

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

Vol. LXVIII No. 22 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 2, 2016

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
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MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	Seine River	NDP
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PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
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PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
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SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Gimli	—
<i>Vacant</i>	Southdale	—

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 20—The Environmental Rights Act

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I move, seconded by the honourable Attorney General (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 20, The Environmental Rights Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce The Environmental Rights Act. This bill proposes to affirm that every Manitoban has a right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. This legislation supports actions already taken by the Province and demonstrates our ongoing commitment to an integrated approach to environmental management that provides independent oversight and increases stakeholder engagement in decisions that impact the environment. Therefore, it is my pleasure to introduce Bill 20.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any further introduction of bills? Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports. Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Congratulating Sheena Braun

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): When I visit schools in Fort Richmond, I'm always so impressed by the hard-working staff that I meet.

It's no secret that teachers dedicate hours to their students in and out of the classroom, whether it be coaching school teams, supervising lunch programs, volunteering for school events, prepping for the next lesson, marking assignments and so much more.

Their dedication is what drives Manitoba's education system. It's our job to provide the proper tools for them to best prepare students for the future.

I was delighted to learn that Sheena Braun, principal of Ryerson Elementary school in Fort Richmond, has been named one of Canada's outstanding principals by The Learning Partnership.

This award is given to principals who have demonstrated outstanding leadership within their schools and communities. The Learning Partnership has recognized Sheena's excellence in delivering initiatives which have raised academic bars and closed gaps.

Since arriving at Ryerson in 2008, Sheena has worked tirelessly to create an atmosphere within the school that is safe, respectful, inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

She is a kind and nurturing educator, who's constantly looking for ways to improve opportunities for her students. She is an inspiring role model to the young teachers she hires and is dedicated to providing them with the best employment experience possible.

She has established strong partnerships within the Manitoba education community and even stronger relationships with the Ryerson School parents. She has also created lasting connections within the larger community, networking with community members and local agencies.

I am so proud to have a leader like Sheena in Fort Richmond. Thank you for your leadership and immeasurable contributions to Manitoba.

Youth Mental Health Support

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that 10 to 20 per cent of Canadian youth are affected by mental illness or disorder, the single most disabling group of disorders worldwide.

Today, approximately 5 per cent of male youth and 12 per cent of female youth, age 12 to 19, have experienced a major depressive episode.

Mental illness is increasingly threatening the lives of our children with Canada's youth suicide rate the third highest in the industrial world.

Suicide is among the leading causes of death in 15- to 24-year-old Canadians, second only to accidents; 4,000 people die due to suicide each year.

In Canada, only one of five children who need mental health services receive them, and up to 70 per cent of young adults living with mental health problems report the symptoms started in childhood.

I bring this up, Mr. Speaker, because the other evening in my community of La Salle they held a mental health awareness evening. There was a young gentleman there, by the name of Bryan Young, who described himself, actually, as a suicide survivor. He was a young man, 20 years old, and shared his story with the entire audience present about how twice he attempted to commit suicide.

This young man laid bare how he projected himself as a very outgoing, friendly individual, engaged in his community, in the theatre, in the arts and that, and yet at home he would become so overwhelmed he would literally hide and huddle in a corner in an attempt to deal with the anxiety that was threatening to overwhelm him.

Not only did Bryan speak about the courage that it took him to get the help that he needed, his father also spoke about the impact that this has had on his family, and about the importance of what he called a trusted team around him, a trusted team to help Bryan through this time in a recognition that those—that help must come from a group of individuals that need to dedicate themselves, that mental health—we may not win every mental health battle, Mr. Speaker, but thanks to outreach and efforts like Bryan's we'll get that much closer.

Thank you.

Lions Clubs

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): Through hundreds

of hours of volunteer hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars they have raised over the years, the Lions Club of Swan River, Minitonas and Bowsman have become the role models of community service. These three clubs have put their heads together on a variety of projects and have accomplished great things.

One of their great success stories is the recycling program that they run in 11 communities. They employ seven people to sort and sell the recycling product and, to date, they have generated over \$2.4 million that has been reinvested back into the community through Lions' projects. That material will otherwise—would have landed up in landfill with no repurpose. The paper, for example, is turned into insulation for homes.

It's a story of how environmental protection, social justice and good jobs can go out, hand in hand, with the right leadership.

The right leadership is also the strength of our health care. In 2011, together with the Swan Valley Health Facilities Foundation and the Swan Valley Lions Club, they raised nearly \$400,000 to purchase cataract surgery equipment.

* (13:40)

This equipment is helping to restore sight for hundreds of Manitobans, and they're getting the care they need closer to home.

Thanks to the dedication of the members of the Lions Club in Swan River, Minitonas and Bowsman are making great progress for things that matter to their families and their communities.

Members of the Legislative Assembly, please join me in 'commending' the great service they provide in the valley.

Midwifery Program

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the midwifery program in Manitoba is floundering because of NDP mismanagement and an attempt at political expediency that has backfired. After 17 years of an NDP government, there are only 56 midwives in Manitoba.

If they had followed through in all the work that had been done on creating midwifery education programs and legislation in the '90s, we would have hundreds more midwives today. Instead we have a small handful of midwives and a birthing centre that delivers only one quarter of the babies they could be

delivering if there were more midwives to utilize this centre.

There would have been more midwives if this government hadn't botched the midwifery education program. Rather than putting in place the education program written in the '90s, adopted in the '90s and fully ready to go in the '90s, they shelved it and let it gather dust.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, years later, they threw together a midwifery program that did not succeed, that has costed millions of dollars, has been the subject of lawsuits and is now dead in the water.

Mr. Speaker, there is no midwifery program in Manitoba and there hasn't been for the last number of years. Because of this, we are not growing the number of midwives Manitobans need. We know there is a new education program developed by the University of Manitoba and that without it the midwifery program in Manitoba will continue to flounder.

The few midwives we have in Manitoba have been without a contract for two years. They feel disrespected, not valued, and they have taken a 91 per cent strike vote. This will profoundly affect families, Mr. Speaker.

It is time for this NDP government to admit that they have failed midwives and the thousands of families that have valued this service.

This disrespect and incompetence shown by this government is inexcusable, Mr. Speaker, and Manitoba families deserve better.

Accessibility of Mental Health Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, River Heights is a vibrant and active community filled with people who care. The residents of River Heights are so concerned with the safety and well-being of others that almost all make the effort to ensure their pathways and sidewalks are cleared in the wintertime.

From parents and grandparents that help out at community centres, to students I'm privileged to grant community citizenship awards to for their selfless efforts, to the enormous community spirit displayed every year at the Robert H. Smith School's annual fundraiser that I'm looking forward to serving breakfast at once again this Friday, the people of River Heights demonstrate compassion every day.

It is with concern for health and well-being that many residents of River Heights have been calling and emailing me about recently. Manitoba Liberals have committed that a Liberal government on April 19th will fund psychologists under medicare and increase funding to hire and retain additional psychologists.

Effective diagnosis and treatment of mental illness are integral parts of primary care. Not only is this plan fully endorsed by the Manitoba Psychological Society and the Canadian Psychological Association but the people of River Heights are making it clear mental health is an essential part of overall health, and making mental health services equally accessible to everyone is the right thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, many constituents are expressing support for putting these necessary services under our medicare system. One resident also pointed out that if we had an adequate system to address mental health in its early stages, we'd have fewer people turning to substance abuse.

We can't ignore such realities. It's time to ensure all our children have the best possible opportunities. It's time to ensure that those who suffer from depression, including postpartum depression, receive the psychological support they need.

It's time to equitably treat mental health like physical health under medicare.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Just prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us this afternoon Sheena Braun, principal at Ryerson school, along with family and friends, and these folks are the guests of the honourable Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

And also seated in the public gallery this afternoon we have, from Louis Riel Arts and Technology Centre, we have 20 adult education students under the direction of Ms. Lucille Miller, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

NDP Climate Change Plan Demand-Side Management

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and Deputy Premier are attending meetings of our federal and provincial ministers and discussing issues of energy efficiency and of conservation. This week, interestingly, the first bullet on the NDP climate change plan is a commitment to demand-side management agency. And two years ago, of course, you know the Public Utilities Board made the recommendation for such an agency to be established.

But, yesterday, the Deputy Premier of Manitoba said to reporters, quote: Nothing solid has been developed yet. We haven't had a chance to go through it as a Cabinet or myself as a minister.

So, how believable, Mr. Speaker, could the Premier possibly be, talking about leading on climate change efforts and energy efficiency and conservation strategies when it's pretty obvious that Manitobans can't believe him? Why would Manitobans believe the talk that the Premier doesn't match with a walk?

Hon. James Allum (Acting Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, in fact, when we did announce our climate change plan—and we do have a climate change plan on this side of the House—we, in fact, said that we would act—and by the way, Mr. Speaker, it was a very, very comprehensive climate change plan—we said, quite clearly, that we would be establishing a demand-side management organization, that it would have an arm's-length relationship with Hydro; it would report to the minister and it would have an—a majority independent board.

So the truth of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, is that we want to make sure we have a demand-side management organization in place, but we want to make sure that it's public. The Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that he wants to slice and dice Hydro so that he can privatize it. It's happened with every Tory government in this country, and if these guys ever get into power it will happen with them too.

Mr. Pallister: Well, this assertion will come as quite a surprise to the NDP-appointed members of the Public Utilities Board, Mr. Speaker, who recommended what we supported yesterday.

And their efforts—and the efforts of Tim Sale, former Hydro minister, who advocates for the same position we support—would come as a surprise too. These accusations ring rather hollow and excessively partisan. We're all in this together on fighting for climate change, Mr. Speaker—against climate change.

Now, Manitoba could be a world leader in energy efficiency. We should be at the front. We should be leading a team of premiers to pursue energy competitiveness, energy efficiency, energy conservation. But how can we do that when there's no team over there, Mr. Speaker, when the members of Cabinet don't even know what the position is, when the talking points were developed in haste yesterday, after members opposite were confused as to what their position actually was? They claim they have a plan, but it's most certainly not an action plan.

Now, this Premier's plan is unbelievable. It's a mystery. It's an enigma. It's a puzzle, and that's just to the members of his own Cabinet, Mr. Speaker.

When they can't even address the first bullet in their action plan, how can Manitobans believe that—when they haven't even discussed this as a team, how can Manitobans believe they are serious about addressing climate change?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, when we announced our comprehensive climate change plan, not a one-point climate change plan that has as its goal—that has as its goal—to privatize Manitoba Hydro, including the demand-side management agency. The truth of the matter is that we have invested in Power Smart programming in a way that never happened when the Leader of the Opposition was a member of the Filmon government. It never happened.

On this side of the House, we have the Pay As You Save program which has been very important to families in Manitoba to ensure that they can have insulated homes, to keep the bills low and to keep warm in winter.

The sad reality is, Mr. Speaker, it's the Leader of the Opposition wants to throw Manitobans out into the cold, cold winter in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's a plan without action, Mr. Speaker; it's just empty rhetoric and words. That's all it is. The government claims, now, it has a plan. The first bullet is a demand-side management agency recommended two years ago, and they haven't even met to discuss it yet. That's not a serious plan that involves any real action.

* (13:50)

It's just like their budget, Mr. Speaker. They underspent on the demand-side management strategies they have today within Hydro by \$35 million, and they claim they care about addressing climate change, but the words don't match the actions. Now, their budget is just like this. It's a mystery. It's an enigma. It's a puzzle. They tell Manitobans, just trust us; just believe us. After 17 years of inaction, Manitobans aren't going to trust them; they deserve better. Manitobans deserve a real opportunity to contribute to national efforts to increase energy efficiency in conservation. Yesterday, three different MLAs from the NDP government did interviews in response to this demand-side management issue. One said yes; one said no; one said: You've lost me.

Now, why doesn't the Premier (Mr. Selinger) stand in his place today and admit, why does he not stand in his place and admit today, to this House and the people of Manitoba, the only conservation he really cares about is conserving his own job?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a revelation to this side of the House that the Leader of the Opposition even believes in climate change, because up until this point his environmental policy has been from the Stone Age, not the 21st century.

So let's remember what we've done with Manitoba Hydro in this government. First of all, we've kept it public. We've invested in Manitoba Hydro so that we can have clean, renewable energy. When doing—in building out Hydro, we're creating jobs for Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. Twelve hundred people, including indigenous Manitobans, are working at the 'keeysak' dam as we speak.

The Leader of the Opposition has no environmental plan. He has no climate change plan. He came up, stumbled, bumbled into demand-side management, but the only reason that he wants to do it is because he wants to slice, dice, privatize Hydro in the same way that he did with MTS when he was at the Cabinet table, and I can tell you, on this side of the House, we're never, ever going to let that happen.

Demand-Side Management Government Position

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Well two years ago, the Public Utilities Board said that there needed to be a demand-side management agency overseeing Hydro. The NDP then hired a consultant because they said that actually that they agreed, but yesterday it seemed that they'd completely forgotten about

what they'd committed to even a year ago. In response to the media, on what happened to that report—that consultant's report and the recommendations—the Minister responsible for Hydro said: You've lost me. We haven't had a chance to go through it as a Cabinet or myself as a minister in over a year.

Mr. Speaker, in over a year, the Cabinet hasn't had a chance to review the consultant's report or the recommendation. Now, I know they've been busy in the last year. There's been lots going on on the NDP side. But if they truly cared about the environment, if they truly can—cared about this issue, they would make it a priority.

Why are they so concerned about their internal fighting that they wouldn't even be concerned about the environment?

Hon. James Allum (Acting Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Mr. Speaker, this is quite remarkable because the member from Steinbach, in my four years in the House, has never, ever asked a question on the environment. He also discovered it the other day, because he also he has a plan to privatize Hydro. Remember he was the buddy of the former Leader of the Opposition who now, I think, works in Alberta, who had a plan to privatize Hydro, and he has now convinced the new Leader of the Opposition that that's a good idea, that they should privatize Hydro. We announced our climate change plan, a comprehensive climate change plan last November and in it, it talked about a public demand-side agency. That's what we said. That's what we were going to do.

The biggest threat to Manitoba Hydro, the biggest threat to climate and to a clean environment is the Leader of the Opposition and the member from Steinbach, apparently.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I don't know who the buddies are of the NDP; they're not even friends with each other.

You know, Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Hydro said he was lost, he didn't really know what was going on, and then the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak), well, he went out and he had a different story. He told the media everything's okay. He said: We've always said that we're putting in place a separate demand-side agency.

Unfortunately, the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) wasn't able to watch the news yesterday, apparently, because he went onto social media last

night, and he said that they would never put in a separate demand-side agency.

Now, I understand that there is probably not a lot of caucus meetings happening with the NDP these days. They probably cancelled all their caucus meetings. But maybe for something as important in the environment, they might want to get together and get on the same page.

Can they please come together for the sake of the environment, try to talk to each other, even for a few minutes, get along for a little bit and do something right for Manitobans and the environment, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a—quite a remarkable statement from the member for Steinbach, because on this side of the House, we're solid on values for social justice, for equity, for fairness for Manitobans to make sure that every Manitoban has a job, every Manitoban has social security, every Manitoban lives in a—safe communities and every Manitoban has the right to a clean environment.

My friend, the minister of the environment, just tabled an environmental bill of rights. We're very proud of that environmental bill of rights. We're very proud of our climate change plan, Mr. Speaker.

The truth of the matter is they have no plan. They don't care about the environment. The only thing they care about is selling Manitoba Hydro to their friends, just like the Leader of the Opposition did when they sold MTS to his buddies.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which of the five NDP caucuses that member is speaking on behalf of, but it is important that there be one unified voice within the government, but we did not see that yesterday.

