



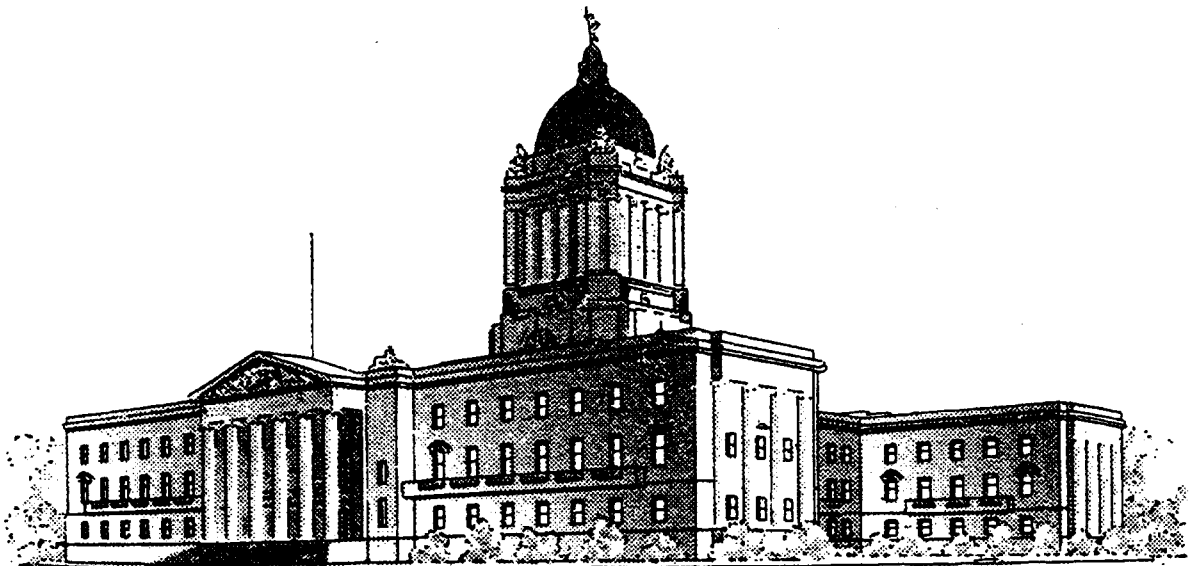
First Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANTOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Members, Constituencies and Political Affiliation

<u>Name</u>	<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Party</u>
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert, Hon.	Steinbach	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
ERNST, Jim, Hon.	Charleswood	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David	Riel	P.C.
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 25, 1995

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

**Emergency Health Care Services—
Seven Oaks General Hospital**

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Frances Spooner, Kathleen McCallum, Gerri Unwin and others requesting the Legislative Assembly to request the Premier (Mr. Filmon) to consider maintaining 24-hour access to emergency health care at Seven Oaks Hospital, as was promised in the 1995 general election.

**Emergency Health Care Services—
Community Hospitals**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Antonio Cesari, Klara Jarrin, Richard Vermette and others requesting the Legislative Assembly urge the Minister responsible for Health (Mr. McCrae) to consider making a commitment to the people of Manitoba that emergency health care services in Winnipeg's five community hospitals will remain open seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

**Emergency Health Care Services—
Seven Oaks General Hospital**

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak). It complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

The petition of the undersigned residents of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth

THAT on at least six occasions during the 1995 provincial election the Premier promised not to cut health care services; and

THAT following the election the Minister of Health promised that emergency services would not be reduced at community hospitals in Winnipeg; and

THAT the Minister of Health on October 6 announced that emergency services at these hospitals would be cut back immediately; and

THAT residents of the Seven Oaks Hospital vicinity depend upon emergency service at this hospital.

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba go on record requesting the Premier to consider maintaining 24-hour access to emergency health care at Seven Oaks Hospital as was promised in the 1995 general election.

**Emergency Health Care Services—
Community Hospitals**

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes. The Clerk will read.

Mr. Clerk (William Remnant): The petition of the undersigned residents of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth

THAT emergency health care services are the core of Manitoba's health care system;

THAT Manitobans deserve the greatest possible access to this care;

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly urge the Minister responsible for Health (Mr. McCrae) consider making a commitment to the people of Manitoba that emergency health care services in Winnipeg's five community hospitals will remain open seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY
STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

**Standing Committee on Economic Development
Fourth Report**

Mr. Mike Radcliffe (Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Development): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the Fourth Report on the Committee on Economic Development.

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Economic Development presents the following as its Fourth Report.

Your committee met on Thursday, October 24, 1995, at 10 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building to consider the Annual Reports of the Communities Economic Development Fund for the years ending March 31, 1994, and March 31, 1995; the Annual Report of A.E. McKenzie Co. Ltd. for the year ending October 31, 1993; the Consolidated Financial Statements for A.E. McKenzie Co. Ltd. for the year ending October 31, 1994, and the Annual Report for Manitoba Mineral Resources Ltd. for the year ending December 31, 1993.

Mr. Gerry Offet, general manager of the Communities Economic Development Fund, and Mr. Gord Wakeling, director of fisheries of the Communities Economic Development Fund, provided such information as was requested with respect to the Annual Reports and business of the Communities Economic Development Fund.

Your committee has considered the Annual Reports of the Communities Economic Development Fund for the years ending March 31, 1994, and March 31, 1995; the

Annual Report of A.E. McKenzie Co. Ltd. for the year ending October 31, 1993; the Consolidated Financial Statements for A.E. McKenzie Co. Ltd. for the year ending October 31, 1994, and the Annual Report for Manitoba Mineral Resources Ltd. for the year ending December 31, 1993, and has adopted the same as presented.

Mr. Radcliffe: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Morris (Mr. Pitura), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

* (1335)

**Standing Committee on Economic Development
Fifth Report**

Mr. Mike Radcliffe (Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Development): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the Fifth Report of the Committee on Economic Development.

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Economic Development presents the following as its Fifth Report.

Your committee met on Thursday, October 19, 1995, at 7 p.m., Friday, October 20, 1995, at 1:30 p.m., Monday, October 23, 1995, at 9 a.m. and Tuesday, October 24, 1995, at 2:30 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building, to consider bills referred.

At the meeting of October 19, 1995, your committee elected Mr. Newman to fill a vacancy for the position of vice-chairperson.

