

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

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
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DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
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JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
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McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
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SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PRIVATE BILLS

**Bill 300—The Association of
Former Manitoba MLAs Act**

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable MLA for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 300, The Association of Former Manitoba MLAs Act; Loi sur l'Association des ex-députés de l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Martindale: I had the privilege of piloting this bill through the rocky shoals of caucus, and eventually this private member's bill came out safely on the other side.

Now, why would I start off with a metaphor like that? Well, because, as Eugene Forsey in *How Canadians Govern Themselves* says, governments in democracies are elected by the passengers to steer the ship of the nation. They are expected to hold it on course, to arrange for a prosperous voyage and to be prepared to be thrown overboard if they fail in either duty. This, in fact, reflects the original sense of the word government as its roots in both Greek and Latin mean to steer. We are the people who steer the ship of state.

The former captains have chosen to band together to establish the association of former MLAs as a non-profit corporation. Our former government is a parliamentary democracy about which I will say more later. This bill, The Association of Former Manitoba MLAs Act, establishes the association as a non-profit corporation. The bill provides for the operation of the association including details respecting its membership, objectives and powers.

First, a little history. The association was formed in 2001. All former MLAs are eligible for membership, which provides for potential membership in

excess of 100. The association describes itself as non-partisan with its executive from all three major Manitoba political parties. The Speaker is the honorary president of the association. A speakers bureau has been created, and they also support an essay contest and Youth Parliament.

The objectives of the association are to put the knowledge and experience of its members at the service of parliamentary democracy in Manitoba. I think that is the most important objective, to promote, really, parliamentary democracy. Another objective is to serve the public interest by providing non-partisan support for the parliamentary system of government in Manitoba. The non-partisan nature of the association is outlined in subsection 3(2): "The association must not (a) pursue its objects for any partisan political purpose; or (b) advocate a position in support of any partisan political purpose."

Other objectives are to foster a spirit of community among former MLAs and to foster good relations between former and current MLAs.

Winston Churchill said, and I quote: "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

We are familiar with two models of democracy, parliamentary democracy of which we are a part and the American or republic system of democracy.

The republic system is an intriguing system. As we know, there are checks and balances. As in any system, there are advantages and disadvantages. There is a separation of powers in the American system, a separation of the powers of the judiciary, the legislative branch and the executive branch. I think that checks and balances are one of the strengths of the American system, but one of the weaknesses would be that the executive branch is not accountable to the legislative branch. In fact, the president has a veto.

In a parliamentary democracy like ours, the executive branch and the parliamentary branch are combined. The result is that in a majority

government, the government can always get its agenda through. However, many people have observed that when the government has a majority, they are like a dictatorship. They can do anything they want. But like the American system, there are still checks and balances; for example, the fifth estate. The media are a check on the power of government if they are doing their job, if they are scrutinizing Parliament, if they are holding us to account.

Then there is the official opposition, the shadow Cabinet or critics, and it is their job to scrutinize, to criticize, to be critics, to critique, and we call them Her Majesty's loyal official opposition. It is a very important role. In fact, you could say that their job is dissent. Now, in the United States, we have a president, President Bush, who says, you are either for me or against me, suggesting there is no room for opposition. But in a parliamentary democracy, we have an official role for the official opposition, to be the dissent, to criticize the government, to hold the government to account. It is a very important role.

An Honourable Member: You can do that as a backbencher.

Mr. Martindale: Well, we will talk about that later.

Finally, minority rights are respected. For example, one person can stop the business of the House if it requires unanimous consent. The most famous example of that in Manitoba is Elijah Harper who blocked the Meech Lake Accord from being fast-tracked through the Manitoba Legislature by saying no to unanimous consent.

Now, the origins of our parliamentary democracy are located in the Palace of Westminster, and today I am wearing a lapel pin which is the Portcullis which is the symbol of Westminster. Just as Jerusalem is the holy city for Jews and Christians, the precinct of Westminster is also holy ground for those of us who are adherents of parliamentary democracy. As I was visiting Westminster last November, I felt I was walking on holy parliamentary precincts. The oldest part of the palace called Westminster Hall dates from 1097, so one can see and feel centuries of history.

I was present in the public gallery for Prime Minister's Questions, where the opposition and government members questioned Prime Minister Tony Blair. I was also present for a debate on the

government's terrorism bill and the vote on which his terrorism bill was defeated, his first major defeat on legislation, also a historic occasion.

So although there are major similarities between us and Westminster, there are also major differences, so that it is common for backbenchers to question the prime minister and even to vote against government bills and legislation.

* (10:10)

In conclusion, I think that the most important purpose of the Association of Former MLAs is to put the knowledge and experience of its members at the service of parliamentary democracy. We wish them well. We encourage them. We are glad that they are there. We look forward to joining them when we are either defeated or retire so that we can enjoy the camaraderie with each other and with them. We can take part, too, in promoting parliamentary democracy throughout Manitoba, probably at educational events in schools and other opportunities as they arise because it is important that we keep parliamentary democracy as a viable system, as a vigorous system.

You know, there are great debates about how we can improve it, whether that is by proportional representation or preferential ballots. We should take part in those debates. In fact, there is legislation before us that suggests our system of parliamentary democracy with a Senate and a House of Commons could be changed. This will be an important debate in this Legislature and across Canada. If the federal government introduces changes, members of this House will be a part of that debate. I hope that former members of this House will be a part of that debate.

We look forward to the speedy passage of this legislation and hearing from the association at the committee stage of this bill. It has been my pleasure to pilot this bill through the Manitoba Legislature. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I enjoyed listening to the comments for the Member for Burrows on this piece of legislation. I would have liked to have heard more about the rocky caucus meetings that the New Democrats have. That certainly piqued my interest, and perhaps I and the Member for Burrows could have more discussions about those rocky caucus meetings that they have. Maybe when we are both members of the former MLAs' association, then at that point we will be able to have those discussions.

This is sort of a club that—

An Honourable Member: Twenty more years.

Mr. Goertzen: Twenty more years. This is something of a club that some of us will go into more willingly perhaps than others. It is a little bit like death. You never know when it is coming, but eventually it is going to take us all, and it is a club that we will all be joining whether we willingly go or whether we go unwillingly.

But, certainly, I think that there are some merits to the bill and I appreciate the fact that it has been brought forward by the Member for Burrows. We always do not have, perhaps, the collegial relationship as MLAs when we are sitting here in the Legislature representing different political parties and different interests, but at some point, I think, when we put down the mantle of partisanship and the mantle of our political parties, when we join together like the member and I did in Washington on a recent exploration of policy in that city, we do put down those political mantles at times and work together.

So it is nice to know that our work here will continue on after we are no longer elected here. I think that the goals of the association in terms of education and arousing awareness are good. I notice there are a number of clauses in here. I see section 4(2), the restriction clause, it might be known as the Member-for-Inkster clause where a person is an MLA and then they are, I guess, unelected and then they become part of the association. Then, if they are elected again, they get thrown out of the association. I notice that there is even a clause for the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux). It is a form of resurrection in a way, I suppose, where you can get resurrected from being an MLA into the association, back to an MLA and then presumably back to the association.

So it seems like a well-thought-out bill. I know the Speaker will be the honorary chair. We are foisting more work upon the current Speaker and future Speakers to come, but I am sure that it will be work that they will do gladly, willingly and proudly. While I look forward to becoming a member of the former MLAs' association, I do not look forward to it too soon, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Any other speakers?

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I am not sure why. I always seem to follow the Member for Steinbach, but I will chart my own course on this bill. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to speak on this bill. I

believe it is fitting that the association of former Manitoba MLAs be incorporated by this bill.

Now the members of the association admitted that they could have, like other individuals, simply tromped down and applied for incorporation at the Companies branch. But, I think it is a reasonable thing to do and a suitable measure of respect for this Legislature to acknowledge the work of the former members of this Legislature, to pass this bill and then permit the statutory incorporation of the association.

Now, as both my friend from Burrows and my friend from Steinbach have pointed out, we all do have the opportunity to join the association, some of us perhaps sooner than later. Certainly I am in a camp that hopes I will not have the opportunity to join that club for a very long time but, of course, each of us relies on our real bosses, the public, to keep us out of that club.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I am very impressed with the objects of the association. First and foremost, the association has made it very clear from its establishment in 2001, through the guidance and direction of our Speaker, that it does not advocate any partisan political purposes. Indeed, the opportunities I have had to speak with members from all three political parties who belong to the association make it abundantly clear that they take their non-partisan role very seriously, at least when they are acting on association business. I further understand it is the usual practice of the association to send along two or more speakers to events to avoid even the appearance of partisan activity.