The Minister responsible for Hydro, who should be the lead on this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, he said that he was lost and he didn't know what was going on; he hadn't actually seen anything in over a year.

The House Leader also seemed confused, Mr. Speaker, adding to the lostness of the Minister of Hydro, and then the MLA for St. Norbert, well, he was sort of equal parts lost and equal parts confused when he went on Twitter last night.

Now, we haven't seen this NDP government dedicated to anything or unified on anything since they decided to jam the PST through in 2013. That

was the last time they were actually a unified force. Maybe they could try to come together and do something for the environment, or maybe they only come together, maybe they're only unified, maybe they only speak with one voice when they're reaching into people's pockets and taking their money, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Allum: It's funny that when the member from Steinbach mentions that, Mr. Speaker, because he conveniently forgets to state to the people of Manitoba that we have among the lowest hydro rates in Canada, and then when you bundle that with home heating and with car insurance, you have the lowest bundle of utility bills in Canada.

We're Canadian leaders when it comes to hydro. We're Canadian leaders when it comes to environmental protection. We're Canadian leaders when it comes to energy efficiency. The truth of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that they want to privatize Hydro, they want to privatize child care. Before you know it, the member opposite will be standing up and privatizing education too. They're the privatizers; we believe in the public ownership for all the people of Manitoba.

Power Smart Program Report Recommendations

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, in June of 2014 the Public Utilities Board recommended that Hydro be divested of its responsibility for Power Smart programming. That's a recommendation this government said in a press release that it accepted.

Despite the assurances, the minister said yesterday, and I quote: I do not know what the plan is. End of quote.

Who's telling the truth, Mr. Speaker? Is it the member from Kildonan, who is the acting minister of Hydro, as he has said is they accepted the recommendation, or is it the current minister who said he doesn't know what the plan is?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, with respect to yesterday's discussion, I said that we were accepting the recommendations and I said the structure that was going to be put in place would be a structure that would be independent. And I said the issue was, as in legal terms, a 'discrene' and the difference between one structure and the other structure, and I said that had not been yet determined.

We were talking about structure. We weren't talking about the actual implementation and that was the effect of the discussion. The members have turned it around. At the end of the day, every day I hear in this House attack after attack after attack on the most important Crown corporation in the province of Manitoba, the corporation that has the lowest rates in North America, and all they do is attack Hydro, attack who works for Hydro, attack the government. It's clear what their agenda is, is to bring down Hydro, privatize it, just like they did to MTS, just like they did with the jobs moving out of Manitoba. That's what's on their agenda.

Mr. Eichler: No wonder, Mr. Speaker, the minister's confused. With a colleague like that, they don't [*inaudible*] any better either.

In September of 2014 Philippe Dunsy was contracted to advise the government in what an independent agency should look like. And yesterday we found out that the minister said, and I quote: I have not had the opportunity to speak to anyone about the report. End of quote.

*(14:00)

The NDP used \$160,000 taken from the pockets of Manitobans for advice, good advice, from a respected expert. The NDP has ignored his advice. The minister needs to apologize to Manitobans.

Will he apologize to Manitobans today for his incompetence?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as Government House Leader, I am responsible for bringing bills to the Legislature. We have about 20 on the Order Paper. We are bringing bills forward on a regular basis. I can guarantee members opposite—I can guarantee members opposite—there will be a bill brought forward on DSN on the next opportunity we have to meet, or, on the alternative, if the members want to extend the session, if the members want to sit nights for a change, if they want to sit after 5 o'clock, if they want to sit on Saturdays, we'll bring that bill forward. That's when I'll have the opportunity to do so.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lakeside.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Lakeside has the floor.

Mr. Eichler: Clearly, the Minister of Hydro does not want to answer these questions. Manitobans deserve to know the answers why \$160,000 flew out the door from the NDP to pay for advice that they are ignoring, \$160,000 to pay it—advice that the Minister of Hydro has not even seen. Yesterday he said, give me a break.

I think Manitobans are ready to give the NDP a break, and that break will start on April the 19th. He should maybe read his report.

Mr. Chomiak: Curious logic of members opposite, Mr. Speaker. If we had revealed the contents of that bill, they would have stood up on a matter of principle and privilege, saying you cannot reveal the contents of the bill before it's tabled in the Legislature. Now they say, oh, you're taking a consultant's report.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister responsible for Hydro brought together one of the most significant bills in the history of the province of Manitoba. He brought to this Chamber the TRC bill, which is one of the most significant. And at the same time, members asked about a specific report.

I've seen Dunsy, I've talked to Dunsy, Mr. Speaker. We are drafting legislation. It will come before this Chamber.

I again ask: Will you sit after 5 o'clock? Will you sit in the mornings? Will you come in on extra hours? I will ask leave to you that—and we'll bring that bill forward, Mr. Speaker, if we give the people who draft it enough time. Will you sit longer? It's now on your shoulders.

Budget 2016 Tabling Timeline

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, this government was given six months longer to get their act together, and they still haven't done it. Another day won't help.

Mr. Speaker, today at City Hall in Winnipeg, there will be a budget. But today at the Legislature here in Manitoba the Finance Minister is sticking to his guns that he won't deliver a budget. Now, this same Finance Minister said last September: There will be a budget next spring, definitely. When the people go to the polls, they will know our plans. And then the Finance Minister changed his mind.

Now, the Finance Minister doesn't want to deliver a budget. He doesn't want to show

Manitobans the absence of an NDP plan and more evidence of the NDP's mismanagement.

Well, why did he flip-flop? Why is he not providing a full and complete budget to Manitobans because that is what governments do?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, we've addressed this issue in the House several times, both myself and the Premier (Mr. Selinger). Next week, on March the 8th, we'll be presenting to the Legislature an economic update, outlook, which will, as I said earlier, draw a sharp contrast between this government, who's going to continue to invest in health care, continue to invest in education and infrastructure. As you know, we've got one of the strongest economies in Canada. We'll continue to ensure that we have one of the lowest unemployment rates. People will see that.

They'll also see the members opposite as well, the—their plan, Mr. Speaker, to, as mentioned by my colleagues, to privatize our Crown corporations, Hydro, by the Conservatives; the liquor commission, privatization by the Liberal leader. They want to fire 800 jobs. They want to fire 1,000 nurses.

Next week our plan will be revealed to Manitobans.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, he's got it all wrong. A plan—a budget is a plan. A budget is a promise. And how is their plan going? Well, it shows that—the second quarter financial report shows the deficit is up 30 per cent. Financial reports show the NDP overspent its planned budget by \$140 million.

And how did the Finance Minister respond? He said, some targets you hit and some targets you don't.

Mr. Speaker, accountability matters. A plan matters. He will offer a drive-by update, but Manitobans deserve nothing less than a full financial plan.

Will the Finance Minister just admit that he won't table a budget now because he does not want to be accountable to Manitobans for his failed record of mismanagement?

Mr. Dewar: As I said, Mr. Speaker, we're presenting that—the update next week in the House. The member talks about the, you know, the second quarter. I'll draw attention to the member to the document which we provide in this House; it's called Estimates. These are Estimates of expenditure, these are estimates of revenue. For example, last—when I revealed the second quarter it was revealed that there was an

overexpenditure related to the fighting of forest fires. There was 454 forest fires that we had to fight last year.

Is the member opposite telling us now that we shouldn't have done that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Friesen: This Finance Minister offers excuses; Manitobans expect results.

How did the NDP plan for Manitoba turn out? It's a record of financial mismanagement. They've raided the Fiscal Stabilization Account, the debt is doubled and Manitoba's credit down rating—downgrade is the first downgrade in 30 years. The Finance Minister is refusing to meet his fundamental responsibility to provide a full and complete plan. A budget is a plan. It is a promise.

Won't the Finance Minister just admit that the NDP's deplorable finance record shows there is no plan, and Manitobans just don't believe their promises anymore?

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier on in the—as we—both the Premier and I addressed this last week, the Province of Saskatchewan recently had just announced their third quarter. That was their fiscal update. The federal government, as we know, in the past they, as well, provided a fiscal update. When the Leader of the Opposition—when he was an MP he likes to talk about the fact that he was the chair of the finance committee. He claims that's his great credential is to speak to fiscal matters.

I'll remind the member, Mr. Speaker, that, in 2007, he was the chair of the finance committee the Harper government—that year the Harper government brought down an economic statement, Mr. Speaker. They did not bring down a budget. I'm assuming because this member—that was his advice to the Finance Minister.

Personal-Care-Home Beds Placement Wait Times

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, according to freedom of information documents there were no new personal-care-home beds opened in 2014 or 2015 in Manitoba. Because of this, today there are over 1,100 seniors on a waiting list for a personal-care-home bed in Manitoba. They need a bed because they can no longer take care of themselves, and some are stuck in unsafe situations.

I'd like to ask this Minister of Health to explain to these vulnerable frail seniors why she and her government have so badly failed them.

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

I'd like to assure Manitobans that we are doing work on personal-care homes and looking after seniors with personal-care homes and supportive housing beds because we do know that seniors and their families want a variety of supports and housing options, and our strategy of continued investment in adding new PCH beds, supportive housing and home care is, in fact, on the right track.

There are five personal-care homes currently under development bringing over 300 new beds online, including in Lac du Bonnet, Morden and in Winnipeg. So we are continuing to look after seniors and develop new personal care.

Mrs. Driedger: She's been announcing those beds for about six years and we still don't see them.

Mr. Speaker, in the last election this NDP Premier promised more personal-care-home beds in Manitoba. Right after the election he broke that promise and actually cut \$16 million out of the long-term-care budget. This, despite a report by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy that same year, saying that Manitoba needs as many as 6,300 more personal-care-home beds by 2036.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain why her government—her Premier (Mr. Selinger)—made that promise, ignored the warnings and that they have now created a PCH bed crisis in Manitoba.

* (14:10)

Ms. Blady: I believe members opposite are the last ones that have any opportunities to speak with any moral high ground around a personal-care-home bed crisis, because, again, all we need to do is reflect on the words of Dr. Adrian Fine, who called the health-care policies of the PC government of the 1990s, and I quote, dishonest and stupid.

Several years ago, when ERs were overflowing, the government decided to close many acute medical beds in the city and, at the same time, considerably expand PCH beds, the latter part being part of an election promise. But guess what? After the election their government—a PC government—cancelled the PCH development but maintained the cut in acute

medical beds. Dishonest and stupid decision had the entirely predictable result of ER overcrowding, though it continually worsened. Total government liability. No moral high ground, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Driedger: In the '90s we built more beds than this government could even dream of. That's true. What was it, 90 per year? Mr. Speaker, compared to their record, the Tories built 90 beds per year compared to their 20 beds a year. That's the difference between us.

We have a bed crisis caused by this government. The WRHA says we need 250 new beds a year for years to come. This is not happening. This is all because all we get out of this government and this minister are news releases, a lot of talk, no action. Maybe she's thinking that her happy thoughts and neuroplasticity is going to fix the problem. It is not.

So I would like her to explain to Manitoba seniors: How could she have mismanaged this file so badly and how could she have failed Manitobans so badly?

Ms. Blady: One thing I will explain to Manitobans are some facts.

There are 125 licensed PCHs in Manitoba today, six more than in 1999. There were 69 supportive housing units in the whole province in 1999, to over 700 today. That's a tenfold increase. And we've added more than 1,000 PCH and supportive housing beds and expanded home care.

And let's remind Manitobans too: We're the folks working to keep home care accessible. They're the folks who tried to sell it off and privatize it. Again, no moral high ground.

Co-operative Promotion Administrative Expenses

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): In June of 2013, the government introduced a law that would require support for co-operative organizations through the Cooperative Promotion Board. In the last annual report, I note the government spent more on administration than it did on supporting grants to community groups involved in the promotion of co-ops.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain how it would be the case that a body set up to provide grants to promote co-operatives would spend more on administration than on actually supporting co-operative organizations?

Hon. Mohinder Saran (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I thank the member for asking the question. I thought she is in retiring mode; she won't me—she won't ask me any questions at all. And I think she was pretending as NDP on the social media, according to the Opposition Leader.

And as soon as she retires, she can come and complain with me and we can discuss this quite better how we can, those organizations, how we can support them. And it will be a really good experience to be on the NDP side and understand the co-op housing and co-op organization.

I think these people are just to privatize all the houses and all the development—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, it's a little befuddling to listen to the minister and his answers. He didn't even come close to answering the question that I asked.

Only the NDP, Mr. Speaker, could spend more on administration than they do on giving out grants to the community. What a waste of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, can he try to explain to Manitobans why, in fact, he spends more on administration—I'm being very clear. Hopefully he can understand and answer.

Why does he spend more on administration than on providing grants to community organizations?

Mr. Saran: The member should understand, like, we are continuously providing grants, and I don't think there's any way that we are not supporting those organizations. We are supporting those organizations every day.

How they can support those organizations with a \$500-million cut in the budget? So can you imagine what will happen, all those organizations? Those organizations will be decimated and they won't be exist at all. Everything will be privatized. People will be left at their own, and they will only will be supporting just the one per cent. And that's their agenda, and people should understand where they are coming from.

And we are supporting those organizations every day, every year, every time.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, let me try again.

Those dollars—those tax dollars were allocated and earmarked for co-operatives and organizations, for community organizations, not for administrative expenses, Mr. Speaker, and taxpayers in Manitoba deserve to have an answer from this government and this minister.

Can he just give us a straight answer or is this just another example of NDP incompetence and financial mismanagement?

Mr. Saran: Mr. Speaker, let me explain.

The Opposition Leader was a senior minister in the Filmon government that clawed back the National Child Benefit, forcing middle class and working families to get by on less. We ended this extreme cut and put \$533 a month into hands of single parents with two small children. And the Filmon government, he also put low-income Manitoba families at risk by freezing the minimum wage seven times, refusing to build any new affordable housing, firing 700 teachers and 1,000 nurses, cutting the social assistance rate by nearly \$150 per month.

So what kind of responsibility they have? They did not help any family. They did not help any—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has elapsed.

ABA Therapy Treatment Wait Times

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, there are, today, about 100 children with autism sitting on a waiting list to receive help using applied behavioural analysis, or ABA, in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, when a child is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, parents are told that early intervention is a key. This gives families a sense of hope until they discover that, today, early intervention is far out of reach for most. A Manitoba Liberal government, on April 19th, will correct this problem.

Why is the Premier (Mr. Selinger) not ensuring, today, that there are sufficient treatment spaces for children with autism?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, since 1999 we have been working with families, with agencies to support children with a diagnosis of autism. What this government has done is we have invested

in programs such as ABA, Floortime, outreach programs.

We are making sure that there are services across the province but we're not stopping there. We have heard time and time again from advocates that want to ensure that there are services on the lifespan to make sure that we are providing services along with our partners in education, making sure that we're providing those services as individuals age to be adult.

What are we going to provide? How are we going to work together? We have expanded those services. I am proud of the work that we've done. We have a lot more work to do, but I am confident with our approach of investing in front-line services, we're going to make a difference, unlike the members opposite with all of their reckless cuts that they're promising.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it's not about a smattering of programs. This is about whether all children with autism can expect—can receive the supports that they need.

* (14:20)

As the president of the Manitoba Families for Effective Autism Treatment has indicated, there was no increase in funding for ABA therapy this year, even with the continued long waiting lists.

The Premier's (Mr. Selinger) autism program has enough spaces for 40 per cent of the children who need it. Every child should be supported, not 40 per cent.

