

Third Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MARCELINO, Flor	Wellington	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
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ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
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ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
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STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

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, 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.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 37—The Public Schools Amendment Act (Limited At Large Elections of Trustees)

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill No. 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Limited At Large Elections of Trustees); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (modalités d'élection des commissaires dans des circonstances limitées), now be read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Education, seconded by the honourable Minister of Health, that Bill No. 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Limited At Large Elections of Trustees), be now read a first time.

Mr. Bjornson: This amendment to The Public Schools Act would enable a small number of school divisions to hold at-large elections when electing board members as per the request of a couple of boards that brought this forward as well as the Manitoba School Boards Association.

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

PETITIONS

Provincial Nominee Program—90 Day Guarantee

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Reuniting families through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program should be the first priority in processing provincial nominee certificates.

Lengthy processing times for PNP applications cause additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families here in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider establishing a 90-day guarantee for processing an application for a minimum of 90 percent of applicants that have family living in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by J. Ledda, M. Caldo, and A. de Leon and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

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

Parkland Regional Health Authority— Ambulance Station

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The communities of Eddystone, Bacon Ridge and Ebb and Flow First Nation rely on emergency medical services personnel based in Ste. Rose, which is about 45 minutes away.

These communities represent about 2,500 people. Other communities of similar size within the region are equipped with at least one ambulance, but this area is not. As a result, residents must be transported in private vehicles to the nearest hospital if they cannot wait for emergency personnel to arrive.

There are qualified first responders living in these communities who want to serve the region but need an ambulance to do so.

A centrally located ambulance and ambulance station in this area would be able to provide better

and more responsive emergency services to these communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider working with the Parkland Regional Health Authority to provide a centrally located ambulance and station in the area of Eddystone, Bacon Ridge and Ebb and Flow First Nation.

This petition is signed by Aurel Breland, Toby St. Germain, Darrell Frobisher and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Long-Term Care Facilities—Morden and Winkler

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

Many seniors from Morden and Winkler area are currently patients in Boundary Trails Health Centre while they wait for placement in local personal care homes.

There are presently no beds available for these patients in Salem Home and Tabor Home. To make more beds in the hospital available, the regional health authority is planning to move these patients to personal care homes in outlying regions.

These patients have lived, worked and raised their families in this area for most of their lives. They receive care and support from their family and friends who live in the community, and they will lose this support if they are forced to move to distant communities.

These seniors and their families should not have to bear the consequences of the provincial government's failure to ensure there are adequate personal care home beds in the region.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to ensure that patients who are awaiting placement in a personal care home are not moved to distant communities.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider working with the RHA and the community to speed construction and expansion of long-term care facilities in the region.

This is signed by Merv Reimer, Helen Reimer, Hilda Hamm and many, many others.

Long-Term Care Facilities—Lac du Bonnet

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

These are the reasons for the petition:

Many seniors from the Lac du Bonnet area are currently patients in the Pinawa Hospital while they wait for placement in the Lac du Bonnet personal care home.

There are presently few or no beds available for these seniors in the Lac du Bonnet personal care home.

These seniors have lived, worked and raised their families in the Lac du Bonnet area for most of their lives. They receive care and support from their family and friends who live in the community, and they will lose this support if they are forced to move to distant communities to access personal care home beds.

These seniors and their families should not be required to bear the consequences of the provincial government's failure to ensure that there are adequate personal care home beds in the region.

We petition to Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to ensure that patients who are awaiting placement in a personal care home are not moved to distant communities.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider working with the RHA and the community to speed up the construction and expansion of long-term care facilities in Lac du Bonnet.

Signed by J. H. Sellers, Norma Hrysio, Cliff Hiebert and many others.

Traffic Signal Installation—PTH 15 and Highway 206

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that traffic volumes at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald

exceeded those needed to warrant the installation of traffic signals.

Every school day, up to a thousand students travel through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts their safety at risk.

Thousands of vehicles travel daily through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts at risk the safety of these citizens.

In 2008, there was a 300 percent increase in accidents at this intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate installation of traffic signals at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald.

To request that the Minister of Transportation recognize the value of the lives and well-being of the students and citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Andrea Wolfe, Sheldon Mastaler, Greg Cherweski and many, many other Manitobans.

*(13:40)

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Public Accounts Sixth Report

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Vice-Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its Sixth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions:

- December 5, 2003
- November 28, 2005
- February, 22, 2007
- September 9, 2009

Matters under Consideration

- Auditor General's Report – Dakota Tipi First Nation Gaming Commission and First Nation

Gaming Accountability in Manitoba dated March 2003

- Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Workplace Safety and Health dated February 2007
- Auditor General's Report to the Legislative Assembly – Audits of Government Operations dated December 2008: Chapter 4, Compliance with Oil and Gas Legislation
- Auditor General's Report – Special Audit: Image Campaign for the Province of Manitoba dated October 2007

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the December 5, 2003 meeting:

- Mr. AGLUGUB
- Hon. Mr. GERRARD
- Mr. LOEWEN
- Mr. MALOWAY (Vice-Chairperson)
- Mr. MARTINDALE
- Mrs. MITCHELSON
- Ms. OSWALD
- Mr. REIMER (Chairperson)
- Mr. SANTOS
- Hon. Mr. SELINGER
- Mrs. TAILLIEU

Committee Membership for the November 28, 2005 meeting:

- Mr. CALDWELL
- Mr. CUMMINGS
- Mr. HAWRANIK
- Mr. MAGUIRE
- Mr. MALOWAY (Vice-Chairperson)
- Mr. MARTINDALE
- Mr. NEVAKSHONOFF
- Mr. REIMER (Chairperson)
- Mr. SANTOS
- Hon. Mr. SELINGER

Committee Membership for the February 22, 2007 meeting:

- Mr. AGLUGUB
- Mr. DERKACH (Chairperson)
- Mr. FAURSCHOU
- Mr. HAWRANIK
- Mr. LAMOUREUX
- Mr. MAGUIRE
- Mr. MALOWAY (Vice-Chairperson)
- Mr. MARTINDALE

- Mr. SANTOS
- Hon. Mr. SELINGER
- Mr. SWAN

Committee Membership for the September 9, 2009 meeting:

- Mr. BOROTSIK
- Ms. BRAUN
- Ms. BRICK
- Mr. DERKACH (Chairperson)
- Mr. DEWAR
- Ms. HOWARD (Vice-Chairperson)
- Mr. LAMOUREUX
- Mr. MARTINDALE
- Mr. MAGUIRE
- Ms. SELBY
- Mrs. STEFANSON

Officials Speaking on Record

Officials speaking on the record at the December 5, 2003 meeting:

- Mr. Jon Singleton, Auditor General
- Ms. Bonnie Lysyk, Deputy Auditor General and Chief Operating Officer

Officials speaking on the record at the September 9, 2009 meeting:

- Ms. Carol Bellringer, Auditor General
- Hon. Mr. CHOMIAK
- Hon. Ms. ALLAN
- Mr. Jeff Parr, Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration
- Hon. Mr. RONDEAU
- Mr. John Clarkson, Deputy Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines
- Mr. Hugh Eliasson, Deputy Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following reports as presented:

- Auditor General's Report – Dakota Tipi First Nation Gaming Commission and First Nation Gaming Accountability in Manitoba dated March 2003
- Auditor General's Report – Special Audit: Image Campaign for the Province of Manitoba dated October 2007

Your Committee completed consideration of the following chapter as presented:

- Auditor General's Report to the Legislative Assembly – Audits of Government Operations dated December 2008: Chapter 4, Compliance with Oil and Gas Legislation

Reports Considered but not Passed

Your Committee considered the following reports but did not pass them:

- Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Workplace Safety and Health dated February 2007

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the 2008-2009 Annual Report for Manitoba Trade and Investment Corporation.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Harmonization Sales Tax Government Consultations

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, let me just try to change gears here under a serious topic moving away from memberships.

We've been concerned, Mr. Speaker, as have Manitobans, that over the past 18 months Manitoba has lost about 12,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector. This morning Stats Canada released data showing that this summer Manitoba had the biggest decline in manufacturing sales in Canada. The rest of Canada is up 5.5 percent, Manitoba is down 4.7 percent over the summer. We're down almost 20 percent since last year in manufacturing.

Now, adding to this climate of uncertainty is the fact that the NDP government is dithering, and it's being secretive in terms of its discussions with Ottawa over the proposal to implement a harmonized sales tax.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) if she will be clear and transparent and up front with Manitobans about the state of those discussions. What's on the table from Ottawa, and how long is that offer on the table before it gets revoked?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the monthly stats can fluctuate a bit. The Royal Bank—[interjection] The Royal Bank—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: The numbers—as the Royal Bank said that Manitoba's rate of—well, first of all, that the Royal Bank just said today that Manitoba will be the only province in Canada to have a positive GDP in 2009. They—Mr. Speaker, they also state that the manufacturing has been modest; loss of jobs have been modest in Manitoba relative to other provinces.

In terms of manufacturing, I would assume that the member opposite, when he said take a hard look at the HST-GST harmonization because manufacturing will benefit from that change, is he therefore saying that it's a Conservative position to have the harmonization of the GST and PST as they've done in Ontario and many other provinces in Canada and not in Manitoba?

Mr. McFadyen: We've said that you need to—that we need to take a hard look, and that's based on having all of the information, Mr. Speaker. And they have been secretive. They have been dithering. They have five different public positions on the issue plus one private position with the federal government: five different public positions, one private position with the federal government.

Will they be transparent, and will the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) stand up today and indicate to this House and to Manitobans where are the discussions with the federal government and what are the impacts according to her department's analysis of this tax? I ask the Minister of Finance to stand up on this issue given that the Premier has a clear conflict of interest on federal-provincial issues.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the C.D. Howe Institute has produced a number in terms of its impact in Manitoba. That report was released publicly—[interjection]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: —publicly in 2008-9, dealing with the impact on HST-GST in Canada. It said at minimum it would cost the Treasury of Manitoba \$240 million. It indicated a shift off of business by about 70 percent and an increase on consumers by the—by a huge amount of money.

We—Minister Flaherty said the door is open. I can assure the people of Manitoba, when a federal minister opens a door, we look behind it; we don't go

through every door. There is no intent at this point to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Doer: We've said publicly, Mr. Speaker, that it taxes all kinds of areas of consumers. The 5 percent has to be negotiated with Ottawa. We haven't dealt with that. We haven't got that.

Mr. McFadyen: And there's no hint of clarity in that response, and I don't know whether he's speaking for the federal government or the provincial government or the Conservative Party or the NDP when he makes his statements in the House today, Mr. Speaker. So they've got five different positions on the issue.

The Minister of Finance has the data. They've done the analysis. Will they come clear in terms of the impact in three different ways: one, on the consumers of Manitoba; secondly, on manufacturers who are losing jobs at a record rate, down 20 percent from a year ago right now; and, thirdly, what is the impact on the provincial Treasury? Will the Minister of Finance stand up today and be up front and transparent with Manitobans about the current position of the province of Manitoba, the position of the federal government and where these negotiations are leading.

Mr. Doer: Well, the current position of the province of Manitoba is we're one of three provinces that has not proposed to harmonize the HST and GST. Seven provinces have harmonized the GST and PST. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island are the three provinces that have not done so. On the basis of the C. D. Howe Institute report of a loss of \$240 million to Manitobans, on the basis of consumers being hit dramatically, it is the current position of Manitoba to not harmonize these two taxes.

Harmonization Sales Tax Government Consultations

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): The Stats Canada report this morning provides stats—they're not projections—and I'm just going to emphasize these figures for the Minister of Finance: Canada increased manufacturing sales 5.5 percent from June to July 2009. Manitoba had a 4.7 percent decrease.

This is the largest decrease amongst all provinces. Year over year we're down almost

20 percent. Struggling manufacturers could stand to gain from harmonizing.

I want to ask the acting Minister of Finance: Would she share with the House the projections her department has done on the value of input tax credits that manufacturers could stand if we harmonize in Manitoba?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, that's very interesting. The Leader of the Opposition says we should take a hard look at this. The critic now says that we should move forward on it. We should move forward on harmonization because it's good for the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Speaker, we have had a proposal put forward by the federal government as to move forward on harmonization. When those kind of things happen we have to look at them very closely. We don't—we don't have to look at what only the impact will be on the manufacturing sector. We have to look at the impact on individuals in Manitoba. We have to look at the Province's ability to continue to deliver services given that this move to harmonize sales tax is projected to mean less revenue in the—around the terms of \$375 million.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the acting minister might not know it, but she's got over 570 people in her staff, in her department, that should have these numbers for us, and we're simply asking for the numbers so we can have a good political discussion about harmonization here in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, even the Premier (Mr. Doer) has stated the first step of consultation is being transparent with the public. Well, that's what we're asking. We're simply asking for the numbers. Why is her department being so secretive?

Show us the numbers and we can have a good public debate about harmonization here in the province of Manitoba.

*(13:50)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, again, the member is indicating his position clearly, that now he wants us to move into harmonization. Before we look at this we are going to look at all the options. As others have said, the federal government has—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Let's have a little decorum here. We have people in the gallery that come here to listen to the questions and the answers, and I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers in case there's a breach of a rule. Let's have a little—let's have a little decorum here. The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, it's clear from the information that we've received that there are going to be certain sectors that will benefit. And the member opposite is showing his support—that he supports harmonizing because of the manufacturing sector because there are jobs down right now. As a government, we have to look at what the impacts will be on everyone. We have to look at what the impact will be on farm groups. We have to be—we have to look at what the impact will be on all areas.

The federal government has put a proposal. We're looking at it. We're reviewing it. A decision has not been made by the government's side, but I think the members opposite have decided they want to see the harmonization happen.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Manitobans see that the NDP party has five positions on this one issue, Mr. Speaker.

We're simply asking if the minister has the numbers. Will she share them with the public so we can have a real debate about this very important issue going forward? Ninety-four percent of Canadians are covered under HST. Why can't we have the numbers here in Manitoba so we can have a good discussion about HST in the province of Manitoba? What's the agenda there? Why is the department being so secretive? Is she prepared to release the documents she's got?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, when there's a proposal put forward we look at it. We look at the facts that have been put out by the C.D. Howe Institute. We look at the—

An Honourable Member: Public.

Ms. Wowchuk: Public document. The member can look at those numbers put forward by the C.D. Howe Institute. We know where the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce is. But we also have to look at other options to be sure that we are—we have said right now, we're not moving to harmonization. We haven't put it in our budget.

We are looking at the facts, what the federal government proposes. Right now there is no

advantage for the majority of Manitobans. And we have to be careful that when we move on any such issue that it is balanced out—balanced out. It has to be an advantage for the majority of people, not just a few.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Greyhound Canada Government Knowledge of Service Cuts

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, yesterday during debate on the Greyhound passenger service cuts, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) said that he was, and I quote, "quite taken aback" by the company's September 2nd announcement that they would be leaving Manitoba.

I'd like to table in the House, today, a letter that Greyhound Canada sent to the minister personally on August 14th, 2009, Mr. Speaker. This letter states, and I quote: Greyhound Canada is on the verge of taking some very serious service reduction decisions that'll most likely result in the surrender of all of our operating authorities in your jurisdiction in the next few weeks. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, why is the minister trying to cover up exactly when he knew Greyhound was thinking of discontinuing service in Manitoba?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, let me clarify something. When Greyhound went to public meetings, they were looking at discontinuing a route, for example, from Flin Flon to Thompson. They presented that to the Motor Transport Board, and when they did so, they asked the Motor Transport Board that they wanted to come back with more information so the Motor Transport Board could look at all the issues. They never did come back.