Your committee heard representation on bills as follows:

Bill 2—The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Protection and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi sur l'équilibre budgétaire, le remboursement de la dette et la protection des contribuables et apportant des modifications corrélatives

Rob Hilliard, President, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Rick Wiend, CUPE Local 500

Gary Russell, CUPE Manitoba

Peter Holle, Manitoba Taxpayers Association

Maureen Hancharyk, Manitoba Nurses Union

Diane Beresford, Private Citizen

Ken Peach and Glen McRuer, Manitoba Teachers' Society

Dr. John Loxley, Choices

Mark Francis, Private Citizen

Darrell Rankin, Communist Party of Canada, Manitoba

Dan Kelly, The Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Peter Olfert, Manitoba Government Employees' Union

Ron Schmalcel, Private Citizen

George Harris, Private Citizen

Nancy Paterson and Pat Issak, Transcona/Springfield Teachers' Association and Seven Oaks Teachers' Association

Claudia Sarbit and John Wiens, Seven Oaks School Division

Carl Ridd, Private Citizen

Lance Norman, Manitoba Chamber of Commerce

Written Submissions:

Victor Olson, Private Citizen

Ian Fillingham, Private Citizen

Your committee has considered:

Bill 2—The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Protection and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi sur l'équilibre budgétaire, le remboursement de la dette et la protection des contribuables et apportant des modifications corrélatives

and has agreed to report the same with the following amendments:

MOTION:

That section 9 be amended by striking out clauses (a) and (b) and substituting the following:

(a) the amount required to bring the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to its target level as described in section 3.1 of The Fiscal Stabilization Fund Act, or any greater amount that the minister, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers appropriate, shall be transferred to the Fiscal Stabilization Fund;

(b) any amount remaining after a transfer under clause (a) may be left as a surplus of the operating fund or may, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, be transferred to the Debt Retirement Fund.

MOTION:

That subsection 13(2) of the bill be amended, in the proposed subsection 3.1(2) of The Fiscal Stabilization Fund Act, by adding "at least" after "reaches".

Mr. Radcliffe: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Morris (Mr. Pitura), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us this afternoon members of the Downtown Y Seniors Group.

We also have 28 adult students from the Global Connections Training Programme under the direction of Mr. Sharma and the members of the Community Legal Education Association.

Also with us are one hundred and sixty Grade 9 students from John Pritchard School under the direction of Mr. Murray Lampert and Mr. Tim Peachy. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Winnipeg Jets Operating-Loss Agreement

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I believe we are all very proud in this Chamber to note that today the Cree in Quebec have voted 96 percent in favour of Canada in the referendum that took place today.

I will proceed with the question that may not be as positive.

Madam Speaker, last Wednesday, we asked the government about the liability of losses for the taxpayers under the 1991 operating-loss agreement signed by the Premier (Mr. Filmon). We asked about the liability of losses under that agreement. Unfortunately, the minister responsible for the Jets, the Minister of Finance, answered in terms of the liability that he, quote, had met the owners of the team that morning, and he indicated the liability would be in the range of \$17.5 million and would end with the selling of the team at the end of this season in June of next year.

Madam Speaker, we find out that the liability agreement is still in place until 1997, the agreement the Premier signed, and the date does not expire until July 15, 1997. I would like to ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon) why his Minister of Finance did not inform us after meeting with the majority owners, why he did not inform the public of the offer date agreement and therefore the liability until 1997.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the agreement that the member is referring to was forwarded to us later that same day, that Wednesday that I met with Mr. Shenkarow, Mr. Sector and Mr. Davis in terms of the official agreement that they ultimately entered into with Mr. Burke and Mr. Gluckstern.

I want to make it clear, Madam Speaker, that the clause the member is referring to does suggest that the team would be sold by July 1997 or an earlier date as agreed to by the buyer and the seller, and the majority

owners here in Manitoba indicated to me that morning that it is their agreement with Mr. Burke and Mr. Gluckstern to sell the team by July of 1996.

That is certainly what they went out and said publicly, Madam Speaker. That is what Mr. Burke and Mr. Gluckstern have said, and the majority owners also have confirmed that in writing to me today, that the whole intention is to conclude the agreement by July 1996, and while there is a master agreement that reflects some of the terms of the 1991 interim agreement that the Leader of the Opposition refers to, there will be subagreements executed and entered into that will very clearly outline that the team will be sold by July 1996.

Mr. Doer: Is the minister telling us today that the majority owners, when they met with the minister last Wednesday morning prior to Question Period, did not inform him that the agreement stated July 15, 1997, which would make our liability in terms of the operating-loss agreement of the Premier (Mr. Filmon) extend another year, Madam Speaker?

Did he not know that? Was he not informed of that when the minister informed the House that our liability was over at the end of this hockey season?

* (1340)

Mr. Stefanson: The fact is it will be and is over by July 1996. That is the very clear undertaking of the majority owners of the Winnipeg Jets hockey team, with the support of both levels of government, the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba, to sell the team as soon as possible after this hockey season.

I have explained for the Leader of the Opposition why there is reference to July 1997. It is a technical issue because of the interim operating agreement, but the agreements between the majority owners today and the buyers, Mr. Burke and Mr. Gluckstern, are to transfer that team by July 1996.

As I have indicated, we do have that outlined in writing to us today, and we also will be receiving copies of the subagreements that will spell that out in further detail, Madam Speaker.

So what I outlined to the House that day were the results of meetings I had that morning in terms of confirming what is going to happen with the Winnipeg Jets, and that was confirmed that same day by Mr. Shenkarow at a press conference he held that has been widely covered through the media here in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Doer: I asked the minister specifically what is our liability and what are our losses going to be, and the minister answered our liability is only to the end of this season.

An undertaking does not change a liability. I would like to ask the minister, does our liability extend to June 30, 1997, pursuant to the operating-loss agreement signed by the Premier (Mr. Filmon)? An undertaking does not change a liability. What are we liable for, the losses to 1997, Madam Speaker? Is the government going to pass legislation to change that agreement as we have proposed in the past?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, we will be responsible for 50 percent, but when I say we, I mean the Province of Manitoba will be responsible for 50 percent of the losses for this hockey season, 1995-96.

The transaction will close by July of 1996, and we will no longer be responsible for any portion of any of the losses. In fact, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, we will receive our share of the proceeds, proceeds coming to the two levels of government of some \$32 million by the time you pay back the private sector notes. Our share of those proceeds will be approximately \$10 million or \$12 million, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Doer: With a new question, Madam Speaker, in 1993, the government told us the operating-loss agreement would end at the end of June of 1994. In June of 1994, the government extended that agreement until May 1, 1995, and before the election the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the minister responsible for the Jets promised us that we would no longer be liable for losses after May 1, 1995.

I would like to ask the Premier, why should the public believe this government that this undertaking

will cancel our liability, when every time we have been promised before, it has, unfortunately, not been carried out and implemented by this government as they have indicated, Madam Speaker?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the terminating of the 1991 interim agreement by May of this year was obviously on the basis that the Leader of the Opposition knows full well, that the team would be sold. That was one of the conditions in terms of all of the discussions and negotiations with originally the MEC organization and then ultimately Spirit.

The member refers to believing people in this Chamber, Madam Speaker. I want to remind him that it was they who came to this Chamber with suggestions that we would be responsible for \$6 million in one year as part of a contract for the hockey player, Keith Tkachuk. It was not us who came with that inaccurate information. I clarified that information for them here in the House, that we are responsible for one-fifth of that contract. They were wrong on that issue.

The member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) suggested some time ago when asking about—[interjection] You do not want to hear the answers? Madam Speaker, the member for Crescentwood some time ago made reference—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I believe if you refer to Beauchesne's, I think you will find that the minister can choose not to answer the question. The minister can choose to put on the record, but the minister ought not to try to attempt to answer questions he could not answer last week in the context of his response, and he ought not to provoke debate, and I think you should call the minister to order on that.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Kildonan does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

* (1345)

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, only this government can defend hiring Keith Tkachuk, paying his salary and closing emergency wards in community hospitals. Those are the priorities we see opposite.

