

Third Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Human Resources

Chairperson
Ms. Marilyn Brick
Constituency of St. Norbert

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, June 7, 2005

TIME – 6:30 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson)

ATTENDANCE - 11 QUORUM - 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Messrs. Bjornson, Struthers

Ms. Brick, Mrs. Driedger, Mr. Jha, Ms. Korzeniowski, Messrs. Penner, Schellenberg, Schuler, Mrs. Stefanson, Mr. Swan

APPEARING:

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux, MLA for Inkster
 Mr. Glen Cummings, MLA for Ste. Rose
 Mr. Leonard Derkach, MLA for Russell

WITNESSES:

Mr. David McDowell, Private Citizen
 Mr. Jake Peters, Private Citizen
 Mr. Ron Anthony, Private Citizen
 Ms. Marj Grevstad, Private Citizen
 Ms. Jean Ogren, Private Citizen
 Mr. John Carroll, Private Citizen
 Ms. Karen Boughton, Private Citizen
 Ms. Ruth Livingston, Private Citizen
 Ms. JoAnne Irving, Private Citizen

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 48–The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act

Madam Chairperson: Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Human Resources please

come to order. This meeting has been called to continue consideration of Bill 48, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act.

We have a number of presenters registered to speak this evening, which you will find noted on the presenters' lists before you. We have also posted the lists at the entrance of the room. Before we proceed with these presentations, we do have a small number of other items and points of information to consider.

First of all, if there is anyone else in the audience who would like to make a presentation this evening, please register with staff at the entrance of the room. Also, for the information of all presenters, while written versions of presentations are not required, if you are going to accompany your presentation with written materials we ask that you provide 20 copies. If you need help with photocopying, please speak with our staff.

As well, I would like to inform presenters that, in accordance with our rules, a time limit of 10 minutes has been allotted for presentations, with another 5 minutes allowed for questions from committee members. Also, in accordance with our rules, if a presenter is not in attendance when their name is called, they will be dropped to the bottom of the list. If the presenter is not in attendance when their name is called a second time, they will be removed from the presenters' list.

On the topic of determining the order of public presentations, I will note that we do have one out-of-town presenter in attendance marked with an asterisk on the list. At previous meetings considering this bill, members had agreed to hear out-of-town presenters first. Is it the will of the committee to continue that practice? *[Agreed]*

I would like to inform all in attendance of the provisions in our rules regarding the hour of adjournment. Except by unanimous consent, a standing committee meeting to consider a bill in the evening must not sit past midnight to hear presentations unless fewer than 20 presenters are

registered to speak to all bills being considered when the committee meets at 6:30 p.m.

As of 6:30 p.m. this evening, there were 13 persons registered to speak to these bills; therefore, according to our rules, this committee may sit past midnight to hear presentations. How late does the committee wish to sit tonight?

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): I would like to suggest midnight.

Madam Chairperson: Is it agreed by the committee to sit till midnight? [*Agreed*]

Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I would like to advise members of the public regarding the process for speaking in committee. The proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript. Each time someone wishes to speak, whether it be an MLA or a presenter, I have to first say the person's name. This is the signal for the Hansard recorder to turn the mikes on and off. Thank you for your patience.

Before I proceed, I would just like to inform the MLAs that I have been given the information that in some occasions, Hansard is having a difficult time hearing our presentations, in particular MLAs. So, if you could bring the mike a little closer to you, and if you could face the mike during the time that you are asking questions, that will help in terms of Hansard getting your comments on the record. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Thank you for your patience.

Bill 48—The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act

Madam Chairperson: We will now proceed with public presentations.

I will now call on John Zubatiuk, private citizen. Is Mr. Zubatiuk here? We will drop Mr. Zubatiuk to the bottom of the list, and he will be called one more time.

That is our out-of-town presenters. Calling JoAnne Irving, private citizen. Is JoAnne Irving here? JoAnne Irving will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

Calling David McDowell, private citizen. You can proceed, Mr. McDowell.

Mr. David McDowell (Private Citizen): Chairperson and members assembled to hear this, I would like to present a view as a citizen who has retired six years ago and would like to present my view on where all of this current bill is going or not going as the case may be.

You can see by the presentation that the whole problem is inadequate funding, and that is really what you have been hearing last night, this morning and it is the crux of the matter.

While we see that you have proposed a move from 5.7 to 6.8 and 7.3 to 8.4, that seems reasonable and is a move in the right direction, but does not go far enough. As has been brought to the minister's attention by other parties, more must be done to fulfill the cost of living, the COLA, that was agreed to in 1977. This must be done to avoid condemning retirees to an ever-decreasing buying power as inflation erodes the pension's value. While we were working, we contributed at a higher rate to achieve a higher COLA, and we are not getting that promised return.

The fund was able to grant a full or almost full COLA during '84 to '98, but since '99, its ability to support CPI COLA grants has been steadily declining; 43 percent in 2003, 27 percent last year, even less this year. Yet everything else rolls on or above at current inflation. My mail when I wrote this yesterday morning informed me that I have to find another 10.9 percent to meet my home heating bills, something that you cannot avoid here in Manitoba. Even my Internet provider informs me that they want another \$2.26 on my lowest rate of \$15.93, an increase of 14.18 percent.

As seniors, we feel that we have been an important part of Manitoba's economy. We still are with what I see comes off my cheque each month to taxes at all levels, and then the taxes repay you when I go out as a consumer. We, also, through our volunteer efforts see that many aspects of our community move ahead at little cost to the government. We are at the stage where we have been well trained, and we are able to volunteer and make sure that a lot of things get done, but we need to be supported at a reasonable living level while we do that.

* (18:40)

My cohort, when I went through teacher training back in the fifties, started with little wages. Through considerable investment in time and money, we were able to improve our qualifications from high school leaving right through to degrees, and we did get a decent wage. The Department of Education did support that fair wage and got good value for it. However, it has also ignored since 1987 the actuarial warnings to see that the COLA provision was properly funded.

Now that we are retired, we ask that measures be put in place to see that we get what we contributed to, a fair inflation protection by a properly funded COLA. As the chart below indicates, the gap between inflation and our ability to match inflation is getting even wider. When I set this into my graphing, you can see that by now if I had retired in '77, I would be out over a hundred dollars' difference for every \$100. That kind of gap, really, I think, if we could turn it around the other way, it would show the declining purchasing power going down and down.

My group of retirees looks to all parties to this pension fund to be assembled, including representatives of the recipients of that pension. You have heard considerable of that over the last day and that a solution be worked out quickly for future retirees. I think we should be telling them that if you are going to retire under the present rules, you are going towards a fixed pension that leaves them at a disadvantage while inflation erodes their livelihood. We need a solution that is fair and balanced to all parties. Thank you for hearing me.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee? Seeing no questions, we thank you very much for your presentation.

The committee calls Jake Peters, private citizen. You can proceed whenever you are ready, Mr. Peters.

Mr. Jake Peters (Private Citizen): Members of the Manitoba legislative hearing committee, thank you for the opportunity to present a very personal brief on this very important piece of legislation.

The Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson), and you, the members of the committee, have been educated on the present

problems with The Teachers' Pensions Act and the reasons for the insufficient funds to follow through on the promises provided in this act. I will focus only on how I am affected by the shortcomings of this Teachers' Pensions Act. Consider this brief to be the equivalent of a victim impact statement.

During the time that I happily contributed to the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund, I did so knowing that there was a provision, a promise, to annually increase my pension the amount of which would be determined by the Consumer Price Index. I recall staff room conversations in '76 or '77 where my colleagues agreed that we would be willing to increase our contributions to TRAF because it would pay off when we finally retired way into the future. If teachers wanted a cost of living adjustment in their plan, they would also need to remove the disability insurance from The Teachers' Pensions Act. Not only were we willing to increase our contributions to TRAF, but we were also willing to pay for our own disability insurance plan. Since 1977, I have done my fair share. Now that I am retired, TRAF is not doing what it promised.

In my 34-year career as a classroom teacher, I have seen many forms of bullying. Should I have chosen to ignore such incidents, serious consequences might have followed. Seldom does the aggressor wish to admit to bullying, for that is admitting to a shameful act. Neither is the victim too anxious to admit being bullied since that may be seen as admitting to weakness. Usually, taking the time to listen carefully to both the victim and the aggressor resulted in ending the bullying and often restoring or beginning a more sociable relationship.

Here I am, admitting to my vulnerable state, telling you that I am being bullied by my teachers' pension plan. Looking forward to my fourth year of retirement, I feel as though I am being robbed of my snack money. That does not seem all that serious, and it might be nothing more than that if the bullying stops, but look at the pattern. Today, it is my snack money; in five years, it is my lunch money and, in 20 years, it is rent money. This charge of being bullied out of rent money in the real future may seem rather far-fetched, but take a look at the following very personal information. In the following table, you will see the growth of my annual pension, compared to how that pension should have grown if the COLA had been based on CPI; that is, as was the intent of The Teachers' Pensions Act after 1977.

If you look at the first row across, I retired in the summer of 2002. That first year I started off a pension, a nice number of \$2,600. That is gross. At the end of that year, TRAF was going to pay out a COLA of 1.6 percent, when the consumer price index was 2.6 percent. Now, you will see a little footnote of what I actually got. It was less than the 1.68 percent and, in my note, I explain that my first pension increase was just a little more than half of that 1.68 percent because, in the TRAF plan, the first year of COLA increase is prorated until a person has been on pension for 18 months. Well, those are the rules and fair is fair. I can accept that. Now, in the last column, I have the gross monthly pension if it had been increased by CPI and, in note 3, you see that I tried to be very fair. I even prorated that as well. If you go back to the third column where you see TRAF's COLA, you can see how it has decreased, until this year it is 0.4 percent.