Why is the Premier running a vital program at only 40 per cent when it comes to helping children with autism?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I've said previously, this government has continuously invested in providing services to families with children diagnosed with autism. Starting right from the point of diagnosis right to the age of 21, we're providing those services. And through Community Living Program, we're going beyond that.

What we are doing is making investments, making sure that we have the resources that are available. We know that we have more work to do but we know, with our focus on providing and funding front-line services, we're going to make a difference.

With our partner at St. Amant and our partner with MFEAT, we've been able to redevelop the program where we are going to be able to see more children in a group setting, and we believe that that will prove to be very successful.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it is not about a smattering of insufficiently funded programs.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP only are considering today's costs and not future costs in their 40 per cent autism approach. When a child with autism doesn't receive effective early treatment, the additional costs to education, to health care and to our province become much higher downstream, because this NDP government did not see fit to allow that child to achieve his or her potential.

Since the Premier is consumed with a short-term, partial and discriminatory program, can he tell us, today, how he is selecting his chosen 40 per cent among these children?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What we provide to families that are dealing with the diagnosis of autism with their children is a continuum of service; it starts from the point of diagnosis to adulthood. We are proud of those programs. There are a multitude of different programs that are being funded, outreach workers across the province, which we have increased since 2008.

We have more funding for ABA program Floortime; we are providing more supports within the school system; we are making those investments. What Manitobans and parents dealing with children with the diagnosis of autism need to fear are the members opposite and their reckless cuts and the Liberals' commitment to reduce the health and education levy. How do you fund any social programs with \$471 million leaving our budget? It's impossible.

Surface Water Management Support for Bill

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, it's interesting, today, to hear the members opposite boast about their one-point environmental plan which is, in reality, just the first step in selling off Manitoba Hydro, when we have a comprehensive water—surface water management bill on the Order Paper ready to debate and ready to pass through this House. This is forward-thinking legislation that will help protect our lakes, our rivers and our water for today and for the future.

Can the Minister of Conservation remind the House why it's important we pass this bill to committee today?

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I thank the member for the question.

The Surface Water Management Act was before the House earlier this week. Members opposite chose to use political ploys to delay its passage and, ultimately, spoke it out at the end of the day. Perhaps, if an opportunity arises again, this time they will actually allow this fundamental legislation to pass through second reading so we can take it to the standing committee so it can become law before this Legislature is finished its work here.

This is fundamental to the—addressing the challenges of climate change, which is the most important thing before us as a people. It's very interesting; I actually heard the word climate change come out of the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition, so, hallelujah, Mr. Speaker. Maybe we could actually move forward on the topic of climate change today and pass The Surface Water Management Act through second reading.

Lake Winnipeg East Transmission Project Rural Consultation Concerns

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, it seems every couple days we're hearing more and more conflicts when it comes to Manitoba Hydro and the way this Deputy Premier and the Selinger government has handled the Manitoba Hydro file.

The Lake Winnipeg east transmission project had an environmental assessment in 2012. Consultation meetings with all communities were supposed to have taken place by December 2012. As of now, work has started on the project and the communities of Bissett, Manigotagan, have felt their voices have been left out of the consultations.

Why does this Deputy Premier, the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson), feel that he has the right to bully and exclude these rural communities, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. James Allum (Acting Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Mr. Speaker, it's an interesting day that he's termed—that the member should use the term bully when this is the opposition that voted against the most progressive antibullying legislation in the country.

But the truth of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, is that we work in collaboration and co-operation with all the people of Manitoba to build this beautiful province. We've invested in Manitoba Hydro so that our citizens have clean, renewable energy that they can rely on for generations to come, and every time we get up to build Manitoba Hydro, the opposition wants to tear it down.

And, really, the saddest part is that the Liberals have gone to the right of the Conservatives when it comes to public policy in Manitoba. Liberals, Conservatives—the same old story. The only ones you can rely on to build Manitoba is the NDP and the existing government of Manitoba that governs for all the people of Manitoba all the time.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Is—the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, yesterday we heard the Premier (Mr. Selinger) demand that we debate the water rights bill in the afternoon. We granted—we wanted to grant leave for that, and the NDP House Leader refused to have it called.

Today I hear the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), echoed by the Minister of Conservation, want to debate this afternoon Bill 20, The Environmental Rights Act. We're prepared to grant leave to debate that bill this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, as requested.

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

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order I'd like to remind members opposite that we are prepared, on this side of the House, to extend sittings of the House. We're prepared to sit past 5. I know the members don't like working past 5 o'clock. We're prepared to work past 5 o'clock. We're prepared to work on Fridays. We're prepared to work on weekends. We'll even offer the members opposite not put up speakers to allow them to do all of the talking, which they seem to like to do—only talk and not do action.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to grant leave to do that. I'm prepared to negotiate it with the member. We have lots of things we want to do for Manitobans. We want to build Manitoba. We want to

see a better Manitoba. We want to do that on behalf of all Manitobans, and we're happy to do it and sit here longer, sit extra hours. We'll grant that if we get unanimous consent from members opposite, which I can ask for today. If they want to grant it, we're happy to do it.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), I listened very carefully and thank all honourable members for their advice on this matter.

I listened very carefully to the comments that were made. I did not hear a reference to a particular breach of a rule, as would be indicated in our rule book, and I also know that, as I've indicated, I believe it was yesterday, that we have not yet proceeded to orders of the day, and I leave it to the members of the House and the House leaders to determine the order in which the business of the House is conducted.

And so I must respectfully rule that since there was no breach of a particular rule, nor mention of it, that there is no point of order.

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed to petitions.

Provincial Trunk Highway 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank—Pedestrian Safety

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These—the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH 206 at the intersection with Cedar Avenue.

(2) There have been many dangerous incidents where drivers use the right shoulder to pass vehicles that have stopped at the traffic light waiting to turn left at this intersection.

(3) Law enforcement officials have identified this intersection as a hot spot of concern for the safety of schoolchildren, drivers and emergency responders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in

Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

* (14:30)

This is signed by K. Gomes, C. Shymho, K. Randall and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Manitoba Interlake—Request to Repair and Reopen Provincial Roads 415 and 416

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Interlake region is an important transportation corridor for Manitoba but, unfortunately, is still dealing with serious underinvestment in infrastructure under this provincial government.

(2) The provincial roads 415 and 416 are vital to the region but have still not been repaired or reopened since sustaining damages during the 2010 flood.

(3) Residents and businesses in the Manitoba Interlake are seriously impacted and inconvenienced by having no adequate east-west travel routes over an area of 525 square miles.

(4) This lack of east-west travel routes is also a major public safety concern, as emergency response vehicles—pardon me—are impeded from arriving in a timely manner.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government repair and reopen the provincial roads 415 and 416 to allow adequate east-west travel in the Interlake.

And this petition is signed by J. Morrison, L. Lamoureux, J. Jabling and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any further petitions?

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route—Information Request

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is follows:

(1) The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating current transmission line that is set to be located in southeast Manitoba, will cross into US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

(2) The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with a tower heights expected to reach 40 to 60 metres and be located every 400 to 500 metres.

(3) The preferred route designated to be a line will see hydro towers come to close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternate route that has been also considered.

And (4) the alternate route would be seen the line run further east, avoiding densely populated areas and eventually terminate in the same spot at the US border.

And (5) the Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive a response.

And (6) landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on their land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation of all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding the criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not the routing represents a least intrusive option to residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne's, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

And this petition is signed by D. Froome, R. Cameron and D. Richey and many fine Manitobans.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating-current transmission line set to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

(2) The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 and 60 metres and be located every four to five hundred metres.

(3) The preferred route designated for the line will see hydro towers come in close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternate route that was also considered.

(4) The alternate route would have seen the run—the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and, eventually, terminate at the same spot at the US border.

(5) The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

(6) Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing represented the least intrusive options to the residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

This petition is signed by D. Balcaen, T. Bassa, R. Mireault and many more fine Manitobans.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating-current transmission line set to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 and 60 metres and be located every four to five hundred metres.

The preferred route designated for the line will see hydro towers come in close proximity to the

community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternate route that was also considered.

The alternate route would have seen the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and, eventually, terminate at the same spot at the US border.

The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing represented the least intrusive option to residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

And this is signed by S. Buechi, M. Kurlowich, H. Schlup and many others, Mr. Speaker.

Community-Based Brain Injury Services and Supports

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

Brain Injury Canada, cited at braininjurycanada.ca/acquired-brain-injury/, estimates that 50,000 Canadians sustain brain injuries each year, over 1 million Canadians live with the effects of an acquired brain injury, 30 per cent of all traumatic brain injuries are sustained by children and youth, and approximately 50 per cent of brain injuries come from falls and motor vehicle collisions.

Studies conducted by Manitoba Health in 2003 and 2006, and the Brandon Regional Health Authority in 2008, identified the need for community-based brain injury services. These studies recommended that Manitoba adopt the Saskatchewan model of brain injury services.

The treatment and coverage for Manitobans who suffer brain injuries varies greatly, resulting in huge inadequacies depending upon whether a person suffers the injury at work, in a motor vehicle accident, through assault or from medical issues such as a stroke, aneurysm or anoxia due to cardiac arrest or other medical reasons.

Although in-patient services, including acute care, short- and longer term rehabilitation are available throughout the province, brain injury patients who are discharged from hospital often experience discontinuation or great reduction of services which results in significant financial and emotional burdens being placed on family and friends.

* (14:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to develop and evolve community-based brain injury services that include but are not limited to: case-management services, known also as service navigation; safe and accessible housing in the community; proctor or coach-type assistance for community reintegration programs; improved access to community-based rehabilitation services; and improved transportation, especially for people living in rural Manitoba.

And to urge the provincial government to encompass financial and emotional supports for families and other caregivers in the model that is developed.

And this petition is signed by D. Gambito, D. Mitchell, J. Ficek and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

And this is the background to this petition:

(1) Brain Injury Canada, cited at <http://braininjurycanada.ca/acquired-brain-injury/>, estimates that 50,000 Canadians sustain brain injuries each year, over 1 million Canadians live with the effects of an acquired brain injury, 30 per cent of all traumatic brain injuries are sustained by children and youth, and approximately 50 per cent of brain injuries come from falls and motor vehicle collisions.

(2) Studies conducted by Manitoba Health in 2003 and 2006 and the Brandon Regional Health

Authority in 2008 identified the need for community-based brain injury services.

(3) These studies recommended that Manitoba adopt the Saskatchewan model of brain injury services.

(4) The treatment and coverage for Manitobans who suffer brain injuries varies greatly, resulting in huge inadequacies depending upon whether a person suffers the injury at work, in a motor vehicle accident, through assault or from medical issues such as a stroke, aneurysm, anoxia due to cardiac arrest or other medical reasons.

(5) Although in-patient services including acute care, short- and longer term rehabilitation are available throughout the province, brain injury patients who are discharged from the hospital often experience discontinuation of great reduction of services which results in significant financial and emotional burdens being placed on family and friends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to develop and evolve community-based brain injury services that include but are not limited to: case management services, known also as service navigation; safe and accessible housing in the community; proctor or coach-type assistance for community reintegration programs; improved access to community-based rehabilitation services; and improved transportation, especially for people living in rural Manitoba.

(2) To urge the provincial government to encompass financial and emotional supports for families and other caregivers in the model that is developed.

This petition is signed by C. Osborne, H. Fleming, D. Morgan and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: I believe that concludes petitions.

We'll now move on to grievances.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): We would like to call for second reading the following bill: Bill 17, The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act.

After that, Mr. Speaker, we'd like to call debate on second reading for Bill 5, The Surface Water Management Act. Then we'd like to call second reading on Bill 6, The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act, then debate on second reading for Bill 4, The Manitoba East Side Road Authority Amendment Act, then second readings on Bill 3, which is The Post-Secondary Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policies Act, and then Bill 16, The Children's Advocate Act.

Mr. Speaker: We'll be calling bills in the following order starting with second reading of Bill 17, followed by debate on second readings of Bill 5 and then second reading of Bill 6, and then debate on second reading of Bill 4, to be followed by second readings of Bill 3, and Bill 16, starting first with Bill 17.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 17—The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is the only party that values and respects teachers in Manitoba because we know that so much in our education system and our society depends on the work they do each and every day.

We also have a deep respect for the Manitoba Teachers' Society and what they do on behalf of teachers, and the teaching profession and students in our province each and every day, and I'm very proud, Mr. Speaker, to recognize members of MTS in the gallery today and welcome them for this historic bill.

I've had the honour of working closely with MTS along with other education partners to make our education system stronger, keep it public and make sure that all of our students get the support and education they need because in our—on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, everyone matters. I know that MTS shares with us a commitment to high-quality education that is based on strong

teachers with strong supports in classrooms throughout the province.

This bill is important because it formally recognizes that MTS is the voice of teachers in Manitoba and makes sure that MTS is able to respond more effectively and efficiently to the concerns of the over 15,000 public school teachers in our province. When MTS told me that The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act was in need of updating to better recognize the strong autonomous voice that MTS provides for teachers, we acted; we listened and introduced this legislation because, Mr. Speaker, we listen to teachers.

This is not the view that all parties take on teachers. The Opposition Leader and his Conservatives have a history of putting their ideology of cuts ahead of supporting teachers in our classrooms and ensuring our children have a bright future. You know, when he was in government, 700 teachers got fired. According to the Manitoba Teachers' Society, education funding in the 1990s can be summarized in one word: cuts. In 10 years we lost more than 700 teaching positions.

Now the Conservatives are talking about cuts to education again, Mr. Speaker. We know that, when the Conservatives talk about cutting budgets, they are actually talking about firing teachers, jamming more kids into classrooms and closing community schools. We know that's what he would do because that's what he did—the Leader of the Opposition—when last he was in government. Families remember having to fight just to be allowed to keep their community school open while kids went without proper supplies and teachers struggled with larger and larger classrooms.

When I moved here in 1996, the Tories were suggesting that we should put commercial advertising in our classrooms. This will never be our approach, Mr. Speaker. We've been investing in education every year and giving more supports to teachers, students and parents, and the NDP will keep investing in our teachers and our schools.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 is an important bill that gives the Manitoba Teachers' Society more control over their internal governance structure and greater autonomy over its bylaw-making powers. This new act will, in effect, make the act more clear and accessible to readers and better reflect the needs of an organization with a proud 100-year tradition of public education in Manitoba.

This is an important bill, all of us on this side of the House agree. But I know that we have other important bills to debate today, and I know that all members will agree with us, and with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, that we should move quickly to pass this bill on to committee so that we can debate Bill 5, which represents a real plan for the environment, not just privatizing Hydro like the opposition wants to.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker, in this province, teachers matter. Our government recognizes the value and importance of teachers and other education professionals and we stand with them every step in the way.

I ask all members to join me to swiftly pass this bill to committee, and I thank MTS once again for joining us in the House today.

Mr. Speaker: The floor is now open for questions on this bill.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to stand today and put a few questions on the record. And it's really too bad, Mr. Speaker, that I'm going to take up a few seconds of the question time to basically say that it is shameful that the Minister of Education, the person who's in charge of our education not only for K to 12 but also for post-secondary, would stand up today and speak the way he does in regards to this bill.

This is a bill that is being brought forward to make adjustments to The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act, and as a teacher myself, coming up this coming June, for—basically going to be 22 years, Mr. Speaker, it disheartens me that the person in charge of our education system stands up today as the member in Fort Garry-Riverview did today.

