands and buildings within a school division and across school divisions.

Well, these are all important points, but the issue here is are you going to get three deputy ministers with adequate expertise in all these diverse areas relating to school construction, sustainability of design, the various levels of expertise that will be important in making judgments as to whether projects should go ahead or not. This is a very practical and important aspect because if you are going to get good decisions you need to have people at the table who have the right sort of expertise and background to make those good decisions.

Now, the minister will probably argue that these deputy ministers are going to be supported by engineers and scientists and all sorts of other people, land use planners, et cetera. But the problem is that my experience in this area is that you need to have good decisions. You need to have people at the board level who have some understanding of these issues, who have some level of expertise, who can ask the good questions, who can make sure that they are not being led astray by somebody who is an expert in a particular area because they have a special interest or a particular bias. You need to have people who have some expertise in these areas in order to have good judgments, good decisions made.

Too often, Mr. Speaker, what has happened is that decisions have been made to spend a lot more money than needs to be spent, based on people not having a good understanding of what can be done to do things efficiently and well. Clearly, here we have an example of setting up a small in-house board, which probably will not have the geographic base, which probably will not have the expertise to make the kind of high-quality decisions that should be made for the children of Manitoba.

Now this is what the bottom line is, Mr. Speaker. The bottom line here is that we want the best quality

learning environments for the children of our province. We want to recognize that we have, in this province, a need for our children to be learning and acquiring knowledge and being knowledge builders in this age, themselves at a level which is among the highest in Canada, among the highest in the world. This is the platform on which our young people will go out and work and play and live in Manitoba and in the world. We need to give them the platform and the framework for the highest possible quality of opportunities that they can have.

So the question here is, let us look at certain of these issues. One of the things that is happening is that more and more knowledge now is coming in via the Internet, distance education, use of technology and learning. Some fascinating developments that I saw in skills competitions for high school students at Red River College not very long ago, high school students building extraordinarily advanced robotics, doing things that were absolutely amazing, could blow you away. If we are going to give students all over our province the advantages which are now possible, we need to be able to use the technology in a way that is going to bring the best expertise anywhere in the world into the classrooms to help the teachers be teachers, to help the teachers facilitate the learning of the students, to help the students not only learn, but themselves be knowledge builders in this knowledge age.

There is an increasing opportunity for the young people, for students, to be participants in this world and not just learners. That is what is so important is, in fact, participating. So one of the areas which clearly is critical has to do with the use of technology and distance learning to open up the world and to bring the quality, the highest possible quality, into our classrooms to help the students and the teachers with the whole process of learning and being ready when they graduate, to be prepared in the best possible way for the rest of their life.

Now there is no mention here of understanding or requirements to make sure that there is a technological structure and base. Do these three deputy ministers have the kind of knowledge of technology and distance learning and global learning to be able to make sure that these advantages are possible for our children, for our young people?

Clearly, these are important issues. These are issues which give us some real pause for concern with this legislation. This legislation which, instead of opening Manitoba up to its citizens, opening

decision-making up, opening our schools up to the best in the world will, in fact, allow for a closed-shop, three-person, maybe sometimes, two- or one-person decision-making situation, in-house, where it is going to be impossible to learn how decisions are made and what is happening. So we see some really significant problems with the approach that is being taken by this minister and by this Premier (Mr. Doer) and his government with regard to this legislation.

* (16:10)

Now, we know that there have been significant problems in Seven Oaks School Division, and that the minister himself has gotten into serious trouble in the way that things were handled in Seven Oaks School Division. The minister is reacting by trying to correct the problem because he made a bad mistake. This bill, we know, is an acknowledgment that the minister made a bad mistake in the way he dealt with Seven Oaks School Division. We appreciate that, that the minister has come forward with an apology in the form of this bill, that he made a mistake and wants to change and improve things.

But we have some real concerns about the direction that the minister is going, that it may, in fact, be worse instead of better. So we suggest to the minister that at the committee stage, he look very carefully at this, look very carefully at making some very significant changes so that, indeed, this process of decision making is more accountable, that there is more transparency instead of less in this bill, that there is better democracy instead of less, that there is going to be the expertise present to make high-quality decisions and that we are going to have a process which is going to be better for children instead of worse, because that, Mr. Speaker, is the bottom line.

