

Second Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Legislative Affairs

Chairperson
Mr. Doug Martindale
Constituency of Burrows

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

**CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Doug Martindale
(Burrows)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Bonnie
Korzeniowski (St. James)**

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Ms. Irvin-Ross, Hon. Mr. Selinger

Ms. Blady, Mr. Borotsik, Ms. Braun, Mr.
Hawranik, Ms. Korzeniowski, Messrs.
Martindale, McFadyen, Mrs. Mitchelson, Mr.
Saran

Substitutions:

Ms. Brick for Ms. Blady at 10:21 p.m.

APPEARING:

Mr. David Faurshou, MLA for Portage la
Prairie
Mrs. Mavis Taillieu, MLA for Morris
Mr. Leonard Derkach, MLA for Russell
Mr. Stuart Briese, MLA for Ste. Rose
Mr. Ron Schuler, MLA for Springfield
Mr. Cliff Cullen, MLA for Turtle Mountain
Mr. Blaine Pedersen, MLA for Carman
Mr. Cliff Graydon, MLA for Emerson
Mrs. Leanne Rowat, MLA for Minnedosa
Mr. Kevin Lamoureux, MLA for Inkster
Mr. Ralph Eichler, MLA for Lakeside
Mr. Kelvin Goertzen, MLA for Steinbach
Mr. Larry Maguire, MLA for Arthur-Virden
Mrs. Heather Stefanson, MLA for Tuxedo

WITNESSES:

Bill 38–The Balanced Budget, Fiscal
Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act

Mrs. Karen Boughton, Private Citizen
Mr. Keith Boughton, Private Citizen
Mr. Andy Sirski, Private Citizen
Mr. Howard Rybuck, Private Citizen
Mr. Gordon Gillies, Private Citizen
Ms. Peggy Prendergast, Private Citizen

Ms. Kelly de Groot, Private Citizen
Mr. Greg Georgeson, Private Citizen
Mr. Jim Huggard, Private Citizen
Mr. Robert Diamond, Private Citizen
Mr. William Gardner, Manitoba Employers
Council

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 6–The Securities Amendment Act
Bill 25–The Embalmers and Funeral Directors
Amendment Act
Bill 29–The Business Practices Amendment Act
(Disclosing Motor Vehicle Information)
Bill 38–The Balanced Budget, Fiscal
Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act

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Mr. Chairperson: Good evening. Will the Standing
Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to
order.

This meeting has been called to consider the
following bills: Bill 6, The Securities Amendment
Act; Bill 25, The Embalmers and Funeral Directors
Amendment Act; Bill 29, The Business Practices
Amendment Act (Disclosing Motor Vehicle
Information); Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal
Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.

At our previous meeting, Mr. Borotsik moved
the following motion: That this committee
recommend to the House that it waive rule 92(2) for
these committee meetings to allow all presenters to
Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management
and Taxpayer Accountability Act, to present for an
unlimited amount of time and to accept questions for
an unlimited amount of time from committee
attendees.

The motion was ruled in order. At the time of
adjournment, Mr. Faurshou had the floor.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Thank
you very much, Mr. Chair. I do appreciate the
opportunity to once again speak in favour of the
motion this evening. It is, as I was saying last night,
very important to recognize individuals that are
volunteering their time, taking monies out of their
own pocket through expenses to pay for their travel

costs. They wait very patiently for their time to present and bring very, very good information to the committee based upon their experience and understanding. Obviously, they are motivated to make the presentation for the betterment of all that live in Manitoba.

I think it is incumbent upon us, the committee members, to allocate enough time to truly examine the information provided by the presenters as well as given the opportunity to question the presenters to extrapolate on the information that is so vitally important to the committee and to the legislation to which we are currently studying.

It is, with that thought in mind, that I've got to compliment the honourable Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) for bringing forward the motion, so it gives us opportunity to examine the importance of the presenters. This motion speaks volumes, if we were to pass this motion as how we should regard those that come before us and make presentation.

I know the honourable members opposite believe that it should be a time limit; that is something that they are unwilling to reconsider. It's a real shame that they did not believe that. For example, the former Finance Minister who experienced more than a billion dollars of cutbacks and transfer payments from the federal government—quite the converse here under the current Finance Minister's tenure where greater than \$2 billion has come by way of the federal government, in addition to the previously existing financing, this past year alone over \$200 million more in exclusive transfer payments.

A vindication of this government's prowess is making Manitoba even a more have not province. If members on the government's side of the House are proud of that accomplishment, I hope that they take it home to their children and their spouses, friends and family and say, this is what we're really all about—making Manitoba more of a have not province.

Here at this table, to cut off the former Finance Minister who has experience that none of us around this table have, that he had to accommodate and navigate through, making priorities, making very, very, conscious, hard decisions—I know the NDP make a lot of out of the education budget only went up by less than 1 percent or it was zero for one year. Oh, my goodness. When you're experiencing a significant \$300 million cut, year over year over year, from the federal government and you're even

able to maintain a program at zero, that involves significant, significant decision making and prioritization.

I think it is a testament and a true accomplishment that, through the tough years and the recessionary years of the '90s and the cutbacks from the federal government, supporting education and health-care services and justice—I should mention justice as well—that was also experiencing significant cutbacks from the federal government during the 1990s. All of this was accomplished.

To the credit of the former administration, balanced budget legislation was passed and has been adhered to since then. This is something that a person should be proud of, but it also something that we here in this committee are now examining its demise.

*(18:10)

Not to be able to take the time necessary to hear all of what our presenters have to say is truly a travesty. I don't know how members opposite can look themselves in the mirror and say, no, I don't want to hear from you. I've heard enough. I'm done. Whatever you have got to say, I'm not interested. Take a hike. There's the door. That's what you guys across the way are saying to presenters.

This motion that we have here tonight is indeed an important statement to presenters that we are here to listen, and that is what we as legislators are responsible for doing. I know there is a member who has extolled many, many times during question period, from the government side, who says, new era of accountability. I would say that, if you're truly supportive of a Cabinet colleague, Mr. Minister, this acceptance of the motion before us would speak volumes and effectively add credence to the statements made by his Cabinet colleague that this is a new era of accountability, because we're here to listen and we're not going to shun anyone. If they have taken the time and made the effort and accounted for the expense of making their way to committee, I think it's incumbent for us to regard their passion and commitment to the future of this province by sitting a few more minutes and listening to what they have to say and questioning to more fully understand what they are here to present.

It always amazes me the depth of understanding that Manitobans have. Also, with another perspective, we as committee members can benefit from that perspective. It is only that we need to take

the time and show that we indeed want to hear what they have to say. With passage of this motion here this evening, I believe that it would make that statement.

I ask for members opposite's support for this most important motion before us this evening. Once again, I want to say thank you to the honourable Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) for placing this motion before us this evening.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I also want to speak in support of the motion to allow all of the presenters to Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act, to present for an unlimited amount of time and to accept questions for an unlimited amount of time from committee attendees.

I do want to thank the Member for Brandon West for bringing this motion forward because I do believe it's very important that the public be heard. Before, we have seen a number of people come before the committee that have been experts. These are people that have an extreme amount of knowledge in certain areas, and they come to present to this committee to impart their wisdom and their knowledge. Certainly, we should take every opportunity to have them impart that knowledge to us, and we should take every opportunity to ask some questions to gather and garner more information that they might be able to present to us, rather than cutting them off and sending them away without having taken the full opportunity to learn from what they had to say.

I know the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurshou) was talking about the former Finance Minister who came to committee. That would be Mr. Clayton Manness, actually, a former MLA for Morris. I ran into Clayton one day. As we were talking, he said, well, what's going on in the Legislature these days? I told him about a number of the pieces of draconian legislation that the NDP was bringing down. He said, you know, I haven't been too involved in what's been going on in the Legislature, but you know what? This really, really concerns me. I want to come down and I want to make a presentation on Bill 38—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mrs. Taillieu. I'm having trouble hearing you. So I would like to ask—

Mrs. Taillieu: I can't even hear myself.

Mr. Chairperson: Good point. I'd like to ask committee members to either take it out in the hall or

whisper. Please listen to the person who has the floor.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It was very difficult to speak when everyone else was not listening. So thanks for that.

I was just saying about speaking with the former MLA for Morris, Mr. Clayton Manness, who, I believe, has an extreme amount of knowledge and would be considered an expert in balanced budget legislation, as he was the finance minister during a time in the mid-'90s when the balanced budget legislation was brought forward.

As I was saying, he and I were speaking and he was asking about what was going on at the Legislature. I was telling him about the draconian pieces of legislation with Bill 38, Bill 37, Bill 31, Bill 17, Bill 15, Bill 35, Bill 34, a lot of others that were very problematic to us. He was saying he wasn't following politics as much anymore, but he said, I'm inclined to want to come down to the Legislature and speak on Bill 38, and he did. When he came down here to speak, he was not given any free time to finish his presentation and given more time for the committee to ask questions of him. I think that was very unfortunate because I think that this committee could have learned an awful lot from someone that would be considered an expert in his field.

I think that anybody that comes down here to make a presentation, they are either expert in the field or they have a passionate reason for speaking out or for some of these pieces of legislation. I don't know why at any time we would want to cut off their ability to do so. Why would we want to restrict their ability to talk freely about an issue? They've taken the time to come down and prepare a presentation and, certainly, I think it behooves as a committee to listen to everything that they have to say.

I know, also, other presenters that presented on bills, such as Bill 31, that were experts in the matter of the bill that we were discussing, and, again, they were cut off. We were cut off in our questioning. I don't think that benefits us here in hearing the public. I think that we do ourselves a disservice by not listening to what the public has to say.

Certainly, I would think that the government would want to listen. I don't believe that there was a lot of prior consultation out there because I'm just scratching my head and saying, who asked the government to bring in legislation that says they can

run deficit budgets? I'd really like to know. I'd really like to know how many Manitobans said, hey, we're going to elect you as long as you bring in legislation that allows you to run deficit budgets. I don't believe that that was a platform that the NDP ran on. I don't hear that out in the communities. I don't hear people saying, oh, yes, that's a good thing. They should run deficit budgets. We encourage them to do that in public consultations. I don't see where this is coming from. It's a government that has lost sight of what they are elected to do. They are elected to run the affairs of the province, that being all the people of the province, not just the people that elected them or voted for them, but all of the people in the province, and not to run the government for the government.

This government is not supposed to self-serve itself. It is supposed to govern for the people of Manitoba and not govern for the NDP party. Mr. Chair, I think that the government has lost sight of what it is, it is that their responsibility to do. Certainly, with the pieces of legislation we're seeing, it's very, very self-serving to the government in power and not in the best interests of Manitobans.

There were a number of other former MLAs that came to present at committee and were not given full opportunity to be heard, to voice their concerns to the government. In fact, I believe that the government has an interest in cutting off presenters that come and don't present the point of view that they would like to hear, because why would they want to allow people that don't have their point of view to put these words on the record and bring these recommendations forward to them, when they simply know they aren't going listen to what Manitobans have to say. That I find to be very unfortunate and a government that is out of touch with what Manitobans want and what Manitobans have to say.

* (18:20)

I also want to say that, when presenters come to the committee and stand at the podium, it's a very difficult thing for a lot of people to do. Public speaking or speaking in front of a group of people is a fear that a lot of people have so, when people come here and stand at the podium and express themselves, they should be given the courtesy of being listened to. The government MLAs, I believe, should pay attention when people are speaking, and they should listen. It's courteous instead of being rude, I guess I would have to say, when you don't pay attention to what people have to say. Certainly, I don't believe I've heard many of them. I think, the odd time, but

there aren't many of them that have asked any questions of the presenters. They haven't taken that opportunity to ask a question of the presenters as to what their feelings are on this legislation. I don't believe they really care or really want to know because they will intend to ram through the legislation that they want regardless of what Manitobans come here to say about these pieces of legislation.

Well, I mean, the minister can say, no, that's not going to happen, but we'll have to wait and see on that, but I don't see anybody taking notes about what did this person say. Is that a good idea? Is that a suggestion that we can take for an amendment? I don't see anybody listening to the public and saying, that person is an expert, had a really good point to make. I think that that would be a valid amendment to this legislation. I haven't seen anybody ask a question and make a note of what might be some suggestion that they could take forward, so—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mrs. Taillieu, you need to be winding up. You have less than a minute left. Thank you.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, thank you very much. I just feel very passionate about the point that I'm making, is that people should have the ability to make their full presentation and not be cut off with any time constraints, and have the full ability to answer questions without being cut off because of time constraints, because there's a wealth of knowledge out there, an opportunity to learn from people with that knowledge and an opportunity to use that knowledge to strengthen some of the legislation we have before us.

Again, I just want to say thank you for the opportunity to speak on this.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'm pleased to speak to this motion. It's a good motion. It's a right thing to do if we're truly interested in it as a committee in listening to what Manitobans have to say about this important piece of legislation. This is a bill that was introduced, contrary to the commitments made by the Premier (Mr. Doer) in the 1999 election campaign and the campaign since. A bill that, in effect, allows the government legally to go back to the days of deficit financing, debt, and financial mismanagement that characterized NDP governments of the past.

Now, we had, perhaps, optimistically thought that this NDP government was new and different

from the previous ones. I think we had hoped that this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) was not just a rerun of Eugene Kostyra and other past finance ministers from the NDP who ran up the debt of the province, ran regularly operating deficits, often in the hundreds of millions of dollars. We're disappointed, not that the government plans to run a deficit in their operating budget, because they certainly haven't indicated in this year's budget that they intend to do so, but that they're going to allow themselves to do that going into the future through Bill 38. Give themselves credit from Crown corporation net income that could total as much as a billion dollars in a given year, somewhere between 500 million and a billion dollars in credits that they could use to offset deficits on the operating budget and create the situation where Manitobans could find themselves in the circumstances where the debt of the province is rising, even though the budget—the government is claiming to have a balanced budget. So, when you think about the inconsistency between the idea of general operating deficits being claimed as surpluses, when you think about the inconsistency between rising debt and a government's claim to balanced budgets, it certainly gives rise to lots of questions which require fulsome debate and explanation, and that's why every presenter needs the opportunity with this bill to speak out their views, to have an opportunity to address the various complexities of this piece of legislation and have the ability to address very many significant provisions within this bill.

It's been said many times—and often one word can make a massive difference in terms of meaning. "And" or "or" sometimes will completely change the meaning of a piece of legislation. Long debates have taken place over the use of "and" or "or" at various points in time.

If you think that there's a need for debate from time to time over the use of one word in a piece of legislation, imagine a situation where you've got a 21-page bill, averaging about 140 words per page, totalling about 1,800 words in the English language, if you include the explanatory notes—1,800 words to try to address in the span of 10 minutes is something that is just unrealistic and unfair to those presenters who want to come and speak fully to this bill.

If you think about it, 1,800 words over 10 minutes, that's an average of 180 words per minute that the presenters would have to address. That's three words per second; one second to address three really important words in Bill 38. It's hard to imagine

how that can be fair to the presenters who would want to have the opportunity to speak in a fulsome way to this bill.

The bill contains a language and clauses that are difficult to understand without careful consideration, clauses such as 3(4): Before the balance, as at the end of a fiscal year, is determined, the Lieutenant-Governor counts and may declare that a revenue shortfall or increase in expenses occurred in that fiscal year as described in subsection 3. A declaration must include a description of a shortfall or increase, including the amount of it and the cause of it.

That clause alone deserves at least 10 minutes of discussion on the part of presenters. There are many, many others like it. That's just a small sample, a small appetizer as it were, when it comes to the totality of Bill 38. To expect presenters to be able to address such a long and complex bill in the span of 10 minutes is asking too much, and it isn't in effect. The maintenance of the 10-minute rule is, in effect, a form of closure on presenters.

We've been concerned that the government may invoke closure on the legislative process as we go along but, in effect, by allowing themselves to carry on with rules that clearly are not suited to this kind of a bill, with sweeping changes and complexities, it will permanently alter the financial landscape of our province, potentially increase the debt left to the next generation, potentially put upward pressure on Hydro rates and have an impact on seniors on fixed incomes and people with low incomes, those who have to drive a vehicle as part of their occupation, who have to pay their Autopac premiums.

These are people who are and could be impacted by Bill 38. They could be impacted for generations to come. A massive operating debt in the very worst-case scenario—and this is not something that we anticipate this government would ever get itself into—if we assume \$800 million a year over the next four years in net income from the Crown corporations included, that totals \$3.2 billion in potential deficits over four years.

That's \$3.2 billion in debt for the next generation of Manitobans. That will take a generation to repay. That's why Bill 38 is so important. It's so important that all Manitobans have the opportunity to read it in its totality, to understand it and to address it. To provide them with an arbitrary time limit of 10 minutes at a rate of 180 words per minute, complex words with sub-clauses and

commas, periods, semi-colons and various other forms of punctuation, hyphenation—the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). There are probably other—I don't know if there's any umlauts in there; I don't know if I've pronounced it properly, if there's any cedillas the minister has mentioned—I don't see any exclamation marks—there could be an exclamation mark here. I see a lot of hyphenation; I see the use of the percentage symbol at various points in time.

*(18:30)

There's a lot in this bill that, I think, Manitobans are going to want to turn their minds to and have an opportunity to address. I would just say that this is a common-sense motion. I can't believe that we actually didn't put this rule in place before presentations started on Bill 38. I feel as though it has been a disservice to those presenters who have come before those who remain on the list to have limited them to 10 minutes. I would almost want to see this committee by unanimous recommendation recall those presenters who were arbitrarily cut off at the 10-minute mark and allow them to finish their comments and address the very many significant points in Bill 38.

Now that's a subject matter, that's a different topic, I stray and I may get called on relevance. I'm straying from the point of this motion, but it is, I think, logical that we would allow Manitobans every opportunity to speak to this bill. I think we have to trust them that they are going to choose their words wisely, that they're not going to speak any longer than they absolutely have to in order to properly address all the various important points within this piece of legislation.

It's been noted, I think, that there have been very good speeches given through history which have been short speeches. I think, in particular, of the Gettysburg Address, which was delivered in a relatively short amount of time with few words, high impact words.

I don't think it's fair to think that every presenter is going to have the ability to speak with the same conciseness as Abraham Lincoln, who was the drafter and the speaker on that very, very great speech. As much as we may ask them to try, we could—now, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) is asking me to be as concise as Lincoln, and that's too much to ask from the Minister of Finance. He agrees—that's a point we could all agree on. Maybe that's another debate we could have. We really think

it's important that—and we can't apply these motions retroactively unfortunately.

I've got one minute and so I have to try to contain the very many more thoughts that I have on this motion into a one-minute time span. There is a lot to be considered in Bill 38. If Lincoln was here, I'm sure he could address it within the 10-minute time limit. Other than Abe Lincoln, it's unrealistic to think that Manitobans would have the ability to address this bill, including Manitobans as articulate and talented as the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Manness. Even Sid Green, I think, would have trouble restraining his comments to 10 minutes on Bill 38.

It's been said that if you want a long speech, I can deliver that right away. If you want me to give a short speech, I'm going to need some time to prepare. I think that those words are true as well. The short notice on which this committee was called didn't leave Manitobans time to prepare short speeches and, therefore, we ought to give them the right to give long speeches, and so I support the motion. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): When I look at the motion and then having heard Clayton Manness present before this committee, I can't help but think that a committee that is truly interested in the democratic process would want to give an opportunity to an individual of this calibre or others like him an opportunity to present to the committee without limitation or without brevity.

It is through that process that we make our laws better in this province. I think that is what we try to strive for every time we bring legislation forward is that we are able to present the law that we are forming in a way that represents what our citizens want and, more importantly, the bill or the law would really reflect what is important to Manitobans and how Manitobans want us to govern.

By cutting off debate with 10 minutes of presentation and five minutes of questions, in some instances, I would argue that that is a little unfair. Also, I think the government is being short-changed in terms of getting the information, the wisdom, the benefit of the experience that that individual may possess to be able to be heard. Also, it doesn't allow for that individual to be able to answer questions that might be coming from around the table.

I was little surprised at the members on the opposite side in some of the presentations that we

heard, from whom I would consider experts, that the other side of the table didn't have any questions to ask. Even when the presenter made it abundantly clear that this legislation in the long term would hurt the government and also hurt Manitobans, there was still no question asked from the members of the government.

I think that, in the future, this committee needs to reflect on what it is we are doing, how it is we are trying to achieve the goals of the bill, or of the legislation that's before us, and then to give the benefit of latitude, if you like, to individuals like Clayton Manness or Glen Cummings, for that matter, who were here, who had a number of years of good experience around the Cabinet table and around the Treasury Board table. Glen Cummings sat on Treasury Board for 12 years, Clayton Manness for a number of years as minister of Finance.

So these individuals had something to offer to this committee and I think they stepped forward to do that. I don't think you would find a Clayton Manness coming to present on a frivolous bill. I don't think you'd find Clayton Manness coming before this committee if he hadn't thought about it long and hard. After the committee was over, I stopped Clayton Manness in the hallway—*[interjection]* No, and the member is wrong. There was no arm-twisting on the part of this side of the House for Clayton Manness to come forward.

I think it's a bill of this nature that will bring a former minister of Finance forward to express his views to the committee. It doesn't take members of a committee to run after an individual like this on a bill as serious as the one that I think is before us. This is serious legislation and although we, in committee, sometimes we pass some of these things on as frivolous and a bit jovial at times, at the end of the day, I think the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) views this as a very serious piece of legislation. Although I know he'd like to get it through sooner than later, I think, upon reflection down the road, he will look back and then will probably agree at a later time, that perhaps advice given from people who had been in his shoes before might be valuable, regardless on what side of the House they are.

You know, Mr. Chair, when we look at the honourable Sid Green who presented at Bill 37—and I'm looking forward to his presentation here—I think here's another individual who, at one time, served this province with distinction, would probably give advice to this table, not because someone twisted his

arm, but indeed, because he felt passionately about an issue and about a topic and needed to give that advice, based on his previous experience, to the minister who's sitting at the table and to this committee.

So, in some instances, Mr. Chair, I think there is good reason to go beyond the 10 minutes, to go beyond the five minutes for questions and to allow, without limitation, individuals who have had experience, either in that portfolio before, or who have something of benefit to bring to this committee, the latitude to be able to make a full presentation and then to be able to stand before this committee and answer some tough questions that the committee may have of that individual.

So I'm very supportive of the motion that was brought forward by the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik). I think Mr. Borotsik shares the same view that there are times when we need to listen to people who have had experience in the areas that we are dealing with, people who have had the benefit of running a department that this bill is housed in, and also people who perhaps sat around the Treasury Board table who made some very, very serious decisions on the part of Manitobans over a course of a number of years.

In my mind, these are individuals who have a great deal to offer, and we should be mindful that they are here on their own voluntary effort, if you like. They haven't been cajoled by anybody to come before this committee. I think they come before it because they have a genuine interest in the welfare of our province. Now, I'm not suggesting that others don't, but these are what we would call, in another profession, experts. I think if you were to go to a professional organization, and any professional organization that had the benefit of listening to somebody who was considered an expert in their field, whether it was in the medical profession or the accounting profession or whatever profession it might be, that body would see it as a privilege to be able to listen to this kind of advice, to take it very seriously and to take it as it is presented.

* (18:40)

Now, I know the former Minister of Finance, Clayton Manness, the evening that he presented to this committee did give the minister some sage advice, and he cautioned him about some of the things that the minister has included in the bill. I think those were good cautions and certainly things

that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), currently, should be reflecting upon.

Now, maybe he has. In the quiet of his own office or perhaps in the discussions that led to this bill, he may have considered some of those things, but the experience of someone like Clayton Manness I think warrants that we approach this bill very cautiously, that there are dangers in this bill and that, indeed, it moves away from the principles that were established when balanced budget legislation was brought to this province. Now, that was serious legislation. It is legislation I think that Manitobans wanted. Yes, as Clayton said, it wasn't without its faults and shortcomings. We knew that when we brought the legislation in, but you can't anticipate every situation. I think the Minister of Finance would agree that even in his own legislation there are going to be things that come down the road, that he'll have said: If I had only anticipated that, I would've included that in the bill.

But, as wise as the people around us are sometimes, we don't always get all of the advice that perhaps needs to be considered in formulating a piece of legislation. The warning signs that were given by both Clayton and Glen in the presentation and the advice that was given I think can give the minister either some sleepless nights down the road or perhaps give him cause to reflect on the fact that he had an opportunity before him where he could have asked more questions, got more clarity, but for whatever reason chose not to.

I think this committee short-changed itself. I think the committee short-changed the people of Manitoba by not providing that latitude. It isn't often that we get people of this calibre before the committee who can give us this kind of advice. When we get them, we should not only listen to that advice—and I'm not suggesting that we should take every single piece of advice that is given to us, but, indeed, we should give the advice that is before us serious consideration. At the end of the day, if we see wisdom in amending a piece of legislation so that it more reflects what the circumstances perhaps are or what people want, I think at the end of the day, together, we will pass legislation that has had the due diligence that legislation should have.

With those comments, Mr. Chairperson, I thank you for your time.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I'm pleased to add some comments in support of my colleague, the Member for Brandon West's (Mr. Borotsik)

motion to extend the length of time that individuals have to make presentation to this committee and also to extend the time for questions and answers.

There are many, many people—and I go back to 1995 when balanced budget law was introduced. I don't have comments in front of me. Maybe at some point in time down the road, as we get into more discussion and debate over the bill, we'll be able to quote back some of the comments that members of the government—or members of the opposition, in 1995, what they had to say about balanced budget law that had been brought in, and it wasn't very complimentary.

As a matter of fact, probably the Chair of the committee tonight has some interesting comments on the record from those days when we had an opposition that fought tooth and nail against balancing the books. They don't believe, philosophically, in living within your means and balancing your books. They have been a party, when they have been in government, that has spent significantly out of control in many, many aspects of their use of taxpayers' dollars.

You know, it's very telling, most of the bills that we see before the Legislature are amendments to legislation. When you look at this committee and the bills that are before this committee, you look at Bill 6, The Securities Amendment Act. They're making amendments to The Securities Act. We look at Bill 25, The Embalmers and Funeral Directors Amendment Act, making amendments to legislation. You look at The Business Practices Amendment Act.

These are all amending pieces of legislation, and you know, from time to time, governments of all political stripes bring in legislation, work with it for a little while and feel that there are some changes that need to be made in order to make it more workable or to bring it up to date and up to speed with reality and what's going on today.

But this bill, Bill 38, is very telling, and it's not an amendment to The Balanced Budget Act, in order to bring in one set of books, but it is a new act. It is The Balanced Budget Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act. Now this tells me, with a new act, the old balanced budget law is gutted. It's gone. It's repealed because this is a brand new piece of legislation. It's not an amendment to the balanced budget act, but it's a complete gutting of the balanced budget act that was brought in in 1995 that this party, when it was in opposition, spoke against and voted against and said that it was going to be the

demise of our province when government moved towards balanced budgets.

So the real agenda of the NDP is coming out today, this year, with this piece of legislation, and a sad day in the history of the province of Manitoba when we see a government that wants to, with its hidden agenda, bring in a piece of legislation, at the 11th hour, on the very last day that legislation could be brought in, and try to slip this through, or ram it through, I guess, in a matter of a few weeks, hoping that the electorate and the general public would not know what was happening with this bill.

You know, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) talks about his trips around the province, as he does budget consultations year after year, before he brings in the budget, and listens to Manitobans. I would venture to guess that in his last set of budget consultations, he didn't raise the whole spectre of gutting, getting rid of the balanced budget that existed and bringing in a new piece of legislation. He didn't ask Manitobans for their comments, for their suggestions or for their ideas or, in fact, he didn't ask them whether they thought it might be a good idea.

When we have such significant changes that are going to have an impact on future generations, on my children and my grandchildren, who I hope will stay in Manitoba, but with many more years of NDP government, as we run this province into bankruptcy, as we chase our young people away, I'm not so sure that I'll have the opportunity to see my children and my grandchildren stay in Manitoba.

Something of this significance really should have been taken to Manitobans. When we look at the amount of money that this government has spent on feel-good advertising, I think it's about \$70 million over the life of this government that they've spent on advertising. Some of it certainly has been informative and has shared with Manitobans some good things, and some of it's been advertising budget consultations on a yearly basis by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger).

* (18:50)

Surely to goodness they could have spent the same amount of money out of their advertising budget in government to advertise to all Manitobans what they were planning to do in this brand-new piece of legislation, not an amendment, but a brand-new piece of legislation that's going to change significantly how our budgets are presented and how

money is going to be spent in the province of Manitoba by this government.

Surely, they could have explained that to Manitobans. Then the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) could have taken his staff and held public consultations in communities, the very same communities that he holds public consultations in every year around setting the budget and the budget priorities year by year.

He could have done that, but what has this government done instead? They have, at the very last minute on the very last day, introduced legislation that no longer requires the government to balance the books on a yearly basis.

It's a recipe for disaster; it's a recipe for deficit financing. It's a recipe for, again, looking at raiding Crown corporations to try to make up for the excessive spending habits that this government has. We've seen it before. We've seen it when they raided Manitoba Hydro for \$203 million back in the early 2000s.

We knew at the time that Manitoba Hydro didn't have the money. They had to go and borrow the money to pay the government. It ended up costing Manitoba Hydro ratepayers over \$400 million, not the \$203 million that was borrowed and put into the books of the Province of Manitoba, but over \$400 million.

What did we see as a result of that? We saw Hydro rates go up significantly; I think it was somewhere between 5 and 7.5 percent that Hydro rates went up as a direct result of this government raiding the coffers of Manitoba Hydro and taking money that Manitoba Hydro didn't have.

So we've seen what this government has done with Crown corporations. We saw what they tried to do with Manitoba Public Insurance, when they tried to take \$20 million out of MPI to put into our education system, and they backtracked. They backtracked and decided not to do it, as a result of significant public outcry.