From the table you will note that in my fourth year of pension, I will be receiving \$112.45 a month less than if I would have received a COLA, based on the relatively low CPI, averaging 2.43 percent in the last three years. This amounts to \$3.74 a day, and that is more than a coffee and muffin at my favourite coffee shop. So you see why it feels as though I am being robbed of my snack money.

But this is only snack money. Why are you so worried, you may ask? Allow me to show you how snack money becomes rent money during my retirement. If you take a look at the second-last row across in table 2, where the difference between CPI and COLA is 2 percent, if CPI were 3 percent and cost of living allowance could pay out 1 percent, and, of course, we know that it cannot, you can see how my dollar, my pension dollar, decreases in value.

The difference between recent CPI and TRAF's COLA is hovering close to 2 percent, and it appears that this difference will grow rather than shrink. You can see that over a 20-year period the 2% difference will reduce my buying power by almost 33 percent. Considering the good state of my health, my family history, the present age of my parents, 89 and 88 and living independently in their own home, my present age of 61, chances are fairly good that I might be receiving pension for another 20 years. If I live to be 91, which is not so impossible, and if the 2% difference persists, then approximately 45 percent of my teacher pension has disappeared. There goes my rent money.

* (18:50)

The Government of Manitoba is the authority overseeing the legislation in The Teachers' Pensions Act. Both the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Teachers' Society receive reports from the TRAF board, and thus have been made aware since 1987 of actuarial concerns that the Pension Adjustment Account would not be able to sustain COLA equal to CPI. Until very recently, there has been little or no effort on the part of government to amend this legislation so as to correct this particular problem.

Bill 48 does nothing more than increase teacher contributions to TRAF by 1.1 percent, and I do not want to minimize what that costs for every teacher. Surely you have received information that 1.1% contribution increases are not enough to eliminate the inadequate teacher contribution to TRAF. Thus, active teacher pension will need to be supported by any surplus funds in Account A, the main pension account. Remember, retired teachers contributed to build that surplus. If active teachers were to contribute at a rate that would fully fund their future pension, then surplus funds might be moved to Pension Adjustment Account from which COLA is paid.

A number of years ago, it was estimated that the financial problems of TRAF would require at least a 2% increase in teacher contributions with 1 percent going to the main pension account and 1 percent going to Pension Adjustment Account. It appears that even 2% increase may not present teachers with a pension that was promised in '77.

Bill 48 represents a tattered Band-Aid for a problem requiring major surgery. This short-sighted amendment to The Teachers' Pensions Act does not solve the future pension problems for active teachers, nor does it solve the present pension problems for the more than 9000 retired teachers.

Madam Chairperson: If you could conclude. Thank you very much.

Are there questions for Mr. Peters? Seeing no questions, we thank you very much for your presentation.

The committee calls Ron Anthony, a private citizen. You can proceed, Mr. Anthony.

Mr. Ron Anthony (Private Citizen): Chairperson, Minister, MLAs, as I look at you this evening I am mindful of when I started my career in 1967. The dress code for teachers was much like the men in this room are wearing tonight, and the dress code I am wearing is much like what teachers wear today. Trudeau did a pirouette in Parliament, and I have to admit he was far more agile than I am at the same age. Anyway, I notice my ensemble, the shirt is new; the pants are Value Village. My loving wife bought my shirt; she is still working. I am retired and I shop at Value Village.

Madam Chairperson: I just have to ask you to stay at the mike so that the recorder can get your comments. Thank you.

Floor Comment: Tell us how to dress, too.

Mr. Anthony: Well, if anybody can decide how you are going to dress, you guys should be. Anyway, so I started teaching in 1967, and what a great year. We had a 25% pay increase. I really did not care initially, but it sounded really great and I only worked for six months and I made \$3,000. Wow. Well, yeah, I do not think I have been as wealthy since.

I bought a car. I paid cash. I took a trip to Minneapolis. I went to a friend's wedding in Vancouver; a trip to Expo and Montreal in '67; saw all the pavilions and whatnot. I visited Ottawa. I looked for Louis Riel's signature up there in the book, but I did not notice it. Anyway, I spent a year in Europe, North Africa and Asia. I wanted to make sure that I could afford to come back so I withdrew my pension. That was the first time I withdrew it, \$129. Times have changed and I guess I have too.

Now, in my opinion I think there are three types of teachers: young frisky ones, seasoned veterans and retirees. The young ones, well, of course, I cannot speak for all the young ones because I am not there anymore. The young ones, as a rule, ignore pension issues. That is for old people. They are busy with the important stuff, working with kids, coaching drama, et cetera. I, myself, pulled my pension three times before I was 30. I am not proud of that now, but that is how important it seemed to me at the time. I think young teachers sort of require protection of that sort, at least my type. It is fortunate that I was able to buy back.

I was 45 with over 20 years teaching when I realized maybe I would not start that business career

or another career entirely, that maybe I would end up retiring as a teacher. So I thought, oh, I better find out about what is going on, my pension. Well, I found there is a lot of misinformation out there. A lot of people did not know anything about the pension. My local, the MTS and TRAF either did not give me information because they did not know, or they could not tell me or whatever. Initially, I got the feeling that if I worked 30 years contributing 2 percent a year, I would get a 60% pension, sort of like Hydro, or 70 percent if you worked 30 years. Anyway, I got a letter from TRAF and did the math. It turned out that my pension would be closer to 40 percent.

When I retired, I was earning \$55,000. Now I would be earning \$65,000, four years later. That is an 18% increase. According to TRAF, my COLA has been less than 3 percent. This morning I phoned a friend. He is in his seventies. He worked with Murray Smith's COLA task force 30 years ago. He said the most important provision with our pension is and was the COLA, and I think that is the real issue for us tonight.

Now the part that I typed up for last night. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to reflect.

Okay. I am happy to have a pension. Really. Because I have friends and peers who do not have one, and there is nothing like a pension, and I appreciate the work of all the teachers and the MLAs in the past who worked to bring our pension about. The issues are complex and many of the details are beyond my understanding. I listen to people talk about, you know, 0.3 percent and 0.9, and if so and so does this. Yeah. Great. Anyway, and people said I should have been an accountant. I mean, I cannot fathom it.

* (19:00)

Anyway, I appreciate the work of this committee on Bill 48, and as I say it is great to be able to come in front of you and speak to you. In the past few years, several improvements have been made in the fund and benefits extended without increasing contribution rates. I am not against extending the benefits, but if you increase benefits, then somebody has to pay. We have been told that the fund could support these changes. Meanwhile, the actuaries have been expressing their concerns of underfunding for over 20 years. I was listening to Bill 51 last night, and the gentleman was saying about red flags and all

that. I guess we have to pay more attention to the red flags in the future. Certainly, I hope we do on our pension.

Our COLA has been sacrificed in part to meet the shortfall for the main account. In negotiations with the government 30 years ago, teachers, unlike government civil servants, assumed responsibility for funding their own disability program. I was talking to a friend who is retiring from the civil service this evening. Also, I believe supplementary health benefits in return for government guarantees for a decent COLA. I believe that the Manitoba government has a moral obligation to provide an adequate COLA for teachers, and I do not think that that has been met.

Since I retired in 2001, the COLA has increased by 2.6 percent, while the CPI has gone up by 10.3. At this rate, in six more years, my pension will be worth 80 percent of what it is now. We have to bear in mind that the CPI index mutes the effects of some of the more volatile elements. I know that Greenspan, I follow him occasionally on the Internet, and my health plan has gone from \$66 to \$103, a 55% increase. In four years, gas has gone, and this is being generous, 58 to 88 cents a litre, a 50% increase.

In closing, I would encourage the committee to make certain that TRAF is properly funded, and that you address the COLA issue which has been neglected far too long. Only the Legislature has the power to amend the pension under The Education Act. If we wait another 20 years, many of us will not live to see these changes, let alone benefit from them. Thanks very much.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Anthony. Does the committee have questions for the presenter? Seeing no questions, we thank you very much for your, oh, excuse me, just one moment.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Thank you very much for your presentation. Certainly, we have heard from numerous people last night as well as this morning telling a similar story. It was our view that when this government was first elected one of their platforms was to deal with these kinds of matters and to deal with them fairly.

Do you believe that there is an opportunity now for us in this committee to be able to amend this act at this time to ensure that the commitment that was

made by the NDP government when they were first elected to rectify what is lacking in this bill?

Mr. Anthony: Well, I know what I believe and I know what I think. First of all, it is nice to be here in front of you. I have worked to help elect MLAs over the years. I am from Wolseley, by the way, and I realize that MLAs are under a lot of pressure. They have a lot of obligations. It is very hard to please everybody.

I think that if the government and the Legislature have the will, they will make the appropriate changes to The Education Act so that the Teachers' Retirement Fund is properly funded, that the COLA is properly funded. It is not going to be easy.