As I bring my comments to a close, we need to make sure that our children are really well prepared in the highest possible quality-of-way for life and that as we move into an era and as we are in an era where there is lifelong learning, that that be part of this equation, too, that people need to keep on learning on and on throughout their whole life and that the system that we are setting up is going to work for young people, for our students, but that it will also work for older people who want to come back and go on in terms of lifelong learning because that also is a critical component now and must be a critical component of our education system.

So, with those words, Mr. Speaker, I bring my remarks to a close.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, would like to put a few words on the record on Bill 35. It is an interesting bill at this point in time, Mr. Speaker. It is interesting in the sense that we have the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), who is going through a bit of a problem in regard to the Seven Oaks issue, and we see a bill like this before the House at this point in time. What I would like to be able to do is to refer to an article, possibly two, and some comments from the minister in regard to the Seven Oaks issue.

But, before I do that, I did want to really acknowledge a little bit of disappointment in the sense that I believe it is at 4:30 or something like that, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to be putting the question to a number of bills. This could be one of those bills where I think it is going to be held over, because I think it is one of the ones that the Conservatives have determined to hold over. But there are a number of other bills that I would have liked to have commented on but, due to time, will not be able to comment on. That is unfortunate, and, hopefully, we will get a chance during third reading.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I do want to get right into the discussion on this bill. It is interesting the public finance board and the role that it has played over the years are of critical importance. I know one of the issues that I had to deal with when I was very first elected back in 1988 was the issue of school overcrowding out in my area that I represented, in particular the Tyndall Park, Garden Grove, Meadows West area and Shaughnessy Park before the redistribution. I can tell you that there was a huge push—and it is not to neglect my Maples area because at the time in '88 I did not represent the portion of The Maples.

But, having said that, at the time there was a huge push for new construction of a new school facility. Even today, when you look at the size of Sisler High School, I believe it is in excess of 1,700. I can recall when it was closer to 1,400, 1,300, and some headlines I can recall offhand were saying that it was busting at the seams. We have invested significant public dollars over the last number of years into that school, and I like to think, Mr. Speaker, that a good reason for that investment has really come because of an individual by the name George Heshka, who has been a principal at Sisler High for a good number of years. I suspect that he will continue to be a principal at Sisler High for many more years to come. He is treated more like a father figure, been recognized throughout Canada. In

fact, Sisler High School has been recognized very significantly as a first-class high school in Canada.

Most of the young adults that go to that school, in fact, live in my constituency and very proud of the fact that Sisler has done so well. Of course, it has done so well because, in good part, of the teachers and the students. But there always has been a need, and I can recall having discussions with the public finance board, whether it was in regard to the construction of a potential new high school to an elementary school and, Mr. Speaker, sometimes we were able to prevail and other times, not.

We had Prairie Rose School, I should not make it quite that direct. I do not want to mislead the House. I did not actually talk to members of the board and say that we need a new high school, but I did make it known that I did believe that there was a need for a high school, as I am sure others have done as they tried to do what they can in terms of getting what they believe is in the best interests of their constituents.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is a need for us to be very careful and diligent when we make changes to the act. It is interesting that we are seeing the changes at this point in time. Because it was only last year, back in May of 2005, there was an interesting article. I want to make reference to that article, and then talk about Bill 35. Whenever you quote from an article nowadays, you have got to be very careful that you do not say the minister's name, so it will not be verbatim. I will just say, Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson). The minister of post-secondary education is getting a little frustrated, there, but I am not too sure why—or, advanced education. My apologies, I do not want to offend members by giving a wrong title, I know titles are very important to the New Democrats.

Mr. Speaker, this article, I thought, was very telling. It is in regard to the Minister of Education, and it was in *Free Press*, May 4. Mia Rabson was the reporter at the time. I would like to take some quotes directly from it. This way I cannot be accused of plagiarizing or anything of this nature.

I think it is important because, when you talk about the Public Schools Finance Board, you cannot help but reflect on some of the experiences that this minister has had. So I will read, and quote: Education Minister, blank, admitted yesterday he knew Seven Oaks School Division was getting into the business of land development a year ago and did not see anything wrong with it. On Monday, blank,

that being the minister, Mr. Speaker, denied he had any previous knowledge of the division's activities with Swinford Park development, a new subdivision in Riverbend. He told the *Free Press*, following Question Period on Monday, he had just then been advised about the situation, after he was asked about it by Tory education critic, blank blank.