Now, the association uses the knowledge and uses the experience of its members at the service of parliamentary democracy within our province and elsewhere. Certainly they bring a wide range of experiences to the association. Their careers span from the rather brief two years that several members serve, for example from 1988 to 1990, up to the legislative careers of individuals such as Harry Enns, who served the people of Lakeside for more than three decades, and Len Evans, who served Brandon East for more than two decades.

But really, Mr. Speaker, I am most excited about the association's efforts to reach out to young people in Manitoba. As all members are aware, and indeed as was highlighted in the *Free Press* just today, the disinterest by a substantial number of young people in the political system is unhealthy for democracy. The opportunity for the association to come out and speak to young people in our schools and in the

community is truly an opportunity for young people to become involved in, become invested in our political system, hopefully to vote when they reach the age of majority and, most importantly, to buy in, to have opinions and have beliefs which they are prepared to share with others.

Now, I know certainly that most members of our Legislature make efforts to connect with young people. I know that some members in the Legislature, as I do, have a tremendous opportunity to go into schools. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the Winnipeg School Division is very good about allowing current MLAs to come in and speak, but there are some school boards which have more Byzantine and outdated rules that make it very difficult for MLAs to come in and speak. *[interjection]* I know the Member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer) agrees with that point.

I hope the association will be successful in getting into schools to spread a non-partisan message that, for whatever reason, certain school boards do not want to hear from current MLAs. I cannot remember ever having a current or former MLA come to visit my class when I was at school, but, of course, like the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), I did attend school in a division which has a great deal of difficulty with current MLAs coming in and speaking to students. But the Member for Fort Whyte and I seem to have survived the experience in any event.

Of course, in some divisions, the efforts to interest students in our democracy are left entirely to teachers, with varying degrees of success. Indeed, I have a vague and hazy memory of Miss Norwell's *[phonetic]* Grade 6 class at Strathmillan School, studying what would have been, in 1979, a federal election. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, perhaps members of this House will not be surprised to know that I was partisan even at that age and indeed led the NDP to victory, if not nationally, to the Grade 6 government. I also, as I expect would the Leader of the Official Opposition, have some fond memories of debating current events in Mr. Kouts' *[phonetic]* International Baccalaureate history class at Silver Heights Collegiate. Again, I was partisan, as was my friend, the Member for Fort Whyte, in our own way.

One of the other objects of the association is to foster good relations between current and former MLAs. It is certainly helpful to be able to call upon what I could politely call the institutional knowledge of those who came before us and not only those from

the same political party. I had the chance several weeks ago to speak with none other than Gerry McAlpine, who indeed defeated me in a 1990 provincial election in Sturgeon Creek. Now, Mr. McAlpine joined the ranks of former MLAs in 1999 after the boundary distribution when the current Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) defeated Mr. McAlpine and joined the Legislature. But Mr. McAlpine and I did not spend time getting into a partisan debate. In fact, we had a very pleasant conversation about the joys and the benefits of being involved in public service.

* (10:20)

I have been lucky, Mr. Speaker, for my first two years here to be the MLA for a former MLA and, indeed, a former Speaker of this Legislature, Myrna Phillips. Ms. Phillips just sold her home on Ashburn Street and will be moving out of Minto, unfortunately. But she has and I expect will continue to provide advice to both myself and the MLA for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer). I look back at some of the tremendous advancements that Myrna Phillips was involved in, advancements in child care, pay equity, family law and, indeed, opportunities for women from across the province to participate fully in our democratic system. I look today at the very capable women in this Legislature, and I believe that individuals such as Myrna Phillips and Muriel Smith certainly blazed a path and have much to share with us.

Now Al Mackling does not live in Minto, but his old St. James riding includes much of the area that I am privileged to represent in the Legislature. Indeed, some of Mr. Mackling's brothers live in the riding, and some of their children continue to live in the riding. I enjoy speaking with them about all kinds of issues, and I know that Al Mackling, again another former Attorney General, is one of the active members of the association.

Now, as we know, politicians and former politicians may be called many things by those in the public, but I want you to know I always call former Attorney General Gerald Mercier m'Lord, and that is because when he left the Legislature he went on to a very distinguished career and is now the Associate Chief Justice for the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench. Mr. Justice Mercier has been good enough to share with me some of his experiences in the Legislature, and he recalls, not so fondly, some memories of legislative sessions that stretched well

into the summer while his family enjoyed time at the cottage on Lake Winnipeg.

Indeed, I remember meeting Roland Penner, another former Attorney General, at the Toronto airport when I was just about to start law school, and we spoke about what the study of law would be all about. He just returned from a series of negotiations at a place in Québec called Meech Lake, and little did I know at that time that the debate over Meech Lake would spark a very intense debate on constitutional reform and lead, of course, to some of the most compelling moments in Manitoba's legislative history. Who can forget, of course, Elijah Harper standing up with his eagle feather in hand and taking a stand which he believed was the right thing to do?

Now, like Mr. Justice Mercier, Mr. Penner also enjoys family time at the cottage, although maybe it is appropriate that he spends his time on the other side of the lake from Mr. Justice Mercier because certainly they were political opposites, although both involved now as members of the association.

Now, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, certainly the point is that former members of this Legislature have a tremendous opportunity to share their experiences with our current legislators and, most importantly, I think the general public and our youth. I am hoping that the passing of this bill will raise the awareness, raise the status of the work that former MLAs do in our community. If it results in a more engaged public, if it results in even some young people becoming more involved and voting, I think that all the efforts of the former MLAs with the association will have been worthwhile.

So it is my hope that this House will send this bill on to committee, we will be able to pass this bill by the end of the legislative session and truly show the respect that former members of this very important institution deserve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, as a former member of this particular association—and I hope that it will be a number of years before I get my membership back—I must say that I do admire and have a tremendous amount of respect for former MLAs. I think that MLAs for a number of wonderful reasons decide to get involved in public life at the beginning when they make the decision to run for MLA and contribute. Each and every one of them contribute in whatever ways that they can to make our province a better province at the time. It does not really matter the length of time one serves inside the Chamber, I believe. MLAs are afforded the

opportunity to express themselves whether they are in government or whether they are in opposition.

I listened intently to when the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) was talking about, you know, Westminster and parliamentary tradition and so forth. I truly do believe that, whether you are in government, a minister, a backbencher, you are in opposition, in an official opposition party or a non-recognized opposition party, we all have the ability to be able to contribute in a very positive way, and MLAs from the past, from this Legislature have contributed in many different ways. I have witnessed private members' bills passing to ideas that were talked amongst the back benches which, ultimately, were incorporated into the budget of the day. I have seen governments reverse decisions based on information that is provided from MLAs of all political stripes, whether they happen to be sitting in the government benches or not, Mr. Speaker.

We have all seen and experienced discussions with former MLAs, and some of the things that they are doing nowadays. I believe and I think the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan) made reference to the issue of respect. This is, indeed, a respectful bill, Mr. Speaker, that reflects on what many of those MLAs want to do today, and that is to go out and promote and encourage and educate, all these wonderful things that I believe are healthy for the institution that we have here in the province of Manitoba, something which we should all be proud of.

I admire the objectives of being non-partisan or apolitical, Mr. Speaker, in the way in which they deal with the affairs of the association. I know that they have active members from all political parties that have been elected in the past from this Legislature. I applaud them on that.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you and the Clerk's office have assisted and facilitated to a certain degree in making sure that notices, information is provided, that there is a place or an office in which the former MLAs can go to and can rely on support. I applaud you on taking the initiative and supporting this, the former MLA association. I think that that, in itself, provides a good vehicle for the longevity, the future longevity of this association. As we know, every time there is an election there is always some sort of a shifting of MLAs. I believe the average lifespan of an MLA in the province of Manitoba is not much more than seven years. So we know that this is going to be an opportunity for even the MLAs that are here

today to be able to continue to talk about the benefits of our system well into the future.

