Fourth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 2, 2010

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 235–The Cemeteries Amendment Act

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), that Bill 235, The Cemeteries Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, 104 years ago legislation was brought into effect placing a $4 minimum and a $40 maximum fine for vandalism in a cemetery. The fine levels have not been changed since 1938. Bill 235 would increase the amount to not less than $1,000 and not more than $2,000, bringing Manitoba more in line with the present-day realities of the cost of repairing damage and vandalism to tombstones and cemeteries, which are sacred sites where our loved ones are laid to rest.

I recommend this legislation to the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PETITIONS

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

This is signed by K. Hay, D. Unrau, K. Armstrong and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Health care has approved that the use of 'revlimin' for patients with multiple 'mylomie'–myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is a treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already

listed that this drug on their respective pharmacare formulas.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

This is signed by D. Johnston, V. Spence and I. Spence and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bipole III

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba Hydro has been forced by the NDP government to construct its new–its next high-voltage direct transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of the–of Manitoba, a decision for which the NDP government has not been able to provide any logical justification.

Since this will cost Manitoba ratepayers at least 640 million more than an east-side route, and given that the Province of Manitoba is facing its largest deficit on record, the burden of this extra cost could not come at a worse time.

Between 2002 and 2009 electricity rates increased by 16 percent, and Manitoba Hydro has filed a request for further rate increases totalling 6 percent over the next two years.

A western Bipole III route will invariably lead to more rate increases.

In addition to being cheaper, an east-side route would be hundreds of kilometres shorter and would be more reliable than a west-side route.

West-side residents have not been adequately consulted and have identified serious concerns with the proposed line.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider proceeding with the cheaper, shorter and more logical east-side route, subject to necessary regulatory approvals, to save ratepayers hundreds of millions of dollars during these challenging economic times.

This petition is signed by P. Gillies, A. Gillies, D. Richardson and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from the Westdale School, we have 45 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Caroline Josephson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

Also in the public gallery we have from Horizons Adult Learning Centre, we have 20 students under the direction of Ms. Tara Debreuil. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister for Conservation (Mr. Blaikie).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Economy
Provincial Comparisons

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the capacity of our province to create jobs for young Manitobans and to balance the budget at the same time as we protect social programs is a function of the strength of our Manitoba economy. Absent a strong economy we're not able to do all of those things that are important to families in Manitoba.

That's why we're concerned today that information released this morning by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business shows that for the fourth month in a row, Manitoba's economic outlook, the Business Barometer, is below the national average, and that as of this month we're not first, second or third in Canada, neither are we fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh or eighth or ninth, Mr. Speaker. We're in 10th place in Canada today as of today's survey.

***** (13:40)

I want to ask the Premier how it is that Manitoba can be in 10th place in Canada in terms of our economic prospects when we have so many needs in our community, including jobs and social programs which need to be fulfilled.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): That is exactly why we put forward our five-year plan to move Manitoba forward. That is exactly why we have invested in education, to allow people to access higher quality, better paying jobs. That is exactly why this year we will be the first tax-free zone for small business in Canada. Up to $400,000, it will be zero. That is exactly why this year we are phasing out the capital tax, and that is why we are working with the federal government on a stimulus program that will generate 29,000 person-years of employment in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the five-year plan has been immediately followed by the lowest business confidence rating in all of Canada. That's the verdict on his failure on the negative five-year plan, the sinkhole of debt, the rising deficits, the new taxes on food, the hikes in hydro rates, the increases in taxes across the board, Bill 31, which focusses only on protecting NDP ministers' salaries and independent businesses. The engine of the economy are indicating now, as of today, that they have the most pessimistic outlook in Canada when it comes to Manitoba's economy. If you look at western Canada, Manitoba's rating is now below 60 and all three provinces to the west of us are over 70, the three provinces that are part of the New West Partnership.

I want to ask the Premier again: Why is he leaving us out of the New West Partnership? Why is he allowing our western neighbours to race ahead and leave Manitoba in the dust economically, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, when you have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, you are providing Manitobans with opportunities to make a labour market income to support their families. We are looked at with envy by all other provinces in terms of our unemployment rate. We are also working with other provinces on things that are to our mutual benefit, whether it's Saskatchewan with issues like energy, whether it's Alberta with issues like security regulation, whether it's with British Columbia on labour market issues or climate change. The reality is that–in this survey that the member put forward–the shortages of both skilled and semi-skilled labour were identified as constraints. That was their No. 1 constraint. That is why we're investing in education. That is why we're investing in apprenticeships. That is why we're going to increase the high school graduation rate, and all of these measures are opposed by members opposite.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely opposed to Manitoba being No. 10 in Canada when it comes to our economic performance. We are opposed to a budget that sends a negative signal to people who want to invest. We are opposed to a government that wants to isolate Manitoba from our western neighbours. We're in favour of growth. We're in favour of moving ahead. We're in favour of being part of western trade agreements. We're in favour of the–of living within our means and protecting social programs.

I want to ask the Premier why it is that he has allowed a situation to arise where Manitoba has slid, not just into the bottom half of the country, but dead last in Canada, lower than the Canadian average for four months in a row. Mr. Speaker, why is he enacting policies that are failing Manitoba and failing to tap in to the untapped potential of this great province?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, let's be absolutely clear, the policies that the member just enunciated would've laid off front-line workers in health care. They would've laid off teachers in the classrooms and they would've taken police off the streets. That's what their policies–they never identified the implications of their policies.

Now the survey indicated that 43 percent of businesses in Manitoba say the overall state of business is good compared to 37 percent nationally; 47 percent say it is satisfactory compared to 46 percent nationally.

The reality is the small business environment in Manitoba is well supported with zero taxes on the first 40–$400,000 of income. It's supported by having the lowest unemployment rate in Canada as we go forward. It's supported by the education investments we are making, and it's supported by the stimulus spending which is generating 29,000 person-years of employment right now here in this province, and the members, again, have voted against it.

Economy
Small Business Outlook

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we're last in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we've known for years that this NDP government is anti-business and it's finally catching up to us in this province. In the latest CFIB Business Barometer, Manitoba small business owners are the least optimistic in Canada. And who's the most optimistic, you ask? You guessed it: Saskatchewan. Optimism leads to growth, growth leads to jobs–and we're last.

What policy is the Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade going to implement to bring back hope to the business community? Because everything that he's done to date is failing miserably.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Last I checked, during the last election, we were the only party that committed to increase apprenticeships and education funding in the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. And we committed to 4,000 apprenticeship spaces, $2 million for apprenticeships this year alone, with 600 new seats.

And one of the concerns that the business community has, Mr. Speaker, is skilled workers, and we're meeting that need by working with the sector councils, working with industry to ensure that they have skilled labour.

And I'm looking forward to providing more information for the member opposite in my next answer.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that the minister doesn't want to deal with reality.

The latest CFIB report says that we are last in the country in optimism in small business. We are behind everyone, including Nova Scotia and P.E.I. That's not something to be proud of. An index level of 65 to 75 means the economy is growing; Manitoba's index level is 59 and going down. Small and medium enterprises are the backbone of our economy, and they are sending a direct message.

Is the minister not just a little bit concerned?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, Mr. Speaker, with the many businesses that I've had the opportunity to meet in my short tenure as ETT Minister, there's a tremendous amount of optimism in this province of Manitoba.

And perhaps the member should look at what other reports that we've had of late, including the KPMG report that came out in March of 2010, which talked about Winnipeg being ranked first among 22 cities–up from third in 2008–in North American midwest cities, with a 6.1 percent advantage in comparative business costs, Mr. Speaker.

And if you look at what the Conference Board of Canada has said as well: Despite the difficult fiscal situation, public infrastructure investment totalling $1.8 billion will go ahead, which will benefit the construction sector and help support the economic recovery. What matters most is that people have jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be in a province that has the lowest unemployment rate in Canada right now.

Mr. Borotsik: You know, isn't that just wonderful, Mr. Speaker? When the minister can cherry-pick all those wonderful comments that he just quoted–cherry-pick. Cherry-pick, because in 2007, in the budget speech of 2007, they quoted the CFIB because at that point in time they had good statistics. But CFIB just came out yesterday with their report. Now we're last in the country.

All of a sudden he can cherry-pick the good comments, but doesn't want to deal with realities. Is it because the business community is sending a message to him that he doesn't want to listen to? Is it because they don't know anything about business, Mr. Speaker, or is it simply because they don't care about business?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, as the former operator of a small business for 15 years, Mr. Speaker, I find it rather interesting that he says we know nothing about business on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Brandon West is waiting impatiently to hear the answer, so let's give him the courtesy to hear it. *[interjection]* Order. Let's have a little co-operation here.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I'd also like to mention–perhaps the member from Brandon West isn't aware, but in his own community our commitment to improve apprenticeship opportunities for people in Brandon is

more than doubling, from 600 to 1,300 in Brandon alone, at Assiniboine Community College.

***** (13:50)

And, Mr. Speaker, the training opportunities that we're providing throughout Manitoba–not only in rural Manitoba, northern Manitoba with the University College of the North–our investments in education have spoken volumes to our commitment to having a skilled, trained labour force in this country.

And members opposite, when they talked about the public school sector, which, of course, feeds into post-secondary education, they were only going to put $10 million into elite schools, not look at the entire system where there is need. We govern for all–

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Child and Family Services Agencies Devolution Legislation

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): And, Mr. Speaker, Gage Guimond's tragic death was a direct result of this NDP government's rush to implement legislation without the proper checks and balances in place. The minister and his colleagues are responsible for the creation of a system that failed Gage Guimond.

When will this Minister of Family Services show some leadership and ensure the safety and best interests of children come first?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Both safety and best interests of the children are first, Mr. Speaker, and we've reinforced that as a result of Gage's law passed in this Chamber.

I ask the member: I understand yesterday in the hallways, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) said that the opposition had opposed devolution, Mr. Speaker, and we find that a rather strange rewriting of history. I was in the Legislature when the opposition rose with the government and unanimously supported devolution. In fact, I have a vague recollection of the minister of the day working very collegially, actually, with the opposition to make sure that there was a comfort level with all aspects of the legislation, which I assume is why the members opposite so whole-heartedly endorsed devolution.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But we supported devolution process that's managed properly and protects children, not the one that was implemented by this government. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate legislation is not worth the paper it's written on if it's not being followed, and the legislation protecting and putting the safety of children first has not been followed by this NDP government.

Does he believe, Mr. Speaker, that it's in the best interests of a child to be removed from a long-term foster family, which has loved and nurtured that child, to an extended family that the child does not even know?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, I also understand that the Leader of the Opposition yesterday rewrote history a second time and said that it was after the 2003 election when devolution was brought in. It was actually after the 1999 election. No wonder they think it was rushed; they took three or four years off the process.

But in terms of the safety of the children, Mr. Speaker, the–there are far too many children, both in care and with their natural parents, who die from many causes in this province, and efforts are under way and have to be redoubled to enhance the safety of our children. As a former minister who saw child after child die in foster care under her watch, without devolution around, who did she blame then?

Mrs. Mitchelson: But I want to reiterate again: it was legislation that this NDP government brought in that wasn't implemented properly, that saw Gage Guimond die in the hands of a foster family that didn't want him. And, Mr. Speaker, this government has to accept some responsibility. Actions speak louder than words.

When will this minister show some leadership and stand up and send a directive that children will not be removed from loving foster families and placed with extended family that they don't know and we know is not in the best interests of children?

Mr. Mackintosh: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the child in question–it was a matter that the member brought to our attention last week–in fact, was not removed from the foster parents in question, but the–here's an interesting statement, and I'll quote: The Department of Family Services has introduced standards which require a Family Services agency to place a high priority on ensuring that Aboriginal children are placed with family or extended family, other families within the child's community of origin or other families of the same tribal council or region as the

child. Those aren't my words. Those are the words of the member who just asked the question, June 30, 1999.

But this Legislature has reinforced the fundamental rule and principle that while culture is important, safety is job one.

Sexually Transmitted Infections
Increased Rates in Youth

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): And I'm getting people from the other side of this House who are chirping when there's some very serious issues being presented from this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the rate of STIs among youth in Winnipeg has skyrocketed. From 2000 to 2008 there was a 239 percent increase in the number of people with chlamydia and a 243 percent increase in the number of people with gonorrhea. The bulk of these new cases are among the youth aged 15 to 24, and it was recently revealed that youth know virtually nothing about gonorrhea and chlamydia and feel uncomfortable getting these facts on safe sex from their teacher and their parents.

Can the Minister of Healthy Living explain why the reproductive health of our youth has gotten so much–has gone so wrong under this government's watch, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): Mr. Speaker, it is a serious issue and we take it seriously on this side of the House. I'm pleased that we had an initiative like the *Little Black Book*, which provided all youth information on STIs. And that went out, and I remember that the members opposite were against that initiative.

I also am pleased that we're testing more people. I think it's really important to expand the testing to make sure that people are aware that they should be tested because it is an important public health issue, and on this side of the House we're encouraging people to get tested. We're providing information on the testing and these diseases, and because of that people are taking action. And I'm pleased to see that people are more aware of the issue and more people are–

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, the minister is talking about after the fact. This minister has no problem spending over $2 million on a Spirited Energy campaign saying they're educating the province. Well, we need some education for our youth.

Mr. Speaker, this minister has done little and it's a little too late. In fact, no one within this government wants to take responsibility. A WHL report blamed the rise in infections on the lack of consistent education in schools. Meanwhile, the Department of Education says there are no gaps in the reproductive education provided to students.