I understand that most of the available money goes to health care, and I realize after seeing my Manulife premiums increase by 55 percent since I retired, the sorts of pressures that the government is under, whatever the political stripe. However, I think it is in the government's interests to have a solid pension. If you want to attract, there are actually some young teachers who come into the profession for money and maybe for the pension. I have worked with the university and I see the complexion of people coming into the profession has changed in the sense that we are not attracting nearly as many men to the profession as you were years ago. I do not know why, but I have some thoughts.

I know years ago, Duff Roblin, I think that is in the days of the 25% increase, I could be wrong, made some major sacrifices to change the schools, I mean dramatically change the rural schooling in the province, dramatically increase pay for teachers. Of course, it did mean extra taxes, and as a citizen, I am not interested in that, but it can be done if the will is there. So thanks.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. We appreciate your presentation and your sense of humour.

The committee calls Gayle Robertson, Private Citizen. Gayle Robertson will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

The committee calls Marj Grevstad, private citizen. You can proceed, Mrs. Grevstad.

Ms. Marj Grevstad (Private Citizen): It is Ms. Grevstad. Minister, Madam Chairperson and

members of the committee, my name is Marj Grevstad. I am a retired teacher and a member of the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba. I retired four years ago in June of 2001.

I taught school for 34 years mostly in River East School Division. I began teaching after one year of teacher training and as a young woman, while teaching full-time, attended university in the evenings, at summer school and earned my Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degrees.

After 34 years of teaching which I very much enjoyed, I felt it was time to end my full-time career. Since I am single, I knew that I would be doing some work to supplement my pension for a number of years. The first year after I retired, I substituted in River East. During the three years since then, I have been working in Winnipeg School Division's tutoring program which I enjoy doing. This is not a full-year commitment. As my career ended, I felt as if I had provided for myself well and looked forward to a secure future as a retiree.

I am speaking to you today because I am extremely concerned about the very limited amount of the cost of living allowance being applied to retired teachers' pensions. My concern is shared by many of my retired, and soon-to-be retired friends and former colleagues. I did not realize that this problem even existed until a year or two after I retired. It is only recently that I have come to realize the full impact this is having on our pensions.

When I asked my friends for their thoughts in a word or two about the situation, some of their replies were shocked, defeated, nervous, disrespected. I feel like a second-class citizen, not as highly valued as I felt when teaching, not a stable situation, frightened for my future and old age, very disappointed, totally surprised, extremely annoyed, and there were a few comments which I refuse to print here.

* (19:10)

I have compiled some calculations that help me understand what is happening to my money, being that math is my area of expertise if I claim to have any, and I hope they will help you see the effects of how this has impacted my gross monthly pension income. What has happened to my pension is, of course, what is happening to all Manitoba teachers' pensions.

So, when I retired, I received my first pension cheque in July of 2001, and that gross amount, not my net, my gross, was \$2,569. I am not going to go through every one of the details here because I think you are aware of what happened in each of the years. So the total amount of the increase due to COLA, that is anticipating 0.4 percent for the coming year, the total amount of increase due to COLA is \$77.

What would have happened to \$2,569 if full CPI was applied? I am not saying here that I expect full CPI, but that is really what happens to our dollars out there in the big world, from my perspective anyway. So, \$2,569, had full COLA been applied to that, would become \$2,819. The total amount of the increase, then, if full CPI was applied, would be \$230 per month.

This is what has happened to my pension in four short years. Since June of 2001, I have experienced, as have all of you, increases in my housing costs and costs of gasoline and groceries. Telephone rates, cablevision and health insurance rates have increased also, and there are other things I could have mentioned as well. Overall, these increases exceed the \$77 that my pension has increased as a result of the COLA we have been granted. I am extremely concerned and feel that in a very short time my pension income will not even meet my very basic needs, let alone any extras. I might just add at this point that I think that I live well. I do not live as well as I did when I was teaching. I definitely do not live extravagantly, and I have to say that my pension, out of that I cannot pay my Autopac which is coming due. I have to go into my savings to do that.

This COLA issue is very, very serious to those who are presently receiving pensions, as it will greatly affect our futures as well as the futures of those who will retire after us. I am sure that you, as members of the Legislative Assembly, must be fully aware of the impact reduced pension dollars will have on the buying power, the financial independence, and hence the economy of the province in general if the existing problem is not resolved.

As you consider amendments to Bill 48, I urge you to give the matter of COLA on pensions of already retired teachers your full attention in a manner that will result in a fair and equitable solution to our concerns. Also, I hope this matter will be resolved in the very near future. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I will make sure I speak right into the microphone.

Ms. Grevstad, thank you very much for taking the time and coming out to committee. I read with great interest that you have taught for a long time in the River East School Division, a division that I have put a lot of time into and my children attend. Certainly, you have pointed out very clearly, as have others, you focused on what you did best and that was teaching. Really, it is not until later on when you are facing retirement that is when you start to look at what your retirement is going to look like. I noted with great interest you mentioned that you retired and you are happy, but you do not live extravagant. To take the example from previous, the issue is not today; the issue is in 10 to 20 years from now without a proper COLA. So I think that is a really important lesson for us to grapple with as a committee.

I would like to thank you for the second page of your presentation. You have done what you do best and you have really taught us well. This lays it out very, very quickly what you are facing and, certainly, as one member of this committee, I thank you for that. As we start to move through line by line later on this evening, certainly this is something we should take into consideration. So thanks again for coming out and we appreciate all the years that you put into River East School Division. You are one of those individuals that made it the great division that it is.

Ms. Grevstad: In reference to something you said earlier in your thanks, which I appreciate, Mr. Schuler, to me the concern is not 20 years from now, it is now, okay.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): On page 1 at the bottom, you had indicated that you were speaking with many friends. Some of the replies are certainly very passionate, and, obviously, some are very serious concerns. Were a lot of these comments coming from teachers or other than teachers, just individuals out in the community that you would know that also had some feeling about this?

Ms. Grevstad: Actually, all of these comments came from quite newly retired teachers, similar years of retirement to me or one or two, more or less.

Mrs. Driedger: I guess, too, that we would find a large number of the retirees that could be feeling this way are very likely to be women, are they not?

Ms. Grevstad: Some of these were women and some were men, but I do not think that I could generalize in that because I have a mixture of friends. So I could not really generalize and say that they were women. Probably most of them were, but not all of them were.

Madam Chairperson: Seeing no other questions, the committee thanks you very much for your presentation. Thank you.

Committee calls Jean Ogren, private citizen. Ms. Ogren, you can proceed.

Ms. Jean Ogren (Private Citizen): Thank you. My name is Jean Ogren, and I wish to address the proposed Bill 48. I realize that soon there will be important second and third readings and votes in the Legislature on a matter affecting whether the retired teachers of this province will receive a proper COLA adjustment to their pensions. I am a retired teacher and have a vested interest in your attention to this important issue.

I taught for 34 years in four different schools in three different school divisions in Manitoba, both rural and urban: at that time called Rolling River No. 39, that was Erickson; Seine River No. 14, which was St. Norbert; and Winnipeg No. 1. I have had a long and honourable career and found my job worthwhile, stimulating and exhausting. I loved it.

My retired colleagues span this province, having chosen it as our home and workplace over the years. Please be aware that every single one of you has constituents who will be affected by this vote.

As a teacher, I was active in teachers' associations, usually with respect to professional development, improving teaching methods and equality in education. I have to apologize for starting out "Mr. Chairman." On my written form, the first night I knew it was a man, Madam Chairperson. This kept me closely connected to the changes that happened over the years due in many cases to our communications with the various governments in power, many of whom appreciated our contributions and who were in step with the times. But, alas, the last 18 years have not been a time of keeping in step or of appreciating the efforts of a dedicated workforce.

As a teacher, I paid into a pension plan in good faith, but the governments of the time did not match

my contributions and began a course of pay as you go, not finding matching pension funds until a teacher actually retired. This has resulted in a backlog of what amounts to indebtedness on the part of the present government. This affects both sides of the table today. I would like you to realize that. I have lasted through a lot of governments.

There is no earned interest on investments to bolster the plan. There is not enough money to pay the future pensions of the teachers working now, and not enough money or enough teeth in the legislation to ensure a decent COLA for those of us now retired. I understand that Bill 48 as it now stands attempts only to rectify the problem for teachers who are presently teaching, and even for them the adjustment is too small for the future problem. My son is one of them, and I will bet many of your sons, daughters and grandchildren one day will head for this noble career. But there is no commitment made to improve the COLA of teachers who are now retired like myself. The present government may feel that since they did not create the problem, it is not their problem to solve. This is very short-sighted and narrow in outlook.

* (19:20)

While employed full-time as a teacher, I took three weeks off to give birth to my first baby. There was no maternity leave available in 1968, and I paid a substitute teacher with a master's degree for those three weeks. I adopted a baby in 1971, but there was no adoptive leave at the time. My husband could get a day off work for the arrival of this child, but I, a teacher, could not. Luckily, we were able to time her arrival for the summer time or she would still be wondering who her mommy was.

Although I myself would not benefit from it, I fully supported teachers in their efforts to obtain the rights to maternity leave and to adoptive leave, and I had no option of buying back either of these. These rights were eventually won even though they were won too late for me personally, and that is the attitude I would hope to expect from you. As duly elected legislative representatives, I need and respectfully request your support in a matter that you may feel does not affect you personally, but affects many provincial workers in the field of education from the past, working now and those who will fulfil this important function in the future.