So when they came to my office and met with me, I was certainly surprised because the dialogue was continuing. To have them say that all of a sudden they're gonna discontinue all of their operation throughout the whole province as of October 2nd, I was surprised by that because it was continuing dialogue and they said they would be getting back to the Motor Transport Board with more information to try to make a better case where their losses were incurring.

Government Response to Service Cuts

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister gets a copy of the

letter because it was couriered and faxed to him on the 14th of August, not the 2nd of September.

I'd like to say that it's been reported that nearly 250 Greyhound employees will be receiving their layoff notices later this week. That's a big financial hit on those families and our provincial economy. The loss of passengers' service will also be very detrimental to passengers, seniors, students across the province, especially those in rural and northern regions who rely on Greyhound for critical services like getting to medical appointments.

Clearly, the Minister of Transportation has had over a month to respond to Greyhound. Can he tell us if he's any closer to resolving this matter today?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I just want to state also that today we are having a meeting with Greyhound officials once again and we make sure that the doors of communications are still open and the dialogue continues, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I contacted Minister Baird in Ottawa after the last meeting I had with Greyhound, and I spoke to Minister Baird about this issue being a national issue, Mr. Speaker, because it goes cross borders, cross boundaries. And it's important that the Minister of Transportation federally be apprised of what's going on.

In fact, the ask from Greyhound was to Minister Baird initially for approximately \$15 million to cover the losses. They didn't particularly care where the money came from. We're asking Greyhound to be specific, to give us specific proposals as to where their losses are occurring, and we'll certainly consider it.

But the dialogue continues with Greyhound, and we hope to have a satisfactory conclusion to this.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, this company's been giving this minister examples for four years. The Minister of Transportation calls this Greyhound situation an evolving issue. During yesterday's debate he said, and I quote, ". . . it's too early to really conclude what the result will be . . ." End quote.

Mr. Speaker, make no mistake; the result is very clear. If this NDP government can't find a timely way to address Greyhound's concerns about the legislative and regulatory climate in this province, Greyhound will eliminate passenger service. Is that what the minister wants? Time is running out.

Will the minister outline his contingency plan to Greyhound if they stop hauling passengers in Manitoba? How will this critical void in the transportation system be addressed in Manitoba, and why is there no plan?

Mr. Lemieux: I'm really pleased to hear that the MLA for Arthur-Virden has a crystal ball to see exactly what's going on. He continually—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Lemieux: Yeah. He continually stated in that crystal ball, Mr. Speaker, he saw that—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Lemieux: In that crystal ball, Mr. Speaker, he also saw that we wouldn't be twinning the highway from Virden to Saskatchewan. Finally, he moved his birdbath out of the way so we could do it, and we finally did it.

You know, the reason why this is evolving is because we believe in discussion and consultation. We've met and spoke to the AMM. We spoke to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. We've been in discussion with many organizations, Mr. Speaker, looking at all options to resolve this. And the MLA for Arthur-Virden, if he were listening at all, he would understand that it is evolving and we continue to have dialogue with Greyhound to find a satisfactory solution to this, to this particular dilemma. And indeed today, we're meeting again with Greyhound to see if we can find a satisfactory solution.

Greyhound Canada Job Losses

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): The government's incompetence on this issue is truly amazing. The Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) would have known 90 days ago. She would have known back in July, Mr. Speaker, that Manitobans, 250 employees, were in fact going to be laid off. It's either that or Greyhound broke the law.

Would the minister not agree that Manitobans, the workers, the 250 workers and families in Manitoba, should be treated in the same fashion as the workers and families in Ontario, where the layoff doesn't even take effect until December? Why the double standard? Why doesn't the government stand

up for their workers here in the province of Manitoba and protect those jobs?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I know that for some odd and curious reason, the MLA thinks that I knew about this situation three months ago. And I think he thinks it's because I'm the provincial minister responsible for the Employment Standards Code. But I have to tell the member opposite that he's wrong, that because these employees are interprovincial transportation employees, that they fall under the Canada Labour Code.

So I would like him to apologize to me for the comments that he put on the record yesterday and the comments that he's putting in this—on the record again today, and it's unfortunate that they didn't know this, especially when the Leader of the Liberal Party used to be a federal Member of Parliament.

* (14:00)

Mr. Lamoureux: The minister demonstrates that the member is a joke. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, she had an opportunity yesterday in a urgency debate to address the issue.

Why doesn't she raise the issue during the emergency debate? Why did she wait until today? Is it so that she can try to score a political point? Is she trying to say that she had no idea that this—these layoffs were gonna occur?

The minister has a responsibility and she needs to take that responsibility seriously, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

Point of Order

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

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, it is rare to stand up on a point of order. The member made an inaccurate statement. All members of the House unanimously agreed yesterday to have an emergency discussion on that particular issue. So the member—so the member for Inkster is wrong in stating that the member didn't express that particular issue, and in fact he's wrong in his other facts, but we are required to put accurate facts on the record.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yeah, on the same point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly, the member from Inkster is very passionate about the issue, and he has very good reason to be passionate about it. We stand to lose many, many jobs in this province, and I think he stands for his—he obviously stands for his constituents, and he's concerned about the employees in Greyhound.

Clearly, it's a dispute over the facts, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lamoureux: On the same point of order.

Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader makes reference to the emergency debate and justifiably so. If the member—if the Government House Leader were to read the closing remarks just prior to the Speaker saying, is there anyone else that would like to speak to the emergency debate, the Minister of Labour was clearly challenged in terms of to stand up and tell us what she knew.

Obviously, she knew something, Mr. Speaker. She knew about this legislation apparently. Either that or one of her diplomats or one of her bureaucrats would've told her that in fact—well, diplomats is the reference to the Ambassador "delect"—but obviously, between now and the conclusion of the emergency debate someone clued her in, and that's the reason why she's standing up today.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

On the point of order raised by the honourable, by the honourable Government House Leader, I wanna make a few points here. First of all, it's not a point of order; it's a dispute over the facts.

No. 2, points of orders should not be used for means of debate. And, No. 3, I would caution members on the language and how they are directing their comments, because constituent members in the House are addressed by their constituency and ministers will be addressed by the portfolio they hold.

So I want to caution the member on that, and it's not a point of order. It's a dispute over the facts.

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, let me give the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) a very simple question. There's 250 Manitobans that are going to be laid off, Mr. Speaker, and they're gonna be laid off effective in October. Manitoba is being used as a pawn.

Ontario Greyhound workers are not gonna be laid off until December, Mr. Speaker. So, my suggestion to the government, a positive suggestion, does she not believe that the employees here in Manitoba should be treated fairly compared to the employees that are being laid off in December?

Why is she allowing Manitoba workers to be used as a pawn for negotiations with Greyhound and this government's incompetence in being able to deal with this issue?

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, I said very clearly yesterday when I answered the question from the MLA that this is a very serious issue, and I mentioned the fact that our minister that has the lead on this file had been in consultation with the federal Minister, Mr. John Baird, and that he had also requested an FPT meeting and would be phoning through to his counterparts in other jurisdictions because this issue does not just relate to Manitoba, but it also relates to other jurisdictions.

So I made it very clear yesterday that we were concerned about this and we were continuing to meet with Greyhound employee—Greyhound in regards to how we could find solutions to this. We understand that this is a priority for us as a government, and that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to see just in terms of how serious the government does take it. Maybe the Minister of Labour on behalf of the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux), can indicate to this House that she and the Minister of Transportation will indeed be meeting with Greyhound—and I understand Greyhound officials are, if not in Winnipeg, will be in Winnipeg later today.

Will she give me assurance that she and her Minister of Transportation will indeed be sitting down and meeting with Greyhound officials? That she's not gonna just leave it up to bureaucrats, that they're prepared to get directly involved in this.

Ms. Allan: You know, Mr. Speaker, I think that it is really unfortunate that the MLA always does this kind of thing, in these kinds of issues, when he gets a tiny bit worked up, where he starts to cast aspersions on our federal people and our provincial bureaucrats.

I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to work on this issue. I think we all have a role to play in this. This is a very serious issue, and it's really unfortunate—it's really, really unfortunate that he didn't realize that these workers are covered by the Canada Labour Code.

You know, I would have thought that he would have known that and, you know what, it's really unfortunate that he didn't know that and I almost feel, Mr. Speaker, that if he would like a meeting on this issue, at any time, I've always told him, my door is always open and he's always—he's always welcome to come and have a briefing in my office if there are any issues that he would like to know about this—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Police Helicopter Government Strategy

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has indicated to Manitobans that the combination of being in the Legislature, plus dealing with one piece of legislation, which has been before this House for months, has left him unable to deal with issues of crime.

But one initiative that needs the attention of an engaged Minister of Justice is the need for a police helicopter in the city of Winnipeg. As shown in other provinces, having an eye in the sky not only assists and protects police, it protects residents on the streets below.

Can the Minister of Justice tell Manitobans when this helicopter is going to take off or is he waiting to find out who lands in the NDP leadership seat?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): The member, the drive-in question member from Steinbach, who drove in every—drove in from Steinbach and had a press conference about gangs, then drove in again and had another press conference on gangs, then drove in yesterday and had a press conference about why don't we have—why don't we have a gang strategy, forgets that—I was thinking, in 1999, the only gang initiative that came over 11 lean, Tory years, were they built a jail—*[interjection]* They build a courthouse—a courthouse and cut police.

We put in place anti-gang programs. We put in place a Spotlight program. We put in place a complete gang program, Mr. Speaker, and he also forgets there's a bill before this House that says who is responsible for the Winnipeg Police Service. It is the City of Winnipeg. The member wants to change it, he can do it. He can phone the mayor when he drives in next time, next time he drives in he can phone the mayor and talk to him. But, in fact, that decision is made by the responsibility of those who direct—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: The worst thing he can say about—the worst thing he can say about our government is that we built a courthouse. Well, if that's the worst thing you can say, we're in good *[inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Minister of Justice has said that he has an interest in this. We would have reason for optimism except this was the Minister of Justice who said he had an interest in refunding the tickets for the photo radar which the courts said have never been issued, and then he flip-flopped on that. It's the same Minister of Justice who announced on the fly the seventh gang strategy in ten years without talking to the City or talking to the police. It's the same Minister of Justice who agreed with us that there should be cameras in courtrooms, but hasn't done anything on that file for more than two years. Expressions of interest mean very little from this Minister of Justice. He needs to be clear to Manitobans.

When can we expect that helicopter over the city of Winnipeg so we can protect the police, protect the residents and protect those who are living in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker?

* (14:10)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, this summer, when the RCMP and the police met with us and decided to set up a task force, the member didn't drive in from Steinbach to have a press conference to talk about taking police resources to look for murdered and missing women. There was no photo ops from the member opposite. There was no photo ops from the member opposite when we went to Ottawa this summer to work with the federal minister and say we've got to get the Senate moving on two-for-one remands and put in a request to appear before the Senate. Where was the member? He didn't even pick up the phone from Steinbach to call Ottawa to talk to the federal minister.

And, Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well, and the member—the minister from Ottawa, Minister of Justice, will tell you that no government in this country, other than Manitoba, has done more on gangs and crimes than the government of Manitoba. His own MP, Vic Toews, has said that on many occasions. He should pick up the phone and talk to Vic Toews.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: If the minister—if the minister spent half as much time worrying about driving gangs out the province as opposed to where I'm driving, we'd be a much safer province, Mr. Speaker. We know—we know that the Minister of Justice is preoccupied. He's preoccupied with the leadership politics that his whole party, Cabinet, and caucus are preoccupied with. Yet the evidence—yet the evidence of a police helicopter in the ability to reduce high-speed chases, in the ability to lend a hand in the sky to high-risk arrests, the ability to assist police on the ground and protect citizens, that evidence is clear. And even a distracted minister, even a distracted government, even a distracted caucus should be able to get this done.

Will the minister commit, not to muse and to have an on-the-fly announcement, but commit today to say when that helicopter's going to be in the sky? When are they going to put their money on the table for the city of Winnipeg?

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Speaker, how does the member who loves to talk—how does the member who loves to talk, co-chair of the last campaign on crime, why did he vote against the budget that put an extra 200 police officers in Manitoba? He voted against it. The question of helicopter he asked in Estimates several months ago. In fact, that's where I think he first heard about it. He said, uh, is the city of Winnipeg—do you know anything about a helicopter? And I answered in Estimates, I understand that the Chief of Police is talking to the City of Winnipeg about a helicopter and they're having a discussion. He's had at least three press conferences on the helicopter on his drive-ins from Steinbach. Maybe the helicopter—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chomiak: But, Mr. Speaker, the meeting that we're having in Saskatoon tomorrow where Manitoba's taking the lead on gang—and they're going to follow some of Manitoba practices, the 973 convictions for gang members, the interprovincial

agreement with Ontario and Québec, the highest level of policing in the history, the highest level of Crown prosecutors in history are all done from—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Inwood Manor Snake Infestation

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, it has been brought to my attention that the Inwood Manor, a 55-plus housing unit has been taken over by snakes. I have heard that residents—there have been slithering—snakes are slithering up the walls, dropping from sleeves, sliding around the doorframes. I'd like to table for the minister a copy of a letter and a petition from the residents which I have received. As of this morning, no one from the government has contacted the residents to assure them that this problem is being looked after.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister responsible tell this House what steps are being taken to get these snakes out of the senior home and back into their natural habitat?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, members in this House know full well that any time that there are concerns about housing, and we'll look to see who—if this is Manitoba Housing or whether it's an independent non-profit, but we will, and I have, as always, will look into it on a very timely basis, indeed, today, and I'll make sure that the information that is necessary for the member to relay back is made today.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, I did table for the minister, Mr. Speaker, for his information. I did speak to Inwood Manor resident, Ann O'Malley. Much to her surprise, she had a snake join her for breakfast. Another tenant recently had two snakes in her suite. Mr.—Dr. Don Mason, an American snake specialist, has said this problem can be solved very easily by snake-proofing the building. The local municipality has snake-proofed their office, and a number of area residents have also done the same with their homes.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to addressing this issue? Not only is it a health issue but also it is an environmental issue. This is not only just about the residents; it is about the safety for the snakes' habitat. It's a great tourist attraction. We believe this issue needs to be dealt with today.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will certainly look into it immediately, and I certainly

will take action sooner than the member. I understand he did not get this today. He could have raised it earlier. I don't know why he's sitting on this information. I'm sure the residents expected more of that member.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, if he checks the date of when we received it, I responded on it immediately. Also, it was sent to the member from Interlake as well, not only just to the minister.

Mr. Speaker, the Inwood area is known well for the snakes. This spring, when two bags of snakes were removed from the crawl space in the manor, it happened—I happen to like snakes, but not in my bedroom, not in my kitchen cupboards, in my ceilings or my walls or my home.

The Inwood Manor residents deserve to have a healthy environment and feel comfortable in their homes.

Mr. Speaker, we, all members of this House, want this issue dealt with in a very timely manner. Get the snakes back where they belong. Let the residents feel comfortable and let's do it today.

