

Fourth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LXII No. 4 - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, December 3, 2009

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
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.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
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MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Wellington	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
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OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
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WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	Concordia	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 3, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom, know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Speaker's Statement

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. I have a statement of clarification for the House. Yesterday, I was incorrect in citing a rule of our House. I advised that electronic devices were not to be used during routine proceedings. Rule 19(4) reads: "Except during Question Period, Members may use laptop computers and other electronic devices in the House and in Committee in a silent mode"—except during question period. And that's a ban of all electronic devices applies only to question period.

So if I have offended anyone, I apologize for that error, and now we will—we will continue on.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 4—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan), that Bill 4, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité et l'hygiène du travail, be now read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill No. 4, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act.

This bill will increase the maximum fines that may be imposed on a person who's found guilty of contravening The Workplace Safety and Health Act. The maximum fines will increase to \$250,000 from \$150,000 for a first offence and \$500,000 from \$300,000 for a second or subsequent offence. The proposed amendments were unanimously recommended by the Advisory Council on Workplace Safety and Health appointed under the act. The increase in fine levels will be an additional tool to assist in our ongoing activities to reduce incidence of injuries.

Mr. Speaker: So, it's been moved by the honourable member for Education, seconded by the honourable minister of—moved by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill No. 4, The Workplace Safety Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Bill 200—The Personal Information Protection and Identity Theft Prevention Act

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I move, seconded by the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), that Bill No. 200, The Personal Information Protection and Identity Theft Prevention Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Taillieu: This bill governs the collection, use and disclosure and destruction of personal information by organizations in the private sector. It also establishes a duty to notify, for those organizations, to notify individuals who may be affected when their personal information the organization has collected is lost, stolen or compromised.

And, Mr. Speaker, the bill was first introduced four and a half years ago at a time when Alberta, B.C. and Québec were all enacting similar legislation. Since then, advancing technologies have been used increasingly to steal personal information, which has led to an alarming increase in identity theft and identity fraud, and I urge the government to

look at this bill and fill the gap in privacy legislation in Manitoba.

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

**Bill 204—The Child and Family Services
Amendment Act**

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I move, seconded by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill No. 204, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Mitchelson: This bill requires the Child and Family Services agency to do the following things when, in the absence of child protection concerns, it proposes to remove a child from the care of a caregiver: prepare a written plan; notify the caregiver in writing about its intentions and explain to him or her its reasons for the proposal and its assessment of factors relevant to determining how the proposed move may affect the child once the final decision is made to carry out the proposal; give the caregiver a written decision; and give the authority under whose mandate the agency operates copies of the notice and decision given to the caregiver.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation would implement recommendation No. 47 of the Gage Guimond report, which is common sense social work practice to protect the safety and well-being of vulnerable children in care and to support foster families.

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

**Bill 205—The Crown Appointment Review Act
(Various Acts Amended)**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill No. 205, The Crown Appointment Review Act (Various Acts Amended); la Loi sur l'examen des nominations au sein des sociétés d'État (modification de diverses lois), be now read a first time.

(13:40)

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable member for Inkster, that Bill No. 205, The Crown Appointment Review Act (Various Acts Amended), be now read a first time.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, for years the NDP have made appointments behind closed doors. This bill requires a person to be publicly interviewed by a committee of the Legislative Assembly before being appointed to the board of Manitoba Hydro, the Liquor Control Commission, Manitoba Lotteries Corporation or Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

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

**Bill 206—The Waste Reduction and Prevention
Amendment Act**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill No. 206, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réduction du volume et de la production des déchets, be now read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable member for Inkster, that Bill No. 206, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, after a lot of rhetoric and inaction from the provincial government, there's still huge numbers of plastic bags going into our landfill sites. This big-bill would ban the use of plastic, single-use plastic checkout bags to customers at retail outlets.

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

**Bill 207—The Tax Administration
and Miscellaneous Taxes Amendment Act
(Land Transfer Tax Exemption for
First-Time Home Buyers)**

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Carman, that Bill 207, The Tax Administration and Miscellaneous Taxes Amendment Act (Land Transfer Tax Exemption for First-Time Home Buyers), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that is very important for the economy and the economics of the province of Manitoba. What it would do is it would exempt first-time home buyers into the marketplace from the land transfer tax, allow them to purchase properties, move into the economy, move into the

home purchasing at which, then, those people who then own homes would move up at a domino effect. It would certainly be a very positive effect for the economy of Manitoba and, certainly, we will speak very favourably to this. Thank you.

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

PETITIONS

Long-Term Care Facilities—Morden and Winkler

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, and I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition.

Many seniors from the Morden and Winkler area are currently patients in Boundary Trails Health Centre while they wait for placement in local personal care homes.

There are presently no beds available for these patients in Salem Home and Tabor Home. To make more beds in the hospital available, the regional health authority is planning to move these patients to personal care homes in outlying regions.

These patients have lived, worked and raised their families in this area for most of their lives. They receive care and support from their family and friends who live in the community, and they will lose this support if they are forced to move to distant communities.

These seniors and their families should not have to bear the consequences of the provincial government's failure to ensure that there are adequate personal care home beds in the region.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to ensure that patients who are awaiting placement in a personal care home are not moved to distant communities.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider working with the RHA and the community to speed construction and expansion of the long-term care facility in the region.

This is signed by Eva Marshall, Olive Kunzelman, Elsie Vatzel and many, many others.

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

PTH 15

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition.

In 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

Injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation stated that preliminary analysis of current and future traffic demands indicate that local twinning will be required.

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning, therefore it does not fulfil the current and future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Ashton) consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Adam Ruby, Anita Killen, John Schaap and many, many other Manitobans. Thank you.

Ophthalmology Services—Swan River

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Swan Valley region has a high population of seniors and a very high incidence of diabetes. Every year, hundreds of patients from the Swan Valley region must travel to distant communities for cataract surgery and additional pre-operative and post-operative appointments.

These patients, many of whom are sent as far away as Saskatchewan, need to travel with an escort who must take time off work to drive the patient to

his or her appointments without any compensation. Patients who cannot endure this expense and hardship are unable to have the necessary treatment.

The community has located an ophthalmologist who would like to practise in Swan River. The local Lions Club has provided funds for the necessary equipment, and the Swan River Valley hospital has space to accommodate this service.

The Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) has told the Town of Swan River that it has insufficient infrastructure and patient volumes to support a cataract surgery program; however, residents of the region strongly disagree.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health to consider rethinking her refusal to allow an ophthalmologist to practise in Swan River and to consider working with the community to provide this service without further delay.

And this is signed by Jerry Dushaek, Harry Vanderschaaf, Bertita Minish and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

**Neepawa, Gladstone, Ste. Rose, McCreary—
Family Doctors**

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

And this is the reason—these are the reasons for this petition:

Access to a family doctor is vital to good primary health care. Patients depend on their family doctor for many things, including their routine health-care needs, preventative care, referrals for diagnostic tests and appointments with specialists.

Family doctors in Neepawa, Gladstone and Ste. Rose are unable to accept new patients. The nearby community of McCreary has not had a doctor available to take patients in months.

Without a family doctor, residents in this large geographical area have no option but to look for a family doctor in communities as far away as Brandon and Winnipeg.

Residents of these communities are suffering because of the provincial government's continuing failure to effectively address the shortage of doctors in rural Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider prioritizing the needs of these communities by ensuring they have access to a family doctor.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider promptly increasing the use of nurse practitioners in these communities in order to improve access to quality health care.

This petition is signed by Irene Hackewich, Roy Hackewich, Louise Shelestynski and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Whiteshell Provincial Park—Lagoons

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wish to present the following petition.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba's provincial parks were established to protect our natural resources and the environment for future generations.

In July 2009, the lagoons in the vicinity of Dorothy Lake and Otter Falls in the Whiteshell Provincial Park overflowed, creating concerns that untreated sewage made its way into the Winnipeg River system and ultimately into Lake Winnipeg.

In addition, emergency discharges had to be undertaken at lagoons in the Whiteshell Provincial Park four times in 2005, once in 2007 and once in April 2009.

Concerned stakeholders in the Whiteshell Provincial Park have repeatedly asked the provincial government to develop plans to address the shortcomings with the park's lagoons and to ensure the environment is protected, but the plans have not materialized.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie) to consider acknowledging that more timely action should have been taken to address the shortcomings with the lagoons in the Whiteshell Provincial Park in order to protect the environment.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider immediately developing short- and long-term strategies to address the shortcomings with lagoons in the Whiteshell Provincial Park and to consider implementing them as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by Bill Nitzsche, Carl Jacobson, Lynn Jacobson and many, many others.

* (13:50)

Provincial Nominee Program—90-Day Guarantee

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Reuniting families through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program should be the first priority in processing nominee certificates.

Lengthy processing times for PNP applications causes additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families here in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider establishing a 90-day guarantee for processing an application for a minimum of 90 percent of applicants that have family living in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by D. Flora, A. Flora and D. Pery and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, we have a group of nurses from the Philippines who are now working with the Central and Brandon regional health authorities, and these are the guests of the honourable Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald). On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you all here today.

And also in the public gallery we have from Kelvin High School, we have 48 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Janice Bazan. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). On behalf of all honourable members, I also welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro Consultation Fees

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, let me say first how relieved all of us are to see the member for Kildonan

(Mr. Chomiak) back in the Chamber today and certainly the other side more so than this side of the House.

But I want to ask the former minister of Hydro who's now asking Manitoba ratepayers to have their hydro rates go up by more than 15 percent over five years, how he can justify spending \$160 million on high-priced consultants for consultations at the same time as he goes to Manitoba seniors with a 15 percent rate hike over the next five years?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I read the front page of the *Free Press* this morning where there was a report about \$160 million used to prepare a partnership with First Nations people to have ownership on the Wuskwatim Dam, to move that forward in a way that satisfies all the concerns of northern peoples—and First Nations peoples in particular—on their traditional lands before we build a dam.

There's three ways to build dams and build these projects in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. There's the old way, where you just go ahead and do it and then spend \$600 million in compensation and mitigation costs after the fact and after the environment has been despoiled. There's the way that we're doing it now, where we work out everything with our First Nations partners ahead of time, including all the environmental studies and feasibility studies and identify the adverse effects, and then there's another way, which I will pick up perhaps in the next question.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we've noted the comments from some members of those communities who have criticized the lack of transparency and the lack of direct benefit for many of the people living in those communities. We support partnership, but \$160 million to high-priced consultants—to put it into context, that's 6,400 times the amount that's been allocated to the Ombudsman to look into the possible allegations of bankruptcy and blackouts at Hydro, 6,400 times the amount of money already set aside for the Ombudsman.

How can he justify this obscene expense that's not going to the regular people in those communities? It's going to high-priced consultants at the same time as he's asking regular Manitobans to pay more on their hydro bills.

Mr. Selinger: Look, I—the best explanation, I thought, was provided by the president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro when he said, I quote: Nobody likes

to pay that kind of money, but we're dealing with First Nations who have zero resources—like, zero. We've got to make sure they don't feel duped and that they aren't duped.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, these costs have been put in place to allow First Nations people to come to the negotiating table with the same level of expertise and information and analysis—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: —and research that the Crown corporation has so that they can arrive at a set of conclusions about how to proceed on a dam or a project that satisfies all parties and that they can go forward with this in a way that ensures Aboriginal people have access to employment and training, that they have access to an equity stake, that the environment is protected and that if there are any adverse effects, they are either prevented or mitigated as we go along.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, he owes, as the Hydro minister of Manitobans, a breakdown and an explanation.

Even at the modest billing rates charged by friends of the NDP for doing this sort of consulting work, Mr. Speaker, this is an obscene amount of money. It's 6,400 times the amount already set aside for the Ombudsman to look into very serious issues related to the potential financial crisis at Manitoba Hydro. And it's happening in the context of a time when he is going to Manitoba ratepayers to ask them to pay more on their hydro bills, hydro power that they can't live without. They need it for heat. They need it for light. He wants them to pay 15 percent more so the money can go into the pockets of lawyers and consultants.

How can he justify this to the ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, first it starts—not only is there a moral and government obligation to address concerns before they become a problem for people, there's a legal obligation. There's an absolute legal obligation to consult with First Nations peoples in an area where a project could have a negative or adverse impact.

And that consultation process requires that the parties being consulted have sufficient resources to put their case in about their concerns. It requires them to be able to do the technical and feasibility studies to ensure that the land and the environment is

properly protected. And that is why the six First Nations have been provided these resources so that they can make their case and ensure that adverse effects are dealt with before they become a problem.

And what are some of the results of that, Mr. Speaker? The Wuskwatim dam was redesigned by working with the Nelson House Cree Nation from flooding 37 square kilometres to flooding less than half a square kilometre, a 99 percent reduction.

Manitoba Hydro

Public Utilities Board Information Requests

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, back on April 29th of this year I asked the member for St. Boniface, the then-Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, a question regarding Manitoba Hydro. And the question was: Will Manitoba Hydro be supplying the information as requested by the PUB by the September 30th deadline? The member's response was: I'm confident Manitoba Hydro will cooperate with the PUB and provide them information.

Mr. Speaker, the deadline has come and gone. Will the new minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro advise the House when and if all the information requested by the PUB will be supplied to the PUB?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): As we know—as we know, the Public Utilities Board has an obligation to review the operations of Manitoba Hydro with respect to any rate-setting matter. They've asked for certain information. Hydro expressed a concern that it didn't compromise their commercial interests, because they compete against many other utilities throughout North America.

I'm on the public record—I'm on the public record as encouraging Manitoba Hydro to comply with the requests of the public utility board and to find a way to do that that doesn't compromise their commercial interests, which compromises the interests of Manitobans.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, there certainly is a shroud of secrecy around Manitoba Hydro, and it's not just us as opposition members saying it.

I want to quote Ian Goodman, who's an energy industry consultant who appeared on CBC Radio recently, and he says: Manitoba Hydro is very reluctant to provide information about their operations. The Public Utilities Board has been asking very nicely for the kind of reports they need

to see what's going on inside, and Hydro is very resistant to provide that information.

Mr. Speaker, one way we as Manitobans have access to see what's going on in Manitoba Hydro is the quarterly financial statements that Manitoba Hydro supplies. Normally, Manitoba Hydro supplies those second-quarter statements mid-November. We're now into December. We have not seen a financial statement from Manitoba Hydro.

When will those statements be delivered?

* (14:00)

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act):

Mr. Speaker, the member asks about the PUB and Manitoba Hydro. I can assure him that Manitoba Hydro's CEO has been meeting with the PUB. They have been working together on many issues.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro has a responsibility to protect its interests and its commercial dealings, and they are in discussion with the PUB as to what information can be provided and what cannot be provided to them, and they are working very closely.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the quarterly report, I can assure the member that that quarterly report will be released very shortly.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I'm gonna refer to another independent report that just came out yesterday, and I quote: The only unusual characteristic of Manitoba Hydro is the secrecy with which it conducts its everyday operations. Manitoba Hydro provides very limited materials to the Manitoba Public Utilities Board. Hydro-electric operations, export sales and even Manitoba Hydro resource plan are shrouded in secrecy.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro just filed its rate application this week. We're looking at a 6 percent increase in rates. We're asking the minister: Will Manitoba Hydro supply the Public Utilities Board all the relevant documents and make them public to the ratepayers of Manitoba?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, when the—when Manitoba Hydro makes application to the PUB or goes before the PUB, they do supply the information that is needed for the PUB to make the necessary adjustments to hydro rates.

But the member opposite also has concern about the rate increases. I would remind him to look at the

comments of his leader, that his leader made in March 2007, where he said that he thought that the power rates in Manitoba were too low and they should grow in proportion to economic growth.

If we were to follow what his leader said, Mr. Speaker, hydro rates would be skyrocketing in this province. They would not be regulated by the PUB as they are now.

**Manitoba Hydro
Bipole III West-Side Location**

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has thought of every excuse under the sun to try and justify this asinine decision to run the third bipole line down the west side of the province. They've even stated that they don't wanna jeopardize the boreal forest on the east side, but what about the forest on the west side?