I know there have been challenges that have already been pointed out in terms of education, going into some of our school systems. I can appreciate the sensitivity that principals and school divisions have in terms of not wanting to see politics, to a certain degree, being directed at the student population in a very partisan way. But, Mr. Speaker, I think that as former MLAs, as a group that is apolitical, that that might be the opportunity for them to be able to go into our educational facilities and elsewhere, because let us not just limit it to schools. I think there are areas such as rotaries, clubs, all sorts of non-profit groups that are out there where we can talk or see members of this association educate and inform. The more people have a better understanding of our system, the healthier it will be.

You know, we have a system that is evolving. The Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) was talking to me about how Question Period works in England, Mr. Speaker, quite different than the Question Period that works here in Canada. I suspect that there are pros and cons. I know that there are many issues that we would like to see addressed in an apolitical way.

You know, we have legislation, The Elections Act, a bill that is before us, Mr. Speaker, that some might argue it would have been better if it was four bills as opposed to one bill. But, there are areas in which we need to put the party politics to the side and allow for individuals that have a passion for the issues to be able to express themselves, whether it is even at times inside this Legislature with current MLAs, or it is with the past MLAs.

* (10:30)

I think that our foundations of democracy and voting and the way in which we have independent offices, such as Elections Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, you know, a part of that legislation that we are passing with Elections Manitoba, refers to again the issue of promotion, allowing Elections Manitoba to get in, and I see that there are some common threads there, and we do recognize that, not only from past MLAs but current MLAs, and I see Bill 300 as a bill that has some very good potential for the province of Manitoba in terms of education, much in the way in which I see Elections Manitoba has a very important role. In fact, I would ultimately argue on the apolitical side of things that you cannot even compete with Elections Manitoba because they do indeed do a service to all Manitobans in the way in

which they carry out the business of the province regarding elections.

But, Mr. Speaker, I did not want to speak at great length on this bill. In fact, I was not aware that it was going to be before us this morning, but I did want to say those few words and to look forward to seeing elections in the future, and we will see no doubt some additions to that club. It was interesting to see the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) be the individual who kind of guided it through the NDP caucus. It sounded like it might have been a little rowdy when he did it, but he was able to bring it here, and I can indicate that we support the bill, would like to see it go to committee, and we look forward to that, and who knows when the Member for Burrows might be looking at becoming a member of this association. So I think we will try to pass the bill just in case the member is thinking sooner as opposed to later. Thank you.

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I would like to put some of my thoughts in support of this particular bill. I understand that this bill is, with an objective to put the knowledge and experience of its members, former MLAs at the service of parliamentary democracy in Manitoba, to serve the public interest by providing non-partisan support for the parliamentary system of government in Manitoba. The known parties and nature of the association is outlined in section 3(2) which says that the association must not (a) pursue its objective for any partisan political purpose, or (b) advocate a petition in support of any partisan political purpose.

One of the things that I understand will benefit from this particular association, Mr. Speaker, is also a speakers bureau that had been created in support and an essay contest and Youth Parliament. A youth parliament is very, very important as far as we have concern to see how we train our future political leaders who will be the lawmakers of this society in future and the whole system of their knowledge shared between the parliamentarians who have experience is something that is worthwhile, and I congratulate the Member for Burrows to start and initiate this particular act.

I am particularly very, very interested in looking at the act which also says it does not call for any public funding, and there is no stated intention to use the association to pursue any additional benefits for the members or otherwise attract public funds. Parliamentary democracy, Mr. Speaker, is very important for the world today and particularly today

when the globe is coming together we are thinking, and the societies that we are exchanging in terms of their culture, immigration and citizenship. So it is something that, if these experienced MLAs share their knowledge with us, it will be very beneficial for new MLAs and the existing MLAs to learn from them, their experience and their views and values.

I think, as I understand the democracy which is the challenge of the world today, and as Winston Churchill said, democracy is not the best part of the government but there is nothing better than that, that we can have. So I think that parliamentary democracy versus just the general democracy, the better democracy, the difference is that here we are opposed to direct democracy for the simple reason that the parliamentary democracy is a much better system where people debate. They talk, their thoughts come and exchange, and then we make laws based on the consciences and the policies of the majority of the government.

I would like to give examples of the new emerging world that is now embracing parliamentary democracy and are doing very well. India is one example. With 17 official languages, five major religions and a population which is huge compared to the size of the land, that democracy has demonstrated that. We have a Roman Catholic born in Italy, a woman who is the head of the ruling party, a Muslim president, a Sikh prime minister, and that country is prospering economically as to be heading towards perhaps No. 2 in a few years and maybe the No. 1 open democracy in the world on economic benefits.

So one sees how democracy helps to build a better society and, is again, the parts of all the people, elected representatives, intellectuals and the scholars getting together and discussing about how to build, how to make things work. I think the experience of these elected officials, who have worked in Manitoba, would be of a great advantage to us. I think that the world needs democracy, one needs to have parliamentary democracy being fostered. We need to support this kind of act that will encourage those elected officials to come and share their views and experiences with us. I think I, in particular, have the honour to be at one of the preliminary meetings where all these ex-MLAs are talking about how they can come and share their own concerns, their own views, their own policies in a non-partisan way from all parties and give us their ideas of how to make improvements here.

I am particularly thankful to, I do have some relationships with the previous MLAs that I go to them, talk to them, get their guidance. Muriel Smith is one; Len Evans lives in my constituency; Gerard Lecuyer was also the Radisson MLA and I consult with him; Wilson Parasiuk, from time to time, I come across him. Jerry Storie, Clif Evans, including Mr. Filmon, Mr. Pawley and Mr. Schreyer, these are the people whom I have encountered from time to time on different occasions and meetings. They do share their own experience and knowledge, and I personally have benefited with their experience and their own points of view on particular issues that may be not very easy to digest and do here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think these are some of the points I wanted to make to support this particular bill. I think that to promote democracy and to promote freedom of our society, we need the continuity of all these experienced MLAs. Most of us here, in years ahead, will be ex-MLAs and our experience will benefit the new generation. Youth Parliament is one of the tools, so I think that this kind of act is good for our democracy, our Parliament, our assemblies and for future assemblies. So I fully support this bill and I thank the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) for bringing it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Rossmere): I would like to put a few words on the record concerning this bill. As an MLA, I do realize that some day I might be a former MLA. When that happens, I plan to really get involved with organizations. I want to say this is a very good bill, and I want to thank the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale). It is a very detailed bill and it is well thought out.

*(10:40)

I just want to point out to the House here, I sponsored a fundraising breakfast in Rossmere this spring, and former MLAs from three different parties attended, and I appreciate that. The idea that we do not get along and so forth is not always true. I think we do get along very well. In fact, this morning I just got a call from a former MLA not from my party, and he asked me about this bill. [*interjection*] I will inform you later.

I appreciate this is a non-partisan bill. It reaches out to the schools, and former MLAs can talk to our youth about democracy and how government works. By the way, as a former history teacher, a Canadian history teacher of many years, I brought students here many times, had many trips to the Legislature,

and the students would be in awe when they would see this beautiful building. I brought them to the gallery many times to see the monuments and so forth around this Legislature. So the point I want to make is that youth is very interested in democracy, very interested in government if they are introduced to democracy.

I want to point out I had a former student, Marianne Cerilli, who was my student at River East Collegiate, and I want to say that I hope that there are more of my former students who come to this Legislature and I am sure more will.

Here are a few objectives of this organization. For instance, it talks about foster a good spirit, a spirit of community among former MLAs, to foster good relations between former and current MLAs. I would like to add my own which is to reach out and improve the image of politicians where former politicians can show leadership as they have done when they were an MLA.

Mr. Speaker, really this organization could improve the image of politicians. They could see us as serving the public good. For instance, just this last 24 hours I got many phone calls like many other MLAs did. I got calls on the Provincial Nominee Program, about installing a traffic light, about getting a tree removed, about getting into a personal care home, about attending a community fundraiser, attending a seniors centre. So we are always serving. That is one part the public does not see, the servant part.

Mr. Speaker, the public only sees Question Period, and they form their views about MLAs on what they see on TV at supertime. Also they form their views on what they read in the newspapers. This organization could continue some of the good public service that MLAs were doing for years. I must point out that many MLAs were public servants long before they were elected. They were serving people, but somehow this does not get out into the public. They get the wrong image of politicians. Politicians really give of themselves and they really do serve the public. So I would suggest that it improves the image of all politicians.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say a few things about the history of this association. It formed in 2001 and all former MLAs are eligible for membership, which provides for a large number of people who can be used for the speakers bureau. It describes itself as non-partisan with an executive from all three major political parties.