But yesterday the Minister of Education acknowledged he had received a letter in May 2004 from the private citizen who was concerned about how much money the division was spending on contractors to develop the land in Riverbend. The allegations were investigated. The minister said yesterday he was told by the Public Schools Finance Board the division's actions were not inconsistent with The Public Schools Act.

It goes on: Since then, however, the department flagged the issue again and asked for a legal opinion on the matter. That opinion, the minister said, was that the school divisions are not allowed under the law to be in the business of developing land for anything, but building a school.

* (16:20)

As a result, the minister has now asked the department to spend the next month reviewing everything that had happened to determine what went wrong and why, Mr. Speaker.

And it goes on. We are talking considerable, into millions of dollars.

There are a number of things that come from that. There are certain protocols that are put into place. You know, we are changing some of those protocols with Bill 35, and the ways in which things happen within the department. But there are a couple of things that really came to mind for me. First and foremost is that of public education. I think that we have to be very, very clear. The role that our school divisions have is to provide for the best quality public education system possible with the limited resources that are provided to them.

I used to be the education critic a number of years back. I always thought that a public educational system was a wonderful thing, and we need to get behind it. I like to think that a well run public educational system would challenge the individual abilities of all children, no matter what their situation might be. We need to strive for that. One of the reasons why we have school divisions, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that it remains well-focussed on being able to meet the challenges of our young people, and

that our young people are, in fact, getting the best possible education that we can provide. I can say that our teachers are, in fact, world-class teachers, and deserve immense credit for the job, work and effort that they put in, in terms of ensuring that our young people are taught.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important that we do not lose that focus. We need to realize that focus, agree to it and stay with it. Well, here is a situation that came up there, and, once again, you had personalities. Is it not funny? It is relationships, again, that gets this government in trouble. You know, I spoke for a half-hour just a few moments ago, a few minutes back, about relationships with the Crocus file. Well, it is once again that we get the experience of relationships coming to the floor, and one has got to start questioning whether or not this government will ever learn.

I was pleased, first of all, when this particular scandal was out there and quite hot, we had heard that the minister was going to do an in-house investigation, and so forth. There were a lot of people who were a little disappointed in that and expected that the government would try to cover up some of the important things that Manitobans should be made aware of. We thought a more truly independent investigation into the matter was warranted, Mr. Speaker. So, when we saw the provincial auditor's office take note of it, and now has made a commitment to look into it, we think that is wonderful. We really and truly believe that now we are going to find out some more information about what actually took place with the Seven Oaks land deal and some of the circumstances.

I can appreciate that this is a sensitive issue. I truly believe that a number of the school trustees have done what they truly believe was in the best interests of the children in that school division. I do not want to take anything away from those individuals, school trustees, who really, kind of, followed suit and listened to what was being presented, felt that they were doing the right thing. I do not want to take anything away from that.

Having said that, you know, it is interesting. The provincial auditor makes the determination that they are now going to look into it. We are glad. We in the Liberal Party are very glad to see that. But, with the Crocus fiasco, one of the concerns that we have with the provincial auditor is that of resources. Even the provincial auditor, Mr. Speaker, made reference that he was not able to do all the things he could have

done because of time and resources in regard to the Crocus file.

We heard earlier that we see a provincial auditor's office that has years to wait before it can even act on a file. This is something that the provincial auditor's office could have looked at back in May 2004, if in fact it had been adequately resourced, or this government was not having so many other problems. This government—I do not want to go there. This government has had so many problems. I even had to come up with a petition to try to tax this government, or to suggest to this government that they need to give more money to the provincial auditor's office. The provincial auditor in Saskatchewan gets over \$800,000 more than what they get here in the province of Manitoba. Yet do the comparisons; this government has four scandals for every one scandal in Saskatchewan.

Our Auditor's office is overworked. You have to wait 10 years. What is the impact it is having on Seven Oaks? I would love to be able to have the provincial auditor's report on the Seven Oaks issue prior to passing Bill 35. I think there would be some merit to having this bill, quite possibly after the provincial auditor has come out with his report, because I suspect we are going to see some recommendations coming from the provincial auditor that are going to cause us to have to make some more changes to this legislation. It is going to be coming. You get that feeling.

Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson)—I do not know in terms of what background work he has really done in terms of coming up with these recommendations. I take it, it was not too much in terms of consultation. My leader talked about the make-up of the board itself, with three deputy ministers. Well, we need to hear the rationale behind some of the recommendations that we are getting, what this government is turning into the law or wants to make law in our province. We just had, prior, another bill in which they talk about an independent officer, an independent officer who has every control possible and beyond in terms of ensuring that this "independent officer" is nowhere near close to an independent officer.