I know that, if Manitobans had had the opportunity to look at this legislation, to make comment on this legislation, they would have been and will still be outraged at the way this government is going about gutting balanced budget laws, giving them the opportunity to spend freely and spend in a deficit situation.

I know that Manitobans who come here to present want to be able to talk to the government. We would like to see them have the opportunity to spend as much time as they need to make a presentation, and we would like to be able to ask them questions. I would hope that government members would support this motion.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Just before I recognize the next presenter, I did hear a call for relevance. There are rules and guidelines about relevance and, rather than read them to you, I would just remind all honourable members that relevance is important. What we are debating in this motion is why presenters should have unlimited time to present and unlimited time for committee members to ask questions.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to be able to speak to this motion on presenters to speak an unlimited amount of time and unlimited questions to be allowed. I'll try and stay relevant and, if I get off track, it's because I haven't had a whole lot of experience in these things. I'll gradually get around and I'll come back to it, honest.

We've had a good number of presenters with a great deal of expertise basically cut off in their presentations. We've heard my colleagues talk about people like Clayton Manness. The one I wanted to mention, because he's been somewhat of a mentor to me, is Glen Cummings, the former MLA from our area. He lives only a few miles away from me and he drives in here to present. It's a little over two hours to the Legislative Building for his 10 minutes in the sun, and this man was one of the most respected legislators this province has had over the years and noted by both sides of the House for his ability as a sober second thought at various things that went on in this House and being able to put forward new and better ways of doing things.

It seems sad that the committee wouldn't allow him as much time as possible to make his presentation. I heard his presentation at one of these committees and every word is worth hanging onto.

I think one of the ways we could have got around this little impasse we're having here right now is for these bills to have been presented sooner. Start the process a little sooner. We wait till the last possible day to present Bills 37 and 38 and it doesn't allow us to absorb what is in the bill, to study it, to decide what parts of it we like or don't like, to come forward with some solutions and some amendments

that maybe would be useful to those bills. When you leave it late and then you have something like 48 hours and you're into committee hearings, it's difficult for presenters, it's difficult—and intentionally difficult, I think—for the opposition to develop positions on some of these bills. I don't think it does our democratic process a whole lot of good.

Bill 38 itself is a bill that will allow the government to get away from balanced budget legislation and that astounds me. It's served us very well ever since it went into place, I think, in about '95, and the present legislation would continue to serve us well. If a private business, or a private individual even, ran a system where they didn't balance their books every year—every fiscal year they have to balance their books—they wouldn't be in business very long. I don't know how we expect a government to have any different outcome than private business would. Governments have more room to build their debt and continue to build their debt, and I anticipate that if Bill 38 passes in its present form, that's what will happen here.

The simple fact is the norm is accepted now, the present balanced budget legislation is the accepted model out there. We possibly had some discussions early in the process after that legislation, or when that legislation was coming through, that some didn't see much value in it, but now, these days, not balancing the budget every fiscal year is simply totally unacceptable to the people of Manitoba. This legislation does allow you to balance it every fourth year.

Now, back to the relevance. I roamed around a little bit there, and I'll come back to the relevance. I think we need to take a look at what we're doing at these committees, take a look at this proposal that's put forward and let people make their full presentations and let us question them to the full extent of our questions. It may well be that it won't change the questioning format a whole heck of a lot simply because sometimes we don't have things that we need to question them about. I've noticed this as we sat through various presenters, that some presenters, we have hands going up all around the table, people wanting to ask them, to gain a little more knowledge from them, and then, because of time restraints, we'll cut them off and cut off the questioners.

* (19:00)

Another thing that I think should be done is let the presenters remain on the list at least until the end

of the presentation stage of these committee sittings. I think calling them once, calling them twice and then striking them off the list is not advantageous to any of us. We have to do everything in our power to try and fit their schedules and to try and allow them a convenient time to come and present to these committees.

Last night and the night before, when we start looking at sitting in these committees till midnight or later, it seems somewhat counterproductive to me because it doesn't fit the presenters' schedules, and that's not serving the people that want to present at these committees.

I think we should also allow presenters to register as long as the bill is at the presentation stage of committee. I think the fact that we do cut them off—did I take one your points, I see you stroking something out—I think people should be allowed to register as long as the bill is still before the committee at the presentation stage. I don't think there should be a cut-off there.

Another indication that I see that I think is an indication of somewhat the disdain that the government has toward presenters is Bill 17 which, they, for some reason, seem to be refusing to call. I'm just guessing, I'm just surmising that maybe that reason is that there are 400 presenters and they have not got any idea how they're going to handle that.

This is a process that we're involved in here that is designed to improve legislation before it becomes law. That being said, the committee does actually need to be listening to what's actually being said by presenters. They need to be questioning. They need to be very clear on what the presenters are saying. They don't necessarily have to accept everything that comes from the presenters, but they do have to consider everything that comes from the presenters.

If something makes good sense, has common sense and looks like it will make an improvement to the legislation, must be considered very, very carefully, because I've heard presenters here come up with things that I hadn't even thought of pertaining to some of these bills. As soon as you hear it, it kind of clicks in and makes pretty good sense. This rigidity we have from the government side on how they handle some of their legislation, I don't think it's a loss of face just because just because you get something changed in a bill.

I'll go back to basically where I started with the allowing the presenters to present for as long as they

want to present and allowing us to ask questions for as long we want to ask questions of those people. I think that's critical to the whole democratic system in Manitoba. I think it behooves us to do that.

With that, I'll end my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee. Members of this committee, it's a very important resolution that's been put forward by my colleague. What's interesting throughout this whole process is we are talking about democracy. I think I mentioned yesterday, if we were all students of history, we would look throughout history and look at those kinds of countries. For instance, we've had the Democratic Republic of Congo, the German Democratic Republic. We've had all kinds of countries that had to put democratic in their name because they weren't. It's intriguing how those who are the harshest on democracy have to cram democracy into their name. I guess that would apply to the New Democratic Party of Manitoba because what we have seen is less than democratic. It is actually one of the most appalling procedures I certainly have seen or that I have studied in a modern parliamentary, democratic system.

It is frightening that we would have a political party in power and a substantial majority party putting handcuffs on the opposition because what they want to do is stay in power. It's an absolute lust for power. That's it. It's been laid bare. I think all the major newspapers in the province of Manitoba have looked at the NDP and have told them, shame on you for even suggesting this kind of legislation, bringing it in in the darkness of night with stealth. The box was basically painted black as it was snuck into the Legislature and the Premier (Mr. Doer) got up from his chair and winked and all of a sudden, as he fled from the Chamber, the bill was put on everybody's desk. He went out into the hallway and—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me. Excuse me, Mr. Schuler. I'm sorry to interrupt you, but perhaps you weren't here when this motion was introduced or earlier when I reminded members about our rules on relevance. The motion we're debating is about why presenters should have unlimited time to present and unlimited time for committee members to ask questions. So I would ask you to remember those guidelines in the 8 minutes that are remaining to you. Thank you.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I certainly appreciate that. If the Chair would bear with me, I was just going to get to

that point, just right before I was interrupted. I mean it is important for people to have the right to come forward because of all the things that I have been laying out.

Mr. Chairperson, it is scary for the public that they find out that a government would introduce a bill at the darkness of bill, sneak it into the Legislature, quickly distribute it, the Premier flee the Chamber, spin something about set election dates and flee the Legislature and off he is.

Now we have this chaotic sense of committees are called in the morning and then, maybe in the afternoon, and then, well, the committee is supposed to sit until 2 in the morning or maybe they'll sit until 12 that night. It's just chaos that the government's trying to create and the public is somehow supposed to be agreeable to all this and is supposed to be able to react to all of this because clearly, the New Democrats have no life. I guess they kind of feel nobody else has one. There are no doctor's appointments. Nobody has a job. Nobody has anything else of value to do. All is what they have to do is come and wait and sit out to see when they get to present at this committee. That is shameful.

So that's what prompted this particular motion, this resolution. It's the right motion. It's the right way to go. What's amazing is we have a Premier—

Point of Order

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Chair, point of order, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, could you ask the Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross), who's sitting right across from me, if she could contain herself? I did not heckle her when she spoke. Oh, that's because she hasn't, but I wouldn't heckle her.

There has to be decorum, and you know what? I have a right to speak, and I know the bill is in front of us. They want to shut me down as an opposition member. They want to shut down the opposition. Now, we have ministers trying to shut down individuals speaking to the motion.

I was addressing the motion. It is a serious matter. There will be a provision in Bill 37 that when I do a brochure, I walk up to the high altar of the New Democratic Party and I lay it down at the feet of the NDP and I have to have it approved. If it dare offend the NDP, they can stamp rejected on it with a big rubber stamp and say no. Basically, all my material that gets sent out will now be NDP

propaganda. This is very serious, and I would ask that the Member for Fort Garry not be trying to shut down members while they are arguing a very important point.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, thank you, Mr. Schuler. I've heard enough. Is there anyone else on this point of order? If not, I'm ready to make a ruling.

On the very narrow point that you are making, Mr. Schuler, on decorum, I would agree with you that we do need decorum in committee so that people do listen to each other. Thank you, please carry on.

* * *

*(19:10)

Mr. Schuler: Thank you very much.

Before I was so rudely interrupted, what I was going to say was we take our job very serious. And you know what? You run in elections and you accept the results. We accept the people of Manitoba elected a government. We accept that. We also know that the people of Manitoba elected an opposition and that it's important that they have an effective, good opposition. That's what they want. Our title is Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and what the government is trying to do is it's trying to strip the opposition of any and all tools that they might have to be an effective opposition, from heckling them at committee to putting handcuffs on them when it comes to doing mailers. I can't imagine that any of us would travel around the country and we would hear that the governing party gets to approve any mailers sent out by opposition members and that we wouldn't be horrified by that.

Then, while we have all these presenters sitting here, the Premier said: Oh, I'm prepared to work—not like the opposition—Friday, Friday night, Saturday, Saturday all night, Sunday, Sunday all night, until he could barely wait for question period to be over and he was out of the Chamber like a snowball shot out of Hades. He was out that door onto his airplane singing, hooray / hooray / tequila / tequila, in Mexico, and as he's twiddling his little tootsies in the sand in Mexico, people sit here, want to present and have no idea when they're supposed to present. The committee system is chaotic, and the Premier—where's the Premier? He's in Mexico. He's having a great time whooping it up, having tequilas and heavens knows what—dos cervezas, por favor, Señor [*two beer, please, sir*—and all the rest of it.

I mean, that's where our Premier is. Whatever happened to the, I'll work. Where is the Premier? Oh, I'll work Saturday night, all night long, he pontificated to session. Yeah, he'll work on his tequilas and cervezas [*beer*] in Mexico. That's what he is going to do. That's what we get for work. In the meantime, it's the opposition that is sitting here and fighting for democratic and correct policies.

I have pointed out to a lot of people of the public, the only thing that stands between you and tyranny is a strong opposition, and what the government is trying to do is trying to strip the opposition of any and all rights that they have currently. That is shameful, and I've said to many of the opposition members, in three years from now when the tables are turned I want to see what any of those that are left standing on the NDP side, what they will then say if they have to bring their brochures to the PC caucus and have them approved, and if it dares offend us, that big rubber stamp will come down and say disapproved, and they will have to put out PC Party spin. How would they like that? I don't see one of them having the courage to speak up on this piece of legislation. You know what? At least the public, at least the public has the wherewithal to come out and speak and should have the right to take time to express their opinions on this.

We have had some amazing presenters who have said they are embarrassed for the government, that the \$250,000 that the NDP gets gets a COLA, and we've seen today what's going to happen, is the government's going to ram a less-than-cost-of-living increase on retired teachers with a 51.8 percent vote. But that's how the government's going to work. Big cost-of-living increase for the NDP; retired teachers, well, I'm sorry, not today and probably not tomorrow. That's all that the retired teachers get.

That's where this NDP government has gotten to. They're lining their political party pockets with \$250,000 a year, with a COLA, so that's over a million dollars over four years, retroactive. I mean, we're not even talking about starting this after the next election. We're not talking about starting this after the next fiscal year. No, this goes retroactive. The taxpayers are going to have to pay a \$250,000 cheque right off the hop to the NDP, and then they still owe them for this portion of the year. I mean, what a disgrace.

Did the retired teachers not have the right to take a bit of time to express their concern about where the legislation is? Do they not have a right to be heard—

[interjection]—No? What we have is the government called the committee Monday morning, 9 o'clock; next morning, 10 o'clock. Then it's cut-off here; then it starts there. Then it's maybe in the afternoon; no, it's in the evening. Then it goes till 12; no, it goes till 1:30.

It's chaotic. We have chaos and the government has allowed this whole process to deteriorate into this carnage that we have now where people are frustrated with where the government has gone—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Schuler, you have—

Mr. Schuler: —and with the legislation.

I support this motion.

Mr. Chairperson: I was going to say you have one minute left.

Mr. Schuler: I thank you, and I just want to squeeze that last drop out of that stone. Maybe, somewhere, we can squeeze a bit of common sense out of members opposite.

I say to you, give the people the right to have their say, because of the chaotic way that this committee system has been run. Thank you very much.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Chairman, it is indeed a pleasure to have a discussion tonight on Bill 38. Certainly, my colleague from Springfield brought forward a lot of good ideas there. We look forward to more discussion on Bill 37 and Bill 38.

I do want to address the motion that was brought forward by the honourable Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), one of the rookie members on this side of the House. It's certainly a pleasure that he's on this committee tonight in his capacity as the opposition Critic for Finance. I thank him for bringing forward this important motion.

The motion really speaks to democratic reform. As many of my colleagues have indicated tonight, there is a time for change in terms of bringing forward new ideas to committee. I think this is a very important aspect of it. We have people travelling from all over Manitoba to come to committee to make their presentations, to make their views on various pieces of legislation known to the government.

I think it's incumbent upon us, as legislators, to take the time to hear what all Manitobans from

across the entire province have to say on these various pieces of legislation.

Many of these people—in fact, we had the previous member from Ste. Rose travel a couple of hours to come to the city to make a presentation. He was allowed a very minimal amount of time to make his presentation. Then we talked with somebody with 20 years of experience here in the Legislature. They had certainly seen a lot of different things come and go, especially when it deals with the finances of the Province.

I think it's important to point out that we're dealing with a \$10 billion budget here in the province of Manitoba on an annual basis. It's important to recognize the fact that that budget has increased from about \$6 billion back in 1999, when this particular government came into government.

Every few years, they want to bring forward amendments and, in this particular budget or this particular bill, Bill 38, dealing specifically with balanced budget legislation, fiscal management, taxpayer accountability. It's a key component of legislation and how we do business in Manitoba. It's very, very important that all Manitobans get a say in how this framework, as legislation, will impact all Manitobans into the future.

It's very important that Manitobans have their full time to make their views known to committee members; then, the second part of that is allowing the committee members the opportunity to address those presenters and ask questions of those presenters.

The whole concept—and it is very rare. Manitoba is one of the few provinces that actually allows the public to come in and make presentations. It's a novel idea, a novel approach to providing legislation, to developing legislation; we should make sure Manitobans are allowed to voice their opinion.

* (19:20)

It's even more incumbent on us as legislators to actually listen to what they have to say because, a lot of times, the ideas that they bring forward will, in all likelihood, make better legislation. I know sometimes governments, once they have their documents drafted and presented to the public, are a little reluctant to actually make changes to their own legislation, but, really, that's the whole process that we go through here in Manitoba at the committee stage—to hear from Manitobans on how we can make legislation better. I think there's onus on the

government to take notice of what Manitobans are saying, having a look at amendments to this particular legislation. Indeed, we know this particular bill, we would certainly love to see some amendments to it. I think we're hearing loud and clear at committee, for at least the short presentations that we've heard, that there should be changes to this particular legislation.

Mr. Chair, it's really all about democracy and democracy moving forward here in Manitoba. We have someone, a previous Minister of Finance in the government here, a number of years ago, back in the '90s who understands budgets, understands the balanced budget legislation that currently exists. To have people like that come to the table and express their concerns over legislation going forward, is very, very important. Again, I think the onus is on us to pay attention to what they have to say and make the legislation more democratic going forward.

Mr. Cummings the other night talked specifically about some of the events that happened in the 1990s. His concern with the increasing budgets we have in today's terms, about \$10 billion and the sort of things that we can get ourselves into if we're allowed to have the deficit of the province and the debt of the province to increase. There can be some very substantial implications to that. In fact, now we're paying about \$650 million a year interest payments, each and every year. So that's three-quarters of a billion dollars that we as Manitobans have to pay out of our pocket every year just to service the debt load that we currently have in Manitoba.

This particular legislation, what it does, it will basically repeal the existing balanced budget we have in Manitoba, bring in its own set of rules and allow this government to, in effect, borrow more money than what they are taking in on an annual basis. It certainly has come to the point where Manitobans should be aware of exactly what it is this government is trying to do and what they're proposing by Bill 38.

You can imagine, we get to a situation that happened back in the '90s where interest rates escalated. We're relatively well off now in terms of interest rates. Luckily for that. Certainly, even if we saw an increase of 1 percent or 2 percent in terms of interest rates, that would impact our interest and our service debt a tremendous amount. We'd be digging into our pockets as Manitobans for a bigger chunk, more than the \$650 million we're currently paying in

interest payments. Could you imagine what \$650 million would do if this government had its hands on an extra \$650 million? That particular figure represents more than the entire budget of the City of Winnipeg, each and every year that we're paying to our creditors.

The unfortunate part about this legislation, it just enables the government to go deeper and deeper in debt. We know what's going to happen. As we get deeper in debt, down the road interest rates turn around, they start to creep up on us. We're going to be forced to paying more and more money in interest charges.

Now, the context of this bill here as well, now that we're going to have the summary budget reporting, the government will be allowed to balance its budget, if you will, on the backs of some of the Crown corporations. We're talking about Crown corporations such as Manitoba Public Insurance, the Workers Compensation Board and Manitoba Hydro.

We know the record this government has in terms of taking some money, some revenue off Manitoba Hydro, back in 2002, I believe it was. The government went over to Manitoba Hydro, needed some money to balance the budget and took \$203 million out of Manitoba Hydro to balance their budget. Of course, that's money that Manitoba Hydro didn't have. So Manitoba Hydro runs into a situation where they have low water and can't generate electricity and they don't have the electricity to sell to our export markets. They're forced to go out and borrow the money. We've seen the debt of Manitoba Hydro increase as well. We've seen the debt of the Province of Manitoba increase as well.

So we've got a total debt here in the province of somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$20 billion. I know the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) will stand up and say, well, our net debt is not near that high. Well, that's true, our net debt is probably not that high, but at the end of the day, we still pay interest on the total debt of the province, including all the Crown corps. So to mislead Manitobans by talking about net debt is not realistic, and it's not being fair to Manitobans.

That's another point where we are a little afraid of where Bill 38 is headed in not being open, fair and accountable to Manitobans. That's where Manitobans should have the chance to come to the table, have their say in terms of how this legislation will move forward. Clearly, this legislation will come into play and in fact it's retroactive. That's something you don't

very often see in legislation, is actually retroactive legislation, which will go back to last April.

Is that my time, Mr. Chair, already? I have so many more points, but we'll save those for another time. Thank you.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): First of all, I want to start out by apologizing. When I bumped the table underneath here before, I didn't mean to wake anybody around the table. So, my apologies for doing that—it's the apology act, get it in free.

On Bill 38, the motion is to have unlimited time to present, as well as unlimited time for questions. It's actually an excellent motion, and it's unfortunate—I'm assuming this government is not going to vote with this motion. We haven't heard from any of them. Again, the government members seem to be under the gag law or don't seem to be interested in speaking to these.

But in terms of unlimited time to present, we've had a great number of public presenters. Wait until we get into Bill 17, as, the last time I checked, there were 417 presenters coming to that one. So, this whole committee process, when we have people coming from a great distance to come here, and we're cutting them off at 10 minutes and questions at five minutes, I think is a disservice to the public. If you really want to hear from the public—and again, with the Chair's discretion, I'm sure if the presenter got off topic, just like when we get off topic, the Chair pulls us back in and that brings us back on topic.

An Honourable Member: Relevance.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, we're working on some of them more than others, but that's all right. But you know, that's an excellent example, Larry, if the presenter got off topic, and just like one of the former speakers, I'm sure the Chair would be right on top of them and pulling the presenter back on topic.

We have presenters coming in that have a great deal of expertise, and when they are there and they're doing their presentation, we should be able to get as much information from them as what they can provide us and not cut them off.

You know, if we actually had unlimited questions, maybe even some of the NDP would feel like they could ask some questions. Maybe they wouldn't be afraid to take up some time. They don't want to cut into our time for taking questions. I would certainly welcome some of the backbenchers waking up and asking some questions. I think that

would be very interesting to hear their angle. But I guess they're not serious about improving the bill because they don't want to hear from presenters, and they don't want to hear all the questions that we could be asking. It's unfortunate.

We have Bill 37 in the other room where it's the same thing. They have a very tight schedule in there, and again, they don't seem to be interested. It's good that—I'm sure the Premier (Mr. Doer) is balancing the budget in Mexico for the next couple of days, as he's in the sand and doing—*[interjection]*—and he's left you to carry the load. I think that's admirable of the government backbenchers to carry the load while the Premier's dipping his toes in the sand and solving mid-continent transportation issues.

* (19:30)

But, you know, with Bill 38, I can see where this government is quite excited about Bill 38. It certainly gives them—it means they'll be able to continue this spending spree in the next years and be able to run deficits. Conveniently, though, they only have to balance the budget once in every four years, and, as this is turning out, it will be after the next election, assuming in Bill 37 that he does call the election in 2011.

He has a prerogative to call it sooner for the first election so we'll have to see there, but I guess the election call will probably depend on how much the deficit is and how well the Crown corporations are doing so that they can balance the budget using the Crown corporations. I always hear the government, particularly the backbenchers, complaining about us, the Conservatives, the bad, old Conservatives in the '90s, selling MTS.

When Bill 38 came out, it was like a light went on to me. Now I know why they're mad at us for selling MTS because it's one less Crown corporation that they can bleed out and balance the budget with. It's unfortunate that they're going to use our Crown corporations as their slush fund. They've done it before, and actually we have—If you're interested in MTS, go to SaskTel and see—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr. Pedersen. I'm having trouble hearing you, not because you're not loud enough but because there's some chatter happening at the table, so I'd ask all members, especially those sitting closest to me, to rein it in so that I can hear Mr. Pedersen.

I apologize for interrupting. Please continue.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm sure Minister Selinger will hold it down from now on. I'm sorry, Mr. Selinger. I didn't mean to point you out—*[interjection]* and the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen), too. I believe they were probably having a discussion about balanced budgets and core operating debts versus—*[interjection]* summary budgets. *[interjection]* I did. Actually, I have read the legislation. Have you read the legislation? Did you know about it before it came out? After it came out, I read it. I bet you didn't read it before it came out. I bet you didn't even know it was coming until it was there. At least I have a reason for not seeing it before it came out. I'm on the opposition side, but, man, at least I have a reason.

I did read it once it came out, and when I look at \$20 billion in debt for Manitoba right now and we're heading the downward slope into more deficits in the coming year. I'm very fortunate to have grandchildren, and the unfortunate part is my grandchildren are going to saddled with this debt that this government's going to spend in the next few years. Probably, unlike most members of the government side, I have been in debt over the years. I ran a farm operation and we had huge debt, and I'm even old enough to remember 21 percent interest.

And, right now, we're running the lowest interest rates we have in decades—*[interjection]* 30 years. Thank you, master. Every time that interest rate goes up one point on \$20-billion debt for this province, \$20 billion today, never mind what it will be three years down the road, that's a huge cost to Manitobans. *[interjection]* Well, you can only lock in debt for so long and then—*[interjection]* Right, and you've locked in debt on the new debt that you've got coming in for the next few years? You've got that locked in? Man, you must have spent the cheque already then because I don't know how you could do that otherwise.

This Bill 38 is a licence to go into debt more, and that's what's so sad about this. Coming from a business perspective, any time that you—there's nothing wrong with being in debt. Most of us have been in debt at one time or another or continue to be in debt, but the difference is you have to have manageable debt. You have to be able to pay out your debt, and we're not doing it on the backs of taxpayers.

So, Mr. Chairman, from this motion, we've had people come in that have expertise in finances. I know one of the gentlemen that was in last night has a great deal of experience in finances. We should be

able to let them have more time for presentations, and we should be able to have more time for questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Chairman, I do believe so, and I think that Mr. Pedersen's and Mr. Schuler's presentations probably swayed a lot of the government members to vote in favour of this resolution, so, yes, I would call the question on the motion.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. The motion before the committee is as follows, moved by Mr. Borotsik: That this committee recommend to the House that it waive rule 92(2) for these committee meetings to allow all presenters to Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act, to present for an unlimited amount of time, and to accept questions for an unlimited amount of time from committee attendees.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Borotsik: Recorded vote, please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote has been requested.

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 3, Nays 6.

Mr. Chairperson: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: As was announced in the House, this committee will also meet in this room to consider these bills on the following occasions: Wednesday morning, June 4, at 10 a.m.; Wednesday evening, June 4, at 6 p.m.; Thursday evening, June 5, at 6 p.m.

How long does the committee wish to sit tonight?

An Honourable Member: Midnight.

An Honourable Member: Nine o'clock.

Mr. Chairperson: It's been suggested we sit till midnight and we will deal with the matter then. Agreed? *[Agreed]*

We have a number of presenters registered to speak this evening. Please refer to your presenters' lists.

Before we proceed with presentations, we do have a number of other items and points of information to consider.

First of all, if there's 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're 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 five 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 a 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 presentations, I will note that we do have new out-of-town presenters registered marked with an asterisk on the list. We also have additional presenters registered to speak to Bills 6, 25 and 29.

Does the committee wish to follow what was agreed to last night and hear presenters on Bills 6, 25 and 29 first, then hear from our new out-of-town presenter, and then resume where we left off last night on the list, continuing to hear from our in-town presenters? *[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 first have to 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.

* (19:40)

We will now proceed with public presentations, beginning with Bill 6, The Securities Amendment Act.

Mr. Rick Negrych. Mr. Negrych. Mr. Negrych not being here, his name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Bill 25, The Embalmers and Funeral Directors Amendment Act.

Mr. Rick Negrych. Rick Negrych. Rick Negrych's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Bill 29, The Business Practices Amendment Act.

Rick Negrych. Rick Negrych. Rick Negrych's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Bill 38—The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act

Mr. Chairperson: We're going to presenter registered as No. 65, Lloyd McKinney. Lloyd McKinney. Lloyd McKinney's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Scott Hayward. Scott Hayward. Scott Hayward's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Greg McIvor. Greg McIvor. Greg McIvor's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Ron Thompson—[interjection]—Thomas, sorry. Ron Thomas. Ron Thomas's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

We're now going to No. 1 on our list for in-town presenters. Nancy McDougall. Nancy McDougall. Nancy McDougall's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Karen Boughton. Karen Boughton.

Welcome. Do you have a written presentation?

Mrs. Karen Boughton (Private Citizen): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The Clerks will distribute.

Please proceed when you're ready.

Mrs. Boughton: Mr. Chairperson, Mr. McFadyen, Mr. Selinger and members of the committee, speaking on Bill 38, as I consider this balanced budget, this fiscal management and taxpayer accountability act, many questions and ideas come to

mind. Some I will deal with in this presentation, some I will allude to, and some I will pass because of time constraint. I did endeavour to read the proposed bill. I then read some recent newspaper articles. One of these articles was certainly supporting the passing of this bill. That one was by Lynne Fernandez.

Since I was raised in a large family of nine siblings on a small farm west of Portage and had my beginnings in the early 1930s, I have a difficult time with the freedom this bill gives and the latitude it gives the government to raise taxes and overspend. There are many reasons why one can find to overspend, and that frightens me. Lynne sees that limited increase in taxes can cause serious fiscal and economic problems because it limits the government from, quote, "running reasonable and occasional deficits when there are serious downturns in the economy." To this I ask, who is to decide which debts are necessary? Which debts are too large? Who will be responsible in the ensuing time to pay back these debts? And when will the budget be balanced? Will it be balanced after four years?

Again, she wonders whether it is necessary for a referendum to raise taxes. I want to know whose back these taxes are going to be on. Will it be the seniors on fixed incomes, which are much lower than the living wage paid at any time in history? This includes the retired teachers, who have paid their share for a promised COLA, but they find themselves years later with dollars worth less than 90 cents, as mine is. Or will these taxes be on the young people who choose to work hard and pay their way, raise their own family, as they start out in life, and, at the same time, have to pay higher taxes because the government saw fit to spend beyond its budget? I'll wait till the conversation is finished on the right-hand side of the table.

I will begin again. Yes, I am a retired teacher.

Or will these taxes be on the young people who choose to work hard and pay their own way, raise their own family as they start out in life and at the same time have to pay higher taxes because the government saw fit to spend beyond its budget at some time for reasonable and occasional deficit?

Or will it be on the real financially poor, struggling to keep body, soul and family together while they search for income to be able to move ahead without seeking government assistance but

rather keeping the spirit and the nurturance of a family together?

Manitoba does have a debt problem. Just ask any of the retired teachers about The Teachers' Pensions Act of 1977 when a plan was put in place to deal with the government's half of the deal. I should say the plan was not put in place to deal with the government's part of their deal, though every retired teacher paid their half and another 60 percent besides in order to have a full COLA, such as some government members are getting today, and theirs is retroactive.