A question to the minister: If Bill 13 is a consequential amendment to The Education Administration Act, where does it discuss the mommy gap that the minister advertised to the public in December, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, this bill is a very important bill, as I just finished saying. And what it does is empowers MTS to provide it with bylaw-making authority, so every time the organization wants to do their own bylaws, they're in a position to do it and they don't have to come back to government to get some kind of approval. It simply provides them with the liberty to conduct their own affairs in the way that they should, in the way that

many other organizations should. That's the essence of this bill. That's what this bill is all about.

The member can ask a whole bunch of other questions. This is about MTS. This is about its own autonomy and it's independent to conduct its affairs in its own regard. That's the matter before the House today.

I urge the member to simply support and—this bill moving on to committee where we can have a further discussion. And I'm sure MTS would be very happy to come to committee and speak about this bill as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ewasko: So, Mr. Speaker, I believe my question was fairly straightforward. On the 3rd of December, the minister went ahead and introduced the fact that they were going to close that mommy gap and create—put something into legislation. And it was applauded by fanfare by the current president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society. And I just want to know that—where that is or how come he announced it and then it doesn't seem that he's bringing in any legislation towards this.

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the member's going here. This is a question-and-answer pill—period on Bill 19, the bill before the House, the bill that we're debating right now on second reading and we want to move it to committee.

So I'm asking the member that he should stick to the bill and the matters at hand. We want to provide MTS, the Manitoba Teachers' Society with a proud history and a proud tradition of over 100 years, with the ability to conduct its own affairs independent of government.

The member opposite might believe in the nanny state and looking over the shoulder of reputable organizations, Mr. Speaker. We do not.

MTS brought this matter to our attention. We're happy to work with them on it. We want them to be autonomous. We want them to continue to work with us, however, to build a strong public education system, because every student matters in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ewasko: And just to clarify for the minister, it's actually Bill 17, as opposed to whatever number he's basically saying.

Now, the whole point of my question, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that this minister, as he's done in the past, has played fast and loose with the truth to all Manitobans and in particular to teachers. And

I know that teachers in this province are not buying what this minister is selling. And I do—I would like to commend the Manitoba Teachers' Society for being here today—[*interjection*]

I know that the member from Burrows is busy talking about being disrespectful in this House, and maybe she'll have a chance to get up and speak in a few minutes. And she said she hopes she does, so I'm sure that the minister will give her some time.

So my point is, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister had brought up a press release that they were going to bring in legislation in regards to capping or bringing in—closing the mommy gap, and there was a big fanfare about it, and I'm just wondering where in The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act, where in this Bill 17 is it located that he's actually doing that?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member, actually, for pointing out the number of the bill. I stand corrected on that. The truth of the matter is we have so much important legislation to put through in this session, it's hard to keep all of the numbers straight, but I thank him for that correction.

I know he wants to get on to all of the various important pieces of legislation that we have before us, important legislation on environmental protection, important legislation on surface water, which I know both he and the member from Steinbach has wanted to get through this House and get on to committee so that the public can have an opportunity to talk about it.

In this case, Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 is an important bill for the Manitoba Teachers' Society. It provides them with very clear autonomy to conduct their affairs in the manner in which they—is right, independent, at arm's-length from government, as the way it should be. But we always work in partnership with Manitoba Teachers' Society because both of us are interested in building a strong public education system for every Manitoba student.

And I can only suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the member's line of questioning today, which has nothing to do with this particular bill except in the most indirect manner possible, suggests to me that he's not really interested in supporting this bill. He doesn't seem to, but, more importantly, he has no interest in maintaining high investment in public education to making sure that we're hitting all the right points in our public education system to continue to make strong strategic investments in small class sizes for that important one-on-one time,

to continue to build the capital infrastructure for our schools as well.

I would invite the member to tell the House now if he's in support, and if he is, we should move on to committee immediately, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, what's very interesting is when the minister stands up and he starts putting rhetoric on the record in regards to all of the important bills that this government, the NDP government, has to bring forward. They've had 17 years, and it's amazing on just within the last, you know, two and a half months, all of a sudden they've got about 57 high-end, fast-track priorities, and, you know, apparently this minister isn't happy with the process here in this wonderful province of ours that we sit in this Chamber and debate these various issues.

So, since the minister will not put on the record exactly when he was going to bring this legislation forward about the maternity or parental leave, full credit for senior and incremental benefits, it is—he can rest assured that I will make sure that a lot of my colleagues, teachers throughout the province, are very much aware of how this minister actually treats teachers, Mr. Speaker.

So then my second question, particularly to this, to Bill 17, is if teachers are allowed to opt out of MTS, why do they then still have to pay dues, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I wasn't quite clear where the member was going in his earlier questioning. The fact of the matter is the other matter that he's referring to is a simple regulation, something that we are happy to take care of.

With respect to his second question, I'm actually quite astounded that he would even ask. If he's not familiar with the Rand formula in Canada, maybe he should be familiar with the Rand formula. It's a historic thing in our country that ensures that if you get the benefits of a membership of an organization, of a union or association, even if you're not a member, if you choose to opt out, you still must pay those dues. That's a basic foundation, a constitutional principle in our country. I'm astounded that he would ask such a question. It may be, Mr. Speaker—and I don't really think the member opposite is like that, because he is a teacher and has benefited from the great work that MTS has done over the years, and I know he cares about public education. We've had lots of conversations about that.

But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that when he goes in that direction that's a virulent anti-union, red-baiting question. He should frankly apologize to the union leadership in this province for making that—asking that kind of question.

* (15:00)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): First of all, as a prelude to my question, I want to make it very clear to members of the Legislature that the Manitoba Liberal Party has a long and proud tradition of valuing the importance of teachers and the work that they do in our province. It is of absolutely critical importance. Teachers are contributing to the well-being of children and families, and I have stood up before—many, many Liberals in the past have stood up before to support teachers.

Now one of the things which is present in this bill and what I do is to bring this forward just to ensure that it's been looked at carefully. Under this bill, The Corporations Act will not apply to The Manitoba Teachers' Society. Now The Corporations Act is, in fact, important for holding Manitoba corporations—organizations which are under the act—accountable to their own members. It puts the responsibility of the corporation and its action on the members of the board to be responsible. Without this oversight, the board could, for example, misuse member funds and no board member would be personally liable as is present under The Corporations Act.

Now, for example, under the College of Physicians and Surgeons the legislation—The Corporations Act only doesn't apply when it's in conflict with The Medical Act. In other words, it is still very much present. The Medical Act doesn't mention liability of the council and therefore The Corporations Act would apply in that circumstance.

So I just raise this as an issue as to whether the minister believes that without The Corporations Act there is sufficient accountability of the Manitoba Teachers' Society to its own members and accountability of the board.

Mr. Allum: I thank my friend from River Heights for the question.

Of course, when we develop legislation we develop it in partnership with key stakeholders, be it on this piece of legislation or others, because it's a very important principle for me that we walk in partnership if we're actually to build an enduring and resilient public education system. And, when we do

that, of course, the member will know that we have very strong legal advice on whether things like The Corporations Act should or should not apply; we get the advice, we follow that advice, Mr. Speaker.

But the question from my friend from River Heights is that, unfortunately, he's being asked to do the bidding of his leader. He's—was up two times this week talking about cutting the health and education levy; he's advocating for that. So he can hardly get up, Mr. Speaker, today and say he's proudly—a proud supporter of public education and a proud supporter of teachers when he's proposing to cut \$470 million out of the budget that go directly to health and education in this province and that are paid by banks and corporations.

Why would the member opposite from River Heights be a defender of banks and corporations?

Mr. Ewasko: So in regards to explanatory note—third point on the discipline, the Manitoba Teachers' Society being able to discipline their members, how in the—how does that work right now in regards to—before this bill is enacted today—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Education—oh, pardon me.

Mr. Ewasko: But debated today and then further moved on towards committee, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Sorry.

Mr. Allum: So, Mr. Speaker, if I read—heard the member correctly, the third explanatory note in the bill that's there, as you know, to help the rest of us often understand the complicated legal language of a bill, it says, and I quote: "The Society's ability to discipline members and operate insurance and benefit programs for its members and others involved in the school system is continued."

By that, Mr. Speaker, those procedures were already in the existing act; they remain as they were.

As I said earlier and I've said a few times during this question and answer period, this bill is designed to empower MTS to govern its own affairs in the manner that it should. It doesn't need to come back to government for every bylaw that it wants to pass. It has its own internal checks and balances. I'm confident in those checks and balances, and so the explanatory note in regard to the question that the member asked, it's simply continued as it once was. And I expect as a teacher he knows what those discipline procedures are.

Mr. Ewasko: It is interesting that the minister would create a bill that basically is just saying that they're going to continue doing what they already do. So it is interesting.

I'd like to ask the minister: So of the over 15,000 teachers that the Manitoba Teachers' Society speaks and—[interjection] represents, thank you, of those 15,000, how many of those teachers were surveyed in order to carry forward with this act, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to was the explanatory note that he asked for some explanation on relating to discipline, and I simply reiterated that what existed before exists now, but this bill is different and changes one important thing, and that is when the Manitoba Teachers' Society wants to change its bylaw, it doesn't need to come cap in hand to government to do so, but it can do so on its own quite independently of government.

It's a simple request from a proud organization. I'm proud to support it. I know every member of our caucus is really proud to support it. We don't need to spend any additional time on this, Mr. Speaker. This is a straightforward, obvious, transparent thing to do. We should all be voting for this bill when it—at the end of the day, but we should certainly be all be voting for this bill right now to send it on to committee so that we can move on to other important matters. We have a strong legislative agenda on this side of the House. We only want to work.

Thanks so much.

Mr. Speaker: Time for questions on this matter have elapsed.

Is there any further debate?

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand up and put a few words on the record today towards Bill 17, The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act.

I did pause for a few seconds, Mr. Speaker, before I got up to put a few words on the record today because I know that the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) and, with her permission, I mean, I could ask for leave on your—on, you know, to you that if the member from Burrows would like to speak just before me. And she's already saying that she would love to speak, and so I just seek the leave of the House to see if the member for Burrows would like to get up and put a few words on the record before I speak.

Mr. Speaker: I'm assuming that that was not a rhetorical statement and that the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) was offering the opportunity for another member of the House to speak. So, before I seek leave of the House, I want to ensure that that was the intent.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, I do want to put more words on the record, but I am asking if there is leave of the House for the member for Burrows to put a few words on the record before I commence with my 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: There has been a request that I place the question to the House.

Is there leave of the House to permit other members of the House, and I believe it was referenced in particular the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight), to speak to this particular matter prior to the member for Lac du Bonnet? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I would just like to put on the record my support for this bill is a hundred per cent, as is all of our support not only for this bill but for the incredible work that our teachers do every day in our schools. I'm so grateful for that. And those are the words that are always on the record on this side of the House if you check them in Hansard.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Further debate on this matter?

Mr. Ewasko: Well, I guess those brief couple of comments from the member from Burrows—she seems to put far more, you know, in behind the scenes, Mr. Speaker, when she's busy talking from her seat when it's not her turn to actually speak.

* (15:10)

But, that being said, Mr. Speaker, we are going to get going on Bill 17, The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act. As the member from Burrows put it, I believe she actually spoke for about 25 seconds, which is a new record for the amount of time that she's spoken, or the lack thereof. She rarely gets up to put a few words on the record.

We on this side of the House as well, Mr. Speaker, we're going to—there is a few members on this side of the House that have teaching degrees and have taught for many years within the public school system. We've also had members on our side of the House that are married to teachers and have

various relations—relationships within our families that are teachers as well. And so we do support, we actually do support Bill 17, The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act. And we are going to be seeing Bill 17 go to committee today, for sure.

And—but I—but unlike the members on the government side, which I know, as we found out not only today but the last year and so, is they're—they've got about five different caucuses on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, five different teams. And so it is interesting that the member for Burrows is speaking on behalf of all of their team on their side of the House in regards to being in favour of Bill 17. And the reason why it's interesting is because each and every day we're finding out more and more of the fractured team approach that they have on that side of the House.

And so we on this side of the House, if there are people that are wanting to put words on the record in regards to any kind of legislation that is being brought forward to this great Chamber of ours, the Manitoba Legislature, then we feel that we shouldn't stand in the way of allowing people to put words on the record, unlike the dictatorship that is happening on the government side, Mr. Speaker.

And I know that the Minister of Education, you know, as I've mentioned before, he's talking about rolling or something right now, Mr. Speaker, and, unfortunately, I know that he feels that because, you know, he's maybe acting speaker—or not Speaker—acting House leader, that he feels that he's in charge of the House and he should direct traffic by all sides. And I know that he's probably a little upset that on their side of the House he's having a tough time keeping control over there.

I know the minister is passionate or, as he says, it's passion. To me, the minister looks awfully angry on a day-to-day basis. But he tells us that it is passion, Mr. Speaker. Now—*[interjection]*—oh, and now the minister, or the past minister, sorry, the member from Minto is wanting to put a few words on the record. So I'm sure he'll have an opportunity as time goes on as well, you know, so if he'd like to share, that's fine.

So Bill 17 modernizes the legislation constituent—the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the representative of teachers in the province. The bill continues the leadership structure and membership of the society and the society is given a comprehensive set of bylaw powers to deal with its own governance and operations. The society's ability to discipline

members and operate insurance and benefit programs for its members and others involved in the school system is continued.

Now, I know that the minister is saying that they're bringing forward this bill to basically allow the Manitoba Teachers' Society their own power to make various changes throughout their organization without having to come to the minister. And I know that since the Minister of Education is a little bit of a disarray and his team of government officials, Cabinet ministers, I have no doubt that that's part of the reason why the Manitoba Teachers' Society had pleaded with him to make these changes, so that they wouldn't have to come to this debacle once in a while, Mr. Speaker, and listen to what has to happen in the minister's office.

We know that in the last, you know, 17 years, there has been a decline in the way that we are able to show our successes here in the great province of Manitoba in regards to our kids. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm finding more and more, each and every day, the reason why that's happening. Absolutely, the member from Burrows, as she mentioned that we stand behind teachers, we on this side of the House stand behind teachers as well.

What we've seen in the last 17 years is the fact that the leadership at the department level—the ministerial level—has absolutely declined in talent and, that being said, we do want to see teachers empowered. We know that the teachers work very, very hard each and every day. And, you know, I know many people in other professions, as I had mentioned earlier in the short time that we were able to ask questions, that the 22 years—I'm coming up to 22 years of being a teacher in this province—I've lived in this province absolutely all my life and I absolutely love this province. And, Mr. Speaker, it frustrates me to see that a Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum) would stand up in this House and would take a simple piece of legislation as this and turn it into a total partisan issue and absolutely talk about things that, in his view, have happened so far in the past, but in the fact, the fact of the matter is is that this minister said himself that he moved to the province in the mid-'90s to the late-'90s, so he really doesn't have that experience of going through the Manitoba education system. He does not have the experience of teaching in the Manitoba education system.

And, again, part of the reason why I decided to become an MLA was for the fact that, being a

teacher in various subject matters, core subjects within the school system, and then a guidance counsellor working in the student services area for eight of the 17 years before I got into this wonderful gig, is that I saw that the level of support for teachers from this government had absolutely started to decline. And we really started to see it decline sharply over the last 10 or so years, Mr. Speaker. So that is the reason why I got into politics.

I didn't decide one day to, you know, have this long life plan like the Education Minister to get into politics and go knocking on every door, whether it was a federal riding or a constituency here in the province, to try to get into politics. I chose to get into politics because we want to see our kids—I want to see our kids benefit and get the full advantage of each and every person's expertise in the education field. And that goes with teachers, that goes with administrators, that goes with support staff, custodians, bus drivers, absolutely everybody. Not like the Minister of Education who had tried a couple times to get into federal politics, failed, kept knocking on the doors and finally got into provincial politics.