Madam Speaker, the minister just answered that the operating-loss agreement was going to be cancelled because they were going to sell the team to another set of owners.

Is this not the same undertaking the minister now has, another attempt to buy the team by another group of owners, so are we not liable in a legal way until June 30, 1997, when the operating-loss agreement is over, Madam Speaker, and why did the minister not tell us about the total liability and the 1997 date? Why did we have to find out about it a week later?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I have already outlined very clearly for the member that the current majority owners have an agreement with Burke and Gluckstern to sell the team effective July 1996, and part of that agreement will be the termination of the 1991 interim agreement, and with the termination of the agreement, that terminates any liabilities or responsibilities of the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba.

I want to get back, Madam Speaker, to his question in terms of the whole issue of credibility on this issue. His member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) suggested there is forlorn hope that there will be any interest returned on the \$5-million down payment. Well, I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition here today, Madam Speaker, that today we received a cheque from Aikins MacAulay, the solicitors for the Winnipeg Jets, for \$5,116,318.79, which is the full refunding of the \$5-million deposit along with interest, so once again, as has been the case on this issue continually, they bring misinformation, inaccurate information, and are incorrect in terms of their dealing with this issue.

Barry Shenkarow Salary

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, last week, the minister indicated that he would

take as notice the salary that is being paid to Mr. Shenkarow for the '93-94 year and the 1994-95 hockey year.

The minister has had a week now to get that information. Can the minister now tell the public how much is the salary for Mr. Shenkarow?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, an oversight when I responded to that other supplementary question, I will table copies of the letter I referred to.

Madam Speaker, the member is correct. He asked me that question last week. I followed up on it that day. The chair of the committee responsible for reviewing the interim operating agreement, Mr. Del Crewson, was out of town, is expected back this week, and I will certainly undertake to obtain that information from him this week and provide it.

Winnipeg Jets Purchasing Agreement

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, under Section 9.5(a) and (b), (i) and (ii) of the interim operating agreement signed by the Premier (Mr. Filmon), a buyer of the team, and I quote, shall have executed and delivered to the province and Enterprises an offer in writing, take along offer to purchase all, less than all and so forth.

The Minister of Finance has a very easy way of resolving the questions that have been asked in this House, and that is simply to table the offer which the province has received, which has a material effect on the well-being of the province's finances over the next year.

Very simply, you have the offer in your possession. Will you table it so the public does not have to ask questions over and over and over again?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, it is certainly our intention to make as much information available as we possibly can relating to that agreement. We believe it is in the best interests of not only individuals in this Chamber but all Manitobans,

recognizing that we are only one party to this entire transaction.

In fact, the agreement is with the majority owners of the Winnipeg hockey club along with Winnipeg Enterprises Corporation, which effectively owns the shares for the interest that the city and the province have in the entity, Madam Speaker, so, again, we are one party to a transaction.

There are elements of third-party confidentiality, but, certainly, I will undertake to provide as much information as we possibly can, that we are able to provide, on the agreement.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, given his refusal to provide documents that are in his possession and which could answer all these questions, will the minister then at least table with the House in writing the specific clauses of the offer which offer Mr. Burke and Mr. Gluckstern an out from the current agreement?

What are the conditional clauses? They will include at least NHL approval, a place for the team to go and many other clauses. What are the outs, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I guess, unlike the member for Crescentwood, it is not a matter of refusing to table the information, it is a matter of respecting third-party confidentiality and the rights of other individuals, other than just the questions from the member for Crescentwood. It is that simple. I wish the member would understand and appreciate that.

We will certainly provide all of the information we can on that agreement. We have certainly provided some of the most significant information to date that we can in terms of the price that the team is being sold for, \$68 million U.S. We have now discussed and clarified the issue of the timing of the closing date, and we will continue to provide as much information as we possibly can on that issue, Madam Speaker.

* (1350)

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, will the minister at least agree that keeping this information secret until after the civic election clearly has a material effect on the civic

election and on the re-election of their favourite candidates in this case?—another political election manipulation.

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I have experienced many ridiculous questions from the member for Crescentwood, but that is unquestionably the most ridiculous question he has put in his short time since being elected.

I certainly encourage him to stand up and indicate who he is supporting for mayor and who the NDP party is supporting for mayor, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Medical Association Meeting Invitation

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, it is very clear that the decision to close the community hospital emergency wards was badly planned, ill-conceived and is frankly a mistake by the Department of Health.

Another example of that mistake is the fact that the Manitoba Medical Association which is supposed to be a partner in the planning of this entire process was not even invited to the planning meeting held last week in order to discuss the emergency wards. Can the minister explain to this House, in the midst of all of the difficulties and the total failure in the planning of this whole process, how it is the Manitoba Medical Association was not invited to attend that major meeting?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the honourable member is wrong. The Manitoba Medical Association was, indeed, invited. That does not mean there was not some misunderstanding about the matter. [interjection]

I say that quite seriously. The association, the Manitoba Medical Association, was advised of the meeting prior to the meeting, the day before the meeting, but we have a letter from Mr. LaPlume of the Manitoba Medical Association complaining that he did not get appropriate notification, and he has an apology from the department about that, but there was notification of the meeting the day before.

Information Request

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I will table a copy of the letter from Mr. LaPlume to the government, indicating that the government did not invite the MMA, and, in fact, the government's letter back to the MMA indicated they did not have their association members approved until after the meeting.

My question for the minister: Can the minister please advise this House whether or not the MMA, which is also requesting information, information that the public ought to have—will the minister provide the information the MMA is requesting and is suggesting that it will get from Freedom of Information?

Will he provide that information to the MMA so it can have some material to help base its decisions on, that it is supposed to be helping the government with when it gets invited and attends?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): The honourable member is aware, Madam Speaker, of the membership of the Integrated Emergency Services Delivery Steering Committee.

There are numerous, numerous medical people, including representatives of the Manitoba Medical Association, numerous people representing various aspects of the nursing profession, the Consumers' Association, the Manitoba Society of Seniors, Ron Wally of the MAHCP. There are other physician representatives. All the hospitals are represented on this committee.

Who better to be brought together to talk about emergency services than the people who know more about emergency services than I do or the honourable member, Madam Speaker?

* (1355)

Health Care System Emergency Services

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the minister, now that he is consulting after the wards are closed and have been closed, will

the minister provide the public with information concerning why they made the decision, on what basis it was made, whether or not cost savings were the factor, et cetera?

Will he provide that information to the public, now that he has already made the decision, Madam Speaker?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, honourable members opposite often complain about the nature of answers to the questions that are put to us on this side of the House, and they confound the issue with their preambles, so that you have to spend the time allotted to you to sort out all of the incorrect rhetoric that they put on the record.

For example, the honourable member talks about the fact that we are now consulting. We have been consulting since back in July, long before the doctors decided to go on strike on Labour Day. I mean, we asked the doctors not to do that, but we had to do something to develop a contingency plan, and that has been done through a very, very consultative process and a consensus arrived at in these matters, Madam Speaker.

The honourable member gets told that by myself and by others, but he chooses not to hear that, I guess, Madam Speaker.

Health Care System Emergency Services

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): My question is also for the Minister of Health.