The debt indicators of 13 years ago that Lynn speaks of are not valid today, and they will be less valid with the escalating gas prices and all the commodities that are a spinoff from those prices. I sometimes recall the stories of the Bennett buggies of the 1920s and '30s. Perhaps we are now on the verge of the same phenomenon, except but for the people of rural Manitoba, we don't even have a place to house our horses that would be used to pull our cars. That says nothing about the cost of foods and all commodities affected by the present gas prices and the tax that is on them.

To whom are the social obligations to be addressed? For which group? It can't be them all. A four-year timetable to write a provincial budget is going to be much too long to be of any effect. When it is over then the higher costs of Hydro, MPI and all the Crown corporations that provide services and utilities will be passed on to us, our children, our grandchildren, on down through the generations to come.

Taxes and costs never decrease. They become cumulative as the years pass. Just compare where we are now to the turn of the century, the end of the last millennium. In 1995, the Progressive Conservative government introduced a balanced budget law. Yes, there were restrictions and some of them were severe. The books were balanced, and that government left a rainy day fund instead of a debt. We know it was not perfect and one of the things left undone was The Teachers' Pensions Act that should have been dealt with, made clear, and a plan put in place to have it fiscally responsible. It wasn't done then, and in the past nine years of NDP government, it is still not done. But our basic benefits that we paid 60-percent extra for are in danger of being drastically reduced. The Conservatives however, did, throughout their time, keep the spirit of that act, and we were paid, often full COLA, but always enough

so that our finances weren't reduced as they are today. Because each year a COLA is left out or we get 40 or 50 percent of one percent, that stays. It's cumulative. We never can add on to something we haven't got. The next year, it's simply lower again, and we continue to go down, except we have paid for it.

* (19:50)

I have serious questions about all the social spending of this government. I have questions about whether the spending has helped the needy people of this province, or has it helped contribute to the social problems of the youth today, including crime? That will probably be a bombshell in this discussion and the debate of a balanced budget.

I will say only this that, back in the time of the 1930s, when young men rode the rails across Canada looking for work, there was financial poverty all over the country. Yet, living a half a mile from the main line of the CPR and seeing the number of men riding the rails and having them often get off in our little town, I recall no crime. We left our doors and our buildings unlocked. Men came to our places and wanted to work for their board and a place to sleep, and they worked.

We might claim \$5 a month from the government to pay them. They might even sleep overnight in the barn without us knowing, or take a few eggs, but no one was ever found dead or robbed as a result of that visit. There was no poverty of respect for one's fellow man. Values were not in poverty as they are today. I wonder who is tending the homes where we have so much youth crime.

I would also like to ask you where the government will get its extra money when the federal grants decrease, and they will. If they take it from Crown corporations, we will never finish paying it off.

If this bill passes, I am certain we will all pay dearly for the overspending for years to come. Maybe there won't be money for all the wonderful social services that we have about us at this time; maybe there won't be money for COLA, even for government. I thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mrs. Boughton.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mrs. Boughton, thank you for that walk through history. We really appreciate it. I do thank you for your

comments and bringing us back to some sense of reality. Sometimes we lose that sense of reality.

You had referred to taxes. In this legislation, there is a clause that requires a referendum of Manitobans in order to raise certain taxes. That's only one way the government gets revenue, though. It does increase its revenue through other streams. One of them is Pharmacare; they increased your Pharmacare this year by about \$72 a year.

Do you drive a vehicle?

Mrs. Boughton: Yes.

Mr. Borotsik: They increased your vehicle registration by about \$20. The reason I ask that question—the limited COLA you do receive on your pension income right now, would it cover the inflationary costs of those fees and the inflationary costs that you incur every day with respect to gasoline, food and other staples?

Mrs. Boughton: I'm sorry, it won't even begin to cover them. Possibly, if we're lucky, maybe it will cover two or three months, but that would be all it would cover, all told, in a year's COLA.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you.

This legislation also allows the government to, as you correctly identified, have what's referred to as a rolling four-year average. They don't have to balance their budget every year. They can have a four-year rolling average and budget at the end of that four years.

In your own household, Mrs. Boughton, do you manage your finances in that way? Do you spend more in the first two years with the understanding that maybe your COLA will pay for those expenses in the third and fourth year?

Mrs. Boughton: Way back when I retired, I might have been tempted to just look at it once a year, but I keep track of every cent I spend. I make sure all bills are paid by the end of the month, and then I move carefully on to the next month. I don't risk anything that may happen that would cut into my budget, even month by month.

Mr. Borotsik: You were raised in a different era than I, not much of a different era but a different era nonetheless.

When you were raised in that era, what was your upbringing with reference to debt? Did your parents like to go out and buy perhaps more items than what

they could actually afford and hope that they could pay for them over time?

Mrs. Boughton: It's interesting. I prepared a little paragraph about who I really am, and, if I have your permission, I'll read it.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes.

Mrs. Boughton: Perhaps, in order to understand where I'm coming from, I should state that I am from an era where money was extremely scant. I remember eating porridge three times a day, but at least we ate. There was what we would call now real financial poverty. But in my home there was never social poverty, nurturing poverty or a spirit of poverty, because the spirit in our home, we each learned to work hard and overcome, and we all did quite well.

We have today come to expect that with financial poverty, people will be forever put down. Not so. One brother, in particular, joined the Navy in 1938 at the age of 17. He saw the bitterest of naval war in the North Atlantic and other places. He was on the Murmansk route, even. He was decorated by King George VI. After the close of the war, he was chosen to plan and build the trainer for radar training in the naval base at Halifax. The administration building on that base now bears his name, the Carroll Building [*phonetic*].

We were offered a grade 8 education and we rose above it. Another brother is a retired Winnipeg high school principal. I taught after my children were established in school. I earned two university degrees as an adult, one from the University of Western Ontario and one from the University of Manitoba.

So we were able to come above what financial poverty could bring down on people in every respect of the word.

Mr. Chairperson: Mrs. Boughton, you waited so patiently for your name to be called, I'm going to allow one more question.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I certainly thank you very much for your presentation and thank you for your years of service to society. My wife is also a teacher, so I know some of the trials and tribulations that teachers go through over the years.

You made some comments there in regard to provincial funding going into some of our social programs here in Manitoba. I just get the sense that you might think some of that funding has been misguided, that we're kind of missing the mark there

on some of those social funding and social issues. Could you elaborate on that?

* (20:00)

Mrs. Boughton: I spoke to a friend who's very well informed, today, and I told her what I was saying. She said, I don't know that I would agree with you. But I said, it seems to me with the higher rate of youth crime in our province, is it because parents are too busy working before their children are ready to be left in someone else's care? Is that really impinging on the nurturing that they should be getting in the home and the values they should be getting from their home and the security they should be getting from their home? That's why I spoke on that. I don't know whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong, but it seemed to me we didn't have that crime when there was just financial poverty with homes being what homes should be, and I question it.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation, Mrs. Boughton.

The next name is Keith D. Boughton.

Mr. Boughton, do you have a written presentation?

Mr. Keith Boughton (Private Citizen): Right here.

Mr. Chairperson: We will distribute it. Please begin when you're ready.

Mr. Boughton: Mr. Chairman, committee members, I was a former schoolteacher, and I generally waited till the class had their material before I started to talk. You know, you might think that I would be second-class to my wife but I've been a minister for pretty well 45 years, I've had my chance to talk. Now it's her turn. She's doing a great job.

Our family believes in an annually balanced budget. This means that we paid for everything we purchased during the year and, hopefully, have a little money in the bank. A loan on a new car or a mortgage on our property was seen as balanced if we regularly and on time made our payments for the car or the house until we were free of those debts

Your original balanced budget, debt repayment, and taxpayer act introduced by Gary Filmon in the mid-1990s demonstrates his government's anti-deficit commitment. The NDP have elected to change the law and the law's standard of compliance. Instead of balancing the budget for core, tax-supported operations, the Province would be forced to balance its budget for all government activities,

core operations, Crown corporations and special operating agencies. This would be done, not on an annual basis, as the old law required, but over four budgets.

I mention, as my wife did, Lynne Fernandez, an economist for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba, and she wrote an article in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 29. I quote, not to run a deficit in a recession/depression time is irresponsible and immoral. Sounds to me a lot like the New Deal thinking of the United States of the 1930s. There are always exceptions to the government and any rule that's made, and government here anytime needs to be leery of becoming too comfortable with deficit spending.

I was born in the late 1920s. Our family was given, along with every other family in the province, a crash course in what debt load would do. We were fortunate. While it was tough going, we kept our property and had enough to eat despite being a family of seven children, one parent, my father. The people with debts so often lost it all. Those who didn't have a debt generally fared quite a bit better even in these very bitter difficulties

I took my Bachelor of Arts degree between United College and the University of Manitoba, majoring in economics and history. These two areas must always go hand in hand; you can never separate them. I've always marvelled at the economist who can stand on either side of the topic and give you a good report on either side of that same topic. To them, it's purely academic.

The government needs to totally balance its finances; now, the bill says over four budgets. This is not an easy task in such a huge financial industry. What happens—and it probably will—what happens if excessive spending creeps in over the four-year period?

The debts' annual payments will seriously handcuff the government's ability to continue to finance its programs. There will be always the worry with the average citizen about government's financing. Will the individual be able to make a living, operate a business, and progress with all the multitude of taxes—and more it seems each year—that create such a burdensome environment as is happening today?

Bill 38 mentions Manitoba Hydro. It makes us very uncomfortable. We know that the government took \$203 million from Manitoba Hydro in 2002.

This wasn't expected to happen, but it did. In 2000, an attempt to redirect \$20 million from MPI money brought such a backlash it didn't happen.

If a government overspends, spends in undisciplined fashion, guess who gets to pay the piper? Some deficits happen from time-to-time, but excessive deficit from undisciplined spending is totally destructive. Too much excessive deficit creates a debt over a period of time and will bring that government into disrepute. Keep it up and the ballot box will introduce the opposition to power. Then, that party has to clean up the mess.

When I majored in economics and history, I also studied mathematics throughout the degree. Therefore, I am always keenly interested in how costs affect things, for example, this proposed vote tax—the CPI yearly.

How are these things going to affect us, we people who pay the taxes? We place these costs alongside the Manitoba continuing-slowdown economic economy; we add the tremendous fuel-rising costs and the costs which are affected always along the line that affect us in everyday existence.

On top of this, each average citizen has to contend with the multitude of presently extremely high taxes. This quickly catches the eye of the mathematician. It also catches the eye and the pocket of the average citizen. It creates a burden on the citizen today, on its children tomorrow and the grandchildren of the days to come.

Looking at this and realizing the mess that the federal government has been talking about in terms of how money just seems to wander off, I would say, forget the idea of a budget every four years, and let's have a budget every year, as we should. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you, Reverend Boughton. I appreciate your being here and waiting as long as you did. I know it's a long time; it's a long evening for you. I appreciate you making the effort to come and give us your opinions and insights.

* (20:10)

You focussed on debt. It's something that I focus on a great deal. A wise man once told me a long, long time ago that the best investment that you could make is to retire your debt. I'm sure that you follow that same philosophy, as you did identify the debt with respect to a car payment and a mortgage. Now,

there's good debt. There's a requirement to have that car payment and that mortgage, but you had talked about also in your presentation how that debt was retired eventually and you became mortgage free, which all of us attain to at some point in time in our lives.

With this particular government, it doesn't wish to become mortgage free. In fact, they use a benchmark called debt-to-GDP which is kind of a smoke and mirrors kind of benchmark because as GDP goes up and debt goes up, it stays the same. But things can change with GDP on a regular basis but not necessarily the debt.

How do you see this government abusing this piece of legislation with respect to debt? Do you see them overexpending and perhaps using a debt to be able to cover off those deficit costs?

Mr. Boughton: I would think the way things have been going to now, that's a foregone conclusion. I'm really concerned that, by the end of this government's term, whether they're still going to be in office. That would be my concern.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, we don't share that concern, Mr. Boughton. I'm not so concerned about this government still being in office in three years. So we'll put that as a point of disagreement. I'm not concerned about them being in power.

The four-year rolling average, the summary budget, obviously as you're well aware, being an economist, rolling all of the Crown corporations into a summary budget, or what you and I would probably know as a consolidated budget, on a four-year rolling average.

Again I'll ask the same question I asked your wife. If you overexpended in two years of your budget annually—you earn money, you spend money. If you overexpended your annual income in two years, would it be reasonable to think that you should make it up or could make it up in the third and fourth year based on your current income?

Mr. Boughton: I know our dad I don't think was out of debt in his whole lifetime. Of course, with seven children to raise and that on his own, there's no way. I just abhor debt. Now that's me personally, and I don't get into debt unless it's organized debt and payments on time.

Mr. Borotsik: The last question from me, Mr. Boughton.

Now you did have a comment in your presentation where you indicated \$2 million yearly with respect to the vote tax. That's actually \$2 million over four years. It works out to about half a million dollars per year. I just point that out for a simple reason. The \$2 million is an interesting number. In this budget that has just been submitted by the Finance Minister, he shows a \$2-million surplus. He has a \$10-billion budget, but on that \$10-billion budget, revenue in, expenses out, and budgets are based on assumptions, he shows an assumption of a \$2-million surplus based on \$10 billion.

Is it fair to say that \$2 million is a reasonable amount to have as a cushion, based specifically on the economy that we're facing today and based specifically with the cost increases that I think we're facing not only today but in the future? Do you think the \$2 million is a sufficient cushion in a \$10-billion budget?

Mr. Boughton: First of all, I don't mind being corrected. I like to be correct. Two million dollars, in this day and age, it's hardly a drop in the bucket.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Hawranik, you have time for a last question.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Thank you very much, Reverend Boughton, for your very interesting presentation. I was looking at your presentation and listening to it. One of your lines says that the party after—first of all, the government has a potential to create deficits every year and increase the debt, and then the party after the election, who wins after the election, has to clean up the mess.

The interesting thing is that Bill 37 and Bill 38 have been introduced at the same time. Bill 37 indicates an election will be held every four years, which is about three years from now. Bill 38 says we have to balance only every four years. So, potentially, this government could go on to deficit for the next three years and leave the next government, which, I believe, will be ours to clean up that mess. So the result is that Manitobans are losers.

First of all, would you agree with that, and how would this affect you in your personal life?

Mr. Boughton: Actually, if you are into debt for this first year and there's three more years, it's simply adding to the debt, so it's my four-year speaking that I'm referring to and I would think still fits. Am I answering your question?

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, I guess so. What's curious to us is the fact that Bill 37, in the case of an election will be held three years from now, and the reality is Bill 38 allows them to run under operating deficits each of the next three years. What that'll do is it'll leave the next government to clean up that mess.

What will that mean to you? Could that mean increased taxes, and are you in a position to afford that?

Mr. Boughton: Well, I think you've heard from my wife and from me that we finance carefully. This vote tax, this CPI—you know, I spent the first several years teaching, then went into the ministry. The amount of raises I got don't even use up one hand. So we have to finance carefully.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Reverend Boughton. It's good to see you again.

Mr. Boughton: Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The next presenter is Clyde Bramadat. Clyde Bramadat. Clyde Bramadat's name drops to the bottom of the list.

Richard Benoit. Richard Benoit. Richard Benoit's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Jack Carroll. Jack Carroll. Jack Carroll's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Andy Sirski. Andy Sirski is here.

Do you have a written presentation?

Mr. Andy Sirski (Private Citizen): I do not.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. Please proceed.

Mr. Sirski: Mr. Chairperson, honourable members, guests, I'm richly blessed. When I hear speeches like I just heard, I guess I have to thank my lucky stars that I had opportunities to learn things that most people don't know and that I'm in a position to teach some of those things to other people.

I'm a farm boy at heart. I was a farm boy all my life and I worked in agriculture until December '06. So I have a special feeling for farmers and for the guys that are going to talk to Bill 17 and so on.

But when I spoke to Bill 37, I told a joke. So, I don't know, should I tell one today, or should I tell you what happened to me today, because I had a very good day. Okay, you'll let me decide.

I know this is going on the record, so I feel a little funny saying this. Today I sold a call, a covered call on 400 shares of a stock called RIM and a

covered call on 200 shares of a stock called Apple, and doggone it, someone put \$6,200 in my trading account today. Then I bought back another call on another stock that I owned. I sold that stock, and doggone it, I made \$6,000. It was kind of a good day.

Now, I think when we look at Bill 38 where the government wants to move away from a balanced budget, I really think it can open a lot of worms or, sorry, doors, or a lot of cans of worms. I'm going to come at this from a different direction. It seems to me, and I think previous speakers have alluded to it, that this government now wants to set up a system where it can take money from Crown corporations, as if they were their own business.

* (20:20)

Madam Vice-Chairperson in the Chair

Now, from what I understand of Manitoba Hydro, it doesn't have too much spare money. It should use its money to develop the hydro business in Manitoba and to service debts on that business. Things like Workers Comp, Autopac, if it has too much money, maybe it should drop the rates for us people of Manitoba.

Liquor, well, I guess you could tax that if you want to, and same with cigarettes. Maybe not everybody agrees with that but the whole thing of moving from a balanced budget to deficit spending really needs to be examined because there's the magic of compound interest when you're making money, and a viciousness of compound interest when you have debt. And deficits turn into debt and debt creates more debt and it becomes a vicious spiral.

It would almost seem to me that this is a great election strategy. Free up government spending for the next three years, create a pile of debt, lose the election, saddle the next bunch of politicians with servicing that debt, they'll become very unpopular and they'll lose the election, too, to the NDP party. Sorry, Mr. Gerrard, if he's somewhere close by. You know, so maybe that's the strategy. I don't know.

The other thing is maybe it just—this province likes to cash the cheque that it gets from the federal government in transfer payments. Now, from what I hear, other provinces are starting to resent this business of transfer payments and maybe we should look at it. So, I propose that this government institute an education program immediately to teach people of Manitoba how to make money with money. I propose that that would expand the tax base that any government will have and, when you start doing the

numbers, there could be a lot of money, almost into perpetuity, instead of debt.

Let me explain. When I was editor of a farm newspaper called *Grainews* for many years, and somewhere along the way I kind of lucked into the concept of an overall financial plan that I affectionately called the five-legged stool. Now, it's farm boy talk, I know, but, you know, basically the five legs were the business or job that a person has, their career; proper insurance for their point in life; a second skill; a registered retirement savings plan, or an RESP if you have young children; and learn how to make money with stocks. That's a very rare skill. I taught it in *Grainews*, and when I retired I started a newsletter called *StockTalks*, and I teach that concept to my readers. It's going along quite well and you'd be amazed how easily people learn how to make money when they get some half-decent education.

The thing with an investment portfolio is, you know, it doesn't stink. It doesn't need a lagoon. It's liquid. The decisions are reversible. The more we learn, the easier it is to learn more, and there are local markets, national markets, international markets that we can tap into that are not affected by the weather. They're not affected by current politics. They're not affected by currency fluctuations. We can manage with all those things. If people would learn and, you know, if provinces and municipalities and governments would learn these things, and farm organizations, if they would learn or help their people learn these things, maybe we as governments or as farm organizations could stop going cap in hand to the federal government or back to taxpayers and quit grabbing more money or trying to grab more money out of everybody.

There are a lot of benefits to learning how to make money. I'm going to suggest that it is quite easy. Like, if I can make \$10,000 or \$12,000 today in a day, it's pretty easy for people to make \$1,000 a month. Now I'm not saying that everybody can do that, but, if we took 100,000 taxpayers in Manitoba and if each one made \$1,000 a month, that's \$12,000 a year. That's an extra \$1.2 billion of income. Some of that will end up being tax base, and you can do the math.

There are a lot of benefits to teaching people how to make money. For one thing, baby boomers, and some of us are going to get there sooner than others or are there. Some of us are going to end up in nursing homes at some point. If you have a low income, you don't pay much into a nursing home. If

people made more money, they'd pay more into a nursing home or get less subsidies. There's an income supplement. The threshold ends at \$18,000 but goes up as income goes down. I suggest that if people knew how to make money, the governments could save money on that income supplement.

Surely, if people make money they're going to have to declare it, so the government would collect more taxes. Another \$500, \$1,000, \$2,000 a month would certainly help a lot of people deal with rising energy costs, rising food prices, lack of COLA clauses in their pension, all kinds of things that spare money could help people do. There would be more money in homes around the province, and people spend money. They don't usually hoard it, so this would boost our economy in Manitoba.

It sort of boils down to this. B.C. has mining. Alberta has oil—

Madam Vice-Chairperson: One minute left.

Mr. Sirski: Okay. Alberta has oil. Saskatchewan now has oil. Manitoba could have brains, investment brains. Spare money would help moms stay at home and certainly would help retired people. Maybe employees could be a little less aggressive in agreeing to or negotiating wage claims. Now, if I proposed that instead of spending an extra 10 percent of whatever this government proposes to do, that it should set a good example and spend less than it makes and start teaching people through the education system how to do that too.

Saskatchewan has a minister by the name of—well, the portfolio is called innovation and enterprise. Manitoba is hiring PP, phosphorus police, to go out and check on farmers, how much phosphorus they are putting on their soil. I think that 10 minutes sure went by very quickly.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Yes, it did. Can you wrap it up, please.

Mr. Sirski: I really think that the education system is missing teaching people how to make money as a way of life.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Sirski.

Questions?

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Thank you very much for that presentation, Mr. Sirski. In your presentation you referred to the farm terminology of the five-legged stool. In that five-legged stool I suggest that you have five streams of income. If one

or two of those streams happen to be losing money, would you take the other three streams and subsidize the two losers?

Mr. Sirski: Maybe temporarily, because sometimes enterprises do lose money. You'd have to assess it and see if it's got some turn-around potential and has it got long-term potential if you do turn it around?

Mr. Graydon: Would you, perhaps, re-assess your whole situation at that time and re-adjust your expectations so that they could make money?

* (20:30)

Mr. Sirski: Madam Vice-Chair, you have to take a look at the situation. I know in our situation we never lived on a budget. We had one paycheque. We managed our affairs to live within that. Then we also went out and learned how to make more money.

So, if some enterprise that you're referring to isn't making money, sometimes maybe you have to shut it down and go find something else to do.

Mr. Graydon: For the record, does your wife work?

Mr. Sirski: Well, don't tell her she doesn't work. She raised five children.

Mr. Graydon: I'll rephrase that. Is your wife gainfully employed outside of the home?

Mr. Sirski: My wife quit her job as a teacher. She'd be a class 7 teacher right now if she was still working. She quit her job in 1976 when our first child came along. She has not worked at a paying job besides a couple little, I think, election things, because she has some friend in the election campaign thing. She has not had a full-time or even a steady part-time job since 1976. She does not have a pension and she has very little CPP.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Thank you.

I just want to remind the members of the public that, as hard as it might be sometimes, we're not allowed to participate through applauding.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Sirski, then you would have been a one-income family. Could you tell the committee tonight how many children you raised, how many of those have university educations and how you went about financing that?

Mr. Sirski: My wife and I raised five children, one daughter and four boys. They all have degrees—well, one is one course short, but he took his four years in university; three have finished their masters and one is working on her Ph.D. The baby in the family,

because we summer fallowed for four years and had another one, he's currently in the second year of university.

How do we do it? Well, we adjusted our life to the income that we expected to have. Then, because we only had one paycheque, we could never take any financial chances.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: I would just remind you that there are other members. *[interjection]* Okay. There's less than a minute left.

Mr. Graydon: I beg your pardon, Madam?

Madam Vice-Chairperson: There's only half a minute left.

Mr. Graydon: Okay, don't interrupt me then, please.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: I'm taking the time in.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you.

If you were the government today, Mr. Sirski, and you were faced with a situation where perhaps you could see a downturn in the economy, which would be in direct relationship to the downturn of the American economy, and it's a well-known fact that our economy follows theirs would you then introduce this type of budget, as the Minister of Finance, to prepare the path to run a deficit?

Mr. Sirski: No. I would certainly try to manage the affairs to be ready for a downturn, which means saving money for a rainy day, which is something we always did. A lot of my readers in *Grainews* and in *StockTalks* have done that, too. They save for a rainy day, they have a back up skill, that sort of thing. I think that's what governments should do, too.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: The time has expired. Thank you very much for your presentation.

Stefan Paszlack. Stefan Paszlack will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

Howard Rybuck.

Good evening, Mr. Rybuck. Do you have a presentation to be distributed?

Mr. Howard Rybuck (Private Citizen): No, I just have sort of a collection of thoughts that I'll try and get through.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: That's just fine. Please proceed.

Mr. Rybuck: That way I was able to avoid having to make 20 copies and I could save a few trees, seeing

how this government's not very committed to saving trees with the decision to go around the west side of the lake with the—in 1995, Manitoba's balanced budget legislation was passed to ensure the Province lived within its means. Many Manitobans don't have the luxury of financing or other revenue streams.

How can a government think of not having to live within a budget when many Manitobans are forced every day to live with very, very tight budgets?

We have three kids at home. We've given them all bank cards, but we've not given them lines of credit. We don't let them overdraw their bank accounts and just say, look, if you don't have enough money, it's okay; hopefully, we'll find it in another bank account and, hopefully, in four years, you balance things before you go away to college and leave us. It's just not the way to do business.

I studied economics 30 years ago, and one of the things I remember was my teacher telling me that deficit financing was one of the most-outdated economic strategies. Yet, we have a province here with—and I just have a comparison to Saskatchewan which I always thought was a lesser province in population and revenue sources. Yet, in 10 years, our revenues have gone from roughly \$6 billion to 10. Our debt's grown from 6.4 to \$20 billion, I heard tonight, whatever the number is; it's incredible.

Saskatchewan has increased its revenues; it appears pretty close to the same amount. Yet, they've reduced their debts. Their federal cash transfers are half, or even less, of what ours are. I just don't get it. There seems to be a serious lack of economic conscience in this province.

Bill 38 essentially kills the '95 balanced budget legislation. Under Bill 38, the Province is only required to balance its summary budget. The Province can use a net income of Crown corporations. I think many Manitobans have been critical where they understood the government was raiding Crown corporations. I remember a few years back where the government wanted to take money out of MPIC and donate it to the university. Not that that wasn't a worthy cause, but I think it's inappropriate to raid Crown corporations to finance political whims. This must not continue.

With Bill 38, the Province's overspending comes out of the pockets of Manitobans by what would be legally raiding Crown corporations and increasing debt. I've looked at forecasts over the next couple

years and the Province's budgets were in the millions of dollars; yet, Manitoba already spends, I believe I saw, \$806 million a year in debt servicing.

I think we need to develop an economic conscience quickly. The idea of living without a budget and hopefully balancing in four years, if we're even around as a government, is wrong.

Bill 38, using accounting as an excuse to limit accountability—I think the NDP are trying to cover up changes by changing how Manitoba reports its financial statements. This just doesn't cut it. I think that this bill cannot pass; it has to be stopped.

In closing, once again, I just want to talk briefly about this whole committee process, because I've come here many nights and become very frustrated with having to wait in line to see if tonight's going to be my night, or do I come back tomorrow? Friday, I had a call from the Clerk saying that these hearings were going to continue Monday and Tuesday, and I was still considerably far down the list.

* (20:40)

I hope that this committee or this government can streamline this whole process. I don't understand why we can't have people registered, give them considerable time to register, so they can plan to be here and make a specific time for an appointment. If I call my dentist and he says I have time at 9:15 on the 28th, then I'm there. I have to give him 24 hours' notice if I can't be there. I think it would be fair to individual presenters to have a scheduled appointment. I'm not a great speaker, but a retired teacher who was first up tonight, I could have listened to her for a lot longer, and I'm sure she could have said a lot more had she been given maybe the 30-minute time that she might have needed to really present what she had to say.

So I hope that in future presenters are given more time to register and more time to present if needed, and, certainly, when unforeseen circumstances happen, that presentations are read publicly, because I think that these people deserve to have their presentations read, so that people can listen to them.

That's all I have to say.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Rybuck. I appreciate the very articulate presentation and the thoughts that have gone into it.

I don't know if we would all want to compare ourselves to coming to a visit to the dentist necessarily. I would actually argue that this in some respects can be more painful than a visit to the dentist, but I hope you haven't found that to be the case, and certainly your presentation was anything but.

You know, you used a line, which I think was exactly right, which draws the distinction between using accounting to get out of accountability, the distinction between accounting policies and accountability. I happen to know you, so I know you're in business. Can you just indicate or expand on that point and outline whether or not it is the case that if you simply change from one set of accounting standards to GAAP, does that in and of itself make your business any more or less healthy simply by changing the accounting policies you're applying to the company?

Mr. Rybuck: Well, you know, we can all play smoke-and-mirror games by changing accounting principles, but GAAP doesn't preclude presenting an operating budget in addition to a summary budget. We must be more specific.

I think the government went a long ways in 1995 to bring in balanced budget legislation. We saw our deficit drop for several years, and since the NDP came to power we saw our deficit grow and grow to a ridiculous level. We need to have budgets; we need to live within budgets, and we have no right to raid Crown corporations to make ends meet.

Mr. McFadyen: One of the things that this government has done—and it's not just this government but other governments—and we take some issue with it in terms of the way in which it can distort debt numbers, is go to a concept known as net debt which subtracts assets from obligations. You're right that the \$20-billion number represents the total obligations of the Province including Crown corporations. It's roughly \$20 billion today, higher than at anytime in the history of the province, and that means that at some point in time over a period of years we have to repay that \$20 billion with interest.

The concept of net debt allows the government to set off that number by claiming certain things as assets. In business, if you present something as an asset on a balance sheet, the presumption is that there's the ability to liquidate that asset in order to generate cash to repay obligations in the event the company gets into trouble.

Do you agree that that analogy should apply to government, that, in effect, the government is saying our net debt number is representative of our obligations minus assets and the presumption that those public assets could be sold at some point to satisfy the obligations?