Why is no one within this NDP government willing to take responsibility for the skyrocketing rates in STDs among our youth, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased I'm part of a government that now has established 12 clinics in rural Manitoba and 22 in Winnipeg, and these clinics are providing information to young people on healthy sexuality.

They're talking about STIs, and, Mr. Speaker, those clinics were not present or in any part of the opposition's government. So in other words, we've expanded the public health information. We've worked with many providers to expand teen clinics and healthy sexuality information.

And, Mr. Speaker, these are all initiatives that have been very progressive and supported by this part–side of the House and opposed by the members opposite. So we are interested in helping people–

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a gap between announcements and results. It seems the more announcements they make the worse the results.

Manitoba has some of the highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea infections in all of Canada, and it keeps getting worse. This NDP government has very clearly demonstrated that the reproductive health of our young and our youth is not a priority.

***** (14:00)

The PR campaign launched by the WRHA encouraged youths to get tested for STIs, but has nothing to educate the youth about how to prevent them. Meanwhile, the WRHA and the Department of Education are shifting responsibility for these alarming statistics–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can barely hear the question. Order. Let's have some decorum.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With an increase of 239 percent of people having chlamydia and 243 percent increase in the number of people with gonorrhea, why will the Minister of Health not show leadership? When will he start taking responsibility for preventing these diseases from infecting young Manitobans in the first place, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Rondeau: I'm very happy that the member opposite actually referred to the public campaign to get people tested because that is when people get tested and then they know what their health is.

And I'm also pleased to be part of a government that supports the teen clinics which was not done when the Conservatives were government. And I'm also pleased to say that there are appropriate places in the curriculum that healthy sexuality is discussed and that, Mr. Speaker, leads to positive health messages.

And we have looked at the whole issue of prevention. We're encouraging people to get tested. We're encouraging the whole idea of healthy sexuality. And, Mr. Speaker, the teen clinics are having a good effect on STIs; decreasing them, getting people tested and on teenage pregnancy. I'm pleased that this side of the House believes in those proactive measures.

Cemetery Vandalism
Fine Amounts

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that the desecration of a tombstone or the vandalism of a cemetery is a senseless crime that dishonours and disrespects the memory of our departed loved ones.

Can the minister indicate if he feels that a fine between $4 and $40 is an acceptable punishment for cemetery vandalism?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): No, I don't and I don't think a fine of $1,000 is good enough either for heinous desecration, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schuler: Well, Mr. Speaker, these fines have been on the books since 1906, over 104 years ago. This government has amended numerous fines, yet, it hasn't touched these fines even after numerous acts of cemetery vandalism.

Mr. Speaker, cemeteries are sacred places where we remember our loved ones who have departed. Will the minister support Bill 235 which recognizes the respect our cemeteries deserve?

Mr. Mackintosh: As the member has been advised, and I thank him for his interest in cemetery issues on behalf of a constituent, but as the member knows, The Cemeteries Act is being rewritten for introduction to this House. It is out of date and for no small reason because of the completely out-of-date fines.

Of course, there are other options available to police. But, Mr. Speaker, the act has to send a message, and with this private member's bill, I don't see a message in here that is appropriate to what is a terribly damaging event. It is not a mere mischief, Mr. Speaker, it is, indeed, heinous desecration. And I also disagree, not only with the amount that is set out here; it should be more, but it's not enough for monies just to go by way of fine to general revenues. The families who have to repair those monuments, as well, should be entitled to restitution and that will be in our legislation.

Mr. Schuler: Great to see that the minister woke up to this issue, Mr. Speaker, because last year on Halloween vandals damaged St. Boniface Cathedral Cemetery causing over $5,000 worth of damage.

Bill 235 increases fines for individuals who desecrate the resting place of our loved ones. The minister seems to indicate he's prepared to support this legislation with some amendments. Certainly, we will accept that with amendments, Mr. Speaker, if the minister is so bold to accept it.

Will he and his colleagues vote for Bill 235, The Cemeteries Amendment Act that has not been amended for 104 years, of which a large part the minister was a member of this Legislature and never, never woke up, not as a member of the opposition and not as a minister. Finally, now he's on the issue. Will he support this piece of legislation?

Mr. Mackintosh: I thought he said the legislation hadn't been touched, not for 10 years but for 100 years, and I wonder where he was, Mr. Speaker. I mean, it's time to fix up this bill.

Actually, this is the most pathetic–I mean, this is not anything near what has to take place. It's fundamentally flawed. We can't just approach this by, you know, doing some indexing of inflation and

putting it in here. There has to be legislation that is based on the whole notion of restitution, and it's not good enough that a fine for damaging one headstone be the same for damaging all of them. And then he says there was $5,000 damage. There's nothing in here to give restitution. This is a pitiful little piece of paper.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I've only been here a few years, and I know decorum is very important, so.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have some order here. Order. We want some respect and dignity of this House that we're very fortunate to be sent by our constituents. Order.

Bill 234
Government Support

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. By the chatter over there, the government is genuinely embarrassed.

Mr. Speaker, when Manitobans go shopping they expect clear, fair and constructive laws to protect them as consumers. Yet, this NDP government negotiated a loophole that excludes shopping centres from a law prohibiting retailers from reducing the balance on gift cards through charges. Over three years ago, the Premier, then minister for Consumer and Corporate Affairs, made the conscious decision to exclude shopping malls from the legislation.

Can the minister please explain why the NDP government is putting the requests of shopping centres before the protection of Manitobans?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): First, Mr. Speaker–and perhaps I should have tabled in the House our five-year strategy for stronger consumer protection called Let's Make a Better Deal. And I want to just take the moment, as well, I think, on behalf of all members of the House, a hearty thank-you to Monty Hall for lending his trademark to that. And I hate to take time just on this alone, so I want to deal with the answer, but when asked if–what compensation he would seek for use of that trademark, he said he just wanted a scholarship at his old high school. And I think that speaks so highly to his spirit of generosity.

The legislation that was introduced by the member, Mr. Speaker, would kill the popular mall gift cards that we have in Manitoba, just like it's doing in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia. I say shame–

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Faurschou: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously this government did make a deal and deal with the shopping malls over the protection of Manitoba consumers.

And offering up a five-year plan when this legislation has been on the books for over three years, and it was a review by this government. This government actually conducted a review about the gift card, whether or not the gift card was acting in the–in protection of the Manitoba consumers. Yet this government took no action whatsoever to protect consumers and close this loophole.

What is this government intending to do?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, as soon as our gift card legislation was introduced, even with just the inactivity fees after a year, Polo Park, our largest mall, stopped issuing a shopping mall gift cards, which was a real loss to consumers because those shopping mall gift cards allow consumers to go to many different vendors, and if one closes down they don't lose their shopping–their card.

But, Mr. Speaker, legislation that banned inactivity fees, as the member is trying to do–in Saskatchewan the shopping malls there are discontinuing their shopping mall cards. And Nova Scotia, within 10 days of that legislation coming into force, the shopping malls in Nova Scotia are shutting down their cards.

And I should remind members, they should go to the Web site that's called bring back our shopping mall gift cards, because there's a–now a strategy in Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker, to undo the damage that was caused by legislation just like this member is now proposing. This should be called the gift card elimination act; that's what it's going to do.

Mr. Faurschou: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister answered the question so far as it doesn't matter whether the loophole exists or doesn't exist; the shopping cards are disappearing anyway. What is incumbent upon we, as legislators, to protect consumers, consumers from being charged fees that are outrageous and unwarranted.

***** (14:10)

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe I've–the government's already asked, but I will ask–answered the question, but I will ask anyway: Will this government support Bill 234 and protect consumers against charges that are unwarranted?

Mr. Mackintosh: You don't protect consumers, Mr. Speaker, by taking away a consumer's choice. Consumers like shopping mall gift cards. This would do away with it.

There's one thing worse than shopping mall inactivity fees–shopping mall card inactivity's fees. There's one thing worse than those fees and that's no shopping card at all, and that's what that legislation would do. It's been proven in other jurisdictions and by Polo Park pulling out, even with the limited legislation that we have.

Child and Family Services Agencies
Tabling of Document Request

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): What is very clear is that this government, in particular the minister that just gave his response, Mr. Speaker, and let's be very clear on this point: This government has in fact failed the children of our province.

I would like to give a quote, because I know this minister likes quotes, Mr. Speaker: Child welfare in Manitoba is in a state of chaos.

I would love to be able to table this particular report, but because the NDP have put the silence and they don't want this report tabled–why, we don't know. Maybe it's because it makes it look– *[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Remind the House that points of orders and matters of privilege are very serious matter, and when any member of the House rises I need to hear every word, because after the point of order has been addressed I have to make a ruling. So I ask the co-operation of members, please.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, from–

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, from his seat the member from Kildonan yelled across the floor that that is a lie, implying that when I said that I could not table this report that I was not telling the truth.

Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge, I am not able to table that report. If, in fact, the member from Kildonan is saying that I can table the report, I would like to table the report, because I do not–and I resent the fact that the member from Kildonan accused me of lying to this Chamber. If I can table it, please allow me to table the report.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the–that report that the member is referring to is under the authority of the legislative management assembly committee, and that is a decision of the legislative manage assembly committee in order to table or not table reports.

So, political parties do not have the say in whether a report is tabled or not. That's an inaccuracy. That's an inappropriate fact put forward by the member, and, Mr. Speaker, I understand in the Legislature it is our duty as members to bring accurate facts to the table. The member did not bring an accurate fact to the attention of this Chamber and, in fact, he has no point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable member–the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

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

And very briefly put, obviously the member from Kildonan should withdraw his remarks and apologize to the member from Inkster.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. On a point of order raised by the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), independent offices, when they do their annual report, it is tabled in the House, and I don't know what report the member is referring to, because I, as Chair of LAMC, don't recall any report going to–there's maybe submissions or proposals, but I don't know anything about a report.

But that's not the issue. The issue is members' use of languages–the use of language in the House, and I can honestly tell you that I did not hear the comments from members that are on the floor, and I think this would be a good opportunity to remind all members why it is very important to maintain decorum in the House, because if there is–order–because if there is words spoken that are unparliamentary, I, as Speaker, I need to hear them

in order to deal with them. And that's why I've asked many, many times for co-operation of members about the decorum in the House.

So, I did not hear the comment, but I want to caution all members at this moment that use of any kind of language that is derogatory or harmful to any member is not accepted by this House and by me as the Speaker. But like I said, I did not hear the comment, so I cannot make a ruling on it. But I'm going to ask the members for their co-operation, so that way, if there's anything that is said that is–order, please–that is harmful or derogatory to a member, give me the opportunity to hear it, please.

And I hope this points out the importance of why I have tried to get the members to maintain decorum, because it is very important, because members say things back and forth and with all–with the noise level I can't hear a thing. A lot of times I have difficulty hearing the questions and the answers, and I think this should be a good reminder to all of us as a collective why it is very important.

So I have to apologize to the honourable member. I did not hear the comment, so I cannot make a ruling on your point of order. But this should be a good reminder to all of us.

* * *

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'll go forward with my question and the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) can feel free to stand up at any point to apologize for his comments. Other members of this Chamber heard the comments.

Having said that, there is a quote: Child welfare in Manitoba is in a state of chaos. These are not my words. The Minister responsible for Family Services knows whose words they are.

Mr. Speaker, I'm asking the Minister of Family Services: Would he agree that this is a report that should in fact be tabled inside the Legislature?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Well, Mr. Speaker, the Children's Advocate has the very independent role in reporting publicly on any aspect under her mandate and including the well-being of the child welfare system and its effectiveness and the status of change that's under way, and she does that at her own volition by way of public reports, and we certainly take any public reports of the Children's Advocate most seriously.

In terms of the new interim children advocate–Children's Advocate, I certainly look forward to helping to ensure that she gets any briefings in terms of our action and outcomes that are under way should she request that, and, Mr. Speaker, we also note that there are several officers of the Legislature that have been watching the child welfare system very carefully and are noticing the improvements that are under way.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Family Services fails to protect the interest of the children of the province of Manitoba, I have no other option but to ignore that particular minister and look directly to the Premier and ask for the Premier to demonstrate some leadership on the issue.

***** (14:20)

And I look to the Premier and I ask the Premier: Will he do the right thing and instruct his Minister of Family Services to 'actognize' the value of having a discussion about the report in a standing committee, and will the Premier do the honourable thing and acknowledge the need to have a standing committee to immediately review the report that was being called into question in order to protect the interest of the children of our province, Mr. Speaker? Will the Premier do so?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that we are able to debate these matters of whether it's Child and Family Services, health-care, education, in the Legislature, whether it's through question period, whether it's through Estimates, whether through any other procedures the member wish to pursue which follow the laws that we operate under.

The Minister of Family Services has always been available to discuss matters related to his portfolio with all members of the Legislature. The minister has moved forward on significant measures to increase prevention services. The minister has moved forward to add more staffing to the Child and Family Service agencies. The minister has moved forward on audits and reviews, where required, to drill down and find out what issues have to be addressed. I think this minister has done an excellent job, and I know we all support him on this side of the House.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it has become, maybe, possibly, apparent that the Premier has not been provided a copy of the report, so I'll ask one of

the pages to provide a copy of the report, and I would highly recommend that the Premier give serious consideration to reading the document. And after reading the document, maybe, then, the Premier will recognize that it's time that the government protect the interests of the children of our province.