It seems that it is only this particular minister or this government that believes that emergency community services are not necessary 24 hours a day. I was quite pleasantly surprised when the Minister of Health yesterday said, and I quote, the whole idea of savings is not what is driving the process of emergency services in the city of Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker, my question to the minister is, if it is not because of savings that you are doing this, then why are you doing something which it seems every

expert out in the field is saying that you should not be doing? Why are you doing it?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the honourable member talks about savings, and I remind him that there will be a need for savings in our health system. We have to make sure we spend every dollar very, very wisely. Just by way of example, if each and every community hospital in Winnipeg, not just the emergency rooms at night, but whole hospitals were closed down and those services not made available somewhere else, we would not have enough money saved to equal the \$220-million cut that Ottawa will have imposed on us by two fiscal years from now. That is the gravity of the situation Ottawa is imposing on the provinces in this country, Madam Speaker.

I would like all honourable members to realize that this is the kind of environment we are working in. Nonetheless, Madam Speaker, that being the case, the honourable member talks about all these people who have a differing view, and yet the changes that have been made thus far have been made after consultations and after consensus-building has happened. I shared, yesterday I think it was, with the honourable member a membership list of the Integrated Emergency Services Delivery Steering Committee.

Madam Speaker, those are all experts in the field of emergency medicine, not the honourable member, not me, not the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), but people who know how these things should be handled.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, those individuals are not necessarily agreeing with what the Minister of Health is saying. My question to the minister is, will he stand by what he said yesterday in this Chamber when he said savings are not what is driving this process and tell this Chamber what is driving the process if it is not savings?

Mr. McCrae: Well, the honourable Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) has asked this question, and the honourable member for Inkster, too, about savings. I have said that is not the driving, determining factor here, Madam Speaker. We were placed in a situation

on Labour Day when we were in a position where we had to put together a contingency plan, which we did.

Madam Speaker, we are carrying on with an orderly reopening of emergency services in the city of Winnipeg. That is what happened when the strike came to an end. Services during the 14 hours of the day were brought back to ordinary levels of service available in our community hospitals and closed at night. That was the consensus reached at that time as to the best plan to go with.

The honourable member is alone, almost, except he is joined, I think, by the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), in saying that the best emergency services program is to have this 24-hour service across the city, when virtually everybody else agrees, Madam Speaker, that that amounts to an oversupply and not something that appropriately deals with the need that is out there.

* (1400)

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, can the Minister of Health tell us who everyone else is, outside of this cabinet and the Conservative caucus? Who are the other people who are telling this minister that we need to shut down emergency services? It is not Marcel Laurendeau.

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, it is not unlike, clearly, the honourable member to take the same attitude as members of the New Democratic Party, for example, who are on record in the past as saying that double-staffing is what should exist for certain circumstances—double-staffing, twice as many people as you need to deliver services.

In other words, our friends on the opposite side of the House would have health care professionals all across this province sitting around twiddling their thumbs, doing nothing while patients need services.

Health Care System Sexual Assault Treatment Protocols

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): My questions, too, are for the Minister of Health.

Last week, my colleague from Burrows (Mr. Martindale) expressed concern about the experience of a sexual assault victim. I note, as well, that on June 22, 1994, the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett) expressed concern about there being no standard protocols in Winnipeg's emergency rooms to deal with victims of abuse and assault.

The minister answered that day that he had, and I quote from Hansard, today asked the Department of Health to bring together the Department of Justice, the major police forces, the Manitoba hospital organizations, so that we can sit down and decide on the appropriate kind of protocol.

My first question for the minister is, has the minister reviewed the policy guidelines from the Moncton Hospital in New Brunswick which the member for Wellington sent him in June 1994?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the question raised the other day by the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) was taken very seriously by myself and by my department.

I would like the honourable member to know that in that case the appropriate measures, I am given to understand, were taken. In a case like that, for evidentiary and other reasons, it is appropriate that a person in those circumstances present at the forensic unit at the Health Sciences Centre. That is what was done in that case, and that would be appropriate to any protocols.

As far as the other part of the question, I will review my file on the matter and report to the honourable member.

Ms. McGifford: Can the minister assure this House that his department, in conjunction with the others listed earlier, has developed a standard protocol which is now in place in Manitoba's hospitals?

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, I remember my days in a former portfolio, and much of my work at that time which I am glad to see is carried on by my successor had to do with creating a safer society for women and children in all of our communities.

Part of my work and part of the work that is still going on is to ensure that we follow protocols in Manitoba that flow from things like the Pedlar review and those types of reports dealing with violence, domestic violence and other kinds of sexual assaults and those sorts of things that have been more and more in Manitoba.

In fact, I am told even today that Manitoba is on the leading edge, and I am not being told that as a Minister of Health. I am being told that because that is what is important to people, Madam Speaker, right across this country, that issues relating to people's personal security and dignity are important in Manitoba, and the government recognizes that.

Ms. McGifford: Since the minister agreed last year that protocol was a serious issue, can he tell this House why he has not even taken himself seriously?

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, with a question like that, I think really all you can do is consider the source.

I tell you, Madam Speaker, I take my responsibilities extremely seriously, and I know my colleague the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Vodrey) and all my colleagues take our responsibilities seriously, and those responsibilities have to do with developing the safest province that we can possibly develop.

MERLIN Manitoba Telephone System Role

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, in 1994, after six years in office, the government recognized distance education as one of its six educational priorities and created a special operating agency known as MERLIN. In its long-term business plan, MERLIN has indicated, quite naturally, that it must work closely with the Manitoba Telephone System.

I want to ask the Minister of Education to tell us why on September 26 of this year in committee the acting president of the Manitoba Telephone System, Mr. Fraser, could say: I am quite honestly not familiar with MERLIN and what role MTS may be playing with

regard to it. I do not know if anyone is familiar with that.

Madam Speaker, this gives new meaning to the term "distance education."

I would like the Minister of Education to tell us how this could happen.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): I cannot comment on a conversation that took place back in September of 1994—[interjection] 1995. I cannot comment on a conversation that was made in September 1995, Madam Speaker.

I can tell you, whatever was said back then, that the MTS is certainly aware of MERLIN today, and that is the important thing as we begin our work in distance education in Manitoba.

CRTC Licensing

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, I was referring to the public record Hansard, September 26, not a private conversation, and that was—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. This is not a time for debate. The honourable member for Wolseley was recognized for a supplementary question.

Ms. Friesen: Madam Speaker, would the minister explain to the House how MERLIN will be involved in the setting of tariffs under the CRTC, again indicated in MERLIN's business plan as one of their major roles?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, the member knows that MERLIN is in its infancy.

MERLIN has been set up as a special operating agency only very recently, and the work that is being done to date is to iron out specifically those kinds of concerns the member has identified, taking a look at regulations, taking a look at rates, taking a look at opportunities that are available for various communities, school divisions and others, because MERLIN will not be restricted specifically and only to education.

We will see other people coming onto that highway sharing costs and services, and all of that, Madam Speaker, the member would like to see in place today or tomorrow at 9 a.m., and I would as well, but I am indicating to the member that which I think she does know, that it does take time for projects to get up and running and be fully implemented.