Mr. Rybuck: I don't agree. You know, this government is like the business that has two accountants, one for the banker and one for the taxman. Accounting is accounting. We have corporations where we've raided, like Manitoba Hydro, the amount of equity in Manitoba Hydro. I mean, no bank would probably finance a business like that. They wouldn't finance me in business if whatever little equity was left in my business at the end of the year was taken by my ex-wife. This equity needs to be left in a business.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Rybuck, I don't know if you're in business or not, but it seems you are. Do you do a yearly financial statement of your business?

Mr. Rybuck: Yeah, absolutely.

An Honourable Member: On that yearly—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Borotsik.

Mr. Borotsik: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

On that yearly financial statement, do you use revenue for that year against expenses for that year? Usually, at the bottom of that line, there is either a positive or a negative. Is that the way your financials usually work?

Mr. Rybuck: Yes, absolutely. I actually look at that financial statement on a daily basis. I don't wait till once a year or every four years.

Mr. Borotsik: I was actually kind of heading there. It's not something that you just let happen on a 12-month basis. You actually look at what your expenses are and what your revenues are coming in on a monthly basis.

If your revenues are less than what your expenses are, how do you react to that? How do you deal with that particular situation?

Mr. Rybuck: There are many different ways. I look at it daily; I look at every employee in the business, and I look at the different avenues or areas of business. I have each person broken out to—how much revenue do I make off each employee and what do they cost me?

If we're losing money, then we need to change something immediately, because I'm not going to have the revenues in other places just replace those losses and not worry about them.

Mr. Borotsik: That's exactly the point I was getting to. You look at efficiencies within the operation; you try to deal with those efficiencies; you reduce your costs, if you can't increase your revenues.

In government, it's not quite that easy. Their costs seem to be fairly—not only are they constant, but it seems they go up on a regular basis. Are you aware that the provincial government this year budgeted for an additional 6.2 percent increase in expenses?

What you know of the economy right now and where the government receives its income—it comes from personal income tax; it comes from retail sales tax; it comes from—a whole swack from the federal government.

Do you see their revenues increasing at that same kind of level over the next year or two years, just based on your own personal experience in the economy at the present time?

Mr. Rybuck: I really don't see any plan at all for revenues, just a hope that the revenues will come. I don't see them planning for a lot of extra revenue.

When we have a situation with forest fires or whatever the case may be, sometimes expenses do run higher, and that's why you need to have a lot of revenues in your forecast. You need to have money for a rainy day, instead of spending it like a sailor on shore leave. It's just smart business.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, sir.

The name of the next presenter is Gordon Gillies.

Gordon Gillies, do you have a written presentation?

Mr. Gordon Gillies (Private Citizen): No, I just have some notes.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. Please proceed.

Mr. Gillies: First of all, Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister, MLAs, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for being here tonight.

Back in 1995, when the Conservative government brought out balanced budget legislation, I retired. I've been retired for 12 and a half years,

actually. I was able to retire at 50 because I used a little bit of balanced budgeting. I bought a home; I bought cars, but I managed to pay down my debts, paid them off, and put money away in the bank for a rainy day.

That was when I retired, and I've been living off that basically. Other than for a few stints with the provincial government for the Y2K projects, I have been retired.

Now, I can't see how the government can turn around and get away from balanced budget legislation because, basically, this Bill 38 eliminates or basically kills balanced budgeting.

You've got to pay down your debt. You keep paying it up and all you do is you increase the cost to the citizens yearly, and the kids coming in the next generation are going to have to pay more and more as we go along.

I just can't understand the philosophy of spend now and we'll find it somewhere later. If that had been the case, I would still be working and I would still be paying off my interest on the loans I had.

*(20:50)

I don't agree with the fact that the Province should be able to use the net incomes from Crown corporations to reduce their net debts, or reduce their net spending. I figure that that money should stay there and help the citizens of the province of Manitoba reduce the monies that they have to spend on such things as hydro, such things as MPI payments, driver's licences, registrations for their vehicles, and so on. All we're hit with is taking money out of Crown corporations and then they raise—as what happened a few years back when hydro was raided to the tune of \$203 million or something. They ended up raising our rates to turn around and pay for it. Is that not a tax? Yes, I think so. You know, raising user fees? No, not a tax there. Just pay more, right? I don't agree with it.

I do agree that summary budgets can be good, and you could use a four-year rolling budget as long as you have a balanced and operating budget at the same time. This GAAP principle is nice. You know, generally accepted accounting principles. I'm not an accountant, never was. It's good in principle and it can work, and it works great. But you have to have an operating budget to find out where you're at and how much you're spending, how much you can afford to spend and how much you can afford to have to raise.

Right now, I believe the citizens of the province of Manitoba, I think every man, woman and child is in debt, or spends—or it costs every man, woman and child in Manitoba \$1,143 to pay off the interest on the provincial debt. Now that means that my wife and I, we're retired and it costs us \$2,286 to pay off the interest on the debt in the province of Manitoba. I have two kids. One happens to be married. So now we have three more in my immediate family, so that represents about \$7,700 for five people to pay down the interest debt on the loans we owe. Doesn't it make more sense to turn around and manage a balanced budget approach, pay down your debt and then use some of that saved interest on things like education, on things like the gang problems and maybe turning around and giving these people something else to do, maybe some job training or whatever, using this money in a positive way other than just spending it on debt repayment. Pay down your debt, you'll have money for other things.

Another thing that seems to me that this balanced legislation is going to allow the government to turn around and get away from mandatory debt repayment. So we're going to run bigger deficits. Yes, it's nice to turn around and say, you know, if we take all our assets and we take all our liabilities, we got more assets. That's good, but I'd like you to try to sell some of those, turn around and pay down the debt. Who's going to buy Trans-Canada Highway in the shape it's in? That's a federal thing anyway. Let's take a provincial road. Who's going to buy that? Who's going to buy our crumbling bridges? Not too many people. You know, we have assets on paper, but you cannot sell them. So, therefore, it makes no sense at all to turn around and use that as an example of turning around and saying, we have a net debt of only so much. You can't sell your assets so they're not really worth anything in my estimation.

However, that's basically my presentation. I hope I didn't take up too much of your time. I just want to say that I just can't believe that you would get away from balanced budget legislation which forces governments to turn around and be accountable. That seems to me the mandatory thing is being accountable to the citizens. I mentioned in another meeting one time that it seems to me that I am the government. I am a citizen of the province of Manitoba. I vote in every provincial and federal election. So you people here, sitting here, you MLAs really work for me, because I am the voter. I am the government. So it should be us that makes the decisions, and you guys should be working for us. It

seems that you work for yourself, to turn around and allow yourself to be elected next time by telling people how well we aren't doing.

So that's all I have to say. I want to thank you very much for taking up your time. It was a pleasure to be here, but now I'm going on to another topic.

I agreed with the fellow that was just up here. You've got to make these things a little easier on us people. There are a lot of people in the province of Manitoba that would likely want to talk to these bills, but they're working stiff, you know. They have to work to pay the salaries and the taxes that the government is spending. They can't afford to get here Wednesday because they're working in the morning. Now you've called more meetings in the morning. In the evening, it's bad enough, because you may or may not be called, and you can spend a week down here when you should be sitting at home with your wife and kids or doing some yard work or something else.

So you're making it very difficult for the average citizen to attend these meetings. It would be much easier to have a town hall meeting or hold these conferences outside the Legislative Building and take them to rural Manitoba's towns and some of the bigger cities in the province, and let the public come to them and sit down and have a say in things. Make it easy for them. This isn't that easy. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Borotsik: It seems this government didn't want to make this particular piece of legislation easy. They brought it in on the eleventh hour. They've compressed the time line on it so that Manitobans such as yourself cannot easily get here to make presentations. So don't think that this whole process was meant to be easy so Manitobans could make their opinions known. It was quite the opposite. So I'll just have to put that on the record.

When you were in the last provincial campaign, you're very astute, you made a presentation, obviously, you understand politics. Did you ever hear the NDP government, as part of their election platform, say that they were going to change the—change, that they were going to repeal the balanced budget legislation and replace it with something else? Did you ever hear that in their platform?

Mr. Gillies: No, I didn't. I didn't read all their information. It may have been out there, I did not hear it. I did not know anything about it.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, I can assure you, you didn't miss it. It just wasn't there. They didn't run on that particular platform.

This government also takes great pleasure in announcing that they've balanced the budget for the last nine years. We have a piece of legislation, 1995 balanced budget legislation, that has a number of clauses in it and has opportunities for the government to do certain things, whether it be the rainy day fund or whether it's Manitoba Hydro's special dividend, which you referred to.

But they do take some great pride in suggesting that they balanced budgets for nine years, rather than simply an accounting change, which is the GAAP compliancy. Why do you think the government now would get away from a core operating balanced budget, meaning the money in, money out on an annual basis? Why, in your opinion, do you think it's now that they're looking for this change in the legislation?

Mr. Gillies: I get the impression that it's getting harder and harder to get re-elected and this is one of the ways they figure on hiding the fact that they're running deficits. They may have been balancing the budgets, but it's been costing me a lot more money. I've been paying more service fees than ever before.

Mr. Borotsik: You've been paying taxes, too. We're the only province, actually, in western Canada that doesn't have indexation in our tax brackets and in the personal basic tax exemption. So, if you have any more money this year than you did last year, you're going to pay more taxes, I can assure you.

You had mentioned the \$203-million special dividend that was taken from Manitoba Hydro. Just for your information, in a summary budget that they're calling for right now in this legislation, it doesn't necessarily mean that you transfer money from those Crown corporations to the operation side. It just simply shows a better balance sheet at the end of the day. I make that comment, but simply ask you the question: If, at one point in time in history they did take a special dividend, does it concern you that they, in fact, could transfer some of those cash assets from one Crown corporation to another in a special dividend in the future?

* (21:00)

Mr. Gillies: They've tried to do it with MPI. They did do it with Hydro. I'm assuming that the present government will likely raid Hydro again for more money to pay for something, I'm sure.

Mr. Borotsik: You have a pretty good handle on the economy, what's happening around us right now. The minister calls me a naysayer, that the sky is falling and I'm Chicken Little. He might be right, but I'd like to hear your opinion.

Do you feel that the economy going forward from now is going to be as solid as the economy has been for the last nine years? We know we've been in some fairly good growth in the past nine years, perhaps not as good as another jurisdiction, such as Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and others. But do you think the economy—in your own opinion and I just want you to share it with me—going forward is as optimistic as what it has been in the past nine years?

Mr. Gillies: The quick answer is no, but I'll expand upon it. The province of Manitoba is one of three or four have-not provinces at the current time. Saskatchewan climbed out, and they are now a have province. Alberta is very wealthy. B.C. is very wealthy. Ontario, they are threatening to become a have-not province. I hear the government say we're middle of the road. No, we're not. We're in the bottom two-fifths of Canada, okay?

Now, you want to talk about the economy. We have the town just south of us, Steinbach, Manitoba, that's laying off employees in Loewen Windows and cutting back on working hours because they sell most of their windows to American customers. The Americans aren't building houses right now because they have a problem in their economy, in their jobs and so on. Ontario, they want to be a have-not province. Why? Because an awful lot of the autoworkers are losing their jobs in Ontario and related businesses that make parts and fenders and stuff like that for automobiles, because people aren't buying cars in the States because they don't have the money.

That's part of the problem. Our grain farmers are squeezed right now because, hey, we got this stuff called ethanol out there, and it takes 1.1 gallons of diesel fuel to make a gallon of ethanol because you still have to plant the corn and grain, reap it and everything else in order to turn around and crush it and make alcohol out of it. The price of corn has doubled and tripled in price, so it's costing the farmers that plant it more, costing the hog producers more. You got a bill in here about hog production and everything else. You'll hear all about that later. The price of rice is going out of this world. People who want to buy a bag of rice now, it's up about 2.5

times over what it was about six months ago, went from \$29 to 64, 65 bucks a hundred pounds. I can go on and on.

No, the economy isn't doing as well as it was. I don't think we're in a recession or in a recessionary period. I think Canada's still relatively strong, and we can combat the problems that exist. However, we have to be careful of what's happening down in the States, and, of course, they're going to have an election, so that could be a problem with us, too.

Mr. Chairperson: I allowed a little latitude in questions because the brief was short. Thank you very much, Mr. Gillies.

Mr. Gillies: I thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The next presenter is Peggy Prendergast, who is here tonight.

Do you have a written presentation?

Ms. Peggy Prendergast (Private Citizen): I do.

Mr. Chairperson: We'll distribute it. Please proceed when you're ready.

Ms. Prendergast: Good evening. I have a written presentation, but I've also got some add-ons to it.

I'd like to start off by saying I read with interest Bill 38, and I'm so glad I was here to hear Mr. Sirski. It's an education that I am trying to come to—that's investing—because of something that's happened in my life.

So I'm taking this opportunity to speak to Bill 38 based on my interest in seniors issues. I've been a member in the past of the Creative Retirement board for six years, and I've also been a member of the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba board for the past ten years. I am here not as a member of either board, but as a private citizen confused about the principles of funding and provincial budgets.

I'm a mother, a grandmother, a member of the NDP party, a retired teacher, a volunteer and a passionate learner. Creative Retirement is an adult learning program that at one time in the 1990s was heavily funded by the Province. It is struggling from lack of core funding. I have attended the pre-budget hearings for the past at least five years, asking about funding for seniors programs and have been told about the \$80,000 funding allotted to four seniors organizations that began a few years ago that soon had other organizations added, so the amount of money got smaller and smaller each year to each organization. At this point, I must point out that each

of the ministers we as seniors have worked with over the past four or five years have been sympathetic and supportive, and have listened to our concerns and requests but had no money.

You have established a Seniors Secretariat instead of a directorate and are pursuing seniors issues in the ministries of Health and Housing and hopefully expanding further, but some form of core funding could be provided to some of these organizations. I must just add to that. I noticed Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross is here and she's worked really hard with us. A group of organizations have banded together and come asking for support and trying to give advice and some ideas.

I've been involved with RTAM, working toward a fair cost of living adjustment for the past nine years. A 2 percent COLA was awarded to retired teachers in the year 2000 when no money was available for the first time for a COLA. It was a short-term fix. I thought at the time this was just the beginning to finding a long-term solution to this COLA and that one would be found to funding a fair COLA for retired teachers. It has not happened yet. I realize it is not easy. You started matching the new entrant teacher funding at that time and have borrowed \$1.5 billion since to solve the unfunded liability problem that has been a problem right from the beginning of the teachers' pension plan. That does not solve the COLA problem, which is especially severe for teachers over 75 years of age. A whole generation of retired teachers is living close, if not in poverty, some very close.

Okay, what does all this have to do with Bill 38? My understanding of the bill is that you are going to use the surplus from the four companies cited to help balance the budget. My concern is that, especially in the case of the Lotteries Commission, the money that was available for not-for-profit organizations will be gone. We as seniors have never gotten something for nothing from the government, but at least we were allowed to work at the casinos once in awhile to provide funding for Creative Retirement. I understand that also is not fair. Sport organizations are funded regularly. Creative Retirement is allowed to apply only once every two years and must have a unique request each time. Whereas it isn't a lot of money and gets less and less as time goes by, it is a source of funding on which we have depended. I always looked on it as seniors giving back in a strange way to the community because so many patrons of the casinos are 50 years of age and older. I am also suspicious of the money in the trust fund at

the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund. Will you dip into that fund also when the budget doesn't balance and then put teachers' pensions in jeopardy?

Not-for-profit organizations are expected to balance their budgets. Creative Retirement provides a service to our community that would not be there if it were not for the volunteer work of many seniors providing a service to the seniors in our community. Much of their time is spent fundraising. The government is not providing that service any more, but could help with the use of surplus from the lotteries and/or the Liquor Commission, as I thought had been decided in the past.

* (21:10)

As individuals, we're expected to balance our budgets even when the source of income we depended upon when we retired dries up, namely our COLA. We paid for a fair COLA, and there's often a surplus in the main pension fund that, in my opinion, should be shared with retired teachers.

As you can see, the word "surplus" raises a lot of questions and questions for me. I would hope the people who have given a lot to this community will be considered, when surplus funds are available. I have managed budgets at home, at school and in organizations. Surplus was used for something we wouldn't otherwise have had and was usually people-oriented. They were our priority.

These people deserve your consideration. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Borotsik: Again, thank you for your presentation. That was certainly well-received. I thank you for taking the effort and the time to putting your thoughts on paper and appearing before this committee.

The Creative Retirement board—maybe you wish to tell me a little bit more about it. I don't know what it is, but you've been working at it for quite a while. When you put a budget together, you spend as much money as you can possibly find.

If you don't have as much money, do you cut back on those expenses, or do you simply spend more with the hopes that you're going to find the money in the following year?

Ms. Prendergast: The budget is usually what we absolutely have to have. We try to offer affordable courses to seniors. Our funding comes from

membership fees and it comes from what we take in from the courses that we offer, but there's a whole piece of it that then needs to be fundraised.

What's happened in the last year, year and a half, is our rent has doubled. We need space to operate from. We used to co-exist with Age and Opportunity. Then we got space of our own because we needed it; we had some very cheap rent is the only way to say it, for awhile. That building got sold, so now our rent went up.

Then, what do we have to do? We have to beg, basically. We come to the government begging and we also go fundraising. So we're not in a deficit. Whatever we do, we do each year.

We are going to be offering, I believe—I'm not on the board anymore. I do teach for them and I do some workshops for them, but I'm not involved in the financial workings at this point. We will be offering more courses during the summer, I believe, because of the lack of funding.

Mr. Borotsik: You answered my question. You basically spend what you can either beg, borrow or steal, but you don't go into deficit. You cutback on the programs or you—

Floor Comment: You can't.

Mr. Borotsik: Okay, that's a very good point. Yourself—why can't you?

Ms. Prendergast: I understand, if we do, the board members themselves are liable for any deficit that would come about. Am I right? Plus, we're people that have lived through the Depression, most of us being poor earlier on in our lives, and lots of us are women—you have to balance the budget.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. The government this year budgeted for an increase in spending of 6.2 percent. We recognize that costs go up. We recognize that gasoline is going up, your rent's going up, taxes go up, food costs are going up, but that was 6.2 percent of the increase they're spending by.

Your pension was increased by 0.63 percent, what I believe the COLA was. Do you believe that you can maintain your standard of living increase of 6.2 percent which it seems the government—

Ms. Prendergast: Well, I guess that I—

Mr. Chairperson: Wait, excuse me, I have to introduce you.

Ms. Prendergast: Sorry. I guess the way I look at it is that my pension was not increased but, instead, I retired in 1996. Since 1999, my pension is now an 89-cent dollar. It goes down every year.

So the numbers stay the same on the page, but the value of that number goes down, and I understand—I don't go into the detail of how much the government budgets. I also understand—I happened to hear Mr. Doer on the radio this morning for a few minutes, and he said the rainy day fund had gone up, so you are trying to cover the expenses. The forest fire's a million dollars a day. Things happen in families the same way where sometimes the crunch comes and things have to be balanced.

I guess what my concern is the priorities of that budget. The budget is really walking the talk of what you believe. If you believe your people are your most important resource, then you cover the cost of an excellent education for your children and you cover the costs of providing your seniors with activities that keep them active, keep them well, because they're a huge resource to you. They've got experience, they've got education, some have wisdom and knowledge, and they can be a huge resource to our community. I think often people don't look past the body that maybe limps a lot or maybe has shrunk a bit or doesn't look quite as young as they used to, but that resource is still there.

I have to share with you something that happened tonight. I told you I'm a passionate learner. I have joined—there's a group of us that have made up what's called the New Horizons Adult Band. We had the pleasure tonight of playing at the Lyric Theatre with junior high and senior high kids and it was just a marvellous experience. Someone overheard kids walking along the path and parents saying, are you sure we're going to the right place? Are these people coming, too? Like, we're bringing our instruments. And they said, oh, yeah, Mom, there's going to be some old people playing tonight, too.

So it was just a thrill, given that I've been a teacher and I'm now a student and involved again. It's great, but I guess the thing is there has to be some support from somewhere. Now, we happen to be financially well off that we can support this band ourselves, but there're many other people. We hope that people will get involved and will see what we're doing. They can't all afford, so wouldn't it be nice to have that opportunity for others as well is what I'm trying to say here.

So I have a philosophy on money that you may or may not want to hear. That is I intend to die broke. I intend to spend my money, partly providing some of these, through the Winnipeg Foundation, keeping some of these organizations alive with my donations so that they'll be there for my children who are now in their mid-forties and looking at retirement. I also have seven grandkids that I can help, but the influence that we have on the world is really quite great.

So, scary to come and say this to everybody, but I think it's worth the effort. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

The next presenter is Kelly de Groot.

Kelly de Groot, do you have a written presentation?

Ms. Kelly de Groot (Private Citizen): Oral.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Please proceed.

Ms. de Groot: Thank you. Mr. Chairperson and committee members, good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Kelly de Groot and I'm here to speak against Bill 38.

* (21:20)

As a professional accountant and a person who understands public-sector accounting, not only as a prior school trustee for four years, but, as a civil servant, a finance director with the Province, I know how complex and detailed the departmental Estimates and end-year cash flow statements are to prepare and communicate, both internally and externally.

Now, I agree with all the speakers tonight in their objection to Bill 38, and I'm going to put a different spin on it as well. I have many grave concerns regarding Bill 38, and one of them is transparency, the ability to be easily understood, evident, obvious and, of course, open.

But first, some background. In 1995, Manitoba's balanced budget legislation was passed to ensure that the Province lived within its means. It required a referendum before taxes were increased, reduced salaries for Cabinet ministers who ran deficits, and put in place measures to prevent the province from increasing debt.

I believe Bill 38 essentially kills the 1995 balanced budget legislation. More importantly, it

removes the Province's requirement to balance its operating budget. The Province's operating budget includes all departments under the government's direct control and allows Manitobans to clearly view and assess the financial performance of the government.

Now, although it's still a big and complex animal, there is currently, I believe, transparency to the government's annual departmental Estimates and ability to review and question departmental program priorities, changes and increases to the budget under the 1995 legislation. Under Bill 38, the Province now is only required to balance its summary budget. The summary budget includes all government departments under the government's direct control plus government-related operations such as Crown corporations and universities. Therefore, the Province can now use the surpluses of Crown corporations and other reporting agencies to artificially boost the performance of the government and balance their summary budget.

Bill 38 not only allows the Province to use the net income of Crowns to balance its books, they will only have to balance their summary budget every four years, using a four-year average. The 1995 legislation included a requirement that the operating budget be balanced every year. In my opinion, it will be virtually impossible for a deficit to occur with a four-year summary budget, even with hundreds of millions of dollars of unfunded spending by core government each year.

In addition, in the extremely unlikely event that the Province can't balance its summary budget, some losses can be excluded. Who is going to be able to understand this? How many more accountants will need to be hired by the Province to be able to calculate and communicate financial information to the departments both internally and Manitobans externally? How transparent is this going to be to Manitobans on an annual basis, and how are they going to know if the government is being fiscally responsible with their taxpayers' hard-earned money?

Cities, municipalities and individuals have to balance their books and be transparent to their stakeholders. Why does the government feel that with Bill 38, they can be outside the norm and have a different set of standards? The Province's overspending will come out of the pockets of Manitobans by raiding the Crowns or increasing debt, and even though the summary books will balance on paper, the government will need to come

up with the cash to pay for any extra departmental spending. This cash will come by accumulating more debt or by raiding the Crowns.

Bill 38 will lead to increases in debt which will lead to an increase in taxes, and this means the Province will have less money for services. Now, I have heard the reason that the government is putting forward Bill 38 is because of generally accepted accounting principles, or GAAP. However, I believe it is really about using accounting as an excuse to limit accountability.

The NDP are trying to cover up the changes in Bill 38 by saying that they have to change how Manitoba reports its financial statements to incorporate GAAP. However, my understanding is that GAAP doesn't preclude presenting an operating budget in addition to a summary budget. Therefore, the Province should continue to balance its operating budget every year. This would provide a clear picture of the Province's ability to live within its means.

I am really pleased to see the many experts that have come forward over the last few weeks to put forth their opinion in opposition to Bill 38. They all agree that we should have a balanced operating budget every year, and I'd like to reference some of these people. Chuck Davidson, the vice-president, policy and communications at the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce said, and I quote: In a nutshell, Bill 38 makes it virtually impossible for a government not to balance the books, and, in fact, allows for governments to run annual operating deficits and, in turn, increase the provincial debt. Manitobans should demand more and urge that future governments continue to balance the operating fund on an annual basis to ensure accountability and transparency. This is the *Winnipeg Sun*, May 20, 2008.

Adrienne Batra, the former provincial director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said: What should be raising alarm bells for Manitobans is the government's desire to abandon mandatory debt repayment and living within their means. At a time when revenues are at an all-time high, the last thing the Province should be doing is cooking up ways to spend more and add to the debt. There may be required changes to the balanced budget legislation to incorporate GAAP, but there should not be amendments that water down the legislation. It is one of our most important pieces of legislation and the Province must move towards strengthening it for current and future generations of taxpayers.

The Business Council of Manitoba stated in their 2007 pre-budget submission: We agree that a four-year rolling average is appropriate when factoring in the performance of Crown corporations and government-reporting entities. We do believe, however, that it is appropriate to keep the provisions of the balanced budget law that require annual compliance on the operating line of government.

Finally, Dan Overall, director of policy for the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, said just this week: Simply put, Bill 38 will create false impressions as to the amount of money available to the government by killing balanced budget legislation that has served Manitoba so well. Bill 38 is throwing the baby out with the bathwater, because it's our future generations that will take the hit if the government fails to live within its means.

If the government fails to live within its means—that is a big if. I'm sorry to say that I do not have the confidence in this government that they will be able to live within their means. Remember transparency, the ability to be understood, evident, obvious and open? Transparency will be seriously compromised, as Manitobans are given numbers that include government entities outside of the core government operating departments that are calculated on a four-year average and that exclude adjustments to revenue and expenses due to unforeseen circumstances.

Given Bill 38, in reality how will Manitobans be able to understand the government's budget and financial statements on an annual basis to keep the government accountable and ensure they are living within their means? In my opinion, Manitobans won't be able to, and, in that, the government has succeeded in their objective. Thank you for your time today.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you for your presentation. I couldn't have said it better myself, actually.

I really appreciate your comments and certainly the understanding as to what the potential downsides are of this particular piece of legislation with this government. The opportunities that they have showing a summary statement with all of the Crown corporations and their net revenue certainly opens the doors for them to spend on the operating side and cover it off on debt.

You talked about municipalities in your presentation. You had mentioned that municipalities are required to balance their budget on an annual basis. You realize, of course, that municipalities are a

creature of the Province and the Province has an act that administers the municipalities. Why would you think that the Province would demand that municipalities on an annual basis show a balanced budget—and if they don't have a balanced budget, if they have a loss, they have to recover it the next year by raising rates—why would they demand municipalities to do that, but they don't have to provide that same kind of accountability to the citizens of Manitoba?

Ms. de Groot: It's an interesting question and maybe instead of municipality, I'll put school division since I was a school trustee. There is, obviously, the expectation that a school division be able to balance their budget, and we have seen some very interesting legislation come through this government over the last few years that are making it very, very difficult.

I don't know the answer to that. It's not fair. It's not equitable. I think the government should be held to the same standard that they are expecting from school divisions and universities and municipalities. So it's a very good question.

* (21:30)

Mr. Borotsik: We've heard the Finance Minister say on numerous occasions that it's GAAP required. It has to be compatible to GAAP, compliant with GAAP, I'm sorry. He uses this comment that we don't want to keep two sets of books, meaning—the connotation to that is two sets of books are bad. I mean, there's one set of books that you show somebody and there's another set that you show the other.

You had indicated in your presentation that, in fact, there is the opportunity to have a summary financial statement balance sheet and still have an operating annual set of books. So those are the two sets of books we're talking about. We only had the one set in the 1995 budget balanced legislation. All we said was you had to balance the operating side, so under GAAP you do a summary statement. But the two sets of books isn't a bad idea, is it? If you had your summary balance sheet, which is fine, you can tell what the total entities are wrapped into the financials of the province. But having an annual operating budget balanced with one set of books is not a bad idea, is it, Ms. de Groot?

Ms. de Groot: In my opinion, it's not. For example, I currently work for a foundation and we have an operating budget. We have a number of different fund accounts, and I keep an operating budget that I

have to balance and be responsible to my board for. Yet, overall, I have investments in funds that I also need to be accountable to my donors for. So it is totally, in my opinion, reasonable to expect that we should be able to keep and balance an operating budget and a summary budget.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. That's what we've been saying all along, but obviously this government doesn't share that.

I'll ask you the simple question that I asked the earlier presenter. The experience of the last nine years has been fairly positive for this government. They've had lots of revenue coming in from different sources, most of it coming from the federal government. Their expenses have been going up quite substantially but they've been covering them off with that increased revenue. They balanced their budget in nine years, give or take a couple where they've had some interesting little ways of balancing the budget. But let's give them the benefit of the doubt and say they've balanced it for the last nine years.

Why now would they want to go to a four-year rolling average on a summary statement and not show the transparency that's necessary, I think, for Manitobans to see with the fiscal responsibility of their government. Why now? Why now, after nine years, would they want to make that change? Do you have any opinion?

Ms. de Groot: In my opinion, I think there's been some forecasting that's happened and we see a downturn. We see a federal government that has some challenges across Canada in terms of equalization, and one way to be able to protect the budgeting and the demands placed on government is to be able to go to a four-year average and be able to—if you have one bad year you know you've got three more years to make it up. It's unheard of. It's unheard of, and we've listened to other presenters tonight that we don't do it personally, we don't do it in business, we don't do it in other areas of not-for-profit or public sector. I find it offensive that we're doing it today.