I realize that the government faces constant demands on its revenues. I applaud your efforts, for example, with all the recent flooding trying to help and doing that quickly. I admire that about the quick emergency response, but what was a problem in the making 18 years ago has become an injustice to be righted today. I agree with the previous speaker who said that the problem is now today, it is not a future problem, it is already here and it was 18 years in the making. If it is not righted now, then when, for heaven's sake? Of course, after years of neglect, the problem has become costly. Just imagine how horrendous it will become if it is left even longer.

I thought that the days of pensioners being able to keep up with the ordinary expenses of everyday life were past. I did not imagine that all of the bills of my daily life would jump by huge percentage points while my pension barely gets a whiff of a COLA. I am always pleased to read of Manitoba's and Canada's healthy economies, but economies are only as economically strong as their citizens.

Among my many roles in life, I am as taxpayer, a voter, a consumer, a very busy volunteer and a retired teacher. Limiting my income year by year is of no advantage to this province, and certainly is of no advantage to me and to my family. It is time for past commitments to be addressed. Retired teachers have waited long enough for our properly indexed pension.

I ask all of you here today to please speak and vote in favour of COLA for teachers who are now retired when the subject arises for discussion and final vote. If it does not arise, please bring it up. I have never made a presentation to a legislative committee before and thank you for this opportunity to do so and for your thoughtful and courteous consideration of this request.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation. Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing no questions, we thank you. Mr. Cummings.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Well, thank you for your presentation. Would you believe that this committee should move forward and make appropriate amendments to this bill to implement COLA for the immediate future? Would this be something that should still have further discussion or negotiations? I am not completely naive. The

presentations that we have been receiving for the last while are all saying do something now, but I would just like to confirm that that would be also your opinion.

Ms. Ogren: I remember one presenter giving some statistics. If this is left for six months, it will mean this much less in PAA, this much less in the pension fund, and sooner is obviously better. I do not pretend to know your job. I know what I want to come out of your job. I want it fixed and I want it fixed quickly. Whether that means that you vote in the 1.1 that exists now for active teachers to at least ensure that, you know, Account A is taken care of and then reopened. I do not know how difficult it is to reopen. The minister mentioned it had been reopened; the act had been reopened four times in the last six years, which I am glad to see. It certainly needs some more; you need a can opener for this one.

I would not want you to leave it closed. If you were to do that, but if it was a choice between doing nothing and then talking for another few years, I am sorry, I would rather you got right to it. Thank you.

Mr. Cummings: Just on that point, and because you phrased your response in the manner you did, it appears from information that has been shared with us that if any changes, or even the changes that are recommended here, were to be delayed for six months, it could amount to three-quarters of a million dollars less in the PAA and \$3.25 million less into the main fund, so I put that on the record just to confirm your sense of urgency.

Ms. Ogren: Thank you.

Mrs. Driedger: Are you also of the beliefs, and, sorry, I was away from the table to hear all of your presentation, did you also indicate that you felt that retired teachers need a stronger voice on the Pension Task Force? Would that be your opinion?

Ms. Ogren: It was not in my report, but it is my strongly held opinion, so reading my mind in that way is very good. RTAM is great.

Madam Chairperson: Seeing no other questions, I thank you very much for your presentation.

Ms. Ogren: Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: John Carroll? Just before you proceed, are you Mr. Carroll?

Mr. John Carroll (Private Citizen): Yes.

Madam Chairperson: You are. Okay, great. You can proceed, Mr. Carroll. Thank you.

Mr. Carroll: Madam Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Jack Carroll. I have been a teacher for 39 years. I have spent time teaching in the country, six years, Flin Flon, Swan River, Dominion City, before coming into the Winnipeg School Division for 34, 35 years. I taught at all levels, elementary, junior high, senior high, was an administrator at the elementary, junior and senior high as well. I am a retired teacher who has been on pension for 15 years.

I, along with thousands of my fellow professionals, clearly understood when we retired that there was a built-in indexing of our pension incomes. This would reflect the rises in the cost of living. I believed at the time that the indexing would go as high as 5 percent per year, depending on the rise in the cost of living. I, as it turns out, erroneously believed, after being informed by a representative of TRAF, that this was a firm policy. I later discovered to my dismay that any increases received depended on the amount of excess funds that the TRAF happened to have in reserve.

Last year, for example, as you have already heard a hundred times, I received one half of 1 percent. In fact, the cost of living was, I thought, about 3 percent. Again this year with the COLA about the same, I am getting four tenths. There have been years when, I believe, I received nothing. Consequently, my pension has been reduced by at least 20 percent and probably 30 percent in terms of real income. Under these conditions, it is almost certain that by the end of the lives of me and my spouse our incomes will have been reduced by over 50 percent of what I worked for, what we expected and what we are entitled to after 39 years in education. That ought to be, and is, if it continues, a disgrace to the Government of Manitoba.

This is even more distressing when it is recognized that practically every other group of government employees and related groups, but at this point I would like to take out the comment about the MLAs because I understand it is not quite true, but these other people do have indexing in their pensions. Perhaps, had I been more aware of the situation, I should have gone on teaching more years,

even if that would have been to the detriment of both the students and my own health.

* (19:30)

I understand that there is a bill which has been placed before the Legislature dealing with teachers' pensions. It is unbelievable to me that this legislation does not deal with the problem of the presently retired teachers. I ask you how could you possibly pass a bill into law that treats your retired teachers so badly. What is so upsetting to me and many of my fellow professionals is that we paid all these fees, all the fees that you asked for, and we paid for indexing of retired teachers while we were working. Why are we now being victimized?

What is also significant to note is that nearly every other province in Canada is treating their retired teachers better than Manitoba. Teachers' pensions are a provincial responsibility. Please accept this responsibility.

In conclusion, I want to strongly urge you not to proceed with this bill unless it deals with the disgraceful problem that the Province has regarding its retired teachers. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cummings: I just wanted to pick up on your last comment and thank you for your presentation. You emphasized that you do not wish to proceed with the bill unless it deals with the problem of its currently retired teachers. That is not a position that everyone has taken at this table. Would you like to expand on that a little bit? Are you prepared to wait? Or is this simply a demonstration of your unhappiness with it not being properly dealt with at this time?

Floor Comment: You know, my father was a champion ploughman—

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Carroll, sorry. I have to recognize you.

Mr. Carroll: I am sorry. My father was a champion ploughman in Canada. He was a Canadian champ. He used to try and teach me to plough. He used to say to me, "If you can't do it right, don't do it at all." That is what I am saying to you.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Lamoureux, if you could, just a short question because we have other members who have had their hands up as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Madam Chair. I will try to keep it brief. Mr. Carroll, I truly appreciate your presentation and the passion in which you have delivered it, not to take away from other presenters. I think that you have all done an excellent job. I have got a tremendous amount of respect for what it is that you are saying.

We are in a position as MLAs which, if we wanted to, even one member of this Chamber could prevent this bill from passing ultimately and maybe see it come back in November. But there is a substantial cost if that was to happen. It has been reported as in excess of \$1 million, or not in excess of, approximately \$1 million, just under \$1 million if, in fact, it does not pass by Thursday. That is really when we are looking at having to pass it.

Having said that, is it worth saying no to this bill in hopes that we are going to be able to get a change in the future, given the government's record on this issue? Or are we better off to take that \$1 million or that 1 percent today and push on the government to recognize how they have neglected our retired teachers?

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Carroll: I can answer the question. I personally believe that you should not lose the million dollars. But I also personally believe that you have got time to amend this thing to look after retired teachers, even by Thursday. You have owed it a long time. I think it is due, well overdue.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, Mr. Carroll. I have a couple of questions. The first one is more—*[interjection]* Mr. Carroll?

Madam Chairperson: You have to stay at the mike because you have a couple more minutes.

Mrs. Driedger: I have a couple more questions. One is more of an interest, just for me personally. Did you say you worked in Swan River?

Floor Comment: Yes, I did.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Carroll. I have to recognize you, Mr. Carroll.

Mr. Carroll: Minitonas.

Mrs. Driedger: Oh. I just wanted to indicate, I am from Benito—and so that jumped out at me—and did go to school in Swan River for a year.

Mr. Carroll: That was probably before you were born.

Madam Chairperson: I will let you continue.

Mrs. Driedger, you have a question?

Mrs. Driedger: Yes. Mr. Carroll, certainly, this side of the table has definitely heard you and what you are saying. It has become very clear through all these hours and hours of presentations that we obviously have a wrong that needs to be righted, and certainly hearing all of the presentations and the passion and commitment of retired teachers has made us very aware that we have to address this in some way. So I do not really have a question for you, but just those comments to relay to you.

An Honourable Member: Thank you very much, Mr. Carroll. We truly thank you for your presentation. I also understand that you taught at Dominion City for a while, which was of course—

Madam Chairperson: Excuse me. Sorry. I just have to make sure I recognize. Then we only have 30 seconds left. Mr. Penner, do you have a question?

Mr. Penner: Just very, very briefly. Thank you for teaching at Dominion City. It is one of my home towns, but I want to just make a short comment saying that you need to realize that this group of MLAs sitting around here average tenure, lifespan, is six years.

The second point I want to make is we are the only people on record who voted themselves a decrease in salary. We are one of the very few groups of people that truly made the decision to have no pension at all for themselves, so I just want you to recognize who you are dealing with.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Carroll. Thank you. We appreciate your presentation.