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, action will be taken immediately. I can assure the member.

Bill 9 Withdrawal

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): In no other province does regulation of the social work profession fall under the Department of Finance. In all other provinces, Mr. Speaker, it falls under the Department of Family Services or the Department of Health.

Bill 9 was introduced by the former member—former Minister of Finance which was the—who was a former social worker.

Can the new Finance Minister tell the House if she plans to withdraw Bill 9 so that it can be re-introduced under the proper department?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): The member knows full well that it has passed first reading in the House, and we will continue to proceed with that bill.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, and that doesn't stop the minister from removing it from the Order Paper and re-introducing it.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen scathing reports as a result of child deaths in the Child and Family

Services system. Front-line social workers are seeing increased caseloads as they deal with 8,000 of the most vulnerable children in our province.

Why has this Minister of Finance introduced legislation that lowers the standards and makes Manitoba dead last when it comes to education and training requirements for social workers?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, this bill will be going to committee and the member opposite has had a chance—it falls under The Consumer Protection Act, and we will be going to committee and the member will have the opportunity to raise those issues.

But I don't think she's raised them in her comments previously when this bill was being passed—or introduced, and I would encourage her when we get to committee to raise those questions and have an opportunity to address them.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I haven't heard this Minister of Finance stand up and put her comments on the record either. We will be debating that bill for second reading this afternoon, and I hope that she stands up and articulates her position.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 9 allows a person with only volunteer experience and no formal academic training in the Child and Family Services system to become a registered social worker.

Mr. Speaker, the Province doesn't allow a person with volunteer experience in a hospital to register as a nurse. The Province doesn't allow a person with volunteer experience in the classroom to register as a teacher, and the Province doesn't allow someone with volunteer experience in a child-care centre to register as an early childhood educator.

Why on earth, Mr. Speaker, would this government lower the standards in the social work profession and allow people with volunteer experience to be registered as a social worker?

Ms. Wowchuk: As I said earlier, and as the member opposite said, this bill is going to be before the House this afternoon to be debated. I would welcome the member's comments at that time and then I would listen to her comments, but certainly we will then be going to committee stage where she should have further opportunity to raise her concerns.
[interjection]

Mr. Speaker: I'm sorry about—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order.

Information of the House is the agreement that we have in the House, is the first—the first seven questions are by the opposition and No. 8 is for a government backbencher if they wish, and then—and then if we have time to get to No. 9, then the member could raise her question then.

But right now—

* (14:20)

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Right now the honourable member for the Interlake has the floor.

Biodiesel Industry Mandates

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the issue of snakes in the Inwood Manor has been covered off, I'll put a new question.

It is a fact that adding value to primary product is a key component to the continued prosperity of rural Manitoba, and the production of biofuels is a classic example of this policy in action. A number of years ago I had the honour of serving on the Biodiesel Advisory Council and learned that a biodiesel strategy is a win-win for our producers in our province.

Recently, the Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) made an important announcement in this regard. I ask: Could he update the House on this government's biodiesel mandate?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to let all members know that we have announced the first biodiesel mandate in Canada. It's a 2 percent biodiesel mandate that's gonna go in as of November. It offers a triple win with the economy which is offering a new opportunity for farmers to sell non-food-grade Canola. It's good for the jobs in the rural economy. It also decreases 56,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases, and it also replaces a non-renewable fuel with a renewable fuel.

So it's a win for the rural economy. It's good for greenhouse gases, and it's also good to replace non-renewable fuel. So it's a wonderful announcement for all Manitobans.

Disraeli Freeway Repair Options

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, the snakes may be moving very quickly in Inwood, but I want to tell you that the residents of northeast Winnipeg were moving as snails this morning as a result of a stalled vehicle on the Disraeli Freeway.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know that all parties in this House and all members of this Legislature do support a solution to keep the Disraeli Freeway open during construction, and I do know that members on the government side of the House support that.

So I'd like to ask the government today: When are they going to announce their commitment of funding to ensure that the Disraeli stays open during construction?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we have been—we said as early as a year and a half ago, and we've confirmed, that we met with the mayor well before the initial decision to close the Disraeli was made that we'd be willing to be part of the solution on the Disraeli, and we have had an ongoing commitment to keeping the Disraeli Freeway open.

We're pleased that the City has received a number of bids that allows for the Disraeli Freeway to be open during the construction—reconstruction of the bridge which does pose in the long term a safety risk. We're pleased that they've done that. We've given the City our views and our commitment, major commitments on it. We are still dealing with the City. They are the ones that are going to make the final decisions and when they're gonna make them. But, yes, we have been part of both the financial decision and we've been part of solutions that can deal with the ability to rebuild bridges that really need to be rebuilt, at the same time not stopping traffic.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad that the Premier has finally indicated that there is a financial commitment from the Province of Manitoba 'cause we haven't heard that in this Legislature before, and I think we would all agree that it's the right decision. It's important for the Province to be involved in such a major capital project in our city, in our major city of Winnipeg.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the government today if they could share with us what the financial

commitment from the province is to keep the Disraeli open?

Mr. Doer: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly the—when the member was a minister, the contributions to a much smaller amount for roads was 18 percent. The capital project to the city of Winnipeg is \$80 million, and the contribution of the Province is close to 40 percent of that roads project. In other words, we've gone from \$5 million under the member, \$5 million on capital and roads to the city of Winnipeg to \$32 million, and so our commitment is beyond that amount of money over a longer term.

I would not want to—we had said 18 months ago we're willing to put financial support into that project. We put money into the Kenaston underpass. We put money and pledges into the sewage treatment plants. We put money and commitment into the museum, Canadian Museum of Human Rights, and I want to say publicly that we applaud the appointment of Stu Murray to head that institution. He will be a fine leader for all of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

Order. During oral questions on September 14th, the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) rose on a matter of privilege contending that the honourable First Minister (Mr. Doer) was in a potential conflict of interest situation due to the announcement that the First Minister is a Canadian Ambassador designate to the United States while continuing to act as First Minister.

The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) concluded his comments by moving that this matter be sent for review to be seen and looked at by a legislative committee. The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) and the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) also offered contributions to the Chair. I took the matter under advisement in order to consult the procedural authorities.

I thank all members for their advice to the Chair on this matter.

There are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for the matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege. First, was the issue raised at the earliest opportunity, and second, has sufficient evidence been provided to demonstrate that the privilege of the House has been breached in order to warrant putting the matter to the House.

The honourable member for River Heights asserted that he was raising the issue at the earliest opportunity, and I accept the word of the honourable member. I should note, though, that there's a difference between what the honourable member for River Heights moved as a motion and what the honourable member for River Heights submitted as a written motion. According to page 3000 of *Hansard* the honourable member was referenced as saying that this matter be sent for review to be seen and looked at by legislative committee while the motion submitted to the Speaker stated that this matter be sent for review, as to be performed by a legislative committee. It is vitally essential that the motion submitted be the same as what the member says on the record.

Regarding the issue of whether or not a prima facie case exists, I would note for the House that there is—there is legislation in place, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Conflict of Interest Act, which deals with the issue of conflict of interest by describing actions that are prohibited as well as steps that must be taken to avoid conflict of interest situations. The legislation also outlines penalties for members found to be in conflict of interest situations. The remedies provided by this legislation include the ability to request either formal or informal advice from the Legislative Assembly Conflict of Interest Commissioner concerning members' obligations under the act. In addition, there's also the remedy of applying to a judge of the Court of Queen's Bench for authorization to have a hearing before another judge of the court to determine whether a member or a minister has violated the act.

Additionally, I would like to advise the House that Joseph Maingot advises on page 180 of the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* that the Chair is in no position to interpret either the law or the Constitution. Whether something takes place in this House is constitutional or legal is not for the Chair to decide. The Chair only decides whether we are following our own rules. The concept that Speakers do not decide questions of law is supported by a 1994 ruling by Speaker Rocan and by a 1996 ruling by Speaker Dacquay. Therefore, it is

clear that the Speaker is not in the position to determine questions of law. As I just referenced, there is already legislation in place that deals with conflict of interest issues as well as providing remedies, and it is clearly not the job of the Speaker to be interpreting or enforcing questions of law.

On a subject of alleged conflict of interest allegations, Speaker Hanuschak ruled on a matter of privilege raised in 1970 regarding an alleged conflict of interest by members who were voting on The Automobile Insurance Act, that it was beyond the jurisdiction of the Speaker to decide if a conflict did exist. Given that there is legislation that deals with conflict of interest situations and given that the Speaker does not determine questions of law, it would be inappropriate for me as Speaker to be making a decision about whether or not a conflict of interest has occurred.

*(14:30)

Also, House of Commons Speaker Parent ruled in 1994 that a matter of privilege raised about a potential conflict of interest was not a prima facie case of privilege, as it was a disagreement after the facts, which does not fulfil the conditions of parliamentary privilege. Similarly, I ruled in 2006 that allegations of a conflict of interest do not meet the criteria for a prima facie case of privilege.

I would also note for the House that Joseph Maingot advises, on page 224 of the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, that parliamentary privilege is concerned with the special rights of members, not in their capacity as ministers or party leaders, whips or parliamentary secretaries, but strictly in their capacity as members in their parliamentary work. Therefore, allegations of misjudgment, mismanagement or maladministration on the part of a minister in the performance of his or her duties does not mean—does not come within the purview of parliamentary privilege.

I would therefore rule that the matter is not in order as a prima facie case of privilege and remind members that there are other remedies that can be sought regarding conflict of interest situations rather than raising the issue as privilege in the House or asking for the intervention of the Speaker.

I would also note for the House, that issues of conflict of interest or potential conflicts of interest are issues that must be taken seriously because not only can there be serious consequences as outlined in The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council of

Interest Act, there is also the issue of public perception and public trust and confidence in the elected officials that could be shaken if valid conflict of interest situations were found to exist. Similarly, caution should be exercised when raising alleged conflicts of interest as this can have the action of perhaps unjustly tarnishing the reputation of those members so accused if no conflict of interest situation is found to exist.

I would urge members to exercise caution when raising such matters. Thank you.

Okay, we'll now move on to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Ed Belfour

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride to recognize the extraordinary hockey player who was recently honoured for his contributions to this sport. Carman's Ed Belfour was inducted into the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame for his outstanding NHL career.

Throughout his career, Ed has inspired many young players in the province to follow their dreams, as Manitobans such as Ed Belfour have proven that we can compete with the world's best.

Ed Belfour started his hockey career with the Winkler Flyers in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League and received the title of top goalie in the league in 1986. From there he went on to play for the Fighting Sioux at the University of North Dakota, posted a record of 29 wins and four losses with the team. Belfour then continued on to the former International Hockey League where he played for the Saginaw Hawks before joining the Chicago Black Hawks in the 1988-89 season. He would go on to play a total of nine seasons with the Black Hawks. Belfour then made his way to the San Jose Sharks for a single season, followed by the Dallas Stars for five seasons, the Toronto Maple Leafs for three seasons and then he finally wrapped up his NHL career with the Florida Panthers for a single season in 2006 and seven.

Over the course of his NHL career, Belfour recorded 484 victories, which is the third highest in career wins among NHL goalies.

One of the highlights of his very long and successful career came in 1999 when Belfour led the Dallas Stars to become Stanley Cup champions. He also won the Vezina Trophy for top goaltender twice

and has been named to an all-star—as an all-star five times. He was also part of the 2002 gold medal winning team at the Winter Olympics.

Even though Ed Belfour has played in the NHL, he has not forgotten about the community he grew up in. He continues to donate funding to many local charities in Manitoba, including Carman Minor Hockey, the Winkler Flyers, MJHL, Carman area health care and Carman Collegiate.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Ed Belfour on his induction into the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame. I would also like to thank him for his contributions to the community through financial means and his many years of displaying exceptional athleticism in professional and junior hockey. Thank you.

Prairie Pathfinders Walking Club

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome today in the gallery many members of the Prairie Pathfinders Walking Club. I'm rising to recognize their contribution and their 10th anniversary.

Since 1999, the Prairie Pathfinders have been gathering together mornings, evenings and weekends to walk the neighbourhoods of Winnipeg and the Manitoba countryside. The group was started by four women: Leone Banks, Kathleen Leathers, Sheila Spence and Wendy Wilson. Over the last decade more than 1,200 members have discovered the natural beauty of our province, as well as the physical and spiritual benefits of a long walk.

The group's urban hikes include walks around Winnipeg's historic neighbourhoods, wilderness areas and parks. On weekends, the Pathfinders meet to explore Manitoba's diverse countryside, including many of our excellent provincial parks. Routes for these hikes can all be found in Prairie Pathfinders four best-selling books, which make excellent gifts.

It was a joy for me, along with the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), to attend their 10th anniversary celebration, which included a hike along the La Salle River in St. Norbert and culminated in a delicious French Canadian feast.

While I may not have done the walking necessary to earn my piece of tourtière, it was a great opportunity to hear members reminisce about their many adventures. A common theme of these memories was the discovery by members of the unknown strength it takes to participate in a

challenging hike over several days, and the many lasting friendships made along the way.

Mr. Speaker, groups like Prairie Pathfinders inspire us to explore the hidden treasures of this province, while promoting active living. I would ask the House to join me in congratulating Prairie Pathfinders on 10 years of walking and discovery.

Minto School

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): As the MLA for the Minnedosa constituency, it's my privilege to offer my sincerest congratulations to the staff and students at Minto School for achieving a rank among Canada's top 20 schools.

This prestigious appointment reflects Minto School's exceptional achievements and the positive impact it has had on the community. The passion and dedication that student, staff members, parents and volunteers have demonstrated in a community commitment are truly worth recognition.

Community comes first at Minto School. Nearly every activity and program fosters important concept of community. With a staff of three and a school population of 43, many see Minto as more than just a school, but rather as a family.

Each spring, students cook for friends and family in the community hall, donating proceeds to charity. From impressive Christmas concerts, or the Minto grade 8 graduation ceremony that attracts more than 250 people, to cleaning up the entire village as a part of the Earth Day activities, to hosting our very own Speaker of the Manitoba Legislature and staff to learn more about the processes here within our building. Minto School is truly a special place, one that we can look at as a role model.

Mr. Speaker, Minto School has made the important realization that achieving personal success involves the commitment of the whole community. I have been fortunate enough to witness the significant contributions of the Minto School community to Manitoba in my capacity as the MLA for the constituency, and words simply cannot express my sincere sense of pride and happiness for the achievements of this wonderful little prairie school.

Mr. Speaker, Minto School is teaching their students how to be men and women for others, and I would not be surprised to see a Minto student in a leadership role in the near future. Minto School is truly an inspiration to all Manitobans.

Cuthbert Grant Day

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, on July 11th I joined members of the community to celebrate Cuthbert Grant Day at Grant's Old Mill on Sturgeon Creek, which is a working replica of the grist mill built by Grant in 1829.

Cuthbert Grant was a fur trader and a Métis leader at a historically significant time in the history of Manitoba. He was the Captain of the Hunt in the Red River Métis community for several decades and Captain-General of the Métis in the Northwest Company as it engaged in the struggle with the Hudson Bay Company to dominate the fur trade in the west.