Mr. Chairperson: Our time has expired, and thank you for your presentation.

The next name is Greg Georgeson. Do you have a written presentation?

Mr. Greg Georgeson (Private Citizen): No, just a collection of notes.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. Please proceed.

Mr. Georgeson: First of all, thank you for listening to me tonight. I've got to say that I'm a little bit disenchanted with this whole process, and not because I've had to wait around, then come back and forth. It's just I've come to learn a little bit about the spirit of how all this is done, and I'm under the understanding when the standing committees were first introduced years and years and years ago, the whole idea was to give the government an opportunity to hear the public and their opinions on different bills and so on and so forth that come across the government's threshold, so you will.

I just hope today and throughout this entire process that the people that are sitting on this committee today walk away with a little bit of an understanding and actually make our efforts as the general public coming out to speak for or against these bills worthwhile, and not to be just meant as just a filibuster or whatever you want to call it. To give a great example, I'm really, really surprised that Bill 38 is such a great bill. I don't see a whole bunch of people coming in to support the bill and arguing for it. It doesn't make a lot of sense. As a matter of fact, if the government was doing such a great job, I would personally expect if there are champions in Finance and they're doing such a great job of managing, Bill 38 should maybe be a legislation for recall, like some of the other governments have adopted.

Anyway, on with my presentation, I come to speak to you as a private citizen who's very concerned with the state of our economy. We have become a welfare state that's growing increasingly dependent on outside resources to stimulate our economy. These numbers I'm going to give you, by the way, I collected off StatsCan today.

In 1996, our federal transfer payments were about \$1 billion and our own-source revenue was \$3.8 billion. Our closest comparable neighbour, Saskatchewan, had transfer payments in 1995-96 of \$975 million and their own-source revenue was \$4.1 billion.

Now, moving forward 10 years to 2006—that's as far as the statistics went—in 2006, our transfer payments have grown to \$2.9 billion; our own-source revenue has only increased to \$5.5 billion. Our neighbours to the west, in 2006, have had transfer payments have gone to \$1.2 billion. Now here's the really embarrassing part—their own-source

revenue has grown to almost \$7 billion; that's \$1.5 billion more than Manitoba.

A lot of you guys might put that down to, well, they've got oil now. If you actually look at these statistics—you're free to pull them up on the Internet—their growth started back in 2000. The oil, under my understanding, has just come on board recently.

Our debt has grown over the same period to \$8.3 billion from \$6.8 billion, and Saskatchewan has gone down from \$7.6 billion to \$6.6 billion.

We're starting to stress our financial government for money and, instead of showing strong leadership and working to grow our economy from within, we continue to focus on this welfare, have-not attitude and, yet again, are looking for ways to borrow from Peter to pay Paul.

Bill 38 is a glaring example of this. The purpose of a Crown corporation, in my understanding, is to protect their valuable assets, to help and provide essential services and to help stimulate the growth of our economy.

In my opinion, it is not and has never been created for the government to raid dividends in corporate profits. The Province already gets its fair share of revenue from these Crown corporations through collecting taxes, in the instance of Hydro, from over 5,000 employees, not to mention all the stimuli that come from all the associated business that goes around a Crown corporation such as Hydro.

Instead of looking for ways to encourage Hydro to grow and to be our Crown jewel, Bill 38 only serves to retard its growth and development. If this bill passes, I have to wonder how the NDP and its strong relations with unions are going to explain to the membership of the Hydro unions that they can't afford to provide increases during their next collective-bargaining agreement, because they no longer have the profits to bargain with. Or how about our university students having to pay higher tuitions, as our government has raided their coffers as well?

Every successful business has to operate within its budget; the government is no different. It's high time our government does away with this welfare attitude and steps up to the table with some real plans to grow our economy.

How do you do this? I may not be a government politician, an economist or a wealthy businessman, but I am a thinker. That being said, look at Manitoba-grown corporations, such as Princess

Auto, Boyd Autobody, CanadInn, the Murray Auto Group, the list goes on and on of successful Manitoba businesses that have become economic leaders in our community.

To grow as a province, we have to focus on ways to provide incentives to our small and medium businesses. This is a sector of our economy, in my opinion, where our future lies. As for our Crown jewel, Manitoba Hydro, we should be making them as strong as possible, encouraging them to be more involved in the development of alternative energies.

* (21:40)

A case in point, biofuels—as they are helping to stimulate our oil consumption, it is now being realized through cause and effect that, over the long term, they're not a wise choice as an alternative energy source. It's already having an effect on our global food supply.

The most developed, viable replacement for petroleum fuels happens to be, at this present date, hydrogen fuel cells. Most automakers have the technologies and are ready to start the production of fuel cell cars by 2011 to 2013. Now, the issue with fuel cells is how to fuel the cars. Would anybody like to know the two major components to manufacturing hydrogen fuel for these cells? Electricity and water. Funny how, at this moment, we happen to be sitting on one of the largest and most effectively run energy companies in North America, and we are not racing to develop the technology to position ourselves as a global leader in hydrogen fuel technology.

In a nutshell, if we should be doing anything with the profits from Hydro, I believe that we should be putting the money into research and development, and positioning ourselves as the next energy leader such as Alberta. Thank you.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you for your presentation. You may not be a wealthy businessman, you may not be an accountant, you may not be an economist, but I got to tell you, your presentation hit home. It hit home on a number of points, and certainly with Manitoba Hydro.

We've always, in this province, said that Manitoba Hydro was the goose that lays the golden egg. However, it's quickly becoming quite the opposite. You could see there's been some expenditures made that perhaps are going to put them in some—I won't say financial difficulty, but certainly could have been spent in other ways. The new Hydro building that we have in downtown

Winnipeg I'm not so sure it came in on budget, but I'm sure we'll find out eventually. There's also a proposal to put in a Bipole III, another transmission line down the west side of the province that was forced on Manitoba Hydro. That, in fact, could be anywhere from \$1 billion more to, at the worst-case scenario, \$2 billion more. Is that a wise decision, in your opinion, for Manitoba Hydro, or should that \$1 billion of extra money, of taxpayers' money ultimately, be spent in, as you say, research and development? I love the idea of the hydrogen. Should it be spent in that area as opposed to having it wasted on a west-side instead of an east-side line?

Mr. Georgeson: I'm actually quite happy that you brought that up. I wasn't too sure how pertinent that little decision was to Bill 38, but now that we're on this subject, I have had the opportunity to do a little bit of reading on that. Yes, I'm extremely concerned about that because, in my opinion, it's a complete waste of money, what they're doing. You know, there's been a lot of untruths and innuendoes of, you know, the native population not fully supporting the power line coming down the east side, yet, I've learned from my reading that they haven't even been really formally consulted on it. You know, a lot of the environmental groups that are out there don't really have a whole heck of a lot of opposition to coming down the east side. Yes, I think it's a waste of money and that billion dollars is very much spent in other directions.

Mr. Borotsik: I also was very—I won't say intrigued, because I knew the numbers, but I was very happy to have you mention the comparisons between Manitoba and Saskatchewan, particularly on their debt, particularly on their own-source revenues. You did mention transfer payments. As part of a transfer payment, one of those categories is equalization, as you're well aware. You've done your research, you've seen the numbers on the Internet. This year in Manitoba we've budgeted for \$2.063 billion in equalization coming from the federal government.

I have two questions: Do you know what that number is for Saskatchewan in this budget year, and, secondly, do you think that those numbers are going to either stay the same or grow at the same level that they've been growing in the past for Manitoba?

Mr. Georgeson: Sorry. I'm not exactly sure of that particular number. I pulled this off the Internet this afternoon and those were the two most glaring facts that I noticed. But, that being said, I think the way things are going right now is those equalization

payments will continue to go down in Saskatchewan and up in Manitoba unless we change the way that we do business.

Mr. Borotsik: Just for your information, Saskatchewan this year will be zero on equalization, whereas Manitoba will be \$2.063 billion. They give Saskatchewan, I think, probably a bit more flexibility in the way they operate. However, I would love to be able to get to the point where Manitoba would sit at zero and we were a have province as opposed to a have-not province, but it doesn't seem that that's going to happen I guess.

The next question I asked was with the economy, equalization payments are based on a federal formula where other provinces that don't have the same kind of revenue streams that wealthier provinces have receive the income, but it's based on revenues that are also generated from the federal government. Under the certain economic conditions that we have now, do you think that those equalization payments are going to be increased, stay the same or perhaps even decrease, especially if there's another province like Ontario who ultimately may become a have-not province as well because of the economic uncertainty there? Just your opinion. I don't have the answer, by the way, and I don't know if you do, but what would your opinion be based on the economy today?

Mr. Georgeson: I think, first of all, the economic issues that we face in Manitoba and, you know, I've lived in other provinces over the years, but for the main part I've lived in Manitoba for the majority of my life. I think our lack of revenue streams are our own damn fault. We used to be a leader in Canada, third-largest city, transportation hub of western Canada, go on and on about all the great things—opportunities we've been presented with in Manitoba, and through lack, I wouldn't say, you know, bad decisions but more so in my opinion lack of doing anything to recognize, you know, these downturns and upturns are what's caused our greatest problem.

You know, you talk about transfer payments and so on and so forth, like, I mean, unless we start doing something now, we are either going to have to start to demand more money, or continue borrowing from Peter to pay Paul or they'll just continue to go up and up.

Mr. Chairperson: Time for questions has expired. Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Georgeson: You're very welcome. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The next presenter is Jim Huggard. Jim Huggard, coming.

Do you have a written presentation?

Mr. Jim Huggard (Private Citizen): Just oral notes, Sir.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. Please proceed.

Mr. Huggard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jim Huggard. I would like to thank you for the ability to speak on Bill 38 before it proceeds any further.

I understand this bill is called The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act, which sounds very nice. Can I ask what is part of this bill? Will this bill ensure the government balances the books yearly? Will total government debt go down yearly? Will the yearly financial snapshot of the government's books be clear and easy for everyone to understand?

I'm not even sure today listening to the presentations that have been made here what Manitoba's debt is, but when people start talking in the words of billions that's a number I have a tough time comprehending. I work in numbers of dollars and cents and when numbers start to get past 1,000 I get a little nervous when it's coming out of my jeans. I do not want to pay any more taxes. Do we have any say in any more monies that Manitoba's going to spend? If taxes are to be raised, should the taxpayer not have a say in what is going to happen with those tax dollars? I do not want to see a larger public sector, and I believe the government must live within its means. We must work to eliminate our debt and use monies paid on interest and service charges to enhance required services and infrastructures.

* (21:50)

I understand that interest costs and debt repayment costs in this province, and the numbers I dug up, were \$263 million annually. There was a gentleman earlier that used it on a per-person basis, so, either way, it's a pile of money that is going up in, basically, smoke. What can be done with that amount of money than seeing it disappear annually? What effects will higher interest rates have on our ability to provide for health, education and family services in the future?

This morning, I talked with my family's broker, and I would not buy my granddaughter a Manitoba Builder Bonds because a five-year Builder Bond is going to pay 3.7 percent. I'm not that old a person,

but I remember interest rates of 20 percent, and I remember having to refinance my mortgage, and, I'm telling you, it was not a happy time. With these huge numbers that are being thrown about here just like whimsical numbers, what would happen if the interest rates ever return to 10 percent? Could we carry the debt we have today?

Why is the government looking at changing rules that are working? Has spending increased to a point that revenues do not cover expenses? Has the government's cash flow got to a point that new debt must be secured to pay these current bills, or are we just moving our poor fiscal management to the balance sheet as a liability? Will we pluck the pockets of the corporations dry? When will this increased financial exposure stop?

I'm here tonight so my children and grandchildren can afford to live in this province. I think the first step the present government should take is to acknowledge it has a money problem, and the second step it should take is look for some financial credit counselling.

In conclusion, I know that any family or business that lives within its means will flourish and grow. When you decrease your liabilities, you have the ability to do more with the same amount of money.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Thank you, Mr. Huggard.

I should just add that the Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party offers credit counselling to this government just about every day, but they don't seem to take us up on it.

When you look through Bill 38 and using Crown corporations included into balance on a summary budget, and a balanced budget, only one in four years, would you care to speculate why they would bring this in? Why would they bring in this kind of legislation? What would be the intent of that?

Mr. Huggard: Sir, I can only speculate on an intent, but I'm going to look at something that I have had to practise for all of my years in business. I must present a budget before the fiscal year starts. I must report on that budget on a monthly basis, and I must report on a monthly basis why there is a variance between this line and this line. If it's feasible and there's a reason why, I'm allowed to keep my job. If I

can't, then they're going to find somebody to replace me because somebody else will do that job.

I'm not sure if I can answer the question why they want to look at a four-year—and I believe the word is "rolling average." The problem I have is, if I was looking at a budget for a business and if I had a deficit in year one, a deficit in year two and a deficit in year three, I don't know in year four, if I have followed those same thought processes and had a business, that I'm going to be able to make up the difference in year four.

I hope I've answered your question.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Next is Dr. Robert Diamond. Do you have a written presentation?

Mr. Robert Diamond (Private Citizen): No presentation, Sir.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. Please proceed.

Mr. Diamond: Thank you.

MLAs, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Robert Diamond. I'm a pediatric dentist here in Manitoba, and I spend most of my days dealing with little children. It seems tonight I have the same sort of thing in front of me, a lot of fighting and pushing and shoving, and everybody wants to get their way.

As a citizen of Manitoba, I'd just like to get a couple of points across about Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayers Accountability Act. Hopefully, this committee, having heard from citizens of this province, will see better light on how to manage my future, my children's future and—unfortunately yet, I don't have any grandchildren, but their future.

What I think we all really want is to keep our young people in this province, so we can have professional people, be it doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants and hard-working Manitobans to fill the jobs that need to be filled in our province.

In 1995, our Province's balanced budget legislation was passed to ensure that the Province lived within its means. It required a referendum before taxes were increased and put in place measures to prevent the government of the day from increasing debt.

I do not think that we would call it a law, as failure to comply does not prohibit or punish in any real terms. No minister is forced to give up his or her

seat as an MLA, and no election is triggered. The penalty is a salary reduction for the Premier and Cabinet. If my information is correct, this would probably be about a \$20,000 salary reduction.

I'd like to ask the Finance Minister if this penalty of the \$20,000 reduction would be considered as a tax loss on his personal income tax return for that year.

In fact, the government is permitted to run a deficit, if there's a severe economic crisis or natural disaster. The question I have is, how severe does the natural disaster have to be and how severe does the economic crisis have to be for this to trigger?

If we have a natural disaster, isn't there federal funding for anything over a million dollars? Isn't it, I think, about 75 percent?

Bill 38 essentially kills the 1995 balanced budget legislation. Most importantly, it removes the Province's requirement to balance its operating budget. This operating budget includes all departments under the government's direct control and allows Manitobans to clearly view and access the financial performance of the government.

Under Bill 38, the government is only required to balance its summary budget. The summary budget includes all government departments under its direct control, plus government-related operations, such as Crown corporations and universities.

In effect, the government can now use the net income of Crown corporations and other reporting agencies to artificially boost the performance of the government and balance their summary budget. This bill not only allows the government to use the net income of Crowns to balance its books, but they only have to balance their summary budget every four years.

The 1995 legislation included the requirement that the operating budget be balanced every year. It will be virtually impossible for a deficit to occur with the four-year summary budget, even with hundreds of millions of dollars of unfunded spending by core government each year.

In the extremely unlikely event that the government cannot balance its summary budget, some losses can be excluded. If Manitoba Hydro, for example, sustained a loss due to a drought, this would not be included in the summary budget balance. Cities, municipalities, and Manitobans in

general have to balance their books. Why then can this government set a different standard for itself?

This government's overspending will come out of the pockets of the citizens of Manitoba by raiding our Crown corporations or increasing this province's debt. Even though the summary books will balance on paper, this government will need to come up with the cash to pay for any extra departmental spending. The cash will come by accumulating more debt or raiding the Crown corporations.

Crown corporation net income has been forecast to be approximately \$753 million, averaged over the March 31, 2006, to March 31, 2009 time period. This income can be used to offset deficits under Bill 38.

*(22:00)

What about our debt? Increases to debt will lead to an increase in taxes and means there will be less money for services in Manitoba. The average cost to each and every Manitoban to service our debt is well over the national average at \$1,143 per year. The \$806 million in debt servicing is already more than the combined 2008, 2009 forecast spending for seven government ministries.

Bill 38 is really about using accounting as an excuse to limit government accountability. This government is trying to cover up the changes in Bill 38 by saying that they have to change how our province reports its financial statements to incorporate GAAP, generally accepted accounting principles, the current accounting standard for bookkeeping that most auditors general believe is the only way to express fiscal standing of governments. Just because one believes in something doesn't make it so. I believe the world is flat. I believe the sky is falling. I believe I'm going to win Lotto 6/49. Doesn't make it so.

GAAP does not preclude presenting an operating budget in addition to a summary budget. The Province should continue to balance its operating budget every year. This would provide a clear picture of the Province's ability to live within its means and would ensure accountability and transparency. Do not abandon mandatory debt repayment; live within our means. When Crown revenues are at an all-time high, why are we cooking up ways to spend more and add to our debt? This is sort of like the commercial for that credit card that wants your business, you know, to get rid of the bankers. They're running around, switch to us and you'll have

eliminated the bankers and your debt. No, you do not eliminate your debt. You only decrease your interest penalty. Debt still exists unless you decrease it by making payments against it.

That is what this government must do for Manitobans. Experts from the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the Business Council of Manitoba are calling for the current balanced budget legislation to be maintained. It makes sense to have a one-year system for finances that are directly within the government's control and a four-year system that takes into account the big picture, including those entities over which government only has limited control.

Finally, how does Bill 38 tie into Bill 37? Fixed election dates every four years. Bill 38 has the rolling summary every four years. Does this rolling summary budget align itself with that or does it vary and is this a loophole that exists that gets the government of the day off the hook in an election year?

As Dan Lett of the *Winnipeg Free Press* said in his May 30, 2008, article entitled, "Bill 38 doesn't give anyone a free pass," and I quote, "The real penalty for fiscal mismanagement has never existed in the balanced budget law. It exists in a ballot box, and Bill 38 won't change that."

I believe—no, wait a minute, I can't believe. I know he is wrong because you're all here at the pleasure of the voters of Manitoba and our pleasure can become short when we can see how our financial future and that of our children and grandchildren is put at risk.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Pedersen: I looked around there for a moment.

Thank you for your presentation. It's Dr. Diamond, isn't it?

Mr. Diamond: Yes.

Mr. Pedersen: Yes. Obviously, you have a good handle on debt and this Bill 38 summary budget, balancing it every four years and you tied in Bill 37, so-called fixed election dates, which would be three years from now unless the Premier (Mr. Doer) decides to call it sooner on the first one. Obviously, the first summary—or the end of the four-year period right now would be after the next election.

Obviously, from your presentation, you understand debt and the importance of repayment and cash flows and the like. Would you care to speculate for us where you think this—what's going to happen to provincial debt in the next three years by the time this summary budget, the end of the four summary budget?

Mr. Diamond: My thought is it would depend on what other expenses we pick up. It would depend on cash flows, where we're going to be getting income from and if we should have a natural disaster. Let's say it doesn't rain for three years, one year. What's Hydro going to do? I would assume on the Hydro contracts where we're exporting energy for non-compliance, if that's the correct word, there must be penalty clauses. I'm just concerned that, as government, as our leaders, this is sending a very bad example on how to manage your own house to our children and to Manitobans. If the government can run a debt, why can't I carry a \$20,000 debt on my credit card. I'll just make those \$100 a month payments and never get out of it, and I think that's what's happening.

So I just think there's a very good possibility, although I hope it never comes true, that we are going to be much worse off than we are now.

Mr. Borotsik: You talked about the insistence in having debt repayment, and I couldn't agree with you more. I believe that most businesses and most individuals like to repay their debt. In fact, I said earlier it's better to have—the best investment you can make is to retire debt. Don't let this confuse you with this legislation. When it requires debt repayment, what it does is this government pays a portion on the debt, but that doesn't mean debt reduction. Actually we have more debt this past year than we did the previous year, even though there was a debt repayment, okay? So that's just smoke and mirrors and funny language.

But I do have a question. During this last election, it was about a year ago. Did you hear or see anything on a platform or any kind of a political plank from the NDP that they were going to repeal the balanced budget legislation and replace it with something that they say is better. Did you hear any of that in their platform?

Mr. Diamond: No, I did not.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Yes, picking up on what the honourable colleague for Brandon West was speaking about, you did indeed

focus on the debt of the province and we've heard that at this point in time our own-source revenues have never been any higher at any point in history, transfer payments from the federal government have been extraordinarily generous, as well as other payments from the federal government to attempt to recognize us as a have-not province.

At what point in time would you expect a government to be paying down its debt, if in this case we have all of this revenue coming in and we're still building the debt? What advice would you be giving the government as to what point in time we should be reducing the debt?

Mr. Diamond: Well, if I was a credit card company executive and I'd see someone making minimum monthly payments on their account, not paying down the principal, not really servicing the debt and just paying off the interest charges, I'd be really worried about that and I'd sort of gather up their credit cards. As a Manitoban, you try and live within your means. I'm not trying to put my nose in the air or stick anyone out of joint, but I have a ten-year-old vehicle that I drive. I'd love to have a brand new Audi A5. I've got a Volvo. I'd love to have it. I can't afford the car because it's not within my means. If there're things that we cannot afford, we shouldn't be having them and we shouldn't be increasing our debt.

Yes, you know, I'd like to go to 529 once a week for dinner, blow \$200 without beverages. Take my wife out; can't afford it. Maybe you go to the Keg and you spend \$50, but at least you're getting something. Here we're just adding more and adding more and adding more, and it's a very dangerous thing. It sends a bad message to the citizens of the province that, if our government can't live within its means, how do you expect us to live within our means? Maybe we all should Audi A5s and go to 529 and do those kinds of things. If we can't do that, the message is bad and debt is never going to go away. I'd just shred the Province's credit card.

* (22:10)

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Dr. Diamond. We're out of time.

The next presenter is Adam Cunliffe. Adam Cunliffe. Adam Cunliffe's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Nataliya Hryshko. Nataliya Hryshko. Nataliya Hryshko's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

Marni Larkin. Marni Larkin. Marni Larkin's name is dropped to the bottom of the list.

William Gardner. Do you have a written presentation?

Mr. William Gardner (Manitoba Employers Council): Oral, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. Please proceed.

Mr. Gardner: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I'm here representing the Manitoba Employers Council. It's a bit unusual for us to be here. Our mandate generally is with respect to legislation and matters concerning labour and employment. However, such is the concern of the members of the MEC, there was a motion passed at our last meeting that I should come down and address legislative committee regarding this bill.

Given that we are concerned with labour and employment, thus our concern when there's legislation which potentially impacts on the health of the employment scene in Manitoba, it was felt appropriate for me to come and address you.

I was wondering just exactly how I would preface my remarks. As I came to the Legislature, I was on the phone to my daughter, newly returned from her first year of med school in Ireland. She's going to med school in Ireland because, notwithstanding a 4.0 average in her Zoology Honours B.A. and a 90-percentile MCAT, there isn't a place for her at the University of Manitoba med school.

There's isn't a place for her, because we can't afford to fund the number of places at the faculty to train the numbers of doctors that we know we are going to need. So she's going to Ireland, which apparently can fund places for its own needs and a few left over. So much for feeling sorry for Ireland.

Debt, as we know, has a significant hampering effect on the ability of government to fund the programs that we, as Manitobans, all want. In preparing for this submission, I took a look at Statistics Canada numbers for provincial debt. I picked net financial debt, because that appears to be a number that the government wants to use.

I took a look at how we compare with our neighbours in Saskatchewan and Alberta. In the last 10 years, leading up to the most recent figures which are available in 2006, Manitoba's net debt has increased from \$8.9 billion in 1996 to \$11.8 billion

in 2006. So, notwithstanding debt repayment, we're headed in the wrong direction.

Saskatchewan, in comparison, has reduced its net debt from \$11 billion in 1996 to \$8.5 billion in 2006. In the same period, Alberta has gone from debt of \$7 billion in 1996 to a staggering minus figure of \$27.6 billion. In other words, they're over 27 billion to the good. They could pay off the accumulated debt of Saskatchewan and Manitoba and still have almost 10 billion left. That's room to maneuver, which in Manitoba we're dangerously short of. We've seen our net debt increase during a time of unprecedented economic health and plenty, and it concerns me that we have not made adequate provision during these good years for the lean years that I believe are going to come.

The prospect of using income from Crown corporations, the MEC finds that to be of significant concern. MPI, if it has a retained surplus beyond an amount that's prudent for it to manage its affairs, should deal with that by rebates to policyholders. Manitoba Hydro should be allowed to function as a corporation that has all of the tremendous economic potential that hydro does. We complain habitually that Alberta does so well because Alberta has oil. Saskatchewan's doing well 'cause they've got oil, too, and in addition they've got uranium and potash, and the concept is poor us, we don't have these tremendous advantages. We seem to forget that we have many advantages, not the least of which is our hydro-electric power, and we're not making full use of that tremendous potential economic engine.

I am deeply concerned, as is the MEC, that in this legislation we're headed down a road that will further tie Hydro's hands when it should be using its profits to reinvest in infrastructure. I heard one of the previous presenters talk about research and development on hydrogen fuel cells, which I think is intriguing. Another obvious area for Hydro to look at is how to reduce energy loss which currently is endemic when hydro power is sent over long distances on transmission lines. We really need to allow Hydro to reach its full potential, and I'm concerned that this legislation is going to achieve the opposite.

I have a further concern and it grew as I watched the proceedings in this room tonight. I heard one of the members from the government side of the committee speak about this government having been re-elected three times, a significant achievement by any measure, and I submit that this government has

achieved that in part because previous terms have been characterized by this government taking a moderate, cautious approach and listening to all Manitobans, in particular listening to employers and employer groups who I represent.

* (22:20)

I've been here most of the night. I've been out of the room once or twice. All of the questions of the presenters have come from the opposition side of this table. I may have missed it. I did not hear a single question from the government side. That suggests to me that the government's going through the motions and that there's no real intention to listen and give effect to the comments of presenters who speak against this legislation. I find that disheartening. I hope I'm wrong, but it does seem to me that since the election last spring, this government is listening less to all Manitobans and, in particular, listening less to employers and employer groups. And those are my respectful submissions.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Committee Substitution

Mr. Chairperson: Before we go to questions, I would like to make the following membership substitutions effective immediately for the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs, meeting on Tuesday, June 3, 2008: Brick for Blady.

* * *

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Gardner, no, you didn't miss any of the questions that were posed by the government side because there were no questions posed by the government side. If you find it disheartening, we find it equally as disheartening.

I honestly believe that individuals such as yourself, representing a very credible organization, the Manitoba Employers Council, have some legitimate opinions to put forward, some legitimate concerns to lay out before the committee. Unfortunately, I do believe and I hate to be the bearer of bad news but it is definitely landing on deaf ears. But I do appreciate your comments. I do appreciate your concerns that you've outlined.

You said initially in your presentation that the Manitoba Employers Council does not normally get involved politically. They do not normally make political presentations or presentations to the committee. I heard your presentation and I understand your concerns. Why was it that your

board of directors was so insistent that this be one of the bills that you make presentation on?

Mr. Gardner: Thank you, Mr. Borotsik.

I should clarify that remark. We're certainly involved and our mandate focuses upon matters relating to labour and employment. We would definitely show up at a committee hearing on The Labour Relations Act, the Employment Standards Code, Workers Compensation, so forth. You don't usually get involved with fiscal matters. In this case, we see this legislation potentially impacting negatively on employment in the province and thus, it's a concern. It was enough of a concern that it was decided at the most recent meeting of the MEC that I should come down and make a presentation.

Mr. Borotsik: And we're glad you did. Thank you very much for the presentation. Now, again, I appreciate you are hear representing the board of directors of the MEC, but do you personally have any recollection at all in the last election campaign of seeing this particular policy being bandied about by the NDP and suggesting that this would be an election platform and that they would be passing this type, or better yet, that they would be repealing the balanced budget legislation and replacing it with a different piece of legislation? Do you recall that at all?

Mr. Gardner: Gee, Mr. Borotsik, that's a tough one. No, I did not.

Mr. Faurschou: I'm going to deviate a little bit from your focus of your main presentation to, perhaps, an observation from your daughter's perspective, now coming back from Ireland, who obviously has had an economic resurgence that has been noted worldwide. Did she bring back any considerations that you could share with committee from her perspective?

Mr. Gardner: She's having a great time. This has been a tremendous experience for her. The thing that worries me, of course, is that she represents, in my humble, completely unbiased opinion, the type of individual that we're all concerned about retaining. She's young, smart. She has a tremendously productive career ahead of her. Had she gone to the University of Manitoba med school—she's fifth-generation Manitoban—I think she would have stayed. What she'll do now is anybody's bet.

First thing, of course, that happened is she met a guy, so she could end up anywhere. I'll tell you one thing, there's no one anywhere near here who knows

as much about the exchange rate between the Canadian dollar and the Euro.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Thank you, Mr. Gardner. I noted that you had commented on none of us on the government side of the House making any comments, so I thought I'd just break that impression that you had, and thank you for your—

Mr. Gardner: I'm honoured.

Mr. Selinger: We'll call it the luck of the Irish and thank you for your presentation.

I want to assure you that we actually do take the views of the employers seriously, as we do all groups in Manitoba, as well as individual citizens who have presented tonight. I hope you've found that most of us have been listening carefully to the presentations, and some of us have been making notes.