May I stop for a minute, digress? As I am a teacher, I would get politicians into my classroom to speak, and I was always leery about getting people to speak in my classroom that were left. So I would always invite others, from other parties, the right-wing parties because I knew I would get no flak. But I was very careful on that always. Now, these—*[interjection]* You distract me here. Former MLAs would be seen as non-partisan when they come in your classroom, more so. They could enter the classroom and the teacher would not have to be afraid of some problem later on. *[interjection]*

Another good point is the Speaker is the honorary president of the association. In our Canadian democratic system, the Speaker is neutral and very much respected. That would really add a lot of respect to this organization.

Also, a speakers bureau has been created that supports an essay contest and Youth Parliament. When the time comes where I might be a former MLA, I would like to do a fundraiser for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and former MLAs do have a lot of clout. They have a lot of leadership skills. In fact, the foodgrains bank, as I was at Brandon for the Brandon winter fair, I went through there and they said why do you not start a fundraiser for the foodgrains bank. I have passed this on to other MLAs, and they said get going on it. I think that would be a very good thing for all MLAs and all former MLAs, and I am sure it would be a great success. We could take on bigger issues than right now. But let us wait awhile; this organization will grow, and people get sort of accustomed and accept it. But I think it has tremendous potential for public good.

As a former teacher here, I just thought I had to get up, a former Canadian history teacher. I had to get up and speak on this issue because my whole life has been in the classroom where I promoted democracy. I promoted civics, promoted how government works. I do think this can be used for this whole matter of improving the image of politicians and reaching out to young people, getting young people involved. Young people are interested in politics. They are interested in democracy. They are interested in government. They are interested in this Legislature. That has been my experience.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Conrad Santos (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in this debate. I would like to start by saying that there are two members of this

House that I have seen who have passed through what they call political resuscitation. *[interjection]* You see, I saw the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and I saw the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg). I am forgetting about myself.

An Honourable Member: Well, you were resurrected, too.

Mr. Santos: No. I am still here.

There is a secret to what you call serving others; it is simply forget yourself. Because if you always focus everything to yourself, then you fall into the human failure, the human element of pride and you try to get the glory from your Maker to yourself.

The Jesuits had a motto: *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

An Honourable Member: What does that mean?

* (10:50)

Mr. Santos: It means: To the greater glory of God. Whatever we do in life, we have to bear in mind that we are just creatures of the Maker of the universe and everything that is in it. He established all hierarchy, all functioning, not only in this Earth but wherever it may be. Therefore, all the glory belongs to him. We do not take it up to ourselves. And the only way you can do that is to forget your own interests.

That is why there was a great philosopher called Plato. He was all the time aware of political manoeuvrings. He knew in his time and his age that once he participated actively, he will die. That was the age of the Greek city states.

And you all serve also even in our present society who are the great ones? They are the ones who died: Kennedy—

An Honourable Member: Trudeau.

Mr. Santos: Trudeau—oh yeah, Trudeau was not assassinated.

An Honourable Member: Martin Luther King.

Mr. Santos: Martin Luther King.

An Honourable Member: Mahatma Gandhi.

Mr. Santos: Mahatma Gandhi.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Santos: Because—*[interjection]*

Oh well, I do not want to—I only speak of what I know.

Therefore, if you are only seeking your own glory, you know that it is temporary and the more you seek it, you know you will fall down. It is written: For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know nothing anymore, and they have no more reward for the memory of them is forgotten. Also, their love, their hatred, their envy have now perished. Never more will they have any share anymore in anything that is done under the sun. That is the situation of the dead.

So it is written, either you live in the land of the living, the quick, or you are there in the land of the dead. The question is: Is there such really a division between the two arenas of human life? Can the dead communicate with the living? I do not know. It is a matter of belief.

But in life, we have to follow certain rules that transcend the human laws. These are the rules laid down according to our belief, according to our knowledge, according to whatever we are endowed with. We have to act accordingly.

Question: Are we just instruments of some powers beyond us? Or are we acting on our own? Do we determine our own destiny? To a certain extent, maybe, but not to the fullest extent. Sometimes we say, oh—he said, I cannot take this one anymore. We have every role in this life. What role it is sometimes it is not to our liking. Sometimes we are drawn into it by the circumstances that happen around us, and so, in that sense, we are performing certain functions in our social life, in our individual life, in our family life, that we have no way of resisting.

So the less we forget of ourselves, the more we can serve others better. The more we look after our own self-interest, by definition, there will be less for others, and when we struggle in this peaceful arena, either in the violent side or on the peaceful, democratic side, there are always struggles. The struggle is sometimes silent and sometimes unspeakable and sometimes you are not supposed to tell.

We should remember also that we are weak. We have two components, the spirit within us and the flesh outside of us, and the two are always at war with each other. So it is said the spirit is willing to do good but the flesh is weak.

Notice that I am always quoting from the good book of my faith because without your faith, you are nothing. But, we do not have to hold to anger

because somebody stab us in the back. *[interjection]*
No.

Let me give you a quote from Buddha. Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it to someone else. You are the one who gets burned. I repeat that. Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it to someone else. You are the one who gets burned.

An Honourable Member: Do not harbour anger.

Mr. Santos: Do not harbour anger. If you harbour it in your heart, it will motivate your every action and you know it does not lead to good things. I have seen that. When your wife is angry at you, she speaks all the things that she can speak in foul language, she will throw the plate on you, hit you and there you go. Because of anger.

It is written, see not, you can be angry, but do not take it inside. Do not keep it. It will not lead to good stuff. *[interjection]* Yes, and in our aspirations, there is one bit of wisdom I like to say, expect nothing and you will not be disappointed. *[interjection]* Expect nothing and you will not get disappointed. We always call one another and in jest sometimes, we talk against each other here, but these are all enjoyable things if we know what we are doing.

Then, another bit of wisdom. The bill is about political life. The bill is about how you can be effective without being partisan.

An Honourable Member: That is relevant.

Mr. Santos: That is relevant and I am telling you how it can be done. There are two reasons why some people do not mind their own business. What is the first reason you think? They have no business. Second reason? They do not mind it because they may not have the mind. I am not saying anything against anybody, I am quoting it from someone.

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

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I sense that there is a willingness to move this bill. Unfortunately, the NDP were filibustering it, but I would ask leave if there is a willingness to extend private members' business until noon. We could then deal with Bill 207 and we

could move this bill on now if the government is willing because they wanted to filibuster this bill.

Mr. Speaker: Is there will of the House to extend private members' business to deal with private bills? Is there agreement to continue on with bills until twelve o'clock because—

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? Is there agreement?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, there is no agreement.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is eleven o'clock. When this matter is again before the House the debate will remain open.

The time being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions.

RESOLUTION

Res. 7—Hometown Manitoba

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): I move, seconded by the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar):

WHEREAS Hometown Manitoba Program is an initiative launched in the spring of 2003 as part of the Rural Economic Development Initiative that provides financial support for rural and northern community enhancement projects; and

WHEREAS Hometown Manitoba is a partnership involving the province, smaller communities, non-profit organizations and businesses wanting to improve the physical appearance of their communities; and

WHEREAS the program supports community-driven projects that advance community identities, build community pride and citizen involvement, and enhance the appearance and use of community gathering places and buildings in the 'main street' area of rural and northern communities; and

WHEREAS the physical enhancement of community main streets can encourage economic and social sustainability that build community pride and citizen involvement while promoting the use of local products, services and talents; and

WHEREAS in its first year Hometown Manitoba supported 176 upgrading and beautification projects worth more than \$300,000, and over the next year more than 190 community-improvement projects will share over \$350,000 in provincial funding; and

WHEREAS combined contributions in the first two years of this program are approximately \$2.5-million worth of structural and beautification improvements throughout the province; and

WHEREAS ongoing community pride and increased tourism are added benefits of this program.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba congratulate the communities and volunteers for their involvement and efforts in building stronger communities and increasing community pride; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider continuing to invest in rural and northern communities through such initiatives as the Hometown Manitoba program.