Significantly, he led the Métis at the Battle of Seven Oaks, a seminal event in the formation of Métis identity in Manitoba. Grant went on to work for the HBC after the two companies merged in 1821 and established the Métis settlement of Grantown on the White Horse Plains, which later became St. François Xavier. There he served as warden of the plains, justice of the peace and sheriff for Assiniboia. He was an influential figure at an important time; a leader when the idea of a Métis nation was beginning to formalize in the face of increasing settlement. Many consider him the first leader of the Métis nation.

*(14:40)

The day was celebrated with a teepee, trapper's tent and bannock cooked over an open fire. I had the opportunity to meet Micoow Mistatim Epim Pathat, English name Robert Nolin, a Métis elder who shared teachings about Métis culture and respect for the land. I also presented a grant from the Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport (Mr. Robinson) to Nancy Fluto of the St. James-Assiniboia Pioneer Association, who operates the mill as both a working mill and a museum dedicated to preserving the history and genealogy of Cuthbert Grant and his descendants.

As an educator and academic in the field of Métis and First Nations history, I was particularly pleased to participate in Cuthbert Grant Day. This celebration was a fun way for families and friends to learn about Métis culture, and to connect with the history of the Red River Settlement and what was one day to become Manitoba. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Record

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, we live at a time with an almost unprecedented number of issues which are being poorly managed by the NDP government in Manitoba.

Those in the hog industry are facing a very, very difficult period, and yet the government is not even listening. There was a huge rally of farmers in Morris on June 22nd with hundreds and hundreds of farmers present calling for help. The situation was and still is urgent, yet there was not a single NDP Cabinet minister present. There was not even a single NDP MLA present. It is beyond belief that elected NDP officials can be so irresponsible as not even come to listen even if they don't speak and be accountable.

We're faced with an impending second wave of H1N1 flu and the minister appears to have focussed primarily on the expectation of a flu peak in December and January with vaccinations set for November, and yet the situation in Japan and the United States is developing in a way that suggests the flu epidemic may be much earlier.

We are faced with Greyhound Canada indicating that they're going to be giving layoff notices to workers this Friday, and they plan to shut down almost all their service in Manitoba on October 2nd. Hundreds of Manitoba communities will have their major transportation service eliminated and the NDP government has been slow and lackadaisical on this file.

We are faced with a huge disaster in the Interlake where more than 190,000 acres of farmland were not seeded due to overland flooding caused by record rainfall and an NDP-neglected drainage and water management system. The municipalities of Bifrost, Fisher, Gimli and Armstrong have all declared disasters, and, in some cases, farmers have had to purchase specialized equipment normally used for working in rice paddies just to get a meagre harvest off this year. Ken Foster, Melvyn Eyolfson and Les Jacobson are just a few of hundreds of farmers that are calling for immediate action from this NDP government. Why is that not occurring?

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

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

(Mr. Lamoureux), that under rule 36(1) the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the very unusual wet weather in the Interlake region, which has resulted in the municipalities of Bifrost, Armstrong and Fisher declaring their municipalities a disaster area. As a result, there is a severe impact on farmers' livelihoods in the region.

Mr. Speaker: Before I recognize the honourable member for River Heights, I believe I should remind all members under rule 36(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other parties in the House is allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in *Beauchesne's* citation 390, urgency in this context means urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I've raised this at the earliest possible opportunity. We have had other matters of urgent importance which had to be dealt with earlier this week and so this is the first time that it could reasonably have been raised.

Clearly, it has come along over the course of the summer. It has developed. There have continued to be heavy rains in the Interlake and, Mr. Speaker, I was up visiting in the Interlake and talking with farmers and looking at the fields. The extent to which crops could not be seeded was huge; 193,000 acres went unseeded in the Interlake this year, which is 38 percent of the total cropland for the area. Farmers are out millions, some estimated \$20 million in unseeded crop profits alone.

It was amazing to see the weeds growing in the fields, the weeds which are normally present in marshes. The situation even where farmers had got in to plant the crops, the crops were full of, in some instances, marsh weeds and clearly it had been extraordinarily wet and very, very difficult. And there were many farmers who have done their best to seed the land, to do everything they could, often in very difficult circumstances, as farmers call it, muddying in the crop when you can't do it in the normal fashion.

The reality is that farmers in the Interlake have tried very, very hard to do their best but due to the disastrous circumstances, disastrous circumstances acknowledged and reinforced by municipalities in the area, Bifrost, Fisher, Armstrong and Gimli declaring the disaster area, acknowledging the huge extent of the problem and coming to the Province for help.

But the sad part about this is that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has not fully acknowledged the extent to which there is a disaster. The Minister of Agriculture has not acknowledged that this is a situation where the normal crop insurance and AgriStability programs don't cover because in fact what is happening is, when you've got sequential, extraordinarily unusual disastrous conditions, not one year but two years in a row as we've had here, then in fact the farmers in this area need some extraordinary disaster relief because that is what this is, a disaster and not the ordinary ups and downs of cycling.

And part of the reason that the Province and the federal government should be involved here is that the—part of the reason here is that the water management system has not been properly maintained, had not been properly invested in in this area and it has contributed to the extent to which there are wet fields, swamps in fields, lakes in fields.

I heard in one field it was so bad that people were canoeing in the middle of a field, and that doesn't happen unless there's a severe, severe problem. And this government, although they made an announcement on August of \$21 million for drainage, it was all over the province and it was for something that had actually been committed to before in the Interlake area some four years ago, and the government never followed through and if they had it might have at least helped a little bit.

But what is needed is not just that which was announced in August but a real water management system plan for this region of the Interlake so that there's adequate drainage and there's also areas of water retention to hold back water, a real water plan which balances the investment in drainage and water retention and makes sure that this area is protected from this heavy rainfall situation.

Indeed, the situation was so bad that the existing provincial drains were not adequately maintained, were not adequately excavated so that they would operate as efficiently as they could had they been properly prepared and maintained. Indeed, even

when I was there, we saw areas where there was a little swaths cut through the drains instead of the proper cleaning out of the drains. It was unbelievable the extent to which these drains and the water management system in the area had not been maintained and so we need this debate urgently, not only to make sure that the farmers have the attention that they should to the immediate needs to help the farmers who have been hit by this disaster, but also to make sure that adequate attention is paid to making sure there is in place adequate water management system for the area.

*(14:50)

And so this is an urgent matter. It needs urgent attention because farmers right now are in the field, or trying to be in the field, to harvest their crops. They need this information in order to make good judgments in terms of how they should proceed, and this is an extraordinary year because a very late year and so that a lot of the crops are not far enough along.

It is not just the grain crops. It is the hay crops. It is the people who have cattle herds. It's the people who have bees, who are losing large amounts of money because the crop of bees didn't grow up, and three-quarters, I'm told, of the bees will not be there to be held over the winter, and so that will have not just an impact this year but next year and many of the fields, because of a lack of help, will not be cultivated and will not be adequately looked after so that they may not be—they may not be able to be adequately cared for, adequately prepared, for the season next year, so they may not be planted next year, even.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): My understanding in regards to a matter of urgent public importance on this particular debate, the mover must present sufficient reasons toward setting aside the business of the House to debate a matter of urgent public importance.

Are there opportunities to debate a MUPI motion? For example, members' statements, debates, question period, and so on, and will the public interest be harmed if the business of the day is not set aside to debate the motion today.

If the Speaker rules against the debate in a MUPI, there is no appeal. That ruling cannot be challenged. If the Speaker allows a MUPI to be debated, each member would be allowed 10 minutes to debate, a maximum of two hours be allocated for

the debate, but the House may agree to shorten this time, Mr. Speaker.

I know the member from River East certainly brings forward an issue that is very important to agriculture in the Interlake region and a disaster of which has been a repeat, unfortunately, of the past year, and we know that 2008 was a sufficient issue in that region. Again, they were dumped on again this year, and a number of producers unfortunately are in worse shape than they were, in fact, last year. It just seemed the rain would not stop. A number of producers, as previously mentioned, was not seeded through no fault of their own.

The member also talked about the purchasing of equipment. Last year a number of producers went out and bought \$400,000 to \$500,000 combines with tracks in order to get that crop off, in order to ensure, in fact, that they would be able to collect crop insurance on those parcels, so they get it off in a very timely manner and to ensure that, in fact, that those payments would go from agri insurance into the producers' hands and make sure that that money flowed in a very timely manner. So that's why they went out and purchased these equipments, Mr. Speaker, in order to get those crops off.

Unfortunately, the cattle producers didn't have that opportunity because the hay land was underwater, and unfortunately, a number of producers had to sell off their cows. The federal government, provincial government, recognized the hurt and came up with a ag recovery program which did mediate some of those problems, and also they put in place a income tax deferral so that those producers that sold off those cattle last year would, in fact, be able to replace those herds this year and that was the hope.

Unfortunately, a number of those producers saw that because of the early rain in the early part of the season, that it wasn't going to be a sufficient year for them to be able to make the hay and, as a result of that, a number of those producers again started selling off a number of those herds at a very early stage in order to ensure that they didn't deplete any more of their savings, unfortunately.

And I know the long-term effects that's going to come about as a result of this overland flooding will not only be felt by the—by the cattle producers but also the grain producers, and we talked a little about the bee and honey producers as well—but it's the impact in rural Manitoba. Rural Manitoba is gonna have a sufficient deficit as a result of the overland

flooding, and one of those parts is, in fact, that the tire dealers, the truck dealers, the implement dealers are all gonna be feeling the ramifications of this particular issue as a result of the heavy rains in that area, and just recently in the past couple of weeks.

Alonsa. I know the member from Ste. Rose certainly has significant issue in regards to this. They received some 11 and 14 inches in areas of which there was a heavy amount of rainfall that came within a 24-hour period, and there was a number of hay bales that were actually placed right under the water of the heavy rains. This land was already well saturated.

Now that hay is again lost and those producers will not be able to supply the adequate feed supply that's needed for those stocks to be sustained over the winter months, and as a result of that, these cattle will be sold off. The grain rust that the member from River East had talked about is going to be also a significant impact for next year, and I think the real impact's going to come not this year but next year.

We've seen no land really transpire in transfer through a sale of land or inherited down from one generation to the next, but I think next year will be the real tale of tales when we look at the overall significant impact of what's really going to happen, whether or not they're going to be able to get those dollars in place in order to ensure that they're able to make sure they get a crop in, buy those cattle back with realistic values on them that's going to make sure that, in fact, that those family farms would be sustained.

Now, I do want to go back to the bee industry because that's a significant issue as well. And I know that some two-thirds of those bee operators in that area have certainly had ramifications as a result of the cold weather and unable to pollinate the crops, unable to harvest the honey, unable to produce the extra bees that they normally like to do and certainly going to have an impact on that industry as well, one that's been struggling for quite some time. And a number of years ago we did ask the government, the current government, for help, a helping hand, to ensure those producers, in fact, do be able to sustain their industry. Unfortunately, that did not come about.

Now, in regards to the AgriRecovery program, we've seen nothing announced by the government this past month or months prior, but certainly I know that the Keystone Ag Producers have asked the government to have a look at it. We know that in

regards to the freight assistance program, also needs to be looked at. We know that, in fact, that a number of those producers that are trying to make arrangements to buy hay, to buy straw, to buy screenings, a number of these producers are trying to get trucks into place. They don't know how they're going to pay for it. We encourage the minister to act on it very quickly. I know that the Manitoba Cattle Producers have wrote to the minister in regards to this very important issue. I encourage her and her staff to respond in a very timely manner in a way that which these producers can make their decisions and whether or not they want to go ahead and purchase this, these feed stocks and make sure that they be able to hold on to their livestock, if it's, again, feasible enough for them to do that.

I know we have some stiff competition in regards to the feed because we added another disaster, which was in the western part of the province, which was called a drought. So we go from flooding on one hand, drought on the other. Saskatchewan's also had a significant issue. Alberta's had a significant issue, so we also have a feed shortage within the province of Manitoba which is being fought for very competitively. In fact, Montana, Mr. Speaker, has declared that they will pay freight, whatever it takes, in order to ensure that they get feedstock for their livestock producers in that particular state, so I know they're buying hay within the province of Manitoba. They're buying hay within the province of Saskatchewan. They're buying hay wherever they can get it and trucking that back to their particular state.

I know that Saskatchewan's certainly well aware of the effects this can have on their livestock industry. I know Alberta's very much aware of it, and certainly we need to be very much aware of making sure that our freight assistance program gets immediate attention so that those poor producers can, in fact, make sure that it does move forward.

The long-term effects is certainly going to be there. We need to ensure that we learn from this mistake. I know last year, we thought it was one-time effort, but, unfortunately, nature repeated itself again this year, and we need to make sure those drains are, in fact, cleaned out, culverts put in place to ensure, in fact, that next time, when these rains come, that we're able to make sure that that water does get away and drain it away that this land—and it's very productive land; there's a number of good acres of productive land up there. Unfortunately, that has been put underwater and held there because they just

don't have the ability to get that water away. And I know the effects that I talked about on these small communities like Arborg and Riverton and the R.M. of Bifrost and Eriksdale and Ashern will certainly be multiplied in the next year and year after. Unfortunately, once you deplete that savings account, there's just no way that you can just jump back in and have extra money.

*(15:00)

A number of these producers are actually moving up in age and they have an opportunity to either make that decision to exit the cattle business or the grain business, and those are decisions that they're going to have to make. But they need to be very clear on what those options are.

I know under the AgriRecovery program that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), along with the federal minister, agreed to pay out a \$40 per acre recovery program in order to get that land back into place, back into workability. We certainly commend them for that. That was last year and this is this year.

So, unfortunately, we need to look at those programs once again in order to make sure that those farmers have the dollars that are available to them, those dollars that are, in fact, so important to those producers because, as we know, not all producers can afford insurance. All producers can't afford to be covered off and some of them just can't, quite frankly, afford insurance. And so those producers need that help up right now from the provincial government and the federal government. The minister needs to develop these programs, in fact, ensure that they are done in a very timely manner.

So, with that, I notice my light has been blinking for quite some time, but we encourage the members of the House to, in fact, debate this issue, to deal with it. And it's certainly an issue that is very important for all members of this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): This is the third day now that this House has sat during this session, and it's the third MUPI that's been brought forward by the Liberal, the independent party, Mr. Speaker. Their first priority was a—the very first priority they raised in the Legislature was conflict of interest—no bills, no reference to disaster, no reference to the plight of Manitobans.

We, as a party that has members from all parts of Manitoba, don't just have a person go out one day as

the Liberal leader does and maybe sell a membership or two and put on his toe rubbers or maybe rubber boots and walk around. We have a member from that area who every day in caucus provides us with information. We don't have the luxury, Mr. Speaker, like the members of the independent party to vote one day one way on the floodway in Winnipeg and another way on the floodway outside of Winnipeg. We don't have the luxury of saying you should do more in agriculture and drainage and flooding and then vote against the largest increase in agriculture budget in the province's history, and then to stand up and say there's a crisis. You know the third party are trying to do this to gain recognition.

We acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that it's a major disaster. There's a number of major disasters going on across the province. Unlike the Liberals, who have the luxury of saying every issue is their priority and is the top priority, we have to deal with a number of priorities at the same time. And our budget that the Liberal leader and the Liberal third member voted against had extensive measures to deal with this matter.

Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, in recognition of the people and of those communities, we will agree and I think we have consent of all—I know that the Liberal leader's paying vast attention to this. We have consent of the members of the House that will agree to a debate on this matter because we have to deal with other business as well that was scheduled by agreement with the third party. We have other business to deal with. We have an agreement that will deal with two speakers from the government's side, two speakers from the opposition side and one speaker from the independent party's side and we'll limit our comments to five minutes. And I think that's a reasonable compromise to allow us to deal with this issue as a priority.

To recognize that the tactic of raising a MUPI a day in the long term is not what the purpose of MUIPs are in the Legislature. That is not the purpose of MUIPs, and this matter should and could be discussed by House leaders in terms of legislative procedure.

But we recognize the disaster. We hear it from our member who spends—who lives in that area and has been re-elected in that area. So we're agreeing as a House to—notwithstanding that, I'm sure Mr. Speaker will note, on procedural matters, this is not a MUPI. We're agreeing in this House, all three party leaders, to debate on this matter, to be limited

to two speakers from the government side, two speakers from the opposition side, one speaker from the independent party, and to limit the—and to limit the comments to five minutes each in order to allow us to continue with the House business that was scheduled, which includes some significant matters that affect not only rural Manitoba, but all Manitobans as well.

So we can do both, Mr. Speaker. We don't have to just focus on one issue. We can focus on several issues, and with that I think I speak for the, for—the consent of the House in that regard.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) should be debated today.

The notice required by rule 36(1) was provided under our rules and practices. The subject matter requiring—*[interjection]* Okay, just make a correction on that. The motion was proposed by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), not Inkster.

Whether it should be debated today, the notice required by rule 36(1) was provided. Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I've listened very carefully to the arguments put forward. However, I was not persuaded that the ordinary business of the House should be set aside to deal with this issue today. Although this is an issue that some members may have a concern about, I do not believe that the public interest will be harmed if the business of the House is not set aside to debate the motion today. Additionally, I would like to note that other avenues exist for members to raise the issue, including question period, members' statements, and grievances.

Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I must rule that this matter does not meet the criteria set by our rules and precedents and I rule the motion out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

However, despite the procedural shortcomings, there does appear to be a willingness to debate the issue. I shall then put the question to the House.

Shall the debate proceed? *[Agreed]*

Okay, there is agreement.

And also is there agreement that there will be two speakers from the government side, two speakers from the official opposition's side and one independent member to speak each for not more than five minutes. Is there agreement to that? *[Agreed]*

Okay, there is agreement. And I want to remind members that the speaking limit on MUPs is limited to 10 minutes and there is to be no vote on—*[interjection]* Oh, yeah, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. The agreement, the rule is 10 minutes, but the agreement is five, and there is no vote on a matter of urgent public importance.

So we will now proceed with the debate.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'm very pleased to be able to put a few comments on the record on this important issue, and I want to say that I'm surprised that the Liberals, members of the independent party wouldn't have taken the opportunity to raise at least questions. They have had the practice in the past of splitting up questions and putting this information on the record, so they do have other opportunities.

However, I think we are taking the time to discuss this and I want to—I will put a few comments and to say that I am also disappointed, when we are putting money in place through budgets, significant budgets, both for agriculture programming and for drainage programming, the members who are bringing this issue forward choose to vote against those budgets and then go out into the community and say they support them on these issues but, in actual fact, they don't support, because they didn't support the budgets that would put funds in place for these very important issues.

Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to be in the Interlake several times this summer and visit in various communities, and there's no doubt that they are feeling the consequences of the heavy rains, some of it carrying out for the previous year. And certainly we were anticipating that there would be some improvement in the situation given that there seem to be some drying weather. And the last time I was in the Interlake in early August, they were starting to work on some of those fields that hadn't been able to be worked. And then, unfortunately, they got rain again.

* (15:10)

But this nice weather that we've got right now, I'm hoping that we will have some opportunity, that farmers will have some opportunity to put some hay

up. But, Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite talks about not having the support or commitment from government—and I just want to put on the record that certainly our government last year and this year has recognized and worked with the federal government on this issue to get as much funds as we could do.

I want to just bring out, the member talked about the number of acres that were not seeded in the Interlake, and it was certainly a significant amount of acres. Member does not recognize that it was when the NDP came into power that we put excess moisture insurance into place, and producers who take advantage of crop insurance—and I think every producer should take advantage of crop insurance because that is a business management issue—a business management issue, Mr. Speaker. But for those people who took out excess crop insurance in this year, we paid out about \$21 million for unseeded acreage and seeded acreage. Of that, 95 percent of the money went into the Interlake—95 percent of the money—and those people who took advantage of the insurance would be getting that.

Mr. Speaker, there's also disaster finance rural assistance that we announced on April 7th, that through DFA we would be putting in place \$3 million to help field damage and hay bales, and of that, about \$2 million has been paid up. The forage assistance insurance, the Livestock Feed Assistance Program put in place about \$12 million that was jointly with the federal government, and put up \$70 per head. The Manitoba Forage Restoration Assistance, \$10 million, which would allow \$40 an acre to help producers restore their fields.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the serious situation, and I want to commend the member from Interlake, who has been very diligent in his keeping the government informed of the situation in the Interlake, and I want the members opposite to also recognize that there are programs, such as AgriRecovery, AgriStability, AgriInvest. Those are programs that are there to help people when their income declines.

There is also the ability to defer taxes, and I believe some people this year will have to sell some of their livestock because there just is not enough feed in the country. There isn't enough. There isn't enough feed to move, and my department, my staff is working with producers in that area to work out different kind of rations as to how to keep the livestock going, but the tax deferral will be a huge

benefit to those producers and they have to—I encourage the producers to do everything they can to get whatever feed they can, whether it's straw or other feed supplies that are there. Work with the staff at the Department of MAFRI to work out rations, to take advantage of the various programs that are there and to look at the programs, and many of them have applied for the forage restoration and for the crop restoration programs. There are programs out there. It is a challenging time in the Interlake. We will continue to work with—

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for Ste. Rose, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us we have Honourable David Caplan, who is the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for the province of Ontario.

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

* * *

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I'm pleased to rise to speak to the matter of urgent public importance related to the wet conditions in the Interlake and the Westlake.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I think it's convenient they've forgotten quite often here that the Westlake region is impacted by this too, and the Westlake region is on the west side of Lake Manitoba, which is in my constituency. The north end of Alonsa municipality, the areas of Cayer, Rechovic, Meadow Portage, Jethestone and Crane River were all dramatically affected a week ago with the torrential downpours. Some of the areas receiving as much as 250 to 275 millimetres of rain, which translates, in my terms because I'm old school, to about 10 inches of rain.

The problems in the area are compounded by the wet conditions. The wet conditions aren't the only problem, but the problems our producers have been having in that area are compounded definitely by the wet conditions.

Ever since 2003 and the advent of BSE, anybody that's strictly in the cattle business, the livestock business, has been having difficulties. The original

problems weren't handled very well by this government and from there it became a downhill ride. And when you have programs like AgriStability that operate on the, on the margins that these producers have when your margins go down every year it isn't very long before the program is useless to them.

What should be used and should be addressed in these areas is the AgriRecovery program. We argued long and hard last year to even get this government, this NDP government to acknowledge that. They wanted to spend the time arguing whether it had to be declared a disaster or not. Whether it's declared a disaster or isn't declared a disaster, it's a crisis to the people in that area. It has to be addressed. It has to be looked after.

AgriRecovery is a program that is supposed to kick in when certain areas are devastated by things that are beyond their control and that's what's happened last fall and this fall in that area, the Interlake and the northern part of the Westlake area.

There's a number of things that happened up in that area that—I know they've been struck by a lot of moisture but they—we have water. I have reports from the R.M. of Alonsa, and their CAO, Pam Sul, has been telling me that the water is running over the roads, they have washouts. There are provincial roads that have water running over them and they, this time of the year when, if there is any feed, these—the producers are trying to transport their feed, they're trying to move their livestock, and the roads are impassable, on top of all their other problems they have.

Some of them this year had finally got started producing a little bit of feed for their cattle, doing a little bit of baling, getting things going. Now those bales that they baled because of the flatness of the land are sitting in water.

I believe that in these areas drainage issues are a great part of the problem when we have these torrential rains and the lack of maintenance on drainage on existing ditches has just compounded the problem. Another factor in that area, certainly this year, is the fact that the Portage Diversion ran full for a whole month this spring. The water levels are high on Lake Manitoba and they're backing water up into the tributaries and into many of the hay meadows around the lake that might have produced some hay at some time this fall for some of these cattle.

I hear the minister talk about some of the producers are going to have to sell animals. That's unfortunate because we're in a cycle with very low prices and she's probably right, but what—we may even need an exit strategy for those producers because that's all they've got, is the cattle. Most of them have their cattle and their machinery and they're on Crown land, so they don't have big value to land. And they're producers that are—some of them are getting into their retirement years and they've been proud of their industry and they would, I'm sure, love to exit with dignity—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The member's time has expired.

Mr. Briese: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair, and I welcome the opportunity to rise to speak to this very important issue.

I don't know if I can truly do it justice in the five minutes that we've agreed to. To be frank, it's been five years of hardship for producers in the Interlake and right since the onset of BSE, I would have to say, in the midst of the provincial election campaign in 2003, our troubles began there. And, of course, at that time, it was the opposite of what we face today. It was extreme drought conditions, and some very good programming managed to bridge our producers through that difficult period of time, and then the vagaries of, the vagaries of Mother Nature—*[interjection]*

* (15:20)

Madam Speaker, I wish that members opposite would give me the opportunity to speak uninterrupted. This is a very serious issue for producers in the Interlake, and to be heckled by members opposite in the midst of this I don't find very productive. And I would just ask them to give me the opportunity to speak uninterrupted, if that would be—if that would be okay.

But, you know, as I was saying, a very serious issue with the situation turning from drought to monsoon to excessive rainfalls. Last year was a complete and utter wipeout for the entire sector, grain producers and the livestock sector as well. We had a bad start, a very bad start this season, particularly from a grains' perspective with the heavy, heavy rainfalls in the Arborg area and the Fisher Branch area, and, you know, thankfully, we

do have the excess moisture insurance. And I want to acknowledge the good works of the member for Swan River, our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk), on this front because it was in January of 2000, just mere months after we were elected, that this program was constituted, and it was the saving grace this year.

When members opposite, of course, were in office, this program didn't exist and farmers had to look for ad hoc programming, and there was all that uncertainty inherent in that.

So, at the very least, having excess moisture insurance at this time is a good thing and contributing to their, hopefully, carrying on in the—in the years to come. But the rainfalls are just so frustrating. We were getting some good weather. We were starting to get some hay in and, then, just a mere week ago, we had rainfalls that approached 10 inches, 10 inches of rain.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is absolutely unheard of. This is unprecedented weather, and government will have to give this due consideration and attempt to structure programs that will help us out, whether it's the necessity for say, for example, a freight assistance program. I know that the message has gone out to grains' producers in the south that they should try and hold their straw. We've had to feed straw in times past and it looks like we'll have to do it again. But freight assistance, to bring this product into the—into the area—an area like Ashern, for example, where there is next to no grain production whatsoever because of the marginal nature of the land. And it's such a distance to annual crop fields, something like this is fundamental and it's something that I am asking for.

On the drainage front, this is always an issue and, you know, we have drastically increased our budgets in years past. We're now into the millions of dollars and, you know, I look to the Filmon era when there were cuts of 60, 70 percent to the drainage budgets over their time in office. It just boggles the mind, and we have to reverse that and we have made substantial increases to that budget, but there's always room for even more.

And, you know, recently there have been some concessions on the licensing front so that we can expedite licensing at both the provincial and the federal levels. So both levels of government are aware of this and are working toward it.

The Growing Forward suite of programs that was initiated—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The member's time has expired.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Madam Deputy Chair—Speaker, pardon me. It gives me pleasure to be able to rise to speak to this matter of urgent public importance as raised by the member from River Heights today as well.

When you look at the situation in the Interlake-Westlake area of Manitoba, there has been a tremendous amount of rainfall, and some of that area—as my colleague from Ste. Rose was indicating to me the other day—has received 11 inches of rain last week alone, and other areas, such as Thornhill and Darlingford, received seven and eight.

But the Interlake, particularly Westlake, has been very much deluged by water, and it goes back to a year ago, at least a year ago, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker—and that is from huge amounts of rainfall that are very unusual in any particular area. The ground has been completely saturated in that area for—*[interjection]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Mr. Maguire: —upwards of 18 months. For nearly 18 months, Madam Deputy Speaker. And just from the fact that I had the opportunity of driving through that area a couple times this summer and once last year, as well, this has been very much a concern to the farmers that have spoken to me on this issue from that area. I know that there is very, very little harvest being done. There was an extremely short amount of hay put up, and I think that, from the cattle perspective, the livestock perspective, there is an ongoing, extremely pertinent ongoing concern amongst those individuals, as well.

And while crops in a lot of other areas of Manitoba and the grain crops may seem to be in average or better condition, the crops in the Interlake are in a situation where they can't even get on the land to begin harvest, and many of them, here we are in the middle of September, have had a hard time even getting started.

And I know that from last fall, even toward Christmas while they waited for freeze-up to come, there were crops in that area from the fall of '08 that

never got taken off until this summer. And you can imagine, Madam Deputy Speaker, I farmed all of my life and I know that when a crop lays out there that long, there's nothing left of it, or very, very little, particularly in regards to quality, but you still have a great expense to go out and clean up the circumstance.

And that's why we support this matter of urgent public importance, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that is because the government has not taken a number of these considerations—or these catastrophes into consideration, and probably the most heartless point that I want to make, you know, they say the programs are working. In fact, farmers in my area from '08 in regards to the drought of '08 who received absolutely no help from this government, and cattle producers in that area when they hauled water for over 18 months, hauled feed from a great distance, and it wasn't the matter of the fact that there wasn't a feed freight assistance program put in place, it was a matter of being able to find the feed. Southwest Manitoba, they want to make sure that they put all the straw back into the fields so that they can add tilth to it, whereas in some other areas they'd like to get the straw off of it because it helps it dry out.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the circumstances are that a disaster is a disaster whether it's a drought or whether it's a flood, and this government hasn't realized in—because they've made the comment, it just shows that they haven't realized the application of the programs that are available out there today. They have said that these farmers in these areas are going to have to exist on the existing programs. Well, when you've had five years in a row of disaster, your margins, your negative margins are so great in those areas that even if you started out at—at virtually a full margin, five, six years ago, you're down to very, very little. You know, your program based on 20 percent of what your margin is today doesn't give you anything in regards to the expenses and the relevant expenses that go into your operation.

And so that's why, Madam Deputy Speaker, we think it's very important that the government take a second sober look at all of these circumstances, particularly for the farmers. I'm not—certainly am on side with all of the support that went into that area last year for the programs, like the tax deferral on cattle sales, so that we could give them an opportunity to buy back in at some other date without losing at least the tax on the income that they would have received from the sale last year, the

forced sale, basically, in many cases in my area last year. And I know that it was the same in the Interlake.

And so the government has got to take another look at the programming that they are going to try to make available, because the existing programs don't work in the circumstances as—that I've just outlined or as has been outlined by my colleague from Ste. Rose today.

So with those words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to listen to some of the other comments of other members in this House today on this important matter. Thank you.