We have also gone out before these hearings tonight and consulted widely in the community through a consultant's report, the Deloitte report, which is on-line and is the basis for many of the recommendations within this legislation. If you don't have copy, I would be happy to make it available to you, because there was a great deal of thought that went into this, based on, first of all, recommendations from the Auditor General himself, and then followed up by a very serious set of consultations and reviews by independent experts in accounting which rolled into a variety of recommendations that find themselves expressed in this piece of legislation, so it wasn't arrived at lightly.

It was arrived at after very careful consideration and a great deal of review of where it's going in terms of the accounting business as it applies to the public sector, and how we can continue to meet the evolving standards of accounting, fiscal responsibility and prudent financial management of the resources. Those resources are available to you.

Even after presentations are closed, if you have further comments or concerns, we'd be happy to discuss them with you going forward. Thank you for coming out tonight.

Mr. Chairperson: Since the minister didn't actually have a question, I'll give Mrs. Rowat a question.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Can you indicate to me—you were talking about consultation, or the minister was talking about consultation—was your organization consulted on Bill 38 at all during the process?

Mr. Gardner: Although I didn't have a question from Mr. Selinger, I will express my appreciation and I will have my office contact yours and get those materials.

The answer to your question is, no, we were not consulted. In fairness, we're not normally involved in fiscal matters. We normally focus on labour and employment matters.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation. We're way out of time.

Mr. Gardner: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

* * *

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Chairperson, I move that this committee recommend to the House that this committee only hear presenters from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. and only from Monday through Thursday.

I believe you'll find this motion is in order, Mr. Chairperson, and I would like to present it to the committee.

Motion presented.

Mr. Borotsik: As you can see, we have no more presenters this evening. It did go fairly well. The motion, I believe, is not only in order, but it's absolutely vital to change the process of the committee as we know it.

* (22:30)

I think the members around this table heard from a number of presenters that one of their most serious concerns was the way the process of this committee itself was handled. As you're well aware, we have some 70-odd presenters sitting on this list right now. Of those 70 presenters, I'm sure if we went through them, we would find a wide range of individuals. We would find everything from soccer mothers to people who work, to individuals, grandmothers, grandfathers, as we heard this evening, Mr. Chairperson, people from all walks of life that, unfortunately, cannot just simply drop everything that they're doing and present to this committee at its whim, whether it be at 10 o'clock in the morning, whether it be at midnight on an evening night. I think that that, in itself, is asking way too much of the public when we are asking them to put their opinions and their views forward to this committee.

That's exactly what we're doing. The reason why we have this committee is so that Manitobans, ordinary, general Manitobans, can look at a piece of legislation that's being proposed by this government,

and they can come forward and make their opinions known. That's why we're here. That's why you're the chair of this committee. That's why the minister that's responsible for this bill is here, so that we can listen to ordinary Manitobans come forward and make their opinions known.

We do not have a lock on ideas. I don't care how often the Finance Minister says that he's been through this for the last nine years and he obviously knows better than everyone else. That's not true. I do not believe that I know everything that is put forward, whether it be in legislation or whether I believe everything that—I know everything. Other people have ideas. Other people have opinions that should be shared, and in order to do that, we should make it as convenient for them as possible. That convenience is listed in this motion. That convenience, Mr. Chairperson, is from the hours of 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

I don't think we should impact on their weekends. I don't think we should impact on presenters' times during the day. I don't believe that tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock, when we've scheduled the next meeting, that individuals on this list, the majority of individuals on this list would be able to make their time and their presentation. We heard tonight from at least two presenters that said, listen, why can't the committee process include a time slot, similar to a dentist appointment, I think the comparison was made.

Why don't we make it like a dentist appointment, make a time available, and within 24 hours you can either cancel that time or you can make it at an additional time. Then at least you know what your time for presentation is made available to you. That means it doesn't impact on your children's hockey game, your children's soccer game, or, for that matter, perhaps a Stanley Cup playoff game. I'm sure a lot of people over the last three days have missed a number of those playoff games because they've been sitting in this committee room waiting to make presentation, and that's wrong.

So the motion is a very valid motion. I think if we honestly were working on behalf of not only our constituents but the constituents of the full province of Manitoba, that we would support this motion, sit from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., make it convenient for individuals to make their presentations.

You heard this evening, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry. I gave you a promotion already.

An Honourable Member: In his salary, too.

Mr. Borotsik: Yeah, well, I don't know. After I found out what you're making as the Chair, you're probably right up there anyway.

Mr. Chairman, we heard this evening—

An Honourable Member: We're listening, Rick. We're listening.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, I'm really happy about that.

Mr. Chairperson, we heard this evening where there were a number of presenters who have given us some great ideas.

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me. Oh, you want on the speakers' list, but that reminds me that it's getting a little hard to hear Mr. Borotsik. I think there is considerable chatter coming from across the table and behind him.

Mr. Borotsik: It's getting hard to think, Mr. Chairperson, with all of the chatter that's going on. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: I think Mr. Borotsik agrees with me that we need a little quiet so we can hear him speak.

An Honourable Member: Just tell him to speak louder.

An Honourable Member: It's not a problem for him. That's true.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, I know. Unfortunately, I have to take ownership of that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson, for calling that order. As I say, this is a very serious motion. This is nothing to be laughed at. It's nothing to take frivolously. What it is is a motion that would allow all Manitobans the opportunity to present in a convenient fashion. I think we as members of this committee should look at this motion in the vein in which it's been presented, one of a serious vein, so that from this point on we can, in fact, call these individuals that are left on this presenters list, and there are quite a number of them, and then give them the opportunity to make their time available to the committee, obviously.

Also, you'll find on this list, Mr. Chairman, a number of out-of-town presenters. Now, I would like to ask each member of this committee just how easy that they think it would be for an out-of-town presenter, some two-and-a-half or three hours out of this committee room, to make a meeting at 9 o'clock

on a Monday morning. I would suffice to say that would be almost impossible. So what we're asking those presenters, those out-of-town presenters to do, is to come into the city, to overnight, to be here for 9 o'clock and not know if they were going to make a presentation at that 9 to 12 slot or if, in fact, they would have to wait until that evening to make a presentation at 6 o'clock. That's wrong, Mr. Chairman. That's wrong.

What we should do is make sure that there is a definite time line, that that time line be 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. and that appointments be made for those out-of-towners to be able to come into the city at a reasonable time. Maybe the individuals who want to present from rural areas some two-and-a-half, three or four hours out of town, could do the last presentation at 9:30. That means that they would only have to leave their hometown at 4 or 4:30. That just makes so much sense.

If you don't support the motion, what it means is you don't want to make a convenient time available to the people that we represent. In fact, one of the presenters tonight said, you work for me. I'm the government, is what he said. He said, you are the ones that we vote into power. He was right. We do represent our constituents, we do represent Manitobans. I think it's only fair that we make those Manitobans available to this committee, that we give them the opportunity to make their comments and make their opinions known in a convenient time.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for accepting this motion. I certainly believe that there would be other speakers to this motion, if you haven't already identified them.

Mr. Chairperson: Just for the information of all members, the speakers' list currently consists of Mr. Derkach, Mr. Lamoureux, Mr. Schuler and Mr. Eichler.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): It's raining in the west side of the province. As a result, there were a couple of presenters on this bill who had been called twice and whose names were dropped. These were people who were engaged in the agriculture industry and just could not be here. A call was made this evening and they wondered whether they could still be on the list. According to our rules, Mr. Chair, they can't. I think that this bill speaks to running a committee in a sane way. A way which, perhaps, would better reflect what we, as Manitobans and as lawmakers, should pay attention to.

Mr. Chair, earlier this evening in the committee in the other room, we also had a situation where five presenters were dropped from the list because they could not come tonight but indicated that they would be able to come tomorrow. So, in the wisdom of the committee, it was felt that we should be listening to these Manitobans and indeed, the committee agreed that we would allow for those Manitobans to come back tomorrow evening and be heard in committee.

I think this committee owes it to Manitobans to do the same thing to those who are out of town, to those who are in the city. As the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) indicated, not everything revolves around the committee here. There are people who have lives. They register, yes, but they need some more precision in terms of when they can present rather than it being left to appearing before the committee and waiting for hours and hours with a hope of presenting, but not with a guarantee.

If we truly believe in democracy, if we truly believe that people have a right to express their views on legislation that is presented before Manitobans, then I think we need to be flexible in ensuring that they have the opportunity to come and present before this committee.

* (22:40)

I've been around this table for a long time. Some years ago, there was a process where we would call members to the committee at all hours of the morning. About 10 years ago or less, there was a decision made that that was not a prudent way to proceed. We then embarked on a process where committee would not sit beyond 12 o'clock to try to make it more reasonable for Manitobans when they came to present, but I don't ever recall, even when sitting in the chair of a minister, ever turning away a Manitoban who wanted to present because they perhaps couldn't appear that evening or when, in fact, their time might have run out. It didn't matter whether that member was agreeing with us or disagreeing with us, we always tried to be open enough to allow Manitobans to present before the committee.

This is the first real time that we are seeing a very strident approach to how individuals can present before this committee. In the number of bills that we dealt with last week we saw the inflexibility of this committee in particular to the way in which members presented and the amount of time that they were allowed to ask questions. Yet I sat in the committee

next door, Mr. Chair, and the Chair of that committee allowed some flexibility for presenters to not only present but also to ask questions. It was reasonable. It didn't go beyond reason, I would say, but there was adequate time for members of both sides of the table to ask questions and for the minister to ask questions and have full responses.

I think this is what we should all be about. We should be here to listen to Manitobans. You know, I listened to Clayton Manness on this committee and just a former presenter here who I thought made some very valid points in their presentations, and these have to be considered in this legislation. In fact, these points may motivate the minister to make some amendments to this legislation which will make it more palatable to Manitobans and indeed will give some credit to a government that perhaps is prepared to listen to Manitobans and prepared to listen to members on the opposite side of the House in terms of bringing forward sensible amendments, if you like, that will reflect better what Manitobans truly expect of balanced budget legislation.

So, Mr. Chair, when we talk about having Manitobans present between 6 o'clock in the evening and 10 o'clock in the evening, that gives some, I guess, sanity to the process that we have here. I think it's much more palatable to Manitobans than the current situation is. I would have to say, in the last few days, the situation has been somewhat chaotic here in that Manitobans show up, they don't know when they're going to present, they sit for hours, and I'm not pointing the finger at the government here. I think it's a matter of how the committee has almost become dysfunctional in the way that it hears Manitobans.

We have to improve that process, and I think that's what Manitobans expect of us. They expect us to—I mean, they elect us to this Legislature because we present ourselves to the public as reasonable individuals who have worked in our communities in the past and who show some leadership and truly Manitobans send us to this Legislature to continue to show that type of leadership. If we're going to do that, Mr. Chair, I submit that we have to show that we are flexible, that indeed we are democratic and that we indeed are prepared to listen to Manitobans not just during the election campaign but indeed through the process of government.

So I encourage the minister and the members on the government side of the House to look at this motion. So what if we don't pass this committee

stage in the next day or two. If we have to sit another night or another evening or so, that's not going to make a big difference in the grander scheme of things. I think it's going to make for better legislation, it's going to allow Manitobans to have a greater input into the process, and it's going to allow us to come out of this with better legislation. I think the minister would do himself proud and his government proud if in fact he were to listen to this kind of an amendment that was put forward by the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) to perhaps give it second thought and move ahead in that direction.

I would certainly encourage the minister to take a serious look at this and, I think, at the end of the day, the process will be one that we'll all look back in terms of having had some impact and some effect on the bill in its end result.

With those few comments, Mr. Chairperson, I would, once again, call on the government and the minister to consider this motion very seriously.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Having gone through the other committee room and I see that there are some similarities in terms of numbers of presenters, patterns. I, too, listened to the previous speaker from downstairs. I have the ability to, kind of, tune in and listen to what's being said in the committee room. I was intrigued by the comment when he indicated that he observed, through the presentations, that members of the government were not necessarily providing any comment or asking any questions. I appreciate, and I heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) did acknowledge and put in a few words of encouragement.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: A point of order, Mr. Selinger.

Mr. Selinger: I just want to clarify. Are you sitting on our side of the House?

Mr. Chairperson: That's an interesting point, but it's not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, Mr. Chairperson, I don't know if you can read the T-shirt.

Having said that, Mr. Chairperson, I did make a note in terms of what it is that the presenter was trying to get across. Just an hour or so ago, I was commenting in the other committee room that there

is a certain expectation when people come down to make presentation that they want to have a sense that the government is genuinely listening to what they're saying. They're quite often coming up with ideas or recommendations, their own personal thoughts, and I think that we owe them the respect to listen. Quite often, and I really kind of felt for the last presenter because you could almost sense this feeling of frustration in the sense that he felt, well, maybe all these presenters are here and the government is just, kind of, going through the procedures, going through the things that have to be done in order to get through the system.

Then we take a look at some of the newscast reports as to what's taking place in the committees. I guess, I for one would like to think that Manitoba has a wonderful democratic system that allows for us to, after second reading, solicit public input. What we should be doing is trying to be as accommodating as possible in terms of ensuring those that do have an interest are afforded the opportunity in a dignified way to be able to come to the committee, say what it is that they would like to say, whatever position, quite often, it's against. But whether it's against or for the legislation in question, they deserve to be clearly listened to, understood and, hopefully, try to influence government in a way that could ultimately make the legislation better.

So many times I've sat through a committee where a presenter will influence something to the degree in which government will acknowledge it and bring forward amendments. I think it's countless the number of times I've seen that happen over the years. So I think that we have a great system, a system that allows for individuals to come forward and express themselves.

The other thing that the system works quite well at is, and I said this in the other committee room, that 95 percent of the legislation that comes before standing committees is relatively speaking non-controversial. It speeds through, actually, quite easily. It will go through the clause by clause. You might get the odd presenter that will make a suggestion. You'll get the opposition that will make a suggestion. There'll be an amendment from the minister, or the minister, him- or herself, will just bring forward a change. It is, relatively, speaking non-controversial and it passes through the system.

* (22:50)

Then you get legislation that comes before the public through the standing committees. Some of those legislative bills are exceptionally controversial and, much like in the other committee room, we had Bill 37 and that's the T-shirt that I'm sporting right now, talking about freedom of speech. I think that—*[interjection]* yes, it was a freaky shirt, and I thank those that provided it to me. Having said that, the message is something which I support that I don't want to be limited in terms of my ability to mail into my constituency and outside of my constituency what I believe are very, very important issues. If that means I have to use the phrase NDP, I should be able to do that. Or if I want to use the phrase Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, I should be able to do that. Or if I want to print or republish an editorial that's well-written that I think Manitobans should be more aware of, I should be allowed to do that.

Well, whether it's that bill or the bill that we have in this committee room in the form of Bill 38, balanced budget legislation, here you have a bill in which the government is trying to come across as a staunch supporter of balanced budgets and as if they're fixing the balanced budget legislation and it's going to be that much better. If you start getting into the details of what it is the government is proposing, it actually takes away from what most Manitobans expect, and that is an actual balanced budget on the core expenditures of the government. That's really what Manitobans think about when they have the balanced budget.

So I take those two pieces of legislation as examples. Quite often, when you have controversial legislation such as these two bills, there are other things that kind of factor into how the committees operate and why it is some people might present, why it is some opposition members will take certain actions, it allows for expressions of frustration. It allows for opposition members in particular to lobby and to try to ensure that all government members are aware. It also affords the opportunity for government members to defend themselves, and it becomes very frustrating when we don't see anyone really defending.

The first time, in the other room, I saw someone defend. It was actually the Member for Wellington (Ms. Marcelino) in her comments. I had suggested across the table that if it was actually debated inside

or talked about inside the caucus in regard to Bill 37 and she indicated that yes, it was. I said, well, who opposed freedom of speech? And she says, we all support freedom of speech.

So, even by that interaction and that interaction is very important because what I learnt through that interaction was that the NDP MLAs had no idea that the Bill 37 had any impact on freedom of speech because of what the Member for Wellington said. Every member of the NDP caucus supports it. So, they didn't know about what was happening in the bill, Mr. Chairperson.

Then, you look at Bill 38, and it's the same principle. You know, we've encouraged government members to be able to add comment, to provide some feedback as to what they understand about the bill. Do they realize when it was brought to caucus that it changes the dynamics of how a government tells Manitobans about a balanced budget? Most Manitobans, I would argue, a vast majority, are concerned that they want a balanced budget legislation that's going to deal with the core expenditures of government on an annual basis. This bill does away with that, and I think that the government members need to know what it is that was actually brought forward. So, this committee process allows for that to take place so that there is an educational component to it.

So then we look at the motion that's being brought forward, and what is it that the motion is really attempting to do? I would suggest to you it's an attempt to bring more decorum, to make the committee more functional. I think that that's something that is very positive. If we take a look at the past, we have seen an evolution that has been taking place in terms of committees. At one time a presenter had unlimited time. At one time there were unlimited questions and answers. We've modified that.

In those modifications, I must say—and it's more of a sidebar—it's very important that we recognize the importance of having discretion. You don't try to end debate, or questions and answers, or a presentation prematurely, when the public good would be better served by allowing a few extra minutes or a few more members the opportunity to pose a question.

Those are the types of things which we've got to be cognizant of. We need to be diligent in making sure that, when we look for changes and into the future of the operations of our committee, it's done in

a way in which it's for the betterment of the whole process.

It doesn't matter who's in opposition or who's in government. What we should be thinking about is what is in the best interests of the public as a whole and recognize that there is value in why it is certain things happen in the committee rooms.

It's interesting to do the comparison from previous years—I see my time has actually expired, Mr. Chairperson. Suffice to say, I do think it's a good idea and would encourage committee members to support the resolution.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I always think it's important for committee members to take the opportunity to address motions that are before the committee. That's what we do for a living, and I would certainly encourage the Member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun), the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), the Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross), the Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski); they should also let their voices be heard.

Many years ago, when I was on the school board of the River East School Division, I was told that—oh, I'm sorry, I forgot my colleague from The Maples. Come to the table, Member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) and let your voice be heard. Grab that piece of duct tape that your Premier (Mr. Doer) put on your mouth and go "whoosht" and pull it right off, and let your voice soar.

Let it soar throughout this committee room. Let it be heard far and wide, because that's what people elected us to do. They elected us to come here, to debate and to be heard and that our voice—really the people's voice, because we can't expect all 22,000 of our constituents to be here. They expect us to speak on their behalf.

We have a motion in front of this committee, and it's a good motion. What it is, it's an attempt to bring reason to what has, basically, become carnage at these committees.

In the years that I've been here—I think I've been here basically as long or longer than most of the government members, other than a few members here—I've not actually seen anything run as poorly as I have seen this. We start Monday morning at 9; then the next day, it starts at 10. Then it goes till 10—no, it goes till 12—no, we're going till 1. Chaotic.

It reminds you of a car that the brakes are failing on; it's careening down this mountain. Nobody seems

to be in control, and there's no way of stopping it. What we need are properly organized, well thought out motions, like we have in front of us today.

The motion is clear. This committee will hear presenters from 6 p.m. till 10 p.m., Monday through Thursday. How reasonable. In fact, I'm sure the member wouldn't mind a friendly amendment where we would say we would do 15- or 20-minute time slots.

People would be called and told, your time is from 6 to 6:20. The next person is called; they're told it's from 6:20 for the next 20 minutes, and so on and so forth. That way, everybody would know when their time is and when to appear. That would seem to make imminent reason.

What we have here is, really, a government where it seems to be there is more desire to get out of the Legislature than to stay in and debate. I would like to talk about our Premier, Mr. Mexico himself. This was the man who stood in this Chamber and said, I will be there Friday and I'll be there Friday night and I'll be there Saturday—

* (23:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr. Schuler. We have guidelines on relevance in the committee. The motion that is being debated says that we should only hear presenters from 6 p.m. till 10 p.m. So I'd ask you to try and stick to the motion a little bit, please. Thank you.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. McFadyen, on a point of order.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure that your comments were directed to relevance so much as they were volume. I don't believe there are any restrictions on volume.

Mr. Chairperson: On the point of order of Mr. McFadyen—*[interjection]*—as far as I know, there is no rule on volume.

Mr. Schuler: Well, and again, again, why we want to have this discussion that we have presenters from 6 till 10, Monday through Thursday, is so that the Premier (Mr. Doer) can take the opportunity to take flight to go to Mexico because he would know when presenters are here. This has become as confusing for the Premier as it is for the presenters. The Premier is one of eight minds on all of this. He doesn't know

when presenters are going to be. I mean, he had that speech in the Chamber that he was prepared to sit here Friday, and he was going to sit here Friday night, and he was going to sit here Saturday, and he was going to sit here Saturday night, and he was going to sit here Sunday, and he was going to sit here Sunday night. We didn't realize it was in a cantina in Mexico drinking cervezas [*beer*], Mr. Chairperson.

That's the carnage and the disbelief. I feel sorry for the Premier. The only place he can get any stability anymore, any stability, political stability, for him now is in Mexico because it's all turned into shambles here. That poor man, that Premier, because if we had this motion, he wouldn't have to flee to Mexico. If we had this motion, and if the committee would finally put it into place, then the Premier wouldn't have to be sacrificing, sitting in a cantina on the beach, some sticky, hot beach with water rolling on the sand, with this beautiful sunset, with palm trees. I mean, really, the Premier is sacrificing himself because he doesn't have the kind of order that's being presented in this bill, in this motion, that we would sit reasonable hours from 6 till 10, Monday to Thursday.

Really, I think of our Premier sitting in a cantina with his friends, raising his hand and saying, *uno momento, señor, por favor, dos cerveza [one moment, sir, please, two beer]*. I apologize to *Hansard*; they'll have to somehow translate that. He'll have to say after he's downed those two cervezas, *uno momento, dos cerveza [beer, one moment, two beer]*. That's how he's going to sacrifice himself because there's no order here. I mean, when you think of it, question period wasn't even over today and the Premier headed for the door so fast there's a black mark on the carpet where he burned the carpet beating a path out to the door.

Folks, it's time we have some change here at committee. I would like to thank the member for—the rookie, may I say—and it always takes a rookie. It takes the new guy to bring some common sense to committee, you know that? He's the one who finally looked at this mess, who looked at this carnage and he said, we can't have this anymore. No way, no way can I tolerate this. I am going to bring reason. That's what he's put forward, and he's done it—

An Honourable Member: It's a novel idea.

Mr. Schuler: —and it's a novel idea, and, frankly, I'm getting a little concerned that it seems to be the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) is trying to bail out the Premier. I mean, he's actually showing

the leadership that we should see from the Premier and his government. When you think of it, really, if the Premier would have suggested this, what would the committee have said? There would be cheers and accolades; finally, we have some order at this committee.

It's important that, when people call up and they say, I would like to have my name on the list and, really, I mean, great empathy towards the clerks. What are they going to say to these hundreds, hundreds, almost thousands of people that want to come out in protest to government legislation. What are these—what are they supposed to say to thousands of people that want to come forward and want to complain to how the government is shafting them on Bill 37 by putting handcuffs on the opposition by sneaking it in the darkness of night? I mean, they basically brought the legislation in in a black box. It had this sleek design on it so they could swoop it into the Chamber so, just before the Premier (Mr. Doer) left, they would quickly hand it out.

I mean, I don't know how the Clerks can even do their job under these old rules. What we really do need is this kind of order. Bill 38, there's thousands of people protesting against Bill 38. It's just that they haven't been given the opportunity to register and come to committee, or there would be thousands on the list, and, frankly, they would like to know exactly when they would have an opportunity to speak.

So I think this is a very reasonable motion. In fact, I think that the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) would probably be agreeable if, maybe, the Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) or my next-door-next-door neighbour from Rossmere or the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick) or even the Member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) would second the motion. Actually, I'm sure—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr. Schuler, excuse me. I'd just like to point out you have about one minute left to wind up your arguments.

Mr. Schuler: Well, that's going to be very difficult. I will try to compress all the many things that I'd like to say about what's good about this motion and what's bad about Bill 38 and Bill 37, you know, Bill 38, which is going to bankrupt Manitoba—we should call it the bankruptcy bill—and 37 which is going to be there, that's going to try to destroy any kind of opposition in Manitoba.

These kinds of motions bring freedom. They bring light. They open up the windows, let fresh air

into this building, and I'd like to commend the Member for Brandon West for having the courage to have brought this in.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I know the Member for Brandon West who brought the motion forward that the House sit from six to 10 to hear presenters Monday to Thursday is definitely a motion worth paying attention to. I know that the government is looking for changes that's going to make the democratic process much more fair, so we can hear all sides of the House. I know it's very important.

I know that we have bills—and this bill, in particular, had over a hundred presenters—which affect each and every person here in the province of Manitoba. We know that we have Bill 17 coming forward, as well, for which there's 412 presenters as of this afternoon. It's a family bill. It's a bill about people's livelihood. It's a bill about people being able to make a living. It's a bill about the opportunity for people to express their concerns, and I know that they want to make sure their voice is, in fact, heard.

I'm very concerned about whether or not they're going to be able to make it during certain times, and I think that the Member for Brandon West brought up a very good point that was suggested, and that's something similar to some type of a generality of when they, in fact, may be able to speak.

Now, we can only imagine what it's going to be like whenever Bill 17 is going to be called, 412 presenters. We think about the hallways of this Legislative Building. We think about security issues. We think about the ability to be able to house that number of people. So the Clerk's office do their part. They call each and every presenter, and they notify them that Bill 17 is going to be called. So we not only have just single parents; we have workers, mothers, fathers, children, all of which are going to be brought into this Legislative Building. So if you just look at the number of 412 and you look in here, we have roughly enough room for maybe 75 people, and if you overrun that into the other committee room, that's 150 at the best, and the rest of them are going to be stuck into the hallway or a closet somewhere. Now, how is that going to be a democratic society? Then we're going to say to them, would you please come back maybe tomorrow or maybe the day after that or the day after that.

Well, we know that with fuel at \$1.30 a litre, it is not going to be a cheap trip to the city. We know that each time these dedicated people come to the Legislative Building which many of them have never

been to, that is going to also be very overbearing, in and of itself, never mind the financial strain it's going to cause them. So I know very clearly that a number of these people will say, I don't know about this process. I don't think it's right, and they're not going to come back again, some of them, as a result of that. Quite frankly, a lot of them can't afford to.

* (23:10)

So I think it's very important that we take this motion very, very seriously. Anything we can do to make sure that each and every person within the list that's been provided to us, whether we pick 10, whether we pick 15 or whether we pick 20, 25 or 30, it doesn't really matter. The matter is that we need to make sure that each and every voice is heard. Otherwise, they would have taken time to put their name on the list. I know that no matter what we do, as legislative people that want to make sure that each of these voices are heard, do everything we can.

Now, it's not up to us, as individual MLAs, to contact these people. It is up to us to ensure the process is fair and adequate in order to meet those needs. That's what our job is. I have asked people, both for and opposed to Bill 17, to come forward to make sure that in fact their voice will be heard. I'm not going to call those people. That's the Clerk's job, and they do a fantastic job of doing that. But the problem is, once we get to Bill 17, which has, as I said, well over 412 presenters, most of them will be lost in the shuffle. As they say, they're not going to continue to call back and nor should the Clerk's office be responsible for calling each and every one of those people back.

But if we looked at the reality of the bill and the presenters that are going to be there, if we revamped, before we call that committee, a system that would be fair, that could be negotiated between the House leaders in order to make sure that every person in fact would be heard. I had made the suggestion that perhaps it's 20, maybe it's 30, really the number is insignificant; it's the process which we need to look at. I know that if you do the math, it's going to take a number of days in order to get through that. But we are prepared on this side of the House to make sure that each Manitoban will in fact be heard. We will make sure that all those presenters will have their full 10 minutes, and we'll make sure that those people have their five minutes for questions.

I know that members on that side of the House also have concerns about these bills, and I know the

Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) have both shown indications that they want to be open, transparent and clear about whether or not each of these presenters, their voices are here to be heard and make sure that the proposed amendments will be reflected within the wishes in the presentations made on behalf of those presenters. Now, we don't know whether that's going to be the first presenter, the last presenter, or the one in between, but that's why it's so important that each one of these presenters' voices in fact is indeed heard.

So, when you look at the hours of six to 10, it's very friendly to that of families which in fact most of these presenters are coming from out of town. The list is quite large, which is almost, I would say, 90 percent outside the city limits, which we have agreed that those presenters be called first. But, in fact, if they are called first, then they're not around at that opportune time, their name would then be dropped to the bottom of the list, so again don't know where they're at as far as the number of presenters are concerned. So we need to make sure that we are very transparent, we're very clear on the fact about where we, as legislators, want to be.

So we need to make it very easy for the Clerk's office. We need to make sure that every presenter that is listed on the presenters list be contacted, and we know that this is going to take some time. But that's our job. We get paid to sit here; we get paid to listen. We need to make sure that each person that is on that list is heard.

I know that members opposite sometimes don't ask questions. We heard that earlier. But the minister certainly jumped in tonight on the last presenter and made sure he asked a question. I know they want to take these presentations very seriously. I know that sometimes we don't have the opportunity on that side of the House in government that some of the people or the ministers have the opportunity to ask questions, but it is their ability to be able to raise questions if they so like. I know some of the members that are not ministers have an opportunity to make sure their voices are heard as well.

So, when we look at the time lines from six to 10 and Monday to Thursday, most families are away from Friday, Saturday or Sunday. In fact, I can guarantee you, I know the Premier of this province (Mr. Doer) wants to sit on Sunday. I don't think that's conducive to family.—[interjection] Well, somebody

said he's not in the province, and I will not be held accountable for what the actions are, but I'm sure that—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr. Eichler. I apologize for interrupting you, but I'm having trouble hearing your comments. I wonder if we could have a little decorum in the committee, then I would be able to hear you. Thank you to all honourable members.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to speak into the microphone in order to make sure my voice is, in fact, heard very clearly for you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Two minutes.