The committee calls Linda Boughton, private citizen. One more time for Ms. Linda Boughton, private citizen. Ms. Boughton will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

The committee calls Karen Boughton, private citizen. You are Karen Boughton?

Ms. Karen Boughton (Private Citizen): I am Karen Boughton, yes.

Madam Chairperson: You can proceed with your presentation.

Ms. Boughton: It might be noted that Linda Boughton and I both taught in the River East School Division for many years. I have never met her. Once in a while our cheques got crossed. I understand that she was a wonderful teacher, so I do not mind being connected.

Madam Chairperson: You can proceed with your presentation, Ms. Boughton.

Ms. Boughton: Madam Chairman, honourable member Mr. Bjornson, committee members. I thank you for the opportunity of stating my brief on Bill 48.

Mine is a more personal one. I would like to say that I started teaching after grade 11 at 17 years of age. I taught in a one-room rural school. My memory of that was that I was the caretaker, unpaid, but there was a long line of pipes from the back to the front. I lived with my chairman. I lived in my chairman's house. I went over one morning, and I lit the fire at seven o'clock. I waited for it to get going, and when I came back for breakfast the two girls from this home went over and came running back to say the pipes had fallen down, and he looked at me as if I was to blame. At 17, I took no blame. However, I taught in rural schools in various places: Minnedosa, Boissevain, and River East is where I finished.

* (19:40)

I am a retired teacher in Manitoba. To begin with, I would like to take a quote from the letter I received on July 27, 1992, referring to my retirement. It is from the Teachers' Retirement Fund Board with a Manitoba logo in the heading. I will quote the third and last paragraphs of that letter, "In your 13th month of retirement, you will receive a prorated cost of living adjustment based on the change in the Consumer Price Index for the previous calendar year. You will receive further cost of living adjustments in July of each year thereafter. Your future pension payments will go forward in like

manner at the end of each month. If you have any questions in this regard, we shall be pleased to be of assistance." Signed, Claude DeGagne, executive director.

The purpose of this brief is to bring attention to the serious situation of the retired teachers of Manitoba with the lack of cost of living adjustment, or one of 0.54 or 0.4 percent. I would believe we, the retired teachers of Manitoba, provincially have the unenviable position of being the only retired teachers in Canada with almost no indexed cost of living. If not the only province, then we are one of two. Is that something the Manitoba Legislature can be proud of, and how can that above quote be explained?

We are not a part of the Manitoba Teachers' Society now that we are retired. What is done on behalf of the Manitoba Teachers' Society is not done on our behalf. We are a separate entity now. It is true that as active teachers we financially supported the retired teachers through our own monies when the cost of living adjustment first began. As I understand it, that amount was set by the government and we paid into the fund. Therefore, we have given, but now we are told when it is our turn to receive an indexed cost of living that the well is now dry.

We have given many years of our lives educating children of Manitoba. We have consistently given to those students the gift of education on which they are now able to build their lives. We have given beyond books. As we taught each day, we endeavoured with each student to encourage and impart a love of learning and a desire to reach for the best they were capable of attaining. We wanted them to be able to enjoy a quality of life throughout their whole lives. We began in September, and until the end of June each of those students was on our minds. I even remember waking up dreaming about them. Now we are retired.

When I retired after nearly 30 years of teaching, I was assured by TRAF that my pension was indexed to the cost of living. It would not necessarily be the same percentage as the yearly Consumer Price Index, but it would be maintained within some acceptable percentage of that annual CPI. Had this not been stated so clearly and understood by me to be true, I believe that I would have remained in the active profession far beyond the age that I did. However, I believed what I was told, that there would be an indexed cost of living or COLA. On this I made my

decision to retire, as it appeared to be the best decision for myself and the students I would be teaching as I aged.

Since I have now been retired 13 years, I have compared my initial pension to the pension received today. This indexed COLA is so very much lower than the increase in the Consumer Price Index that, over 13 years, I believe now my pension is at least 25 percent to 30 percent less buying power. I feel it daily. For only one item we all require, we need only to look at the increase in the price of gas. It is so heavily taxed on top of the increase in the real product. What percent has it increased over that time? I look ahead and I wonder how to continue living with any degree of quality. The CPI would show that it now continues to outstrip our buying power.

My husband and I, many years ago, chose to purchase a very modest bungalow in a slightly older area of the city, one that we felt that was small but adequate, that we could continue to afford for the rest of our lives. Our home assessment for the year 2006 went up 34 percent. Bungalows, I am told, are taxed more heavily than the others because they sell faster. It is a strange world. I have even talked to others whose assessments are much higher. Then there are the countless other taxes that have been put in place or increased since 1992. I had not expected to be forced to face this problem after working in the profession of teaching in the province of Manitoba for that many years, especially after being assured that there would be an adequate indexed COLA, as in the quote from above.

Will I be able to continue living in our home with the taxes and utilities climbing at exponential rates, to say nothing of food? The cost of dental work, the cost of medical insurance and drugs are constantly rising, and we need them more now as we are becoming older. Blue Cross rates, as we heard, will continue to do so. To have a crown put on a tooth, I found out just recently, is about \$800.

Notice I have not mentioned any travel or entertainment. I think we all suffer a much lower standard of living and will suffer a much lower standard of living in the not-too-distant future if there is no guaranteed, indexed cost of living adjustment to that pension, as it was promised. Several provinces, I understand, have a set percentage rate to be added to their teachers' pensions, and not just the rich provinces.

Most individuals in my family enjoy longevity. I expect to look forward to at least another 15 years. If that is so, my pension will have much less than half the original buying power. Seniors' housing in this city can cost \$2,000 and up a month. Yes, there are cheaper ones. Is that what you, as a provincial Legislature, feel is worthy of your retired teacher?

Is there any group who have been employed by the Manitoba government who are not receiving an indexed COLA? I think I need to take out that next sentence. It takes many teachers to teach the large number of students in this province. We do deserve to be treated fairly, not only for the work we have done, but for the standard of living we have left on the promise of a yearly indexed COLA which should be adjusted according to the price index.

Should the retired teachers of Manitoba not be on the same level playing field as teachers in other provinces? Must we continually be the poorly provided for by the government? We not only deserve, we very much need, an assured regular COLA.

In closing, I urge those who are receiving these briefs to take immediate and appropriate action to keep the promise given at our retirements by TRAF. It is time to attain for the retired teachers of Manitoba a constant adequate indexed cost of living that can and must be given.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you so much.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you very much, Mrs. Boughton. I am probably politically incorrect by saying I had a favourite teacher. Maybe we are not supposed to. I do not know. I had one, and you reminded me of her. Your paragraph at the bottom of that first page just really, really struck me, "We have consistently given to those students the gift of education on which they are now able to build their lives. We have given beyond the books."

It was my Grade 4 teacher, I just feel compelled to tell you this, it was my Grade 4 teacher that I give credit for probably getting me to where I am today. On one hand, I can count about five people that have influenced me hugely in my life, and it was a Grade 3-4 teacher who taught me in each of those grades. She did teach me to reach for the most I could be, and it was just her innovative way of teaching. You have captured in one paragraph an

incredible language that really says what teachers do for kids. Certainly, I think it is our obligation now to see where we can address this issue. So I do not really have a question, more so just those comments.

* (19:50)

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Boughton, did you want to respond?

Ms. Boughton: Thank you for that. That is very nice.

Madam Chairperson: Seeing no other questions, I thank you very much for your presentation.

Ms. Boughton: Thank you for hearing my brief.

Madam Chairperson: The committee calls Kris Arnason, private citizen. One more time, Kris Arnason, private citizen. Kris Arnason will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

The committee calls Ruth Livingston.

Ms. Ruth Livingston (Private Citizen): Do I have to wait?

Madam Chairperson: You can proceed, Ms. Livingston.

Ms. Livingston: First of all, I would like to apologize for the cut-and-paste document you are receiving, but it was all I could manage today after being here last night. My day was non-stop from eight this morning until 6:30 this evening, and then I was here, and there were extra things after reflecting on last night that I wanted to say.

My name is Ruth Livingston. I am 60 years old and, unlike many of my same-age friends in the room, I am still an active teacher. I work in an inner city alternative high school program, and I absolutely love what I do. I am so lucky to have this job, which is why I am still working, but, anyway.

In the 1960s and seventies I worked in Toronto as a social worker. I came to teaching well into my thirties in Winnipeg, having, of course, cashed out my previous pension to go back to school. At that time, like many people at that age, I had no idea how quickly that money as a pension would become important to me. I have concerns regarding

the pension I will be receiving next year when I do retire.

The proposed amendments to Bill 48 do not deal adequately with the needs of retired teachers. When my colleagues retired 25, 26 years or so ago, they expected their pensions would be protected against inflation. You have heard this over and over. Not only is \$1,100 or less per month, which they now receive before taxes, not a significant amount of income in today's economy, they have lost purchasing power every year because the COLA was not equivalent to the actual increase in cost of living expenses. This especially affected women due to the lower classifications they had at the time and to family leaves which in those days there was no provision from which to buy back mat leaves and so on.

I am very concerned about the ability of TRAF to provide for reasonable COLA payments in the future. Teachers in this province have contributed throughout their careers a percentage of their pension contributions towards protection against inflation. Retired teachers currently are not receiving appropriate COLA, which seriously affects their standard of living.