I am extremely pleased and proud that this government has taken on this initiative and is working so hard to ensure that this project is ultimately successful—[interjection] Are you rising? The Speaker is not.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. It is absolutely amazing how many people would like to sit in this Chair at one point or other.

Ms. Friesen: Madam Speaker, could the minister tell the House whether MERLIN has yet applied for a licence from CRTC as a broadcasting entity—again in the business plan indicated as of the utmost priority for MERLIN?

* (1410)

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, I do much rather take my instructions from you than members opposite. I am pleased to see that you insist upon that role being played.

The member has been informed as we went through Estimates in the spring and I believe as well through communications with my department and also just from general information that is available through committees, et cetera, that MERLIN is in the process of getting itself up and running.

I have indicated that they are in communication with the Manitoba Telephone System, with the—[interjection] Well, Madam Speaker, if this is another case where the member comes to the House, as she does so often, with a predetermined answer that she has decided is the answer—I mean, I am telling her an answer, and she is telling me what she thinks the answer is, does not clearly want to hear what I have to say, bases all her subsequent questions on her own assumptions of what she thinks the answer to the first

question is, and like the Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae), it is extremely frustrating to try and have a proper dialogue with these people.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Ms. Friesen: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, my quotations have been precisely from the public record of Hansard on September 26. My questions have been based upon the business plan of MERLIN in the minister's department responsible to this minister.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley does not have a point of order.

Swan Valley School Division Post-Secondary Distance Education

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, now that the Minister of Education has been briefed on distance education, I hope she understands that the Swan Valley School Division, after being denied FYDE and Universities North, went ahead and set up their own program, invested their own money, and people have been graduating from university courses, but that program is now in jeopardy because of high telephone costs.

What action is this Minister of Education prepared to take to ensure that this program that is such a success, a program that could be used as a model for the rest of the province, is not shut down because of high telephone rates?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): If my memory serves me correctly, I believe I was asked this question yesterday, but I understand, according to the rules, members are allowed to ask the same questions repeatedly daily, and that is what she is doing.

As I told her yesterday and will tell her again today, we appreciate very much what has happened in Swan in terms of the initiative that the people there have put in place, getting involved in this initiative. Other divisions have done the same, and we feel that that is a

very good thing. They have been proactive in that regard, Madam Speaker.

The government of Manitoba, working to put in its overall program, supports those kinds of initiatives in divisions. Madam Speaker, as I have indicated, we are working very hard to see distance education set up, so that those clusters that have already started can come together to a common network that might not just be in Manitoba but outside of the province, as well.

Now, all concerns about rates and so on, of course, are something that will concern all of those involved. We want the lowest possible cost available, and we will do whatever is possible within our power to effect that.

Ms. Wowchuk: Since the government has been spouting about its commitment to distance education and this program is in jeopardy, will the Minister of Education put in place a plan for interim funding until a decision is made by the CRTC on rates and interim plans, so that the programs can continue to be offered from Swan River Collegiate?

Mrs. McIntosh: The member indicates her interest and concern in the distance education initiatives in her area, and I commend her for that because that is what I believe MLAs should be doing, expressing concerns for their constituencies as they embark upon new initiatives.

Right now, of course, Swan is able to interact with Infotech. It has a few sources. It is wanting more. Obviously, we want them to have more. As we go through the process and as rates are determined, as needs are identified, I have assured the member we will do all within our power to ensure that distance education does that which it is intended to do, with the help of the special operating agency MERLIN there to try to help address some of the very problems she has identified, purchasing problems, getting on stream, et cetera. So I cannot say to the member that tomorrow at nine o'clock, all of these things will be addressed and in place. I can say we have been working on them for many months and are continuing to work upon them and bring along with us those divisions that have started already.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Speaker, the minister does not understand that this has absolutely nothing to do with MERLIN. Why is this government not—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Swan River, please pose her supplementary question now.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Speaker, since this has nothing to do with MERLIN, why is this government not prepared to take action and ensure that rural students who cannot come to the city for their education have an opportunity to take their courses in rural Manitoba? Why will they not put in place interim funding?

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, I believe I answered this three times yesterday and for the third time again today to indicate to the member that the distance education initiative of this government—this government put this initiative in place.

This government has worked very hard to work with divisions, those few divisions that have already started, to try to get co-ordination, get everybody onto a common highway. We are now working to try to see that rates and so on that might be of concern to various jurisdictions are properly addressed, and I do not know what more I can say than to give her those reassurances.

Sport Manitoba Administrative Costs

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): I have a few questions for the Minister responsible for Sport as he moves ahead with the amalgamation of the Manitoba Sports Federation and the Sport Directorate to create the new body Sport Manitoba, keeping in mind that this is being done to ensure administrative costs are spent efficiently with the aim being to support and develop the athletes, the coaches, the volunteers of amateur sport in Manitoba.

Can the minister, in terms of administrative cost, compare the cost for renting the new building on Main Street with the cost for the 31 staff at the Manitoba Sports Federation?

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister responsible for Sport): I am not sure, Madam Speaker, of the question the member has asked. Perhaps she could clarify it somewhat for me.

Ms. Cerilli: I would be pleased to clarify the question. The minister has said publicly that this endeavour is to ensure efficiency in administration of sport in Manitoba, and I am wanting some clarification to compare the administrative cost of the rent for the building on Main Street with the cost for the staff of the Manitoba Sports Federation.

Mr. Ernst: Madam Speaker, I do not have the exact numbers, either of the lease cost of the Manitoba Sports Federation building, which is the business of the Manitoba Sports Federation, nor the cost of their staff, which is also the business of the Manitoba Sports Federation. What we have done is put in place a transition team to try and ascertain all of these costs and to determine what direction should be taken in order to minimize those expenses.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Committee Changes

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): I move, seconded by the member for Broadway (Mr. Santos), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Economic Development be amended as follows: Thompson (Mr. Ashton) for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen); The Pas (Mr. Lathlin) for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk); Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans); St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) for Thursday, October 26, 1995, for 9 a.m.

I move, seconded by the member for Broadway (Mr. Santos), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources be amended as follows: Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) for Thursday, October 26, 1995, for 10 a.m.

I move, seconded by the member for Broadway (Mr. Santos), that the composition of the Standing

Committee on Municipal Affairs be amended as follows: Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) for Thursday, October 26, 1995, for 2:30 p.m.

I move, seconded by the member for Broadway (Mr. Santos), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Agriculture be amended as follows: Wellington (Ms. Barrett) for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans); Thompson (Mr. Ashton) for Interlake (Mr. Clif Evans) for Thursday, October 26, 1995, for 8 p.m. Thank you.

Motions agreed to.

* (1420)

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, I have committee changes.

I move, seconded by the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Municipal Affairs be amended as follows: the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson) for the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner).

I move, seconded by the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources be amended as follows: the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render) for the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau); the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) for the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe); the member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) for the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Stefanson).

I move, seconded by the member for Sturgeon Creek (Mr. McAlpine), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Economic Development be amended as follows: the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik) for the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau); the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) for the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner); the member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer) for the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render).

I move, seconded by the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render), that the composition of the Standing

Committee on Agriculture be amended as follows: the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) for the member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay); the member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer) for the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson).

Motions agreed to.