And, again, I ask the Premier of the province of Manitoba: Is he prepared to protect the children of this province by, at the very least, reading the report and, then, maybe, reflecting on whether or not there's a need for the government to take some action, because your action to date as a government has failed the children of this province, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Can I ask the page to–okay, I am going to address the House here, because now I see what the member has brought forward. This is not a report. This is a document that was a submission on behalf of the Children's Advocate to our Legislative Assembly Management Committee, and any submissions that are brought forward to our management committee are for the committee's use and to look at and study in order to either grant or to assist the committee in–order–and to help the committee in assessing the request of the submission.

These–this is not a public document. This is for LAMC purposes. And the reason we need that is because of the confidentiality that is maintained through our Legislative Assembly Management Committee, because we deal with a lot of very sensitive personal issues that pertain to a lot of the Legislative Assembly staff that are–that work here, that face–there are some very personal issues, and that is where it's dealt with, that's where it should be. This is not a report. This is a submission to LAMC to make a decision on a request on behalf of the Children's Advocate.

I would caution and warn about members of using documents that are for Legislative Assembly Management Committee. That is not the purpose of our meetings. So this document I will keep, because it is not public record, and I will hand it to the Clerk for safekeeping. And this is, like I said, used for us to determine a request that was submitted on behalf of the Children's Advocate. This is not a report–not a report. It's a submission to LAMC, not to the House, not to specific ministers, not to the government, not to opposition. It was a submission to LAMC for discussion purposes. And I'm very disappointed that this has happened.

The honourable member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff)–order–I'm sorry, the honourable Minister of Family Services has not answered the question.

Mr. Mackintosh: We respect your ruling, Mr. Speaker, but I'm just–was there a question there? I need some direction as to whether some answer was being solicited from this side.

Mr. Speaker: Will the honourable–if you want to pursue a question, you–we'll give–I'll give you the opportunity for your–to deal with your last subamendment, but I would throw a caution in there about the questions you were leading to.

An Honourable Member: On a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Family Services, on a point of order.

Mr. Mackintosh: There was a question already posed. I needed to know whether, in fact, you were recognizing that for an answer, not giving an opportunity for another question.

Mr. Speaker: Let's see what the honourable member for Inkster has to say because you're asking for a second supplementary question.

*** * ***

Mr. Lamoureux: I listened closely in terms of your comments. Mr. Speaker, my question was, in fact, to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and it was asking the Premier, in terms of–to recognize the important state of child welfare in the province of Manitoba and if, in fact, the Premier would give consideration maybe to then talk with the minister responsible for the child advocacy office and then report back to the House as to what kind of action he's prepared to take in order to ensure that there's more transparency in Family Services regarding children of the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Mackintosh: First, a very fundamental misunderstanding. The minister–this minister is not responsible for the children's advocacy office**,** as he calls it. The Office of the Children's Advocate, an independent office of the Legislature–the member should get the basic organizational chart out of how this place functions.

Mr. Speaker, what we can't comment on is what independent officers of the Legislature do say publicly.

The Auditor General of Manitoba has recently reviewed the child welfare system from many points

of view and she said on March 24, 2010 in standing committee, and I don't think the member–you know, if he wants some debate, I don't remember him asking any questions about this. But she said, I'm extremely impressed with the amount of energy and effort thats gone into addressing not just our reports, but those that have been issued by the Ombudsman, the Children's Advocate. They've certainly been faced with a large number of issues that they've had to deal with. Those that we've had to follow up, we've seen real action. We've seen real improvement.

Even the Saskatchewan Children's Advocate says the Manitoba example shows that this issue can be solved. There just needs to be the collective, political and administrative will to do so.

Mr. Speaker, those are public comments from independent officers.

Rural and Northern Development
Government Initiatives

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, members of the opposition, in the last election, promised little in the way of improvements to agriculture and rural and northern development.

Based on remarks recently made by the MLA for Carman, we now know that this will be their approach in the next election as well, where he said that the Tories will put less focus on issues such as health care, roads, social services, agriculture, rural depopulation and First Nations. He said, we're not going to win elections on those issues.

This government has done a lot in regard to rural and northern development and I would like to ask the Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines if he could share with the House the kinds of economic development that has been happening both in rural and northern Manitoba?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): I had the occasion yesterday to meet with AMM to talk about rural and northern Manitoba and they were–they actually took notes and they want us to give them this information. You know, Mr. Speaker, we don't often go out and brag because we know that Manitobans just want action.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, the oil industry has invested $1.5 billion in the last five years in southern Manitoba. Half a billion dollars is going into wind farms in rural Manitoba. The $200-million investment in Minnedosa and rural Manitoba has resulted in 350,000 tonnes of feedstock from local Manitobans being used in Manitoba, plus 120,000 tonnes of distillers grain.

Flooding
Drain Licence Application Wait Times

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, agricultural producers have told us that they've spent upwards of $15,000 on laser technology to undertake proper field drainage on their farm.

***** (14:30)

Municipalities are also working diligently to address local drainage concern, to ensure that water can get away quickly in the event of heavy rains and flooding. However, the main theme that we've heard in discussions with municipal officials and farmers alike is that they can see no reason for a huge backlog in the processing of provincial drain licence applications, sometimes up to 18 months.

Will the minister today commit to erasing this backlog and keeping drainage licence applications current to help insure future damage from heavy rains and flooding in Manitoba?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that we're in a very wet period. The last weekend showed an extreme water event, a one-in-50-year event, but, since 2007, we have more than doubled the number water resource officers in the province, who the members opposite continue to call the water police. Our government has tripled spending on drainage capital and maintenance from 3 million in 2001-02 to 10 million annually.

And the former member from Emerson actually said, in 2000, that the former government cut budgets so severely that it left the government with inadequate resources to address the provincial drainage system. Mr. Speaker, we're still cleaning up their mess.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Oak Park Raiders Basketball Team

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Oak Park Raiders boys' basketball team on winning the AAAA Provincial High School Boys' Basketball Championship on March 2nd at the University of Manitoba.

In the semi-final game against the Sturgeon Heights Huskies, point guard Elliot Taylor scored 22 points as the Raiders defeated the Huskies 72 to 62 to advance to the final against St. Paul's Crusaders.

Both teams were looking forward to a close game. Over the season they were tied with one win and one loss against St. Paul's. It looked like the St. Paul's Crusaders were going to win their first championship since 1951, the last and only year they won a provincial boys' basketball title. The No. 2 seed led the No. 1 ranked Oak Park Raiders 37 to 22 at half-time. The Raiders ended up winning their third provincial title by 10 points in front of a rowdy crowd of approximately 2,300 spectators. They didn't give up but instead regrouped and came back to win.

The Raiders outscored the Crusaders 24 to 11 in the third quarter and post Dave Kohler gave Oak Park its first lead of the second half when he scored a three-pointer with 6:15 to go in the fourth. St. Paul's went up 56 to 55 on the next possession but Kohler followed that with two successful free throws that put Oak Park up for good.

Raiders guard Elliot Taylor had 19 points and was named tournament MVP. Oak Park's Graeme Fardoe scored 13 points and earned all-star honours.

Randy Kusano is thinking of ending his coaching career after 34 years. This will certainly be a big loss to Oak Park High School as he has been an institution at the high school for many Charleswood students. Randy was selected as male AAAA coach of the year and, in addition, he received the Mike Spack Award. This award recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions to the growth and development of the game.

On behalf of the Charleswood community, I would like to thank Randy for his dedication and service over the years and congratulate him on yet another championship. Congratulations to all the players on a great season. Charleswood is very, very proud of you. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek leave to have the names of the players included with the private member's statement. Thank you.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave to continue–finish? *[Agreed]*

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Leave was granted.

Mrs. Driedger: To have the names included with the private member's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, okay, the names will be included in–

Mrs. Driedger: *Hansard.*

Mr. Speaker: In *Hansard.*

Oak Park Raiders boys' basketball team: Cash Blanca, Jordy Lomonaco, Elliot Taylor, John Kiesman, Chris Friesen, Caivin Birdsall, Fatlum Selishta, Jamie Turner, Bryden Bone, Joe Johnson, Graeme Fardoe, David Kohler, Shapour Birjandian

Travel Manitoba Tourism Award Recipients

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank and congratulate the staff and volunteers associated with two western Manitoba tourism attractions for the work and vision that earned them Manitoba Tourism awards last week. The International Peace Garden board and staff received the esteemed Travel Manitoba Award of Distinction and Brandon's own Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba won the Marketing Excellence Award.

The Manitoba Tourism Marketing Excellence Award went, deservingly, to the Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba, whose outstanding marketing campaign increased local business participation in events and event sponsorship, increased attendance at events, drove up Web site traffic and scored substantial independent media coverage.

The Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba, which was established in 1882, showed that one of the province's oldest and most historic institutions is, indeed, as robust as ever. In 2009-2010, social networking and new media was deftly harnessed to recruit ambassadors, who, in turn, encouraged local business and other organizations to get involved with aspects of the exhibition's various events, which include the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair and the upcoming Manitoba Summer Fair. Their board and every single director is to be congratulated for their remarkable success.

For its part, the International Peace Garden, nestled just southeast of Turtle Mountain Provincial Park, has, since 1932, stood at the heart of the continent as a symbol of the friendship between Canada and the United States of America. The 14-member board of directors, of which I am proud to be one, half of which is composed

by Manitobans and the other half of which is composed by North Dakotans, as well as the skilful administrative staff led by International Peace Garden CEO Doug Hevenor were commended by Travel Manitoba for their leadership in offering a tourism attraction that combines education, active lifestyles, peacemaking, environmental conservation and community building.

Mr. Speaker, both the International Peace Gardens and the events staged by the Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba draw over 100,000 tourists from across the continent on an annual basis. By doing so, they not only contribute to our local economies but proudly represent western Manitoba, and the province generally, to people from across the world.

To all those involved in both organizations, thank you for your hard work and congratulations on your recent success.

Environmental Initiatives

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I rise today to celebrate three important environmental initiatives. Today is Clean Air Day, this week is Canadian Environment Week and June 5th marks World Environment Day.

Canadian Environment Week aims to educate Canadians on the importance of our environment. This week also gives us an opportunity to celebrate our achievements and initiatives in our ongoing campaign to combat climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Clean Air Day celebrates environmentally friendly practices that business–businesses, communities and individuals have adopted to promote clean air. It is also an opportunity to encourage people to adapt–adopt, rather–practices that are both environmentally friendly and part of a healthy lifestyle. Since transportation is an important contributor of greenhouse gases, clean earth day is a great opportunity to make a commitment to use public transportation, cycle or walk more often in an effort to reduce our carbon footprint.

First celebrated on June 5th, 1972, to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference of the Human Environment, World Environment Day aims to give a human face to environmental issues, empower people to become active agents of sustainable and equitable development, promote an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing attitudes towards environmental issues and advocate for partnerships, which will ensure all nations and peoples enjoy a safer and more prosperous future.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members in this House to take the time this week to find ways to make their lives and communities more environmentally friendly. Thank you.

National Fly Fishing Championships

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'm proud the eighth annual Canadian National Fly Fishing Championships were held last week in the community of Roblin. This event attracted several of Canada's top anglers to exhibit their considerable skills in the sport of fly fishing.

Roblin and area's abundant lakes have put the town on the map as one of the world's best areas for fly fishing and, accordingly, catches of large brown and rainbow trout are not uncommon. Because of this exceptional reputation, plus investments made in aeration infrastructure, Roblin was the perfect venue for this popular event.

Anglers came from across Canada and abroad to contend for medals. This year's championship boasted 60 competitors from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, Ontario and Québec, and visitors from England, Scotland and Germany. Both individuals and teams competed for gold, silver and bronze awards, and excitement abounded as the individual competitors vied for a spot on Canada's international fly fishing team competing in the world's event next year in Italy.

Congratulations are due to teams Cormorant, Equip Airflo and Soldier Palmers for their respective gold, silver and bronze awards, and individual winners Terence Courtoreille, from the Northwest Territories, who took home the gold Top Rod award; Shane O'Hara from Winnipeg who secured silver and Todd Oishi from British Columbia, this year's bronze medalist.

***** (14:40)

Although, we were hoping the weather could've been more co-operative, the event was still an overwhelming success. I was pleased to attend the opening ceremonies, where participants enjoyed the community's hospitality and pledged to return.

Mr. Speaker, we would be very pleased to have them back any time. Thank you to the organizers who put together this championship, Mayor Hazlitt

of the town of Roblin, and congratulations to all the anglers who took part.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Child and Family Services Agencies

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The situation with respect to Child and Family Services in Manitoba demands comment and requires answers. There are now more than 8,600 children in care in our province. This number is not far from 10,000, the number of people required to be a city in Manitoba. If the government's approach is not drastically changed, this number will keep on increasing and increasing. On a per capita basis, we have the highest number of children in care of all provinces. We have a similar number of children in care to British Columbia, even though British Columbia has about four times as many people as Manitoba.

On April 27, the Children's Advocate presented information to LAMC, which contained critical information, which indicates that under the present NDP government, Manitoba's child welfare system is in a state of chaos. The situation was described as volatile. Indeed, the presentation is so shocking and so–

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just made a ruling earlier that the document that the members had, that it was LAMC documents and it was not a report. It was a submission for additional staffing for the Children's Advocate's office, and the information that is being quoted from that report I will not accept in this House because it's an LAMC document. It's not a House document. It's for LAMC purposes, to make decisions on whether additional staffing would be given or not given and information that was supplied for justification of that. It was a submission to LAMC.

LAMC documents are for LAMC purposes, and that document, I said earlier, does not belong in the House, and I do not accept any quotes or any contents taken out of that submission in the House. So I caution the honourable member to choose your words carefully.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, indeed–let me complete my comments.

