



Fifth Session- Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FAURSCHEU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley, Hon.	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 14, 1999

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure of tabling the Annual Report for 1997-98 for the Children and Youth Secretariat, and the Annual Report for 1997-98 for the Department of Family Services.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 16—The Court of Queen's Bench Small Claims Practices Amendment and Parental Responsibility Amendment Act

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Cummings), that leave be given to introduce Bill 16, The Court of Queen's Bench Small Claims Practices Amendment and Parental Responsibility Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur le recouvrement des petites créances à la Cour du Banc de la Reine et la Loi sur la responsabilité parentale), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I am pleased firstly to introduce to the House Megan Pauls, Hanover School Division, who has also been selected to serve as a page at this session. Welcome, Megan.

In the public gallery this afternoon, we have twenty-four Grade 6 students from Meadows West School under the direction of Mr. Ed Yaworski. This school is located in the

constituency of the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux).

And, five Grade 9 students from Chapman School with the Crossroads Program under the direction of Mr. Rick House. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister (Mr. Filmon).

And, 50 journalism students from Red River College under the direction of Mr. Duncan McMonagle. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett).

* (1335)

And, eleven Grades 6 to 8 students from Rock Lake School under the direction of Mr. Charles Friesen. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Tweed).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Health Care System Frozen/Cafeteria Food

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, to the former minister responsible for the Treasury Board and the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, who undoubtedly was involved in the decision to proceed with this new frozen food in many of our health care facilities. I was puzzled by his answers yesterday in the House based on the experience that I had witnessed in my own community and other communities. For example, at Concordia Hospital it appears to me that the cafeteria of the hospital is still open and the staff of the hospital have the option of eating the food at the cafeteria, and the patients are given frozen food from another site. In other words, there are two sites, not the one central site that the minister talked about. Can the

minister confirm that that is in fact what has happened?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): First of all, Madam Speaker, the objective throughout all of this change in terms of food services being provided to our hospitals is being done in conjunction with the nine hospitals themselves. As we all know, they own the Urban Shared Services Corporation. Certainly the No. 1 objective is to provide quality, nutritional food for the patients in our health care facilities and as well to do that as efficiently and effectively as possible. In terms of the main provision of the food services, the majority in the main provision is being done through one centralized food service commissary that I believe the capital cost was approximately \$20 million.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, the minister did not answer the question. He has not tabled the business plan; he has not tabled the contract. He is following on the similar vein of the former Minister of Health, who did not table the contract, did not table the business plan, and withholding information on the cost per meal. We know the quality of food is deficient from the previous system from patients, and I would like to ask the minister: are the staff eating food from one set of kitchens in the cafeteria, different food than the food that is being served to the patients?

Mr. Stefanson: Well, again, Madam Speaker, the member refers to the contract and the business plan. He asked that question yesterday in this House. There is more than one contract; there are a number of contracts that are in place, contracts between the health care facilities and Urban Shared Services, contracts between Urban Shared Services and the company that is providing the services.

I did undertake to him yesterday to review all of those issues with the Urban Shared Services Corporation with a view to releasing whatever can be released. As he knows, sometimes there are preclusions because of third-party confidentiality and other issues. He has been in government, although it was a long time ago, but he knows that full well, that sometimes there are, but we did undertake to

review the whole issue of the contracts and the business plans.

When he talks about the quality of food, I will cite him one example of a survey recently done by Victoria General Hospital during the week of March 28 to April 3, just a couple of weeks ago—found that about 80 percent of the patients related the food as good or excellent. The last survey, which was done before the Urban Shared Services took over the food services, found about a 65 percent approval rate. So, by continually working at the system, Madam Speaker, the whole objective is to continue to improve the quality of food and to provide quality food to the patients in our health care facilities.

* (1340)

Frozen Food—War Veterans

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, we have to assume that after asking the minister twice the same question, he does not have an answer, and what we hear in northeast Winnipeg and what we hear in other quadrants of the city is correct. The staff eat the food from the conventional kitchens and the conventional cafeteria, and the patients are served the food from the Filmon frozen food experiment.

This government is still continuing to cover up all the contracts they have signed instead of making them public. It is the taxpayers that are responsible to this Chamber, that pay for the hospital budgets through the Department of Health, through this Legislature, through whatever bureaucracy this government has created, whatever authority they have created in the last couple of months over to the hospitals. This minister should start taking responsibility, and this Legislature should get the contracts.

The president of the Royal Canadian Legion has stated that they have condemned the mistreatment of veterans, and they have asked this government to realize this mistake and return to the normal way of feeding our war veterans. What does the minister have to say to the president of the Royal Canadian Legion and the war veterans who want to go back to home-

cooked meals in the cafeterias rather than the Filmon frozen food that we have from this government?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Well, again, Madam Speaker, on the whole issue of the release of the contracts which the member referred to, I have indicated to him a willingness to look at that issue with a view to releasing what can be released, certainly in terms of looking to apply the same rules to those contracts as apply to contracts entered into by the government of Manitoba, even though they are entered into by the Urban Shared Services Corporation. So I have indicated a willingness to look at that entire issue.

When it comes to the quality of food, I have given him one example of a survey done at Victoria. I know surveys are being done at all of our health care facilities that have the new food services, and I know that the quality of food, the rating by the patients, continues to improve. As well, at Deer Lodge Centre some changes were made in terms of giving some options in terms of the provision of those foods. Again, I am told that that is something that is being well received by the patients.

So certainly the objective of the Urban Shared Services Corporation is to continue to work at providing quality food to the patients, to make sure it is nutritional and to be sure that it is done as efficiently and effectively as possible, that resources that can be saved in that area can be dedicated to other needs in our health care system.