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Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): I would like leave to make a nonpolitical statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Radisson have leave to make a nonpolitical statement?

Point of Order

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): I have no objection to granting leave, Madam Speaker, but I wonder if the member might wait for a couple of minutes while we have the second reading of Bill 19, following which then we could revert to nonpolitical statements. It would facilitate the agenda of the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson).

Madam Speaker: Is there agreement that we revert to nonpolitical statements after second reading of Bill 19? [agreed]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SECOND READINGS

Bill 19—The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) and Consequential Amendments Act

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae), that Bill 19, The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) and Consequential Amendments Act (Loi concernant l'adoption internationale (Convention de La Haye) et apportant des modifications corrélatives), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce amendments to Manitoba's intercountry adoption legislation as part of our province's commitment to protect the rights of children and their families.

The main purpose of the Hague Convention is to implement a system of co-operation between countries around the world that will safeguard children. Our No. 1 priority is to protect children by preventing atrocities such as abduction and the sale of, or traffic in, children. The Hague Convention also protects the rights of both birth parents and adoptive families by ensuring that all countries which ratify the convention legally recognize adoptions made in accordance with the convention guidelines.

To accomplish these two very important goals, the convention sets out a system of co-operation between participating states. Each state must set up a central authority to deal with cases of intercountry adoption and the central authority must follow established guidelines in order for an adoption to be recognized.

Canada was one of more than 65 countries that successfully concluded four years of negotiations to produce this treaty. In May of this year the Hague Convention was officially enforced after it was ratified by three countries, Mexico, Romania and Sri Lanka.

Because adoption is a matter of provincial jurisdiction, Canada will only be able to ratify the convention after participating provinces pass the necessary enabling legislation. Prince Edward Island passed the necessary legislation to ratify the Hague Convention in 1994, followed by Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

I am pleased to note that Manitoba's legislation is already very consistent with the guidelines set out by the Hague Convention. For that reason, Madam Speaker, we only require minor amendments to meet the standards identified.

At this time, Manitoba's legislation requires that the birth parents provide a signed consent before intercountry adoptions can take place. However, in some countries, the names of birth parents are kept

confidential. With these amendments, we will now accept certification of consent from that country's central authority. This certification will ensure that the consents have been signed by the birth parents in accordance with that country's legislation., Madam Speaker.

Manitoba's central authority will be the director of Child and Family Services. Other countries will designate a person who holds a similar position to act as their central authority.

Madam Speaker, I view the Hague Convention and the related amendments to this legislation as a very important step towards protecting and promoting the rights of adopted children around the world. Therefore I am pleased to recommend this bill to committee for quick passage through this Legislature. Thank you.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I move, seconded by the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave now to revert for nonpolitical statements? [agreed]

NONPOLITICAL STATEMENT

Concordia Adult Day Club

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Madam Speaker, I rise to recognize the new Concordia Adult Day Club opened on October 20 in the constituency of Radisson in the East Kildonan area. I want to congratulate the Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing Centres, which is sponsored by the Lions Club of Winnipeg, for this exciting health service for seniors.

The adult day club will provide social, physical, recreational, educational activities designed to enhance the quality of life for all members and to enable each member to maximize his or her potential. There will be up to 80 members from the East Kildonan-Transcona area who will be picked up and provided with the services of a well-trained staff and participate in a wide range of activities.

* (1430)

The emphasis for this centre is intergenerational, and it shows clearly that the community can participate to ensure that seniors are not isolated. It recognizes that health is not merely the absence of illness, but it is about quality of life. This excellent preventative health initiative is important to the community, and I wish to extend successful best wishes for the staff, participants, the community volunteers, the administration, of this much-needed preventative health program for the East Kildonan-Transcona area. Thank you.

House Business

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the indulgence of the member for Radisson to allow the Minister of Family Services to introduce her bill.

Madam Speaker, the other day I inadvertently referred Bill 28 to the Economic Development committee for its meeting on Thursday, October 26 at 9 a.m. This bill should not have been referred there. It should be considered by Committee of the Whole which I will call next week. So that correction can be made. Bill 28 should not go to the Economic Development committee for Thursday, October 26.

Madam Speaker, in light of the fact that today is civic election day throughout the province, there might be a willingness amongst members to conclude our proceedings today at four o'clock.

Madam Speaker: Is that the will of the House? [agreed]

Point of Order

Mr. Ernst: On a point of order. I am having a great deal of difficulty hearing myself speak.

Madam Speaker: The honourable government House leader indeed does have a point of order. I was having great difficulty hearing you speak as well.

* * *

Mr. Ernst: Would you call Bills 18, 23, 34 and 36.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 18—The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume debate on second reading on Bill 18, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'habitation et de rénovation), on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Urban Affairs and Housing (Mr. Reimer), standing in the name of the honourable member for Swan River.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): I would like to take a few moments to put my comments on this bill and my concerns with what is happening with Manitoba public housing in this province. In Manitoba we have a large number of people who live in public housing, in fact, some 20,000 people. We have long waiting lists of people who would like to get into public housing.

When you look at the rate of income of many people in this province, we have people who live on very meager incomes, and we recognize that these people will never be able to own their own homes. Therefore, it is very, very important that we do have public housing available for these people, and it is important that housing be kept in a reasonable state.

Unfortunately, when I look at the public housing in my constituency, this has not happened. Some of the public housing units are in very poor condition. I have had many phone calls from people in my constituency who have had a terrible time when it comes to getting their homes repaired.

I think that is something that this government should take very seriously, recognize the fact that there are people who have to live in public housing because they cannot afford it, but also that there should be a good quality of home there. Unfortunately, this government has—rather than increasing and upgrading the quality of housing that is owned by this government, we have seen a downgrade since 1990.

In fact, in 1991 this government abolished the volunteer housing boards and replaced them with the

Manitoba Housing Authority and cut back on many of the employees that were under Manitoba housing, and that did not lead to a better quality of housing stock.

I think that it is very important that we do have volunteers and that we also look at ways that we can involve the tenants who live in these homes, that they are involved in the upkeep of the homes, that they are involved in having some say in how the homes are operated.

Bill 18 will change the structure and the membership of Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation from a board of five senior civil servants appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor plus a minister as a chair and a deputy minister as vice-chair to a committee of between five and 15 members who are appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor plus a minister as a chair and a deputy minister as vice-chair, to a committee between five and 15 members who are appointed by Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council who may also designate the chair and vice-chair.

So what we have here is—[interjection] The minister says this is more public participation, but I have to wonder whether this is more public participation or less. He has to appoint a board, and I wonder why, if he wanted public participation, why his government eliminated all those volunteer boards that were in place prior to 1991, where that was a real opportunity for the minister to have public participation. So I think that we have some concerns with what the government is doing, and we really view this as a move towards privatization of the Manitoba Housing stocks.

Madam Speaker, I want to just relate to people in my constituency who are in Manitoba Housing units. As I said, there is a large number of units spread out throughout the constituency. In Swan River, there is a very large number of units.