Unlike many of my retired colleagues, I have no intention of substituting. What energy and health remains to me will be devoted to painting, singing and volunteering at Rossbrook House. I want my pension to be adequate to support me so that I do not need to work for money once I retire from active duty as a teacher.

We expect retired teachers to be consulted in the decisions which affect them. This is the basis of good decision making, including members of a target group in the process of making decisions about themselves. I commend the minister and the Cabinet for having placed a retired teacher on the TRAF board. You will have to make that little amendment for me. I hope next time to see another retired teacher as well as an actuary from the government's side of appointees.

I would like to thank the TRAF board and the MTS executive for making this issue a priority. The proposed 1.1 percent is a beginning. We now need to find a way to increase the pension adjustment account. Yesterday, a member of the committee asked for suggestions on how to do this. I would like

this referred back to your committee to find somewhere, somehow, a pot of money to bring our COLA in line with yours or, failing that, at least to match the actual cost of living increase each year.

I thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I hope your committee is hearing our concerns and will adjust the levels we are allowed to contribute to our plan so that our needs can be met and to guarantee COLA as soon as possible.

Madam Chairperson: We thank you for your presentation.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Thank you very much for your presentation. Actually, I will take this opportunity to thank all presenters who have made presentations tonight. One of the recurring things that I have seen over the course of the committee hearings is the fact that this is an issue that had been identified 18 years ago and, as you mention in your presentation, the 1.1 percent that is proposed is a beginning. Certainly, it was reflected in the comments of the Teachers' Society yesterday, the desire to work with our 10 members and retired teachers to continue to make improvements towards the pension, and I appreciate you taking your time and energy to be here this evening.

Ms. Livingston: I just realized that in my little handwritten notes I actually skipped two paragraphs, so I will ask you to just read those on your own, I suppose.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you. Seeing no other questions from the committee, we thank you very much for your presentation. Did you want to make a final comment, Ms. Livingston?

Ms. Livingston: I do, actually. I would like to say that we are not so much concerned with the past and in assigning blame for whoever is responsible for this situation to have occurred, we just want it fixed. We do not care who is to blame.

Mr. Penner: Just one point I would like to make. I hope you are not serious when you say that I would like to refer back to your committee to find some way, somehow, a pot of money to bring our COLA in line with yours, remembering that we took a 2.5% to 3% decrease last year.

Ms. Livingston: I am sure I heard last night that MLAs, in fact, still get a considerably higher rate of COLA than we do.

Madam Chairperson: Seeing no other questions, thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. Cummings: Madam Chair, on a matter of order, I suspect the next order of business will be to do clause by clause on this bill.

Madam Chairperson: The next order of business, just to clarify, will be to call back the presenters who were called the first time and were dropped from the list, but after that, yes.

Mr. Cummings: I apologize. I would like to raise a point after we have heard the last presenter.

Madam Chairperson: Absolutely. So I will proceed then.

The committee will call now for a second time those individuals who were called for a first time and then were dropped from the list.

Is JoAnne Irving, private citizen present? Ms. Irving, you can proceed whenever you are ready.

Ms. JoAnne Irving (Private Citizen): Thank you for calling me a second time.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am a teacher in the city of Winnipeg. I am an active teacher. I am not yet retired. I would like to retire after today's staff meeting, I would like to retire tomorrow, but that is out of the question. Frankly, I am afraid to retire because I have done that trip down to TRAF. I have seen the not-such-great pension that I would be getting, and I have heard from colleagues that are already retired about the non-existent COLA.

I have been teaching since 1973. I have been a nursery kindergarten teacher, a primary teacher, a special-needs and a special-ed teacher, a resource teacher, an early-years support teacher, an acting inner-city consultant, and I am currently an alternative teacher teaching in a multi-age, Grades 4, 5, 6 classroom.

I am here because I am nearing retirement, and I am worried about my standard of living once I do decide to retire. What worries me most is that my pension is not indexed to the cost of living. As taxes

and utilities increase in cost yearly, my pension will remain fixed at the level it was the year I retire. I have met with the staff of the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund, the TRAF, to determine what my pension will be when I retire and it is scary, especially knowing that in the first month that I retire, that will be when I receive my largest pension cheque.

Twenty years down the road, should I still be alive, probably subsisting on cat food by that time, my pension will still be the same, but can you imagine how much the cost of living will have eaten it away? How will I maintain a decent standard of living on the fixed income surrounded by rising costs? I am wondering if MLA pensions have a cost of living adjustment built into them. I hear there is some discrepancy around the table about that.

* (20:00)

I have been contributing to the Pension Adjustment Account since 1977, and if one out of every six of my pension dollars was paid into this fund, why will I not be getting back as a cost of living adjustment? I do not really understand what happened to this money. What has to be done? When does it have to be done by, and who has to do it so that I can have a COLA when I retire? The Manitoba Teachers' Society blames inaction on the government's part. I blame MTS for not pushing the government harder for a solution, and, frankly, I do not know who is stalling or why.

I just know that I want something to be done about it and I want it to be done soon. Many of us are delaying our final decisions about retirement because of the uncertainty regarding pensions. Many teachers are not even aware of the problem until they meet with their representatives in the TRAF, and then do they not get the shock of their lives. As I understand it from the Teachers' Society, our pensions are seriously underfunded, and we working teachers need to significantly increase our annual contributions in order to fund just the basic pension. Everyone, the government included, is tippy-toeing around this issue for fear of incurring the wrath of young teachers and because of the cost of trying to catch up on a problem that is being allowed to continue for far too long. Surely, the cost of not fixing the problem will be even greater.

It is the responsibility of the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the government to take this issue

seriously and to sit down together immediately to include retired teachers and to solve this problem as soon as possible. Bill 48 will address some of the issues but it is, in itself, not a solution to the whole problem. There are thousands of teachers in this province who have given their whole lives to the education of children and many of us are baby boomers, rapidly reaching retirement age. Do you really want to treat us this shoddily? After all, we may be retired, but we still vote.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. Are there any questions for the presenter?

Mr. Lamoureux: I just have one. If you were to reflect on your colleagues at the school today and you were to suggest to them that we have this TRAF board and the Retired Teachers' Association as an organization, or retired teachers in general, feel that they should have a formal representation on that board as a voting member, what do you think your colleagues would say to that?

Ms. Irving: I think that they would like somebody to do it. They probably would not like to do it themselves, but they would like a representative on that board.

Madam Chairperson: Seeing no other questions, I thank you very much for your presentation.

For the information of the committee, we are going to circulate a presentation that has been forwarded by Gayle Robertson to the committee on Legislative Affairs and will be appearing in the Hansard on the committee on Legislative Affairs. This is being circulated for your information.

The committee calls John Zubatiuk, private citizen. Okay, Mr. Zubatiuk will be dropped from the list.

The committee calls Linda Boughton, private citizen. One last time, the committee calls Linda Boughton. Linda Boughton will be dropped from the list.

The committee calls Kris Arnason, private citizen. Kris Arnason will be dropped from the list.

That concludes the list of presenters I have before me. Are there any other persons in attendance

who wish to make a presentation? Seeing none, that concludes public presentations.

* * *

Mr. Cummings: Thank you, Madam Chair. I ask for your indulgence even before I begin to speak, but what I am about to ask is a little bit irregular, but I would like to have something clarified before we go into clause by clause because of the manner in which this Legislature normally operates. Generally speaking, the opposition, in fact, definitively speaking—

Point of Order

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Madam Chairperson: Mr. Swan?

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I do not believe Mr. Cummings is a member of this committee.

An Honourable Member: I still have a right to speak.

Madam Chairperson: Any MLA can speak but he cannot move a motion on the floor. Another committee member would have to move a motion on the floor. That is my understanding and I have been told I am correct on that.

* * *

Madam Chairperson: Did you want to continue, Mr. Cummings?

Mr. Cummings: Yes, I would like to continue, and I congratulate the minister on sharply reading the list to see whether or not I am officially in attendance.

There are a number of presenters, and I have not heard them all, who have made it very clear that they are hoping there would be some amendments to this legislation. Opposition can make amendments; this is why I am seeking your indulgence, Madam Chair. If the opposition makes an amendment, it actually incurs a cost for government. Normally speaking, that amendment is ruled out of order. Is that still the rule that would be used in our discussion?

Madam Chairperson: Yes, it is.

Mr. Schuler: Again, to be very clear on what my colleague just raised. So, in other words, members of the opposition cannot amend this legislation if it would involve any expenditure of funds. Thus, unless it comes from the government side, the opposition is not allowed to amend anything in the legislation in regard to pensions?

Madam Chairperson: Excuse me, only a member of Executive Council can move a motion such as is being proposed on the floor.

Mr. Schuler: On another point, again, we just seek clarification on this side. Any members on this committee who could be deemed to benefit from the decisions made at this committee, do they have to declare a conflict, or how is that dealt with?

Madam Chairperson: Can you hold on a moment, please, just while I seek some clarification?

* (20:10)

In consideration of the question is a little more complicated than it appears at the outset because there are conflict of interest guidelines as well and, you know, possible advice from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

So we are seeking leave to recess for five minutes. Is it the will of the committee to recess for five minutes? *[Agreed]*

I ask the committee to come back at 8:20 p.m., please. You are in recess for five minutes. Thank you.

The committee recessed at 8:12 p.m.

The committee resumed at 8:33 p.m.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much for allowing us a short recess to take a look at the issues that were involved and to discuss with counsel. For the information of the committee, there is no conflict of interest, according to The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Conflict of Interest Act.