This government needs to get a better understanding of legislation and what is in Manitoba's best interests, because, Mr. Speaker, time after time we have seen errors made by this government that, quite frankly, are made because of relationships between this government and some of its ministers and

personalities outside of this Legislature. We have seen that, time and time again. That is the reason why it is important that, in the Crocus file, you have the public inquiry; on the Seven Oaks ordeal where we anxiously await a report, a report that just cannot come quickly enough. It is sad that it cannot come quick enough because this Legislature—the provincial auditor does not work for the Ministry of Education or for this government, and thank God for that, but the provincial auditor needs to have the resources to be able to provide information to this Legislature in a timely fashion. I think this is an excellent example of why it is that we need to reassess, because I think that we should have the provincial auditor's report on the Seven Oaks ordeal—

* (16:30)

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) will have 12 minutes remaining.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 4:30 p.m., in accordance with the sessional order adopted on June 9, 2005, I am interrupting proceedings to put the question on the government bills that were introduced by April 13, 2006, and have been called for debate at least three times.

The bills that fall into this category are Bill 4, The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Amendment Act; Bill 11, The Winter Heating Cost Control Act; Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act; Bill 19, The Agri-Food and Rural Development Council Act; and Bill 22, The Elections Reform Act.

However, I should note that the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) has the ability to designate up to five bills, for which the second reading stage must be completed by May 31, 2006. He has done so by way of a letter provided to the Clerk's office, and those five bills are Bill 4, The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Amendment Act; Bill 11, The Winter Heating Cost Control Act; Bill 14, The Water Rights Amendment Act; Bill 22, The Elections Reform Act; and Bill 37, The Labour-Sponsored Investment Funds Act, 2006.

Therefore, the bills that I will be putting the question for second reading at this time are Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act, and Bill 19, The Agri-Food and Rural Development Council Act. I remind members that at this point there is to be no further debate or amendment regarding these

bills. I will call a second reading motion for each bill separately.

**Bill 15—The Emergency Measures
Amendment Act**

Mr. Speaker: Second reading of Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 19—The Agri-Food and Rural
Development Council Act**

Mr. Speaker: Second reading of Bill 19, The Agri-Food and Rural Development Council Act, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Wednesday, May 24, 6 p.m., to deal with the following bills: Bill 12, The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act; Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act; Bill 17, The Securities Amendment Act; Bill 23, The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Wednesday, May 24, 2006, at 6 p.m., to deal with the following bills: Bill 12, The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act; Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act; Bill 17, The Securities Amendment Act; and Bill 23, The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Amendment Act.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, would you please verify with the House that there is agreement for Supply to sit tomorrow in three sections from 10 until 12:30 to consider Estimates?

Mr. Speaker: Okay. For verification with the House, that there is agreement for the Committee of Supply to sit tomorrow in three sections from 10 a.m. until 12:30 in order to consider Estimates.

Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Mackintosh: Would you also please verify with the House that there is agreement for Advanced Ed to be moved to the bottom of the list for Estimates for the Chamber and that Transportation and Government Services be considered? That is tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for the Estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Training to be moved to the bottom of the list of Estimates for the Chamber and that Transportation and Government Services be considered? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Mackintosh: To be regular with proceedings, we will continue with the debate that was ongoing at 4:30, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We will continue on with the debates that we were on, and we will continue as ordered by the Government House Leader earlier.

So we were on Bill 35, The Public Schools Finance Board Amendment and The Public Schools Amendment Act, and the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) has 12 minutes remaining.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to continue. One of the bills that would have been nice to have talked to, I guess, would have been Bill 15, but I suspect that we will get the opportunity in committee stage or at the very least in third reading.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I did want to continue on talking about the public school finance bill because, as has been indicated, it is interesting that we have this bill here at this point in time. I spent some time—and I guess I had somewhat anticipated that I would be able to conclude my remarks on another day. Having said that, I am more than happy to finish it here.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the provincial auditor's office and how the provincial auditor's office has gotten involved in regard to Seven Oaks School Division, and how we think that is a positive thing. I am not too sure to what degree. We can attempt to maybe contact the provincial auditor's office and see if in fact there might be some sort of a report coming down sooner as opposed to later, because I suspect that there will be a very good chance that some sort of recommendations out of that report will come that will have an impact on the Public Schools Finance Board and this very act, The Public Schools Amendment Act.