Last week, a child, Kyle Earl, was shot while in care. I suggest that it is important that the presentation, at least the very first two pages, by the Children's Advocate should be publicly released, and the Children's Advocate be asked to appear before a legislative committee for questioning about her observations on why the government hasn't acted and what can be done to prevent future deaths, like that of Kyle Earl.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, that's take cares–members' statements. There any grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, today we will proceed with second reading of bills, beginning with Bill 8 and Bill 21, and we'll see how things go after that.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the business for this–for orders of the day, we will do second reading of Bill 8 and followed by Bill 21.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 8–The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Safety Precautions to Be Taken When Approaching Tow Trucks and Other Designated Vehicles)

Mr. Speaker: Okay, so I'm going to be calling second reading of Bill 8, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Safety Precautions to Be Taken When Approaching Tow Trucks and Other Designated Vehicles).

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson), that Bill 8, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Safety Precautions to Be Taken When Approaching Tow Trucks and Other Designated Vehicles), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ashton: I thank the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs for seconding this. Given the emphasis on road construction in his constituency, this legislation may come in handy, eventually, because it is something that deals with safety.

I want to stress that we have listened to a number of submissions. Currently, we have

legislation requiring that safety precautions be taken for emergency vehicles, and by emergency vehicles– I'm talking about police, fire, ambulance and other emergency response vehicles. We, of course, know that there are other vehicles that have to be in a similar situation. This includes tow truck, roadside assistance vehicles, and some of the vehicles that are currently used by enforcement officers.

Really, what this is is pretty straightforward. It applies the same requirement, in statute, that people take a precautionary position when they're travelling. In other words, you see the vehicle on the side of the road, the emergency response vehicle–in this case, the tow truck–you slow down. We think this is really important. I want to stress, by the way, that we see this kind of caution as being important generally.

I had the opportunity to join the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard), and responsible for Workplace Safety and Health, the recent announcement that focusses in on people slowing down in construction zones and other situations. So this is really an extension of that. A clear message from this bill is that we will be requiring people to slow down, use some common sense. And I do believe this, by the way, is significantly needed.

We owe a lot to our tow truck and roadside assistance vehicle operators. This is a way of saying that not only do we appreciate the work that they do, but we're going to be there to back them up with clear safety protection that requires people to slow down.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this bill. The government may be surprised, but we're 100 percent in support of this amendment, in this bill, and we're fully supportive of this one. We believe that it's badly needed.

This initiative, I believe, came from people within the Canadian Automobile Association, in particular, who are very involved in going and helping people who are stuck, often by the side of the road, and realized that there were some very important safety issues with people who are having a tow truck or providing roadside vehicle assistance, as happens many times, probably every day, but certainly many, many times a day, when there is a storm, when there's particularly cold weather and people need boosting, or for a whole variety of reasons.

And I would like to, first of all, speak out and say some very positive things about the people who work with the Canadian Automobile Association. I know that I have had, from time to time, to use the ability, the people and their equipment, when my car has been stuck for one reason or another, and I am extraordinarily appreciative of when that's happened. And I'm sure that that is the case for many others who are MLAs here, but certainly many in Manitoba have had the opportunity, at one point or another, to appreciate the assistance of services of the Canadian Automobile Association.

And it is for that reason, and for protecting the people, the equipment, enhancing the safety of our roads and supporting those who are with CAA and with other organizations, garages, et cetera–or, indeed, people who are stopping at the roadside to provide assistance–that they are supported and protected to the extent that we can.

***** (14:50)

And so I believe that this is very important, that these individuals, their vehicles and their persons be protected, and that this legislation, this amendment, which would cover people who are providing roadside emergency assistance are protected in this fashion.

It's timely that we do this. It recognizes a very important service that is provided to Manitobans. And particularly when it's a cold or stormy day, we are very appreciative of this service. And indeed it should be noted that it is partly because the conditions that people who are operating tow trucks are out on the highway, it is frequently the worst weather, and so it is particularly important because those are conditions where visibility may be reduced sometimes, where it may be raining, where it may be particularly cold, it may be particularly slippery.

Indeed, it is on days when it is particularly slippery that we have cars sliding off the edge of the road and into the ditch. And I've certainly been out in the winter on days on the Trans-Canada Highway where there's been a lot of ice and there's been a lot of cars who've ended up in the ditch. And the fact is that we need to salute and support people who are operating tow trucks and providing the emergency roadside assistance. And we need to make sure that they are supported to the extent that they can be and that they're protected.

I'd like to say a word of congratulations to one of the people who was involved in promoting this concept, and this was Samantha Charron who actually worked for a while in my office, learned a

little bit about the legislative process and then worked as a communications person with CAA for a while. And I think maybe having learned a little bit about the process, seeing what the problem was, saw that there was need for change and amendment in this instance, that she was able to work with people at CAA and bring this forward to the government.

And we're delighted that this bill is here. We believe that it is an important step forward in making our highways safer and ensuring that conditions and the support of those who provide emergency assistance is there for the people of Manitoba.

So, with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I believe that, you know, the time has come to let this bill move forward. And I look forward to presentations and comments being made at committee stage, but, as I've said, this is a piece of legislation which we are 100 percent behind, believe that it's timely, does what needs to be done, and should make our roads safer for those who provide assistance and those who provide tow truck services. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I, too, have a few words that I would like to put on the record in regards to Bill 8. It's, as the Leader of the Liberal Party has pointed out, a bill that does deserve the support, I believe, of the Chamber and, ultimately, it should go on to the committee stage.

No one would question the valuable work that is actually done by many close to our roadsides or along our roadsides, quite often in one of the designated lanes. And as long as there is adequate signing, postage that is there, that other vehicles have been forewarned and know that they are obligated to slow down, and making our streets and highways safer for that construction or repair, towing facilities, such as, you know, vehicle accidents that occur, and so forth, is critically important. And this is a piece of legislation that will, in fact, be in the best interests of the worker. It's not easy when you're only feet away from traffic, and I suspect there have been a good many close calls. And if you were to talk to some of our safety officers, construction workers, they can all relate to stories regarding close calls.

I know on TV, quite often, we see the, you know, whether it's called Top Cop or police traffic units that are out there, and they're pulling people over–I know, a few weeks ago, I happened to be on some channel in which a police officer had someone pulled over at the side of the highway and the driver's door was open, and a car just comes whizzing right by and took off the door. And there's the police officer virtually standing, you know, right there, and I suspect it would come within inches of the police officer at a very high speed. And, you know, I think that those types of incidences, unfortunately, are not isolated. I suspect that there's a good number of those types of close calls.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, that by having legislation of this nature, that we're better able to educate the public as to the importance of driving at safer speeds in the–in our province, especially when they're passing construction sites, or when you recognize that there are other issues that in our roadways that, at times, dictate that vehicle traffic must slow down. And, as I say, a big part of it has to be in terms of just recognizing the need for adequate signs and lights and so forth, to make the driving traffic aware of the need to slow down.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we had a huge issue, not that long ago, in regards to the importance of signage. And it was in regards to where a number of photo radar tickets were handed out. And I think that–what that illustrated is that there are a good number of Manitobans that utilize our roads in a very respectful fashion. In fact, 98, 99 percent of the people do that vast, vast majority of the time.

But, you know, even some of the best drivers that we have, those drivers that likely have very rarely, if at all, sped, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think that–at least my gut feeling is is that that would be a very, very small percentage. But, having said that, there are individuals with nothing but pure and good intent, and have no issue in terms of really exceeding the speed limits at all. But you recall that when it came to that photo radar situation that we had a little while back, I was amazed by some of the e-mails and the phone calls that I had received.

And there was a couple of them, one, in particular, that I recalled in regards to a lady who was visiting, on a regular basis, someone in a care facility and driving through a construction zone, and was not aware of a construction workers actually working at the time and felt it was, indeed, safe enough. And whether or not it was safe or not, at that time, is something in which we will have to seriously look at, Mr. Speaker, is, in the sense, that the government seemed to have taken a different position. But there was no construction that was going on, but still there was this expectation that they would be going at a slower speed limit.

***** (15:00)

And this particular citizen was, in fact, travelling at the regular speed, believing that it was okay to do so. And we all know that there's a bit of a time delay in terms of when something–when you get a radar ticket in the mail and, in her case, she ended up receiving a number of radar tickets because she went though that particular location on several occasions. And again, here is someone who has an outstanding driving record, who, you know, for all the wonderful reasons, was using this portion of the road in order to be able to be with someone that was in a care facility. Good, compassionate lady, Mr. Speaker, and I believe, had she realized, according to the government, that she was supposed to be going at a construction–and through a construction zone, therefore a lower speed, that she would have done it, and that's the reason why signage becomes so critically important.

Mr. Speaker, there is–if you have adequate signage, it does make a difference. And when I read the–in particular, the 'explanaratory' of the bill, it says it in a snapshot, one quick paragraph in terms of the benefits and why it is that this bill should be–or is being brought forward.

And I anticipate that the government was successful in terms of getting the type of support for the bill prior to introducing it. I, right offhand, could not indicate whether or not there was a need for amendments, but I know that once it gets into the committee stage that they will go through the clause by clause, and I anticipate, Mr. Speaker, that we will see the bill pass. And if the government's done its work, it'll probably pass as is, as I anticipate it will at this juncture.

But I don't believe that there will be any opposition to the bill, but still felt that it was important just to stand up and emphasize what I think is a very important, universal point that had to be recognized, and that is just the importance of having adequate signage so that people understand–genuinely understand–the speeds that they're supposed to be travelling at whatever juncture that they might be or whatever street they're on or part of Manitoba's highway system.

You know, there is–in addition to that, I would suggest that the government at times does need to take a look at highway speeds throughout the province, and where we can have uniformity I think that we should encourage that. Quite often, that might mean some additional work having to be done in certain areas, certain highways, possibly even some shoulder improvements. And, when you see that type of work being done, you'll see that there is a greater need for the type of legislation that we are passing. And I suspect, Mr. Speaker, as time goes on, that the needs to repair and to fix our roads and highways will, in fact, get greater or increase, and therefore I think it is appropriate that we are dealing with this legislation today.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, as the Leader of the Liberal Party has indicated, we're prepared to see this bill go to committee. Thank you.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I move, seconded by the member from Arthur-Virden, the debate now be adjourned.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for the Lakeside, seconded by the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), that debate be adjourned.

Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Bill 21–The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Immobilizers and Air Bags)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie), that The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Immobilizers and Air Bags); Loi modifiant le Code de la route (dispositifs d'immobilisation et sacs gonflables), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Speaker: Moved by the honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation, seconded by the honourable Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie), that Bill 21, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Immobilizers and Air Bags), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Ashton: I certainly look forward to debate on Bill 21. I do think it's a very straightforward bill. We have taken the initiative, I know, of providing full information to members of the opposition. I do want to stress by the way that it has two essential components, and I just want to, as we're dealing with second reading, provide the basic principles of each component.

First of all, in terms of the anti-theft immobilizers, this is an issue that is of concern. I know certainly MPI has made the installation of anti-theft immobilizers a significant initiative. It's been a very significant part of a major reduction in

auto theft in this province, and what Bill 21 is address the concern that anti-theft immobilizers have been knowingly tampered with during the installation of remote starters to save time and money.

Obviously, remote starters are something that many consumers choose. It is something that, certainly, we would continue to see being quite legitimate in terms of installation. The difficulty is the remote starters and immobilizers can either work together if they're properly installed, or else they can, in some cases by unscrupulous installers, who are cutting corners, involve an installation where the immobilizer is disengaged. It does save time and money but, of course, this then leaves the vehicles vulnerable to theft.

MPI has investigated vehicle thefts where the immobilizers have been completely disabled or completely removed during service and repairs. So this is a real issue. This is something that's been clearly identified. It's targeted individuals who are in the business of servicing repair vehicles and who intentionally tamper with immobilizers in the course of this work. It's not aimed at someone who inadvertently or unknowingly disengages the immobilizers, and I think that's important. This really is about supporting the MPI program. I want to point out, by the way, that in addition to enhancing public safety, it saved ratepayers approximately $60 million in auto theft claims.

When it comes to air bag systems, Bill 21 will also provide, or pardon me, will also prohibit persons disabling or removing air bag systems. This includes the air bags themselves and the components that enable their function. This is intended to deter vehicle owners, repairs and rebuilders who might remove air bags for resale. There is a resale market. We also want to make sure there's no tampering.

It's important to note, by the way, that there are provisions in legislation to ensure that there can be a disabling for legitimate purposes. We've had a number of enquiries made by individuals that it, clearly, can be disengaged for children. There are adults who, because of their size, also are at risk because of deployment of air bags. So this is not something that interferes with that ability, and I want to stress that.

I do want to point to the importance of air bags. They're an important supplement to our seat belt legislation which, clearly, again, saves lives. I want to stress that we do have a maximum fine of $5,000. It's our hope that that fine will rarely, if ever, be used, and I do want to stress again that this–these two are aimed at issues that have been brought forward. Both of them have parallels here in Manitoba. I want to indicate that MPI has identified them as–of concerns.

But if you look at what's happening elsewhere in the–in other provinces, other jurisdictions, tampering with anti-theft immobilizers and tampering with air bags, these are issues that have arisen. So we want to take preventive action, and I certainly look forward to the submissions on second reading, and with the passage of this bill, I also look forward to the submissions at law amendments committee. But I do think this again is–it's a common-sense bill and I recommend it to the House.