Motion presented.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to rise in this august Chamber once again to put my thoughts on the record. This is a very worthwhile resolution, I would hope we all agree, and I hope for a speedy passage and the co-operation of members opposite in this regard.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I do recall the spirit of co-operation, I believe it was a year or so ago, the last time I stood to introduce a private member's resolution on the federal firearms registration act and at that time had the co-operation from members opposite, and we did indeed pass that resolution on.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So I would hope that today I would see similar co-operation from all of my colleagues in the House here.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I want to begin by praising the provincial government and, of course, the Member for Swan River, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk) for initiating this very worthwhile project, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have a need in all of Manitoba but in rural and northern Manitoba, in particular, to focus on our

communities to ensure that we keep the community spirit alive, keep people working forward building our communities, enhancing them, beautifying them, so that they are attractive desirable places to live, so that we can continue to have a strong and vibrant economy across all levels from urban to rural to our northern communities as well.

Just a concept of the home town, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think is worthy of discussion in itself. We all have a place of origin. We all think back with nostalgia to where we came from. I think to structure a program with this concept in mind is truly visionary, and, as I said, I hope that all members think likewise. I think back to my home town, the community of Poplarfield, where I spent the first 12 years of my life. Those thoughts are never far from me and—

An Honourable Member: So you moved out five years ago.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Pardon me.

An Honourable Member: You moved out five years ago?

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Well, the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) wishes to chirp and I hope he stands up and talks about his home town, but I will enlighten him since he wants to put snide comments on the record here.

I moved out of my home town back in 1971, I believe it was, after living there the first 12 years of my life, and about four years ago I returned to my home town of Poplarfield. I am now back in the community where I started. I think that is noteworthy. Although we get a lot of flack and criticism from members opposite about people running off to Alberta, never to be seen again, Manitoba is an exception I think in that case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because Manitobans do come back. And I am an example of that as well. I spent 18 years in Alberta working in the oil fields, and I also lived in Ontario for five years, in Ottawa going to university. So I have seen this country east and west, and I came to the conclusion at the end of roughly 25 years of travel that home is indeed best and did return to my home community. So I speak with conviction on this resolution. *[interjection]*

They continue to chirp, but I think my argument is made in that sense and the fact that I live in Poplarfield today is the proof of that.

Now this program is a good complement to other programs that do exist, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of course, the Community Places program, long in place in our province, is well recognized, well subscribed to, and this program will work in conjunction with that program to further enhance our communities in rural and northern Manitoba. I think of the community of Dallas-Red Rose as a prime example of that. It was just a year or so ago that they received a major capital grant through the Community Places program to enhance their hall. They had to put a new floor into the building, and this year they received a grant to put a canopy onto that building. So those two programs are dovetailing together quite well.

The program is divided into two separate components: the Hometown Meeting Places which allows for cost sharing up to a maximum of \$5,000, one third of the cost for rural projects and half of the cost to be covered for northern projects, recognizing the need for enhanced delivery in our northern communities, something that members opposite were totally lacking in the 10 years that they were in office; and the other component, of course, Hometown Main Streets Enhancements, half the cost up to a maximum of \$1,000 is covered. This is an especially good component of the program in my opinion, because not only does it work with non-profit organizations, but it also works with co-operatives and works with small business as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Members opposite wrongly criticize our government for not being business friendly at times, and I think this program is a prime example of exactly the opposite. It proves that our government has small business in mind, and this particular aspect of the program is proof of that.

*(11:10)

A number of my communities have taken advantage of this, but I think in particular to the community of Riverton, especially from the small business component, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this community has capitalized on this program quite well. There are probably over a dozen businesses over the last couple of years that have taken advantage of this particular aspect of the program, and I would encourage all communities to follow Riverton's example because there is money left in the program. We have budgeted up to half a million dollars a year for cost-sharing with our various different communities. I believe this year we achieved 168 projects which leveraged slightly over \$312,000, so there is room yet out there for further

communities to co-operate. In 2005, we had 190 projects in excess of \$350,000 leveraged and, of course, in the beginning year, 2004, 175 projects leveraging over \$300,000 from the provincial government.

But more importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this also brings money from the community into play. Not only that, it creates opportunities for other local businesses associated with the program to play a role and also for individuals themselves to get involved and make some money at the local level.

I was in Killarney just last week. As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) I went out there and announced \$29,000 in grants that were given to the Pembina Valley region, and that is a part of the program as well. Our objective is to spread this money out equally across the province. We are not catering to our constituencies like members opposite did when they were in office using the Community Places program. We are being fair and equal, and my trip to Killarney last week was a good example of that, and how members opposite can dispute that, I am not sure.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would in conclusion, as I said, like to encourage all rural and northern Manitoba communities to take a look at this program, to make applications, to move forward in improving the main streets of their communities, the faces of their communities and I would also encourage all members of the House to join me and pass this resolution. Thank you.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It gives me pleasure to stand up and put a few words on record in regard to the resolution brought forth by the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) in regard to Hometown Manitoba. Initial perusal of the resolution sounds very nice; it is about improving the physical appearance. It was launched in 2003, involves the community, the volunteers, the main street projects, citizen involvement. A lot of those things, you know, it is very hard to criticize things that involve people, because people are one of the greatest assets we have, and volunteers have always played a very, very strong component of everything that happens throughout all of Manitoba, whether it is a small town, home town or city of Winnipeg or anything. We always rely a lot on all our volunteers. And the government is saying that they want to congratulate them, and I agree. We should be congratulating the

volunteers in the communities that come forth to look after their areas and improve their areas and try to make it better for not only their community, but for people that live in the area.

The problem, though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this government in a sense has, as much as they like to bring forth these resolutions about recognizing Hometown Manitoba and the rural area, in essence, their record is not very good. Their record is not very good in dealing with rural Manitoba.

In fact, one of the first things that they failed to even mention a lot of times is the dismantling, actually, of the department of rural development, a department that was there primarily for the development of the rural market, whether it was economic development or social development. There was a dedicated department that looked towards rural Manitoba to try to build up the economic base, the recreational base, the base of people staying and working and living in the rural area. Since this government has taken office, unfortunately, Statistics Canada has shown that over 22,000 people have moved out of the rural area of Manitoba and that a lot of the economy that we associate with rural Manitoba, the various agricultural components, the beef industry, some of the other industries, from livestock, are all suffering under this government's lack of direction and mismanagement of a lot of the areas that they feel need some attention.

As much as the resolution is talking about the beautification of main streets, the sprucing up of buildings, the adding of visual effects, visual enhancements in towns, unfortunately, if the people are not there, it is money and it is efforts that at a lot of times are not that well recognized or appreciated because of the fact that the rural economy in Manitoba is suffering a fair amount of pain right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We saw that earlier this year with some of the water problems in Manitoba and eastern Manitoba. We saw the problems closer to home. When I say home I mean Winnipeg. We saw south of Winnipeg with the flooding on the Red River Valley and a lot of the areas in that area, in those communities, and the amount of cleanup and the amount of effort that has to be put to bring those things back into perspective. A lot of areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they may not even get a crop in, from what I understand, in some of the reports that the department is bringing out and the reports in the newspaper and the news media about the unfortunate things that are

happening in some of the areas because of the conditions.

A lot of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, goes back to management, management of conservation districts, management of water, management of drainage, things that need time to develop and then that makes the community more vibrant, more self-sustaining and an economic entity for business to foster. Once there is a building of businesses in certain areas, and things like that, it attracts people. We have seen the tremendous growth in the Winkler-Morden area because of the economic activity there and the fact that people—

An Honourable Member: In spite.

Mr. Reimer: In spite of this government, as it has been pointed out to me.

Because of the fact that there is a willingness to intermingle with different businesses in locating to those areas, that is what you call home town Manitoba. That is where you get the sense of wanting to be part of that community, part of that participation. The fact that these businesses and the entrepreneurs can make things happen in the area, is something that is very recognizable in certain areas.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a lot of these things are where efforts should be concentrated by this government. The idea of having the fund that has been allocated, as was mentioned, I believe there was over \$2.5 million that has been spent in the various beautification projects, if you want to call it, for the paint and the upgrade and flower pots and things like that in various areas. Those are all well and good. But those are part of a solution, possibly, to a bigger problem, which is the fact that the economic climate in rural Manitoba is suffering quite a bit right now.