Mr. Eichler: There is a significant factor here when we talk about Monday to Thursday. Friday, we have several people that are in town or either gone to the cottage, not necessarily this side of the House. We don't necessarily have that opportunity to do some of those things, but definitely Sunday is a time of family and time of reflection and the beliefs that you do believe in. I know that we on this side of the House would definitely support Monday to Thursday when it comes to the days selected for committees to hear presentations.

I think the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) certainly needs to be commended for this idea. I know the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) brought up a very interesting point that it comes fresh from a newly elected MLA for Brandon West, and we don't need necessarily to have people that have been here for years and years to come up with good ideas. So it just goes to show you that anybody can come up with a good idea, whether it's from a newly elected member or someone that's been here for years and years.

I know that there are a number of people that do want to speak on this resolution being brought forward by the Member for Brandon West. I think members on that side of the House, I know, would probably like to speak on this motion as well, so I would like to be able to give them that opportunity here yet tonight in order to hear from them. I know they'll be lined up on the sign-up list, so thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity.

Mr. Chairperson: Just to satisfy the curiosity of all members, the speakers' list currently consists of Mr. Goertzen, Mr. Pedersen, Mr. Faurschou, Mrs. Mitchelson.

Mr. Goertzen, you have the floor.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Chairperson, I was disappointed in that dissertation of members that we didn't come across any government members who wanted to speak to the motion. They are still saddled with the inability to speak on that side of the House. Maybe they're collecting their thoughts, and I hope that's the case at this late hour to gather the strength and the courage to represent the constituents that they've been elected to represent by putting their comments on the record in terms of how they feel about this particular motion. *[interjection]*

Well, I understand the plane is just going over Texas, so maybe within an hour they'll be able to speak, Mr. Chairperson.

I do want to also commend the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) for bringing forward this motion, and they say that it'll be the young bucks that will lead you. It does look strangely familiar to a motion I've seen before though, perhaps in another committee room. I hope that this motion meets a better fate than the motion met in the other room, but I look—*[interjection]* Well, and you know, this is exactly my point. The Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), who likes to consider herself a democrat, a small "d" democrat, I suppose, is trying to rush the question, wants to go to judgment, doesn't want to speak to the motion but wants to ram through a motion, a democratic motion in the dark of night here in this committee room at 20 after 11 with the Premier's wing tipping over Houston. She wants to ram this particular—

An Honourable Member: Have another drink of Red Bull, get more caffeine in your system.

Mr. Goertzen: I would encourage the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) himself to have a bit of Red Bull, but he—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, excuse me. The Member for Steinbach, excuse me. I would like to intervene here and point out that Mr. Goertzen has the floor and, therefore, we should all give him the courtesy of listening to him, and that includes members on both sides of the table.

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. Certainly, I in my time in the Legislature have always tried to be respectful for other members who are speaking and not to interrupt members and to throw political barbs at them, and I just ask for the same sort of courtesy in return.

* (23:20)

I heard the Minister of Finance say something about bull, and certainly there is a lot of it when it comes to the bill that he's brought forward here in the Legislature, Bill 38.

I'm particularly concerned that he doesn't want to hear from Manitobans. Certainly, my parents always said, it's not the words of an individual that mean much; it's their actions. Certainly, in the small town that I was raised in, out in the country, some might say we look at a person's actions more than their words to determine their character and their integrity.

The Premier (Mr. Doer) likes to go out into the hallways, swagger into the hallways of the Legislature and use terms like democracy, and we want to hear from Manitobans, as he's packing the last pair of shorts for the beach to head down to Mexico, Mr. Chairperson. He's probably still saying that to a reporter on the telephone as he's in the limo on the way to the airport to head off to some southern tropical location. He's still, I'm sure, telling reporters that members opposite don't want to hear from the public, and, you know, all we've done this past week is bring forward motions to try to open the door to democracy, to try to ensure that more Manitobans could participate in the process.

I guess members opposite have been so NDP-washed in their own caucus and, in particular, the new ones. I can understand. You know, they get elected. It's sort of euphoric. They go and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) takes a chair. He puts them in the middle of their caucus room and he pounds on a book and says how everything is wonderful and roses. Then they come into the committee hearings and they hear all the different people who don't like these particular pieces of legislation. I can almost see it. It was almost like large saucer pans in the eyes of the new members opposite as they grew wider and wider as they heard these different Manitobans come forward concerned about the legislation. They're thinking, well, this isn't what the Attorney General told us. This isn't what the Premier told us. He said all of Manitobans would love this legislation. So I can understand that they're a little bit downtrodden on that side of the House. I have a degree of sympathy. I have a degree of sympathy, particularly for the new members, less so for the ones who've been there longer, who should have seen this as the charade that it truly is.

But, day after day, we brought forward resolutions to try to increase the democratic process here in the province. Yesterday was a good day in the committee that I was in yesterday. We had the Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) who we've heard nothing from, really, for days. He wasn't allowed to speak because the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan) had shut him down and he wasn't allowed to ask a question. I know other members probably have had the same experience. They probably feel for the Member for Radisson who isn't able to exercise his democratic right.

But he actually mustered the courage to say something, not on the record, but to me across the table. He said, well, what's wrong with having people come and present at three in the morning? This is true. He actually said to me, what's wrong with having people come at three in the morning? I made to the offer to the Member for Radisson—and it stands for any of the members here today—if any of you want to have a public forum in your riding on health care or anything else and you want to have it at three in the morning, I'll sponsor it.

Madam Vice-Chairperson in the Chair

We'll rent a location. We'll send out some fliers. We'll say we're going to have a public forum on health care at three in the morning. We'll see how many people come at three in the morning. My guess is that we're going to have to have extra security because the kind of people who are going to show up at three in the morning aren't necessarily who you are going to want to have to hear from. It's not the kind of input that you want to have on a particular piece of legislation, yet this is what the government thinks is reasonable. But I suppose when you sit in the caucus and you continually hear the speeches from the Premier and others that suddenly you become NDP-washed and you think it's actually reasonable to ask ordinary Manitobans who are scared to leave their homes to come out at three in the morning and hear from presenters.

What's the worst thing that could happen? I mean, you might get a good idea. If we got lots of presenters through the weeks and the months ahead between 6 and 10, from Monday to Thursday, you might actually hear from somebody who has a good idea. It might improve the legislation. You might actually be convinced that the legislation should be withdrawn.

What's wrong with that? I've heard the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) often say that nobody

has a monopoly on good ideas. He's had a few good ideas. Even a blind squirrel finds a nut now and again. The Member for Inkster has brought forward some very timely and poignant ideas, and to the government's credit, they've accepted a few of them. They've actually taken a few of his ideas.

Now, we shouldn't just rely on the Member for Inkster for good ideas. I'm sure there are many Manitobans who could come forward and strengthen—I mean, what else do we have presenters for? Why do we have this committee and this presentation process, if we're not going to—

An Honourable Member: What if they don't know good ideas when they hear them?

Mr. Goertzen: That could be a problem, if we are not going to actually have the access.

Madam Vice-Chairperson, I'm going to say with sincerity to the members opposite that there are a lot of things which happen here in the Legislature that are partisan; there are a lot of things that happen for purely political reasons.

I think, if you stop and reflect and search your own hearts, if you talk to Manitobans genuinely and ask them, is it reasonable to have presenters come to the Manitoba Legislature to speak to bills between the hours of 6 p.m. or 10 p.m., or would it be more reasonable to ram a committee through the night or on the weekend when it's less likely they're going to come?

Ask them; just do a survey; put it up on your Web site; send it out in the mail, before you're restricted to do that. Ask Manitobans what they think is reasonable. I'm certain you would find that most Manitobans would find this to be a common sense resolution from a common sense Manitoba MLA, just trying to do what's right for the province of Manitoba.

I know you're scared probably to make these decisions with the boss away. You don't want him to—you want him to come back. By now, he's probably across the Mexican border, so maybe you could exercise it.

I think that standing on the side of democracy is always a strong position to take. I think that, when the Premier (Mr. Doer) came back and found out that you'd agreed to a resolution to have speakers between 6 and 10, he may not like it because he's not the most democratic man I've ever met, I grant you that.

He might not care for it and you might earn the scowl of the well-tanned Premier at that point, but I do think, Madam Chairperson, that you will stand the test of time. If you go to your constituents who, ultimately, you're responsible for—I just got the finger. One minute, okay. Normally, I wouldn't get the finger until about 3 a.m., so this is good.

With the one minute that I have left—*[interjection]*—I've gotten the finger from worst people; it's okay. I would say that, if you would search your hearts, if the members opposite would search their hearts, I think they would know that the right thing to do is to vote for this resolution.

I still believe it's never the wrong time to do the right thing, and I know that the members opposite will vote in favour of this resolution.

Mr. Pedersen: That certainly is a hard act to follow, but I will do my best to—and I'm sure I'll get a little bit of help along the way here.

This motion, brought in by the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), to recommend to the House that committee only hears presenters from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. and only from Monday to Thursday, I guess it just seems too simple to some of us, that it's just such a common-sense idea and, perhaps, that's why it's not being accepted.

We've seen a lot of public presenters coming in from a distance. I've had some presenters from my area that have not been able to come in, because of the time constraints on these committees as they go. Again, as the system is, if they miss it twice, they're automatically off the list. The Clerk's office phones them and tells them to be in at anytime and, with the list of presenters that we have, they could be here for days. It's just not reasonable to expect them to come in that long.

The other part of it that we've asked for—I guess it's not going to happen because this government, obviously, doesn't seem to want to listen to any kind of reason—we've asked for extended time on the presenters. We've got people coming in that have expertise. Why don't we tap into that expertise? Perhaps, the government figures they know it all and they don't need to listen to committees; that seems to come across fairly evident.

I noticed tonight there was an elderly lady in here, who was a former schoolteacher. Boy, if looks could kill, a couple of members who were speaking when this lady was presenting, she stopped and gave them the evil eye, and it was quiet after that.

* (23:30)

Maybe we'll have to start giving the evil eye to the NDP so they can start listening to us, but I don't think I have that ability that the former school teacher had. It would certainly be interesting to hear. We also heard from another presenter and that's the great thing about when presenters come in. They have all these great ideas that they want to share. One of the presenters was asking, golly, wouldn't it be nice to hear from the government's side for a change for questions. The minister did oblige and he did ask a question, so that was good—

An Honourable Member: Offered a comment.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, it was actually a comment, but at least it's one for the record so they didn't get shut out all night and that was good. But, you know, I can see, maybe they're just being generous. They're giving us lots of time because we are limited to only five minutes on questions, so they wouldn't want to be seen as taking the entire five minutes to ask pertinent questions. I would assume they're going to ask pertinent questions about this, but then if we'd open the entire presentation up so we could ask more questions, there would be lots of time for both sides to ask questions on this.

It's interesting to note, too, that this is Bill 38, and yet in Bill 37, we've got—the same thing is happening in that committee so it's not just only in this committee that it happens. We've got Bill 17 coming up and I believe there's something like—the notice I saw was 417 presenters coming in. We're getting awful close to a record and the bill still hasn't even been called. We still have people phoning in every day because there are a lot of people very concerned. It's not just farm people that are concerned about this bill. This bill is about banning food production in Manitoba. At a time when there are food crises around the world, we've got a government that's actually out there banning food.

Interesting to note, too, that last week they signed an agreement with Ukraine, an agricultural exchange agreement with Ukraine. So, while they're promoting agriculture with Ukraine, they're busy here banning food production. Go figure. Maybe we're going to import our pork then from Ukraine if that's the way. Of course, China probably produces it cheaper, so we can always get the floor sweepings out of China.

But again it just all relates back to these bills, to this committee, about having unlimited time to

present for presenters, unlimited time for questions, and running what we consider to be reasonable hours and reasonable hours for the presenters to be able to come in. We haven't even gone to the point of where we would actually go out in the country and go to places like Brandon and Thompson and other communities around the province. We'd better go to Winkler, the fastest growing city in Manitoba right now, and we can't miss that one.

An Honourable Member: The second fastest.

An Honourable Member: Steinbach's No. 1.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) says Steinbach's growing faster, but the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) is not here to defend his honour, so perhaps we'll have to take the Member for Steinbach's word on it that they are the fastest growing. But, obviously, we need to go to these communities because they're so busy growing, they don't have time to come into these type of committees.

I actually enjoy the presentations because I pick up lots of tidbits there. Some of the tidbits I picked up tonight was using accounting to eliminate accountability, you know, and I thought, that's pretty good. Another one was having two sets of books: one for the banker and one for the tax man. So maybe that's the way this government wants to set up is one accountant or one set of books for the general public and the other one that actually shows the debt that we are accumulating with this.

One of the other little tidbits—and I just love this one—was the government is going to be like sailors spending on shore leave. Okay, we'll leave that one—*[interjection]* Yes, I know, I should apologize to the sailors, but I'm not going to do that anyway.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

One more that I'd just like to share while I'm at it. The presenter said the budget should be walking the talk of what you believe. I guess if what this government—and you know, that's probably true. If this government believes that they can go massively into debt over the next four years and use the Crown corporations to balance off their budget every year, I guess if that's what they believe, that's what Bill 38 is all about.

They're doing their best to ram it through committee. They don't want to hear from the public on this one. They want to get it through so that they

can actually do what they believe, and that's to go farther into debt.

We had lots of comparisons with Saskatchewan. We're so far behind Saskatchewan now, I don't know if we'll ever be able to catch up to them. That's really unfortunate because we have so much opportunity in this province. The opportunities should never disappear from us, but with bills like Bills 38, 37, 17, the food moratorium that they're putting on Manitoba, no wonder that we keep falling behind other provinces.

I strongly support this resolution. This committee should vote for this resolution, and it's about time that we got on with the business and accept this resolution so we can move on. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Faurshou: It is indeed an honour to have the opportunity to offer support for the motion before us, which is provided by the honourable Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik). Indeed, it is a motion steeped in common sense. That is how I was raised on the farm in Portage la Prairie and how I view life in general.

I look to members across the table this evening, on the government side of the House, and not one individual has offered anything towards the motion or the proceedings here tonight. I know the observation was made that the minister did make one brief comment to one presenter. It is highly curious as to whether or not the government members here even support their own legislation because we haven't heard anything from any member on the government side of the House, positive or negative. It leaves one wondering to what level of embarrassment they are feeling in regard to this legislation.

An observation that was made a little earlier, that Bill 37 and Bill 38, go hand in hand. First off, the balanced budget legislation is tossed to the wind and spending is being made by government as long as the Crown corporations are making money. The government can indeed deficit finance.

We as elected members of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, under Bill 37, are unable to convey that to Manitobans because Bill 37 is a bill that has been quite appropriately, I believe, described as a bill of censorship. In an advanced democracy, that is truly a shame, that we in this day and age, a country that was regarded as being the best country in the world in which to live not so many years ago,

that we're seeing this type of archaic, dictatorial type of legislation placed on the table for us and the public to make presentation.

I don't blame the members opposite for being embarrassed. I certainly would be too. I don't think I'd want to go out to the neighbours and even family members to say that I'm standing here mute but I will stand and support the legislation because I'm told to.

That is the type of regime the New Democratic Party actually stands for, today's New Democratic Party. I think they need to look to their actual name for a name change because democratic is the last thing that the current government is exhibiting within their caucus.

* (23:40)

We all witnessed earlier this evening, the honourable Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) attempting to ask a presenter a question, a simple question, and what took place was something that I could not believe was happening. The lead minister took the Member for Radisson to task even though they share the same side of the Assembly, on the government's side. He was told to be quiet and to go off and not to bother asking any questions. I have no knowledge of what the content of the question was, and I don't believe that the minister even bothered to ask the honourable Member for Radisson what the question was. The marching orders were left by the Premier (Mr. Doer), that now, I believe, from earlier presenters, is absent not only from the Assembly, but from the Province, perhaps, I believe, even from the country. That order that must have been left before he departed is being followed to the letter, regardless of what it might look like to the general public.

Before us we have a common-sense resolution, as I stated earlier in my dialogue. It gives the presenters, as well as those of us that sit around the committee table, structure. It gives order, and it provides persons with an understanding as to when they will be able to present. Like, this evening, we as a committee are currently engaged in debate of this motion, and we don't even know when the committee will adjourn for the evening. There has been no time set. I know, earlier in the committee, midnight was discussed, but it was not agreed upon, and so currently we're open-ended, and I'm very pleased to make note that perhaps 85 percent of the opposition members are currently in the committee room and anxious to continue with debate of not only this motion but others that I believe will be forthcoming, and we are energized and anxious to continue the

debate this evening because it's important and that's why we are present.

I look to the government's side and count but five members, perhaps six. What percentage, perhaps, would that be? Twenty percent of their caucus. It's obvious that the opposition members are much keener to be participants in the legislative process.

In regard to Bill 38, it is a bill that has yet to hear a positive, supportive presenter. It must be awfully, awfully disillusioning to the members that sit on the government side of the House. Not only have they been instructed not to say anything, but they have to effectively take the criticism and not be able to respond to it. It will no doubt continue, and definitely look forward to as I know that the bill will ultimately be passed because the government itself needs to run a deficit. It's obviously cash strapped, even though, with an additional \$200-plus million in equalization payments—that is a term that I cannot easily say because it continues to demonstrate how the current New Democratic Party, today's New Democratic Party is so proudly continuing to make Manitoba more of a have-not province, a province that is, as was stated by an earlier presenter, going in the wrong direction, and, upon his own initiative, made comparisons to Saskatchewan because, in 1996, we were comparative and currently we are not.

It's very, very disappointing to know that the New Democratic Party that is in government right at the present time is totally responsible. I'm sure that they're proud to go to family gatherings and to different events to say that we are making you, my fellow Manitobans, more of a have-not province in relying more and more on our neighbours to the east and to the west to continue to donate to our cause, because we are so inept, as a New Democratic government, to show any leadership, any abilities to stand on our own two feet, and to be able to state that we have accomplished a positive event that our kids and grandkids could be proud of.

I know the honourable Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), acting as Chair this evening, is ready to stand me down as my time is growing very short. I know him to be an honourable man and I wonder sometimes how he is able to sleep at nights, but I'm sure that the errors of his way will be reckoned in, maybe, a future. Thank you.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of this motion which recommends that committees of the

Legislature, hearing public presentations, sit only between 6 and 10, between Monday and Thursday.

This, as many of my colleagues have said, is a very common sense motion, one that should be supported by all members of the Legislature.

There's some good and some bad to having been around this place for a long time, but I'd like to give colleagues—some of the newer ones in this Legislature—a bit of a history lesson on how things were in 1986, when I was first elected and for many years after that, as a fairly young woman with a young family.

We sat in this Legislature till 10 p.m. Monday evening, Tuesday evening and Thursday evening. We had Wednesday evening off to attend community events, but we sat long hours. It was very difficult as a woman trying to balance family life and political life. We also sat on Fridays from 9 till 12:30.

Those days were difficult. It was part of the process then, but those rules today would be considered antiquated. I'm pleased to say that, over the years, I've fought really hard, as have a lot of members of the Legislature, to try to get saner hours of operation and sitting, more family friendly hours.

Even just a few years ago, we used to sit until 6 p.m. Even that, for those that had families to get home to, made it very difficult; you usually missed the supper hour or missed the opportunity to take children to their soccer games or their after-school activities, whether it be piano, or dance, or soccer, or whatever.

Very often, by the time you got home from this place, they were ready for bed. So it wasn't a very family-friendly process. Every year, we tend to look at the rules of operation for ourselves and try to figure out what might be better, and we've changed the rules, year after year, for us but I want to tell you that we haven't changed the rules for the taxpayers of Manitoba that have to come to present at committee.

These rules are the rules that were in place back in 1986. They're still there today, where we expect members of the Manitoba public—when we've made our rules for ourselves better—to live with old rules that are antiquated, aren't relevant, and expect taxpayers of the province of Manitoba to come to committee all hours of the day and night without any concern for their family life, for their lifestyles.

* (23:50)

So this motion that's on the table tonight makes ultimate sense, and, if we're prepared to change the rules for ourselves to make our jobs easier and easier to balance with our family lives, why aren't we prepared to give the same opportunity to Manitobans that want to come and present to us?

I don't think anyone on the other side could argue that point. Why don't we pay respect to Manitobans that want to have their voices heard, that want to be able to come, at decent hours, to know that they're not going to be called to come out to committee 48 hours before the committee starts, knowing that they might be No. 50 on the list or No. 100 on the list or No. 150 on the list and have absolutely no idea how many nights they may have to come, how late they may have to stay, and how very often they're being required because government is forcing a process that requires people to sit and wait and have their names called and if they're not here at that time, their names are dropped to the bottom of the list and they may have to come back again.

Let's take a look at trying to make the rules in this Legislature the same for those of the general public that want to have their voices heard. You know, we just have to go back to some of the comments that were made earlier about the Premier (Mr. Doer) who indicated that he was prepared to sit and to work and to be here morning, noon, and night, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Well, Mr. Chair, with all respect, we've been sitting in committee for a week and a half now, and we saw the Premier at committee the first two nights, when agreement was that we would only sit till 10 p.m. He was there. I think he stayed till almost 10 p.m. both of those nights, but where has he been since? He's been noted by his absence at either committee for the last week now. I believe it was last week on Tuesday that he spent the evening in committee until 10 p.m. If those hours are good enough for the Premier, they should be good enough, and put in place for Manitobans that want to come and present and have their voices heard.

You know, again, I look at legislation that's been brought in. Legislation that should have been the Premier's legislation, Bill 37, in the other committee room, and he should have been here to hear each and every presenter that wanted him to know what they felt about that legislation. He should have been there and intently listened, but where's he been? He's been

to the Western Premiers' Conference. He was here, I guess, entertaining the Prince last evening, and now he's off on a junket to Mexico. *[interjection]*

Well, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) questions my use of the language when I say junket. Mr. Chair, the Premier knew when this legislative session was going to end. He knew that in the last weeks of every legislative session there are committee hearings. He knew when he had his Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) bring in Bill 37, that there would be committee hearings. So, my question is, why did he plan to be away and out of the province when he knew presenters of the public were going to want to let him know how they felt about legislation that rightly should have been his to bring in?

It's unprecedented that a First Minister wouldn't bring in legislation that has major electoral reform as part of that bill. It's unprecedented in this province and yet he—and I feel sorry for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak). I want you to know that I do feel sorry for him. He's been through a very difficult time. He has a major portfolio to run; he's House Leader, and there's a significant amount of work involved in that job.

He's had some personal issues that he's had to deal with and, on top of that, the Premier passes off what should be his legislation to the Minister of Justice to bring in and usher through this Legislature. Now how much more can he expect a senior member of his Cabinet to do? I lay the blame personally on the shoulders of the Premier for doing this to his Minister of Justice and then taking off and leaving him high and dry and not even having the respect to be here to listen to presenters that have come to have their voices heard.

So, Mr. Chair, I support this motion. I believe that Manitobans deserve the same respect as we have given ourselves with the rule changes that we have made for ourselves, and that the committee and all members of this Legislature should support this motion and get down to a common-sense approach to running the committee and to hearing Manitobans on legislation. Thank you.

Mr. Graydon: This motion that's been moved by the newbie, and I classify him that with a great deal of respect because he deserves that type of respect. The common sense that he has put forth in this motion is applaudable. It speaks to the heart of what we do and what we represent daily in this wonderful building that we're in today. It speaks to democracy,

democracy in one of the best possible ways it could possibly be and that's in the freedom of speech. Freedom of speech, Mr. Chairman, to present one's views on whatever legislation is being set before us, and today with the type of legislation that's in this Bill 38, it's imperative that more and more people get to speak to it.

I would suggest that the tip of the iceberg has just been seen up to this point, Mr. Chair, as so many people that have presented have said, we really didn't understand this and my friends didn't know what I was doing or what I'm talking about when I'm coming to speak to this particular bill. They just hadn't understood what it was. They didn't realize that it was on balanced budget. They didn't realize that it would be taking from Crown corporations and using that to balance a budget.

I have to reiterate what I said last night that this minister is very perceptive. He's perceptive in a fashion that he understands the impact of a downturn in the American economy and the effect that it can have on us in Manitoba, and he's preparing his government and his ministers. He's preparing them for the downturn and how he can keep their budgets the same as it is today. He won't have to have them cut back like some former governments had to do. They had to live within their means. In this situation, this minister's preparing to run a deficit and for how long we really don't know. It could be one, two, three years. It'll be so terribly hard to understand because it's going to be so well hidden.

I suggest to this committee tonight that there are a lot of presenters that are in the country that just don't have that same opportunity to come here to present to this committee, but I'm sure that they would be able to share some of the more important aspects of their thoughts on this bill. I'm sure then that the minister and perhaps his whole caucus, maybe not the minister but his whole caucus, would convince him to withdraw this bill. However, we won't know that until the minister agrees to take this committee on the road.

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr. Graydon.

Mr. Graydon: I'm not so sure that he has to take everybody on the road—don't interrupt me I'm just getting going.

Mr. Chairperson: Well, Mr. Graydon, you do have some time left. I will let you know after this interruption how much time you have left.

But the hour being midnight, I would like to read Manitoba rule 92(6): "At midnight on the third or any subsequent evening that a Standing or Special Committee meets to consider a Bill, the Chairperson is to decide, without debate, whether the Committee is to sit past midnight and, if so, for how long."

As the Chair, I am deciding we are going to sit past midnight. We're going to sit till 1 a.m.

Mr. Graydon, you have seven minutes left.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I really appreciate that. If you want my attention again, please speak up.

As I was saying, Mr. Chair, there are many people throughout this province, wiser people probably than a lot sitting at this table, that would like to have an opportunity to speak to this bill. I think the minister, once he has gone through some of the presenters here and really has an opportunity to analyze exactly what has been presented to him, that he'll want to take this committee on the road. I don't know that he has to take a full caucus with him but I'm sure that he would like to take this committee to places like Steinbach, where you have a community that is growing exponentially, that has many, many new businesses move in and the population explosion there that you just have to understand the amount of business sense that's in that community.

I'm sure that they would be able to give this minister, and through this minister, this government a great deal of advice on how to balance budgets and exactly how to make money and stretch money to cover all of the programs like the Minister for Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) wants to put out in a community. I compliment her on her ability to do that; however, it does require a lot of money and I believe the people from Steinbach could give the minister the advice on how best to manage his money.

From Steinbach I would suggest that the minister would carry on to Winkler. Winkler is an area that is really an area that has grown also exponentially. Some of the members opposite are thinking that maybe Winkler wouldn't be the place to have the committee, but I have to tell you that on January 1, they had 200 students starting in kindergarten and on March 31, they had 300. Man, what a population explosion, and the reason that's there, let me tell you, is because of business, business requiring employees. The businessmen that are there certainly have to manage and balance their budgets, and I think they

probably would be able to lend a bit of their experience to this minister and through the minister, of course, to his government. I think we would want to encourage more business in this province, of course, because it would also expand the tax base.

From Winkler I would suggest to Carman. Carman's not a big community but I have to admit that Carman is a very wealthy community. There is a lot of old money in Carman, a lot of well-to-do, I might say, well-to-do businessmen that grew up in the town and managed their money very carefully so that they could enjoy their golden years without having to rely on any pensions including COLA, actually, go from the teachers.

So I would suggest that Carman would be an opportunity for the minister to spend one evening, one evening alone with maybe four or five—the Member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) may well want to go to Carman. Have you ever been to Carman? I'm sure he would enjoy Carman and from Carman I would suggest Boissevain. Now Boissevain to a lot of people doesn't seem to be a thriving community, but it really does have a lot to lend to this province.

*(00:00)

So, from Boissevain, I would say we would go to Brandon. Now Brandon's fairly important to this minister. I'm sure it is as the member that's put this motion forward and has been commended for putting this motion forward hails from Brandon West. He's certainly a shining star there. I'm sure that the minister would like to set the committee there and perhaps spend two or three days in Brandon, perhaps with his small band of, should I say, MLAs to committee members to listen and absorb the amount of knowledge there is on balanced budget in the city of Brandon and how it's grown over the years because of balanced budgets. I'm quite certain that even the Chamber of Commerce in Brandon, they balance their budgets, and the municipalities throughout that part of the country, as well as throughout all of Manitoba, balance their budgets.

I would encourage the minister to take the committee out to the western part of the province, and I wouldn't want to limit just to the western part at all. I would like to see him actually go up into that Minnedosa country. I would suggest one evening up there and the opportunity, at the same time, to see how the ethanol plant operates. I think that is one of the success stories of the province. I'd like to actually go along actually for that because I haven't had an opportunity to tour the ethanol plant there. But I

would really be interested in how their people balance the budget there as well and what the effect would be if they didn't balance their budget. The shareholders in that plant, how they would respond to a constant deficit there. I'm sure that they would be able to impart a lot of information that would help the minister change his position and become realistic with the budget. I would say from Minnedosa, out of respect, perhaps we could go to Russell.

Mr. Chairperson: One minute.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Out of respect for one of the aged members on our side of the House, from Russell, who is just getting a drink of water right now and getting refreshed—

An Honourable Member: Just water?

Mr. Graydon: Just water.

I would suggest that many people in that community—and I'm sure that you've been to the Russell Inn, it's a well-managed facility, has grown from a very small hotel into a wonderful resort, Mr. Chair. I think the minister would be well advised to sit down with the management there and understand how they balance their budget and the reasons for that. I'm sure that he could glean just a couple of things from each one of these stops.