***** (15:10)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this piece of legislation.

First of all, I will indicate that the Liberal Party supports this bill. I would also put on the record, to begin with, that, you know, one of the reasons for this and other measures that the NDP have brought forward is that over the 10 and a half years of the NDP government, we've had a period when the number of auto thefts in Manitoba was extraordinarily high, and this is unprecedented, comparable to no other province. And the rates of car thefts in the city of Winnipeg were at levels which were almost unbelievable when you consider them in a national context or an international context. Clearly, we have had a rather troubled period under the NDP government, and it was reflected in the extent of auto theft and the inability early on in their mandate to get on top of this. And so, you know, we support this legislation now and we recognize that the number of car thefts is starting to go down back to levels which are more reasonable–still far too high, it should be said. But at least they are, you know, not quite so order-of-magnitude higher than anywhere else.

And so the first thing that needs to be said is that, over the period of the NDP's mandate, is that there is a reason for this bill, and it's that the NDP were not on top of this issue at all to start with. And after, you know, a slow and sluggish start at getting after this, the NDP now starting to work in a way that is having some more effect.

So it is important in the approach to reducing car thefts that we have as high a proportion as possible

of cars which are at risk of being stolen having immobilizers installed in order to decrease the amount of auto theft. And that is, you know, one of the reasons why we support this legislation. And that is that, you know, it is important that cars with immobilizers keep their immobilizers on, and that they're not disabled and they're not at higher risk of being stolen. A stolen car is, you know, a problem for the owner. It's also a problem for all of us who have automobiles because we collectively are a part of the insurance program, MPIC, and its bottom line–taxpayers and people who are contributing and part of MPIC, who, in fact, are supporting the extra costs in one way or another. So we certainly support this legislation.

I am pleased with the minister's comments about, you know, not going after instances where it's–the immobilizer might be accidentally disengaged or disabled. But I think it's important that, you know, in order for this law to be effective, you be able to distinguish and identify what is accidental versus what's on purpose. We know that's not always as easy as it may sound and, certainly, when the regulations are put forward, is something that the minister should give some thought to so that people, in instances where there is an accidental disabling or disengagement of the immobilizer, that people are not, oh, given penalties, but at the same time that, you know, where people have done it deliberately, they are. And it's probably not all that likely that people are going to own up to doing it deliberately. So you will need to–the minister will need to figure out a way to distinguish between the two in a reasonable fashion.

When it comes to installing the immobilizers, there were initially some reports of problems with wiring in cars where an immobilizer has been installed. I have not heard of these problems lately, so I'm presuming that with better experience, this is not happening. Certainly, to those drivers who were affected, it was a significant problem and–but, as I said, this appears to have disappeared with more experience by people who are putting in the immobilizers.

On the–one other observation which I think is worth making, and that is that when we look at the statistics on car thefts, there are, you know, a significant number of cars where people have tried to steal them, and so that the car is damaged with an immobilizer in, because somebody has tried to get into it and steal it. And this is something which is not going to be addressed by the immobilizer, I suppose, unless you have a sticker on saying this car has an immobilizer, so that you're warned and maybe that wouldn't be a bad idea.

But, certainly, measures which prevent the underlying problem of people not only stealing but trying to steal cars would be important and, as, indeed, my colleague and I have argued for some time, the NDP should have been much more effective at getting at some of the underlying problems, including being able to address and manage and treat children who have–and youngsters and adolescents–who have FASD and who have, in some instances, becoming–become recurrent car thefts, and this is a problem which is still there, and there needs to be much more effective approaches than we even have at the moment.

Lastly, I want to comment on the situation with airbags to indicate that we support this as well. This is an important safety measure. It is also important that for young children and for those who have disabilities and would be injured by airbags, that it's–one can disable the airbags under those circumstances, although, you know, clearly if sometimes you've got a child in the car and other times you've got an adult, that, of course, you want to operate in favour of the child and not wanting to harm the child. But you're–it's not as if most people who have cars always have a child in one seat and not anywhere else where there's an airbag. And certainly that's something which, you know, might be given a little bit more thought to a way to be able to, in those instances, disable the airbag more easily so that when a child is there and be able to put it back on easily when the child is not there and that that would be a sensible measure if it were possible.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I pass the floor on to others who would like to speak on this.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, would like to add my comments on to Bill 21. It's a bill in which, as pointed out, has two major issues, that of immobilizers and airbags. And immobilizers is an interesting word. It's one of those words that–back if you go into the '90s and you were to do a *Hansard* search, you'd likely find it was very rarely used, Mr. Speaker, especially in the context of cars.

***** (15:20)

I don't believe–and even back in the '90s, I tended to try to provide comment on bills. I don't believe that I ever used the word "immobilizers" in

reference to vehicles. I'm not 100 percent sure of that. That's a couple of decades ago. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, it has become a significant word that is often used in debates inside this Chamber during question period to debates on bills to the degree in which we now have government policies on immobilizers. We provide incentive programs to get vehicles to get immobilizers installed. There is so, so much more that is actually being done that's all related to that word "immobilizer."

And one can look at an immobilizer and figure out why is it today that there is this need, and I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, it's over the last decade, that because of the rise of other activities that it became something that was essential to do in order to attempt to minimize the number of automobiles that were being stolen.

Now, one of the things that I thought was always somewhat interesting was the fact that when you look at Canada as a country you see that there is dealerships, GM and Ford and others, that are now incorporating immobilizers into their keys themselves, and it is because of the issue of automobile theft. So to a certain degree the private sector, allbeit very, very late, I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, has introduced immobilizers in vehicles that have been manufactured.

I'm not too sure if there is–to what degree every vehicle that's now manufactured from, let's say, GM and Ford and Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, the larger companies of that nature, all have mobilizers–immobilizers in their new product. I like to think that it would be a very high percentage, if not virtually all the vehicles, having immobilizers. But the industry as a whole, ultimately, was very slow, in my opinion, to respond to this.

This is something that ultimately should've been done years ago, Mr. Speaker. There was arguments to be made back in the late '90s when automobiles were in fact being stolen at fairly high numbers, and one could've anticipated back then that the numbers were not going to be going down, and the larger automobile dealers could've and probably should have started taking more tangible action back then.

But because, Mr. Speaker, of two things, that never happened. One is that of a social behaviour. The social behaviour was changing very quickly in regards to automobile theft, and the other issue was that the automobile industry, as a whole, didn't see and act on the merit as quickly as it should.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that the government–governments across Canada over the last, let's say eight years, seven years, have really attempted to deal with the issue, and what's forcing that is just the sheer number of vehicles that have been stolen.

But Manitoba is unique. As a province, Manitoba–you know, I believe it was 2004 where we had somewhere in the neighbourhood of 13,000 vehicles that were stolen, which was the record high in the province of Manitoba. I was amazed in terms of how few, in terms of number of people that were stealing so many vehicles.

I believe there was–and again I'm guesstimating just from memory, Mr. Speaker. I believe it was like 150 youth, give or take 30 or so, that were stealing large numbers of cars on an annual basis, and when we say large number of vehicles we're talking somewhere in the neighbourhood of 30 cars or more, Mr. Speaker. And that's one of the reasons why Manitoba was very unique in comparison to other jurisdictions in Canada.

And, Mr. Speaker, I ultimately believe that there could have and should have been done–more done by government in terms of protecting the vehicles back then, and, instead, the government reacted quite slowly. And it wasn't until after those record-breaking years that the government finally took the position of, well, even though we haven't been able to deal with, you know, those 150, 200 youth that are causing the problems in terms of automobile theft, or a good majority of those automobile thefts, or a good portion of those automobile thefts, that they went to the victims and said, well, instead, we're going to have, and subsidize, the installation of immobilizers.

And, Mr. Speaker, it was at a great cost, the implementation of that particular program, but it was a necessary thing to do because there were certain vehicles that were being stolen every day, every day of the year because they were so easy to sell–to steal–so something had to be done. And the government, ultimately, through incentive, and then made it mandatory–and in good part that did have a role to play in terms of the number of vehicles being stolen going down. But you also have to take a look at the identification of a number of high-risk offenders, and having more of a watchful eye on those individuals also played a role in terms of ensuring that Manitoba's rate was not outside of the norm.

And, Mr. Speaker, even though I don't necessarily have the actual numbers, I suspect that the numbers would demonstrate that Manitoba is probably closer to the national average, as opposed to, back in 2004–a few years proceeding and a couple of years following–being at record highs across Canada on a per capita basis in terms of the number of vehicles that have been stolen.

So what we want to do is to avoid getting back into that sort of a situation. And Bill 21–by passing Bill 21–will, in fact, ensure that there's a consequence to anyone that feels that they can actually disconnect immobilizers. Sadly, or unfortunately, there is a need for us to continue on with immobilizers. There is a great value to them in terms of the future and, as such, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing the bill actually pass in the sense that it will ensure that this sort of thing does not occur–disassembling and disconnecting immobilizers.

The air bag issue is a little bit different, and I would be very much interested in knowing to what degree there was discussions amongst the shareholders–or the stakeholders–in regards to the air bag issue. Mr. Speaker, there is differing opinions, I know, on that particular point. I'm not too sure in terms of to what degree the technology is there. Ultimately, I think it would be wonderful to be able to disengage an air bag by, potentially, the flipping of a switch in a certain situation. I know of a lot of parents that–who are very responsible parents–will have their children in the back seat because of the air bag and the impact–the potential damage an air bag could have on a young person. And that has more to do with the body weight and size of the child. For many parents, especially of younger children, they would much prefer to have their children sitting in the passenger side but, really, it's not much of an option because of the air bag, and–in good part, anyway. And, as a result, Mr. Speaker, we're finding that the air bag issue is maybe not as clear as we would like it be.

***** (15:30)

You know, we–seat belts is mandatory, and we recognize that seat belts are mandatory, Mr. Speaker, and, on the other hand, every vehicle that is produced has a seat belt, and governments, in particular here in the province of Manitoba, has made seat belts mandatory.

Again, it's only over the last decade where we've seen more and more in regards to the air bags. I don't know to what degree there is complete compliance to a national standard of having air bags in vehicles, but I'm not aware of legislation that makes it mandatory, here in the province of Manitoba, that every vehicle have air bags. And I would suggest if, in fact, that were to occur, that you would have to, in essence, grandfather something of that nature and, ultimately, it could have an impact on consumer choice because so much is done based in the larger markets when they mass-produce vehicles and, ultimately, we look to the leadership of some of our automobile manufacturers to ensure the safety of the consumer.

And, in part, even though at times they might be slow in moving forward, in part, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that–albeit slower, as I say–the industry has moved in the direction of ensuring that vehicles are produced with air bags, and I suspect that will continue to grow. In fact, I know, in some cases now, you can actually get, from what I understand, air bags that not only go on the front dash, but you'll find them on the sides of vehicles now, in some vehicles.

So I think it's a sign of things to potentially come and, Mr. Speaker, you'll find that, ultimately, the automobile industry can be fairly competitive and the consumer is asking for more safety measures, and I suspect that that's what, indeed, we'll see–more safety measures being put in.

So, in regards to disabling an air bag, I think that there does need to be some discretion, and we look forward to the minister's comments in the–at the committee level, and possibly third reading, maybe fill in a little bit more in terms of how the minister or the government sees the future of air bag usage and what sort of considerations, if any, can be given to those that have the desire of having a younger child in the front seat, and is there, in fact, things that can be done in order to accommodate that sort of a situation.

As I say, as of right now, I'm not sure if there is a switch that can just be turned on and off. I don't know if something of that nature is feasible, or if the automobile industry as a whole is developing that sort of technology–don't know. But I do know that there are many Manitobans that would love the opportunity to be able to have their child in a safe vehicle, and also have their child alongside in the front as opposed to the back.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to see Bill 21 passed into *[inaudible]* Thank you.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I move, seconded by the member from Lac du Bonnet, that debate now be adjourned.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Lakeside, seconded by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), that debate be adjourned.

Agreed? *[Agreed]*

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): I believe that now the House would proceed to second reading of bills 27, and Bill 18 and Bill 24.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we will now proceed a continuation of second readings. We'll go in this order. We will deal with Bill 27, 18 and 24.

Bill 27–The Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park Act

Mr. Speaker: So, I'm going to now call Bill 27, The Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park Act.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable minister of post-secondary education, that the–that Bill 27, The Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park Act; Loi sur le parc provincial du patrimoine d'Upper Fort Garry, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Speaker: Moved by the honourable Minister of Conservation, seconded by the honourable Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), that Bill 27, The Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to just say a few words on the occasion of second reading of this bill, Bill 27, which establishes the Upper Fort Garry Heritage Park.

The bill provides the foundation to commemorate where Upper Fort Garry once stood and the many significant events that took place at this site that were important to the creation of Manitoba as a Province within Canadian Confederation.

Aboriginal peoples met near this location at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers for trade, social exchange and political discourse long before the fur trade and early agricultural settlement in Red River. There is, indeed, Mr. Speaker, archeological evidence of First Nations occupying the area. Campsites over 1,000 years old have been discovered near the proposed park site. Upper Fort Garry may have been dismantled during the 1880s to make way for the rapidly growing city of Winnipeg, but we now have an opportunity to re-establish this site as a specially designated park dedicated to our collective identity as citizens of Manitoba.

And I might also say, Mr. Speaker, before I conclude my remarks, that I want to express my gratitude and the gratitude of the government–and I'm sure the gratitude of all Manitobans–to the Friends of Upper Fort Garry, the group of citizens who came together to make sure that this site would be preserved and expanded and developed in a way that this particular legislation envisions.

So I look forward to the support of this House in the passage of this bill at second reading and in all stages. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill 27, a bill that would create a provincial park at the Upper Fort Garry heritage site.