I'd really like to set—for anybody to put my record up and the reasoning for me getting into politics compared to that minister and his apparent anger towards our democratic system here. And it's upsetting because I feel that it's clouding his job, the job that he should be doing, which should be looking out for the best interests of the only one stakeholder in the province in regards to education, and that's our kids. Everybody else has something—contributes to it, but the only one stakeholder that absolutely everybody in the province should be looking out for is our kids.

* (15:20)

And the fact is, no matter how this minister spins his rhetoric, or any other member on the government side spins their rhetoric, the fact is is that our test results in regards to PISA and PCAP has absolutely declined. And I know that the member from Burrows is raising her eyebrows, but the fact of the matter is the test scores, Mr. Speaker, are absolutely just that. It's a tool. It's a tool.

And the member from Burrows would like to consider—I don't know what she's rolling her eyes about, but the fact is it's whether it's a—you're building a house and you're using a hammer or you're using a drill or whatever else, it just so happens to be a tool. It's a test. It's a measurement.

And it just so happens there's algorithms that are put out there to make sure that the students that are tested on those particular tests are by random selection. And these are tests that are national and international tests, Mr. Speaker. And the fact is is that these particular kids are plucked throughout our province. We don't have a say in how they are chosen. But the fact is is that they're not doing very well on these tests. And I fully blame the minister. I fully blame his leadership skills.

It's not only on his shoulders, though, Mr. Speaker, because I know he's the fourth Education minister since I've been elected in 2011. How do you have consistent leadership when that's the case? Now, I know, within their government side they've had some of their own leadership issues over the last year and some time. And I'm sure that after this next election, they'll be re-evaluating some of those things. But, in fact, is we definitely know that Manitobans are looking for a change, and they're going to be seeing a change come April 20th. And so we do have some plans.

And I know that, you know, the Minister of Education, he went on a vote-buying and promise-spending spree in the fall and all the way up 'til now. And basically, there's multi-millions, if not on the low billions, in regards to all the promises that this minister has brought forward to Manitobans in—as his Premier (Mr. Selinger), Mr. Speaker, has shared with people as well. We know that they—as we've heard many days now since we've been sitting in this 12-day session, that they've got no plans on how they're going to spend or how they're going to pay for some of these promises. I know that they're really trying hard to try to wedge the issue as far as paint us, you know, they're trying to paint us against the whole education world. But that couldn't be farther from the truth. We all value a good education, and we know that our kids are our future here in this province.

And so we know that education is going to be our No. 1 priority in regards to making sure that our kids have the foundation to succeed. We have to make sure that we create the environment and the conditions so that our kids, all of our kids, Mr. Speaker, succeed in this great province of ours.

I know that, you know, the Auditor General brought forward some concerns in regards to Aboriginal education in this province. And just recently, we have seen that 53 per cent of our Aboriginal students actually graduate, Mr. Speaker.

That is a stat that I know, you know, the members on the government side don't really like to use stats or have any kind of measurements or see where they're at, but that is an appalling stat. And, all of a sudden, as you've heard today, the minister wants to fast-track this bill to committee. Well, I'm not sure how much faster it can be because they actually have the authority to bring the bill forward, so they did first reading, which, again, took—they've been in government for 17 years, so in December they brought it up, and then now we're having second reading. And, as I've said, we have a few members that would like to put a few words on the record in regards to their experiences with teachers or their own experiences with the public school system. And, so, I mean, that is our right and that is our process here in the Manitoba Legislature.

So I don't—unfortunately, I don't see, if this was such a priority for this minister and his government, why that it took so long to bring forward. As I mentioned earlier, the mommy gap announcement that was done in December, we're still waiting to see that come to fruition, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not sure if we're going to see that before the writ is dropped, which is mid-March. I do see that, you know, they talk about all these very important bills that they need to bring forward and slide it through to committee in rapid fire. The fact is is that they have had many, many years to get some of this done, and now their backs are against the wall.

So I guess part of my speech today, I guess, on Bill 17, really revolves around the fact that we are going to have hope, Mr. Speaker, hope for this great province of ours. We are lagging behind so many other provinces in this great country of ours, and it comes down to, again—I can't repeat it enough—their dysfunction in government that we have seen, I'd say, over the last two years, but it's really become evident in the last year. They're trying desperately to hold on to their jobs by promising things that they know themselves they're not going to be able to follow through on.

We know how their promises had gone in the past. In the 2011 election, you know, the Premier and the 56 other candidates for the NDP party went door to door and they basically promised many things, Mr. Speaker. They promised things in education; they promised things for infrastructure; they promised various dollars to improve our health-care system again. And then they actually spoke about that they were going to be able to do these things, and they were going to be able to do it without

raising taxes. And the fact is that it didn't take very long for the minister or for the Premier, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), back then in September 2011 to basically say, you know, the idea of them raising taxes to try to pay for a lot of their promises was absolutely nonsense. And we basically said, as a government-in-waiting back then, that we wanted to do it properly. We wanted to make sure that the funds were there so that we could fulfill the promises instead of throwing out ideas and vote-buying promises out there and then not being able to fulfill them.

So what happened? Mr. Speaker, 2012, the budget of 2012, we saw that the Premier came out and the Finance minister of the day came out and they expanded the PST on many goods and services that absolutely every hard-working Manitoban in this great province of ours can't do without. That would be home insurance; that would be auto insurance; that would be various supplies for our—in our education system. A lot of the teachers go out and they purchase various supplies.

*(15:30)

We look at the amount of dollars that the various school divisions are going through in the province right now, budgeting for the upcoming school year. They have to take into account now an 8 per cent increase to a lot of different things, Mr. Speaker. That goes with the insurance on all the buses, on all the transportation, the various insurances on our education buildings.

It's disheartening that this government, again, without saying the big L word, was playing fast and loose with the truth right through the 2011 election. And then—what happens in 2013, the expansion of all those goods and services to the PST in the 2012 budget, all of a sudden they decide to raise the PST by one point, or a 14 per cent increase. I know that the minister was busy knocking on all the various levels of government doors to try to get in so that he could be a representative, but I know that the fact is that he went door-to-door knocking on various doors in the 2011 election promising not to raise taxes; 2012 increased those taxes—increased the services—the goods and services that tax would be applied to, and then, in 2013, went and rose that by a 14 per cent increase.

Did he go back to all his constituents and apologize? No, he didn't. What they did, they ended up spending hard-working Manitobans' tax money on

a lawsuit to defend the right that they felt that it was okay to take the right of Manitobans to vote on tax increases. We on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, value the collaboration, value the opportunities to go around and speak to those hard-working Manitobans, because we know that it's hard-working Manitobans' monies that we will be in charge of come April 20th, unlike this government—the Minister of Education, he feels that it's his right to, No. 1, get up and make accusations and, again, put interesting topics on the record, or facts—I wouldn't even call them facts, he just gets up and starts spewing whatever one of his staffers had decided to write upon. The—it is very interesting that Bill 17 comes forward today, and we are going to hear what other teachers have to say when it does come to committee within the next few days. I'm assuming it's going to happen within the next week or so.

I have had a very good relationship with the Manitoba Teachers' Society over the last 20–21 and a half years. It's coming almost up to 22 years. I, just so happened, was a professional development chairperson for our teachers' society—or, for our teachers' association back in the Agassiz Sunrise days. I had many great meetings with my colleagues that worked on various issues that specifically pertained to the teaching profession, and I have the utmost respect, as we do in—on our side of the House, Mr. Speaker, for the teaching profession. And we know that, with some proper leadership and guidance from—at the provincial level, I know that we can work with the various organizations and make this province, once again, another leader within this great country of ours.

I know that, in 2002, I know that the member from Burrows—she often shakes her head in this House, and I think most of the time she's shaking her head with having to listen to her colleagues on that side of the House squabbling all the time, but I know that, in 2002, when the PISA and PCAP scores actually came out, we were actually a leader in this country. We were in the top three in numeracy and literacy, and I know that recently, those test scores have shown that we've dropped to 10th, and then we're falling. And we're getting farther behind 9th than we are getting closer to it.

And I truly believe that that's why this Minister of Education, on a day-to-day basis in this Legislature, has a bit of a fit. And I think the fit comes from—his anger comes from the fact that he's stuck in a party, stuck in a position, that he feels helpless and that he sees that the ship is sinking and

he's holding on to an extra-large boulder, and that is with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) because he did back the Premier in the leadership race. So he sees that ship sinking, and I think he's upset because he was—I think he was really hoping that the Premier was going to, maybe, step aside and give him another shot at potentially, you know, winning the next provincial election.

But, that being said, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great—it gave me great pleasure to stand up here and speak for a few minutes and put a few words on the record not only to Bill 17 but the fact that we do cherish the job that teachers have to do on a day-to-day basis, and it hasn't gotten any easier. In the last 10, 15 years or so, we've seen more and more jobs being dumped onto teachers on a day-to-day basis. They're having to wear multiple hats when it comes to showing up to work every day and, that being said, you know, as far as a social worker; a parent; a teacher, of course; sometimes a medical professional. You know, there's lots of things. Kids are coming to school nowadays with a whole lot of baggage, and I know that teachers truly and dearly want to put those efforts in to make sure that our kids are learning as much as they possibly can learn when it comes to literacy and numeracy and, of course, science.

But I do truly feel that some of the things that this government has put in the way to allow those people to do their jobs properly, it is this government. And we do see a change for the better coming to Manitoba come April 20th. We are going to see our new read to succeed plans come forward. We are going to be seeing more and more of those, the things that we are going to be doing as time moves closer and closer to the election, Mr. Speaker.

And, with that being said, I thank the Manitoba Teachers' Society for coming today and for listening today, and then they're going to be seeing—I know that we'll be seeing them in committee in the next few days or so, and so with that, I'm going to allow anyone else that would like to put a few words on the record a chance to speak to Bill 17 today.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any further debate on this matter? Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I saw another member across the aisle

rising and then I saw him sitting, so I was assuming that he wanted to speak on this bill. I am very pleased to stand today and put comments on the record concerning Bill 17 and The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act, so I welcome the opportunity. I'm glad to be recognized.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome our guests this afternoon from the Manitoba Teachers' Society who are here for this debate. I have to say that I was earnestly looking forward to the debate because this is a significant bill. It has 28 sections in it; it is multiple pages. And in reading the bill I was hoping that the minister was coming prepared to actually unpack some of the content of this bill.

* (15:40)

The very first words out of the minister's mouth are partisan; they are ideologically rigid; they are designed to get a reaction. I was expecting so much more from the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum). I thought he earnestly wanted to come here this afternoon and talk about the fact that all Manitobans share an interest in education in this province. I thought that he would acknowledge that all Manitobans want to see the teaching profession thrive and flourish in this province. I thought he would acknowledge that all Manitobans have this shared concern for the current state of our children's proficiency in reading, science and math.

Mr. Ted Marcelino, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

But he didn't start that way and he didn't continue down that path. He did very little to unpack what he should have unpacked. We weren't all present in whatever briefing he offered the member on this side of the House. So this is the minister's opportunity to say—to run this debate and to understand that he has a responsibility to do a side-by-side, to signify to the members of this Chamber what the significant changes are that this legislation brings and to identify certain key sections of this legislation and indicate what the merit is to the system, what the merit is to MTS, what the merit is to the members where the essential improvements lie.

I've read the bill and I've read what the media has reported about it, but there's much more to do on this bill. And I've heard him say, you know, call this to committee, call this to committee. I would remind the member on the other side, there is a process here. He has a responsibility as a minister, one that I would submit he did not live up to this afternoon.

But we have a responsibility on this side of the House. This responsibility is not to the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum). The responsibility we hold is one that we take very seriously, it is a sober responsibility and it is to the people of Manitoba. It is to act as a real opposition and to ask these questions and to have this debate and to measure and weigh and gauge all of these sections of this bill and then to hear from all of those groups, absolutely, at the committee stage.

Now, I've heard the member this afternoon say we need to hurry this up. And I heard the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) calling earlier this afternoon, saying, you know, we have to do all this right now and we're prepared to sit longer. Mr. Acting Speaker, we were prepared to sit last September. We were prepared to sit in October, in November and December. This government got a six-month reprieve on a four-year term. They have had more—they have had ample opportunity to bring their legislative agenda. They have had more than their fair share of time. They got a six-month extension because of rules that have to do with when this government must call an election. They've had six additional months.

Where were they in the month of January? Were they debating Bill 17? No, they were not. They made 113 spending announcements across the province of Manitoba in advance of the blackout deadline. Okay, so then when the blackout deadline came about, were we in the House? No, we were not. Weeks and weeks more transpired where the government was, I don't know, avoiding the accountability that this place would bring? Preparing to bring Bill 17? I saw no further public statement in the media that this minister was bringing in absence of the Legislature sitting to say, here's what I really mean we intend to do on Bill 17. He didn't take that opportunity. He didn't take the opportunity this afternoon to say, all right, here's what I really mean.

So I know nothing about the stakeholder groups that he has sat down with on this bill. Of course, he sat down with MTS, you bet, yes, yes. But the minister will understand his responsibly would then be to say, all right, what other groups should I be hearing from? So I'm asking the minister, why was that not a part of his debate this afternoon? So this bill is very clear that it's about the internal operations of MTS and about their members. So it's about their members. So I don't know who the minister heard from besides that, but the opportunity he had today he squandered.

He stood up and the first thing he did is try to poke everyone in the eye around here. And that's not a—I felt like his conduct from the very start was below his office. And, quite honestly, I expected more from him. I expected, when the member for Fort Garry-Riverview and I both began in this House four years ago, I expected more from him. I felt that on a day-to-day basis this would be an individual, with his background and his time in the civil service, here would be a member who would bring reason to debate and not hyperpartisanism every time he stands up. But that's what we get.

So I'm happy to, in the time allotted to me, take a few minutes to unpack some of this bill in the same manner as the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) did previous to me. I have some significant questions about the bill. I'm seeing what I believe it's setting out to do. There are some sections which, I believe, are vague and require further explanation. I know that some of this will be something that we can address at the committee stage, but I'm hoping that even during this time and in this debate in the time allotted to us that the member will take the opportunity while I'm speaking to confer with other members. And so, perhaps, even though his time has expired on this and his opportunity is now gone, it's vanished, but perhaps he could collaborate with members on that side. And I underscore this idea that government members could collaborate and take a collaborative approach, and perhaps he can offer further explanation where he himself gave none.

So I heard the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) bring a question during the question-and-answer-exchange period that had to do with one key facet of this bill that is outlined in section 4(2) where it says The Corporations Act does not apply to the society. Now, I can understand some of the reasons why that would be, obviously, that the Manitoba Teachers' Society is going to operate, in many respects, differently than a, you know, a private sector corporation. However, I'm interested to know what articles in The Corporations Act might actually have been beneficial here or on what basis those articles were declined, on what basis it was decided that these things need not apply, because I would remind you, Mr. Acting Speaker, that in The Corporations Act, there are important sections. There are important protections to groups, to entities. It talks about protections to members of groups, protections of governing bodies. And it goes into great depth about good governance and what that looks like.

And so the questions I felt that were brought from the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) were valid questions. Some of the questions he posed were the same ones I have this afternoon. Is there sufficient accountability in the measures of this act of the MTS to its membership? Are there sufficient measures to ensure that there will be accountability of the members of the board to the overall entity? And we're talking about a bill that expands powers to groups and expands powers to committees. And so it is important to ask these questions to understand, you know, where the powers lie and what the latitude is that these groups have.