Further questions?

Mrs. Driedger: I know that by the time we get into the bill, the bill is short and there probably will not

be a lot of time within that to ask questions. I wonder if I might be able to ask the minister a couple of questions at this point.

Madam Chairperson: That requires leave from the committee for the critic to ask questions at this point. Is there leave from the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Chairperson: I am sorry. Leave has been denied.

Mr. Lamoureux: We want to make sure there is no real misunderstanding. I think that what we are asking for is that we just provide leave. Given the shortness of the bill itself, that if we could just provide leave for members to ask their questions, make their statements, generally speaking. This way, I think the process will be speeded up. That is the essence of it. I think it is an innocent request for leave, in other words.

Madam Chairperson: You know what? What I will do is, in consideration of your comments, I will put the question one more time to the committee. Is there leave for the member to ask questions prior to going clause by clause, to ask her questions at this point? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just a few questions, first one being to the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson). How does he specifically intend to address this COLA issue, as it is not dealt with in any significant way within the bill? I certainly acknowledge that the government has made a first step, as everybody is indicating, and wondered if he has anything he wishes to say about how he plans to further address it.

Mr. Bjornson: This issue, as has been past practice with all issues that we have dealt with in the four times that we have opened up the act, will be part of ongoing discussions, and the teachers' Pension Task Force remains the committee that looks at all issues on teacher pensions and makes recommendations to government as the suggestions are negotiated and brought forward.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the minister prepared to put a retired teacher on the teachers' Pension Task Force in

a position as a member of that committee, not a visitor to that committee, where that person will have a voice and a say and a right to have that?

Mr. Bjornson: What I am prepared to do is continue to have discussions with RTAM and with MTS with regard to this issue.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the minister at least open to give it some consideration?

Mr. Bjornson: As I said, I am prepared to discuss this with RTAM and MTS and that, I would suggest, reflects that that will be giving this issue consideration.

Mrs. Driedger: I am going to up the ante a little bit. Would he consider putting two retired teachers on that group?

Mr. Bjornson: Do I hear three?

Madam Chairperson: Excuse me. I am going to ask that there be no participation from the audience at this point. That is part of our proceedings.

Mr. Bjornson: As I said, I think I have indicated by my willingness to sit down with RTAM. I have met with them four times over the last year. I am committed to meet with them on a regular basis. We did appoint a retired teacher to the TRAF board as a result of last year's discussions around the bill that again improved pensions. MTS has indicated in their presentation their willingness to work in co-operation with retired teachers to address issues of concern around pensions, and that is something that we have done in the past and will continue to do in the future.

Mrs. Driedger: I guess that sounds pretty much like rhetoric to me. I like the saying earlier of somebody that had indicated that, while the minister did open the bill four times, the legislation four times, and we will acknowledge that there are efforts being made to address and rectify some of these problems, and to congratulate the minister on that part of it, but the issue of the can opener statement I thought was pretty interesting. The minister is meeting but, I mean, one can meet but not do anything, and the minister is certainly saying that, well, he is meeting, he is talking, but I guess my question is this: Is he prepared to act on that and not just say that he is listening?

Mr. Bjornson: The process for bringing forward recommendations for the teacher pension amendments is a process that has been in existence for, I believe, 30 years, with the Teachers' Pension Task Force, and that is the body that brings forward recommendations for legislative changes. A lot of the concerns of RTAM are on pension, and I continue to listen to those concerns, and certainly as I said, we have made changes with the retired teacher on the TRAF board. I do meet regularly with RTAM. There is a role for RTAM to play at this time in the teachers' Pension Task Force. It is open for discussion, and we will continue to discuss and see what we can do to address those concerns.

Mrs. Driedger: I thank the minister for his commitment to doing that because I certainly think it seems a logical and reasonable next step in where this all goes.

* (20:40)

I would like to ask the minister, I note that in the legislation the act comes into force on the day to be fixed by proclamation. Well, it was interesting that it is not by Royal Assent. Can the minister give us any indication as to when he might be actually then proclaiming this bill?

Mr. Bjornson: I understand from counsel, from staff, that the act can be fixed by proclamation. It does not require Royal Assent, and as far as coming into force is concerned, and through consultations with the teachers' Pension Task Force, that—

An Honourable Member: I could not hear him because there were people talking—

Mr. Bjornson: I am sorry, I overhear the discussion, and, I said, as far as coming into force, the act does not require Royal Assent. It can be fixed by proclamation, as I said. I am sorry, I lost my train of thought for a moment. I have been advised that through discussions with MTS and the teachers' Pension Task Force the intent and our commitment is to have this in effect for September 1 of this year.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. Seeing no other questions, does the Minister responsible—oh, I am sorry. Just a moment.

We gave leave for the critic, Ms. Driedger, to ask a question prior to going clause by clause. Prior

to entertaining other questions at this point, I need leave for other members to do that at this point. Mr. Lamoureux is asking for leave to ask questions prior to opening statements and prior to going clause by clause. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamoureux: The first point, just to get clarification, upon Royal Assent this bill does not, in fact, become law. It is waiting until it gets proclaimed by the government, or Cabinet.

Can the minister clearly indicate when does he expect to proclaim this bill so that it becomes law?

Mr. Bjornson: I have yet to determine a date for that. However, as I said, the proclamation will address the need to have this in place for September 1 of 2005.

Mr. Lamoureux: So it will, in fact, be proclaimed before September 1, correct?

Mr. Bjornson: That is our commitment.

Mr. Lamoureux: I do have some other remarks that I was wanting to get on the record in regard to this bill. I do not want to take advantage of the leave that was granted to me, so I will wait until we get into the bill itself. I appreciate the committee giving me leave to get clarification on that issue. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Lamoureux.

Seeing no other requests at this time, does the minister responsible for Bill 48 have an opening statement?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, I would just like to say that this reflects our ongoing commitment to work with our partners in the teacher Pension Task Force to address issues of concern around teacher pensions. I would like to reflect on some of the things that we have done in the six years in office going back to the year 2000 when we first opened the act, and an 18-month window of opportunity to apply to purchase past periods of maternity leave as pensionable service on a cost-shared basis with government was one of those actions that we had undertaken.

In 2001, for example, recognizing part-time service that continues for the purpose of qualifying for a pension. Also, survivors in same-sex

relationships became eligible for pension benefits; 2004, enabling teachers to purchase future periods of adoptive leave on a cost-shared basis with government, enabling former teachers to purchase past periods of mat leave on a shared-cost basis with government and, again, as I would like to remind people in the gallery today, that this marks the fourth time that we have opened the pension act in our term in office and it speaks to our commitment to continue to work with our partners and stakeholders to make improvements and modernize the pension legislation in Manitoba.

I thank all members of the teachers' Pension Task Force for their participation and the due diligence of the TRAF board and all who have been here to share their thoughts, participate in the democratic process and make their presentations tonight.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister. Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mrs. Driedger: Just some brief comments.

I realize that a considerable amount of time has now been spent over a couple of days by people that are here, so I do not want to prolong the evening unduly. I will just start by indicating and acknowledging the improvements made by the government to date to address pension issues. Certainly, with the baby boomer generation reaching retirement age, there are going to be a lot more impacts, and we are certainly seeing this issue coming forward at many different levels. Certainly, we appreciate the intergenerational issues as they relate to this particular legislation and do realize that that has to be taken into account, do also realize the COLA issue does need to be addressed, as I have indicated earlier. It appears that we have a wrong that needs to be righted and, perhaps, with some good and joint efforts, this issue can be at least put on the right track and moving in the right direction over the next short while.

I would like to thank everybody that has attended and put forward their comments. The eloquence and articulate nature of the comments have not gone unnoticed. A lot of effort was put forward by the presenters in terms of getting their points across. They certainly have thought long and hard and put their hearts, really, into what they were

saying. I think all of us, certainly, recognize that, and we recognize the challenges that are facing the retired teachers as they age and are faced with increasing challenges out there. Certainly note that one of the challenges that they are facing is a 20% increase in Pharmacare deductibles that has been foisted upon our seniors, and I am sure that adds to their burden, as well.

So we will look forward to third reading in the House and want to hear more debate and comments come forward from all parties in terms of comments that are being made during the third reading. I thank everybody for also sticking it out and to all of those retired teachers that came back over this very long period of time in what was a very disorganized process. The math teachers that are probably out there, certainly, probably, could have helped the government figure out that, when you have got over 60 or 70 presenters in total, there is no way you are going to get through those in one evening. This should have been better planned for the sake of all people.

Madam Chairperson: Excuse me for just a second. I am sorry. Just so that I can let you finish, we are having a hard time, sort of, hearing you on this side of the table, so you can just finish your comments if you want, Mrs. Driedger.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you. I do not have anything more to say. I just look forward to this legislation being further debated in the House.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the member.

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; enacting clause—pass.

* (20:50)

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, before we end up passing the bill, I do have a number of words, a number of thoughts that I would like to be able to express in regard to this particular bill, Madam Chairperson.

Madam Chair, I am very disappointed in the government, in the way in which it has managed the affairs of the critical issue of pensions. Quite frankly, I think that it has been disrespectful. What we saw

was a bill that we knew, we had a sense that the government was trying to do something in regard to pensions. Then, at the last minute, after the cut-off date, the government puts a bill on the Order Paper. As one presenter had indicated, using the analogy of a plough, if you are going to do it right, do it right on the first occasion.