One of the things that is important, from an opposition's point of view at the very least, is that, as much as possible, we provide due diligence in trying to make sure that we cover the many different bases that need to be covered. I think that is an important

point in the sense that, as I say, there will be a report, it is only a question of time, coming from the provincial auditor's office, and we anxiously await that.

Mr. Speaker, in looking at Bill 35, I note that there is an accountability. Provisions are added to the board, requiring that there is more consultation with the school divisions, particularly in developing multiyear capital plans, and even operating plans. I think that is a positive thing. We like to think that the Public Schools Finance Board would be kept up with what the plans are for school divisions. The school divisions, for the most part, have these capital plans. One would expect that there would be communication and a good sense of where the tax dollars are going to be spent.

Again, I will speak from personal experience, Mr. Speaker, that I seen school divisions—

An Honourable Member: I saw, Kevin.

An Honourable Member: Get the grammar right.

Mr. Lamoureux: My apologies. I saw. I do not want to disappoint the members opposite.

I saw, Mr. Speaker, in the past where we had school divisions that have had plans, and those five-year plans had not necessarily—or have been questioned by local parent councils. I have had parent councils raise issues with me in regard to capital plans, and then have made inquiries in regard to those capital plans.

I can recall on one occasion where I was told, well, go to the school division; the school division will be able to provide the details, because the Department of Education could not get me the details that I was looking for.

I think that there is a responsibility for the Department of Education or the Public Schools Finance Board to have a sense in terms of what the plans are for the schools divisions. I suspect that would go a long way in ensuring that the schools that are being built are being built in the right locations. There is a huge demand for schools in certain areas of the province. On the other hand, you have schools that are closing down. It is an interesting debate that always occurs.

* (16:40)

As the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) would be aware, there used to be a school called Florence Nightingale School. When I was the MLA for the Shaughnessy Park area it was a wonderful school to be able to go in and visit with the children. It was not a large school. I believe it was somewhere right around 100, just over 100 at times, in terms of student population. You know, the community itself was that of an older area, and, as such, there were not as many kids.

Well, whether it is in Shaughnessy Park, or it is in other areas of the city of Winnipeg, or in rural areas, you get the student age population, kids grow up and start going to high school, and the houses do not necessarily change over. You do not get younger families moving in to sustain adequate student populations to justify having a school.

Well, then, you have other areas. I remember the former Member for Fort White would read a petition quite often inside this Chamber talking about the need for a high school out in his area of the city. Mr. Speaker, I can attest to just how important of a grass-roots movement you can see when there is a justified demand for an elementary school. I have witnessed it first-hand, and MLAs have recognized that need. I have had three relatively new schools constructed since the mid-eighties in Inkster: you know, Meadows West, Stanley Knowles and Prairie Rose. So, on the one hand, you have schools in one area of my old constituency where there was a shortage, a high need for more elementary kids, to other areas of my own constituency where there is a huge demand for additional schools.

Mr. Speaker, it is hard to be able to make the type of plans that are necessary in order to try to envision, well, what can we anticipate 15 years or 20 years from now. What I have seen in some of the discussions that I have had is that they talk about now let us build a school where you have a core facility, that then would be added to by special additions to the project as the school would grow. But, then, as the school population starts to go down, you could then start to take away those additions and the core of the facility still remains. But the key is that the core of the facility has got to meet the demands of the maximum growth of that particular school. A good example that I could give with that one is Stanley Knowles School. Stanley Knowles School is a school that has, again, exceeded a thousand in terms of population.

I had opportunity to sub in with my leader in regard to the healthy task force. In some of the meetings and discussions that I had, people talked about the importance of physical activities inside our schools, and we have suggested that there be mandatory physical education. Well, you look at a school like Stanley Knowles, Mr. Speaker, and what you will find is that the gym itself cannot accommodate the large number of children that are actually attending that school. You cannot slot enough time for the individual kids to participate. Yet we put so much emphasis on healthy living and wanting to encourage our children to be active and participate. Yet we see mistakes of this nature being made.