I understand in principle, and I accept that in the past this government has been guilty of doing too much to centre powers in the minister's office. So, in terms of a rationale, we can all understand, those of us who have been involved in the private sector, we can all understand how it is you want to make systems efficient. And I can understand that it creates tremendous inefficiency if the Manitoba Teachers' Society has to run back to the minister's office every time they want something changed. I think we can accept that. From an opposition party that continues to talk about the importance of building efficiencies into systems, about, you know, making sure that systems operate in an efficient manner, we can accept that.

And, honestly, the government has been guilty of the opposite in many respects. I think back to one of the very first bills that came before this Legislature. It must have been in my first year here in the Legislature, into 2012. I believe we would have sat, probably, for a few days in the fall and early winter of 2011 after the 2011 election. But, when the House resumed in the spring, there was a bill on the Order Paper introduced, then debated. It was called Bill 6, and it had to do with the consolidation of regional health authorities.

*(15:50)

But buried in the content of the bill was a legislative requirement that, basically, centralized powers in the minister's office to choose the chief executive officers for personal-care homes, to decide what their remuneration would be and to recoup whatever savings that faith-based personal-care homes had derived in order to inject them into government general revenues.

Well, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, you can understand why such a bill, with such a provision, would have got such a reaction from such a large

subsection of—cohort of Manitobans who said: This is not an appropriate way to locate power in a minister's office. And I can still remember the debate that ensued. I can remember the committee presentations, and I'm proud to say that, on the basis of the compelling evidence and presentations made by various groups, the government eventually backed down. They said—they quietly backed down. They very quietly backed down. On the day that those bills were proclaimed, they declined to proclaim those sections of the act. But I knew immediately there was a victory there for all Manitobans, because they had, basically, been forced to admit that they were trying to gain too much power, centralize it into the minister's office.

I can think of other compelling examples of where the government has done the same. I'm thinking right now about the same kind of method that would put too much power in the minister's office. As the critic for Finance, I remember last year how the government waited too long—waited almost longer than any other Canadian jurisdiction, but then, finally, at the last minute, introduced a bill that would see the coming together of three professional designations in the profession of accounting to form the new CPA. And, of course, our message, essentially, to the government was: What took you so long? You had lots of time, you had lots of notice, and you had these third-party groups, including the CPA working group in Manitoba, saying to government: What is taking you so long?

But there, again, Mr. Acting Speaker, it did not sit well with all groups that, when you looked into this long, long bill—I don't know if it was 50 or 100 pages, but buried in the context of the bill was a provision that said that the minister will decide who's in and who's out, who can and cannot practise at—as a CPA in certain instances. Basically, instead of assigning that power to an arm's-length group, an unbiased group, a selected group, selected on the basis of their professional experience—maybe they've been ratified by a group of their peers—you could compose a group of that in a variety of ways to ensure that it would be fair and objective and unbiased. No, this bill sought to put that provision right into the bill.

So I say this as a preamble, Mr. Acting Speaker, to say I can understand that, in the past, the government has gone too far in one direction. The serious questions that were asked previously this afternoon, and I ask them again now, is—well, perhaps it's not a question; it's an assertion. And it's

this: we must be careful to make sure that the public interest is still preserved in going in the opposite direction. And that is the essential debate—or one of the essential debates that we must have in this place this afternoon.

What are the new powers? What is the latitude of the MTS to form these committees? I understand, you know, when you look at this bill, you see that it is a bill that, basically, allows MTS new provisions to discipline members. I understand it seeks to do other things as well; operating insurance and benefit programs, and it extends those programs. But I have to say, as an aside, the member could have been so much clearer when it came to some of the essential changes—the way media reported them, changes to the benefits and insurance programs, and it sounded like the minister was, essentially, silent on some of these things. And I wonder why he would choose to be silent on some of these things instead to actually, you know, open the window and let the breeze through, and then we can have this conversation. It didn't seem like the minister was intent on debate; he was intent on concluding debate, jumping to his feet as soon as he can to try to conclude the debate this afternoon.

I'm not interested in the premature conclusion of debate on this matter. I'm interested—and I believe all members should be—in a comprehensive debate, in a real weighing of these weighty matters. So, coming back to my main point there, we see provisions of this bill that are significant. When I look at 6 (3)—actually, 6 (3) is not the one I wanted to address. It talks about the—well, I'm going to work from the back to the front here.

I'm seeing that the provincial council—and, of course, in many respects, what I'm trying to do, Mr. Acting Speaker, is determine where the essential changes lie, what powers and what autonomies did MTS have previous to this bill and now what are essentially the brand new measures or the extension of existing measures in this legislation? That's essentially what I'm trying to get at in this, to decide what's changed. Is it fair? Does it serve members? Does it serve teachers? Does it serve—and does it serve the society's essential interests and needs as a group that has to—that oversees teachers, that advocates for them at the bargaining table, that oversees discipline and professional certification and all these things?

You know, I should probably interject at this point that I'm a teacher. I know that the member for

Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) did the same and I was so compelled by the content of the bill I probably failed to establish that I'm a teacher myself, Mr. Acting Speaker. My first degree wasn't education, neither was my second; I actually studied music first, performance degrees both in this—in the province of Manitoba and in—at UBC, one of my alma maters. But I returned to Manitoba and I was very proud to get enrolled—to be accepted in the after-degree education program. I don't know if they still call it the A.D. B.Ed., but we used to call it the A.D. B.Ed. back then, and I know there's been changes to the way the faculties operate, but I was so proud the day I was accepted and I was so proud the day I received my teaching certificate. That was a good day. I was so proud to enter into this profession.

I first taught in—oh, we used to call it Winnipeg One School Division; now it's called the Winnipeg School Division. After that, I taught in Hanover School Division and finished a 12-year—well, set of years teaching in Western School Division. I still live in that community with my wife and children, and so I'm a member of this profession and so I perhaps should have prefaced my comments by saying that.

So I have a legislator's interest in the bill. I also have a teacher's interest in the bill. I was part of this profession for 12 years. I care about certification, I care about qualifications, I care about a high standard being set, I care about these provisions being fair to all parties and I care about where the changes occur in this bill.

Getting back to the point I was making, though, I was referring to bylaws regarding membership; it's section 7 and it indicates that the provincial council can make bylaws and, of course, that is part of this bill, that it's giving MTS the power to make bylaws and not always go back to the member for Fort Garry-Riverview's (Mr. Allum) office, and so this is reasonable. But it indicates there that the bylaws can respect membership in the society, including eligibility for membership and the process for becoming a member or electing not to be a member or having a member's name removed.

And so I, as a legislator—the legislator in me asks the question on what basis and what changes would be made because we're talking about eligibility for membership so I guess I wonder on what basis would the—would this provincial council then go about making these changes? What would be its duty to consult and collaborate before bringing such

changes? What would be the length and breadth of the changes it could bring before it would have to go back to the minister's office?

So, in other words, does the minister foresee or could the minister foresee an instance in which he'd say, well, that's actually a change that I would have to oversee? What is—where are the ditches? In other words, where are the ditches? Where is this path on which we proceed? What is out of bounds and what is in bounds—because these are significant changes.

* (16:00)

That same section 7 goes on to talk about establishing different membership classes, and I—here, again, if I was in briefing with the minister I would have a question that would come to mind about membership classes. I do not know if he's talking about professional classifications as they now exist or if he's talking to a different issue, if it's the construction of a new set of classes. Perhaps there is something substantive here, so, again, I wonder are we talking about remuneration classifications? Are we talking about something else? Are we talking about that whole rubric that entertains both training and years of service within the profession? So I'm wondering if that's what we're talking about.

There's also a section 8 here that refers to unpaid fees for debts owing. And I'm wondering if this is a new provision. I'm wondering, until now, what was done by the society if a member had unpaid dues or in what instances a member could have unpaid dues because, unless I'm incorrect, it was always the case that MTS dues were subtracted at source. So there was never a context in which a member would submit dues for membership for the collective agreement or for the, you know, to MTS for membership in the association, in the society.

So I'm wondering on what basis that fees would be unpaid. I'm speculating now that would be a member who perhaps under section 6(3) would choose for some reason not to be a member of the society. This is why I'm speculating, because the minister didn't take the opportunity to explain it. So, now, this section 8 would then give the provincial council, I believe, a new authority to recover that unpaid fee as a debt. So it would basically enable the society to bring a civil action against a member. Now, what comes to mind first of all is under what conditions would a member not pay, because I realize unless the rules changed, I believe that the bill speaks to this. I believe the bill speaks to that notification that must be given by a practising

teacher who is certified in this province to teach, that they must provide notice to MTS of a desire to not be part of the society. It's an annual notice that must be given. At least that's the way it operated when I was in the profession.

Now, I'm wondering if that notice given—I don't know—I wouldn't know the number of teachers who would serve not to be under MTS, but I knew I taught with one in one school division. I taught with one teacher who, for reasons of conscience, she chose in our school division not to want to be represented by the society. Now, in that case—*[interjection]* I don't think there would be very many at all. But in that case, I wonder, could this get into a situation where that member is quarrelling with MTS and that it might be the case that that teacher has not paid a due in one year and then has not paid a due in the second year? So I guess I'm wondering about what kind of liability might a teacher who is choosing this have.

Now, I'm not saying yes or no or I support this or that. I'm just trying to unpack, as legislators do. I'm trying to go down this road to decide what would be that person's debt, as defined in this bill, to the society through a civil action and, indeed, is that why we're continuing down this path? Are we seeking to get this provision passed to go back and recoup some unpaid amounts? And so that'd be a question, if I was in a briefing situation with the minister, I'd ask him: Is it a big deal? We always ask these questions. Is this a significant area that you're addressing? And we'll probably ask this question in committee because I would like to know. I expect that members from MTS will be there, and I'm expecting to hear from their—from them at committee. Problem for us legislators, of course, is we only get a few minutes to ask questions of presenting groups. And I know that MTS has been to committee many times. And what do we always say? We know the drill. So we'll be at committee, and we'll ask some questions pertaining to this. I don't imagine it's a big part of the reason for the bill, but it is there and so it begs the question.

I know that the bill also includes standards—would seek to set out in these bylaws to adopt a code of conduct for members. And here I would have to defer to the critic for Education, my colleague from Lac du Bonnet. I'm trying to think of what's in place right now. Now, I know that our school divisions have all adopted codes of conduct, and we know that—I think school board officials have done this. Now, it may be the fact that we might have in place a working code of conduct right now in place for

teachers, or it might be that this bill actually replaces something that's in place.

Now I'm going to apologize because while I was a teacher, it's almost coming up now on 10 years that I've been out of the profession, so I probably should have researched this more because if I learned anything in the faculty of education, it was to research. But that would be a question I would also have for the minister, to say: Is this new?

Now—but when you go further down the road of 12(1), what you also see is that in the standards and a code of professional conduct and code of ethics—boy, I would really like to see where this is all leaning to, because of course we know, then, that you set that code of ethics and yes, then, of course, that will be the threshold up to which members must come in order to be part of this profession. If they do not, then the committee has the powers to resolve complaints, to deal with complaints, to investigate them, to give notices, and I see that in the context of this bill, there are powers to reprimand, powers to suspend, powers to terminate membership and powers to impose penalties and powers to make the member pay out costs, either partial or in total, when there has been a complaint made.

Now, I was the critic for Health at one time, and I can tell you, you know, in my meetings with College of Physicians and Surgeons we had these types of meetings about what constitute adequate provisions for the protection of the profession. We understand that. It was my contention, always, as a teacher, we were professionals and we needed to act as professionals. And we needed to have a high standard, and I said many times to colleagues, we are professionals and we must conduct ourselves as professionals, just as the MTS has a responsibility to ensure we are meeting this threshold in terms of our professional qualifications, in terms of our actions in the classroom, in terms of us meeting out the criteria that is set for us. I took a tremendous amount of pride in that, and I continue to do that.

So this is important, but it needs to be reasonable. It needs to make sure that all parties' interests are protected in this context. It makes sure that no one can run roughshod under—over the rights of those members of the profession. And so I'm wondering about, you know, just the extent to which members' interests are protected, and I certainly hope as practising teachers their interests would be met. I get concerned when I see here that a member who is—promised that right to have, when issues become

legal, to have those costs paid, that there's the threat here that costs could be recouped. I wonder in what conditions that could be the case.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I see that the time is quickly passing, so, basically, if I could sum up my questions this afternoon, it's like—it would be this: The actions I've undertaken in the last 30 minutes are the actions that the minister should have undertaken to give serious deliberation to this bill. It's a substantive bill. He chose not to unpack it; he chose not to explain it; he chose not to do a side-by-side; he chose us not to tell us what's changed. He chose us not to tell us the valid reasons for the changes. He sat here and tried to poke the opposition in the eye, tried to pretend that somehow there is a subset of MLAs who are the only ones who care about education. Nothing could be further from the truth.

So I call on these other government members who want to speak to get to the business of the House this afternoon: Do the serious work of unpacking this bill and have a decent debate.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Acting Speaker, I was looking forward to hearing some debate from members opposite, but, apparently, we're not going to get a debate from them today.

Certainly, it's a privilege to put some words on the record regarding Bill 17. Obviously, it's a very important piece of legislation for the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and we certainly welcome the members from the Teachers' Society that are with us today.

Mr. Speaker, clearly the government members have different priorities in terms of which legislation they want to move forward here with only eight days of sitting remaining here at the Legislature. You know, we've had the NDP in charge here for the last 17 years, we've had an NDP government in Manitoba. They're currently in—four and a half years into this current term, one of the longest terms of any serving government, and we find the NDP, even today, are still introducing legislation.

* (16:10)

So we have a whole bunch of legislation before us with only eight days remaining, and I don't know if the NDP think they're going to get all these pieces of legislation rammed through the House without proper debate on it or not. I'm not sure if that's their intent or not.

Clearly, the members opposite have different interests in terms of which pieces of legislation they wanted. Yesterday in question period the Premier (Mr. Selinger) got up and he was quite adamant that we should be passing Bill 5 and we should be dealing with water management strategy in Manitoba, and he wanted to make that the issue of the day. Well, then, we see when it gets down to orders of the day, you know they call a different piece of legislation. So, clearly, they're torn in different directions, Mr. Acting Speaker.

And then today we have a Bill 20, a bill dealing with the environment, and it was introduced today, Mr. Speaker, again, with eight days left in sitting time. We're not sure if they intend to get that bill passed through the House or not. There certainly was some interest from their members, the member from Concordia and the minister responsible for that piece of legislation. They thought it was a priority and they wanted it to be debated today as well.

Well, again, orders of the day roll around, and Bill 17 is called. So, you know, obviously, the government has a lot of different priorities over there. They can't seem to get their team together to decide which one of the bills is their real priority, and we just have to wait until orders of the day come out to find out which bill is the priority. So there's—clearly there's no plan over there.

We don't know what the agenda's going to be from day to day, and, clearly, the members opposite don't know what the agenda is going to be from day to day.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I do want to say that, clearly, education is very important, and very important for all Manitobans, and we think it's a real opportunity to provide kids the opportunity and the hands up that they're looking for. My wife has been a teacher for—well, it's probably 30 years now that she's been a teacher, and a teacher in the elementary classes, and she's taught in different schools in southwestern Manitoba. And she started in Minto and she moved to Ninette for a few years and then to Holland school, and she's now teaching grade 5 and 6 in Glenboro. So she certainly has a lot of different experiences in elementary classrooms, you know, teaching up to three grades at one time.