As a matter of fact, in a study, the Bipole III Transmission Routing Study, it states, and I quote: A west side routing will cross not only boreal shield but also boreal plain ecozones. This latter ecozone is considered to be highly impacted and at greater risk.

Mr. Speaker, given that the study shows that the western region has greater urgency for protection, why is this government refusing to protect this area? Why are they running the bipole line on the west side?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I was so hoping for a question on polar bears, but I didn't get it this morning and what a—what is a great announcement—and I was glad the member from Tuxedo was there—and it sort of relates to why we're protecting the UNESCO boreal forest on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. It's a large, integral, unspoiled zone that has unique—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Selinger: —that has unique—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The eastern side boreal forest, the southern boreal forest, has unique cultural and ecological characteristics which need to be protected. *[interjection]* The member is right. There are sensitive zones in other parts of the province, but the opportunity for moving the bipole down the west side create—there are more space—there's more space on the west side, which has

already been developed and has various uses, whether industrial or agricultural or transportation or utilities, which have already been installed there. So there's much less potential spoilage to a unique ecological and cultural zone on the west side than on the east side.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, I take the—I take the word of experts and consultants out there over this Premier any day.

Mr. Speaker, in this study it says, and I quote: This region—meaning the west side—has greater urgency for protection of ecological integrity than the vaster boreal shield forest on the east side.

Mr. Speaker, that's what the experts say. Why are they still insisting on running this bipole line down the west side of this province and jeopardizing the forest on that side?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, maybe I missed something, but in the first few questions they were attacking consultants. Now they're using consultants to justify their position. And that's the thing about consultants; they provide opinions to people and they make you pay for it.

And the reality is this, Mr. Speaker, that very report that the member from Tuxedo quotes suggested that the issues on the east side of Lake Winnipeg were of such a magnitude that it should be a question of broad public policy that the government weighs in on. We weighed in on it. We took a position to protect the boreal forest on the east side. We did that before the '07 election and we will do it again before the '11 election, and we will justify and support it.

And I'm pleased that this government, just this week, has received a reward and a recognition for the boreal forest that we protected on the east side.

Mrs. Stefanson: What I said—what I said, clearly, Mr. Speaker, is that we would accept the consultants' and the experts' opinion over this Premier any day. So imagine what that says about our Premier.

Mr. Speaker, this government has chosen to run a bipole line down the west side of this province, where a study has clearly shown that there is a greater need for protection of that area.

And I would like to ask this Premier—I'd actually really like to ask the minister, give him an opportunity to stand up before Manitobans to change

this ridiculous decision and protect the—the west side of our province, Mr. Speaker.

Will they change their decision and save taxpayers millions of dollars as a result of this decision?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I want to—I thank the member for the question. This is a significant question of public policy: Where do you put the bipole?

There is a significant and present and palpable reputational risk to Hydro to building it down the east side in terms of the quality and the acceptance of their product in the marketplace, and we do not want to put those \$20 billion of potential revenues at risk.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: There's a very significant—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: —risk to the environment and the cultural communities on the east side.

And, if we want to get this reliable bipole built, we have to do it in a timely fashion so we can build Wuskwatim and we can build Keeyask and we can build Conawapa so all Manitobans can be wealthier.

Manitoba Hydro Review of Mismanagement Allegations

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): And I—you know, I want to say the Premier's—the quality of his answers are considerably better today now that the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) is sitting next to him whispering—whispering the answers in his ear, Mr. Speaker. I'm starting to think that maybe it wasn't Mr. Doer that was the genius over there; it was the member for Kildonan all along, and I know—I know they're relieved to have him back.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier: We've got another example of not one, not two, but three different parties, three different credible parties raising concerns about risk management, about analysis of drought risks and about potential financial meltdowns at Manitoba Hydro weighing in to this debate. McCullough Research, a report that we didn't pay \$160 million for has come out and indicated that the ICF report was a hastily prepared draft and that, overall, the risk managers' concerns

appear consistent with current research on long-term drought risks and impacts and deserve further public scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans, media outlets, opposition members and experts from across the spectrum are asking for further review. When is the Premier, the former minister of Hydro, the former minister of Crocus, going to stand up and show leadership to make sure Hydro doesn't end up in the same place as Crocus?

* (14:10)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I'm pleased that—I'm pleased that the member has asked me the question because it allows me to put on the record the following: Manitoba Hydro hired the original consultant which resulted in a whistle-blower complaint under our—under our legislation, brought forward for the first time in history by this government, to allow somebody who's an external contractor under the veil of anonymity to register a complaint.

They also did a second report by ICF. There's a chap that's come along and says the report was hastily done. Hydro has now engaged in a third—in a third report being conducted by KPMG where the guidelines were derived partially through consultation with the Public Utilities Board. And, as we now know, the Ombudsman's office is doing a further report for which the Legislative Assembly Management committee has made available additional resources.

So we will have more than one opinion. We will have ample information by consultants—by consultants, I might add, for whom we will have to pay for the expertise we get. Thank you.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, they've allocated only one six hundred—6,400th the amount of money to the Ombudsman as they spent on consultations in connection with the other projects. I want to ask the minister, given that he has a history of ignoring red flags and then trying to whitewash the outcome of situations, from Crocus, whether he can assure Manitobans that the same approach won't be followed with Hydro where the consequences for all Manitobans could be extremely—could be extremely severe.

Will he work with members of all parties to ensure that the Ombudsman has both the resources, has the legislative framework that's required to gather the evidence required, undertake the expert

analysis that's called for and ensure full public reporting on the outcome of that report, so that all Manitobans can be certain that the Hydro utility that we all believe in is sound and that we don't need to worry about these concerns being raised by these three independent experts in the area of hydro power.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the member's long question is yes. We will do that. We will make sure that there is adequate support to the legislative—to the Ombudsman through the Legislative Assembly Management committee, even if it means hiring more consultants. We will do that.

We will support that and we will—we will listen very carefully to what the outcome is, and that's why we put whistle-blower legislation in place. And that's why at the centre of the whistle-blower legislation is an independent office of the Legislature called the Ombudsman, because when these matters come up we want them to be dealt with in an independent, impartial way, without fear of favour of anybody attacking them from within the Legislature.

We will respect that process. If the member opposite will respect that process, I'm sure we'll get a good outcome.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we respect the independence of the Ombudsman on this issue.

The issue, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. McFadyen: On the—the issue, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

An Honourable Member: It's not the issue.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: And I hope he doesn't need the help from the ventriloquist from Kildonan in this response, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. All members in this House are honourable members, and they will be addressed by their constituency and ministers by their title.

I ask the honourable member, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition to withdraw that word.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I withdraw that comment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier—and I want to say I have nothing but respect for the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak). It was—it was intending that as a compliment.

But the question to the Premier is in connection with issues that have arisen in terms of the reporting powers, the investigative powers that are available to the Ombudsman. In the context of a review that is wide-ranging, serious and technical as this one, we want to have certainty that the Ombudsman is gonna have all the powers and resources required.

The Premier has said that he's going to take a sit-back in his armchair approach to this when he knows that the Ombudsman reports to the Legislature. We all have a role to play in ensuring that the terms of reference are right, the resources are in place.

Will he today commit to showing energy and leadership by making that commitment rather than the standard hands-off, I'll take no responsibility for this issue, in the same way he did with Crocus and the same way he did when he got into trouble on the election finance scandal, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, one of the outstanding characteristics of the member from Fort Whyte is he—no matter how low somebody wears their belt, he always finds a way to go below it. That's one of his outstanding characteristics.

And I must say this, Mr. Speaker—I must say this: We have said very simply that the Ombudsman's office is an independent and impartial office of the Legislature. If they need additional resources, even if they're consultants, we will support them getting that so that they can do a thorough investigation.

The member knows that. I've just committed to that in the previous question. If he likes recycling, he can ask the same question over and over again, but the reality is these allegations made by whistle-blowers deserve to be treated with respect. They deserve to be—they deserve to be addressed by an independent and impartial officer of the Legislature. They deserve to have the resources required to do that, and then we hope we'll have a timely, clear and decisive recommendation from the Ombudsman.

Camp for Persons With Disabilities Proposal Government Support

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Today is United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons, and I'd like to acknowledge the wonderful contributions to our province that many persons with disabilities have made. And I've recently met with a remarkable couple from Fraserwood who have developed a business plan to open a fully accessible camp—year-round camp, Mr. Speaker, for individuals with disabilities.

Treena and Ian Ross are shovel ready, and the project has been fully endorsed by the federal government and the municipality, and many, many other organizations that support and serve the disabled in Manitoba.

Why has this NDP government shut the door on this worthwhile project that meets the criteria of their Opening Doors document?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, and it's a day that we can indeed celebrate the contributions of Manitobans of all different abilities, which is why we have launched a new multi-year strategy that we're going to flesh out even further with the communities, stakeholders and Manitobans who have so much insight into the challenges that are amongst us.

I will say, though, that, as part of the foundation on which the strategy Opening Doors was launched was a significant increase to our Community Living strategy. We place a high value on that and, in fact, that line in the budget I think is one of the largest growing. It's an increase since we came into office of 223 percent.

That shows our commitment, Mr. Speaker, to people living in the community, living to their full capabilities.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, but, after months and months of raising expectations in this NDP government that their proposal would be given serious consideration without any meetings, without any discussions, the Rosses got a letter from the minister, the former minister, who stood up and answered that question that shut the door on Camp Kan-Do.

Will the new minister, Mr. Speaker, agree to reopen the file and give serious consideration to the Camp Kan-Do proposal?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, well, Mr. Speaker, we are always interested in the—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River East, on a point of order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The minister responsible for disabilities is no longer the member for St. Johns. He doesn't have that responsibility, and he was the one that shunned the proposal and shut the door on the proposal.

Why will he not let the new minister stand up and answer the questions? Where's the respect, or where's the Premier (Mr. Selinger) in showing leadership and asking his ministers to take responsibility for their portfolios?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. Order.

On the point of order raised by the honourable member for River East, I want to make a clarification here. All questions are put to the government, and the government will choose which minister to answer whatever question. That's our rule. That—*[interjection]* Order. Order. Order. That's within our rules.

The honourable minister has the floor.

* * *

*(14:20)

Mr. Mackintosh: I was very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that, of course, Manitobans are looking for other ways to provide opportunities for persons with disabilities. We take all of those ideas seriously, and in terms of accessibility and camping, indeed we have just, as part of Opening Doors, along with the Conservation department and the federal government, announced a major investment at Winnipeg Beach for a fully accessible campground, the latest state-of-the-art facilities.

But, Mr. Speaker, when there are business plans that are given to us and when there are other partners that are prepared to invest dollars, of course we take those issues seriously, and those are considerations

that are given to every proposal that come to the attention of this government.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But the Rosses are in the gallery today. We've met with them. I've met with them, the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), we've all taken the time to meet and to listen to them. They've asked for a meeting with the NDP caucus, and Mr. Speaker, the door was slammed shut. They refused to meet with them. They asked for a meeting with the former minister and the door was slammed shut. He refused to meet with them.

Today, being the International Day of Disabled Persons, will the new minister, Mr. Speaker, take the time, agree to open the door today, meet with the Rosses after question period, and at least listen to their very worthwhile proposal, a proposal that has the endorsement of the federal government, the municipality and many, many other disabled organizations?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities): I'm very pleased to belong to a Cabinet and a caucus where we all take responsibility for making things better for people with disabilities.

I did today attend—*[interjection]* I did today—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Howard: —attend consultations at the Convention Centre and made a statement there to a group of people with disabilities. I, of course, will listen to any options that come forward and I'd be pleased to meet with the folks today and hear what they have to say.

I also just want to take a moment to reflect on a time, in this House, when one of the members opposite, in the course of speaking on something else, took the opportunity to criticize us for putting a ramp at the front door of the Legislature, the only one in the country. So I would suggest there might be some option for a little internal education on the other side.

Aboriginal Off-Reserve Housing Federal Funding

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I think what education Manitobans are learning, Mr. Speaker—the education that Manitobans are learning from this Legislature is they have to bring their issues to the House. It's the only way they're going to get a meeting with ministers.

Fourteen months ago I stood in this House and described the deplorable living conditions of residents of northern communities of Duck Bay and Waterhen. At that time, the Province was sitting on \$61.5 million from the federal government for off-reserve Aboriginal housing. Since then, houses have been condemned and residents have found themselves homeless. Mr. Speaker, no running water, dirt floors, oil drums for both heating and cooking, walls made of plywood and missing—or missing altogether.

Will the new Minister of Housing (Ms. Irvin-Ross) continue to condone these living conditions for northern Manitobans or will she get the ball rolling and work with the communities to get these houses built?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Acting Minister of Housing and Community Development): Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly do recall the questions being raised by the member opposite about Waterhen and Duck Bay housing. That was private housing that was in serious distress which is why this government has made a decision to provide opportunities for homeowners there to have new homes available, and I believe that that is all under way.

But, you know, the member opposite was getting up, demanding that we put aside all due diligence, that we fund without any home warranty program, that we provide funding for builders that could not be—could not pass a due diligence test. That is not the way to invest in social housing. You do so, Mr. Speaker, with due diligence and that's what we're doing today.

Mrs. Rowat: This minister can speak with both—out of both sides of his mouth. He welcomed the opportunity to meet with these people. He welcomed them at his door and he left out the back door. That's how this minister meets with people.

Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government enjoys photo ops and one-off announcements. The new Premier (Mr. Selinger) talks about steady-as-she-goes approach to governance.

One Waterhen resident family, whose application was approved, is now homeless, and three residents have passed away waiting for these houses to be built. This is a pathetic record for this government on meeting affordable housing needs.

What does this government mean by steady-as-she-goes, walk in one door, out the other, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I have two comments. First of all, the applicants, in fact, were dealing through a dealer that did not have the confidence of those who are charged with protecting the public purse, and we will, yes, protect vulnerable Manitobans. We'll also protect the taxpayers of this province, Mr. Speaker.

And that is especially true when there's a historic investment. Never before in the history of this province has an investment been made in social housing as today, \$327 million over two years, Mr. Speaker.

And to think that a member opposite, from the Conservative Party of Manitoba, would have the gall, the nerve to stand up and ask about social housing. Remember their record. They shut it down.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, this minister is a disgrace to this province. We are all elected in this House to represent Manitobans, the most vulnerable Manitobans as well as any other Manitoban that is looking for help. These are people that need this minister's support. They need a government that cares about individuals.

Mr. Munro from Duck Bay attended a supposed meeting in the building here on Monday when the minister had agreed to meet with him. When he arrived—he had travelled four hours, Mr. Speaker. When he arrived, he was shunned by the minister. This seems to be a continual occurrence with this government.

Mr. Munro is in the gallery today. I'm going to ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger) if he would demonstrate some compassion and some competence and actually respond to this individual and meet with him so that they can get these applications moving. If there's issues, they can be resolved. These people are living in squalor, Mr. Speaker.

Can this minister, this Premier, deal with the issue?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, aside from the fact that the member, of course, is not presenting the very serious shortcomings of the application and the reputations of some that were promoting that, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member—[interjection] Well, you know, if we had gone ahead—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Mackintosh: —she would be up demanding some resignation or saying there's some scandal

because we had actually approved those projects. That's the way she's gonna manoeuvre this.

But, Mr. Speaker, the investments are being made all across Manitoba, 327 million over two years, historic investments. Just go over here to the U of W. See the residence there of mixed housing. Go up Balmoral and see the new Canadian housing. Go over to Bannatyne and see what Welcome house is doing there. Go over to Robertson and see what senior Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are doing.

But most of the money, Mr. Speaker, is going to the north. That is our commitment. It's happening, and thank you to the federal Conservatives, not to the members opposite, no thanks to them.

Child Day Care Centres Spaces for Children With Disabilities

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. The honourable member for River Heights has the floor.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, today on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I remind the Premier that last year his government would not support Liberal legislation requiring universal newborn hearing screening so that such children could be identified and helped early on when they need it.