I have to say that in 1991, the people were very disappointed with the move that was made by this government to not put a regional office in Swan River, and they felt that the government was being very political when they put the regional office in Roblin. There was a big concern that this was going to make it more difficult for seniors to make contact with the

Housing office, and, in fact, it did for a little while. It was very difficult because it was all long-distance charges. That has been corrected; we now have a toll-free number into the area, but there is still not the close contact and not the involvement of the local people in the Housing Authority that we used to have prior to the dismantling of the volunteer boards by this government.

So I think that the government must really look at involving people more in how the Housing operations are run, and I think that we have to look at tenants' associations so that they can have some say. I hope that the minister will consider that.

The other area where we have—there is a large number of housing units in the outlying areas, and I know that the minister became aware of the problems in the NACC communities. In fact, I believe he visited the Pelican Rapids community to address some of the concerns, unfortunately, not all of the concerns, and I will be bringing to the minister's attention problems that still do exist because there are some very serious problems.

It seems to be that when contractors go out to these outlying areas, they do the work and then cannot be held accountable because they are gone. I think what we really have to look at is more involvement of local people, and, again, by forming tenant associations, people start to take pride in their own homes that they are living in. If they are involved in the repair of these works, if there is some way we could look at having local people involved in the upgrading and the maintenance—not only the maintenance of the houses per se, but the properties as well—I think we could develop extreme pride in some of these communities. That is something we should see, I would hope that this minister would consider.

In some of these communities we see a Manitoba Housing unit put up, but there is very little done with respect to landscaping of the properties, and you could not get away with this if you were in a larger town. For example, if you were in Swan River or in Dauphin or in Winnipeg and a Manitoba Housing building was put up, the landscaping would be done very nicely, and it would be done to enhance the facility, but this does not

happen in the remote communities. I know that the minister saw first-hand the community of Pelican Rapids, and he will no doubt agree with me that there has to be much more work done to enhance the appearance of the property.

These are public properties we have, and we should be doing much more to make them more attractive and encourage people to take pride. That is why I think it is important that we have tenant associations and put some responsibility on the tenants and encourage them to have some involvement in the appearance and the quality of the level these are homes are maintained. I think even, as I had indicated, with the upgrading of units, there is no reason why outsiders have to come in to do that work. There should be some incentive, some possible way that the local people can be involved in it.

* (1440)

The other area that I want to express some concern with is seniors. There are many seniors living in public housing units, and they are on low incomes. Again, it is very difficult for them in some of these units.

In another one of my constituencies, there are seniors who I do not believe were treated very fairly. That is in the community of Mafeking. When their homes were being renovated they were told on very short notice that they had to leave their houses. No alternate housing was put in place for them. They just had to go. I think, when the department is doing work like that and upgrading seniors units, that they must be more sensitive to the people who are living in these units. We ended up having to call the department and tell them that some of the people they were asking to evacuate their homes really had no place else to go.

When we are dealing with anyone that is living in public housing, we have to be sensitive of their circumstances, but in particular we have to be very sensitive to the fact that when seniors are asked to move out of their homes, it is very disruptive. They are very set in their ways, and, if it is not handled in a proper manner, indeed it can cause problems as it did in this area. The problem was worked out, and the people were compensated for having to move into hotels. But, again, I think that it could have been

handled much better, and, again, we do owe that to our seniors.

But, Madam Speaker, many people who live in public housing are on very low incomes, and actions taken by this government have certainly not helped those people. In particular, we have seen an increase in rent from 25 to 27 percent. You may say 2 percent is not that great, and that is true when it is somebody who has maybe a two-income family or somebody who is on a decent salary. But when you look at our seniors who are living on very minimal income or when you look at people who are on minimum wage, a 2 percent increase in their rent is very, very great and on lower incomes, this ends up just having a much greater negative effect than it will be on a higher income. Now that we have property tax credits counted in it as income for the first time, this has raised rents even further and it has actually taken over \$300,000 out of low-income families. Again, this is having a negative effect on people on low incomes.

We are very pleased that following the petitions that our members got going and press conferences that were held in Brandon and Winnipeg, the government realized that they had made mistakes and finally set up an appeal panel, an appeal process for those people who are being hit so hard by these increases that made it impossible for them to survive. I guess this increase in rent, Madam Speaker, also affects people who were staying in personal care homes. That is the one place where we saw the terrible effect, where we saw senior citizens, who are, of course, on a fixed income, left with a very small amount of money, not even enough money to buy gifts for their grandchildren if they wanted to, not even the funds to provide the necessities of life. I can certainly relate this to my own experience because in fact we had my husband's parents who were in seniors' homes, and, because of actions taken by this government, their pensions—because they were a couple sharing a room, their rate was different. In fact, they did not have the funds from month to month to cover their expenses.

When we tried to appeal this, we were told that what we could do is apply for social assistance. In fact, many seniors were forced to apply for social assistance because of actions taken by this government. With our

family, we chose to go the other route, and it was the family that had to supplement my husband's parents in this particular case, because the funds that they got from their pension did not meet the costs that were imposed on them by this increase in rent that this government has imposed.

So certainly not a fair action on the part of this government, and I think a lack of sensitivity on the part of the government to realize that there are people who are very limited in their resources. I think it is extremely unfair when you hear that the government increases the rent to public housing and hurts our seniors. I guess we also see the same thing happening with people who are on social assistance here in Winnipeg who have very high rents and are ending up using their food allowance to stay in their homes, and that is certainly not fair to our children.

It is very important that our children have a healthy diet, and our view on healthy children was outlined in our platform where we think that keeping children healthy is a preventative health care service and one that will save us millions of dollars down the road. But when we see people having to take their food allowance and spend it on housing costs, that certainly does not make for a very healthy environment for our children to live in.

The other areas I wanted to talk about, again in my constituency are the communities of Duck Bay and Camperville. Certainly in Camperville we have a Housing Authority that has done an excellent job in getting homes built in the area. Although there is a long waiting list in that community, the Housing Authority has done a good job of persuading the government that they do need homes in that community. But in the community of Duck Bay, which is another NACC community, we have an extreme shortage of housing. It seems impossible to convince the government, and now that we are not going to have any more new housing units built, it is a real problem for people. When we see—[interjection] No, it is fine. I hope you are feeling well, too, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the member across the way mentioned MERLIN. I am speaking about the housing in Duck Bay, but I do have to say that unfortunately,

because of actions taken by this government, I am sure people in Duck Bay will never have the opportunity to access distance education unless we get some positive action.

* (1450)

I hope I am wrong, and I really sincerely hope that we will see the day when we will have the opportunity for good quality housing and the opportunity for people to be involved in their local tenant association so that they can be involved in repairing their homes. I think it is very important. If that is involved, then we will see a better quality of home, Madam Speaker.

I believe that the plan of this bill is to streamline the Housing Authority and the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation and allow it to be privatized, and that is a real serious risk. If the government is planning to privatize the housing units, then what is going to happen to all of these people? If these units fall into the hands of private owners, what is going to happen to these people who are on very low incomes? Are they going to become at the mercy of private landlords? Where we see private landlords, people end up living in very poor conditions, and I would hope that the government is not looking at privatizing these units and, in fact, will look at enhancing the quality of the housing units that we have here in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, we should not be surprised that this government is looking at privatizing their housing units when we see that the federal government, Conservative government, moved in that direction. It is a great disappointment that the government would consider lowering the quality of life of people who live in public housing, but at the same time is prepared to pick up the salaries of expensive hockey players and prepared to subsidize the hockey teams, but not prepared to improve the quality of life of people who, by circumstances that they have been caught in, do not have the ability to build their own home.