* (11:20)

So we have the unfortunate situation where you have small towns that are looking at empty buildings, people moving out, industry moving out. Some of the long-established dealerships are suffering in the areas. Those are all things that are hurting rural Manitoba to a fair extent, quite an extent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In essence, because of the close proximity of the urban areas that are in Manitoba, they too will suffer because of the downturn in the rural economy. So, it is something that we have to be very, very aware of and the funding that is allocated in this Hometown funding goes towards areas for what they have mentioned in community enhancement projects. A lot of it is directed towards areas

that are trying to help themselves, but at the same time, they realize that there are a lot of areas that have to be looked at in a more serious area towards building an economy that is sustainable and that people can identify with.

We have heard of the devastation of the BSE crisis in the rural area and the amount of unfortunate areas and how this has affected the farming industry and the cattle industry. Just recently, the government introduced a checkoff system into the industry. The industry is already suffering dramatically because of the loss of market and now they have put an added burden, it is a tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a tax on the producer so that he can get his animal to market.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are some of the things that I think have to be brought to the attention of people who are involved with the rural market, and it is suffering. So with those few words, I would suggest that a lot of my other colleagues were wanting to say a few words.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it really does give me pleasure to say a few words about Hometown Manitoba. I listened to the member who just spoke, and I cannot believe that a member from the city of Winnipeg could paint such a doom and gloom picture about rural Manitoba. A program such as Hometown helps people build pride in their communities, enhance their communities.

The Member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer) chooses to run down people in rural Manitoba and discourage them from taking pride in their communities. I cannot believe the member opposite could say such negative things about rural Manitoba. You know, I would like to remind him that there are rural Manitobans who have lived there all their lives, some who have come back to rural Manitoba, and they have extreme pride in their communities. They are prepared to make investments and this program allows them to move forward on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to just talk about a few communities that the member might be familiar with. I was at Rural Forum and the representative from Minnedosa was there. He talked about how important this program was because in Minnedosa, by using this money, they have attracted engineers from the University of Manitoba, architects, and are designing, landscaping the community. Investment is coming into that community. The member opposite will not talk about the positives there.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it made the news about how the community of Minnedosa—*[interjection]* I would remind the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) that she will get her chance soon enough to speak, if she would be kind enough to listen rather than blabbing her mouth off now. So the community of Minnedosa has taken advantage of this program, and they are very proud of what they have done.

The community of Riverton has really taken advantage of this program and this is what communities are doing. They are bringing businesses and social groups together and building pride in their community. I was in Ste. Rose. I saw the work they made on Main Street in Ste. Rose. Yes, there was some government money, but the community, the businesses, invested and they could create a critical mass that has made a difference. It has made a difference in Ste. Rose. It has made a difference in Riverton.

I want to share with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) talked about Dallas. At Rural Forum, there was a representative from Dallas there, and hers was not one of the communities that we announced, but she came up to me and asked whether Dallas was going to qualify for funding. I checked the list and I told her that Dallas would be getting funding, and this woman was actually in tears. She was so happy that they were getting some money because it is a very small community. It is hard for them to raise money, and that is what we recognize here, that in combination with Community Places and other programs, this gives the little communities the critical mass that they need to then build their communities, build some pride into it so that when visitors come, they can be very proud of their community. The members opposite may not think that tourism is a very important industry, but to these small communities, tourism is a very important industry. Having people come to visit is just a very important part of it, and people, no matter how small their community is, have pride in where they live and what they can do.

I would urge the member to visit some of these small communities and see what pride they have and what they have done with these amounts of money that government puts in through Hometown and the enhancements that they are able to make, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are significant, but the member opposite does not obviously realize how much pride rural people have in their communities, and he just

thinks that it is only in the city that you can have positive things happen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite talked about the dismantling of the department of rural development. However, he does not go further to talk about how we have reorganized the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives and the number of people who have been hired as economic development officers to encourage economic development in those communities. There are many communities that are looking at how they can have some further economic development, how they can have some growth, and having one or two jobs created in a rural community is very significant.

That is why programs like REDI are also very important, because they complement these programs that we are talking about today, the programs such as Hometown Meeting Places and Hometown Main Streets. But programs like REDI are available to help communities that want to look at feasibility studies. There are programs like Rural Entrepreneur Assistance, Community Works Loan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those are other programs that are in place. So the member can say what he wants, that this government has not looked at rural economic development. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I also want to say that it is a difficult time in rural Manitoba with the high input costs that farmers are paying and the low commodities that they are receiving because of world prices, but the member also said there was no economic growth in rural Manitoba. I would invite him to look at the agriculture stats and look at how the pork industry has grown in this province, how the beef industry has grown in this province. It is those value-added opportunities that people are taking advantage of that are really contributing to the economy of rural Manitoba. We have to move beyond growing grain and oilseeds to export to other markets for them to add value to. Moving into pork and beef is value-added, and we have to move to the next level of value-added, of further processing.

I would urge the members opposite to quit taking opposite positions. On the one hand, they say they want slaughter capacity increased; in the next breath, they are saying, we have too much slaughter capacity already. There is slaughter capacity that is only operating at 70 percent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder on whose behalf they are speaking, because they are certainly not speaking on behalf of the producers if they are worried about the slaughter

capacity in Alberta being empty and not working for slaughter capacity in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that we talked about the difficulties that are taking place in the Red River Valley. Certainly those are very challenging times, and I had the opportunity to visit in that area over the weekend. But I have to say, with the fifth-greatest flood that we have had in this province, had we not made the investment in the floodway, that flooding would have been a lot more serious.

When the members opposite talk about drainage, I would encourage them to look at their years when they cut back budgets on drainage, and now they say the drainage is a problem. Well, it is just like training doctors and training nurses. You shut them down. It takes a little while to get them up. The same thing happens with drainage, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (11:30)

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A point of order is being raised. The honourable Member for Inkster, state your point of order, please.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a question in terms of order in regard to quorum. If there are only three ministers inside the Chamber, does that have an impact on quorum?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. On the same point of order.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): I know the Member for Inkster raises this point and then you will rule. But I do think he raises an important point because at the same that this government and this minister says that she talks about the importance of rural Manitoba, she cannot convince more than a handful of her Cabinet colleagues to come and listen.

The Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) wants us to pass this resolution when the minister herself cannot get anybody to come and listen to the resolution from her own Cabinet. I say shame on her—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There is already a ruling. There is no point of order. How can you speak on a point of order that does not exist?

An Honourable Member: He did not rule.

An Honourable Member: Yes, he did.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We have to have some order in the House.

The honourable minister, to continue.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you very much. I would encourage the member opposite, if he wants to be House leader for his party that they learn the rules as well because, obviously, he does not know the rules of this Legislature. I would encourage him to do a little homework in that area, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with regard to the program, I would encourage members to look at the record. This resolution is asking to give credit to the communities and volunteers who have given up their time, who have raised far more money in their community than has been contributed by the program. But the program works as a catalyst to get people going and it builds pride in their communities.

In many parts of rural Manitoba this program is working. I would ask the members opposite, put their politics aside and give some recognition to the many volunteers and many community members who give of their time and build pride in their communities. Rather than being critical, let us give some pride. Let us recognize that this program also works for northern Manitoba in areas where it is very difficult for them to raise the funds. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I, too, wish to put a few comments on the record regarding this resolution that has been brought forward. It is interesting, and actually I am sort of glad that I can speak after the Minister of Agriculture has made her few comments.

It was at the start of her address where she indicated that the Member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer) had no idea what he was talking about. Then the minister went on to say, well, there really was no problem in rural Manitoba. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would submit to you that either she has no idea what is taking place out there or, in fact, she simply has not been clued in by any one of her caucus members. As Minister of Agriculture, I would hope that she would be at the forefront in knowing some of the concerns that are out in rural Manitoba. So for her to get up and indicate to the Member for Southdale that really he has no idea what he is talking about, I would indicate from the comments that the Minister of Agriculture put forward that I am questioning as to her ability in being able to speak for rural Manitoba.

Just on that, I saw yesterday that she had a big press release—

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A point of order is being raised. Please state your point of order.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is talking about people not knowing about rural Manitoba. I would let the member know, as I did in my comments, that in fact I have been in rural communities across the province. I was in his constituency, in the Member for Steinbach's (Mr. Goertzen) constituency over the weekend to review the situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I am very aware of the situation, particularly with the seeding in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Differences of opinion are not points of order.