* (15:30)

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I'd like to comment on this region of the Interlake around Arborg, Fisher Branch, Riverton, Armstrong, around Gimli and north of Teulon which are badly affected and, certainly, the first thing I would note is that this is a very good farming area. We are not talking about marginal land; we are talking about very good quality land in this part of the Interlake. And we are talking about land, which, partly the nature of the land and the transportation, and so on, that people in this area, farmers are working with higher-value crops, higher input costs, I would suggest, than the average in many parts of Manitoba.

And it is a very serious matter when, as a result of this disaster, the future of many farmers in this area is threatened. The potential loss of large numbers of farmers as a result of two disastrous years in a row because of this wet weather. It's just hard to imagine the scale of the hurt and the problems that will result, not only for farmers but for the communities, the businesses in Arborg, in Riverton, in Fisher Branch and many, many other communities in that part of the Interlake.

The second point that I would like to make is that good stewardship of the land is reflected in part, in fact, in a major way, in good water management, and I've been talking about this for years, and at no time, I suggest, in the history of Manitoba is this more important because with climate change one of the predictions is that we're gonna have much more problems with wet weather in Manitoba, and we've had over the last 10 years, I would suggest, and I think the analysis would bear me out, a lot more problems with wet weather not just in the Interlake but in southwestern Manitoba, in parts of southern Manitoba, and so on, than we have had historically, the

and so that we should have been preparing for this in an adequate fashion.

And the tragedy here is that we have a government which is not prepared, in any way, shape or form that is adequate, for this kind of wet weather in the Interlake. And there are so many other parts of the world where people do better in farming in much wetter conditions than we do. And certainly you may not be able to prevent the whole thing, but you should sure make a significant difference for a lot of farmers by having much better water management, both areas of water storage to hold back and retain water and areas of drainage. And, of course, it's vital that not only that drains be maintained, but that we have a system of drainage which is adequate.

I was talking with farmers in the area, and they were talking about the problem is that while there is an adequate system of drainage in much of the Red River Valley, it has not been put in place in this part of the Interlake, and it should've been done. The NDP have had 10 years to do this, and they've done virtually nothing. In fact, even the drains which are there are not maintained and the investments announced recently, if they had actually started some of those four years ago when they initially made the commitment, then we could've been further ahead. They are not—only a fraction of what is actually needed to have the kind of water management system for the area we should have. That is the tragedy here, that this government has been so far behind in terms of water management and prevention of this kind of disaster that we have it much worse than it could or should have been.

To suggest that the program, for \$50 an acre for unseeded acres, is sufficient is not to understand the situation. I acknowledge, and I applaud the NDP for putting this in place. It was a very significant step forward and it had not been there before, and so this was a very good thing. But, you know, there is a major cost to preparing the land for next year. The fields which are totally full of—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The member's time has expired.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Acting Government House Leader): Would you please call Bills 9 and 4?

Some Honourable Members: No.

An Honourable Member: Grievance.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Thank you for the opportunity today to rise and to put a few words on the record and perhaps explain the frustrations of Manitobans and, more especially, the constituency of Emerson. As well as all Manitobans, we in Emerson have had some difficulty with the health-care system and I'd like to just point out some of that to you today, Mrs.—or Madam Deputy Speaker.

As you are aware, Manitobans were promised 10 years ago that hallway medicine would end in six months and \$15 million. The harsh reality is that the hallways have been equipped now to act as an overflow while we continue to spend billions of dollars and have longer wait times, creating a serious crisis. To make things worse, the NDP have closed a number of rural ERs, some hospitals, forcing Manitobans to drive farther, wait longer, suffer more and perhaps not even survive to get the proper treatment that they needed.

As if this didn't create enough hardship, they regulated an ambulance—a volunteer ambulance service—out of business in the—in the town of Emerson. At the same time they did that, Madam Deputy Speaker, they refused to pay them for the last year and a half of the service that they did provide. That service amounted to a dollar value of some \$45,000, and \$45,000 to a small community like Emerson—that's raised by having bake sales and a number of other small functions in a small community to buy the ambulance because they own the ambulance—it takes a lot of these type of functions to raise the capital that was necessary.

The volunteers were regulated out of business because the regulations and the bar was set so terribly high that the volunteers could not commit the time to attain the level that was necessary, thus leaving the community without any suitable service, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The wait time for an ambulance from any other area to there is a minimum of 35 minutes, and we all know that in a case of a heart attack or in a case of a stroke, that first hour is critical. If they take 35 minutes or 40 minutes to get there, the damage—irreparable damage could be done. I might also add that the survival rate of all of the patients by the volunteers was equal to or surpassed the survival rate by the paramedics that now have to drive an—three-quarters of an hour away, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Emerson constituency has two very vulnerable areas, that being the Dominion City, the Emerson area, where there is no ambulance service—or that doesn't fit into the provincial standards and certainly not to the standards that the people in the area were used to—and of course, the whole southeastern region, including—excuse me—including Woodridge, Piney, Sprague, Middlebro, Buffalo Point First Nation, Moose Lake, Vassar, South Junction.

All these areas, Madam Deputy Speaker, they depend on the ambulance service out of—out of Roseau, Minnesota. And during the day—and during an 18-hour day—or, I should say, a 16-hour day—the service is pretty decent. But since 9/11, there has been a steel gate that's locked across the border and restricts the access of the ambulance. And so the people then have to depend on ambulance services out of Steinbach or out of Vita, which, again, are three quarters of an hour, up to an hour and sometimes longer, depending on where these ambulances happen to be at the time that the call—that they're needed.

*(15:40)

In addition to all of this, Madam Deputy Speaker, in a health-care system in rural Manitoba—and when we talk about the ambulance services—we're talking about health care was to be enhanced and make the service that much better. In addition, the Hadashville ambulance service, which is in effect today is to be discontinued. This is a reduction, not an enhancement.

The minister and that government has not only lost confidence of the people within the Perimeter in the health-care system, but they've also lost the confidence of the people outside the Perimeter. What they have done is create a crisis.

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), the Minister of Agriculture has a track record not much different than the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald). She knows full well that any assistance that she has put forward, that she has funded in any of the crisises, and I will expand on the crisises, has been federal money. The biggest majority of the money that has gone forward has come from the federal government. The bottom line is that she has no solutions that have borne any fruit. She prepared—or she proposed a hemp plant for Dauphin—a failure. A failure. An utter failure. She botched that.

The beef issue caused by BSE certainly wasn't her fault, not at all, but she handled this situation badly. She wouldn't listen to producers when the producers first talked to her. The producers then took the initiative on their own. She still wouldn't listen. She was invited to, but, instead, she put her people in charge of a proposed beef plant in Dauphin that failed. She wouldn't listen, created a crisis that's still in effect, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The hog industry in Manitoba was a shining light. The creativity of the producers, the willingness to work with the University of Manitoba on a number of fronts generated excellent information on ways to lessen the environmental footprint of the expanded hog production, which also generated billions of dollars for the coffers in the province of Manitoba.

Manitoba is recognized and has been recognized as the home of the best genetics in the pork industry and in the world. Along came the NDP wrecking machine to kill the industry. The minister sanctioned a moratorium which devastated a billion-dollar business. A billion dollars a year, more money than is what's generated by Manitoba Hydro, and by devastating this business, created a crisis. Along came a perfect storm on top of that crisis. The minister obviously couldn't predict that storm, but there is a certain portion of that that she had the responsibility to deal with, and that portion of that was the country-of-origin labelling. She knew for four years, five years, that it was coming, there was going to be an impact from that, and still nothing was done to offset that, to offset the hardships of the producers in Manitoba. The minister would not even attend a meeting to address farmers and industry personnel. The minister had the opportunity to be prepared for this scenario. She failed Manitobans and another crisis.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we go forward, the Child and Family Services, the member for St. Johns, the Minister of Child and Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) has had many failures, many crises in his constituency, and in the care of his—and in his care as the minister responsible.

So, one of the things that seems to be obvious to those on this side of the House as we look across at the ministers on the other side of the House and when we see a minister like the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Lemieux) yesterday, with his pathetic, pitiful cry for help when he asked—when he asked me, across the House what my plan was,

when he came to this House with no plan, at least show some respect, not arrogance, and demanding what the plan is, ask for our help. We're willing to give it to him. We are willing to help them with their plan, but, Madam Deputy Speaker, be respectful. Be respectful. They seem to be happy when the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure is on the hot seat because we're leaving the rest alone that have created the crisis in each one of their portfolios.

Manitobans deserve better government. They deserve much better government than crisis to crisis to crisis. What Manitobans deserve is leadership. They need leadership that will give them prosperity as they go forward, not debt, not debt for their grandchildren. And we, Madam Deputy Speaker, on this side of the House, are prepared to do that. We're prepared even to help that side of the House, at this point, to keep Manitobans from paying the debt, the debt that we're going to be faced with, with the legacy that this government has put forward.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I thank you for the opportunity to address the House today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Acting Government House Leader): Yes, would you please call Bills 9 and 4.

Bill 9—The Social Work Profession Act

Madam Deputy Speaker: We will be dealing on the proposed motion of the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), Bill No. 9, The Social Work Profession Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Is there leave of the House for the matter to remain standing in the name of the member for River Heights?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in the House today and speak to Bill No. 9, The Social Work Profession Act, that was introduced in this Legislature back in December of 2008, and at the time was introduced by the Minister of Finance. And we, on this side of the House, found that to be quite

strange and, certainly, as we looked across the country to the profession of social work, and legislation that governs the profession of social work, we found that no other province had the Department of Finance or the Minister of Finance sponsoring such a piece of legislation. It was either the department of health and wellness or the department social or community services, right across the country, that sponsored and managed this kind of legislation. So, very strange to us.

And when the Minister of Finance was asked the question in second reading why he would have sponsored it, certainly, he responded by saying that he had an interest in this, being a former social worker. Well, the dynamics in this Legislature have changed since the Minister of Finance was a former social worker, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we now have a Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk)—we now have a Minister of Finance that doesn't have that same qualification, so there's no reason for the Department of Finance to be sponsoring this bill.

And when asked in the House today, I think the Minister of Finance was caught a little off guard. I'm not sure that she had been briefed in any way about this legislation, and she really didn't seem to know what we were talking about or have any concrete answer, except to say that maybe we should speak on it. Well, I'm hopeful that she will stand in her place today and speak on this legislation, and give us the compelling reason why the Department of Finance is sponsoring this piece of legislation.

I would think, and there's probably a hidden agenda behind this, the way this bill has been introduced, and that's probably to distance the issue of social work as far away from the Department of Family Services as possible. Because we've seen time after time the chaos that's been created in the Department of Family Services as a result of this government's decision to move ahead with the devolution process without thinking through the consequences or ensuring that the proper training and the proper structures were set up in order to facilitate the devolution process.

* (15:50)

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that a mess has been created. We know that review after review of child deaths within the system have indicated that there's more training that's needed for front-line workers. Many of the reviews, and I refer specifically to the Gage Guimond review that was done, talks about the lack of experience of front-line

workers. It talks about the lack of reporting and that documentation was absent or missing. And if you look through the recommendations, many of those recommendations refer to training that needs to be enhanced—not reduced, but enhanced—within the Child and Family Services system.

Now, we know that that isn't the only place that social workers work. We know that social workers work across the broad spectrum of support services in many aspects of our community and we know that they do a very good job. And we have no concern that we're moving towards a regulatory body that will license all social workers.

But the issue that we have, Madam Deputy Speaker, is what is in the legislation that reduces the training standards for social workers and that's unacceptable in our minds. We're moving to the bottom of the barrel. We're going to be dead last across the country when it comes to training and standards for social workers. And I don't know if that's the reputation that the former Minister of Finance would want and whether that's the legacy he would like to leave to the social work profession, to say it's good enough for Manitoba and for us as social workers to be at the bottom of the pack when it comes to training and education and standards within our social work profession.

And you know, as late as yesterday, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was meeting with a social worker who has her master's in social work and she happens to be a young Aboriginal woman, who has worked within the system and she had some concerns about the system. And when she realized that her education was going to count for nothing because others that were going to be registered in the social work profession would have no formal education—they might have volunteer experience within the Child and Family Services system—she was appalled. And her comments, and I'll quote, Madam Deputy Speaker, was, that's a slap in the face to those of us that have got our training and our education and work within the profession.

Well, Madam Speaker, there are going to be many of those people out there who are social workers who have worked hard to get their Bachelor of Social Work, their master's or their doctoral in Social Work and only to find out that this government is now dumbing down legislation and saying to people, if you've got volunteer experience and a little bit of training, you can now register yourself as a social worker.

Well, Madam Speaker, where else in the caring professions throughout our community do we see volunteer experience count to register? Do we see nurses who have had—do we see people that have had volunteer experience working in a hospital all of a sudden be able to go to the Manitoba Association of Registered Nurses and become registered as a nurse? No, we don't. Do we look at a person who has volunteered in the classroom and have her go and register as a teacher? No, Madam Deputy Speaker, we don't allow that.

And the other area within the Department of Family Services where we have the highest standards is in our child-care community. And this government, and governments in the past, have talked about having the highest standards where there are early childhood education levels and all of those require formal training. Madam Deputy Speaker, you cannot call yourself an early childhood educator without the training to back that up. You can't take a volunteer that's worked in a child-care centre and all of a sudden register them as an early childhood educator. That doesn't wash, so why on earth in a profession where the front-line workers in our Child and Family Services system now don't require any kind of formal education in order to call themselves a social worker.

You know, we see the numbers of children in care increasing on a regular basis. We're up to about 8,000 children in care in Manitoba and as I said, that isn't the only place social workers work but there's a significant number of social workers in our Child and Family Services system and those that are on the front lines, those that are case workers have a very significant responsibility to protect children and ensure that their safety is first and foremost.

And, Madam Speaker, I wouldn't think that any government would want to lower the standards and let people without the academic experience and training call themselves a social worker. Now, again, I say there might be a hidden agenda because the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), with great fanfare a couple of years ago, announced that he was gonna hire 150 more social workers in the Child and Family Services system.

Well, I guess, Madam Deputy Speaker, if he lowers the standards and doesn't require any formal education, he can get those numbers up pretty quickly, but does that mean that our children are being protected and that our children are safer as a result?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that you yourself have a social work background and I know that you care very deeply about the kind of work you used to do and it probably bodes well for you in the work that you do here in this Legislature. I don't think you would take any great pride in knowing that your profession is being diminished by the very government benches that you sit on, that all of a sudden the training and the hard work that you did to get your degree is going to be insignificant now because people aren't going to have to have a degree to call themselves social workers.

This legislation is the lowest level of training requirement across the country and isn't it great to stand up and pride ourselves as having the highest standards for early childhood education in our child-care system, but who wants to brag about having the lowest standards for social workers? Not I, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I would hope that some members on the government benches of the House who really haven't had the opportunity to look at this legislation would look very seriously at it and maybe look at amendments that would, at minimum, put the educational requirements back to where they were before this legislation was introduced because it was very clear before that academic training education was a criteria for being called a social worker and this legislation changes that. And, again, I would question why the Minister of Finance, the former social worker, would introduce legislation that would be a slap in the face to his colleagues that have been trained and educated and have their degrees in social work.

And again I believe, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is as a result of them wanting to get their numbers up at all cost within the Child and Family Services system. And at all cost means that it's the children that need protection and need supports, that need to be removed from their home or supported within their extended family, that will be the losers as a result of this legislation.