I don't think you'd want to stop there. I think you'd want to go to Swan River. Swan River at this time of the year is a beautiful place to visit, Mr. Minister. It would be a wonderful place to host a committee such as this. I'm sure that the Member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) has never been to Swan River, and I'm sure that he would enjoy it up there. Even if you only sat from 6 to 10, which I think is very, very honourable to do and probably would work fine for the farmers up there, you would still have the opportunity from mid-afternoon to do some trout fishing, some R and R, I would suggest. But you could talk to the people in Swan River who are not close to a big centre but have been very, very fortunate and, in their foresight on how they built their city or their village—I guess it's a city, is it? Would that be classified as a city? But they have a beautiful, beautiful hospital there, and I'd like to suggest that that hospital probably balances its budget. I'm sure that the minister would be happy to just glean a couple of points from that hospital.

By the time he would get back to Winnipeg, he'd be back here probably before the Premier (Mr.

Doer). I would suggest that he would have an answer for the Premier when he gets back in exactly how he was going to change this legislation that the members on this side of the House would be quite happy to accept it. So, Mr. Minister, I'm not sure. Was he actually thinking that he might change it tonight and give us that notion, or not?

But, rather than that, and I don't think he will, I would suggest that when we do have committee members come to the committee, I suggest that they have a 20-minute slot. They won't maybe all use it, but when they have driven from the country and it's only 10 minutes, I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that, many times, they have a lot more information to impart to us, and it can't be done in that time sometimes. It would give the members on your side of the House the opportunity to question some of these presenters because they do bring a wealth of knowledge to the table. So I can't add it to this motion, but I'm sure, at some point, that I might consider putting a motion forward to change the time on this because I think it's very important. I think at the end of the day that you would probably see a balance of probably eight minutes a presenter, but it would still give your people, the people opposite, an opportunity to question. I'm sure the Member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) would really want to get engaged in this type of discussion, and he should because I believe he is new as well as I am, I think. It certainly gives you an opportunity to participate that I enjoy today.

* (00:10)

But I think it's important to make the rules palatable to the public.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Graydon, your time has expired. I was carried away and you got some extra minutes.

Mr. Graydon: Oh, not again.

Mr. Chairperson: Next is Mr. Hawranik. Oh, well, then, we'll go to Mr. Bryce—Mr. Briese.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Briese, yes, thank you.

An Honourable Member: It's a breeze.

Mr. Briese: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I'm glad you got it right the second time.

I'm pleased to speak to this motion put forward by the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) recommending that this committee only hears

presenters from 6 till 10 p.m. and only from Monday till Thursday. I think we do have to certainly accommodate the presenters that are coming to these committees.

When we decide to hold committees at 9 o'clock in the morning or very late into the night, presenters aren't going to be here. They have no opportunity. They just aren't going to leave their jobs, leave their families. My own community is two and a half hours away from here and to drive in for 9 o'clock committee meetings, they'd have to be, indeed, a very dedicated group. Some are, but some of them would have quite a bit of problem with that.

We need to use some common sense and some logic when we deal with these particular things. The common sense simply dictates that the most important thing that goes on here is listening to the presenters. I heard the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) mention allowing presenters 20 minutes. I don't think that's too bad an idea. I think it's important to have them speak their minds, say what they want to say on these things.

We are elected to represent all Manitobans and I certainly am disappointed that the members on the other side of the table here have not got more involved in the questioning of presenters. It certainly looks to me like they're so dug in and entrenched on their legislation that they don't want to even consider any amendments or any ideas coming from the public. Apparently, the overall take is that they're very much smarter than any of the presenters that are coming, and they intend to be arrogant about it and let their bills stand the way they've written them.

We've heard the various threats. We've heard the threat from the Premier (Mr. Doer) that he was going to be here and he was going to attend all these and, you know, I really don't care—

An Honourable Member: Whether the Premier's here or not?

Mr. Briese: Yeah. The other threats that are made that we're going to sit into the summer, we're going to do this, we're going to do that. Well, my cows are already out in the pasture and they're on grass until September, so I can get right through till September. My tomatoes are planted and the crops in the ground, thank you very much. I'm happy to sit here for half the summer. So—*[interjection]* Yes. So, if anybody thinks they're going to throw a threat at me, they can forget about it. I just am not intimidated by it—

[interjection] Yes, and I heard him many times before.

I'm still somewhat disappointed and not sure whether the Chair's going to go after me on relevance or not, but somewhat disappointed that these bills, especially 37 and 38, weren't put forward a little earlier in this sitting of the House. It would have given us a lot more chance to have a look at these bills. It would have given presenters more chance to have a look at these bills to make very reasoned interpretations of what's in them and be able to take their time, make sure they're not missing anything, make sure they understand what is meant in some of these bills because, with the shortness of time, they're presented on the last day possible and you go 48 hours and you're into committee hearings. It's very difficult to even be prepared. I think the government, the NDP, actually do themselves a disservice when they do that because the automatic knee-jerk reaction from the public then is, what are they trying to hide? There's got to be something here that they're trying to hide, so if they weren't waiting till the last moment, rushing them through, I think they'd get a lot more favourable response on some of the legislation they're trying to put forward.

As I said before, and getting back to the relevance of the motion, I do think some of these presenters need more time. Especially on the questions back from the committee, I think they should be unlimited time because if a presenter has made a very good point that goes in a little bit different direction, I think both sides of this committee table should be zeroing in on that and asking as many questions to make sure they're absolutely clear on the intent of the presenter and they have an understanding, because it may well be an idea that is very, very usable in the legislation. It's something we would want to be, on both sides of this table, very clear on before we make amendments to the legislation and went ahead with putting something new in there.

As said before, we seem to be talking to an awful lot of these resolutions and we have had a number of presenters with a great deal of experience and when we're cutting them off with only 10 minutes of presentation or only five minutes of questioning, we're doing ourselves a disservice, and we're doing the people of Manitoba a disservice. People travel long distances at their own expense to be here and they get their 10 minutes in the sun and, thank you very much and don't let the door hit you in the backside on the way out. With the weird hours

that have been imposed on these committee sittings, they're forcing many rural Manitobans to forego any committee hearing. There've been attempts to basically cut off presenters. Glen Cummings, who is the former member from my constituency and highly regarded in this building for his 20 years of service here and for his down-to-earth approach to things, comes all the way in, has 10 minutes to present and away you go.

The man speaking to Bill 38, for instance, has spent 12 years on the Treasury Board. Make use of that expertise. He's been there. He's done it. He brought this—he was one of the big players in bringing this province out of the dark days of debt that reigned after the last NDP government. Private businesses do balance the books and I think the Province has to, too.

* (00:20)

I think a couple of other changes that can be made that are relevant to this resolution is let people make their full presentations. Let them remain on the list until the end of the presentation stage. Just 'cause a name's been called twice, they're axed; they're done; they're gone, and there's probably some very legitimate reasons why some of them, especially when we have a long list of presenters, why some of them have missed making the presentation. I think we could very easily set up a system where, when somebody's phoned, they're told that they will have a time slot at least in a two-hour period, and then let's make sure that they do get that time slot and have their opportunity. I don't think anybody is too adverse to a two-hour delay, but we have them in, we have 400 presenters for a bill that may not get called, I'm not sure what the delays are on it. Then there's no way we should be calling the whole 400 presenters in here at one time. We should do a rough calculation, or the Clerk's office should do a rough calculation and say, we're going to be sitting for this many hours this evening; we need 20 presenters or we need 25 presenters. Maybe you do call a few more than that because there may be some that don't show up, but there's no reason to call in 400 and then send 375 of them home without presenting and tell them to come back another day. A lot of those presenters on that particular bill, because it is a bill that affects rural Manitoba, will be coming long distances to get here and it's costly. It's very unfair to them.

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr. Briese, your time has expired.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It's my privilege at 20 after 12 or whatever we are at here now, 22 minutes after 12 to have my first opportunity to speak this evening to this particular—

An Honourable Member: This morning.

Mr. Maguire: This morning I guess it is; the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) corrected me. It's now tomorrow, it's Wednesday, but it's early, Mr. Chair. We've been at many of these meetings much later than this.

I just want to put on the record that I'm privileged to speak to the motion put forward by the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), our Finance critic in the Progressive Conservative caucus, where he has recommended to the House that this committee only hear presenters from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. and only from Monday through Thursday.

Mr. Chairman, with your indulgence, I'll just be with you in a second. *[interjection]* No, I just asked for a second's leave from the Chair and I just appreciate that.

Mr. Chair, it's always an honour to speak in the Legislature and particularly, in a committee like this, this evening. Bill 38 is a very devastating bill to the province of Manitoba. I've called it one of the most horrific bills that the province has ever seen in the history of Manitoba. I'll stand by that as long as I'm a member of this Legislature.

I know that the members across the table from me are very, very sincere in how they manage their own affairs in their families. I'm sure they wouldn't have been successful enough to have gained the seats across the table that they have or the respect of their constituents if they hadn't felt that they were running on the platform that the NDP proposed in both the 1999, 2003 and the 2007 elections, where they promised Manitobans that they would maintain The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Accountability Act that the Progressive Conservatives brought in, in 1995, which was recognized across North America at that time, not just in Canada, as the most accountable legislation to be ever put forward by a government and a jurisdiction to account for the financial management of a jurisdiction; in this case, Manitoba.

It required the government to balance the books every year. It did not allow for deficits unless, of course, the Cabinet ministers lost a portion of their salary for the year that they ran the deficit. So to say

that they couldn't run deficits is wrong. They could; it's just that it would cost them.

Of course, I think due diligence would say that any sitting member of a Cabinet would not want to face his or her own members if they weren't able to be able to manage that account as a Cabinet minister, when they had particularly run on three elections in a row.

I know some of the members are new or had come in, in the '03 election, and I respect that. I only feel privileged that I had the opportunity to run in 1999, and I ran partly because of the fiscal accountability of the government of the day as presented by the former Finance Minister, Mr. Clayton Manness, that came forward on Thursday night last week to make the presentation here in this committee to compel the minister to deal with only two sections of Bill 38. And that was to, basically, eliminate the bill that they've got before the House here, or be honest with Manitobans and just pull the previous bill that was before the House as well. Mr. Chair, the two issues that he spoke about were, of course, how unaccountable it is for a government to suggest that they can be accountable by only balancing the books once every four years and then, you know, have an escape hatch that allows them to have an out by saying that we don't have to balance the books if there's a disaster that's caused by either a weather impact or a situation where the—were impacted by another level of government.

Now, this government, this New Democratic government that's been in power since 1999, has no idea of what a negative impact by another level of government is, during the nine years that they've been in government, unlike the experience that they gained—by the way, and they wouldn't extend his time to ask more questions with the experience that Mr. Manness had the other night—but when you're a Finance minister like he and the former Finance Minister, Mr. Eric Stefanson, had to go through, and I've spoken to Mr. Stefanson myself many times, and Mr. Manness when I was appointed Finance critic in a previous term in the Legislature, I made a call to Mr. Manness to speak to me in regard to come in and have a meeting with him in regard to how the situation differed to day from what it was when he was the Finance Minister in the Province of Manitoba, and he quite quickly pointed out something that has been always true to me and that is that they dealt, you know, he and Mr. Stefanson, followed by Mr. Gilleshammer out of the riding of

Minnedosa, as the Finance ministers had to deal in times when the federal government really did impact the finances of Manitoba by cutting the transfer payments some \$350,000—or million, \$350,000 would be a drop in the bucket to what they had to deal with—\$350 million in one particular year, Mr. Chair, at a time when they were in tight financial situations anyway.

The situation today, of course, is that there's much, much larger transfer payments coming to the Province of Manitoba and the government is having to pass this kind of legislation to still continue to balance their books because they're worried they can't, and I guess, you know, if you want to get it through so bad it must be because the Premier (Mr. Doer) or the Finance Minister, maybe there's only two of them that know, that they're already in trouble financially in the Province of Manitoba. You know, I mean, I probably believe that they have already spent all this largess that they've gained from the federal transfer payments, from the increased taxation that they've had.

Only this evening I had dinner with the members of the U.S. states of Ohio, Kansas and South Dakota, and we began to talk about the situation that we're faced with in the province. They wanted to know what the size of the budget was in Manitoba, and when I told them that 40 percent of it came from somewhere else, they were appalled. They couldn't do that in their state, Mr. Chair, but, to even add insult to injury further, they were most devastated to—of course, they felt that most of the revenue then must come from income tax, and when I said that a good deal of it did and that a good deal of it also came from the PST, the provincial sales tax, they said, well, what all is that on? Do you have it on food? I said, no, it's not on food, but I said that the present government couldn't get enough money in the coffers to continue to do what they wanted to do, so, unlike what they ran their election campaign on in the first term, they expanded, in their very first term, the PST onto the labour that are required to fix up your home or do improvements to your property. Any of the labour for electricians, plumbers and carpenters, that sort of thing, and that wasn't enough. In their second term they expanded it to the legal profession, you know, accounting work that's being done by the legal profession, accounting and architecture, just in time to build the Manitoba Telephone—or the Manitoba Hydro building. The Hydro building is a rather large project being

undertaken in the province of Manitoba, some hundreds of millions of dollars that's probably at least a hundred over-budget already.

* (00:30)

This is a situation where the government, it's pretty convenient to collect money when you know have to—to get a building permit, you have to have the architects look over the plans and you have to have the project drawn up in a legal manner. All of these areas must have gained the government millions and millions of dollars just from the seven percent PST that they took off of the extra areas that they looked at, not even to go back to mentioning the labour that they used.

So that's why I think it's very important to speak to the motion, Mr. Chair, that the committee sit from 6 to 10 on Mondays through Thursdays, because Manitobans need to have the opportunity to come and take the government to task for this fiscal mismanagement of the province of Manitoba. The only thing that saved them is the federal government and the transfers of other provinces, and the fact that those provinces have been able to put up with it for this long. I daresay, at some point, Mr. McGuinty in Ontario is going to, maybe, not stand for it as much as he has in the past. I would say that that is going to be a very great detriment to this province.

I know that the members for St. Norbert, we've got the Member for The Maples here, there's members from—I'm sure it must be horrendous, this kind of a bill, because they certainly didn't run on this campaign.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Maguire, I'm sorry, your time is up.

Mr. Maguire: My speaking time may be up, I hope mine's not up.

Mr. Chairperson: It's not a point of order, but it's a good point. Your speaking time is up. I stand corrected.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Certainly, on that note, I know the Member for Arthur-Virden has many more hours left in him this evening, and during the course of the next weeks and months ahead, as we're going to be sitting in this committee process. I know he's very much going to be a part of that, as all of us are. I would encourage members opposite, as well, to take part in this and perhaps initiate and engage in the debate. This is what democracy is all about. I know members opposite are reading

newspapers, and so on. You know this is a very important issue.

Certainly, we heard in the other committee tonight where I had the opportunity to sit in the other committee as a member there this evening. We heard from one member, in particular, who gave an absolutely fantastic presentation tonight. I know that she is very much looking forward to coming forward in front of this committee. But she's a student during the day, and I know that the government has called committee to try and rush through their legislation. They've tried to call committee, or have called committee, between 9 and noon, and 10 and noon, and so on. I think it's very difficult for people, working Manitobans to come out during those times, during the day, and speak on this issue, on this bill.

Certainly, I know Nataliya Hryshko gave a wonderful presentation in the committee next door. I think we can all look to her for guidance in how to run these committees. She came out this evening between the hours of 6 and 10 p.m., which is why I'm speaking in favour of this motion, because here's a prime example of a stellar person in our community, a member of our community. She's in high school. She came out tonight because she believes strongly on Bill 37 that she spoke out against, because she believes very strongly in democracy.

She is from Ukraine. She moved here and became a Canadian citizen about five years ago. I know that she wants very much to have the opportunity to come in front of this committee and present. I'm not sure which way, one way or the other, she's going to present on this committee but, certainly, in Bill 37, she was very much opposed to the legislation. She brought forward many points within that committee against that bill. Points that, this government, I think it's incumbent upon them to listen to the various points that she brought forward on that bill.

She is very much a proponent of democracy, and I think what's happened here in Manitoba is rather unfortunate. She came and moved here because she wanted to be part of a free and democratic society, she and her family and her parents. I think what's unfortunate is that, you know, the display that took place this evening, certainly over in Bill 37, where there was an attempt by government to shut out members who were on committee to speak, and they tried to attempt to put them to the bottom of the list

to effectively shut them out of being engaged in the democratic process.

I'm glad that, you know, in the other committee tonight, there was an opportunity for members of the government to come forward and really do the right thing and allow those people the opportunity to come forward tomorrow evening. I think they made a very good ruling tonight and motion that came forward that we certainly agreed with that allowed the people who were left on the committee to come back at a reasonable hour, again, 6 o'clock tomorrow evening and to speak on this bill.

I'm sure that members on the committee, assuming they don't have something else on that evening, but I know that many of them will realize that it's a great opportunity for them to have the opportunity to come forward at 6 p.m., at a reasonable hour, tomorrow night between 6 and 10 p.m. I think that shows well that the other committee was able to step up to the plate and support something similar. Reasonable members on that committee, and I would hope that members around the table here and members opposite would listen to their colleagues who supported this type of a motion in the committee next door.

When leave was asked of the committee to allow for this to come forward, we felt that it was very reasonable because, again, it allowed the people on the list the opportunity to come forward and to speak at a reasonable hour. Certainly, I think that that—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Mrs. Stefanson, I hesitate to interrupt you, but I'm having trouble hearing you. I wonder if we could have a little bit of quiet so that the person who has the floor, Mrs. Stefanson, can be heard by everyone. Thank you for your co-operation.

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. Oh—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Point of order, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Maguire: Point of order, Mr. Chairman. The only reason you can't hear is because there are 11 members on our side of the House and four on the New Democrat side. If they weren't making so much noise in the four of them, we'd be well away for the rest of the evening. With that, I'll let Mrs. Stefanson finish.

Mr. Chairperson: That's not a point of order.

* * *

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, thank you very much, again, Mr. Chair, for bringing the committee to order. I think it is an important thing to mention that certainly members on our side feel very strongly about this motion that is before us this evening that the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) has introduced and brought forward.

Many of us have had the opportunity to speak to this motion, and I think there are probably many more of us who would like to and believe that, you know, just in a free and democratic society, we need to—and getting back to the issue and the motion at hand here. It's very important that people out there in our community in Manitoba believe that this government honestly wants to listen to them.

Unfortunately, the government has shut them out by calling committee during the day when either students are in school or people are working, and at times when they can't be here, and, I think, other times that sometimes they can't be here, certainly, around the five o'clock time where I know on Monday evenings I go out. My son plays soccer so I go out to my son's soccer. There are many teams within the community. I have the opportunity to talk with other parents out there and talk to them about bills like 37 and 38, and, you know, they're really quite outraged at this.

* (00:40)

Unfortunately, the—again, the members opposite call committee in the dark of night and the wee hours of the morning, times when, quite frankly—and I would think that the Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross) would understand, having children of her own who are probably involved in various activities after school and in school, and so on. I would think that she would probably be in favour of the motion of having committee sit between 6 and 10 at night. Certainly, as parents—and a number of us on our side who are parents of young children who are involved in activities after school, whether it be soccer or hockey or softball or baseball, and I'm sure I'm leaving out—football. I'm sure I'm leaving out, you know, many—lacrosse, ballet—*[interjection]* Well, my daughter actually takes highland dancing, as well. You know what? That's something we're very proud of in our family—*[interjection]*

Well, I know the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), you know, sometimes likes to say some things. He likes to speak quite a bit, actually, at

committees these days. But you know what? The Member for Steinbach, you know it is my turn to speak at this time, and so—

Mr. Chairperson: One minute.

Mrs. Stefanson: —I will say that—you know, we're talking about highland dancing right now, and this is something that is very dear to me. I am Scottish. I know my last name right now is Stefanson, and I know that's not a Scottish name; it's Icelandic. We can talk about the Icelanders in a few minutes, but, certainly, the Scots— I am—McDonald is my maiden name. You know, I used to highland dance when I was younger, as well, and my daughter, you know, very much she is enjoying highland dancing; just getting involved in it and she's going to start probably competing in the competitions coming up sometime soon.

I really want the opportunity to be there. I think that there's certainly a number of parents who have their children involved in highland dancing as well, and they want the opportunity to be out there. These activities happen around the 6 p.m.—sorry, sorry, the 5 p.m., not 6 p.m. because 6 p.m. we can—

Mr. Chairperson: Mrs. Stefanson, Mrs. Stefanson, this member of the Fraser clan is going to interrupt the member of a McDonald clan, and tell you that your time has expired.

Next we have another Scot. Mr. McFadyen is next on the speakers' list.

An Honourable Member: Should we call the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

An Honourable Member: I'm persuaded. We're ready. Question's been called.

An Honourable Member: No more speakers.

Mr. Chairperson: I had Mr. Hawranik, but he's not at the table. Okay.

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion before us is:

I move that this committee recommend to the House that this committee only hear presenters from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m., and only from Monday through Thursday, moved by Mr. Borotsik.

The motion is in order.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Ladies and gentlemen, in my opinion, the Nays have it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Formal Vote

An Honourable Member: A recorded vote, please, Mr. Chairman. That's not so.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Maguire has the floor.

Mr. Maguire: It's okay.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Borotsik, make up your mind.

Point of Order

Mr. Maguire: Well, just a quick point of order, Mr. Chair.

I believe that because the Finance Minister didn't speak up, he must have thought he had the Chairman in his pocket. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: This is not a point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Borotsik has requested a recorded vote.

The Clerk has requested committee members only. Committee members only for the count by the Clerk.

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 4, Nays 6.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is defeated.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Chairperson, I'd like to move the following motion, please. I move, and recommend to the House, that all meetings of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs be immediately

suspended and only resume when the Premier's (Mr. Doer) current summit in Mexico ends, so he may be able to attend in person to hear public presentations on Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act, and I'd like to speak to that motion.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Chairperson, if I can get away from the heckling of my own caucus, I believe very strongly in this motion. As we recognize, this piece of legislation, Bill 38, is, without question, the most important piece of legislation that this government will place before the House in this term and probably the most important piece of legislation debated in the Legislature since this NDP government was elected in 1999. This piece of legislation changes the whole fiscal and political landscape of the province of Manitoba.

A 1995 balanced budget legislation was in fact in place up until, well, until when and if this legislation replaces it, and it was at that point in time that the Premier spoke quite emphatically in opposition to balanced budget legislation. We recognize that the Premier, back prior to 1999, when he was running as the opposition leader, and numbers of his members were in opposition to this balanced budget legislation. They don't believe in balanced budgets. They believe in deficit financing and the Premier is on record as saying so. So from 1999 till today, the Premier has been supportive of this legislation, but, all of a sudden, Bill 38 is to replace it.

I honestly believe it's important that the Premier be before this committee and listen to the presenters who have brought their opinions forward to this committee in opposition to this legislation. It's important that the Premier recognize that Manitobans are not in support of deficit financing and that's where it's important that the Premier be here, as we recognize he's out of the country right now and once I mention the place, I'm sure that there's going to be some other comments made, but he certainly isn't in this House and that's where he should be.

I believe that the Premier has said that he would like to make sure that this committee sits day and night so that he can make it available to the citizens of Manitoba. If it's going to sit day and night, the Premier said he was prepared to work. As a matter of fact, I do recall the Premier saying, and taking some

liberty at our own work ethic, in saying that it was our party who did not want to sit day and night and have presentations made. Well, that's not quite the truth. We are prepared to sit. We are prepared to hear the presentations that are put before us. I believe that the Premier (Mr. Doer) would want the same opportunity. Because he has other functions outside of the country, then perhaps we're beyond his scope of change, that he would like to be able to support this resolution and have this committee adjourned until he has the opportunity to be here and certainly listen to people make presentation.

* (00:50)

Does anybody else want to speak? *[interjection]*
All right. No, no, I'm not going to hurry. I'm going to let you speak because I do want to hear you.

I think it's a fairly valid motion, Mr. Chairman. I thank you for accepting it. I would like to certainly let my colleagues make their comments on this particular motion. Thank you.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, I think there's always a time to be serious at committee, and this would seem to be one. It's a serious issue. The Premier (Mr. Doer) jumps on a plane the first chance he gets when there's trouble in the Legislature and heads down south, and he leaves his colleagues to carry the bag.

I look at the Member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun). The former member for Rossmere was actually in the building today earlier on, a few hours ago. Boy, did he look relieved because he sees exactly—I always thought that the former member for Rossmere had a good sense of timing. Truly, he demonstrated that.

He saw what was coming in terms of an arrogant and tired government and jumped ship when he had the first opportunity. I think that there are others around the NDP caucus table who might be thinking, maybe we got in at the wrong time. Maybe this wasn't exactly the top of the mountain. Maybe we're closer to the bottom of the hill than at the top of the hill.

I look at the Member for The Maples (Mr. Saran), who fought and clawed his way into the Legislature here, I know was determined to become the Member for The Maples. That's good. That's certainly something to aspire to. But with his determination, he probably wonders if it was misplaced, if he shouldn't have maybe done something else at this particular time. I don't know. *[interjection]* The Member for Maples, I'm sure as he

considers his career path here in life, probably wonders: Was this the right move? Was this the right move to come to the Legislature here at this particular time with an arrogant and tired government? I know he probably thought, well, he wanted to learn from the Premier and learn from somebody who he respected, but the Premier's never here. How do you learn from somebody who's off in Mexico one day or off in the Riviera the next day? He could have probably learned more if he'd become a stewardess on an airplane and followed the Premier around from destination to destination—

An Honourable Member: You don't get out much? Sounds like a little jealousy there.

Mr. Goertzen: No, I don't say that. No, I'm not jealous. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) thinks that I'm jealous. I have no problem with—the Premier can be on the beach in Mexico or the Riviera. I'm sure he keeps good company when he's in Mexico, and that's great.

There are always opportunities for all members to travel, but at this particular time, at this time of the Legislature, when there's a gong show going on in the committees because the government can't organize. The government can't organize a two-person parade at this particular stage of their career. They can't get any of their legislative agenda through. They're all consumed—there might be wisdom on those BlackBerrys that you are transfixed to. Maybe you're getting text messages from the beach in Mexico. I hope that the Premier is telling you exactly how to get through this quagmire—

An Honourable Member: We're waiting for a message from you.

Mr. Goertzen: How to get through this quagmire, but I can tell you. The Premier needs to get off the beach, put down the *cerveza* [*beer*], wash the sand off his feet, board the plane, get wheels up, come back to Manitoba, and declare whatever he needs to declare at customs, come to the Legislature, exchange the pesos that he's picked up, Mr. Chairperson, and show some leadership. I mean, when the going gets tough, he got going. The first sign of trouble and he's calling WestJet. I mean, what kind of a leader—what kind of a leader is this? Do we have Nancy Allan running the show over there? Is Selinger trying to run the show over there? Who is leading this charge? Here we are, 1 o'clock. It might be the quiet leader from The Maples through silent leadership, through example, maybe through osmosis. Maybe through osmosis he's leading this

band. He's probably the quiet, sturdy type, and I'd love to hear from the Member for The Maples (Mr. Saran). I'm sure he could add something valiant to this debate.

But, you know, I think we should bring a motion forward that we all go to the airport and we all have our *macarenas* and we welcome the Premier (Mr. Doer) back. We go to gate E and when the plane touches down and his lordship comes off of the plane from Mexico—you know, going to negotiate a trade agreement when we already have a trade agreement with Mexico. We have no trade agreement with Ontario, no trade agreement with the west. He doesn't go west or east. He goes south to a place we already have a trade agreement, Mr. Chairperson.

I know that the time is running short. I'm sure he'll stop in the United States and try to negotiate a trade agreement with our closest ally, the United States, not recognizing that we've had the NAFTA agreement for many years. But, you know, there's a point here. There's an absolute point that you have to have a degree of leadership when times are tough. I ask all the members opposite. I'm sure that the Premier is coming back.. [*interjection*]

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Cullen: Are you done?

I certainly thank the Member for Steinbach for that wonderful dialogue. Obviously, the Premier must feel it's pretty big issues here in Manitoba because he hasn't gone to Saskatchewan. He hasn't gone to Alberta. He hasn't gone to Ontario. He hasn't gone to Wisconsin. He had to go way, way south and get to Mexico to get out of the heat here in the kitchen in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairman, we certainly appreciate the motion brought forward by the rookie from Brandon West, and we think it's a very good resolution here. Quite frankly, if the Premier had any will, he'd be here with us at 1 o'clock this evening. He'd be listening to what Manitobans have to say about the legislation he wants to bring forward here, Bill 37, Bill 38. Obviously, Manitobans have come to the table and they've said there are issues here with Bill 38.

Hopefully, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has taken the time to pay attention and listen to what Manitobans had to say. It's unfortunate, though, the government of the day didn't take the opportunity to ask any questions of the

presenters tonight. In fact, it took four and a half hours before the government actually put in a statement. It wasn't a question; it was a statement. So here we are; we're sitting in committee for four and a half hours. The government representatives at the table never asked one single question of presenters here tonight, Mr. Chairman.

Now, Mr. Chairman, clearly, it's imperative that the Premier be here to address some of the situations that Manitobans are bringing forward, and, really, that's exactly what this resolution is saying. You know, the other thing, when you look around this great room here, we see portraits of previous premiers here that actually were the premiers for Manitoba over years and years, many years back. Would those premiers, would they have taken the time to escape the heat in Manitoba when we're having major debates about legislation that's being proposed by government? I don't think so. I don't think those premiers would have done that. I think

they would have been here to fight the good fight, bring the good word on, and listen to what Manitobans were saying about legislation that they were proposing and how that was going to affect Manitobans throughout the year.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I think it's—you know, I look down here, the premier, Mr. Greenway, from a few years ago, came out from that great south-central part of Manitoba, and I know the Manitobans I talked to tonight out in Turtle Mountain are saying, you guys just keep up the fight. There's bad legislation this government is bringing forward, 37, 38.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, ladies and gentlemen. The time being 1 a.m., committee rise.

Members, please leave your bills for tomorrow's meeting. Thank you.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 1 a.m.

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