* * *

Mr. Dyck: Thank you. So then I am to assume that the Minister of Agriculture knows what is taking place in rural Manitoba. I would then suggest that she also give that information out to her colleagues because from what we are seeing and hearing there is very little support for rural Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to give you a case in point. Further on in her address, she said that we value every job that is out there, and yet, though, when you look at Neepawa or you look at Minnedosa, they feel that this is the way to really enhance rural communities by, in fact, forcing people to move to different communities, when they have already established their roots within the local community. So I see that as being rather contradictory, where the minister says, certainly, we want to support rural Manitoba. Every job is important. But what does she do? She moves them from one location to another, and we are not even sure whether they, in fact, will be able to secure their jobs there. It is called uprooting people's lives. I think that is a very, very, cold, cold-hearted way of dealing with people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to go back to the resolution here. They are talking about how they are enhancing rural Manitoba with putting \$300,000 out there. I mean, \$300,000. We know how far \$300,000 goes. I think the fact that we want to beautify rural Manitoba is wonderful. I applaud that, but just in case they think that this is going to be doing an awful lot for the beautification of rural Manitoba, I would suggest maybe get a reality check.

That leads me to another point that I wanted to make. I was observing and watching on the news last night that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), I believe, has put out 20 new sites, weather sites. Well, I want to indicate to her that the reality of the situation is, and I am going to refer to our farm, the fellows on our farm are hooked up to satellite. In fact, they have it in the tractor and they know exactly what is taking place weather-wise. That information is all there already so I really find this interesting that now, all of a sudden, we have, in fact, found out a real, new technology, so that farmers out there are going to be able to make good business decisions as a result of these 20 locations that have been set up and are going to be out there to assist the farmers.

Well, I would indicate to the Minister of Agriculture, I do not think it is going to stand in their way. It is not going to be a detriment to them, but the farmers nowadays are set up with satellites. They have the Internet. They know instantaneously what is taking place. In fact, I would indicate that, as far as marketing is concerned, while they are driving the tractor they are doing their marketing on the Internet. This has already been taking place for years. This is nothing that is so new and profound. I think that we need to have a government that is in touch with what reality is out there.

The other point I wanted to mention here, listening to the Minister of Agriculture, she was talking about the floodway. Yes, tremendous. That was built under whose government? The Conservative government. The vision that Premier Duff Roblin had at the time of building the floodway, tremendously visionary.

And now, all of a sudden, she is taking credit for the floodway. Do we need it? Absolutely, we do, but I would suggest to the minister, I would like for her in the same sentence to move right on and indicate that, rather than sending all of our water north to Lake Winnipeg, and I realize that they need the water there as well, but we need to be looking at retention of water.

I give you a very classic and a good example of it. The Pembina River, which is causing tremendous hardship for the people south of the border, but also those on the north side and the flooding that it creates. In the '97 flood, the estimate was that the water that came from the Pembina River added to approximately one foot at the north end as it approached and, in fact, ran into the floodway. So

there is a huge amount of water that comes down the Pembina River.

There are opportunities. We should take these opportunities and deal with them and rather retain the water, so that we can use it for irrigation or for potable purposes, but also to mitigate the floods that take place. Now we are going to be spending another billion dollars on expanding the floodway.

That leads me, of course, to another part of it, that \$60 million of that will go to help their union friends. Now that is very interesting. That is very interesting. Forced unionization. Here we go again. And the Minister of Agriculture laughs. She thinks this is funny. These—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Dyck: That is right. The Minister of Agriculture said go get a real job. Get a real job. Go work on the floodway. Now this is what you would call enhancement for rural Manitoba. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find that rather interesting that she would use that position.

* (11:40)

I want to come back to the \$60 million. These are not their dollars. These are taxpayer dollars. These are hard-earned taxpayer dollars that are going to be going to support their union buddies. Well, I think that here again we have a good example of how warped some of the thinking is of the members opposite. It really does add and contribute to the fact that their government is headed in definitely the wrong direction.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I need to go back to this resolution here about how people are wanting to beautify rural Manitoba. It is interesting that today in the city of Winkler, they are planting 100 trees. They are planting 100 trees in the city of Winkler. Now, are these funded and paid for through this program? The answer is no. What they did was they went, they raised money through donations, through contributions and today they are planting 100 new trees. Now this is great because 20 years down the road there is going to be a nice display of trees within the province of Manitoba.

Well, there is a gentleman here who is chirping and saying why did you not tell them about it. I will have him know that this government does not invest in southern Manitoba. No, they do not invest in southern Manitoba. Their comment is let them do it

themselves. Let them do it themselves, so there we go. The member is absolutely wrong in that.

An Honourable Member: I think you woke them up.

Mr. Dyck: Yes, I think I woke them up; that is right. Now I see the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) is here, and I do have to make a comment that I did go and tour the school that he and I had the opportunity to turn sod on. It is coming along very well and, in fact, I believe it is on schedule. As of on the weekend, they think that the opening will take place in September. I am assuming that by then we will have had an election and that I, as the new Minister of Education, will be cutting the ribbon. So I am looking forward to that day.

With those few words, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this resolution. Thank you very much.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I am pleased to follow the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) and put some comments on the record that might put a little bit more perspective into our investment here in Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now it is curious that the Member for Pembina would refer to the program as being only \$300,000. Now if you take that over five years, that is \$1.5 million. If you look at their investment in the entire education system over five years, it was \$1.6 million. They seemed to think that \$1.6 million was a lot of money for the entire education system, and we have \$1.5 million over five years to support beautification in rural communities in Manitoba.

Our investment is not only \$300,000 in rural Manitoba. In fact, our investment has been incredible in rural Manitoba. As somebody coming from rural Manitoba who has seen the benefits of a new hospital, the new school, a new waste water treatment facility in my community alone, renovations to schools throughout the constituency, I think it speaks volumes to our commitment to rural Manitoba.

Now this particular program, which is for the beautification of the main streets in Manitoba, is an excellent example of community partnerships and developing capacity because people in rural Manitoba know that rural Manitoba is a great place to live. This will be enhancing their community by the benefits of the storefront redevelopments on Main Street, et cetera, and all the partnerships that we can foster with rural Manitobans to ensure that

we put forward our best face as a province and in our rural communities where they certainly have pride in their communities.

Now the Member for Pembina also talked about the weather information announcement, suggesting that all farmers have access to the Internet and all the information. Well, it is rather curious because I have met with constituents who are lamenting that the Internet service they do not have available to them, and, of course, that is because the principal provider for Internet is now a private company that does not have an interest in providing that service. There is no social policy for that now-privatized company to provide Internet for areas that are remote and do not have a significant population to support what would be a profit position as opposed to doing what is right and what is a social agenda to provide opportunities for rural Manitobans.

But, I digress. Speaking of utilities, members opposite did not equalize hydro-electric rates for rural Manitoba. We did that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our investment to rural Manitoba is a genuine commitment to rural Manitoba. Members opposite talk the talk about being the champions of rural Manitoba. Well, they raised taxes on farmland. They increased the portioning. We reduced the portioning. We are reducing farmland taxes. We are committed to rural infrastructure with wastewater treatment. We are committed to rural infrastructure in hospitals, in schools and in highways. Members opposite pretend to be the champions of rural Manitoba. I find that quite disconcerting, that they claim to be champions when their record is very clear with respect to their roles in rural Manitoba.

It is curious following the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) who has seen a lot of growth in rural Manitoba because the economy of Manitoba has grown significantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the last seven years, and that growth in the economy in a global sense spurs growth throughout the province. Certainly southern Manitoba has benefited from this government and our economic policies in the growth of the economy. This particular bill to work with the Hometown Green Teams is to promote more pride in our communities and to develop partnerships and capacities to support our communities as they continue to grow.

Now, there are a number of areas where we have made significant strides in rural Manitoba. I hear the members always talking about jobs and the economy. Well, I know when I was teaching in rural

Manitoba, and they announced funding of minus 2 and minus 2 and zero and minus 2.6, that in one year a record number of pink slips were handed out to teachers, 245 teachers in 1995, in one year. This was in 46 out of 58 school divisions.

Now, I am just guessing but I would suspect that the vast majority of those school divisions were in rural Manitoba where teaching positions were lost, where nursing positions were lost, where rural doctors were leaving the community. What have we done, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We have provided support to the school divisions to maintain staffing when we have the issues of population declining and declining enrolments. We have declining enrolment grants. We are investing in rural Manitoba so students have as many opportunities as possible. We have more doctors operating, or practising I should say, in rural Manitoba, and, in fact, "operating" was not a Freudian slip. More doctors are operating in rural Manitoba because we have taken surgeries out of Winnipeg to provide better access for patients in rural Manitoba.