* (16:00)

You know, let me just look and share with members of this Legislature so that they understand what the requirements might be in other provinces. And we know that in Ontario the legislation requires the applicant to have a degree in social work or equivalent program approved by a body prescribed by the regulations and has a combination of academic qualification and practical experience that is substantially equivalent to the qualifications

required for such a degree. And the department in charge in Ontario is the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the department, rightly, within this province that should have brought the legislation in.

But again, the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) didn't want to bring this legislation in because he didn't want to be tied too closely to the reduction in the standards and the training requirements for social work. And that, I think, is because he believes that the announcement that he made a couple of years ago—and he hasn't been able to live up to the commitment yet to hire all of those new social workers—will be met when the standards are lowered and we can include more people in the social work profession.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we look at Alberta's legislation. It goes even further, and it requires applicants to have a baccalaureate degree in social work or a diploma in social work from a program approved by the council and complete 1,500 hours of practical experience. And the department in charge in Alberta is the Department of Health and Wellness.

In Saskatchewan, Madam Deputy Speaker, the legislation requires the person receive a licence to practice when the person is—holds a certificate or a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in social work from an approved university, and the department in charge is the Ministry of Social Services.

In British Columbia, Madam Deputy Speaker, the province requires a bachelor degree in social work and there is no diploma program. It is monitored by the Minister of Children and Family Development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, New Brunswick, the Association of Social Workers, require a degree in social work, and other equivalent degrees are accepted, but there is formal education required, and the department in charge is the Ministry of Health.

So, Mr. Speaker, or Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a situation here in Manitoba where—*[interjection]* Well, my colleague says that it's scary, and it is quite scary, because in what other profession do we see the kinds of vulnerable children that we see than in the Child and Family Services system where social workers are the front line. They are the people whose expertise or knowledge or understanding impacts very significantly on the kind of care that these children receive.

And we've seen far too often where children have slipped through the cracks under this

government's watch as the result of files of information not being documented, staff being untrained, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, we're going to make that even worse when we look at this legislation and implementing this legislation.

And I'm surprised—I'm surprised that the Minister of Family Services didn't speak up when this legislation came before Cabinet at the Cabinet table and say, just a minute here, because he's talked so often about how safety of children is first and foremost and paramount in the Child and Family Services system.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you're going to allow someone with volunteer experience and no specific training to become registered as a social worker, I don't know how he can sleep with himself at night. I don't know how he can stand up and say the safety and security of children is being put first when he is saying our standards don't even need to be as high as they are today. The standards that are written, which, in some instances aren't being followed in our Child and Family Services agencies, are going to be lowered even—they're going to be lower than the standards that exist today. That doesn't speak in my mind to safety and putting the child first.

I have extreme concerns about this part of the legislation and I would hope that members on the government side of the House are thinking very seriously about the profession, about ensuring that those that are working in the profession have the academic qualifications and the background to understand what needs to be done when we're caring for the most vulnerable children in our society, and I hope they will look very seriously about an amendment to the qualifications piece of this legislation.

I don't have a problem with a college of social workers. I think it's probably a good step in the right direction. I have no concern with that about licensing and regulating, and I know the member for River Heights talked a lot about the disciplinary piece of the legislation and how maybe it focussed more on discipline than it did on support for social workers. And we do have to have that disciplinary component—that's part of any regulatory body—but, Madam Deputy Speaker, we don't have to lower the standards. We don't have to lower the training requirements.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at the severity of the situation within our Child and Family

Services system, I would think that we would be looking for more enhanced training and support. All of the recommendations in the legislation point to more training required, higher standards of care. It makes sense. It makes ultimate common sense to look at ensuring and providing that kind of training and support, and ensuring that those that become licensed and regulated as social workers within our province meet the standards that other provinces require and don't lower the standards that presently exist.

So I would hope that this government will take a close and serious look in those—especially those, Madam Deputy Speaker, that have some understanding of the social work profession, may in fact be social workers themselves, you know, because I'd like to commend social workers throughout the province on the good work that they do in many, many areas and aspects of our society, and I want to especially speak to those social workers that have the qualifications within our Child and Family Services system that have been enduring even higher caseloads today and are having to work beside untrained and unskilled workers, and that has been one of the major concerns that's been raised to me since I've become the critic of Family Services.

They are coming forward and indicating that there are many within the system today that don't have the expertise and the skills and the training to do the job that they're required to do. So the onus falls on those with some experience, and, you know, we've heard anecdotal comments from those working right throughout the system that the good and long-time experienced social workers are leaving the Child and Family Services system and moving on to another area within the community, because they can't handle the stress, they can't handle the pressure and they can't handle seeing children not being cared for that are the most vulnerable within our society. So we're losing our good social workers from the Child and Family Services system out of frustration and out of a feeling of lack of support from this government and, Madam Deputy Speaker, that's a sad, sad scenario.

* (16:10)

And are we going to end up with a system as a result of this legislation where there isn't anyone with any formal academic training within our Child and Family Services system? Is this going to create an even greater problem? And what are we to expect in the future for those families and for those children

that need the best of support, that need the training and the experience and the understanding that comes from working with vulnerable families?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have extreme, grave concerns if this legislation passes the way it is, that we are going to see more deaths within our Child and Family Services system. We are going to see more chaos. We are going to see more experienced workers leaving the system and moving on because what does this do for the morale of social workers in the system when they know that all of the training and all of the education and all of the experience that they have is going to mean absolutely nothing when this legislation passes the way it is? That people with almost no training and volunteer experience are going to be classified in the same manner as they are and they've had years of training, years of academic education? I can't see those people staying and sticking it out, and so I'm hopeful that as we move forward with this legislation and have some discussion, that this government will see fit to look at amendments that might, in fact, change the academic qualifications that have been brought in under this legislation, that have been reduced significantly under this legislation, and at least at the very minimum, bring our standards and our educational standards as high and as consistent as we can with other provinces across the country.

So, with those comments, I know there are some of my colleagues that would like to speak, and I'm hopeful that the new Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), whose responsibility it will be to bring this legislation through the House, will take the opportunity to speak and try to justify why her government would take any pride in lowering the standards, the academic qualifications, for social workers when it's not happening in any other area of government, and why, in fact, her government would stand up and laud being No. 1 when it comes to standards for early childhood educators in the child-care system and how they could be proud of being dead last when it comes to academic qualifications for social workers.

Thanks, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to put some comments on the record about Bill 9, The Social Work Profession Act. And as I sat here listening to my colleague, I really have to think that I don't think I've ever, in 11 years, sat in this House and heard any

piece of legislation that is as bizarre as this, and it is very disconcerting.

There are some aspects to this that are good. I think creating a college of social workers which goes along with the creation of other colleges throughout the health-care professions, you know, is a good thing because the intent of creating a college is to provide better protection from the public.

The strange part of this legislation is the dumbing down of the educational standards which actually does the opposite in terms of protecting the public. So while you call it a college and you're enhancing standards at that level, you're actually dumbing down the education standards and, in fact, going in the opposite direction from what the intent of a college is.

This legislation certainly does appear to lower the academic standard for social work, and it allows those with no formal education in social work to work in the field and call themselves social workers. I don't know what could be more demoralizing to a whole profession than the government choosing to go down this path. I find that very, very strange.

I can also guarantee that what will happen out there in the professional world, whether it's in hospitals or in marriage counselling or in Child and Family Services, all these other groups that are privileged to call themselves professions will start to look down on the role of a social worker, because they will not in the future be able to call themselves professionals. You will not be able to have that privilege of being recognized as a professional if you do not have the education standards behind it. That is going to create a major disarray, not only in the area of child and family service, but I'm even thinking in hospitals.

I worked in a hospital with lots of social workers. Those social workers had to work alongside other health-care professions, and I guarantee you that without a high level of education behind them, they would not have the clout to argue their point, whether it's with a doctor, a nurse, a home care—or anybody else. So I don't know what this government is doing with this legislation. Like, I have to wonder what in the world was the thinking process that went on in the mind of the Minister of Finance at the time, who now thinks that he should be Premier of the province. His level of thinking in this is really, really very strange, whether or not he even put any thinking into it at all.

I hope he isn't just, you know, listening to some people out there and thinking that he is going to go along with them, because what he's really doing is dumbing down a profession. And I think this is a huge backward step for the great work that social workers have done over many, many years and, you know, all of the hard work that they've done. And why this was done by the Minister of Finance, again, is very odd because in no other province would legislation like this have ever been brought in by a Minister of Finance.

Now because he was a social worker prior to that, I suppose that could have something to do with it, but that doesn't make it right. In fact, that makes it quite wrong because doing it through the auspices of Finance doesn't necessarily, or doesn't at all give him the expertise to properly address some of the concerns that are being brought up with this legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the social workers that I know are all extremely talented people. I've met social workers, whether they've been in family counselling, whether they've worked in addictions, recovery counselling, whether they're talking to alcoholics, whether they're talking to, you know, children that are contemplating or have attempted suicide. How in the world could you take a social worker that is not trained, is not qualified, doesn't have the expertise, to work with an 11-year-old child that might have thought of suicide or have attempted suicide? Where are the skill sets that are supposed to be prevalent in that social worker in situations like that? This is absolutely bizarre, and I really urge the new Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) to really have a look at this and see if there is any opportunity to revisit this legislation.

This is not healthy legislation. You can't take somebody that's been a volunteer—although, I have great admiration for volunteers. You know, volunteers have a lot of skills. Volunteers can do many good things, but volunteers cannot put themselves forward as a professional social worker and offer the kind of skills that are needed by the people that so desperately need social workers.

* (16:20)

You know, we look at psychiatry, and we look at mental illness, and we look at the work that social workers are needed for in that area, and you cannot take people that are not educated and put them into this position and expect that you are going to make good things happen. You could, in fact, hurt the

cause. You could hurt the client if you don't know what you're doing, and well-intentioned people do not achieve, I don't think, what needs to happen when what is called for are people with the proper training.

When we look at having 8,000 children in care in our province, we don't need good-intentioned people. What we need are qualified people that know how to manage in situations like this. We need people that have the skill sets to work with those kids. Those kids could be messed up for the rest of their lives because of what has happened to them. We don't need unqualified social workers to mess them up even more.

I go back to when I was a student nurse and I was working in the children's hospital. And I recall this little two-year-old that had been placed in a bath of scalding water, and from her waist down she had third-degree burns, and on her hands and arms she had third-degree burns. And this kid had been—I guess, was crying and the man that was in the apartment at the time, in order to quieten her—for some reason, I guess was angry at her for her crying—ran a tub of boiling water and sat her in this boiling water. This child was going through painful condition like nobody could even imagine, and this child shut down. This child stopped talking. This child totally withdrew. This child had a flat emotion. You could pick up the child, but there was no interaction. The child was like a different human being, like was a robot, and there was no emotion there, and no matter how you cuddled and talked and cajoled and no matter what you did, this child was locked down. This child needed professionals. This child does not—did not need a good-intentioned volunteer to come in because that would never have worked. And if you send somebody like that in to work with these kids—abused kids, suicidal kids—you're going to do more damage than you are going to do good. So this is really strange in terms of the thinking that went on with this legislation.

I have the greatest amount of respect for social workers and I've worked with a lot of social workers. When I was the critic for Child and Family Services, I also spent some time with social workers. I was the critic at the time we were given that first leaked document, done—that interviewed front-line social workers who were concerned about what was happening in their field, about the caseloads, the absurd caseload levels here in Manitoba, about the challenges they were facing, working in the environments they work in. I can't imagine a tougher

job than getting up every day and having to be a social worker that has to work with abused kids or has to work with suicidal kids or has to work with kids whose parents don't want them or have beaten them up.

These kids are messed up and these kids have a lot of internalized challenges, and I don't see how you can take somebody without the skill sets to work with these kids and expect that we are going to be able to reach the goals that these kids deserve us to reach. And how unfair is that for these children? Like—this legislation isn't about the kids or it isn't about the client or it isn't about the patient. It's about some crazy thought in the Minister of Finance's head when he put the legislation together and I don't know what that thought is 'cause this doesn't make sense. You know, like, how many more Gage Guimonds do we have to see in this province, or Phoenix Sinclairs do we have to see in this province before we see this government wake up and do the right thing?

And, you know, we should be raising the bar. We should be raising the standards and that was the—you know, what everybody would want to see in this, not lowering the standards so that we create a situation that is so unfair to vulnerable kids. We're making them more vulnerable with this legislation. And I really hope that what the new Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) will do is say, you know, this is in the wrong portfolio. Let's pass this on where some experts can have a look at it, and then let's have a revisit of this, and let's look at what the education standards are.

If social workers want to be called professionals, you have to be educationally qualified to be considered a professional and by having untrained, unqualified people, even though they have great intentions—acting as social workers, that does not qualify them to be a social worker. They are not trained for it, and it certainly won't meet any professional standards anywhere in this country and it'll also hamper people that maybe want to move to other provinces. The kind of skills you have here, and we don't even know what kind of a background would be acceptable as somebody being a social worker, won't allow them to easily transfer their skills to other provinces. So you're basically tying their hands behind their back in that way, too.

So we have to get it right, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we're hearing from front-line social workers. There are a lot of people that are very, very concerned out there about the effect this legislation is

going to have on the system, and third parties out there are raising a lot of concerns. And right now, the way this legislation stands, it is not acceptable legislation as long as it, you know, doesn't have a requirement for a formal academic training.

Now, I understand the government may have done this because they made a promise some time ago that they were going to have so many social workers in place and, like a lot of promises this government makes, it's very easy to make promises. But a lot of their promises are like fairy tales because they can't achieve them; they don't deliver. Like we saw with hallway medicine, fixing hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. It sounds great. It was a great sound bite. They got their votes. They got their supporters, but they didn't deliver, and again, the same thing with something like this. They promised 150 social workers. Where are they gonna get them? Well, dumb everything down, and then you can just take people off the street and put them into the job, and I don't think that is where we should be going in this province. We should have higher standards. We should be able to compete with any other province, any other profession in any other province, and be proud of our standards here and proud of our accomplishments. Otherwise, you know, what's going to happen in this province to all our vulnerable kids?

The workloads for social workers are awful, but putting inexperienced people in there is not gonna fix the workloads. In fact, it's probably going to make it harder. You know, I can speak from the experience of a nurse—when you are working alongside inexperienced people, it doesn't always make for good patient care. You know, you want people that know what they're doing.

And I know that social workers have expressed their concerns about those two viewpoints on a couple of occasions, and I wish the government had listened more closely to what those comments have been because this government, the NDP, have tried to bury those reports. I know the 2001 report that was leaked to us at the time showed that social workers felt unsupported, unsafe and they were dealing with unmanageably high caseloads. In fact, social workers at that time said if things don't change, kids will die, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, that's exactly what has happened in this province. Kids have died, and that's not acceptable, and this government shouldn't be accepting legislation like this that is not gonna fix the problem at all.

And they've made a lot of promises. They promised to fix standards, and instead of raising the bar, they seem to be lowering the bar and, you know, our main concern is that this bill is simply a numbers game for them. You know, they made the promise two years ago to increase the number of social workers. So, by reducing the standards of who can call themselves a social worker, they can bolster the ranks without actually doing anything further. What a lazy way to try to achieve excellence.