Well, I do not believe that you have to re-invent the wheel if there are ideas of planning, of schools that are out there, that we need to look at them from a province-wide perspective, and to support our school divisions with some ideas and some thoughts to provide feedback, if I can put it that way, to our school divisions. The Public Schools Finance Board should be a board that plays a couple of roles. One of them is, I believe, is that of a check and balance in the sense that, if a school division brings forward, here is a proposal, they have the level of expertise at the Public Schools Finance Board level to be able to say, you know what, this makes sense, or why do you not make a change here that will allow for a larger core for the school. When I say "core," Mr. Speaker, what I am talking about are things like the size of the gym, the capacity to be able to accommodate what sorts of numbers of children, to the width of the hallways, if you have to vacate a school earlier. Then, once you have established the core, you can talk about the types of additions that could be brought in.

Well, that sort of knowledge, background, blueprints and so forth, is very important in terms of if you have a body that has some authority like the Public Schools Finance Board does, that they can ensure that the tax dollar is being maximized, because of limitations that our school divisions have. If we do it that way, well, then I believe that we will have a better system 15, 20 years from now in terms of our capital facilities. This way we do not run into some of the problems even that occurred in Seven Oaks, or that have occurred in school divisions like St. James and in Winnipeg No. 1. These are incredibly expensive capital facilities. Quite often, a community looks at a school as a community

property. It is more than just an educational facility. Outside organizations, individuals and families use our schools for many different things, and we need to encourage that.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), that debate now adjourn.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 30—The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan), I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), that Bill 30, The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Water Stewardship, seconded by the honourable Minister of Advanced Education and Training, that Bill 30, The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the opportunity to move this bill on behalf of the minister.

I have had the opportunity to be minister of this department. I think it is important to acknowledge the very important element that we have to look at in this province, because, quite frankly, if one looks at the evolution, certainly, of this department's role through the Fire Commissioner's office of dealing with fire prevention matters in this province, I think most members would acknowledge that we have come a significant distance in the last period of time. I am very proud of the fact that we have a Minister of Labour and a department that has continued the fine work that was done. I was the minister for a brief period of time—[interjection] Well, Mr. Speaker, the member asked, what does the bill do?

That is interesting, the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) has to ask that question because,

indeed, if you look, I was going to table a copy for the member. He has obviously lost his copy. It is The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act.

* (16:50)

Point of Order

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): For the record, Mr. Speaker, that copy is burning his hands—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Points of order are to be raised, departure of the rules or departure of Manitoba practice, and should not be used for a means of debate.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Water Stewardship has the floor.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, actually the member should know. In fact, I do not know if members opposite—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Steinbach, you withdraw that comment right now, what I heard from the Chair. You reflected on the Chair. You said, when Gary gets up on a point of order, you do not respond to that. You withdraw that comment right now unequivocally.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that comment unequivocally.

Mr. Ashton: I do think it is important to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we certainly do not reflect on the Chair. I think it is also important for members opposite—I realize that members opposite have been somewhat distracted by their tactics without a strategy. I certainly think—*[interjection]* Well, the Liberal member who has taken a—he is going to huff and puff and blow the House down, unless he gets his way.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite, particularly the rump of the Liberal Party, the two-member independent caucus, might want to appreciate that usually one has tactics appropriate to a strategy. Their strategy in this House, if it is to get noticed, well, huffing and puffing and threatening to

hold up the legislative process of this House is not going to accomplish anything.

I really think that the Liberal members, Mr. Speaker, along with the Tories, who I know have been involved in a very difficult transition, a transition that involved a lot of bell ringing, initially, a new leader who then spent a week having a transition that brought such new faces to Manitoba, again, we are dealing with what? Eric Stefanson and Don Orchard.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do not need any reflections from members opposite in terms of anything. They are a confused bunch. I think it is important for—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think we should have a little bit of relevancy to the bill.

Mr. Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize for being distracted by the antics of the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux).

There is a very significant legislative agenda. I think it is important that we do recognize the importance of bills such as this. This is a fairly significant bill. It deals with powers, in terms of fire investigation, in terms of complaints. We have considered this bill in our caucus.

I want to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, that all of these bills, some of them may appear to be more significant than others, but I think it would be very unfortunate if we were to tactically see members opposite, on this bill or any other bill, delay passage simply because of an unrelated matter.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen tactics in this House used, but usually they are attached to a strategy. When we have seen attempts to filibuster, debate extensively, whatever word you may wish to use, it is usually attached to something that relates to that particular matter. Certainly, I have seen that with the sale of MTS 10 years ago. We saw, in the 1980s, efforts by the then-Conservative opposition on the constitutional matter.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recognize that these bills should be considered on their own merit. I think the Member for Inkster, I am not sure of the current position of the official opposition, they may wish to consider whether they want to hold up a bill such as this or other bills.