Brand-new ambulances, the investments go on and on and on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is why I think it is a wonderful opportunity to work with people who share the same vision for rural Manitoba that we as a government have for rural Manitoba. That is for better opportunities for rural Manitoba, for growth in rural Manitoba and taking pride in who we are as people, who we are as a province and developing the capacity through partnerships such as the Hometown Green Team.

I really applaud the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) for bringing this forward because this particular initiative warrants the recognition that it has in the House today, the \$300,000 that has worked towards 175 projects, and communities and businesses contributing an additional \$827,000 in this process. It is an excellent partnership. That was in '04. In '05, 190 projects with \$350,000 approved, leveraging \$2.5 million in additional funding for structural beautification improvements throughout the province. You see the growth in this particular initiative, 168 communities in '06 with \$312,000 leveraging over \$2 million as well. So the money is a seed. It is an opportunity, a partnership. It is community capacity that we are working to develop. It is issues of access. It is issues of environmentally friendly programs. It is beautification and it is a reflection of rural Manitoba's faith and trust in the direction that this province is going, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I really would have to challenge the members opposite who profess to be the champions of rural Manitoba when you consider their record and compare it to ours. They do not think \$300,000 is a lot of money for this project. I was really surprised to hear that; \$300,000 is a significant amount of money. *[interjection]*

Yes, I can do the math, thank you very much. There is \$300,000 to support the projects, but I think the member did not hear what I was saying about how it has leveraged more money from the communities that shared the same vision. I think it is wonderful that communities share the same vision that we have, that Manitoba is a beautiful province, a great place to be, and that they will take this seed money to expand and develop beautification programs and green projects throughout their communities. I think that is a wonderful thing.

* (11:50)

Communities do take ownership when they partner and work with the provincial government to advance these programs. So I am really pleased that the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) would bring this forward, and we continue to work with an agenda for rural Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We continue to work to expand the slaughter capacity. We continue to work to address issues of water systems. As I said, over \$40 million invested in rural Manitoba since 2001. Oh yes, that is right, the Tories privatized water tests. They did that too. That is really friendly for rural Manitoba. We continue to work with our partners to provide better services for rural Manitoba. I am really pleased that it is our government that is truly the champions of rural Manitoba.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I would love to rise and speak on behalf of my home town communities in Manitoba. I believe that what the government has done is to bring this resolution forward to give us an opportunity to share our concerns with how poorly this government is taking care of the needs of rural Manitoba.

The Minister of Education just spoke about how important education is and how he is continually funding programs and giving school divisions a substantial amount of money in percentages for programming. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister refused to meet with two individuals in Rivers when he was there recently. He refused to meet with these people who are going to be losing their jobs at the end of this year. He refused to meet with them.

These individuals work in the Department of Education. These are his staff. He was in the community, had time and he refused to meet with them. Not only that, he refused to meet with the community leaders to talk about this issue, and only did he speak to them briefly when they were in the road of him to leave the building did he given them the time. That is not a meeting. That is a minister who was trying to weasel his way out of dealing with an issue at hand and leave the community. That is a real disappointment for my communities when ministers refuse to meet with my people and my leaders and listen personally about their concerns.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he went on about how he feels that this government is funding education adequately. Alexander, a community within my community, is losing a quarter of their staff. Beautification and Hometown grants are wonderful, but if there is not going to be a school in that community or enough programs available to these young people in the school to ensure that they get a quality education, what is the use of having flower pots outside of the school.

Alexander is fighting for their community. They are fighting to keep their classrooms open. They are fighting for their schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this minister has the nerve to stand up and speak nonsense about how well he is paying attention to the needs of communities.

Crocus Plains in Brandon is going to be losing four teacher positions because of this government's inability to understand that they are underfunding secondary education. Rivers, a community within my constituency, is going to have to cancel a pre-calculus program, a course that is critical for people to get into technology programs in university. They are cutting that course because this government is refusing to pay attention about how they are underfunding and how they are not paying attention to the needs of rural communities. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying, pay attention to the programming. There are priorities and you are the minister, take action.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a province-wide funding of \$350,000 under this program does little for the loss at Minnedosa and Rivers, but Minnedosa, specifically here, is going to lose eight positions. That is a stand-alone of over \$2 million in wages and economic spin-off. Yes, the university is going to be out in the community and doing a Japanese gardens

project, good for the community leaders to identify and promote their community.

I know that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) spoke of a conversation she had. I know the individual she spoke to. There were several that shared their views. This individual did share the gardens as a topic because she shared a brochure, and she talked to the minister about the importance of community and the programs and services that are there. If you remove eight people out of a community, you take away the opportunity to grow and prosper.

So, again, as Beth McNabb, who is past president of the Chamber and has a business in the community, has indicated, she said she had a brief discussion with the minister in the food court and invited her to read the handout. She says, but she did her usual Teflon response by referring to the meeting with Lemieux and how they are going to listen and were going to try to look at this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, I think that when this individual, Mrs. McNabb, walked away I think she clearly understood that this minister does not get it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, technology in communities is important, as is beautification. I think that this minister has to understand that to continue to make communities grow and be prosperous and grow in the sense of beautiful communities you have to understand that technology plays a critical role in ensuring that services are being provided in rural communities. This minister does not get it. She does not understand that this is something that can be done for the jobs in Minnedosa. Crown Lands can continue to provide a service that is important to the communities that this department represents. To take Crown Lands and move it out of rural community is definitely working against what this government is trying to do, or should be doing.

Crown Lands, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the staff there have been muzzled. They have been told not to speak out in support of their jobs and their reasons why they want to stay in the community. On Friday I met with the staff at the Crown Lands office. They continually said over and over again to me that they were very disappointed in this Minister of Agriculture. They are under this Minister of Agriculture, and they were very disappointed that she has, in a sense, brushed them away. They write to the minister, she refers the letter on to the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Lemieux). These individuals were disappointed. They were sharing their personal

stories, the reasons why they believe they should stay in the communities, the things that they do that are important to their communities, and she referred their letters on. She did not even have the courtesy to respond and say, I understand what you are saying, I understand what you are trying to fight for. No, she just brushed them off.

I believe that this has become an issue. It is a waiting game, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These individuals have shown and have promoted the reasons why they should stay in these communities. All that this government has done is played a wait and see. They take turns meeting with the community. Some of the minister show up, sometimes they do not, and it really is a very disappointing way of doing business. You never know for sure if you are going to have a meeting with the minister or not.

In the community of Souris, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe last year the Premier (Mr. Doer) was out to present a cheque to the community. I found it very interesting because the town office phoned me and they said, you know, we got this cheque, we want to cash it, we want to put it toward the program that it was intended to be, but we have been told by the Premier's Office to hold the cheque until the Premier comes out three or four weeks down the road to do a little photo op. That was a cheque that was for the last year, the previous year's funding. When he spoke to the community, he spoke as if this was the second cheque or second dollar commitment to the community. To me that is playing politics with the community. It is a minimal amount of money. These projects are important to the community and they need to be utilized and put forward. *[interjection]*

No, it was quite clear. The Premier even said, when the kids were cheering and saying that, oh, you

have the support of the community, and I told the children that it was my community and that they are very proud of all that is being done in that community.

So, I guess, I question the motives of this government putting forward something like a Hometown Grant discussion, Hometown community, because there were a lot of really good programs in the department of rural development prior to this government coming in, and they have pretty much annihilated all of them. They have done everything in their power to destroy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we in Souris have put in a feedlot not too long ago, and this government really did very little to promote or help. When we were working on that project we had government people come out and say you have to tell us what you are doing with this project, where the location is, where the services will be. I refused to do that because I knew that this government was going to try to sabotage or take the project elsewhere. We did not need government money, but the government felt that they should be a part of this, not to help support, because when we asked them for financial support to help with the road access or whatever they indicated, oh, no, we do not have money for that. The company is going to have to do that. You know, more and more we see that: businesses that are interested in promoting economic development are being denied support from this government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Minnedosa will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 12 p.m., I am leaving the Chair with the understanding that the House will reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

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