This is a bill which we are strongly in support of, indeed to tell the Minister of Conservation a little bit of the history of this becoming a provincial park, and, as the minister has alluded to, the Friends of the Upper Fort Garry played a very important role and they are to be congratulated for their efforts and the work that they have done.

Certainly the Friends of the Upper Fort Garry are–played a huge role in identifying the opportunity, in bringing this to public attention, in raising awareness of the opportunity. And it was people like Peter Liba, the–Harold Buchwald, Bob Cunningham, Gary–and a number of others who played major roles and who took up the fight as it were.

When this initially came to the attention of MLAs, the situation was that there was a–an apartment or condominium complex to be developed on this site. And, seeing that this was going to be a major problem, indeed, that the development of a high-rise condominium or apartment complex on this site would make it virtually impossible to have the

kind of heritage park that Manitobans should have, deserve to have, and that this issue was raised first in this Legislature by members of the Liberal Party, who called on the government to act, to preserve this site and make sure that it was a major site for the history of Manitobans and for all Manitobans.

***** (15:40)

And the replies that we got in the Legislature when we raised this were initially much more in support of the apartment complex or condominium complex than of the Fort Garry heritage park. And those replies came from the Premier and from the ministers who indicated, at that point, they were looking to the development of the condominium or apartment block and were not seeing these as all that incompatible.

We strongly disagreed. We felt that there needed to be a historic Fort Garry site, that it should be preserved for all Manitobans and that it should be there as part of the extended Forks complex, because it ties in very well with its location along the–close to the Assiniboine River and very close to The Forks, as part of what should be a major attraction, a tourist attraction, for Manitobans. And, indeed, the site of the Fort Garry heritage park, right along Main Street, would be an incredible tourist attraction site, and a site of Manitoba's history for people coming back and forth to work or travelling around Winnipeg to see, and a daily reminder of the importance of our heritage and importance of Upper Fort Garry to the history of our province, to the initial provisional government, to the location of events that occurred around 1870, the beginning of the province, and, indeed, not only then, but its role in the fur trade before that and its role subsequently as an important site.

And so members of the Liberal Party were very strongly supported and getting a negative reaction from the government. We embarked on efforts, together with the Friends of Upper Fort Garry, to demonstrate along Main Street with a lot of support and increasing publicity for ensuring that, indeed, the Upper Fort Garry site was preserved and developed as a heritage site for all Manitobans.

And, fortunately, as things progressed, there was archeological work done. And, fortunately, that archaeological work showed that the boundaries of the fort were, indeed, too close or even, perhaps, slightly underneath the apartment or condominium block–highrise block, that was proposed. And, fortunately, that indicated very clearly that the two were incompatible. And, fortunately, as well, work was done with the developer to find an alternate site for the development. And over time, gradually, the Friends of Upper Fort Garry have worked very hard, have been able to purchase additional land with help from the Province, and the announcement of the park was made.

And now we have the bill which, indeed, we need to make this formally a park site, a provincial park site, which is going to be preserved for the future and for future generations of Manitoba.

It is good that there will an advisory committee. And we hope that those who have been involved as Friends of the Upper Fort Garry will be very much involved in this advisory committee. And we're delighted that a majority of the advisory committee members would be selected from a lists of persons recommended by the Friends of Upper Fort Garry who've done an extraordinary job in promoting this effort and in raising the funds necessary for it.

We are very pleased that this development is occurring also in conjunction with development at The Forks, with the view that the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the other developments at The Forks and this development of the provincial park at the Upper Fort Garry heritage site will create a wonderful tourist destination but also a destination which is one where there will be a lot of our own history.

I think that credit should also be mentioned to the president of the Manitoba Métis Federation, David Chartrand, in his role as president and in the efforts that he has made in securing not only funding but providing a lot of support for the Upper Fort Garry provincial park site. So I would like to pay tribute to President David Chartrand and the efforts that he has made as MMF president in this direction, and he as well as many others who contributed in one way or another are to be congratulated.

I would also like to compliment Judy McPherson, who was instrumental in providing the historic outfits that the MLA for Inkster and I wore as part of the demonstration that we engaged in to raise public awareness and to emphasize the importance of this particular site and making sure that it was part of our history in an ongoing way, in a way that is open and appealing and going to be, as I'm sure it will be, a wonderful place for all Manitobans to visit and to see the historic nature and to remember the role of the fur trade, the role of the provisional government, the importance of Louis

Riel in the founding of the province and the events which happened critically around the period of 1869-1870 that determined the birth of our province. So with those remarks, we support this legislation and look forward to it moving forward. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, want to put a few words on the record in regards to Bill 27. Bill 27 is, indeed, a very important bill. You know, it's one of those things in which gives me a bit of sense of pride in the sense of the role that the Upper Fort Garry has played in terms of the very creation of our province. And, you know, the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party made reference to an incident that occurred a while back–that would have been back in March of 2008, where we had put on some costumes to, in that same era, went out to Main Street to try to–onto Main Street just to heighten the public awareness of just how important the Upper Fort Garry is to the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And I was really encouraged while we were there. And it was very cold that particular day but the number of vehicles driving by tooting their horns, I believe, in most part because they were supportive of what it is that we, both myself, the leader, and I think there was probably about 10 or so other individuals that showed up in support of trying to raise the awareness and to protect the area. And it was shortly after that, Mr. Acting Speaker, that there was a special lunch that had occurred and there was a great deal more dialogue about the Upper Fort Garry.

Periodically, Mr. Acting Speaker, I often give thought to issues that come before us and there is–I should say, quite often–the issues that come before us, when I look at them and try to get an assessment of them, some issues I find that there's a need for me to try to ensure, as much as possible, that there's a broader sense of awareness or to give credit to certain people, and we do that in different ways.

***** (15:50)

On this particular issue, I made the decision to actually write a letter to the editor about Upper Fort Garry, and the–actually, the *Free Press* did actually print the letter. And I'd like to share with members the letter that I had written back then. And it was actually published back on April the 3rd, 2008. And my comments, the headline, I believe–they're the ones that–the *Free Press* would have been the one that selected the actual headline out of the story that I had written. So the headline was "Get rid of the gas station," and, then, the letter is as follows: Last Friday I joined 250 other people over lunch in support of saving Upper Fort Garry. For the record, it is those people who attended the lunch at the Fort Garry Hotel who led the charge to protect our heritage, not the politicians. Prior to this crisis, more Winnipeggers were aware of the Petro-Canada gas station on the corner of Main and Broadway than our historical gate. Today, because of the recent media attention, more Manitobans are aware of the fort and the role it played in our province's history. The Friends of Upper Fort Garry and many others, community leaders, have expressed concern related to the Petro-Canada gas station and the negative impact it has had on the site. If the mayor and the Premier want to do something helpful, why not lead the way on acquiring that property and–which is situated right in front of the fort's gate. Again, I would thank all those involved who saved our fort. A job well done.

Mr. Acting Speaker, that's what I had written back in April of 2008. And it's with great pleasure that today we have this bill and we're talking about the establishment of a heritage provincial park.

But, you know, what I think is also worthy of note is that the gas station is, in fact, gone now, Mr. Acting Speaker, and I think that that is a very strong positive.

Now, I'm not too sure if–who all was involved in getting rid of the gas station. I like to think that individuals, whether it was the Bernie Wolfes or others who brought to the attention of the public of those concerned, that ultimately enabled them to take some action. I'm not a hundred percent sure in terms of what, ultimately, might replace it. The actual ownership issue–I don't know the details, in other words, Mr. Acting Speaker.

But what I do know is that the gas station is no longer there and, ultimately, if it is going to be replaced with something, I trust and I hope that the politicians at the different levels of government will recognize the valuable asset that we have at the Upper Fort Garry, and not allow for something that would take away from what many would argue is Manitoba's birthplace. And, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would like to think that what we need to do in that area is to really demonstrate, in a very real and tangible way, how Upper Fort Garry and the individuals that interacted with that fort, ultimately, led to who we are as a province today.

And I think the opportunity to educate is very great, indeed. You know, the opportunity to be able to showcase our history and our future–you know, the–our First Nations and the role that they played, to the first pioneers from the western world and other countries, in how they all interacted that, ultimately, allowed for Manitoba to be where it is today. And I think that we have a great–it might not be a lengthy history. It's not like the Middle East. It's a relatively recent history, but it's an important history, Mr. Acting Speaker. And we need to be proud of what it is that has been done by so many in order to bring us to the point we are today. And The Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park Act will, in fact, insist upon more recognition for what we believe is a very valuable asset for the province of Manitoba.

But I think that the credit should go to those individuals that were involved in educating and being there to protect that particular site.

The politicians, I must say, dropped the ball originally on the issue, and I'm not talking just provincial government, I'm talking about the three levels of government. The credit is due and owed to those individual Manitobans that ultimately recognized the value of our heritage and were prepared to fight zoning changes that were not necessarily in the best interest of the Fort Garry site. The groups of people and individuals that pressured community leaders and politicians to do the right thing–and it's amazing, when you stop and think about it, just how close we came to allowing things to occur there that would've profoundly impacted in a negative way that particular site, and that would've been, indeed, a tragic thing to have happened.

You know, as we have found, our Forks is proven to be a magnet in terms of tourist attraction. We have hundreds of thousands of people every year that go down to The Forks. I suspect that the Upper Fort Garry heritage provincial park, if we can put it that way, Mr. Acting Speaker, has the potential to be a wonderful addition to the whole Forks development and, you know, it would be nice to see, you know, a long-term projection of that whole area along the Assiniboia, let's say from as far–well, at the very least from our front yard, the Assiniboia river is what I would classify as our front yard here at the Leg., not–*[interjection]* I'll let you suggest that.

Mr. Acting Speaker, you know, the idea of that river walk now in our front yard at the Legislative Building and possibly even extending it as time allows. For us to do that I think would be a positive thing to do, have it go all the way down to The Forks, as it does, and then it starts to go north. I believe, ultimately, that you can go into the Point Douglas area, and how I, for one–and, I believe, many Manitobans–would love to see a park development in that Point Douglas area that is of a high standard, that would provide opportunity for people, in particular in the North End, but for all residents to take a stronger sense of pride of that Point Douglas area, and it's an area that has a great deal of history to it, an area in which we should all be very proud of, and I suspect that, in time, we will see something of a more significance in terms of development of a park in that area.

Mr. Acting Speaker, when you look at the–look at it from that point of view, if you were to take an aerial shot of those–that path that I just shared with members, you will find that the Upper Fort Garry is virtually in the middle, or close enough to the middle, and, as such, I think that it is most appropriate that we invest in some resources into the development of the heritage provincial park–and when I say development I'm not talking about highrises and things of that nature. I'm talking about things that are tourist friendly in terms of an education–or an educational value. That should be, I believe, the first priority, and I've seen projects and I commend those that have put together some of the blueprints.

***** (16:00)

You can go to the Upper Fort Garry Web site and you will see that they have a draft of where the old site–old fort used to be and, in a visionary way, they show how an outline could, in fact, be put into place and how you can use modern technology in order to be able to educate.

So Bill 27 is a wonderful bill. I believe that it's a good bill that deserves the support of all members. And it begs the question for each of us to look at the city of Winnipeg and ask ourselves in terms of how it is that we can improve the opportunities to be able to educate and promote Winnipeg, develop a destination that we're all very, very proud of and want to take our family and friends as they come to visit our fine city, our province, Mr. Acting Speaker.

And I'd like to think that this particular park will be one of those premier destination points into the future alongside The Forks, and, as I say, what I believe is of great importance is also the development of that Point Douglas area.

With those few words, Mr. Acting Speaker, we're prepared to see Bill 27 pass.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I move, seconded by the member from Tuxedo, that debate be adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Saran): It has been moved by the honourable member for Arthur-Virden, and seconded by the honourable member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), that the debate be now adjourned.

Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Bill 18–The Communities Economic Development Fund Amendment Act

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Saran): Now we'll proceed with Bill 18.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Mr. Acting Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister responsible for Local Government, that Bill 18, The Communities Economic Development Fund Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Saran): That Bill 18–that moved by honourable Minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs and seconded by Local Government–the Minister for Local Government, that Bill 18, The Communities Economic Development Fund Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of the House.

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

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Acting Speaker, very briefly, The Communities Economic Development Fund, or CEDF, is a Crown corporation whose mandate is to encourage economic development particularly in northern Manitoba communities. It offers three general program areas: business loans, fisheries loans, and community development.

There are four areas to this amendment that have been presented to the House: Firstly, to amend the section of the act that indicates CEDF as a lender of last resort to more accurately reflect current practices and alternate lending, including having CEDF encourage other capital sources to participate in deals; and, secondly, to remove the requirement that CEDF accept early repayment of loans without penalty; thirdly, to change how CEDF can accept and manage funds from other sources; and, four, renumbering of sections of the act and improve the flow and regroup related items in addition to redrafting of the objectives and definitions to reduce the need for regulations to clarify the intent of other legislation.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Acting Speaker, I rise to put a few comments on the record with regards to The Communities Economic Development Fund Amendment Act. There are some questions which it would be nice to have the minister clarify in more detail around this act, and I will look forward, if the minister doesn't stand to–he's already spoken or somebody else from his caucus to stand and make some clarifications–that we would get clarifications when this bill comes to committee stage.

I think it's pretty important, and I would urge the minister to make sure that there are a number of presenters there who can speak to this legislation and explain the benefits of the economic development fund and how it's worked in the past and how these changes will provide improvements. We're very much in support of economic development in northern Manitoba and in support in general terms, certainly, of this legislation, but I would think that there are some things, as I said, which might be made a little clearer.