What we have seen is a government that, to their credit, responded very positively in part to a very effective campaign from the Manitoba Teachers' Society. I give them full credit at raising the importance of this issue for their membership. I just do not think that the government introduced this legislation in a timely fashion, which would have allowed for more public input, a better bill all round, Madam Chairperson. This is a bill that ultimately was rushed into committee. Some presenters had less than 48 hours' notice. It was rammed in with the planning bill, the Crocus bill. I suspect that we even had individuals that would have liked to have made presentation, but were bumped for whatever reasons. Some likely might not even have been able to have made it, whether it is this morning or this evening, but were hoping to be able to get their opinions across last night.

Right from the seriousness of developing the bill to the way in which the government is bringing this bill forward, this bill has to pass on opposition members by indicating that, look, this a bill that is going to put \$800,000 or whatever that dollar figure is into the pension accounts, which we see as a positive thing. This bill will pass on Thursday. It is going to pass, I believe, because the opposition is behaving more in a responsible manner towards our teachers and their pensions and the retired teachers and their pensions, Madam Chairperson.

That is the reason why this bill is going to pass. I think the minister, whether it is now or whether it was a year ago, has shown time and time again that he does not respect the important role that retired teachers have to play in the development of public policy, in particular in regard to this particular bill. We have requested in the past, we have requested today, that the minister acknowledge that by putting in a formal way representation from retired teachers on to the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund, the board, so that that perspective is, in fact, not only being heard, but that perspective has provided the opportunity to have full membership.

For the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), over the last couple of years, just to stand by and arbitrarily say, "Well, you know what? We are being generous. We allowed them to come onto this committee this time round." Well, who is to say in the future, a future minister might not be as generous? I think that we need to re-evaluate the importance of the Minister of Education after passing this bill, in sitting down and coming back to the table and resolving this issue. We have thousands of Manitobans. I believe the number was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 9000 retired teachers, another 14 000 teachers that are currently there today, and they are concerned about their pensions.

This is the government that has the responsibility, a government that likes to say that they are concerned about average Manitobans, that they are concerned about the future. You know, I could go to the Tommy Douglas era of how important pensions were. Well, if you believe pensions are important, then your actions should speak as loud as your words. I have not witnessed that over the last period of time since this bill has been brought forward.

I am concerned about the way in which the government has entered into this process. I would like to see the government make a commitment tonight, to make the commitment that they will ensure that this issue of pensions will be resolved over the next X number of months. If it is going to take 12 months, say 12 months. If it is going to take two years, say two years. We want to see a commitment from the Minister of Education as to how he is going to address this issue. If he really wanted to show that he has learned something through this whole process, he should acknowledge that there is more of a formal role for retired teachers dealing with the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund.

As you can see, even though I am pleased to see that the bill is here and the bill will, in fact, pass, it is with genuine concern that I do not believe that the minister is doing all that could have been done and should have been done. I am just not happy with the way in which the government—and I know the minister is not the sole person responsible for this, so is the Government House Leader (Mr. Mackintosh)—the way in which this whole process has led to the point in which we are today. I think that we could have done a better job all way around. Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

Mr. Bjornson: Just in response, first of all, the 48-hour notice, as the member is fully aware, is standard notice for a presentation to committees. I understand that is standard notice.

An Honourable Member: Minimum.

Mr. Bjornson: And it is notice.

With respect to my RTAM commitment to have a retired teacher on the TRAF board, with respect to a plan to deal with COLA and with respect to the way in which we engage the Teachers' Pension Task Force, I humbly sit here as the minister and accept full criticism that I have received over the last couple of days in the presentations, as the first minister to be moving a bill forward in 18 years, the first minister to move a bill forward to increase contributions to the pension and as the first minister to appoint a retired teacher to the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund.

I will publicly state, once again, that we will continue to appoint a retired teacher to the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund, and, certainly, if there are concerns that this will not always be the case, I suspect that that will be the onus on the subsequent ministers of education unless there are further steps taken to address this. But, once again, I sit here and accept the criticism as we have seen no action in increasing contributions. I am the first minister to do that in 18 years and, as I said, the first minister to appoint a retired teacher to TRAF.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I have a few comments that I would like to put on the record with regard to this bill. First of all, I think from the presentations that have been made and the ones that I have looked at and read, I have to say up front that I was not able to be present when these presentations were made, but I have reviewed several of them.

Madam Chair, I want to indicate that this is almost an afterthought by government in terms of bringing forward legislation because between government and opposition, there was an agreement that stated that legislation brought in after the 28th of April would not need to be considered for passage this session. So government knew well ahead of time what the rules of the game were and was very capable of bringing in a one-page bill long before the 28th of April.

Well, Madam Chair, the reality was that the government did not bring this legislation in until after the 28th of April and, as a matter of fact, at the time, government stated that this bill was really not a priority for the government to pass. Now, that was stated by government. But it was not until the critic of our party and the caucus members of our party met with the Teachers' Society and with the retired teachers that, in fact, there was any pressure put on the government to move this bill because, up until that time, the minister, although he had introduced the legislation in the House, did not move second reading.

* (21:00)

Madam Chair, we asked on several occasions why the minister was not giving second reading to this bill because, until the second reading to this bill is given, no debate can take place on this bill by the opposition. So it was days and days until the government decided. As a matter of fact, I think it was in and around the beginning of June or that week of the first part of June that second reading was given to this bill.

Now, having said that, Madam Chair, in having met with the Teachers' Society, as a matter of fact, I think it was the president of the Teachers' Society, who then even called the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province to indicate that this was a priority for the Teachers' Society. So it took some persuasion of this government by the Teachers' Society to make sure that this bill was, in fact, moved on.

Now, we had been pressuring government for months on end through our critic that this, indeed, was an issue that needed to be dealt with and that government should, in fact, move on legislation to improve and to correct the situation with regard to teachers' pensions. I note for the record, Madam Chair, that there are a number of teachers on the government side of the House. As a matter of fact, there is one sitting across from me right now who is a retired teacher and who, in fact, should have been lobbying for this kind of legislation and to ensure that he was advocating, not only for the Teachers' Society, but for retired teachers.

Madam Chair, I also want to say that this bill requires an amendment. This bill does not address the shortcomings of the legislation as it exists today and does require an amendment to the bill in order

for it to address the concerns that have been expressed here before this committee.

So I am quite surprised and, as a matter of fact, almost shocked, that the minister, who advocates that he is the advocate for teachers and for the Teachers' Society, has not come forward with an amendment to address the shortcomings of this legislation. So, once again, Madam Chair, it is going to be left to us, as opposition, to ensure that we come forward with an amendment. We certainly intend to do that in report stage. If, in fact, we can meet the needs of the people who have presented here and reflect their views, we will, in fact, bring forward an amendment.

Now, Madam Chair, when we found out that the government was not prepared to move on this legislation this session, it was very curious to us why the government was not pressing on with this legislation that they had introduced in the House and were prepared to leave it until the fall. Well, when we finally got the briefing notes, and I think the briefing notes just came in a few days ago, we realized that the reason that the government was not moving ahead with it was because there was going to be a significant savings if, in fact, the government could postpone this bill for a year. By not introducing it until the fall would have meant that this legislation would not have been proclaimed until September of 2006, saving the government a significant bit of money and, additionally, giving them a launch into an election campaign, when they could have said that, "Look at what we have done for our retiring and for our teachers because of this bill."

So, Madam Chair, I say to the government, shame on you, for deceiving—

Madam Chairperson: If I could just ask the committee, I am sorry. I am having a hard time hearing the person who is putting forward their remarks.

Mr. Derkach, you can continue.

Mr. Derkach: Thank you, Madam Chair.

So I say to the government, "Shame on you," for trying to deceive teachers and retired teachers by bringing in legislation that you had no intention to pass, until enough pressure was put on you as a government by the opposition and embarrassed you into putting forward this legislation and bringing it forward.

Now, Madam Chair, I say that, now we have had numerous people, 80-some people present, or whatever number that was, who have presented to this committee, I think the message has come forward fairly loud and clear to this government. This is important legislation that needs to be dealt with but, furthermore, it is legislation that needs an amendment. We are going to try to reflect the views of the people who presented here to this committee when we consider whether or not we can bring forward a meaningful amendment to this bill that would address those issues that have not yet been addressed.

So, Madam Chair, I want to indicate to the government I am giving them full warning that, although this was not a priority piece of legislation for them, we, as opposition, have, in essence, gone beyond what the rules that were agreed to by the government and were signed off by both the government and the opposition. We have gone beyond that to ensure that we can accommodate the people, the citizens of this province who are being short-changed because this legislation is not addressing their needs. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bjornson: I would just like to assure the member from Russell that this is not an afterthought;

that the deadline for submission for legislative proposals, unfortunately, did not align with the negotiation process, and the agreement with the teacher Pension Task Force was past that deadline. Having said that, I appreciate that the opposition and the Liberal Party have been represented at the committee hearing this evening, and I appreciate that there has been a lot of due diligence at the committee level. I am looking forward to working with the members of the opposition and the Liberal Party to move this forward.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. Seeing no other comments, shall the enacting clause pass?

The enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

The hour being 9:07, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

Madam Chairperson: Committee rise. Thank you very much for your hard work, committee.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 9:07 p.m.