And today I retable a document from yesterday that clearly shows that the government will not even designate child-care spaces for children with additional support needs. With that lack of government support for children with disabilities, it's no wonder that we have so many children and families who are struggling.

I ask: When is the Premier going to stand up and make a concentrated effort to apply child-care money where it's most needed?

* (14:30)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, in our day-care program, every space is available for a child who needs it, whether they have a disability or not. If they have a disability, special arrangements and accommodations can be made, and many, many day cares across this province care for persons, young persons, with disabilities.

So the idea that the member wants to set aside and segregate the persons with disability spaces—100 percent of our spaces are available for the children who need it, which is why we've more than doubled the program, which is why we have another program to roll out more spaces, invest in capital, invest in schools with day care, increase wages for persons with—who work in the day-care field and training. All of these things are things that we do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I challenge the Premier on the statement that every space is capable of handling a child with a disability. I'm sure that is not true and, certainly, the information I have, when I asked it, was: The information you have requested from government does not exist.

The Premier is basing his statement on information which his own government says does not exist. The fact is that the Premier doesn't know what he's talking about. The fact is that you can't have a good child-care program if you don't have good data.

This Premier is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on consultants, on huge data bases for all sorts of other things, but when it comes to child care, the data doesn't exist.

Mr. Selinger: I just have to—I just have to say that the Department of Family Services and Housing, in a letter, in the past—and we can make it available by protecting the person it was written to—was very clear. It says the department does not designate spaces specifically for children who are disabled. Child-care facilities accommodate a child with additional support needs on a case-by-case basis. We try to accommodate children on a case-by-case basis.

Now, the member—the member wants to have a little bit of sanctimonious exercise here. I just want to remind him—I just want to remind him, when he ran as a federal MP, the red book promised a universal child-care program for this country, and the minute he got elected, his government, in which he was a member of Cabinet, cancelled it.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I would remind this Premier that I have consistently voted against his budgets because they represent poor management. He's not able to deliver on basic services like child care. The fact is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: The fact is, I remind the Premier that when in late 2005 there was an opportunity to bring in a universal child-care program, it was his party who joined with the Conservative Party to kill the program.

If his party had not stood up—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: —in the House of Commons—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: —and killed the national child-care program—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: —we would have it today. His party has to bear the responsibility for killing the national child-care program.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Let's have some decorum here. Order. Order. Order. Order.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just—I just have to say for the record again that the member was part of a government that immediately cancelled their promise for a universal child-care program.

And, you know what? When they finally did bring a program in 10 years later, they had a six-month cancellation—a one-year cancellation clause which the next government acted on. So the member didn't do very much with the former federal government to protect child-care spaces in this country.

And this government, in spite of the fact that we took a cut from the federal government, we backfilled that and continued to expand the program for child care. And we have made a commitment, without additional federal support, to continue to expand child-care spaces inside this province. That's our record. We'll put it against anything you've ever done, at any level of political life you've ever been involved in.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

The honourable member for—order. Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier, in his response to the second question, made direct quote from a letter and, in accordance with our rules, the Premier is required to table it unedited. He made reference that he would want to table it in the future, but it should be tabled unedited. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. The honourable First Minister, on the same point of order?

Mr. Selinger: The leader of the Liberal Party will share the letter he tabled with his colleague in the Liberal caucus. I'm just quoting from his letter.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I once again remind members—order—once again is to remind members that when a member is up on a matter of privilege or point of order it's a very serious—and I need to be able to hear all the words that are spoken.

On the point of order raised—order. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Inkster, our rules do state that if it's a personal, signed letter, that the member should table that letter, if it's a personal, signed letter, right?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order.

Our rules are very clear that when members are quoting from a personal—personal, signed letter, that letter must be tabled, but I've just been informed that what the honourable First Minister was quoting from was the letter that the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) had just tabled. So I—the honourable member for Inkster does not have a point of order.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Family Choices Program (Brandon)

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share with the House the work our government has undertaken to build an accessible, efficient and high quality child-care system across our province.

Through the Family Choices initiative nearly \$1 million in funding is currently at work in Brandon creating 197 new child-care spaces. This provincial funding will support five important child-care projects. At the Assiniboine Early Learning Centre, infant and preschool services will be expanded.

The Brandon YMCA south will establish a fourth child-care program in a completely new facility. Kokum's Little Friends will expand its programming and renovate its existing space. The Brandon University Early Learning Centre will expand its facilities allowing for greater infant and preschool services. And, finally, the Victoria Day Care Centre will undertake a transformative renovation, ultimately adding child-care spaces and additional programming.

These investments are the latest to have been made by Manitoba's visionary Family Choices initiative. Since the program's inception in April 2008, funding for 2,850 child-care spaces has been announced. Less than halfway through the five years of the initiative's mandate the Province is moving confidently towards its ambitious goals. By 2013, 6,500 new child-care spaces and 35 new sites will bolster Manitoba's child-care resources.

Though proud of our accomplishments, we will not rest while work remains. The recruitment and retention of child-care workers is one particular area that continues to demand engagement and creativity on many fronts. Here, too, our government is moving forward.

I'm excited to be part of a team that tackles such important challenges with energy and dynamism. Together we are building child care excellence in Manitoba. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and by observing this day every year we promote, acknowledge and celebrate the rights and achievements of persons with disabilities. And I was hoping that there would have been a ministerial statement on this very special occasion but, unfortunately, the government didn't see or deem it necessary to make it a priority as a ministerial statement.

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

This year's theme, making the Millennium Development Goals inclusive, empowerment of

persons with disabilities in their communities around the world aims to ensure that the needs and rights of persons with disabilities are fully integrated in development strategies and activities.

The inclusion of special needs and the recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities in development strategies will result in the integration of every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life of our communities, and the full integration of persons with disabilities brings countless benefits to communities.

And to that effect, Mr. Speaker, we, as Progressive Conservatives in Manitoba, passed a resolution unanimously at our annual general meeting that said, and we—in the WHEREAS it indicated that we needed to protect, with laws, the most vulnerable in our society. We passed a resolution, a very strong resolution, in support of rights for persons with disabilities and special needs.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there is consultation ongoing on the Opening Doors paper that was distributed by the government. It's unfortunate that the Disabilities Issues Office didn't schedule more sessions on non-traditional work-week days. There was considerable concern within the community and we would hope that the new minister would take that into consideration for future consultations. Thank you.

* (14:40)

Joan MacKenzie

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is lucky to have many extraordinary teachers and educators invested in the future of our children. One of these extraordinary teachers is Joan MacKenzie, who has always put the needs of her students ahead of herself.

Joan's relentless devotion to her grade 2 students has resulted in her winning this year's Prime Minister's Certificate of Achievement. She received the award for her work in the areas of technology in the classroom; innovation and exemplary teaching practices; student skill development; student achievement and performance; and teacher commitment and leadership.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Working at Parc La Salle School in my constituency of St. Norbert, Joan has been described as a teacher who encourages young leaders to try

harder, dream bigger and live beyond themselves as responsible global citizens.

Joan is not only a skilled classroom teacher; she is also trained in resource education, music and counselling. As one colleague put it, her willingness to share her expertise and talents in these areas has been an invaluable asset to our school.

Two other Winnipeggers have received the Prime Minister's Certificate of Achievement in 2009. They are Michelle Lee, a grade 6 teacher at Angus McKay School in the Elmwood constituency and Peter Slobodzian of Ste. Anne Collegiate in La Verendrye constituency.

Two from rural Manitoba have also received the Prime Minister's Certificate of Excellence: Christopher Koop from Steinbach and James Kostuchuk from Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all teachers for the amazing job that they do in educating our students and, in particular, these teachers who've been recognized for their very hard work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mac Robison Community Centre

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): On October 10th, 2009, I had the opportunity to participate in the grand opening of the Mac Robison Community Centre in Cartwright, Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, you may remember the story of the Clipperdome, the hockey rink in Cartwright burning to the ground on October 14th, 2007. It was a very sad evening and time for—and sad time for the Cartwright community. However, with the expertise of the rural municipality of Roblin and the village of Cartwright, along with community members such as Mac Robison, Kim Kemp and Tom Mowbray, the Clipperdome rose from the ashes to stand again in Cartwright.

Following the fire, the Cartwright community immediately began the rebuilding process by appointing a committee consisting of members of various organizations and community members. One of the members integral to the process I would like to mention is Kim Kemp. Kim is an insurance agent in Cartwright and provided insurance advice to the local councils. Thankfully, the council's agreed with his recommendations.

Mac Robison is another very important member of this community and this committee. There were not many times when you can go to Cartwright and not see Mac. Mac was a retired electrician and ran almost every building in the community. January 16th in 2009, Mac suffered a heart attack and passed away leaving a huge void in the Cartwright community and the building committee.

The new centre is a 2009 green version of the former building. The facility is home to a seamless glass viewing area, theatre seats, spacious dressing rooms, a state-of-the-art kitchen, community gym, a multi-media centre and a regulation NHL-size ice surface. The community is happy to receive—happy to have their senior team, the Cartwright Clippers, playing in the league once more.

Mr. Speaker, October 10th, 2009, was a very special day in Cartwright. The Cartwright Community Centre was reopened and named the Mac Robison Community Centre to acknowledge the life and community dedication of Mac Robison. Mac's wife Jean and family were present to unveil the sign.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all members to the Clipperdome, The Mac Robison Community Centre, to visit this beautiful facility.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members, I'd like to congratulate the Cartwright community on their dedication to building such a fine structure to serve the community for many years to come. Thank you.

Bruce Middle School Science Class Project

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I rise to share with the House information about an exciting learning experience to the 8th grade students at Bruce Middle School.

As part as an initiative to introduce students to science outside the classroom, teachers at Bruce Middle School are instructing their students on how to monitor the water in nearby Sturgeon Creek. The school was able to engage in this type of hands-on learning because of its proximity to Grant's Old Mill.

Part of the focus of the grade 8 science curricula is the water systems on Earth, and through their exploration of this topic, students learn how to conduct water colourimetric tests on phosphate, nitrate and other chemical compounds found in the water system. They also learn how to test the

turbidity of the water and take temperature and pH readings. In the spring, the classes analyze the entire water system in Sturgeon Creek as the creek's ecosystem undergoes seasonal changes.

The students' findings are posted to the school's Web site, and they are responsible for submitting a summary report to the Manitoba youth corps. Bruce students are expected to leave no trace around the creek when they are there, as well as to clean up any litter that negatively affects the health of the ecosystem.

I would like to thank the students and teachers for their important contribution to Sturgeon Creek's health and monitoring.

Mr. Speaker, a program like this is important because it allows young people to learn about and establish a strong connection with the environment around them. The government of Manitoba supports this initiative and has recently partnered with the Wildlife Federation of Manitoba for a project that will extend the opportunity for hands-on learning in the area around Sturgeon Creek by developing an interpretive parkway. The parkway will add interpretive signage and an outdoor classroom for students to further their learning of the important role of aquatic habitats. Thank you.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on a matter of urgent public importance.

Mr. Speaker, we have had, over the last number of months—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We've got to move—you must move your motion first.

Mr. McFadyen: I'll move it first. Okay.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with rule 36(1), I move, seconded by the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), that the regularly scheduled business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, issues that have arisen regarding the management of risk at Manitoba Hydro, particularly in light of the most recent rate increase application and questions regarding spending by the utility.

Mr. Speaker: Before I recognize the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, I believe I should remind all members that under rule 36(2), the mover

of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House is allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain their urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in *Beauchesne's* citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interests will not suffer.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, it's been close to three years since the chairman of Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Schroeder, who was appointed by this NDP government to chair the utility, became aware of very, very serious issues being brought forward by a contractor who was retained by Manitoba Hydro to look into Hydro's risk management practices, its information technology systems and the way in which—the way in which it did forecasting for eventualities such as droughts, for eventualities such as price fluctuations in the American energy market and other factors that could have quite significant impacts on the financial health of Manitoba Hydro, which, in turn, could have impacts on the ability of Hydro to ensure that the lights stay on here in Manitoba in the event that it becomes obligated to export power in certain circumstances outside of the borders.

* (14:50)

At committee just several weeks ago, Mr. Schroeder indicated that he became aware of these issues in January of 2007, Mr. Speaker, and so we're now almost three years since he first became aware of the issues. None of this at the time was made—was made public. Presumably, based on Mr. Schroeder's comments at committee, the then-minister of Hydro, the current Premier (Mr. Selinger), was made aware of the issues as well, as Mr. Schroeder indicated that he met with the then-Hydro minister on average every second week in addition to a variety of other meetings in between, and the urgency of the issue is, I think, underscored by the significance of what is being, what is being said by this consultant.

The consultant has said that in certain scenarios, particularly in the scenario of a protracted drought, that Manitoba Hydro could run into severe financial problems and also be required to curtail power

supply within Manitoba which could lead to blackouts here in the province, and lest anybody think that this is an impossibility, you only need to consider what has happened in various places in other jurisdictions where people thought it was impossible for the power to go out in power that was being supplied by various utilities throughout North America and as a result of risk-taking activities and deregulated marketplaces, which is something that Hydro is increasingly involved in, the power did, in fact, go out in many of those states through North America and utilities did, in fact, go bankrupt.

So this is not a completely unrealistic scenario if those circumstances should arise, and so the urgency, Mr. Speaker, is because the member for St. Boniface, the Premier, has been sitting on the information for close to three years and just as he did when he became aware of problems at Crocus, he sat on it. He kept it quiet. They didn't disclose it to the public. He took no steps to actually delve into the concerns or take corrective actions in time to spare those who were holders of units in Crocus.

We fear that a similar pattern is repeating itself in the case of Hydro, Mr. Speaker, where again that very same minister, who seems to move from one disaster to another, has now been made aware for almost three years of significant red flags at Manitoba Hydro but has failed to take any meaningful action to deal with it and has certainly made every attempt to conceal those concerns and that information from the public.

It was only because the contractor exercised rights under whistleblower legislation that the matter even came to the surface. Unfortunately, and contrary to both the letter and spirit of that act, that contractor was terminated by Manitoba Hydro under the watch of the Hydro minister and, Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves in the situation today where some 12 months, or more than 12 months after that original filing, we have yet to have any meaningful action taken by this Premier or this government to get to the bottom of the concerns and to assure Manitobans that this critically important Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro, is, in fact, sound and that we are not going to face these dire circumstances that we're being warned of by these experts.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's not only the contractor that filed the whistleblower complaint who has raised these issues. The Public Utilities Board of Manitoba, which is there to protect Manitoba consumers, has

over the past couple of years begun to raise concerns about risks, financial risks at Manitoba Hydro. In fact they've taken the unusual steps in the last couple of years of requiring rate increases that were even greater than what had originally been applied for by Manitoba Hydro, which is not something that has been the normal practice of the PUB. Normally, the practice of utilities has been to ask for more than what they would expect to get, then the PUB, on behalf of consumers, has stepped in to reduce the amount of rate increases. In this case, the opposite has happened. It's an extraordinary circumstance where the PUB is so alarmed about mismanagement and risk under the watch of the member for St. Boniface, that it has ordered rate increases above those that have been applied for and so we now have a situation where just two days ago, Hydro, presumably with the—after advising the current Premier, has applied for yet further rate increases totalling some 15 percent over the next five years at a time when the Premier is saying that flat is the new up, when he's talking about the fact that incomes are flat in Manitoba and he's perfectly happy about that.

The only thing, Mr. Speaker, that isn't flat are Hydro rates which are going up, and unless he can convince Manitobans that up is the new down, which, I think, is unlikely, he's going to have a hard time convincing Manitobans that this is good news for Manitoba Hydro ratepayers, and so the urgency is that we've got a variety of matters in front of the House. We will have lots and lots and lots of time to debate the Throne Speech in the weeks and months to come. That matter we can deal with as we go forward.

But we do need to deal with the urgent issue of Manitoba Hydro today, have that debate, get some answers from government and some assurances that they're not merely sitting back in their armchairs and waiting for something to happen, but that they're active and energetic in tackling some of these issues and concerns.