*(16:30)

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, with those comments, I would say that it's very hard to support this bill the way it is because I think it's leading to the NDP fulfilling a political promise on the backs of vulnerable kids and I think the kids in this province, 8,000 there, are having a hard enough time. We don't have to go backwards in our standards and make it even harder for them. I think we should provide the best training, the best working conditions, the best support and the best legislation to govern their profession and this is not that legislation.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would have a hard time supporting Bill 9.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, it's with pleasure that I rise to speak to this bill this afternoon.

I think that there are some pieces of legislation in which one needs to give a little bit extra attention to and I would suggest to you that when you're dealing with the most vulnerable in our society, our youth, that that is one of the situations where we gotta be very careful as to what it is that we're proposing to do.

We cannot underestimate the importance of the many people in the profession as social workers in the roles that they play in terms of quite often protecting the most vulnerable in our society. And I have had the opportunity to have a few discussions, a few detailed discussions in regards to the impact of this bill and there have been some concerns that have been expressed that I think that the, you know, the current Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) needs to explain to this House as to why certain things are happening.

And, you know, the member from River East, earlier today in question period, made reference to one of those, one of those issues and, you know, in a very simple way when we look at the professions that are out there, and that's why I like the way in

which the member from River East pointed it out, that, you know, a person that volunteers in a classroom cannot be appointed as a teacher so that they can now teach in the classroom. There's a certification process that takes place. And the reason why that occurs, Madam Deputy Speaker, is because we want to ensure that there is a certain quality of education that's being taught from within that classroom. And, you know, whether it's, you know, the teaching profession or other professions, the same principle applies.

So I would suggest to you that we should be concerned with regards to what it is that this legislation is actually proposing to do. And my understanding of it, at least in part even though there's other changes that are made, but in part, one of the proposed changes would enable social workers to gain the occupation of being a social worker and not necessarily have to meet certain criteria in terms of educational, formal educational standards. And that should cause some concern.

I would look forward to this bill being in the committee stage and hearing some feedback but more importantly, hear from the ministers in terms of precisely what is intended by allowing that to take place and to provide, ultimately, some justification for it.

You know, it wasn't that long ago when we heard some of these huge numbers of kids that are in care. You know, you're talking well into the thousands. I believe it was somewhere in the range of 8,000 kids in the province of Manitoba in some form of care or another and the demands are very high and we acknowledge that right up front, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There are very high demands for social workers and, you know, when you take a look at the, at the individuals that are requiring the services, we're talking about, as I say, the most vulnerable in—or one of the most vulnerable in our society, that being our children. And many of these children are in positions in which, unfortunately, it often leads to things such as dysfunctional families in some areas, other areas just a lot of challenges in the home environment. And as a result, we see a lot of social work being conducted in order to ensure that the child's interests are in fact being best protected. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, that carries on right through, you know, that three-year-old, all the way into time in which they get into school and throughout the school years.

Virtually until they hit that age of majority. It can be very challenging.

I've talked to social workers and have shared in some of the frustrations that have been expressed of some of the problems that are there in the family today. And you know, there's a great deal of challenges. And that's why I think that we have to be very careful. You know, we don't want to—you know, some would call it dummifying down or whatever one wants to—with whatever type of terminology one wants to use. We need to be concerned to the degree in which that those social workers or those social workers that the government is possibly considering appointing. Well, what is the background? What type of social worker are they envisioning being brought into the profession? And what sort of credentials will they have to provide outside of just being a volunteer, working with children? So I think those are all legitimate concerns.

Other aspects of the legislation are fairly—there are some things that are fairly positive on it and that's why I say, you know, it's good to see that we're having the second reading today so that there is some debate. MLAs can get on the record; express what it is that they have to say about the bill. But then it will go into a committee stage and I look forward to hearing from people in regards to their concerns on the issue of the social worker and what is a social worker. Everything from that to the scope or practice or whatever else members of the public might want to share with us.

What I do know is that once this bill does go to committee, that there is going to be a need for clarification. And I look forward to hearing the type of clarification that's required is going to mean that the minister that is now responsible for this legislation, is going to have to be brought up to steam or brought up to par, the word escapes me right now, but she needs to—*[interjection]*—speed—be brought up to speed as to what the legislation is actually proposing to do.

And I can appreciate that, you know, that this is something that's been put on to her plate recently but the impact is quite significant. And that is why ultimately I think that there's a sense of—well, let's wait and see once we get into that committee stage as to how the minister is going to be able to address some of these points. I don't know to what degree the government or the department has been able to consult with social workers. And quite often, when we pass things through a second reading, we don't

really necessarily afford very much time for people to come down to the Leg in order to make a presentation. So we're fairly dependent on the government doing its job in terms of going out into the stakeholders and talking to the stakeholders and getting their viewpoints on what it is the government is proposing to do. And I would be very much interested and I will attempt to put in the effort necessary to hear what some of the social workers have to say about this legislation. But I'm interested in knowing from the minister responsible as to what work she has done in terms of consulting with current social workers that have been in the field.

* (16:40)

One might think, including myself, I must say, that the child's advocacy office should've been involved in some capacity in dealing with this, given the role that the child's advocate's office plays today. So it would be interesting to see if, in fact, the government has met with the child advocate in regards to what concerns, if any, that she might have with respect to this legislation. And that's what I mean in terms of stakeholders. I emphasize the importance of the consultation here, because, as the member from River East pointed out at question period earlier today, that we are talking about very vulnerable individuals. These aren't—you know, it's not going to be the kids that are gonna be coming out to do the protests or to be expressing opinions and thoughts. They are very much dependent on us inside this Legislature doing our job and protecting the interests of the children in our province.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, in looking at Bill 9, we're prepared to ultimately see it go to committee—to the committee stage, and we'll reserve our decision as to whether or not to support the legislation based in terms of what sort of response we get from the government, what sort of assurances that are there. Suffice to say, we do have some very real concerns and some doubt about this legislation, and without adequate information being provided to us, it would be very difficult to support the legislation once it comes back for third reading, and whenever you're dealing with legislation of this nature, I would suggest to you that it should almost be a no brainer. If it's really in the best interest of children then you should be able to get the support of all three political parties. If for some reason you get one or two political parties in opposition to the bill, then I think that, you know, whether it's the media or the public, should take note of that because, ultimately, I would argue that each and every MLA inside this Chamber,

party aside, care deeply about the future of our children, period, especially those children that are most vulnerable and in need of social services.

So, with those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'll leave it at that, and we'll see what happens going into committee and ultimately back for third reading, where I know I'll be here for third reading, and either myself or my leader will likely then be there for the committee stage.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Madam Deputy Speaker, it's indeed a pleasure to rise to speak today to Bill 9, The Social Work Profession Act, at this stage of the bill.

I see a number of things in the bill that I think are probably very good, but one of the things that I'm really, truly concerned about is that it does appear to lower the academic standards of social workers, and social workers in this province are the front-line troops. They do a phenomenal job. They are faced with heavy caseloads and some very tragic situations that they have to walk into and deal with, and I can't begin to give them enough credit for the work they do in this province in very difficult situations.

That being said, I think we must have the highest standards possible for the social workers. They must be trained and developed into the—into the jobs they do. We are dealing with the most vulnerable people in this province when we—especially in the Child and Family Services area, when we're dealing with—when social workers are dealing with them.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The social worker is the front line. The social worker has to walk in, assess the situation, sometimes assess the situation with very little information and they have to be right every time. They have to have the training. They have to have a background that will give them the ability to assess the situation, assess what's happening in a child's life, assess what's happening in a family's life. The best social workers in the world are parents, and I think we still don't pay enough attention to dealing with situations before they get out of hand, before we have to move to a situation where we've got a problem that's insurmountable, and then you have to do various things that separate a child from their family.

Since devolution in this province, we've had huge amounts of problems because devolution was rushed. It was done for reasons that are probably only known to the government of the day, at the speed it was done. And it was rushed and moved ahead too quickly, and we've been suffering the results ever since with some very tragic results coming out of it.

The deaths of several children, Gage Guimond, happened when I was the critic for Family Services and CFS, and just a very tragic situation, and probably a situation where there were some mistakes made by case workers and the social workers.

We keep hearing the stories out of certain areas of children not seen for six months, not seen for a year. And I know the Province passed some legislation last year that states, every child seen every time. And I hope that's being enforced. And, once again, it's the social workers, those people that are working under the heavy caseloads, that have to walk in and deal with those situations.

As I said before, I think we are lowering the standard, and I have checked on other jurisdictions. And it appears to me, I have the standards from Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and a number of other provinces, and it does appear to me that we are setting our standards lower than any other province. And I think it's critical that we keep the level up. I think these have to be some of the best trained people in our province.

I think this piece of legislation was driven by recommendations out of a number of reports that have come out over the last few years and, basically, forced the minister to do something. So, as the NDP government usually does, they threw out \$11.5 million and said we're going to hire 150 more social workers, and then discovered there weren't 150 more out there to hire with any kind of money. So the only way they can get them is to lower the standards, and lowering the standards to somebody that's been working in the field voluntarily and has very little of the training.

Once again, throw the money out. That's what this government does every time. Don't look at the results you're getting. You want to be very careful. You want to be scared of those results because they're going to—you want to distance yourself from those results. That's why devolution was done. That's

why the authorities were set up. You put in enough layers and you remove yourself far enough that you can take no—hope you take no responsibility but, ultimately, it comes back to the minister's desk. In this case, ultimately, it will still come to the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), even though this bill is going through under Justice.

We see services cut to children in CFS. We talk about the caseloads of social workers and case workers. And then we see agencies running short on budget for various reasons and, all of a sudden, directives go out with three months to go in the year to cut travel allowance, they can't visit remote areas. And sometimes that money, that should be used to do those things, has been mismanaged by the agencies and used somewhere else where it maybe shouldn't have been. We've seen the Niagara Falls getaways and we've seen five of the agencies go under review, and I don't know whether we've seen anything on the outcomes of those reviews yet, or very little. And I think it's something we do need to see. We don't need to keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

*(16:50)

The whole issue around social workers is caseload, caseload, caseload, caseload and a number of other factors, but somehow we have to get our mind around how do we handle the ever-increasing caseloads? And, probably—as I said earlier—probably the best way to handle it is do more up-front work and try and keep children in their homes with their parents, and that just doesn't seem to work. It seems to me that the—we have over 8,000 children in CFS care in the province now, and it seems to be that the numbers just continually go up. I can't remember what they were in '99, but I think they were somewhere around half that, and so it's been a tremendous increase in 10 years and I don't know that we can afford to keep this model going for any more years. We have to do—this isn't working. We have to do something that starts to change the picture out there, starts—turn the tables back a different way.

So that's about all I wanted to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, so thank you very much.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, Bill 9, The Social Work Profession Act, in two and a half years in this House—and there's some constants and there's some things that always change, and one of the constants is always be prepared for the unexpected, and here we go with Bill 9.

Just when I'm understanding how ministries work, we have a bill for the social workers, for qualifying social workers, being brought in by the Finance Minister instead of the Minister for Family Services and Housing, where I would have thought it should have been.

So the Minister of Finance was asked, well, why did you introduce this? And in his remarks, he says the department has expertise to develop this type of legislation, having developed it in the past. Any example of them developing social worker policy in the past from the Finance Department?

An Honourable Member: I doubt it.

Mr. Pedersen: I doubt it, but maybe those on that side will tell me.

So, as we're getting our heads around this that the Finance Minister is bringing in social engineering policy, we're thrust into a leadership—well, at least the NDP are thrust into a leadership debate—and the musical chairs continue.

So now, instead of having a Finance Minister bringing in social engineering legislation, we have the Agriculture Minister sitting in for the Finance Minister who is bringing forth legislation for social work.

Man, it's no wonder I can't keep track of things in this place. It's just constantly changing.

So it would be good if the interim Finance Minister, posing as an expert on social workers, would at least stand up in this House and tell us why her department is bringing this in, at least explain the government's position on why they're changing social worker qualifications. But, no, this government just sits back, says nothing, tries to keep their head low and avoid contact at any expense.

So, as the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) asked in question period today about what this new minister's position was on this, she said, well, wait 'til committee. It'll all happen in committee. Does that—does that mean that she's going to issue a statement in committee? I doubt that.

I was checking on the number of presenters—and I just have it in front of me right now—but the number of presenters coming out is not going to lead a lot of credence to why this government is doing what they're doing and I'm sure—I'm sure that the Finance

Department will be sitting at committee and able to answer all our questions about why they're changing qualifications on social workers.

So we're just—it's certainly easy to see that even this government is confused as to where they're going with this.

So the actual bill itself is somewhat reminiscent of Bill 26, which we just passed in second reading the other day. Bill 26 is designed to give the minister and the Cabinet more power in apprenticeships. Take away the power from the—from the trade—from the PTACs, the people who actually work in those trades. It's to take the power up. I think that's where Bill 9 is headed too.

We know we need more social workers in Manitoba. We know that there is a problem in the caseloads of social workers, so we need more social workers. So, rather than providing training—university training, college training—what they're going to do, what they allow—what this bill allows them to do is to bring in people who have volunteered in the community to become social workers. And it—there is—if you're—if you're going to meet a target, this government's way of meeting targets is to lower the bar. Make it easier, so they can meet their quotas. I'm sure we'll see press releases out about how they've hired 150 volunteers, community volunteers who will now act as social workers, in the role of social workers, which is just bizarre, just—to say the least.

You're going to put our most vulnerable citizens of Manitoba, the children of Manitoba, in the hands of volunteer people being accredited with social worker status in this province is ridiculous, and that's where this bill—that's the sole intent of this bill. They can talk about how they've thrown money into everything and how money will solve all problems. We know it won't. We know that there are deep problems within family—within the Family Services and Housing Department. Lowering standards for social workers is not going to solve this, and the sooner this government admits that, the better.

We've asked them to withdraw the bill. We want them to withdraw the bill, bring it back in a new session, whenever that will be, under their new leader, and under—bring it in under Housing and Family Services where it should be and explain the rationale so that the—so that the people in the

department who are best qualified to answer this can actually answer these questions.

Because the way that this government is going to go—and I'm—I just know that that's the way it's going to happen—they're going to—they're going to just keep their heads low on this. It's going to—they just feel that if nothing's said, no damage is done, and then they can pass this legislation, and then they can get on to their—get on to their goal of meeting their—meeting their goals for social workers, and that's a sad state. This government has absolutely no scruples when it comes to meeting their press release goals.

An Honourable Member: No direction.

Mr. Pedersen: There's—well, there is direction in this government. There is absolute direction in this government, and that's—and that's to—

An Honourable Member: Like lemmings going over a cliff.

Mr. Pedersen: It's a bit—that's correct. The member from Ste. Rose—I'll attribute this one day. It's a bit like lemmings going over a cliff, and they see the press release out there.

Mr. Speaker, this bill should be withdrawn. This is terrible legislation. Thank you.

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

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading, Bill No. 9, The Social Work Profession Act.

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

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In my—in my opinion, the Ayes have it.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): On division.

Mr. Speaker: On division.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, September 21,

at 6 p.m., to consider Bill 9, The Social Work Profession Act.

Mr. Speaker: It's been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, September 21, at 6 p.m., to consider Bill 9, The Social Work Profession Act.

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Mr. Speaker: And the hour now being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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