I am sure, Madam Speaker, you have had the opportunity to see some of these communities, but, if you have not, I would invite you to come to some of the communities that I represent, where there is very, very high unemployment, no opportunity for job

creation, except for a few promises that we heard during campaigns.

You know, I mentioned the community of Duck Bay. During the campaign, we heard all kinds of promises that we were going to have economic development in that area. Had that economic development really taken place, then people would not have to worry so much about having public housing to live in. But those were just election promises, and I am sure none of the members across the way would even pretend that they could carry out these promises, such as having a rafter-building business come into Duck Bay and create all these jobs.

But if that were to become a reality and we would have these jobs in Duck Bay and some of those other communities, we would not have to worry about people who have no jobs, people worrying about what kind of housing they are going to live in. But we have many places—

An Honourable Member: Give them trees; let them build their own homes.

Ms. Wowchuk: —across the province where this is happening. The Minister of Natural Resources says, give them trees and let them build their houses. If the Minister of Natural Resources would come up with a program like that—and I know he has done it for one community—there would be an opportunity for some more people to build homes.

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Natural Resources): I offered Pukatawagan 10,000 cubic metres.

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, the minister offered logs to Pukatawagan, and I congratulate him for recognizing that there is a housing shortage. He has to recognize also that providing the logs is only one part of the solution. I am not familiar with Pukatawagan. I do not know whether they have a sawmill or whether they have the ability to process those logs. If they do, then good for them.

I look forward to hearing the minister coming out to other communities and offering that same program,

because certainly we have to look at how it is that we can provide housing for people that have a shortage.

I mentioned Duck Bay. I believe that there are some 30 families that are in need of housing there. In Camperville they are in need of housing.

I should tell the Minister of Housing (Mr. Reimer) that in Swan River right now there is also a need for housing. I hope that he is not looking at decreasing public housing in that area, that we continue to have the homes there. I would very much like to see an increase in the number of public housing units that will be available for people.

But again, Madam Speaker, it is becoming very difficult for people who are in public housing because of decisions made by this government to increase rents. That has hurt people in public housing very much. The change to put the property tax credit to be counted as income has hurt people in public housing.

The government does not seem to have very much sensitivity to the people who are on very low income and need housing. Actions that they have taken have further reduced their quality of life by taking away that additional 2 percent in rent. As I said, that 2 percent has resulted in another \$300,000 for government coffers, which is very little when you consider the whole budget, but for the people who are affected by this, it is a big difference.

It is a big difference when you are on a very minimal income when you have that extra 2 percent taken away. For seniors who are in public housing, this additional 2 percent may mean a difference as to whether they can go out for a meal or not. And for seniors to get out of their homes is very important. Many of them live in isolation. Their socialization is to go out for a meal. But that has changed under moves by this government to increase rent.

So I hope that the government will recognize that their actions to claw back, to increase rents, to take money away from seniors who are on fixed income is not a positive move, and it has hurt our seniors. It has also hurt our families, single mothers with young families who are on a fixed income. Those kinds of

increases in rent just show how insensitive this government is to people who are on low incomes.

I have talked to people who have said every little increase makes a difference, and it is going to matter. These little things make a difference as to whether their children can go on field trips with other children, and that is not fair. The government has to open their minds and recognize that increasing the rent, by even 2 percent, has a very negative impact on the low-income people in this family.

Madam Speaker, public housing is very important. We have many people who are living in public housing. We have many people who are suffering because they have to go into private housing which is at a much higher rate than they can afford. We have to ensure that we always have a good stock of public housing available for people who do not or cannot afford to purchase their own home. It is a responsibility that we have, and it is a way that we can bring a little bit of equality to people across this province. I want to say that it is very important that we maintain this housing stock, that we do not see cutbacks and that we do maintain the quality of these houses.

I want to commend the minister for listening to the people from the Northern Affairs communities when he went to their conference. They told him that there were problems with housing. I commend him for taking that trip out and addressing some of the concerns.

I want to remind him that there are still many other concerns out there, and there are a few specific cases that I will bring to his attention, but certainly I would hope that the minister also addresses the other problems that have been created by his department, particularly the problems of gearing the rent to increases and the increases in rent that have resulted from changing property taxes, including property tax credits in revenue. This has had a negative effect.

* (1500)

I would hope that the minister would consider those things and seriously look at what is happening to people who are living in low-income housing and

address those concerns and perhaps take a different direction than previous ministers have with respect to housing and ensure that those people who are in those homes do have the opportunity to have a quality of life.

Certainly the changes that are being proposed in this bill are not something that we see as positive moves, and we would like to see the government set up—the government took away the community involvement when they took away the volunteer boards. It is important that the people living in housing units have some ability to have a say, to be involved, so the change to remove the volunteer boards we believe was a negative move.

We hope that the government will consider a way to involve the tenants again, and the possibility of tenants' associations is certainly something that we would encourage the government to consider. I think it would be very healthy if we could see the tenants again involved, having some say in how the units that they are living in are operating. That would be a very positive move.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I would like to say that there are problems with this legislation and not a positive move. If this is a move towards privatizing housing units, we would not be supporting such a move.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, very briefly on this particular bill, there are some concerns that we do have. I can recall, being first elected in '88, the government's approach to dealing with some of the many—I think it was over 140—different Housing Authorities or boards, if you like, and having the opportunity to have discussions with numerous people who were on these boards. Then the idea came about to develop the Manitoba Housing Authority in order to replace the boards, and there was again a lot of concern.

The concern comes out of the fact that we want very much so for people to get involved, in particular the tenants of the different nonprofit housing units, in excess of 20,000 housing units that are scattered through, not all of which obviously Manitoba Housing Authority is responsible for. We do feel relatively

optimistic that there are other ways in which we can ensure that there is tenant participation. In fact, this bill can be positive if the intentions of government are to have the one authority—or governing body if you like—while at the same time promoting the development of tenant groups within the many different nonprofit housing complexes.

I personally would compliment, actually not only this Minister of Housing but the former Minister of Housing in particular, in working with the tenants groups in Gilbert Park, an area in which I represent, and in fact that is the agenda of the government—and I have no reason to believe that that is not, given the sort of reception that I have personally had and the tenants in terms of being able to express their concerns to the Minister of Housing—it can be a movement in the right direction.

With that one caveat, Madam Speaker, we do not have any problem with this particular bill going to the committee stage but would really emphasize the importance of the development and promotion of strong tenant groups in Manitoba Housing units. Thank you very much.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Committee Change

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I have a change for the committee. I made an error earlier.

I move, seconded by the member for Riel (Mr. Newman), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Agriculture be amended as follows: the member for Morris (Mr. Pitura) for the member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay).

Motion agreed to.

House Business

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on a matter of House business, I would call the Law Amendments committee for Monday, October 30, at 10 a.m. to consider Bills 19 and 20.

I believe there is a will of the House to call it six o'clock.

Madam Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it six o'clock? [agreed]

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 25, 1995

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