One of the–adding of the definition of northern Manitoba means all of part of–that part of Manitoba north of the southern boundary of Township 21. And not having a map right here in terms of Township 21, but when the object of the fund is to encourage the economic development of Aboriginal people in the province outside of the city of Winnipeg, will this also, you know, not support people in–who are Aboriginal people who might be involved in, you know, whether it's fishing or economic development in other parts of the province, not be able to access the funds?

If this is to support all Aboriginal people in the province outside of the city of Winnipeg, then one has to ask, you know, why doesn't it cover the whole province except the city of Winnipeg? And the minister can, you know, explain that and provide some clarification that would certainly be helpful.

I would look at the question and subject the act and the regulations the fund may receive and manage funds on behalf of another. Does that mean, and will the regulations specify, that all the funds that are to

be managed deal with people in northern Manitoba, or will it deal with all Aboriginal people? It–and the fishing industry, will there be an ability to have funds which might be doing other things than work as part of the main mandate of the object of this Communities Economic Development Fund Amendment Act?

The clarification, then, in terms of where and how, receive and manage funds on behalf of other organizations, one presumes that there will be, you know, regulations or clarifications in terms of the procedures, in terms of managing funds. What is the role, precisely, of The Community Economic Development Fund Act? What sort of due diligence will it be done? Or will it just be done–the funds managed at the direction of, oh, boards or advisory committees dealing with other funds? I'm not, you know, opposed to this; I'm just saying that I would like some clarification on precisely how this is going to work.

***** (16:10)

Certainly, from, you know, from my perspective and from a Liberal perspective, we see that–the importance of development in northern Manitoba. We've seen a lot of areas where there could be a lot more development in northern Manitoba. And we would hope that this, you know, these amendments and the act, will be able to spur on that development much more successfully in northern Manitoba than development in a number of areas has occurred in the past.

There are–I would like, you know, to give an example. I have had some experience, as the minister may know, in terms of economic development in northern Manitoba when I was the minister responsible for economic diversification in the federal government in 1996 and '97.

I worked closely with the Community Futures development organizations, and we established a Community Futures development corporation to operate out of Thompson and the area around it. And, indeed, the current mayor of Thompson, Tim Johnston, has been, and I believe still is, the director of–or the executive director of this Community Futures development corporation and has been very successful in the efforts through the Community Futures development corporation based in Thompson to spur on economic development in that area. I was also instrumental in ensuring that there was a Community Futures development corporation set up in the area of The Pas and helped all the Community Futures development corporations with–have programs for people with disabilities, for youth. We were working on initiatives related to Aboriginal people, although those didn't, in the short time that I was there, come to fruition. But we certainly helped with internship programs, with technology development and application and use in economic development. And those were valuable, because I know that there were some good examples of how they were applied in parts of northern Manitoba.

So I am a long-standing and strong advocate for economic development for northern Manitoba and for Aboriginal people, seen the problems, the barriers sometimes, to economic development for Aboriginal people in Manitoba. I salute the work that's been done by the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce and some of the Aboriginal community futures development corporations and other economic development initiatives that have occurred from time to time.

I also think that it is important to support the fishing industry. I've talked over the years to many fishermen in different parts of Manitoba, seen the–many of the issues and the problems, the need sometimes for capital, the need sometimes for help in one way or another. And I believe that this is an important area in terms of being able to provide for economic development. But certainly there are many, many other areas as well as fishing in northern Manitoba which are important to Aboriginal people.

I think we should salute some of the successful Aboriginal entrepreneurs like Michael Birch, the funds like the Tribal Councils Investment Fund and so on, which have done and been very successful in promoting the development of businesses and Aboriginal businesses.

I was present in Peguis when the first bank–it was Royal Bank–opened on Peguis. I salute the efforts and was there when the first First Nations bank office opened here in Manitoba. And I think there've been a lot of very positive developments that have occurred and that we should be striving and working very hard with Aboriginal people in Manitoba to make sure that the economic opportunities are there, that we decrease the barriers that people have to making investments and that we are finding ways to make sure that there are strong initiatives moving forward in one way or another.

I was–I think that the many things that have been done now by Aboriginal people in the area of business and economic development are very

substantial. I remember on one occasion dealing with a group of people from Fisher River who were partnering with people who were not Aboriginal. And they were talking about the extra due diligence they had to do and show people how to run businesses, and that was certainly good to see–Aboriginal people, people in First Nations communities–and I've seen it with Métis people in other areas taking a real leadership role in developing strong businesses and in developing strong economic development initiatives.

So, as I said, I'm a strong supporter of economic development. I'm looking forward to more details in some of this legislation and what the regulations are. I think it's very important that you set the framework well so that we know how it's going to be used and where it's going to be used. We've had experience with this government recently, as a matter of fact, that they said that they were going to use the TIF funds in one way, and all of a sudden one of the first projects they're involved with is using it in a completely different way, and so we're sometimes a little bit sceptical of the NDP and how they manage money. But I think that that is an appropriate scepticism, given their track record and given, you know, the attempt to set rules around the balanced budget legislation and then to change those rules whenever it seems convenient for them. And we don't believe that that's the good way to operate, that you should set the rules so will people know what they are ahead of time, instead of trying to change rules for your own advantages as times change, as this government is trying to do with the BITSA bill.

So, with those few words, Mr. Acting Speaker, I will sit down and let my colleague, the MLA for Inkster, say a few words.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, want to share some thoughts with members in regards to Bill 18 and the Communities Economic Development Fund.

Mr. Acting Speaker, it's not necessarily a fund as–that I'm as much acquainted with as the Leader of the Liberal Party is, but I do want to recognize and acknowledge the importance of economic development. Economic development ultimately leads to opportunities, and I think that when we talk about opportunities we want to be able to generate opportunities and hope for all communities in the province of Manitoba.

I would ultimately argue that the government does have a role to play in terms of providing economic stimulus to ensure that that stimulus is actually taking place in different regions of the province. And we need to acknowledge, in certain areas it can be very difficult to acquire financing of a particular project. And when that occurs, if government wasn't there to assist in many of these cases, that nothing would actually transpire. And, as such, what would ultimately end up happening is that those economic opportunities are lost, and the reason why they're lost isn't because it wasn't a good idea. It was because they were not able to acquire the financing, in most part, that was required in order to be able to move forward.

***** (16:20)

And that's why I say, you know, that in certain ways, in many areas, the government does have a role to play. And there are tools within the toolbox, if I can put it that way, that government can establish and ultimately be effective in enabling others to be able to participate and get approval and to move forward, Mr. Acting Speaker.

You know, when I think of economic opportunities, I think of the word of hope. Quite frankly, you know, all people want to have a sense of hope in terms of the future. They want to be able to see community development. They want to be able to see pride in their communities. And I suspect that, in good part, provided the opportunity, that they would be able to stay in the communities in which, quite often, they've grown up in or they become a part of, Mr. Acting Speaker. And when you become a part of a community, the last thing you want to see is that community to die or to deteriorate or to go into a downward spiral of activities.

So that's why, you know, we look to government to do what it can in terms of improving the conditions of our communities, and there's different ways in which you can do that. Ultimately, here, we're talking about a community economic development fund that's going to assist in providing opportunities for businesses that might not have been able to exist without that sort of financial assistance. That's one form of government intervention that can really assist.

Another form is in the sense of a direct construction, and that, too, can take place in rural communities, the city of Winnipeg. The type of construction varies immensely. You have construction that, ultimately, of something that is ongoing, and there's examples of that. Quite often, or I shouldn't say quite often–at times, you'll see Crown

corporations established in order to get the ball rolling or to save something from its–from ultimate demise, in putting it into a Crown corporation of sorts that, ultimately, at some point, being able to sell off or allow for the private sector to be able to continue on at a later point.

Now, I wouldn't want that to be misconstrued in any fashion. There's areas of Crown activity that, I would suggest to you, that there is no need to look at privatization, i.e., Manitoba Hydro or MPI, Lotteries, Liquor Commission. Those are Crown corporations that I think that are widely supported and should remain in the public fold as a public Crown corporation.

But, at times, there are other industries that are here today because of government direct intervention. An example of that would be Flyer Industry. Flyer Industry employs many hundreds of people, thousands over the years, and it needed government at one point, and, had government not been there, we wouldn't have had those jobs today. And those jobs provide all forms of tax revenue, revenue that ultimately allows us to be able to do so much more for the citizenry of our province. And, Mr. Acting Speaker, this is but one form of things in which a government can actually do.

Here, when we talk about the availability of money, it is critically important. You know, we can look at both success stories, and some stories that have not been as successful. The Communities Economic Development Fund has done relatively well for our province in terms of providing opportunities that might not have been there, had they not had the financial assistance through that sort of a fund.

And when I look at some of the changes that are being promoted within Bill 18 by providing assistance and not requiring, for example, a company or–to have to go to an international bank or a bank, credit union, or look for alternative financing arrangements first before it goes to the community Development Fund, I think that's a positive thing. You know, if we know the likelihood of getting the–securing the funds really isn't there, then why are we requiring it? Why are we putting in that sort of a roadblock in? So when we make an amendment that allows it to go more direct if someone has an idea that we should recognize the value of doing that.

Mr. Acting Speaker, there are many, many different ideas that are out there and, you know, we have different types of funds to be able to address those ideas. A lot of those ideas would not have a chance if we didn't have funds of this nature. Other funds would include venture capital funds. Venture capital funds can be very difficult, and I suspect that if we took a look at Crocus, as an example, that you will find that Crocus did have rural economic businesses that were a part of the Crocus Fund and relied on the Crocus Fund.

And I suspect that many of those businesses and–because it wasn't all bad news; there were some good things that came out of the Crocus Fund. But, if you look at it from a broader picture, in a broad way, you will find that, yes, there would have been some rural economic benefit through the Crocus.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Sadly, I must say that there was a lot of money that ultimately was lost because of the government not recognizing the red flags that were coming up the pole saying that there were some real issues that had to be dealt with. And no doubt there was a consequence to that, Mr. Speaker, a very real consequence in the sense that 33,000-plus investors lost 100-plus million dollars. Those investors were all Manitobans, and the government didn't do anything to protect those investors. But, as I say, there were some benefits from that fund in the rural communities.

This particular bill supports the Communities Economic Development Fund, and as a whole, it has done a good job. And I believe, ultimately, by the passage of Bill 18, that what we will see is a bill that ultimately will provide more opportunities for, in particular, those areas and regions of the province that have a need for economic development.

And we need to recognize that even if there is a cost for us to be able to establish and support a fund of this nature that, at the end of the day, the more success within many of these communities, ultimately, we're enriching the lives of those Manitobans and, ultimately, Manitobans throughout the province. Because, Mr. Speaker, providing those opportunities provides hope, provides jobs, provides internal wealth within those communities, and that wealth ultimately transpires into many, many different positives.

So in that sense and in looking at the bill, I suspect that it will be–have a bill that–before us that will receive good support and ultimately have it pass second reading, go into committee and see what maybe some of those rural communities, some of our

First Nations, possibly, that might want to make presentation on this bill. Maybe it could be improved in the committee stage, and we look forward to it getting there.

And with those few words, Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to see Bill 18 pass into committee.

***** (16:30)

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I move, seconded by the member from Tuxedo, that debate be adjourned.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, seconded by the honourable member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), that debate be adjourned.

Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Bill 24–The Aboriginal Languages Recognition Act

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 24, The Aboriginal Languages Recognition Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House. *[interjection]* Seconded by the Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson), sorry.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, seconded by the honourable Minister for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, that Bill 24, The Aboriginal Languages Recognition Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, in the coming weeks, we're going to have some significant events in the province of Manitoba, in the city of Winnipeg, indeed, that are going to be part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work in addressing the ongoing saga of the residential school system that plagued this country for many generations.

One of the sad legacies of the residential school system has been the extraction or the taking away of a very fundamental part of one's culture, and that was the languages. We are going to be, as well, approaching the anniversary of the federal government's apology to students that attended residential schools, and the commemoration, of course, occurs on the 11th of June. Unfortunately, the House does not sit on that day here in the Manitoba Legislature, so we are going to be commemorating the brave move taken by the federal government, and we are going to be commemorating that event on the 10th of June. And I'd like to take this opportunity to invite all honourable members in this Chamber to join us in the Rotunda. At the same time, I'm sure that speeches will be made by the leaders of the parties in this Chamber, again to commemorate that very special day in the lives of Aboriginal people.

Specifically, on the legislation that I just tabled for second reading, this legislation recognizes Cree, Dakota, Dene, Inuktitut, Michif, Ojibway and Oji-Cree as the Aboriginal languages of Manitoba.

Indigenous languages have vanished or are in danger of disappearing in many parts of the world, and the same fate is possible for the Aboriginal languages that are spoken here in the province of Manitoba. And it's up to us, as representatives of the people, to act now to protect these languages which are so fundamental and formulate the basis of any culture.

According to the most recent Stats Canada information we've got our hands on, it's estimated that just 25 percent of Aboriginal Manitobans have knowledge of an Aboriginal language, and, as I said earlier, when you take away a language from a people, it's a major step towards the loss of a culture.

So it's remarkable that any of Canada's Aboriginal languages are still spoken following a century and a half of forced assimilation through the residential school system. This legislation is the first step in preserving and promoting Manitoba's proud indigenous language heritage for the benefit of future generations.

And there is, once again, pride among indigenous peoples, among Aboriginal people in our province, about learning their languages and their traditions, and, in many cases, a painful past has resulted in a gap in traditional knowledge that needs to be bridged. This bill does set the groundwork for that to happen. We believe that it's a first step in a long step ahead of us in restoring what has been lost by Aboriginal people due to assimilation policies designed by government to de-Indianize many Aboriginal people.