And again, it's not members of the opposition that are raising it. It's an independent expert with—a highly educated expert who initially raised it, further backup of some of those concerns released by—on CBC television last night, and also, very significant issues being raised by the PUB as it's examining Hydro's spending and its income plans.

Now, members opposite have made something of the issue of market electricity rates, contrary to what the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said in the House

yesterday, where he said rates would go up by 40 percent if we look at market rates. In fact, the financial papers are reporting that rates are down 40 percent, Mr. Speaker, in the first half of this year within the markets that Hydro would be planning to sell into.

So, Mr. Speaker, rates are going up in Manitoba, prices are going down in other jurisdictions, risks are being taken, money is being spent, dire scenarios are being ignored, red flag after red flag is going up, and yet we have the same pattern of inaction and cover-up from the Premier as what he used in the election. Finance scandal is what he used on Crocus, and we fear that this latest disaster, orchestrated or overseen by the member for St. Boniface, could have the most dire circumstances of all. And those are some of the circumstances that have been outlined in their concerns by both the whistle-blower, the other consultant, who has released a report, and the Public Utilities Board.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the urgency of this matter is significant. That the normal business of the House can and should be set aside in order to deal with these very serious issues at Manitoba Hydro, and I would ask all members to support our desire to save Manitoba Hydro from the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) for the benefit of all Manitobans.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): I respectfully suggest that the honourable the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) hasn't made a case, Mr. Speaker, that this is a matter of urgent public importance that would require the setting aside of the ordinary business of the House, and I'd say that on two counts.

Actually, the Leader of the Opposition spent a lot of time going into the issue itself but didn't spend a lot of time actually making any arguments about why the business of the House should be set aside. But he did refer to two things which I will refer to myself in urging you not to rule that this is a matter of urgent public importance and that we get on with the business of the House, and in particular, the debate in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

The Leader of the Opposition cited the investigation that is now—that the Ombudsman has now been charged with, with respect to the allegations made by the whistle-blower in the case of Manitoba Hydro. There is a process in place now for that to take place. The Ombudsman was before the legislative affairs management committee just the

other day to ask for the resources to hire a consultant, to look at just what kind of further resources she would need in order to do the proper investigation.

I say that in respect to the question that was asked earlier in the House. The resources have been made available for that second stage. All parties in the House that were present at the LAMC agreed that those resources should be made available. It's not a matter of a partisan debate whatsoever, Mr. Speaker. Those initial resources have been made available and subsequent resources, I'm sure, will be made available once the Ombudsman is clear on exactly what she needs in order to enter into the next stage.

So we have a process for dealing with the very thing that the Leader of the Opposition is saying is a matter of urgent public importance and that somehow the House needs to deal with it. Well, the House, I would also submit, Mr. Speaker, has been dealing with it ever since we came back.

The opposition has been preoccupied with the whole matter of Manitoba Hydro, and that's perfectly fine on their part. They can choose what to be preoccupied with, but it's not as if the House hasn't had an opportunity to debate this, and I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, also to you, that we are in the middle of a Throne Speech debate. Now, my understanding of the tradition around here is that, you know, these matters of urgent public importance aren't normally raised during Throne Speech debate and there's a perfect procedural reason why that's the case: because during the Throne Speech you can debate anything you like.

* (15:00)

So you don't have to have a MUPI—just a kind of an acronym I'm getting used to—you don't have to have a MUPI in order to—in order to set aside the business of the House so that you can debate something that you wouldn't otherwise be able to debate, because you're in the middle of a Throne Speech debate and you can debate anything you like.

And, in fact, ironically, the Leader of the Opposition is the next person to speak in the Throne Speech debate, and I, for one, am eager to hear what he has to say, because he hasn't seemed to very eager. In fact, you know, he rang bells all day yesterday; he was so uninterested in laying out the government's—or the opposition's response to the Throne Speech, and now is his opportunity, Mr. Speaker. And we look forward with respect to you

making the right decision about the inappropriateness of this request, so that we can hear what the Leader of the Opposition actually thinks about the Throne Speech. And maybe he—he'll probably talk about Hydro, but he might talk about other things, as well, and we look forward to that kind of comprehensive response on his—on his part because so far he hasn't been all that eager to deliver it.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I rise because I believe—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member—it's—only recognize parties in the House, and the honourable member will have to seek leave if the honourable member wishes to speak to the MUPI.

Mr. Gerrard: I seek leave to speak to the MUPI.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member—*[interjection]*

An Honourable Member: Absolutely.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave to speak to the urgency of debate?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Okay. The honourable—it's been agreed to. The honourable member for River Heights to speak to the urgency of debate.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I want to bring up some particular information relative to why this matter is of urgent public importance and why there should be a debate today.

Notwithstanding the comments of the minister—member from Elmwood, I believe that there are some reasons why we should have a debate today: the issues around risk management which we've understood to include the drought possibility, particularly after the experience in the last decade with a year of drought; concerns over the export contracts and the extra expenses that may be required in a year of drought when we actually have to buy power; some of the potential outlying—outstanding liabilities due to erosion on Lake Winnipeg and potential claims by Sagkeeng and other First Nations; the way that Manitoba Hydro manages its funds on the currency and exchange markets; the debt management of Manitoba Hydro; the problems

around building the transmission line from north to south, which the government has decided will go on the west side of Manitoba; the potential for blackouts; and the particular reason, Mr. Speaker, why I believe that we need to have this debate now is that the president of Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Brennan, has repeatedly in the last little while been reported as saying that he himself is surprised at the high costs—as if he had not planned for these or budgeted for these.

In the paper today, the president of Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Brennan, has said that he's surprised at the high costs of the consultant fees. Well, if Mr. Brennan is surprised, then we need to be concerned because, you know, we would expect that Mr. Brennan would have planned for these items and that that money would have been budgeted and that the money spent would be that amount budgeted, instead of being surprised at what appeared to be larger than expected expenditures.

Furthermore, when we had the legislative committee, and Mr. Brennan was presenting and talking at the legislative committee, I specifically asked Mr. Brennan about the timing of the elements involved in building the west side line. And Mr. Brennan, himself, expressed surprise at how long things were taking. You know, if things were happening on time, as expected, then, you know, we wouldn't have to worry so much about risks. But when the president of Manitoba Hydro repeatedly is surprised at how much things cost and how long things are taking, then we do have to be worried about risks, and quite concerned when we have a consultant report which apparently says that there are much larger risks than most of us had understood to be the case. And so, given in particular the recent comments of the president of Manitoba Hydro that he himself is surprised at the costs and the lengths of time, I think we do need to have a debate on the assessment of risks and what's happening with Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition should be debated today. The notice required by rule 36(1) was provided.

Under our rules and practices the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter. I

have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward, however, I was not persuaded that the ordinary business of the House should be set aside to deal with this issue today. Although this is an issue that some members may have a concern about, I do not believe that the public interest will be harmed if the business of the House is not set aside to debate the motion today.

Additionally, I would like to note that other avenues exist for members to raise this issue, including question period, members' statements and the Throne Speech debate. Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I must rule that this matter does not meet the criteria set by our rules and precedents and I rule the motion out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THRONE SPEECH

(Second Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Okay. We will now move on to Orders of the Day and we will resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead), that the following address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at this Fourth Session of the Thirty-Ninth Legislature of Manitoba, and standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'm honoured today to rise to speak to the Speech from the Throne.

At the outset I would like to first thank His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor for the gracious way that he has conducted himself since assuming that office. I've had the occasion—I know other members have as well—to attend events throughout the community, and I think many Manitobans have been impressed with his sense of humour, and his very genuine common touch when it comes to the issues and people in this province. He's, I think, off to a good start in terms of the assumption of this important role within our—within our parliamentary system, Mr. Speaker. So I am pleased to have the opportunity to thank him and congratulate him on a very good start.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to welcome you back to the House. It's nice to be back here in the Chamber. Lots of water under the bridge since the last time—the last time this House sat back in September. A change in leadership on the part of the NDP and the government, and I certainly again want to extend my congratulations to the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) on his success in that contest and, notwithstanding the disagreements and periodic conflicts that we will have, wish him well in the conduct of his very new and very significant responsibilities.

*(15:10)

Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment you as well for the manner in which you have presided over this House and thank you as well for the wisdom that you bring in overseeing the proceedings of this House. Also want to acknowledge the contributions of our table officers, who serve us all very well day in and day out in this Chamber. They're diligent and they are attractive. They are wonderful people in every way and I want to just say to them with further encouragement that we're—they make it a pleasure to come to work each and every day here in this Chamber, and the fact is that they are required, as things evolve around this place from day to day and there is some uncertainty from time to time about how things are going to unfold, that they react very graciously to the—to the various on-the-fly changes that can occur in this Chamber. And so I want to thank them.

To the Sergeant-at-Arms and his staff, thank them for continuing to honour our parliamentary traditions in such a dignified way.

To our *Hansard* staff, who are working so hard at getting our comments on the record, both the intelligent comments and those that may fall even slightly short of that standard from time to time, Mr. Speaker. They do a great job of transcribing the discussions in this House, and it's a very important function.

To the gallery officers, as well, want to just thank them for ensuring the public is given every opportunity to participate in the House proceedings here as well, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to welcome back the pages, and hope that they will find this to be an enjoyable learning experience, watching a democracy in action. There have been some very good quotes in the past about the process of watching laws being made, and the

comparison to the making of sausage, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that they won't be too horrified by the process that they will sometimes see. But it is one, ultimately, that works, as messy as it may be from time to time, and I think all of us recognize and feel privileged to be members of this Chamber and have the opportunity to participate in the debates on the major issues of the day, doing our best every day to bring forward the issues, concerns and priorities of our constituents and to attempt to, I think, speak to and help achieve the aspirations of all Manitobans for a safer and more prosperous province within a great, strong federation of Canada.

We are privileged and fortunate to live in a province like Manitoba in a great country like Canada. We're reminded of that each and every day. We may have disagreements. We may be unhappy with government policy decisions and directions, but we are never, ever, even momentarily in doubt as to the fact that we do live in the greatest province in the greatest country in the world, Mr. Speaker, and it's a great honour and privilege to be part of—to be part of what we're doing here in the Manitoba Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we have raised, over the past number of years, a variety of concerns and issues on behalf of Manitobans. We've been critical of the government in a variety of ways, and that responsibility of opposition to be a constructive critic of government carries on each and every day that we're in this Chamber, and that, I know, will not be lost on members opposite.

And that responsibility to criticize certainly carries forward to the, to the—our response to the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker. This is a speech that is designed and intended to present a broad vision of the government as to how it intends to move our province forward in a variety of areas. And what we were looking for in this speech was a commitment that five and 10 and 15 years from now Manitoba would be a safer province than it is today, that it be the sort of province that many of us grew up in where we felt safe getting on the bus if we grew up in Winnipeg and travelling downtown to the Metropolitan Theatre to watch movies or to go shopping at The Bay and other downtown stores. These are the sorts of things—[interjection]—Eaton's and all of these great downtown institutions. These were all things that were part of my growing up, and which I regret to say, I would be very uncomfortable about today, with the level of gang activity and violence that we see—that we see in Winnipeg. And it's not something that I would want my kids to do

without the supervision of their parents, and I think that's sad. I think it reflects the fact that we've gone backward rather than forward on the issue of public safety over the past 10 years, and it's clear that this speech needed to deliver a message that it was time to move forward on that—on that front and to restore that sense of safety and security that all Manitobans over a certain age will recall, and which all Manitobans, regardless of age, would aspire to for the future of our province.

Mr. Speaker, we were also looking for a vision about the economic future of Manitoba. We know, when we look at the history of Manitoba, that there were eras where this was considered the place to be. It was the Chicago of the North, the Gateway to the West. There was a place where people flocked from across North America, from countries and places around the world. It was a place where people came together in commerce, a place where they came together with innovation and a sense of hope and optimism and pride that this would be a place of bustling opportunity for all people. And that was something, if you look back through the history of our province, that was a feature of Manitoba in the early part of the last century and at various stages along the way.

What we're disappointed to find with this speech, Mr. Speaker, is that there's no such vision for the future of Manitoba. There's no clearly identified strategy for how we get the economy growing robustly again. And, in fact, the most disappointing statement, out of many disappointing statements I've heard from the Premier, was his sense of satisfaction when he said that flat is the new up.

This is a Premier who aspires to flat. This is a Premier who was bragging about economic—a contraction in Manitoba's GDP this year of 0.2 percent, Mr. Speaker, and this is something that left all of us feeling discouraged in terms of the attitude of the Premier and the government, and feeling just a little bit hopeful than we would want to when we consider what kind of a future this province will provide to our children and to our grandchildren.

And all of us, I think, look forward to those days, depending on which stage of life we're at today, when either our children or our grandchildren are finishing up with school, making decisions about what they're gonna do next to their lives, and choosing, after considering all of the options available in this modern era, an era where it is so easy for people to move from one place to another,

but choosing, not because of a lack of choice or a lack of opportunity, but because of the availability of that choice in the modern era, choosing to stay here in Manitoba and to pursue dreams and opportunities.

And I know that there's a lot of looking backwards with this government in this speech, a lot of bragging about the fact that because of massive transfer payments from Ottawa over the last 10 years, that there was a sense that money was flowing into the province thanks to the federal government that created a sense of economic well-being and opportunity.

But what the speech failed to do was acknowledge that that's not a sustainable way to build a future economy. It's not a vision. It's simply a reality that the government happened to be performing relatively poorly compared to other provinces and was on the receiving end of massive increases in equalization payments, which it then turned around and spent in a variety of ways, some of which were worthwhile, and others of which we have taken issue with. But this was the short term, take the money from Ottawa, spend it, and then brag about it approach to politics and government that we saw from the NDP.

That era, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very evident is coming to an end, and there's no recognition in this speech that we're into a new era with significant challenges that need to be addressed with a much higher level of energy, and a much higher level of optimism and vision than what we see in this Speech from the Throne.

We see a laundry list of recycled promises that have been made previously. We see re-announcements of projects that have been announced over and over and over again, Mr. Speaker, but no sense as to what our natural strategic advantages here in Manitoba, being at the centre of North America, the greatest continent on Earth, in terms of economic innovation and growth since the Second World War.

We're right in the middle of this great continent of North America, the engine of global economic growth for the better part of the last four or five decades and we've got this incredible opportunity, because of our central location, and the fact that we have rivers and streams and waters flowing into Manitoba, that present opportunities for hydro generation, where the bottom of the—one of the world's largest—one of the world's largest watersheds.

It's a watershed that stretches from the Rocky Mountains in the West to northwestern Ontario and then into the United States. We have this great quantity of water flowing to Manitoba that we, thanks to the vision and the ability of our forefathers, have been able to harness and turn into economic opportunity for Manitobans, to turn into low-priced—what historically has been low-priced electricity, to power our economy and to provide a high quality of life for all Manitobans regardless of where they live.

* (15:20)

And so these are the two critical advantages, our central location which provides opportunities with the development of CentrePort, with the creation of a vision of a centre of trade, commerce, transportation, with a vision of activity and growth and entrepreneurship and all of these things that are—that have been features of our past and should be features of our future, none of which are reflected in this speech.

We also, Mr. Speaker, sit on some of the most fertile land in the world. We have farmers that are on the cutting edge of agricultural production, who knew more about producing food to feed the world—the world's population than any other producers and any other place in the country. They're people that we should be proud of. They're people we would be supporting. They're people that the government should stand behind, and they're people who deserve—who deserve to be—to be treated as the heroes that they are, rather than to be singled out as villains by this NDP government who apply regulation after regulation without compensation, and are held out as scapegoats by this NDP government.