So, you know, I get to hear about education pretty regular. In fact, pretty well every day I get to hear an education story, and I recognize the challenges that teachers are facing in the classroom. And it's something that's been evolving over the

years as we go, and we see it in societal changes as well. So there's a lot of pressure on teachers to be more than teachers, and it's a real challenge.

So they face a lot of issues, you know, not just in the classroom, but at the recess and before school and after school dealing with kids, dealing with, you know, social issues that the kids have, family issues that the kids have, family breakups that you have to deal with that have an impact both in the classroom and out of the classroom.

So there's a lot of things that certainly impact students these days, and I think we as legislators, those involved in the administration as well, have to recognize the extra needs that are there in the education system. And it's something where we all have to work together, and we have to make sure we have the experts available to bring into—as a resource to help the teachers and, in fact, help the kids.

And really, sometimes I think, Mr. Acting Speaker, we do lose focus on what we're trying to accomplish at the end of the day, and it really is about the kids. It's about educating the kids, giving them the opportunities to go on in life, whether it be right into the workforce, or get them ready for the next level of education, if you will. Whether that be a college or a university setting, it's certainly imperative that we get the basics right so that those kids have all the opportunities provided to them.

And I think it's important, you know, we have a debate about class sizes in K to 3 and limiting the number of students in classes in K to 3. We certainly have the debate about the numbers, but I think a strong component of that should—we should be looking at the composition of the classes. And, quite frankly, we know there's a lot of special needs kids involved in classrooms. And we have to make sure that we have the resources there for the teachers to deal with those special needs children, Mr. Acting Speaker. And that's, I think, is very, very paramount to the system. So I think when we look at, you know, the class size in particular, we have to keep in mind the composition.

And I think that's where we have to give, you know, the local administrators, the teachers, some more autonomy in terms of how we deal with those special needs kids in the classroom, Mr. Acting Speaker. And it's certainly, certainly something that I hear about on a regular basis. And it's something that I think we as administrators have to be knowledgeable about. And I hope that, you know, the MTS as well will be standing up for teachers in

this regard. I think this is an important role for the Manitoba Teachers' Society to take. And I hope they will recognize that and make sure that that dialogue is undertaken in discussions with both government and administrators as well around the province.

Now, I recognize this is a major piece of legislation, a major undertaking by the government. Hopefully, there has been some proper consultation with the Manitoba Teachers' Society. And we want to make sure we get this bill correct, you know, after not much of a debate, but at least there will be some debate on this particular bill. Hopefully, we'll get it right.

We'll get this bill off to committee, I expect, sometime in the very near future. We will hear what kind of feedback we're getting from those involved, and I'm sure the Manitoba Teachers' Society will address any concerns that are in this particular legislation or if there's anything that hasn't been addressed in this particular legislation. But, clearly, there is some comprehensive changes to the Manitoba Teachers' Society in terms of their operations.

Now, clearly, Mr. Speaker, the—I think all teachers, and I know we will be looking forward to see what the code of conduct looks like under the terms of this legislation, and in terms of how that's going to be rolled out, what kind of a discussion there will be with teachers around the province in terms of what that code of conduct looks like. And also there's going to be clearly some fallout from there in terms of the membership complying with that code of conduct, and then how the Manitoba Teachers' Society is going to deal with issues that may arise in the future, if there's some issues that arise that don't follow the code of conduct as it's laid out. So, obviously, there will be more work, more important work and more onus with the Manitoba Teachers' Society to address those issues as they come forward.

And we're certainly looking forward to see what that looks like into the future. And also we look forward to the comments from the teachers across the province in terms of what that code of conduct looks like and how things will roll out and any future issues that may arise out of that. And also it will be interesting to see,—I understand there's going to be a conduct committee that will be established, and I'm not sure who will be on that particular committee and sort of the operations and how that committee will look and the role of that particular conduct

committee. So we will see how that unfolds into the future.

Ms. Jennifer Howard, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Clearly, we're hoping there's not too many breaches in terms of the code of conduct around the province, but, obviously, those things can arise from time to time. So again, we're looking forward to those sort of issues arising, and it looks like there's implications here, when these breaches do occur, in terms of reprimanding the member, and we're not sure what that—those sort of reprimands will look like. Obviously, there could be, if it's critical enough, there could be suspending of the member as well, and they talk about with or without conditions. So these sort of things will be interesting to see what does happen down the road when there is a breach of that conduct, how this committee will be structured and how they will deal with these types of breaches. And it opens up another whole idea of penalties on members as well. So those things will be interesting to see how they develop as well.

* (16:20)

Miss—Madam Acting Speaker, I do want to make a comment that in respect of some of the results that we've seen in Manitoba and some of the relatively poor results we've had in both math, reading and science, which are the core—in my mind, the core elements that we should be dealing with. You know, we looked at the results from the latest Pan-Canadian Assessment, you know, we're the—basically, the lowest in the country and it doesn't really bode well for Manitoba kids.

And, I think, it's us—it's our responsibility, as legislators, to make sure we get it right so that we give these children the opportunity to get to work in Manitoba—hopefully, in Manitoba or anywhere else. And I had a first-hand chance experience here, about a year ago, in this regard. I had a call from a woman who was in the Canadian Armed Forces. She'd just moved from Ontario to Shilo, and she was going through a course. And part of her course was to have a discussion with a local politician. And it was part of her course.

So we set up an interview, and I went over to Shilo and we had a good visit, and, as part of the conversation, education came up. And she had just moved, I think, it was within about six months she had moved to Shilo, and she had a student in grade 8. And I quizzed her, you know, like, how's our education system compared to Ontario? And she

said, you know, I was very concerned, she said, because I would think that our grade 8 student is a year and a half to two years behind. Manitoba is about one and a half to two years behind where he was in Ontario. And I found that very alarming, Madam Acting Speaker. But that, I think—that's kind of the grassroots acknowledgement that our kids here are scoring lower than other kids because we're that far behind. And I don't know what the reason is for that. I wish I knew the reason. I'm sure the minister wish he knew the reason for that too.

But our kids are falling behind other jurisdictions, and the test scores show that. So, clearly, we've got some fundamental issues that we have to address. My take is we have, probably, some of the best educators anywhere, and I'm very impressed with the educators that we have in Manitoba, and I know they have the best interests of the kids at heart. But we have to make sure that we're giving them the proper tools to get the job done and—so that they can educate the kids in their best interests.

So, you know, clearly, we're spending more money per capita on education than ever before—probably more per capita than any other jurisdiction in the country, but our results aren't positive. And, to me, that's a red flag that we have to address some of the basics here. You know, when it comes to reading, reading, to me, is the basics of it all. You know, if you don't have the ability to read, to understand, you're not going to do well in other courses. You know, it just stands to reason if you can't read well, you're probably not going to—if your comprehension isn't well, you're probably not going to pick up science or chemistry or any of those other courses very well. So we have to make sure that we get the basics—especially in terms of reading, we have to get that right, and we have to get that correct at an early, early age.

Madam Acting Speaker, while we look forward to getting this particular bill to committee, I just want to make a comment about another proposed legislation. I know there was a news release went out. There's been an article out. Again, it relates to teachers and the concept of providing teachers full credit on parental leave. You know, that, I think, is very important. I know, in particular, my wife had three different leaves to have children—missed out on some of those benefits over the years. So it, certainly, is something that could be corrected. You know, I'm not sure—we're down to days, as I mentioned before, and we haven't seen this bill come forward to the Legislature for a debate. We're not

sure if that's a priority for the government. I guess it depends on the day when that priority is. But it's certainly a wrong that could be corrected, and we're certainly prepared to have a look at that.

So with that, Mr.—Madam Acting Speaker, we certainly look forward to this particular bill going to committee. We look forward to comments and look forward to it coming back in third reading to see if there's any improvements that we can make in this particular legislation. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I rise to talk about Bill 17. This is an important piece of legislation. It is important that we recognize and respect the tremendous contribution that teachers make to our society. It is important that we recognize the tremendous contributions that teachers make to our lives, to our children's lives, to our grandchildren's lives and that what we are doing today certainly is a step in providing greater autonomy for the Manitoba Teachers' Society. It's also a step in providing better recognition and fairness for women who are teachers.

But I think it's most important that what we are doing is recognizing that teachers play a tremendously important role in making sure that every child in Manitoba has an education. And I think that from the many discussions and conversations that I've had, for example, in reference to the bill that I brought forward dealing with the prevention of family violence through education, that I have heard stories of teachers who have played very significant roles to help families above and beyond the call of ordinary duty of just providing education. The teachers play a very important role in helping to facilitate and enable extracurricular sports and various other activities.

There have been teachers who played tremendously important roles in stimulating students by getting them involved in drama and theatre or music, and I remember a story recently of a teacher who was involved in teaching art, and when she started the week of her teaching art, there was only about 50 per cent attendance in the classroom because the students were not paying attention or their interest wasn't captured, or what have you. And they got so excited about participating in being involved in art during that week, that by the end of the week, every single student was there and avidly paying attention, but paying attention in there not just for the art but, indeed, for the math and the reading and the other things. And so teachers in—

across the spectrum, whether we're dealing with math or reading or art or music, play an extraordinary role in helping to develop the talents, the creativity, expressiveness and the lives of students and young people in Manitoba.

And of course, there are teachers who are involved in adult learning, teachers who are involved in post-secondary education and college, but it is today, with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, we're paying a tribute to the work that teachers have done in this province, the role of the Manitoba Teachers' Society in supporting teachers and playing an important role in making sure that teachers have the opportunities but, more importantly, in a sense that our young people have opportunities.

And so, Madam Speaker, I'm here to say that the Manitoba Liberal Party will support this legislation. We look forward to it going to committee and having further discussion, and I look forward to the next steps and, hopefully, it will go through committee and into third reading and get passed before the session is up. But it's a very tight schedule, and we'll have to see what happens. Thank you.

*(16:30)

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Thank you very much, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker—Deputy Speaker, always a great time to get up and talk about one of my favourite subjects, and that is education. As a former school trustee and chair of the board for the former River East School Division, I've always taken great joy in education. It's a wonderful, wonderful time to be part of the whole process, and even having had three children who've almost all gone through the system—I've got one more left in the education system, and I'd like to, first of all, say I cannot imagine anyone who would have had as great an experience with the education system and with the teachers as we have had over the years. We've had just some of the most outstanding, the most dynamic individuals teaching our children right from kindergarten on up to grade 12.

The standards that we have in Manitoba are just amazing. As you travel across the country and internationally, people often will ask you, so what is it like to have your children in the public school system? You know, what is the education system like? And, when I tell them the kinds of experiences that we've had and the kind of care and attention that's given to every student and the love and appreciation of the individuality of each child—and, as we know, that in the same family you have two or

three or more siblings and each one is just so unique and each one needs to be taught and dealt with in such a different fashion.

We've had many of the same teachers teach each one of our children and they just love it. They say, you know, just so different, every one of them, in the way they learn and their style. In fact, just recently we had parent-teacher interviews at River East Collegiate, and somehow we missed the date. The emails got mixed up, and an email wasn't opened up. And so I went down to the school and I got the email addresses of the teachers and emailed them and said, I apologize; we did not book the way we were supposed to. And we know parent-teacher interviews are over, but we did want to speak to three of the teachers and talk to them about certain points about our daughter's education, and they were more than willing.

And the emails that came back were just unbelievable. Absolutely, they would like to meet and talk, and they were prepared to give up their lunch hour and which they did. The only person who showed up late for the parent-teacher interview was, of course, my daughter, and—but we had a really, really good conversation. And, every time I leave one of these parent-teacher interviews, I'm always filled with this amazing sense of gratitude to a system that is as dynamic as the one that we have.

And I've travelled a lot and talked to people, and I've said, you know, there's a reason why a lot of individuals from all around the world who have unbelievable wealth, and what they want to do is they want to send their students to our schools because they want their students to get a feeling of what it's like to be part of our school system, that, yes, it does teach math and science and all of those important subjects, but also allows our students to be creative, allows our students to be themselves, to exhibit the kind of creativity that they have and learn in the way that they learn best.

And our youngest is incredibly creative. I think I've said to this House she was a child who could walk out into 500 acres of mud and walk 30 feet into the field and reach down and pick a little flower and say, now isn't that beautiful. No matter what, she could always find beauty in stuff. And she had teachers and an education system that wanted to foster that, that allowed her to do that.

You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, they have this great program through River East Collegiate where they partner with the Winnipeg Symphony

and they bring choirs from out-throughout River East Transcona School Division, and they practise with the choirs and they actually do an amazing performance. And I've been there twice now with my oldest daughter and my youngest now just recently, and, to start with, the concert hall was packed. You couldn't find a seat in the concert hall, and they had a mass choir of about three, four hundred students singing with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and it was stunning. It was absolutely stunning performance, and you just sit there and you think, like, these are all students, these are not trained professional singers, these are students.

And, you know, I can't speak about my kids' education and not talk about Jeff Kula, who is one of the most decorated, one of the most award-winning teachers that you can find in the nation. In fact, he was honoured when the Junos were here in Winnipeg and they did a surprise Juno presentation at his school and he was shocked he didn't even know it was coming. And I was able to be with him at the Human Rights Museum when they did a special presentation honouring him for that, and that's the kind of calibre of teacher that we have that are teaching our children, and the world looks at our education system and they see what's being done.

And preparing our children for a—an economy that has changed so diametrically that we almost don't even know what kind of jobs our children are going to be facing when they get out, and teachers are up to the challenge to present and provide our children an education that they are armed with what they need to go into that new modern economy.

And, you know, just briefly again about Jeff Kula. Here's an individual who, because of scheduling, a whole bunch of students couldn't be part of a jazz band, oh, no problem he said, you know, we'll just do it at lunch hour, because seemingly he doesn't need to eat lunch. He would give up his entire lunch hour and, you know, if you think, you know, he waltzes in, you know, and there—I've heard people disparage teachers and I think that's so unfortunate because I know that teachers often show up at six and seven in the morning, and Jeff Kula is one of those. He shows up and he has extra practices early in the morning, and don't think, and throughout all the years—all the years we have had just fantastic teachers.

And I cannot speak highly enough. I've travelled and spoken to relatives and they said, oh, what, you don't put your children into private school. No, our

Canadian education system is second to none. We've got the greatest education system, why would we ever want to do something like that with the kind of standards and the kind of dedication.

And I—I've heard from teachers who are in schools that have students, they come from areas where there's a lot of moving in and out, and the kind of education that they provide to those children and the love that the teachers have for these students is unbelievable.

And so it's always a good time in the Manitoba Legislature when we're discussing education bills, and this particular bill, I know that today we're going to have it go to committee, which is really important, and hear what presenters have to say.

To those listening in the gallery, we have one of these great systems, if you look across the Chamber it's not like the House of Commons which has seating parallel to each other, in fact, it's in a horse-shoe shape or in the shape of a committee because all legislation in Manitoba must go in front of a committee.

And it's always surprising to individuals when you say any Manitoban, any Canadian, in fact anybody in the world can actually come and present to our committees and they can have their say and they will be treated with respect, they will be listened to, and they will have their opportunity to have their input. And I think that's, you know, just—furthermore not just do we have the best education system in the province of Manitoba we also have one of the best parliamentary systems Manitoba does in the country and around the world. It really is a great system.