I want to stress, too, that we have a very important situation here, in the sense that we have an

opportunity through the process that we have in place, which has a sessional calendar, to ensure that bills such as this bill, Bill 30, are also open to public scrutiny. I think it is important, recognizing the role of the Fire Commissioner's office and the important aspects of this, to really point to the fact that there is a significant community of interests of individuals that I am sure would be more than interested in giving a presentation on what is a fairly significant bill dealing with a number of matters relating to emergency and disaster response.

Mr. Speaker, I point out the Fire Commissioner's office does work very closely with fire departments across the province, with provincial agencies dealing with disasters. I know my own department is part of that, Water Stewardship, the department of Emergency Measures. I think it is very important for members opposite when they consider this bill—I appreciate that we are bringing this bill in for second reading today. One should not be expected to have a speedy passage in the imminent sense, but the reality is, bills such as this should all be considered on their own merit.

I think it is incumbent on members to scrutinize this bill, Mr. Speaker, and I hope they will. I think it is important that they have some consideration for members of the public, because I have seen enough committee hearings in July and August where there has been nothing but frustration for members of the public.

Members here in this Chamber have the choice. You either do the job of the Legislature. You either debate the bills. You either put the bills to a vote and allow for proper consideration, or what you end up with is a situation of this kind of tactic without a strategy. A tactic of trying to frustrate the legislative agenda. You know, members will choose tactics as they please, but I have learned one lesson over the years, that you do not play politics with issues such as public safety, and that is what this bill is all about.

I would urge members opposite to, if they have to look at the bill in some detail, not to extend the debate unduly because this deals with public safety. It deals with emergency response. This is an important modernization of our bill. The legislation deals with this. As a former minister, I know how important this is.

I know how much effort has gone into preparation of this bill. I know how many stakeholders there are out there, Mr. Speaker. I think it is incumbent on us with all of the bills before this Legislature, unless there is a very significant reason to delay the passage of those bills, and sometimes we have that, if they are extensive bills where we need to have some form of debate. I would suggest, and I look, particularly—I notice, with some interest, the Liberal leader is anxious to speak on this bill. I hope it is to speak on it, to say it is an important bill that deals with public safety and that the Liberals—well, the two independents, officially—have finally come to their senses and understood that we are elected here to deal with the business of the public of Manitoba, not to play the kind of pointless political games that members opposite keep trying to do.

Mr. Speaker, they are most definitely—if there are two opposition parties here, they are in search of a strategy. Do you want to see a political party in this Legislature that is a party with all tactics and no strategy? It is the Liberal Party. They will say one thing in rural Manitoba, one thing here in the city. Sometimes they will say two things right in the same area of the province, with the same meaning. I know it is difficult times at the Liberal caucus.

They do not have anybody to break the ties anymore. I remember when they used to have three members, it was a lot easier. One lesson, I will say to the Liberal Party, we all have—I have been in a party that was third party opposition. But relevance, it counts for having a relevant position on the issues facing the people of Manitoba, not reading *Beauchesne's* and finding 101 things you knew. I know *Beauchesne's* probably better than most, and *Beauchesne's* is based on the basic principles—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I am having significant difficulty trying to see the relevance in the minister's comments. I am just wondering if you might call him to order. I have been listening intently for about 15 minutes, I think. I am not sure that I heard an explanation of the bill;

like, it is sort of normal practice or procedure around on second reading.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable member for that point of order because relevancy is very important when debating bills. So I would ask the honourable minister to be relevant to the bill that he just introduced.

* * *

Mr. Ashton: Well, I thought the member was distracted. I did not realize she was taking detailed notes on my speech. Well, Mr. Speaker, she will take detailed notes on tactics. They have to have a

strategy attached. When it comes to bills such as this, this deals with the public safety of Manitoba.

We hope that the official opposition and the other members, the independent members, will not take something that deals with the fire prevention, emergency response, in fact—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this bill is before the House, it will remain standing in the name of the honourable Minister for Water Stewardship.

The time being 5 p.m., this House will now recess and will reconvene at 10 a.m. tomorrow (Friday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 18, 2006

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