And you know what, for all of our criticism of the former premier, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Doer, he said—he got it right on his final day when he said that his party didn't have enough farmers around the table to reflect the interests of that important segment in the province. And that was reflected once again in this Speech from the Throne.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we look at—we look at these incredible opportunities. We have—we have forestry. We have mining. We have great farmers. We have rich land. We have—we have hydro-electric opportunities because of the water flowing in. We have a central location. We have all these great natural advantages and the greatest of all of these are the people who come—who have come to Manitoba, over many generations, from countries around the

world, and we were—we were honoured today to be in the presence of nurses who have come here from the Philippines, and we look at the contribution of the Filipino community to Manitoba over the last many years.

And I was honoured when I was growing up, Mr. Speaker, to be neighbours with Dr. Narvis and his family, which were one of the first families to come to Manitoba from the Philippines in the 1970s, and who brought with them family members and friends, and who began this great—this great movement of people from the Philippines to Manitoba, who have made such a great mark on our province.

And the same can be said for the remarkable contributions of the Chinese people who have come here. And the same could be said for the contribution of the Indo-Canadian community who have come here and made great contributions, and I know that the pride that all of us feel about the accomplishments of people like Dr. Jha, the son of the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), in Toronto, who's a world-renowned physician and somebody who's got expertise on matters related to public health and who's recognized internationally. We're incredibly proud that people of this calibre have come to Canada, have come to Manitoba and have chosen to contribute to our great province.

We're incredibly proud of the way—the way that First Nations people and Métis people are coming together. There's been great hardship in those communities, Mr. Speaker, over many years, and we see examples of people coming forward and doing remarkable things. We look at the talents of people like Sierra Noble. We look at the incredible—incredibly gifted musicians and artists and businesspeople and people involved in public life in this House, including the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson), and others who are doing so much to contribute to our province.

So, we've got these great—these great assets, Mr. Speaker, and the Speech from the Throne was supposed to present a vision of how we take all of these gifts that we've been given, and build a better province and a better future for Manitoba, so that we could look at the province 10 years from now and have a vision in our minds as to what it would look like in 10 and 15 and 20 years from now, as a place of opportunity, a place of harmonious relations among people from a variety of backgrounds, a place

of safety and security, a place with a clean environment and a place that is on the cutting edge of tackling the major challenges that face the world.

And at Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker, we have some of the greatest engineering minds in the world. They've gone internationally to help other countries with hydro projects. These are people who are tackling some of the greatest energy challenges that the world is facing today, and these are people we should be proud of. We should be celebrating them in our Speech from the Throne, and yet not a single mention of Manitoba Hydro in the Speech from the Throne. The greatest strategic asset we have, not a single mention of Manitoba Hydro, and it is a reflection of the fact that the former Hydro minister, who has risen to the Premier's office through the NDP leadership process, was Hydro minister for six of the past 10 years, and couldn't even bring himself to mention his own record as Hydro minister in the Speech from the Throne. It is an incredible omission, and it's an incredible admission of complete and total incompetence, as the minister responsible for Hydro, the minister responsible for Crocus, the minister who managed to cover his own back when it came to the NDP election finance scam. None of these things referred to.

And so, when we look at it, the greatest asset being Hydro, not mentioned. Democracy in Manitoba, no mention of that because they can't talk about democracy, Mr. Speaker, because they are an affront to democracy in the way that they conduct themselves during election campaigns, the way they falsify their election returns, the way they go around grovelling for secret letters absolving them of responsibility when they break the law. When they go around—and they can't even talk about venture capital and building up our capital markets because they destroyed Crocus. These are the three biggest elements of the legacy of the new Premier (Mr. Selinger), and it's no wonder he can't talk about economic growth because of Crocus.

He can't talk about our greatest Crown corporation, Hydro, because he moved from the Crocus disaster to the Hydro disaster. They can't talk about democracy in the Throne Speech, the most sacred value in our province, because they have offended the rules of democracy time and time again, Mr. Speaker. And so what we're left with is the thin gruel that's represented in this speech, in this speech, and it was a bunch of recycled announcements previously made by his predecessor.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are individual initiatives in this speech. There are individual initiatives in this speech that are worthy of support. And there are individual initiatives that we have called for in the past that are reflected in this speech. We look at the, the police helicopter called for by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and now copied by members of the NDP. That's—that was a good idea. We're happy that they borrowed it. We're flattered that they borrowed this idea and that's included in the speech.

The initiatives for families dealing with fertility challenges and the tax credits—something that we have said previously that we support in our meetings with those families who have faced challenges in this area. There are lots of good intentions expressed in this speech. There are good intentions in terms of protecting children and vulnerable people. There are good intentions expressed in terms of taking steps to assist families in a variety of ways. But, Mr. Speaker, what is absolutely missing is any sense of hope in this speech, any sense that there's a recognition that we are sitting in Manitoba on some of the greatest opportunities that any human being on earth could ever hope for and any sense that there's any contrition for the fact that they have made a mess of Manitoba Hydro.

They made a mess of Crocus. We've got record high debt levels, thanks to this Finance Minister, which have reduced the options of government, Mr. Speaker. We've got record high dependency on Ottawa, which is going to—which is a chicken that is soon come home to—coming home to roost in terms of equalization, and we've got a range of other, of challenges that we face in this province that were created, that arose, that were generated as a result of the lack of action or the misdirection and the wrong-headed decisions made by this NDP government.

And so, Mr. Speaker, as we've said on the day of the Throne Speech, this is a speech that is long on problems and short on solutions, and that's not what Manitobans are looking for. They're looking for a speech that's long on hope, and it contains some detailed, practical and realistic solutions to move our province forward. They're not there in this speech. He promised that he was going to address the major economic challenges. That's not there in this speech, and for all of those reasons we cannot support it.

Now, I've talked about initiatives that we can support, and one of those initiatives is the indication by the government that at least for now they're not

going to increase taxes on Manitoba families in terms of the sales tax, in terms of the harmonized sales tax. Now the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) has said that he wants to do it right after the election. That's what he's on the record as saying. The member—the Premier (Mr. Selinger), he campaigned on bringing it in right after the next election. The Premier said previously that this is something that we should be doing before he changes his position.

We're pleased, though, in this speech that they're saying that—for now, Mr. Speaker—during a recession they're not going to increase consumption taxes. But you've got to pay attention to the fine print when it comes to this former Finance Minister, because when you look at the fine print you realize that technically speaking a recession is two quarters of contraction in a row. Technically speaking, even if they grow the economy by 0.01 percent, we're out of the recession. That means the HST is coming under the NDP the moment that happens, and that's what they're saying right here in the speech. That's why we can't support it, because we're opposed to the HST today, we're opposed to it tomorrow, and we're going to be opposed to it in the future.

* (15:30)

Mr. Speaker, we will not increase taxes on Manitobans. We won't increase taxes on business. We won't increase taxes on families. We won't increase taxes on individual consumers. But the hidden NDP agenda of calling an election and then imposing an increase in sales taxes is absolutely evident when you go through this speech. It's very, very clear that this is what they're attempting to do.

And there are lots of ways—there are lots of ways we can encourage growth. The NDP payroll tax, which penalizes companies for creating jobs is an irritant that needs to be addressed as we go forward. NDP general corporate tax rates, which are out of line with much of the country, need to be addressed, Mr. Speaker. The issues of over regulation and red tape need to be addressed. The need for a genuine vision for infrastructure investment that builds on our natural advantages that invest where the traffic exists, where the economic opportunities are available to us, that needs to be part of the vision. They're not there in the speech. All we have is more trickery, fine print and hedging on the part of this Premier (Mr. Selinger) when it comes to—when it comes to this—when it comes to the Speech from the Throne.

And we've seen in the past, Mr. Speaker, and we've got concerns about the credibility of statements that are made in this Throne Speech, the credibility of statements that he's made in past budgets, where even after he was warning of the imminent collapse of Crocus, he was bragging about Crocus in the budget documents. It makes us wonder, as we read this speech, what he knows today that Manitobans aren't aware of and which is going to show up later on to have been a statement in this speech of being untrue.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we were looking for something more in this speech. We were looking for vision. We were looking for practical solutions. We weren't looking for more of the same recycled announcements, but we will get out there. We will support some of the individual initiatives that I have already mentioned, and there are others in the speech as well, that is, individual initiatives are good ones.

But at the end of the day if you can't pay for these things, Mr. Speaker, if you don't have an economic vision, then this is more of the same old-style politics of making promises that may sound great, issuing news releases that may temporarily generate some photo ops and ribbon cutting, but do nothing to move Manitoba into the future with a sense of strength and optimism and the knowledge that for all of the spending and all of news releases and all of the ribbon cuttings, that the money is going to be there, the wealth is going to be there in Manitoba to meet all these demands.

And that's where this speech falls short. Flat is not good enough, contrary to what the Premier is saying. We can't support this speech, Mr. Speaker, and then for all of those reasons, that is why today, I move, seconded by the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu),

THAT the motion be amended by adding at the end the following words:

But this House regrets:

- (a) That the government's Throne Speech was long on problems but short on solutions; and
- (b) That the speech failed to address the fact that Winnipeg is the country's murder capital, the child poverty capital and Manitoba has the lowest GDP per capita in the west; and
- (c) That the speech fails to address the high taxes that Manitoba families already pay under this current NDP government; however, the PC caucus does support some positive initiatives in the Throne Speech, including the NDP government's decision to avoid increasing taxes by refusing to move to a harmonized sales tax in a manner that would add to the already high taxes that Manitobans pay; and
- (d) That the speech references fiscal restraint, and yet the NDP has failed to practise fiscal restraint, has increased the size of its Cabinet while at the same time closing the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba over the holiday season and putting some of the most vulnerable Manitobans at risk; and
- (e) The speech indicates that the NDP plan to use the rainy day fund to pay for justice and child protection costs which are important services provided by the Province and something that should already have been factored into the budgeting process; and
- (f) That instead of using the last decade of general global and economic prosperity to move our province forward, the NDP have squandered an opportunity to make Manitoba a have province, and has instead left a legacy of debt for Manitobans; and
- (g) The speech reinforces the government's lack of understanding of Manitoba's agriculture sector, as evidenced by the absence of any new programs or services to help farmers facing economic challenges brought on by factors such as adverse weather conditions, trade-related matters such as BSE and country-of-origin labelling, and public policy decisions based on politics and not on sound science, such as Bill 17; and
- (h) The speech continues this government's history of paying lip service to the needs of rural Manitoba, as evidenced by its ongoing failure to develop broad-based strategies aimed at cultivating growth and opportunities in our rural communities, the spin-off benefits of which are felt throughout the entire provincial economy; and
- (i) The speech revisits the government's habit of making promises about its commitment to protecting the environment in areas such as restoring the health of Lake Winnipeg, the

creation of new parks and protection areas and recycling, yet as its track record has shown, it has proven woefully slow in translating such promises into meaningful and timely actions; and

- (j) That the speech failed to put forward a plan to provide timely access to health care for all Manitobans, to address the closure of 17 rural emergency rooms, to bring back more than 1,500 doctors who have left Manitoba since the NDP took office, and to shorten long wait times that threaten the health and well-being of all Manitobans; and
- (k) That this government continually fails to acknowledge the challenges facing Manitoba seniors such as the shortage of safe, affordable housing, the availability of assisted living spaces and other long-term care options, better caregiver supports and Pharmacare deductibles, which have increased almost every year under this government; and
- (l) That the speech is rife with previous announcements and old health-care capital commitments, some as old as 2003, with no time line or reassurance of these projects will ever get off the ground—Bear with me for one moment—and
- (m) That this speech is rife, pardon me—and that the speech fails to acknowledge the lack of accountability of many of Manitoba's Crown corporations and fails to put an end to wasteful, costly projects like the NDP-directed, west-side bipole line and the NDP government's enhanced driver's licence initiative; and
- (o) That this speech fails to lay out a vision for Manitoba Hydro, and as such is ignoring an asset that Manitobans take pride in, particularly given the ability of our province to generate clean power in an era when clean energy is coveted by other jurisdictions; and
- (p) That this speech does not propose solutions to combat child poverty in our province, or to better protect children in care by reducing the caseloads of social workers; and
- (q) That this speech takes a few small steps in the right direction with the funding for a police helicopter that the PC caucus advocated for, and a commitment to start

tracking gang members and known drug dealers; however, it doesn't go far enough, especially given the horrendous summer of crime we just experienced with innocent victims getting shot at weddings and people being lit on fire in their backyard.

As a consequence, the government has thereby lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, seconded by the honourable member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that the motion be amended—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense. The amendment is in order and now we will have speakers to the amendment.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to add my comments on our Throne Speech that was introduced at the beginning of this week.

I listened very intently to the comments of the Leader of the Official Opposition which I'll speak to in a few moments. But I understand that we're now talking to the amendment to the Throne Speech itself, and I want to indicate from the outset, Mr. Speaker, I do not support the amendment of the Leader of the Official Opposition and I'll explain why in a few moments, why I think that this particular Throne Speech, like all of the past Throne Speeches this government has introduced, are wise moves, as all of our Throne Speeches have been that we have introduced so far.

I'd like to start first, Mr. Speaker, by welcoming you back and the pages and Chamber staff that so ably serve the members of this Chamber. And I've watched very closely, I'm sure like all members have, at our pages that, once again, continue to service in this Chamber, and I'm quite impressed by the skill level that they bring to the Chamber, and I want to congratulate them on their services and on also being selected to be servants of this particular Chamber. And I wish them well in their future educational opportunities and hope they enjoy their experience while they're with us here in the Manitoba Legislature.

* (15:40)

Mr. Speaker, I want to first start as well by mentioning, yesterday when we had Keystone Agricultural Producers before this—in this Legislative

buildings and I had the opportunity, like many members of this Assembly, to sit and talk with the producers and to listen to their experiences first-hand, and yesterday I had a chance to talk in particular to Eric McLean and David Wray who are producers in this province, young farmers, which I was quite impressed to see, and to share with them some thoughts and also to listen to them as they explained their operations to me and some of the challenges that they face.

I believe Eric McLean is a seed grower in the province of Manitoba, has quite an extensive operation, and indicates that his seed-growing operation is going quite well to this point in time. As David Wray also explained, he's a grain and cattle producer in this province. Both of them explained to me that this year was thought to be quite challenging until we hit the period of warm weather in September, and then all of the conditions improved greatly, and they had, from what they've indicated to me, that they had very good crops, and that they were quite happy with the outcome of the crop year as it turned out, Mr. Speaker.

We had a chance to talk with many of the other producers, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the environmental—about being environmental stewards of the land. And the farmers explained to us quite clearly, the farm producers, that they were very conscious of being good stewards of the land, and that they were watching very closely on their input costs, of course, which is a part of their operations, but also on what happens with the land and the product that they produce for consumption, not only of the people of this province but across the country.

We also talked and I heard from producers, as did the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers), when we—the producers were sharing with us their thoughts about land use planning and the location of certain agricultural operations in its proximity to certain communities throughout rural Manitoba, and of course the importance of ensuring that we have the right and the correct land use planning decisions being made in rural areas involving local councils.

And we would like to thank the Keystone Agricultural Producers for sponsoring the Farmer Appreciation Day here yesterday because it gave us the opportunity to hear first-hand from farm producers and, of course, to learn more about the challenges the producers are facing but also at the same time to find out that while they have their challenges, this year was a relatively good year for

them, and that they were quite optimistic about what the future of agriculture holds for the province of Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to also mention that this week we had our minister travel to the—*[interjection]*—the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) travel to Ottawa to represent the Province of Manitoba and receive a boreal forest award on behalf of the Province of Manitoba. And we are quite proud of the member for Rupertsland and the work that he has done on behalf of our government and, of course, we're quite proud of the award that the Province of Manitoba has received with respect to that award.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And, as mentioned in the Throne Speech, this government is taking additional steps with respect to forest and of course wildlife, specifically polar bears, and we'll get into that in a few moments and what they mean to the province of Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that—I'll speak about some local issues that are affecting my community and some changes that have occurred since I last had the opportunity to speak to a Throne Speech but I first want to start to talk a bit about justice issues in the province of Manitoba.

I can recall back, I think it was in 2005-2006, members of the opposition were quite critical of this government and the steps that this government was taking in conjunction with its Crown corporation, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, with respect to the WATSS program and the immobilizer program for vehicles in this province. And if I recall correctly members opposite were saying that the immobilizer program would not work and it wouldn't prevent or reduce automobile theft in this province.