*(16:40)

And I look forward to seeing this bill go to committee, and I would like to say that—I would love to name individual teachers, but the danger with that is then you might leave a teacher out. I would like to say to all educators, whether it's administration, whether it's our teachers, whether it's the school-boards, whether it's the individuals. I've walked into a lot of schools and the floors are just gleaming, in fact, it was I Love to Read Month, and the schools are just beautiful, they're so well maintained. It's such a nice environment to send your children into. They're getting such a wholesome education that—again, I was in multiple schools for I Love to Read Month and I'm just always in awe of our education system and what a good job they're doing and how great it is.

And I'd like to just say, in the few moments I've got left, how much we appreciate our teachers, the front-line workers, and their dedication and the care that they put into our students and the good education that is provided and offered to the students of Manitoba. Congratulations to them. We hope that this bill is something that will benefit our children and, you know, we have to make sure that our teachers are in a position where they're not worried about their safety, that they're not worried about any other things, that their only concern, then, is the students.

And I know that's what they do, and we want to make sure that they have a good organization that backs them up. I appreciate very much Manitoba Teachers' Society and what they do and the different local organizations and I can see my good friend is up in the gallery, and always good to see you as well, and we want to make sure that our teachers are protected, because we know that there are dangers in our schools and we've seen—it seems to be across the world, there was an attack in China on students, and that's very unfortunate, because we want our students and our teachers to be focused on what they're there for, and that's a good education and good healthy environments and, certainly, that's what we would like to see as parents. That's what we'd like to see as legislators.

And, you know, it would be nice to see this piece of legislation go in front of committee, and I'd like to thank the Legislature for the opportunity to have put a few words on the record in regards to one of the things that's very near and dear to my heart, and that, of course, is our public education system.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Thank you for the opportunity to say just a few words regarding this bill. I think we've already—have vindicated, I think, our critic for education indicated that this bill will pass this stage of the legislative process, will pass second reading this afternoon. It will be assigned to a committee whenever the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) chooses to call for a committee; I'm guessing it will be at some point next week. And we'll look forward to hearing presenters at that point.

I want to address a couple of things that have come up in terms of the debate on this particular bill, and a little bit earlier when it comes to question period, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, and that's the issue of timing and how bills are moving through the Legislature.

Now, we had a bit of a confusing—*[interjection]* Well, I hear the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), who added to the confusion in question period by demanding that a bill that was introduced for first reading today get debated, and then, his own Government House Leader decided not to call it, so that was confusing. That confusion also extended to yesterday, when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this Province—one would think the person in charge of the NDP, although, probably, watching the last few months, maybe not so much—demanded that the water rights bill be brought forward for debate yesterday in the afternoon, and then his Government House Leader decided to shut him down and not allow it to come to debate yesterday afternoon.

So there is confusion, obviously, on the government side in terms of what they consider a priority, and what they do not consider a priority. That was made more difficult, today, by the Minister of Justice—or, sorry, the former Minister of Justice, I forgot he was there for a little bit—the Minister of Education, who talked about moving bills quickly and then, trying to shut down and limit debate. I would remind him, and he'll be reminded, I'm sure, when he goes campaigning—I think he's one of the few who's running for re-election—when he goes campaigning in just a few days on the doorstep. But he's campaigning to be part of a democratic house. He's campaigning to be part of a democratic system. And part of democracy is to be able to come to the floor of this Assembly and to speak on behalf of your constituents and behalf of others who are interested, either in a particular legislation or a particular idea.

Now, the Minister of Education seemed to want to shut down that ability to discuss and to debate. I'm not sure what he's going to tell constituents when he's out there on the doorstep, that he wants to be a voice, but he doesn't want anybody to say anything in the Assembly; they want things to be rushed through. No doubt he'll use some catchy slogan, as politicians often do, about being a strong voice, or being a voice for something and, yet, he himself says that he doesn't believe the people should be able to speak on bills here in the Legislature.

Well, that is what this Assembly is about. This Assembly is about having a democratic right and a democratic voice, and I get worried when I hear a member—and in particular, a member of the government, a member of the Cabinet—who says that we should quickly rush through something and we shouldn't allow members to speak, and why are we

waiting and why is anybody speaking the view of their constituents? Well, that's why we're here.

And I'd remind the government that, actually, that was one of the issues that happened around the 2013 PST debate. And I know that there were groups and individuals who came to that committee and spoke in favour of raising the PST, but there were very few, of course, out of the hundreds who came and spoke against it, there were a couple of groups who spoke in favour of raising the PST but they were a small number of groups, and I'm not sure if they represented everyone, Mr. Speaker, that they were there to speak on behalf of. But, when we had that debate about the PST and we had that debate here in the Legislature, there were members opposite who wanted to move things quickly, who didn't want there to be a democratic discussion here in the Assembly, and they were trying to get members on our side not to speak.

Well—and they should think about that in terms of what happened within their own caucus, because we've heard since then, of course, that many members of their caucus, several high profile members whom I respect, have come forward and come out and said that one of the reasons that they rebelled against their government, rebelled against the NDP was because of how the whole PST debate happened, how the whole PST debate proceeded. And part of it was because they didn't have a voice. There are senior members—or former senior members of the NDP who were former senior Cabinet ministers who have come forward and said publicly that one of the reasons that they spoke out against the government is because they weren't listened to, that they didn't have a voice about whether or not the PST would be increased.

And now we have the Minister of Education continuing on the same path, and doesn't feel that people should be able to discuss things here, and he wants things rushed through the Legislature. And you'd think that—you know, we're talking a little bit about learning, Madam Deputy Speaker. You'd think that the government, that the NDP would have learnt something from that experience, learned something about what it does to democracy, what it does to an organization, I'd say, what it does to a caucus when you try to move something through quickly without allowing people to have a voice and have a discussion.

Now, of course, there are going to be discussions in a caucus, like there might be in a school or any

other kind of environment where there are disagreements. And those disagreements are not bad things; they're not negative; they're a healthy part of the debate. They're a healthy part of us as legislators and others within our society. That's how we come to better decisions.

And I would say that one of the issues that happened around the PST debate among the NDP members and particularly among the NDP Cabinet is that debate didn't happen; that discussion didn't happen. That there was a decision made by the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and perhaps a few others that were close to him to say that we were going to move forward with a PST increase. We're going to move forward with moving the PST from 7 to 8 per cent, and there wasn't the kind of discussion that needed to happen. And those aren't my words and I'm not telling any sort of secrets, Mr.—or Madam Deputy Speaker. Those are words of New Democratic members, former members of the Cabinet, who came forward and said that the government, that the Premier in particular, isn't listening, that he's not consulting, that he doesn't have the best interests of Manitobans at heart.

Those are words that came forward from NDP members. And so, when I hear the Minister of Education go back to that same sort of approach in saying, well, we need to rush this through, and we've got to rush this through, and we've got to rush this through. Well, that's concerning, because it's the same thing that got him into trouble with the PST. And the hundreds of presenters who came and spoke against the increase of the PST—and, again, there were a couple of groups that spoke in favour of it, but the hundreds of presenters who came and spoke against the PST, many of them weren't there to argue just against the increase and what it was going to cost them. Many of them were there to speak against the process. They spoke against the process because they didn't think it was done right, that they weren't getting the true public input that they wanted.

Now, that was in reference to the referendum and the changing of the balanced budget legislation and not allowing the referendum on the increase, Madam Deputy Speaker. But that was one of the things they spoke about: that in a democracy, you have to be able to have your voice heard.

And so, I know that over the next several days—we don't have many sitting days left here in the Assembly before we break for an election which I know won't be a break for many of us. But the ability

to be able to have that discussion is important. Legislation doesn't exist just for the term of an Assembly. Legislation generally lasts for a generation; it lasts for a lifetime. And there are many, many people who get affected by legislation. We wouldn't pass legislation if it didn't impact somebody.

*(16:50)

And I know—and maybe the Minister of Education's had the same experience; I know other MLAs have. I've been in situations where bills have passed in Assembly, such as, as quickly—quite quickly, and then a few months later you get a phone call from a constituent and they ask you, how did this bill pass, it's impacting me in one particular way or another. How come I didn't hear about it? How come I didn't know about it? And then you have to sort of go back and, you know, it's a bit of a difficult experience to explain to them that something moved, you know, very, very quickly or without sort of the proper consultation or a recommendation from somebody that was—that's in charge for recommending it, Madam Deputy Speaker. Those are difficult conversations to have. So I continue to say, as Opposition House Leader—and I've said it many times in this House, and so this isn't particular to this bill or any other bill, this is a consistent thing that I've said over and over and over and over again—bills need to have a proper amount of debate. They need to have a discussion.

And the Minister of Education was quite upset earlier on today when the bill—debate started on this particular bill; he was quite almost angry, it seemed, that there might be two hours of debate. The debate started at around 3 o'clock today, and it's going to end at 5 o'clock, and it's going to go to committee before 5 o'clock. I don't think, if we talk to ordinary Manitobans and ask them whether or not they thought two hours of debate in a democratic assembly was excessive for a bill that's going to last there for a generation, my guess is, and I'm happy to take this to the streets and the minister can join me and we can go ask 100 Manitobans, but my guess is, if we ask them if two hours of debate on a bill would be considered stalling or excessive or filibustering or all the other sort of insinuations that he and perhaps his Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) have used, my guess is that ordinary Manitobans would say no. Many of them might say, two hours isn't enough, that how can a bill pass that quickly in two hours. And that's essentially what we're asking for here today, a debate that started at 3 o'clock, it's

going to end at 5 o'clock, it's going to go to committee, this particular bill.

And, if we're open to criticism, it's probably that this bill is moving too quickly. And I'm prepared to take that criticism, if people want to call me about that, that's fine, that's part of the job. But I'm certainly not interested in the criticism of the Minister of Education who thinks that speaking for two hours in an afternoon on a bill that we believe will likely pass this Assembly, depending how the government schedules bills over the next few days, and lasts a lifetime, lasts a generation, that two hours is excessive? I mean, that's ridiculous. And I think that the Minister of Education, if he considers his own words and considers that in the proper context, will understand that what he was saying earlier today is not democratic, it's not reasonable, and I don't think it's in keeping with what Manitobans would expect from this Assembly and from us as individual MLAs. They would expect us to have a reasonable and respectable debate for a reasonable and respectful amount of time on legislation.

And we will give—now, I mean to put it in context, when this bill goes to committee, the committee will probably sit for at least four to five hours; maybe it'll go a second day. It'll be before the public longer than it'll be before us as legislators. We're going to debate it here as the voice of Manitobans; as 57 elected MLAs, we're going to debate it for two hours or less this afternoon and it'll be before a committee probably for two or three times that. So it is not an unreasonable expectation that this bill and other bills are not going to be rushed through.

And I've said this to the Government House Leader, I've said this to the government before, not only have they had four years, they got an additional six months because of the timing of the federal election that happened last year. It was the decision of this House, although not the decision of this caucus, to extend the mandate of the government an additional six months. I haven't done the timing, the clerks could help me out with it, but my guess is that the—that this particular government will have had more time than any government in recent Manitoba memory, having a four-and-a-half-year mandate, and yet they say everything has to be rushed. They haven't had time. Everything's got to move more quickly.

The Government House Leader talks about wanting to sit later and doing different sorts of

things. He's had six months. We gave him an additional six months. I mean, how much more time does he need? Does he want another six months? I guess we could go to the constitutional limit, if that's what they're looking for, but we're certainly not going to agree to that. They were given another six months. We're asking to be able to debate a bill for two hours in an afternoon, and somehow the Minister of Education finds that to be unreasonable, finds that to be undemocratic, finds it to be stalling that members who are elected to be the voice of their constituents would actually want to debate something for a couple of hours in the democratic House called the Manitoba Legislature.

And when he goes to the doors, as he—as I know he will in the next few weeks, and asks his constituents to be their voice, I hope he thinks a little bit on the back of his head when he's asking that, that he wants to be their voice, that being their voice actually means being able to speak and be their voice in this Assembly and that that's his responsibility, that's my responsibility. It's the responsibility of the individual Liberal member, and whatever the composition of this House is after the April 19th election—and I don't presume the outcome of the election. Manitobans will decide, and, ultimately, Manitobans have the choice. All of us are at zero right now; all the ballot boxes are at zero-zero. I understand that. So I'm not presuming the outcome of what the composition of this Assembly will be after April 19th. But whatever the composition of the Assembly is, whoever the 57 MLAs who will be privileged enough to be elected into the Assembly, they have the right to speak on behalf of their constituents. In fact, I'd go further than that. I would say that not only do they have the right to speak on behalf of their constituents, they have the obligation to speak on behalf of their constituents.

I remember the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), his brief time in Parliament, he would put out brochures and say that he spoke more words in Parliament than any other member of Parliament. Now, he took that as a great thing. It didn't result in electoral success, but I take him at his word. I mean, he was there, and he was representing his constituents.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

As a member of Parliament, he spoke more words than any other member of Parliament during his time in Ottawa. And yet the Minister of Education doesn't want us to speak at all, doesn't

want us to speak at all on an issue, wants it to just move through quickly, and anything else would be obstruction. And anything else, if we didn't just move as quickly as we could on every bill the government brought forward and somehow we're delaying. Actually, we're doing our job. That's actually what we're doing is we're doing our job. We're discussing bills, we're discussing legislation, and we'll continue to do our job. As an opposition, we were elected to do a certain kind of job, maybe not the job each of one of us wanted to do and hoped to be in the government. We'll see what happens after the next election. But each of us have a job to do. Each of us have something that we're responsible to do in this Assembly, and when we don't do it, we make the collective Assembly weaker, and we make the collective province and the Manitobans we're here to represent, we do them a disservice.

So I'm not going to make an apology today or in the next few days, the four days we have next week and the two days that we have the week after that, not many days. I'm not going to make an apology for being here to represent and to be the voice of the constituents who elected me and Manitobans, more broadly, and I don't—would never expect the Minister of Education to make an apology for that because that's his job too. And so he should let us do our job. He could do his job and then all of us has—are made better for as an Assembly.

So, on this particular bill, it'll go to committee probably next week. I expect that we're going to have representation from the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and I will look forward to that, and we look forward to having their views put on to the public record through the committee process that we have which is not entirely unique to Canada but almost unique. I think we're one of two different provinces who do it in Canada, and we will hear, perhaps, from teachers and others who will come forward, as well, on this bill, and we'll hear it in other bills that have come forward.

Now, I know that the government'll probably continue to introduce pieces of legislation. That's good. We'll debate pieces of legislation. I hope that they'll consider passing some of the private members' bills that we have here too. If they're in a hurry to pass bills, I'm sure that the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) will want to consider passing bills that deal with reaching out and having trade agreements with other portions of Canada. He'll want to consider dealing with bills that help protect seniors, as brought forward by the member for

Emerson (Mr. Graydon). He'll want to deal with bills, as brought forward by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) and the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) and many other members on our side who've also brought forward ideas, and maybe the Minister of Education will take a different tune in private members' business where then he'll want to talk things out and he'll want to a little bit longer, and then he'll want to be his voice for his constituents, and I won't criticize him for that. That is his opportunity to do that.

But I hope that we can have the debate over the next—tomorrow and the next six days that'll follow, sitting days that'll follow after that and we can have a respectful debate and we can all go to the election and tell people that we're going to be their voice. But being their voice means coming here and being their voice, and to have the government continually stand up and say, we don't want you to say anything about bills, it's disrespectful to members, it's disrespectful for their caucus, and it's disrespectful to this place.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any further debate on this matter?

Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question before the House is second reading of Bill 17, The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act.

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

The hour being 5—the honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, I wonder if the—we might have leave of the House not to see the clock until 6 o'clock, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to not see the clock until 6 p.m.?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no, so leave has been denied.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

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