Government policies are, I believe, the sole basis to blame for this, and it only makes sense that governments like ours take responsibility and action to address it, and I encourage all members to support this government in this effort in taking the first step

and preserving what is very, very important in the preservation of a culture. So I look forward to the support of all honourable members in this Chamber as we move forward in ensuring that we have the fundamental basis of any culture and that is the very important languages that exist to this day in the province of Manitoba among Aboriginal people.

With those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I'll be seated and thank you for the opportunity of putting some words on the record in support of Bill 24.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to talk to Bill 24, The Aboriginal Languages Recognition Act, and first of all, I would congratulate the member for Rupertsland in bringing this bill forward. I think it's a very important step recognizing that Cree, Dakota, Dene, Inuktitut, Michif, Ojibway, Oji-Cree are Aboriginal languages spoken and used in Manitoba. I think the minister, in bringing this forward, is to be congratulated for the effort to recognize the importance of Aboriginal languages, to recognize that these are important parts of Manitoba, important to Manitoba, and important to many Manitobans.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And I think the–there's–the good thing is that we have people who speak each of these Aboriginal languages, but that's not to say that the certainty with which these will be preserved, and their uses will be preserved, is going to be always there, so it is a step, an important step forward in terms of recognizing these languages.

Certainly, there are parts of Manitoba, and certainly in the constituency of Rupertsland itself, where there are people who not only speak and use these languages on a daily basis but use these as their primary language, as they should, in an ongoing basis and indeed, I think the biggest question around this bill that I would have for the minister deals not with the recognition of the languages, which I think is important, but with more details in the bill, or otherwise, with what the plans the minister has, not only in recognizing these as official languages but to make sure that the use and knowledge and understanding of these languages is improved, the availability of materials in these languages is improved, and that we are moving forward in a way that is positive in terms of a long-run status of these languages in Manitoba.

Certainly, we have to acknowledge, as is acknowledged, that, right now, only 30 percent of First Nations people can speak an Aboriginal language well enough to carry on a conversation. With Michif language, there are fewer than a thousand people who speak it, and I know there are a number of people who are actively engaged in trying to preserve and enhance the Michif language and, when I was in Swan River–I think, last year–I talked to one of these people and she's been working in this area and we need more activity like that and this bill recognizes that younger generations of Aboriginal people are increasingly likely to inquire–acquire their language, their own language, their own Aboriginal language, whether it be Cree or Dakota or Dene, Inuktitut or Michif or Ojibway or Oji-Cree, as a second language rather than a mother tongue, and that, nevertheless, we need to recognize that the languages themselves incorporate and are part of the cultural identification important to self-esteem and community well-being.

***** (16:40)

And so that the question, as I said, is what is the government going to do to enhance and make sure that the languages are preserved, that the–we have the–not only the recognition, but, in fact, a living, working, breathing document which takes us the next step.

Will the minister–I would ask the question–make sure that there is a status report produced on each of these languages? I'm sure that there has been work done on many of them, but will the minister's department release and table in the Legislature a status report on each of these languages and the use of the languages, and will this status report have recommendations in terms of moving forward, in terms of what should be the next step? I think this would be a valuable contribution.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

It would've been nice if the minister had, you know, expanded on this and his plans and his hopes, but, certainly, it's the sort of thing which we would like to see laid out more clearly. I know from the Speaker's perspective, you know, the Speaker probably has a particular interest in Inuktitut as a language and that it would be important to have a status report on the use of Inuktitut in Manitoba, and I certainly am aware that there are quite a number of people who come down–having worked in the medical area–who come down, not just from Churchill but from Rankin Inlet and Arviat and Sanikiluaq, Bakers Lake, other communities in the North and come here for medical treatment or,

indeed, for deliveries, for routine medical care sometimes and that it's important that we are there, and I know that there is an effort to make sure that there are some translators.

But, you know, what do we need to do moving forward so that people who are from the North, Inuit background, are made to feel at home when they come here for medical reasons and not only made at home, that the communication is enhanced because those translation facilities are there and abilities to make sure that there's no miscommunication over important medical and health details when you're dealing with critical medical issues. Certainly, one doesn't want to have medical errors occurring because there's miscommunication, and that's a really important reason why you need to have good communication or translation facilities when it comes to Aboriginal people whose primary language is, for instance, Inuktitut as opposed to English and that people can be treated properly and helped.

What efforts will be made to preserve and enhance the use of languages? As I've said, I would hope that the minister would produce from his department a status report on the languages and–with some recommendations. The–will the minister–and I would recommend that the minister have this bill translated into each of the official–or each of the recognized languages.

I don't suggest that all bills should be translated. I don't think that's necessary, but I do think that it would be an important step in this particular bill, that for Inuit people it be translated into Inuktitut and made available, and likewise for these other languages. I think that that would recognize that, you know, this bill sets an important step or precedent in acknowledging these languages are recognized.

I would–we were talking earlier on, in terms of Upper Fort Garry and the provincial park that is going to be there, and I think one of the reasons, obviously, that we are all interested in this provincial park is the tremendous role that Upper Fort Garry played in the history of our province. And, of course, the history of Upper Fort Garry included people who were speaking a variety of Aboriginal languages and the question would be, in terms of moving forward on this bill, we can pass the bill but will be the approach taken at Upper Fort Garry for visitors who may come from different parts of the province, different linguistic backgrounds? Will there be certain elements or materials at the Upper Fort Garry site available in, for instance, Cree or Oji-Cree or Ojibway so that–or Michif–so that the–these languages which were, in fact, used at the Upper Fort Garry site will, in fact, be there as examples and some materials there as examples, as an–part of the effort to make sure that we don't recognize them just in a bill, but we recognize the role that they played in the history of our province and the role and the significance of these languages as languages not only for people's homes but for trade, for the fur trade. And I think that, you know, as we recognize the important role of canoe and the York boat and, well, the transportation as it occurred during the period of the fur trade that we need to make sure that we recognize some of the words for canoe or York boat as they were used in that day.

I suggest that the bill therefore could be expanded upon. I would hope that we would have people presenting at the committee stage who would be able to talk in eloquent fashion about not only the need for this but their view of what we should be doing as a government of our province and as Manitobans, to enhance and facilitate this effort as part of a more broader understanding of, you know, who we are as Manitobans and what the contributions that have been made.

I was speaking at The Forks at the healing–on the day for healing and reconciliation, and I pointed out I wonder how many MLAs, for example, know that the word "caucus," it's not a Latin word as people may have assumed because it's got the u-s ending; it's actually an Aboriginal word. The word "caucus" comes–is an Aboriginal word, and it's one that was adopted on the basis of the Aboriginal tradition of people getting together and coming to a consensus decision. And so that the facts, you know, which are quite interesting from an historical perspective and anybody who wants to find out more should look at a book, it's called the *Indian Givers*, the many things that Aboriginal people have given to others, and one of those, the important contributions of Aboriginal people has been some of the Aboriginal words, and among those is the word "caucus."

***** (16:50)

And that, of course, is very important to all of us here, and we are part, when we caucus, of a long-standing Aboriginal tradition. And that's something that we should remember and something that we should realize and gives us another reason to recognize Aboriginal languages and their contribution in the past, today and in the future.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, it was an interesting point that the Leader of the Liberal Party concluded on in terms of just one of the contributions in terms of the language to this very–very Chamber in a very real way.

But anyway, Mr. Speaker, The Aboriginals' language recognition act is something that is worthy in terms of its recognition. And that, indeed, it is a good thing to recognize the value–valuable contributions that our First Nations continue to make in a very real way, being the founding nations, the–for us, for our province, and the ongoing contributions. And we should all be concerned about languages and the importance of preserving where we can and how we can, in terms of the number of languages that are there.

You know, I understand that Cree is the most predominant Aboriginal language in the province of Manitoba, quite predominant in terms of the number of Aboriginal languages that have been recognized in this bill, that being seven. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not to take away from the others. I'm not too sure exactly of my–if I'm doing the right pronunciation of this, but I know Inuktitut is the language you speak. And I've heard you speak that language and I won't question in terms of your ability to speak it.

As far as I'm concerned you're perfectly bilingual in those–in English and Inuktitut. I hope I'm not butchering it, in the pronunciation of it. But it is a beautiful language to hear, and I think that it's kind of fitting in terms of here we have a bill such as this, and we only need to look to the Speaker of this Chamber in terms of recognizing someone that has carried on an important tradition from his heritage and has shared that–not, obviously, only with myself and other members of this Chamber, but I know as an individual that is very proud of his heritage and shares that heritage with a good number of Manitobans.

And that is the very reason why I think it is important that we debate the bill here today in recognition of those–how important it is to preserve the languages that Manitoba has to offer the world. In fact, you know, I was conveying a story about the war time. And during the war, the Germans were baffled by the Alliance when it was decided to use as a code, if you like, an Aboriginal language, a First Nations language. And the Germans could not decipher it, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, I suspect that if you go through the years, that you will see that the languages that our First Nations have brought to civilization, one could say, has had a very significant impact, not only in the lives of the children and all that spoke them through the years, but have had an impact on who we are as a world today.

And in looking through the seven languages of Cree, Dakota, Dene, Inuktitut, Michif, Ojibway and Oji-Cree is to recognize seven of those languages. I understand that there were, in fact, other languages, Mr. Speaker. And to a certain degree, you know, much like many languages throughout the world, languages through time quite often fall to the wayside and become a forgotten language.

It's interesting to note our friends in the–in Israel–and many of us were at a special event last night where Israel was able to take one of those old languages of Hebrew and bring it back to life when they reformed as a nation. What they did is they recognized the value of the spoken word and their heritage and virtually from scratch recreated that language and I think that maybe we could learn a part from the past and recognize the valuable importance of our heritage as a country is best seen in appreciating the heritage of the many different groups that make our society, Mr. Speaker, and here we're talking about our founding nations.

I would suggest to you that we–all we need to do is also take a look at the more recent immigrants, whether it's from the Philippines and the Tagalog and many other dialects that are a part of the Philippines, Ilocano, to India where we have the Punjab–Punjabi spoken by many, Hindi, Ukrainian, Polish, of course our second official language, that being of French. We are a better province when we appreciate and give recognition to the languages that our citizenry have.

And, Mr. Speaker, it, I believe, does us well as a province and I suspect that if you were to look at it from a practical point of view, that individuals that have an appreciation of more than one language, more than just English, that those individuals, generally speaking, will do that much better in terms of both–I should say, that much better just in general, and that's why I think that we need to encourage that. I like to think that whether it's the past or the future, that we do what we can as a Legislature to recognize the value.

I remember a number of years ago I talked about the Pool of the Black Star here in the Manitoba Legislature, and I made the suggestion, and I'll reinforce it today, that in my opinion, we underutilize that beautiful room where the Pool of

the Black Star is. I would suggest to you that it would be appropriate to incorporate murals of Manitoba's past and–all the way up to today and into the future by looking at our mosaic or our multicultural nature, and, Mr. Speaker, I ultimately believe that that would be a wonderful thing to see and that should–and take into consideration and incorporate the many different languages spoken in our province and, you know, I look forward to some day that that rotunda, that Pool of the Black Star, in fact portray something that has a little bit more value than just whitewashed walls around the star.

And what's interesting is if you stand in the centre of that black star, there is an echo that takes place that many of us are aware of, and I think maybe it would be a fitting place, Mr. Speaker, to emphasize the importance of preservation of our languages that we have to offer in the province of Manitoba, and no language is more important than the ones that–of our First Nations and the many other languages obviously that have followed since.

So, in looking at the valuable contributions, Mr. Speaker, that language has for the people of our province, I suspect that there would be widespread support for this legislation, but I think that we shouldn't stop here. I think that we should continue on, and I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, when this matter is again before the House, the debate will remain open.

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, June 2, 2010

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Introduction of Bills

Bill 235–The Cemeteries Amendment Act
Schuler 2649

Petitions

Multiple Myeloma Treatments
Driedger 2649
Lamoureux 2649

Bipole III
Briese 2650

Oral Questions

Economy
McFadyen; Selinger 2650
Borotsik; Bjornson 2652

Child and Family Services Agencies
Mitchelson; Mackintosh 2653
Lamoureux; Mackintosh 2657; 2659
Lamoureux; Selinger 2658

Sexually Transmitted Infections
Rowat; Rondeau 2654

Cemetery Vandalism
Schuler; Mackintosh 2655

Bill 234
Faurschou; Mackintosh 2656

Rural and Northern Development
Nevakshonoff; Chomiak 2660

Flooding
Graydon; Melnick 2660

Members' Statements

Oak Park Raiders Basketball Team
Driedger 2660

Travel Manitoba Tourism Award Recipients
Caldwell 2661

Environmental Initiatives
Maguire 2662

National Fly Fishing Championships
Struthers 2662

Child and Family Services Agencies
Gerrard 2663

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Second Readings

Bill 8–The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Safety Precautions to Be Taken When Approaching Tow Trucks and Other Designated Vehicles)
Ashton 2663
Gerrard 2664
Lamoureux 2665

Bill 21–The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Immobilizers and Air Bags)
Ashton 2666
Gerrard 2667
Lamoureux 2668

Bill 27–The Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park Act
Blaikie 2671
Gerrard 2671
Lamoureux 2673

Bill 18–The Communities Economic Development Fund Amendment Act
Robinson 2675
Gerrard 2675
Lamoureux 2677

Bill 24–The Aboriginal Languages Recognition Act
Robinson 2679
Gerrard 2680
Lamoureux 2682

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