And I'm happy to report, Mr. Acting Speaker, that it's been announced just recently that, as a result of the WATSS program and the immobilizer installation program, that we have seen nearly a 70 percent reduction in automobile theft in this province since we started this program. That's in large part due to the many, many Manitobans that have agreed to have their vehicle immobilized, both through the most-at-risk vehicle programs or the voluntary programs. And we give Manitobans full credit for coming forward and having their vehicles immobilized, because they have taken the steps to recognize, as all Manitobans do, that we have a part to play in crime prevention in this province. And

Manitobans stepped forward, stepped up to the plate, and we have seen a significant reduction.

And as Manitobans will know that as a result of that nearly 70 percent reduction in automobile theft, we have seen many, many millions of dollars in savings in Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation payouts as a result of reduced claims, and of course those—that reduction in—the reduced claims has meant that our rates have remained stable in the province of Manitoba. And Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation said just that: that as a result of those savings that the rates have remained stable in the province of Manitoba.

And stay tuned, I say to the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), stay tuned. It's not too far away, not too many more sleeps and you'll have the opportunity to once again comment on the Public Utilities Board ruling about how well Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation is protecting the interests of the travelling public in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we have also taken additional steps with respect to crime prevention in this province. And I know most Manitobans and members of this Chamber will recognize that we have taken steps as a part of our provincial government budgets where we have invested in public safety in this province, and we have—just in the city of Winnipeg alone, I believe—we have increased, since 1999, 80 more police officers to Winnipeg alone, a significant involvement of the provincial government in the policing activities in the various communities throughout the province of Manitoba.

And I would like to congratulate the police officers. As most members will know, Mr. Speaker, the Integrated Organized Crime Task Force of the province of Manitoba had success yesterday in bringing about the arrests of numerous individuals living in our province that were involved in organized crime. And I want to congratulate the various police forces in the province of Manitoba for their good work on behalf of the people of Manitoba in bringing these individuals before the courts of Manitoba, and we'll see that there will be an outcome or some consequences for these individuals that are involved in organized crime. And I think that that good work—we have to congratulate the police forces of Manitoba for that work.

Mr. Speaker, we have had many other activities of our police forces, and our government will continue to take steps for public safety as we will

introduce The Family Maintenance Act to improve the enforcement and support for payments and to establish the best-interest-of-the-child criteria that will be used before the courts. And I want to say that over the last year or two I've had a number of cases involving maintenance enforcement, and I think this is an appropriate step to take to make sure that the custodial parents and the children that are in need of these support payments will continue to receive them in a timely fashion, and that this government recognizes that, and we are going to take the steps necessary to make sure that that occurs.

We have taken other steps with respect to sexual exploitation of children and youth with the expansions to Tracia's Trust, Mr. Speaker. And I know this government takes very seriously this challenge and responsibility and will take the steps necessary, working closely with our law enforcement agencies within the province, to make sure that we can locate, if possible, individuals who are missing and also to bring to justice those that were involved in the murder of mostly women in this province.

* (15:50)

Mr. Speaker, we have a number of other involvements in this Throne Speech with respect to the green initiatives, in particular where our government is taking steps and providing additional support to the Assiniboine Park Zoo with respect to the polar bears and also taking steps to increase the participation of the Province in polar bear-related activities in the Churchill area. And I know Manitoba likes to pride itself on being the polar bear capital of the world, and I think it's important for us, as at least at minimum, as a symbol, for us to participate in that, but more importantly, to protect the wildlife of our province and also to share with all Manitobans and all tourists that come to Winnipeg the opportunity—to Winnipeg and to Churchill—to share the opportunity to view polar bears on a first-hand basis and to see them not only in their natural habitat, as Churchill is, but also to see them at the Assiniboine Park Zoo for the orphaned and abandoned polar bear cubs.

Mr. Speaker, we're—this provincial Throne Speech is taking steps to add 1,500 housing, social housing units in the province of Manitoba. That's a plan that we have, and I know that my community is not immune to the need for social housing, and we have—I'm glad to say that our Province, provincial government, recognizes that we have a need for more social housing and that that will add greatly to the ability to have good quality homes for the families

that are in need that perhaps for a variety of reasons can't afford to make the purchases for themselves or to take on mortgage payments due to a variety of issues. But I think it's good that our provincial government is involved in providing additional social housing units in the province of Manitoba.

There are a number of other issues in our, in our Throne Speech that we're taking with respect to cottage lots. We're going to be providing opportunities for other Manitobans that may wish to purchase cottage lots in the province of Manitoba, and we all know that that has generated significant interest in our province and, of course, creates additional construction jobs and generates revenue and investments—through investments in our cottage lots throughout rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we have—we're making investments into more child-care spaces. We're also designating the Upper Fort Garry here in Winnipeg as a heritage provincial park, and I, on my way to this Legislative Building every day, I see that there is work ongoing at the corner of Main Street there and Assiniboine with respect to that particular site, and I'm quite optimistic and hopeful for the future that, once that site is finished, we will see a site that will be a major attraction, being next to The Forks, which is also a major attraction but also will attract tourists and Manitobans alike to the Upper Fort Garry heritage provincial park.

Now, Mr. Speaker, our provincial government has, as we have had for many years now, made investments into our Strategic Highway program, and we have, through that program we have made commitments for a 10-year Strategic Highway capital initiative and, of course, we again had an announcement just today, I believe, where our Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton) made an announcement with respect to highways capital. We are spending \$545 million this year and we're working on over 1,500 kilometres of roads in the province of Manitoba, which is a significant investment, and I can remember back to the 1990s when the annual capital program for the entire province of Manitoba was just a touch over \$100 million, and yet our provincial government is five times greater in its investment in what the previous provincial government was in the 1990s.

We're also investing an additional \$155 million on the bridge infrastructure network throughout the province of Manitoba and, of course, with the announcements with the federal government, we're

also making investments into the Provincial Trunk Highway 15 bridge over the floodway as well as strategic work to complete the floodway expansion project. I know PTH 15 bridge will service the folks, the people of Springfield and also the people residing in my community, so I think it's a benefit to have that construction take place and will greatly add to the ability of the highway network to continue to operate there during flood conditions.

Our provincial government has also announced that we're prepared to make investments into the Disraeli Bridge, and I know there was an announcement made earlier this fall, Mr. Speaker, and I do know that that's a welcome addition to the infrastructure network. That's in addition to the investment that the provincial government already makes to the city of Winnipeg transportation infrastructure, as we do for other services relating to transportation.

We are making investments into the CentrePort on the west side of Winnipeg, and I do know that there's a strong interest by the business community to want to expand business opportunities into that CentrePort venture—excuse me. And also to—we want to thank, in particular, the federal government for partnering the—with the Province of Manitoba to be part of the CentrePort operation.

Now, in keeping with the partnership arrangement that has occurred now with respect to CentrePort, I would also like to thank the federal government for its involvement with Province of Manitoba and other provinces across Canada, for the federal stimulus infrastructure package that has been ongoing. I know that even my own community of Transcona has been a benefactor of that, as so many other communities have throughout the province of Manitoba, and I think this will not only add to the improvements of our infrastructure but also add to the—to the job opportunities for people of Manitoba.

There is also the partnership with respect to the rink investments, and I know my community, it was a benefactor of that, as were so many other communities, and I'd like to thank the federal government for that partnership on those programs and projects, as well, because I think they add to the quality of life for so many Manitobans and it is a good investment.

Now I listened very closely, Mr. Acting Speaker, to the comments that were made by the Leader of the Opposition, wherein he said that—some derogatory comments with respect to our Premier (Mr.

Selinger), and to the comments that were made with respect to the challenges that face the Province of Manitoba, and these challenges are not unique in Canada. Every province is facing challenges with respect to the fiscal situation, and I do know that if you look at the announcements that have been made by the federal government, and I think they're up to \$53 billion now in deficit situation—

An Honourable Member: Fifty-six.

Mr. Reid: Fifty-six billion dollars; I stand corrected, that the federal government, those great fiscal managers who, I believe, thought that balanced budgets were the way to go, but they are recognizing that the Keynesian theory has to apply in some situations, and in this situation they've made the investments into the communities of the province to keep people working. And I think that to make those investments in our working people is the right investment to make because it adds to the quality of life and to the infrastructure for so many of our communities.

I do know that the Leader of the Opposition said he was—he's opposed to the HST. Well, I have to wonder back, then, if he's opposed to the HST, where was he on the GST? Why was he not opposed to the GST when it was announced a number of years ago, and where does he stand on that particular tax, which also hits so many families here in Manitoba, but across the country?

The Leader of the Opposition says that the Throne Speech makes promises that we can't pay for. Well, it's interesting the promises that he made during the election campaign in 2007, like the lake in Point Douglas, for example. I was wondering how he was going to pay for that; just one of the many strange and weird promises that were made by the Conservatives during that particular election campaign.

I have to ask if the Leader of the Opposition is so worried about the rainy day fund and what its uses will be, why he isn't questioning why his own party during the 1990s sold the Crown corporation Manitoba Telephone System and then used the proceeds to balance the budget for the Province of Manitoba. Didn't use the existing revenue stream that was there, but actually had to use the proceeds of the sale of a corporation to balance their budget.

There is many opportunities for growth and for job opportunities, and I know that many of our young people are moving back to the province of

Manitoba. Some of them had left in the past, to the province of Alberta, but they're now moving back here. Even some of my own family members have moved back to the province of Manitoba. The bloom is off the rose in Alberta and folks are moving back here, recognizing that Manitoba is a great place to live and to work and to raise a family, and that they recognize that and they've moved back to be with their families and to work here, and to contribute to the—to the opportunities of this province.

Mr. Speaker, there's—Mr. Acting Speaker—there's so much more that I could add with respect to our budget—our Throne Speech initiatives and, no doubt, during the coming budget debate that will occur I will have the opportunity to add more comments with respect to our initiatives as a government, of which I am very proud to be a part of, and that we have taken the steps to announce to Manitobans, once again, as we have in every Throne Speech, our plan for the coming year, and that this will guide us throughout the coming year as we move forward to continue to provide opportunities that Manitobans need and want.

And thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to add my comments here today.

* (16:00)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating the Premier (Mr. Selinger) in his new position and his responsibilities. Though there are very large differences between our party and the Premier with respect to the type of government that we believe is needed for our province, I respect the Premier for his commitment to public service in Manitoba and the sacrifices that he and his family have and are making in this effort. I also want to recognize those who work in the Manitoba Legislature and their contributions to the working of the Legislative Chamber.

This being said, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to this year's Speech from the Throne, it was a major disappointment. Some Premiers get the essence of what needs to be done for the people of the province. They make plans and charge forward. Others crawl out of the starting gate. This NDP Premier has chosen to crawl and this is not a time for crawling.

Time and time again the Premier, when he was Finance Minister, showed a poor ability to plan and to prepare. He did his best to cover up the fact that he knew very early on that the Crocus Investment Fund was in trouble but the fact remains that for years

after he knew there were big problems at Crocus, he was still acting like a salesman trying to pitch Crocus by praising Crocus in his budget.

Over time the Premier's Finance Minister got more polished and suave, sort of like a used car salesman, and did better at covering for Crocus and better at drawing in Manitobans. He covered up his deficits by grabbing money from Hydro. He covered up the \$900-million increase in debt in 2008-2009 by claiming it was a balanced budget. He covered up the planned \$88-million budgetary operating deficit in the current fiscal year by saying he's bal—a balanced budget and now, in his first Throne Speech as Premier he's failing to deliver a vision and failing to provide goals for our province. But what shone through in this Throne Speech was, once more, the Premier is a poor manager.

We are at a time of economic uncertainty. I know it and the hardworking people of this province know it. We appear to be emerging from a recession with a recovery which is likely to be slow and prolonged. We need to position Manitoba so that whether the recovery is sooner or, as many think, later, we will come out of this period ahead, with the new investments made, and the new thinking that will truly position Manitoba for the next decade and for the rest of this century.

The Premier's Throne Speech contained nothing that would give Manitoba a real advantage heading into the next decade, stronger and better position nationally and globally. Instead the Premier himself even admits his efforts are flat.

How should the Premier have acted? One of the first and most important actions a Premier must take in difficult economic times is to be frank and open with people, open the books and talk about the issues and provide solutions. Yet the Premier and his Finance Minister have ducked the extra effort and avoided providing an economic statement earlier than in years past. Without an economic report from the Province we are missing a huge piece of the puzzle and must wonder just what the future of the province is going to look like.

What we do know is that in the annual financial report for the fiscal year 2008-2009 our provincial debt, the net debt, went up by almost \$900 million. Provincial debt happens because the Premier and their team spend more than Manitoba earns in revenue.

In 2008-2009 our former Premier and his Finance Minister, our new Premier, spent almost \$900 million more than Manitoba earned in revenue, and of course our new Premier says we had a balanced budget. The Premier's credibility on managing and improving this province's economic status is not good. The Throne Speech the Premier delivered to the people of Manitoba did not provide the help or the forward-thinking approach that many in this province need.

The economic statement we asked for this fall is missing. The 2009-2010 operating budget is to spend \$88 million more than the operations revenue brings in and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) calls this good financial management. All the Premier said in the Throne Speech is that he expects to draw down the rainy day fund. So, basically, Manitobans have to raid their savings to help pay for the Premier's shortcomings in fiscal management. The Premier should have been open with Manitobans and told us more clearly what the economic picture is.

The second thing a premier should do for his province when times are tough is to look ahead and give a vision of where he expects things to go in the next five years. That's why we elect our leaders, because we expect them to have the skill and creativity to set goals for improvement and to rally the people needed to reach and deliver on these goals. Our new Premier's Throne Speech had no vision for Manitoba. It contained no goals, and it made no mention of rallying the talent and passion of this province to help move things ahead.

Things aren't going well for many people in Manitoba, and for these folks, hearing the Premier's empty Throne Speech must have been a slap in the face. One group that the Premier short-changed in the Throne Speech is the Interlake farmers. I met with farmers in Arborg. I heard their stories, and I felt their pain as they wonder how they will keep food on their table for their own families and how they will continue to help feed their fellow Manitobans. It's shameful that the Premier did not listen well enough to the people in the Interlake area.

The Premier says in his Throne Speech that he's throwing all sorts of programs, including AgriStability for one, at the Interlake farmers. This is a program which works well if farmers have a single bad year. It's a program which is hopeless when farmers have had a series of bad years. In the Interlake region near Arborg and Fisher Branch, almost all farmers have had three bad years out of

the last five and some farmers are in a belt where they had four bad years out of the last five. And this year conditions were so wet that some farmers even had muskrats building houses in their grain fields.

The Premier, in his Throne Speech, interestingly, was not speaking to the farmers but rather to the people in the city of Winnipeg. Instead of showing that he knows the situation and is ready to tackle the crisis appropriately, the Premier provided just enough words to suggest to those outside the Interlake that he's doing something. And when those who are living with the struggles recognize that the Premier is simply re-announcing funding, that isn't enough to properly help those in need.

The reality is that 40 percent of the land was not even seeded this year. The reality is that even those who planted crops, almost without exception, had very poor crops. The reality is that it's not just grain farmers but cattle farmers who are badly affected because there wasn't enough hay produced and hay prices are very high. The reality is that even those who have bees did poorly this year.

The reality is that the program problem is a large one and it needed larger and bolder thinking than the small-minded lip service the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was able to muster. Not only did the Premier try to cover up his own limited commitments to help farmers by spouting lots of programs, the Premier then went on to name one drain after another which he's going to clean out and improve. What the novice Premier didn't tell Manitobans in his speech is that the drains he mentioned were already committed several years ago and never done. The Premier didn't tell Manitobans in his speech that his government should have done these drains three years ago, and it might have helped reduce the mess of overland flooding that has caused four municipalities to declare disasters.

The Premier didn't tell Manitobans in his Throne Speech that he's no intention of doing the planning needing to make sure the Interlake has an adequate water management plan that includes sufficient water retention and drainage. The Premier didn't tell Manitobans that with climate change, we're gonna need the Interlake to be able to handle an increase in moisture and we should be acting now.

Let me emphasize. The Premier's government had 10 years in office to help the Interlake prepare for high moisture levels. Indeed, amazingly, when I visited the area around Arborg, I saw a provincial drain stuffed with cattails and poorly operating,

making the problems worse instead of better. It's almost unbelievable that in this circumstance, the NDP so neglected the provincial drains in this area that they made the problems of wet fields worse not better. Truth is stranger than fiction sometimes. From those on the NDP side of the House, the truth hurts.

What should have been done? Since the Premier and his government don't seem to be able to meet with farmers in a productive way—I was up there with my staff and asked farmers and residents in the Interlake: how do we need to help? They made it clear and plain. One farmer indicated the need for a one-time recovery grant of about a hundred dollars an acre and this was supported by many others in the area. Logically, this help should be provided 60-40 federally and provincially. Logically, in this instance, rather than waiting for endless provincial-federal negotiation and bickering, each government should its—provide its share directly without waiting for the other government to act. Time is important here.

* (16:10)

Why does such a payment make economic sense? Let's look at the facts. In 2008, there was a crop insurance payment to the area of 12 million. In 2009, it's been, I'm told, a further 8 million so far. The loss in agricultural and economic productivity in the region's been estimated at about 100 million for this year. Creating conditions where farmers can do well is what we're about. Helping farmers through an exceptional year makes sense, because over time the farmers contribute hugely to the economy of the Interlake and the economy of our province.

But we also need to put in place the major effort to have a water management program to include water retention and drainage that will adequately protect farmers from such wet weather in the future. Much of the wet Red River Valley is now better protected. The Interlake has never had the attention it should have, and it must be attended to in a major way. This means ensuring that plans are developed, that we have adequate public consultations and we have the provincial and federal push to take the plans all the way to fruition. It's long past time to do this. The Interlake region needs and deserves this. Why wasn't such a reasonable approach presented in the Throne Speech? Instead of cleaning out a few drains as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) plans, we need to get the total job done. I could go on and on dealing with other critical issues that we're facing today, issues facing the cattle industry, the hog industry and the forestry industries, to name a few.

We should have had a realistic assessment of where we are, a picture of where we need to be in five years and the government prepared to deliver the approach which will position the industry and people in the area and the community, while coming out of this economic downturn. The Throne Speech should have also provided a vision for other vital industries in economic sectors in the province, sectors like environmental industries, biotechnology, medical and health technology and aerospace could not only position us for economic growth, but also can be developed in ways that produce a double whammy, by helping to address critical environmental and health issues, as well as spurring the economy.

Education is not only a service, but it's also an industry, and inclusively a global industry. Forward positioning is vital and yet it was just not there in the present Throne Speech. What a lost opportunity; how sad for Manitoba.

Let me reiterate: An economic downturn is a time like no other to plan and prepare for the future. Where times are tough and money is scarce, the families in this province buckle down and figure out how to do more with less and still grow and thrive. This, the government, and this Premier has fairly—clearly failed to do.

And that is why I give the government a failing grade for this Throne Speech. It was uninspiring, it was amateur, it was stagnate, it was flat.

And now I want to address several other areas of critical need. The first of these is child care, or early childhood education as we should more properly refer to it. There are few things more important than the future of our children, and yet we live today in a province where the waiting times for child care are the longest probably in the history of our province. It's tragic when a young child is half grown before the child care is there and available. What a missed opportunity for the child and for the parents, when a single mother needs to go to school or to work but cannot because the child care is not there. It is tragic for the mother and for the child.

When new immigrants come and need to get child care, so that they can take a course to learn English and to participate in Manitoba, and they cannot, it's tragic the loss of opportunity that could and should be there. One of the most remarkable stories I heard this year was from a family who'd searched and searched and searched for child care, and they could not find it, and they have ended up

sending their children to Jamaica to stay with relatives, because child care is just not available the way it needs to be in Manitoba. The situation is desperate, and yet the government has been and continues to be ineffective in dealing with the situation, and there was nothing in the Throne Speech to suggest any change in this.

And under health care, it's been apparent to many in Manitoba that a fundamental reform is needed to bring our wonderful medicare system into the 21st century. We want and we embrace our health care, public health-care system. At its base, it's the envy of the world but right now, because of problems in the way Conservatives and NDP governments have looked after health care in Manitoba, our health-care system is floundering and fragile. Too many people are waiting too long for critical procedures. Too many medical errors are occurring. Workers on the front line are wasting their valuable time wrestling funding and approvals from bureaucrats sitting around tables instead of delivering care. We are not moving fast enough and far enough on best practices, and most tragic of all today, we are not addressing, in any way near adequate, major preventable diseases like diabetes and FASD.

For 10 years I've been calling for a realistic and focussed approach to the epidemic of diabetes that we have in our province. Instead of action, the present government has spent a decade in poor management and in cover-up. The diabetes epidemic is threatening the lives and well-being of many Manitobans, and it's a huge threat to the fiscal solvency of our province. And yet the Premier (Mr. Selinger), in his inaugural Throne Speech, has chosen to totally ignore diabetes, one of the worst epidemics of the history—in the history of Manitoba, and not even a mention of it once in the Throne Speech.

FASD is another condition where there's great potential to improve prevention and yet, like in child care, the Province isn't even keeping statistics to know accurately how many children have FASD in Manitoba.

There are additional interesting ways the Premier could have approached the health of Manitobans, but the Premier chose not to act. Manitoba Liberals, recognizing that having pets improves health, will be introducing legislation this session to end the NDP government's discrimination against pet owners, which results in too many

isolated seniors being without the comfort and health benefits of having a pet.

Quality controls and procedures and best practices also need to be improved in Manitoba, as the Auditor has recently pointed out. The NDP has shockingly managed personal care homes in this province. This must be improved to improve the health and dignity of our elders.

When it comes to the environment, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and his Throne Speech also get a failing grade. There is little that has not already been announced in the effort to clean up Lake Winnipeg, and Killarney Lake and other lakes didn't even get a mention. The Premier doesn't have an adequate plan. He wants to spend hundreds of millions of dollars—of taxpayers' dollars—to remove nitrogen from the city of Winnipeg's sewage, when only the removal of phosphorus and ammonia are necessary. The extra money required for nitrogen removal—350 million in capital costs, almost 200 million in operating costs over the next 20 years, an unknown additional interest cost—could be far better spent in removing phosphorus from the effluent of municipal lagoons and in doing model studies on a lake like Killarney Lake. Today, such effluent often runs, phosphorus-rich, into our waterways from municipal lagoons. Not good, Mr. Premier; another failing grade for this Throne Speech.

There could have been a far better and forward-thinking approach to the economy, building on the needed steps to position our province for the future and to prepare for a strong future for our children.

There should have been, in this Throne Speech, a vision to overhaul and address the problems in Child and Family Services. Under the NDP, there has been an extraordinary increase in the number of children in care. The only conclusion that can come from this is that the NDP have failed miserably in learning the facts and understanding the realities facing families in this province and then providing good support and effective programming for children and families so that they can stay together and function well.

Bullying in the workplace continues to take a toll in Manitoba. I've introduced legislation several times to address this, but the NDP seem to want bullying to continue to be a problem. Why? Who knows.

I could go on and on with examples in this Throne Speech of poor insight into the problems of

our province and with poor planning for the future health of our province, but I will say this, Mr. Speaker: that Liberals will vote against this Throne Speech because it is not a good Throne Speech. It is not good enough for Manitoba. Indeed, in my many years in politics, I've never seen a worse Throne Speech. It's a very bad start for this Premier.

Therefore, I now move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux),

THAT the amendment be amended by adding the following after clause (q):

But this House further regrets:

- (q) That the government's Throne Speech failed to address the chronic shortage of child-care workers who enter into the field of early childhood education and remain in the industry long-term and how this shortage of qualified workers is negatively impacting access to child care for Manitoba families; and
- (r) That the government's Throne Speech failed to address the issue of spending hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars to unnecessarily remove nitrogen from the city of Winnipeg's municipal sewage and how this money would have been better directed towards assisting municipalities remove phosphorus from municipal lagoons located outside of the city of Winnipeg; and
- (s) That this Throne Speech fails to identify that the prevention of diabetes and FASD are integral to the success and financial manageability of Manitoba's health-care system; and
- (t) That this Throne Speech made no mention of the disaster declarations in the four Interlake municipalities of Bifrost, Fisher, Armstrong and Gimli and that the massive overland flooding that's occurred in the area has so negatively impacted area farmers and agricultural producers that many may not be able to continue farming, and that the government has made no provision for emergency relief; and
- (u) That this Throne Speech makes no mention of the extreme erosion that's occurring along the shores of Lake Winnipeg, and that a major highway is only feet away from being

washed out and isolating the community of Sagkeeng; and

- (v) That this Throne Speech makes no mention of the serious blue green algae problem at Killarney Lake and that the effects of this are negatively impacting the community on a social and economic level; and
- (w) that the government did not make the necessary changes to expedite the processing of provincial nominee certificates in an attempt to reunite families sooner.

* (16:20)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Saran): Just a minor correction in the subamendment. Instead of saying clause (q) in the first line, it should say clause (p).

Does the House agree to this minor change? *[Agreed]* Agreed.

It has been moved by the member for River Heights, seconded by the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux)

THAT—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Saran): Dispense. This amendment is in order.

May continue.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): It's, indeed, a pleasure to get up in the House and speak to a—and speak to a subamendment of an amendment to what is, in fact, a very good Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I don't know—I don't know, I don't want to cast this—I don't want to be negative or cast aspersions or anything, but I hope I didn't—I hope I didn't, you know, imply that the sub-amendment and the amendment were bad, but it's just that the Throne Speech is so darn good that I think—I think every—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Struthers: I don't have to say that. I haven't agreed with every Throne Speech that's come along. I remember back in '95 to '99, I didn't like any of them. Now we're getting it right, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Struthers: —yeah, well, if they're good ones, I'll give them credit. If the Liberal Party ever comes up

with anything good, I'll agree with it too, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I look forward—I look forward to that day. I very much look forward to that day.

I want to—I want to welcome people back to the Legislature after—after being out of the House for a little while. I don't know about the rest of you, but I missed the place dearly. I wanna, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in particular the pages and the staff at the table, all who serve us so well in this—in this—this Legislature, the Sergeant-at-Arms and all the staff that make this—that make this an effective body. Of course, I want to welcome all my colleagues back as well. We do have a role in making it an effective body too, I suppose, and getting the work of the people of Manitoba done.

There's 1.2 million Manitobans, a record-setting number, 1.2 million who depend on us to come in here, day after day and get the job done. Something we didn't see happen yesterday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it's good to see that the opposition is shaking off their laziness and have determined today to get down to business to talk about this very good Throne Speech.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

In particular—in particular, Mr. Speaker, in particular, I think this is a very good Throne Speech for rural Manitoba. I think it's a good Throne Speech for northern Manitoba and for the city of Winnipeg too, but I want to put a particular plug in for rural Manitobans, those of us who've lived in rural Canada almost all of our lives. I think we'll be very much the beneficiaries of what I think is a 21st century approach to rural economic development, a 21st century approach to agriculture.

You know, the other day in question period the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) and I had a little bit of fun, you know, poked a little bit of fun at each other about me not knowing where a clutch on a tractor was, and him hooking up his horses to the hay wagon. We can have our fun in this place, but I really do think that we should not go back to policies that were maybe popular in the 1950s or the 1920s, or maybe worked in the 1950s or 1920s. This, after all, Mr. Speaker, is the 21st century. I think we have to understand, first and foremost, how important agriculture is to our—not just our rural economy, but to our economy, the gross domestic product of our—of our province. I think it's important in all of the regions of our province of Manitoba, and I think we not only need to understand that and acknowledge that, but I think what we have to do is understand

that we can't go back to the kind of policies that members opposite would like us to go back to. We can't do that or we will return to the—to the old days, the days that have gone, that have gone by.

I think what we need to do is develop not just agricultural policy, but agriculture and rural policy, and, indeed, food policy, Mr. Speaker. I did an interview this morning on Hank FM, *Moose in the Morning*, and we were talking—we were—they're good—[interjection]—a good country station. I think the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) across the way doesn't get that. I mean, it's not just the very narrow, very, very traditional kinds of sources that get agriculture. Even, even a guy like Moose on Hank FM understands—and you can tell by the questions he was asking me that he understands how important the rural economy is. And he understands that agriculture, although the biggest and the No. 1 industry in rural Manitoba, isn't the only one, and that's the Agriculture Minister saying that because we have to understand that for rural Manitoba to be successful we need to support farmers. We need to support agriculture. We need to support those services that are there for farmers. We need to support the little communities that, in turn, support farms, farmers and farm families.

A good case in point is my neighbour in Dauphin. My seven-year-old and his seven-year-old play all the time. They play with little—the little John Deeres and New Holland and Ford tractors and I know they're going to find these underneath the Christmas Tree. His dad not just plays with the little tractors, he sells the big ones too. And his dad, who's a very good neighbour, likes to talk to me and others about how important the farm economy is to his John Deere dealership in our community of Dauphin, Manitoba. It's a very good lesson for—and would be a very good conversation for anybody in this—for anybody in this Legislature to sit down with my neighbour, maybe sample a little bit of farmers' product, maybe help the barley industry as they do it, sit with my neighbour, have a chat about what 21st century agriculture not only looks like today, but will look like in the future, because I think it's very important for us to, first and foremost, acknowledge how important agriculture has been to the development and to the growth of our province. There is no one who can deny that. There is no one that should not understand that. There's no one in this province who should turn a blind eye to the importance of agriculture.

* (16:30)

And it doesn't matter if you're in Churchill or Sprague or Pierson or Winnipeg itself. We need to understand the jobs that emanate either directly from farming or indirectly—and I want to suggest there's a whole number of jobs that are very close and very—they're indirect jobs, but they're very directly linked to farming. And there's a lot of jobs that spin off, kind of in rings that flow out from the farmer at the centre. And, without that farmer being successful, you could see, you can—you could imagine and you could prove statistically and you can—and I think we just know in this Legislature the importance of making sure that that farmer at the centre of that economic diagram is an important person who needs to be supported. I think that's pretty clear, Mr. Speaker.

You can go to Churchill and tour the port at Churchill. You can tour the port and you can talk to people all along that bay line. You can go to my colleague's community of The Pas. You can talk to farmers in the Carrot River Valley, and you can talk to them about how important it is to have that connection up to Churchill and why it is important that we have a port there as an option for farmers.

You can talk to people in the Swan River Valley and the Dauphin Valley through the—between the Duck Mountains and the Riding Mountains, and they'll tell you how important it is to have good transportation links to the rest of the world, to their markets.

You know, we got some good news the other day, Mr. Speaker, that the—that the China—that China will be lifting its ban on Canadian pork. That's good. [interjection] It's lifting a ban. And maybe the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) doesn't like that, but it's good news for the pork industry and—you know, we should be working for those, and we should be giving credit to people like Stockwell Day, who put a lot of work into that. He's a Tory; I don't mind telling you he did put a lot of work into it, as did we here in this province.

The—I think what's a key question in the future of agriculture is the word "market." And I know the Tories across the way like to pretend that they're big market experts, that they have all the answers when it comes to a free market and its freedom and its—you know, you gotta sometimes put your money where your mouth is too. We have lots of opportunities, and our farmers are well positioned in our province to take advantage of those opportunities like China, like Russia, like Mexico, like a lot of places that have—that

have big possibilities for our Manitoba farmers. Now that's what people think when they—when they talk about a market for farming. And we have to do everything we can in co-operation with the—with our federal counterparts, in co-operation with other provinces, in co-operation with other countries to make sure that those markets are protected—to make sure that farmers have someone to sell their produce to.

But I want to suggest that there's a part of our market that, while maybe not being as, maybe as big and as sexy, maybe, as those large planetary world markets, but a market that, I think, we have to a certain degree missed out on. And I think 21st century agriculture has to understand and has to pursue a local market. It'll be smaller than that big market. It'll be *[interjection]*—I sure hope they do send this *Hansard* out. That would be a very good idea. I might do it myself.

Now, the local market, the buy local, organic market that we need to be—that we need to be developing—the Tories didn't have enough sense to do when they were in government—that we need to develop is that—is that Manitoba market, that group of people who will pay a premium for an organic product, who will go to the farmers' market in Dauphin, Manitoba or St. Norbert and they will pursue that market. We need to be able to enable farmers to sell into those markets. We need to set the conditions so that they can. We need to put rules in place that allow farmers the freedom to satisfy that market because that means a couple of things. That means Manitoba consumers are getting a good product, because just like any other MLA in this room, I will stand up for the quality of Manitoba products any day. We need to get those products to Manitobans.

The other—the other reason we need to do that is that that means money for farmers. It's not a program, you know, cost shared by Ottawa and the Province and that sort of thing. It's a source of revenue for farmers, a source of revenue for farmers that is needed, and it satisfies the—satisfies market conditions, I think, that'll work in the favour of Manitoba farmers.

I do want to—I do want to congratulate the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) in when I—the speech that I heard him give. I know that he's met with producers in the Arborg area. I think that's good. I commend him for bringing forward the plight of farmers that—at least in that part of our province. I

think the more people that understand the challenges that farmers, whether they be in Arborg or in the southwest or the southeast or in the Parkland or in the Carrot River Valley, I think the more people we can get to understand those challenges, I think the better policy we put forward.

I think we can start with us, the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) and the member for River Heights and myself, I think we can start from a premise as to what we agree, and the first thing I think we can agree to is what the mayor of Arborg told me. He said it was a good thing that Mother Nature decided to co-operate and have a good weather this fall because every day, every day there was good weather gave the farmer that extra day to do the job that the farmer needed to do and improved his own farm operation but also lessened the amount of money they need in terms of putting food on their own table, realizing some kind of revenue on the farm operation. So I think we can all agree that, although most of the weather has been working against farmers in the Interlake for quite a while, that this—that we all dodged a little bit of a bullet when it came this fall and lessened the kind of needs in terms of hay and those sorts of things that farmers in that area need.

We have, in the Interlake, made available, I think, an impressive amount of money. We've got a number of programs that have been announced by my predecessor, the current Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), programs that she and her officials worked very hard with federal officials on to put together to help Manitoba farmers, to help Manitoba farmers who faced the kind of conditions that farmers in the Interlake and west lake, Eddystone area have faced over the last couple of summers. We've had a forage assistance program that made available in the order of \$5 million. We've made available to farmers—we've made available to farmers a forage restoration assistance program, which is a further \$10 million, and I'm hoping the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) is adding these up. I hope he's got his—I hope he's got his calculator handy, because the number will get quite large, and I'm—he might have, he might need the assistance of a calculator in doing this. We brought forward the Manitoba Livestock Feed Assistance Program, which is a further \$12 million in this area, and I, and I and I want to say, Mr. Speaker, when the, when the Tories had their opportunity in government, they could have brought forward an excess moisture insurance program which our which our former Agriculture

minister had the foresight to do. The Tories did nothing in this. They can try revisionist history all they like, but the facts are the facts, and they did, they did nothing.

* (16:40)

The excess moisture insurance which injected, which injected a further \$21 million into the farm pockets, the pockets of farmers in the Interlake and the Westlake area, another \$21 million, and I want to say—well, actually I better correct myself. Close to 90 percent of that 21 million ended up in this area, and it even includes Beausejour in the area of the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), who doesn't believe that maybe it's a good thing to be helping farmers out on this. But close to 90 percent of that, of that excess moisture insurance money went into these exact farmers that he's—pockets that he's talking about, so that I think, Mr. Speaker, is a good thing.

The other thing that we did which I think was very progressive was that through the Disaster Financial Assistance program for the, again, for these farmers in the Interlake-Westlake area, we increased to \$3 million to cover field rutting. I know this became an issue in the House a while ago, several months ago, when the former minister, my predecessor, was faced with this and spoke with farmers, and our former premier spoke with farmers. They said this was necessary, so we did it. We sat down. We put together a program that was designed and was effective in helping farmers in this area who had faced a couple years' worth of heavy rainfall, who tried to do some work in their field and ended up with ruts, and, Mr. Speaker, we came through with a program to help there.

In previous to that, after one year of rain, we were acting then to move forward in conjunction with the federal government, and again I don't mind giving the federal government credit where credit is due. I think, Mr. Speaker, we need to do that. Through AgriStability, we increased the advance that again was money for into farmers' pockets from 60 percent to 75 percent.

So I understand when members from River Heights and Lakeside and, you know, the farmers that I've spoken to and the Eddystone, Arborg, Westlake-Interlake areas, when they talk to me about the challenges they face, I understand that. I also understand that there has been significant dollars made available, and I look forward to meeting further with Keystone Agricultural Producers, the

Manitoba hog producers and the cattle producers and others to talk about good ideas. And we can come forward—[interjection] Okay, I get it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm—there are lots of possibilities out there for us in working with farmers. I invite, I invite people from the other side to be co-operative and work with us, and with those few words I'd like to encourage members opposite to vote in favour of our Throne Speech.

So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to put a few words on the record in regards to why I'm not supporting this government's Throne Speech today and why I would like to reference as well a few of the issues that were raised by our leader, the member from Fort Whyte, in the amendments to the Throne Speech that he, seconded by the member from Morris today, put forward in this House and also some of the concerns raised by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) actually as well, the Liberal leader in Manitoba, with some of the questions that he raised as further amendments to the Throne Speech are quite relevant as well, and I think it's a very big concern to Manitobans to see that not only does the Premier (Mr. Selinger) feel that the economy is flat in Manitoba, but I think most of Manitobans that I've talked to since Monday have indicated to me that the Throne Speech was pretty flat itself in regards to new material.

That isn't to say that I wouldn't commend the government for the, for a few of the things that they've put into the Throne Speech. A couple of them are, but most of the—but the first word that came to my—the first words that came to my thought line as I was about—as the new Lieutenant-Governor, Mr. Lee, His Honour, Mr. Philip Lee, read the Throne Speech the other day was rehash, Mr. Speaker, and it was a very much a re-announcement of many, many programs that the government has had on its agenda for a number of years. And, if you took those out, instead of a 45-minute Throne Speech, it might have been more like five or 10, and I think that's something that's of relevance that we should be cognizant of as members in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say, as I start here, that I want to congratulate all of the members from the government side, the new Premier, and some of the Cabinet members in the shuffle that took place. We just heard from the now-Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) and some of his comments quite

concerned me as I heard his remarks in reference to what he thinks is the future of agriculture. Of course, he said that we shouldn't go back to the 1920s in regards to agricultural policy, that we should stay in the 21st century, and I would suggest to him that there isn't a farmer out there today in Manitoba that wouldn't base his decisions on sound science as we move forward in this 21st century, and the farmers today that are given any kind of a level playing field in their industry are the best producers in the world in regards to the best farming practices, whether it's in livestock or grain in this province or in the processing side of that industry as well. And the industry makes thousands of other jobs in regards to processing and transportation of goods and services, and we are in the middle of Canada. I'll talk more about CentrePort and those opportunities later.

But I just want to remind the minister that his policies of—that he put in as Minister of Conservation were not designed around sound science, so how can any farmer trust this Minister of Agriculture in this province when they are living in fear of what this minister might do now in their agricultural field if he is parallel in making decisions on what he was doing in Conservation, Mr. Speaker? And two of those examples come to mind. One of them, of course, is the infamous Bill 17, the hog bill in Manitoba or the banning hog bill in Manitoba, if you want to put it that way. There was no science behind that bill. He admitted that in the House. A record number of presenters came to appear before that bill and this minister in Manitoba's history, even more than appeared before the Meech Lake debate.

And so I think that the minister shouldn't be quite as uppity as he is in regards to some of his pronouncements, and I would—of course, there is always room that he could change his mind, Mr. Speaker, and start to pay attention to what science is actually telling him and take the advice, as his cohort from Transcona said, he could have taken a lot of the advice that some of the Keystone Agriculture Producers had here yesterday in this House in regards to Ag Awareness Day. And other producers and processors across the province of Manitoba would provide this minister with very sound judgment in regards to how to proceed with the development and further development of this industry and the rural initiatives, the rural development industries because the minister's decisions in Conservation were not—they were aimed directly against development of rural development in Manitoba.

You can't ban hog industry expansion or development in half of a province, Mr. Speaker, and think that it didn't contribute to the problems that they're faced with today in high dollars, country-of-origin labelling, contexts in the United States, with the protectionist attitudes in other areas of the world in regards to trade as well.

* (16:50)

And, of course, we did see here a few days ago that China has increased, opened up, taking some of our pork products again, and those are all good news items, Mr. Speaker, but it certainly is not going to help our rural economy in the decisions that the minister has made in the past. Of course, the announcements in China are good for the rural development of our economy in those areas.

The second area that the minister has cost farmers on is the area of ejectors and sewage disposals, Mr. Speaker, in regards to grey water. I take from the minister's answers in the House, the member, former president of AMM, who's now one of our members in the House, from Ste. Rose constituency, in his questions last October just before we ended the session, it was very apparent from the minister's answer to those questions in regards to ejectors and what actually comes out of them that he doesn't understand that you can't get anything larger than a cherry pit through the bottom of a venturi in an injector, or it will plug it.

So you cannot have solids coming out of an injector system. It's grey water, and it's purely that. The ultraviolet rays of the sun's break it down. Natural cattails and those items do a great service in breaking down. So now he wants to go back to polluting the land with fields and, if you want to put those in—and I know that one of the councillors from the R.M. of Cameron came forward at the Association of Manitoba municipal convention just last week, of which I had the opportunity of spending every day there listening in detail to the resolutions and concerns of those councillors from all over the province of Manitoba, some 920 that were registered.

And Mr. White got up, a councillor in Cameron, and indicated to this minister that he had made a decision as Conservation minister to pick his pocket for 20—I think those were his very words—pick his pocket for \$25,000, because he had now reduced his assessed value of his land by \$25,000 because he was going to have to put a field in before he could sell his operation, Mr. Speaker. And because he has a subdivided yard, he can keep his farm and still sell

that 12 acres, I believe it was, that he indicated that he has around his buildings, and that sort of thing. But it would cost him \$25,000. So he's appealed to his council of revision to have his assessment reduced by \$25,000, and they granted that.

So now it will go to the municipal appeal board, and he awaits the decision to be made there. Of course, he has to wait to appear before them, and I know that the minister of—the new minister of intergovernmental affairs, who I appreciate, having had the opportunity to work with him in Transportation and Infrastructure in the past, will now be dealing with these issues. And I—I know that he will do his very best to try and look at these areas.

But this young farmer was asking the new Minister of Agriculture and rural development for an answer himself—as the minister responsible now for encouraging rural development—if, in fact, he would rescind his—work towards rescinding his former decision as a Conservation Minister so that he could actually enhance rural development in Manitoba.

And I think the member from Dauphin would do very well to have paid closer attention to that and maybe even taken the lead in answering it, but, of course, he had to let his new Premier do that. And I'm sure that the member from St. Boniface needs to take this into greater consideration and do what AMM asked, and that is deal with these issues on a case-by-case basis. And that is solely what is needed because, Mr. Speaker, no one is against cleaning up lakes and rivers along our parks and streams in this province and enhancing the opportunities on Lake Winnipeg and—the northern tributaries leading into Hudson's Bay as well. And that is exactly what we would intend to do as a government, as well as make sure that we do everything in those areas to clean that up.

But, Mr. Speaker, that's just two examples of how this new Agriculture Minister, in his previous portfolio, discouraged rural development. And we hope, and I know all farmers in Manitoba hope, that he changes his philosophy and certainly does a better job.

While I'm on the issues of cleaning things up, I would have to mention the issue of north Winnipeg as well. I knew the new Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie) lives in that area of the city, and I congratulate him for his portfolio assignment as well and look forward to his energetic support of being able to get a new waste-water treatment facility in place and enhance those, and also look at removing

and using science and listening to the 63 scientists that appeared before the Clean Environment Commission, Mr. Speaker, that told the Clean Environment Commission that it was not necessary, at a cost of over \$350 million, to include the removal of nitrates from these waste-water treatment facilities as well because, of course, they come from the atmosphere as well. It was impossible to stop them from coming into the lake through the rivers into Lake Winnipeg, but it was imperative that they remove the phosphorus, which can be done at a much reduced cost, Mr. Speaker, and a greater cost that Manitobans can afford and bear.

And that's not the issue. If the taking out of the nitrates was going to do as much good as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) seemed to think the other day in his areas—but he didn't give us a very good reason in his replies to questions on that in the House the other day either for spending \$350 million. But, of course, spending money is something on unaccountable solutions to Manitoba's future problems—is not something that this Minister of Finance was immune to when he was Minister of Finance, and so I don't suppose it's going to change now that he's minister of—now that he's the Premier.

And one prime example of that that will cry out to Manitobans forever, if they go ahead with it, is the waste of \$650 million to build a hydro line down the west side of this province, Mr. Speaker, when, in fact, some of the arguments that they use for maintaining the boreal forests and maintaining the environment will even be harmed more by going down the west side, cutting up more logs, cutting up more areas. I mean, I know that the former, that the now-minister of intergovernmental affairs or local affairs, local government affairs, was the transport minister who was in charge when a lot of the new lines were—roads, rather, were broken down and trees destroyed to provide more winter roads for access to communities that need it, much needed road up the east side of Lake Winnipeg that we would build as well, and encourage to.

We just have concerns about how the government's going about that one with an east-side road authority, Mr. Speaker. But, nevertheless, they've already broken down more tree lines and more trees and more vegetation than would probably be necessary to build the line up the east side of Lake Manitoba directly from the north to the east side of Winnipeg, where it could then be distributed in our power lines down to the United States and our export markets in Canada as well.

And so these kinds of programs, and that's only two, that add up to about a billion dollars—the other one is enhanced identification cards that they're—have spent 14 million on to get 8,000 people signed up when they predicted a hundred thousand. This shows some of the mismanagement that this government has had, and that's only three areas.

The one is—the others are—some of them are in the health-care field where, Mr. Speaker, they have had 1,500 doctors leave the province since 1999. And we've had to seen—we have seen more nurses come in and more be trained from some other areas, and those are—that is a good thing, but we are short 1,300 nurses in Manitoba as well right now, and that is a shameful figure when you're looking at the opportunities for training and services that we could have in this province.

We have a great potential in this province to be a have province, but this government in good times has left Manitoba as a have-not province, and is still a have-not province, Mr. Speaker. Minister—the Premier talks about how we're in a flat society today, or a flat budget today. And, you know, even though we have a plus 0.2 percent recovery in the economy this year predicted here in this last while, and we still have a situation where the Minister of Finance—well, the now-new Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), former Minister of Agriculture, will have to deal with some of these issues as well.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that one of these areas is in the fact that the Premier thinks that our economy being flat is a good thing. I would probably agree with him under normal circumstances, but we aren't in normal circumstances. Manitoba's budget is 40 percent dependent on transfer payments and equalization. And the prime minister has said this week that he will not cut transfers to provinces that require the funds that they had last year. He'd try to keep them as balanced, but he did not indicate that in regards to equalization payments, and we know that, with the deficits of Alberta and Ontario, the people that make up the biggest parts of those budgets, that the deficits, that there will be cuts at least. And even the former Finance Minister, the new Finance Minister (Ms. Wowchuk) and the Premier himself of today are indicating that there will be cuts. He's trying to forewarn Manitobans that we should watch for tough times in the future. Well, we've been trying to warn them about that for the last 10 years, as the government has used great times, great transfers to continue an economy and grow a number of areas. But, at the same time, they're wasting a billion in—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Arthur-Virden will have 14 minutes remaining.

The hour now being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 3, 2009

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