Health Care System Frozen Food—Operating Costs

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, in spite of his protestations, the minister knows that the frozen food fiasco is far over budget with millions of dollars of renovations needed at the Health Sciences Centre and St. Boniface Hospital not even yet tendered, let alone underway, with a facility that is hopelessly overcrowded.

Will the Minister of Health finally admit that the frozen food project is over budget, that the plant itself is very overcrowded, extremely

overcrowded, and is underperforming significantly in terms of meals assembled, and will he now table the actual capital and current operating costs of that facility?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, again, I think I indicated to the same member yesterday, let us look at this issue, and let us look at the objective of the centralized food services change to the Urban Shared Services Corporation, which is the nine hospitals. They are on both sides of the issue. They are providing the service to themselves. So the objectives throughout that are to provide quality food, provide nutritional food, to do it as efficiently and effectively as possible.

To give him one example when it comes to the capital cost—as I have indicated the capital cost of this one centralized facility is approximately \$20 million. The capital cost of making improvements to all nine hospitals, I am told, would have been in the range of at least \$40 million. So right there alone on the capital cost side of the equation there is a savings in terms of the capital cost, the investment that would be required to upgrade the kitchen facilities and maintain the kitchen facilities at appropriate standards.

As well, by providing services from one central location, there are the opportunities for the economies of scale and improved efficiencies, and that certainly will be and is the long-term objective of Urban Shared Services Corporation.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, spokespersons for the Health Sciences Centre dispute the minister's words: The costs were far less than he has ever put on the table.

Will the minister confirm that the renovations to the nine participating facilities required by this fiasco will cost far more than is budgeted and that in fact the renovations to HSC alone will cost more than was budgeted for the entire nine facilities?

Mr. Stefanson: The member is wrong, Madam Speaker, certainly in terms of meeting the future needs of our health care system. We are not just talking today. Again, I know the members

opposite take a short-term narrow view and cannot look over a medium-term or a longer-term period of time in terms of what is required to provide quality food services in the most efficient and effective way. Certainly the facility that has been put in place will meet those needs for many years to come.

So, over the next several years, in the absence of a centralized facility, all of our nine hospitals would have had to make significant capital improvements. The amount that I have been provided with is those capital costs would have been in the range of about \$40 million, and that compares to a capital cost today of about \$20 million. Those are the numbers.

* (1345)

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, will the minister finally do some homework and confirm that the facility now has more staff preparing 5,400 meals a day than was budgeted for to provide 8,700 meals a day? They already have 15 more full-time staff providing 5,400 meals than they budgeted for to provide 8,700 meals. Will he do some homework and report to this House?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I do not need any lessons on homework coming from the only elected person in Manitoba who was reprimanded by the Monnin inquiry, and that is the member for Crescentwood right there. He can certainly read from the transcript if he is so inclined to be interested in terms of what was said about his performance as an elected official.

But, again, the objective of Urban Shared Services is to provide quality food, to provide nutritional food and to do it as efficiently as they possibly can. Certainly they are going through a transitional period, which we have acknowledged over the course of the last several months. We have acknowledged publicly that things are taking a little bit longer in terms of introducing the new system. That is not necessarily bad if it means at the end of the day we are going to end up with the best, most appropriate system in terms of meeting the quality that we all want the patients in our hospitals to have and being sure it is done as effectively as possible, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Auto Theft-Deductible Policy

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, in the early '70s the Public Insurance Corporation was created by the Schreyer government which has resulted in the second lowest rates in Canada and an investment of money being maintained in Manitoba. [interjection] If you want to talk about the broken promise on privatization of Telephones, we are more than willing to talk about your broken word.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would like to remind all honourable members this is not a time for debate. This is Question Period.

The honourable Leader of the official opposition, to pose his question.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In 1997 the government changed the policy of the Public Insurance Corporation and required the deductible to be paid for by the victims of car thefts. We had urged the previous minister to look at dealing with the criminals, not the victims, in policy. I would like to ask the Minister of the Public Insurance Corporation whether she has reviewed this horrible policy established by the previous minister, and has she reversed that treatment to the victims of car thefts here in Manitoba.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): A very, very interesting question; the preamble itself could take an hour to address. I will not burden the House with differences in how good stewardship can make good differences. I will not talk about some of the mismanagement of Autopac and MPI prior to this administration taking its place in Manitoba. I will say that the member likes to make comparisons, but he very seldom will make comparisons to what is happening in Saskatchewan where their deductible is much higher than ours. Theirs is \$700 versus our \$500. [interjection] On the basic. They have exactly the same system, except they charge their ratepayers more under the NDP in the

province next door, as they do in British Columbia.

We have, Madam Speaker, been able to save money, particularly where auto theft is concerned, some \$2.4 million this year alone in premium savings for ratepayers because of the things we have done with Autopac this year.

Mr. Doer: A stolen car represents a loss of property to a family or an individual. It represents much higher costs now with the Public Insurance Corporation, and it also represents a danger to other members of our community because of this car that is stolen in the hands of somebody that cannot be trusted on the roads. We believe, and I think all members of this Chamber believe, that all efforts of the public through their agencies and through this Legislature should be focused in on the criminal not on the victim. I would like to ask the minister: will she reverse this policy of having the deductible paid by the victim? Let us focus in on the real problem, and that is the alleged criminals who commit the act.

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, we have a number of programs that we co-operate in partnership with the community regarding auto theft. We have last year some \$600,000 that was shared with the Winnipeg police, resulting in a 9 percent decrease in auto theft, by the way, this year. In fact, if you take a look at March this year versus March last year, we are down 23 percent in auto theft largely because of measures of partnership and proactive things that have been done through combatting auto theft strategy and other measures put in place by MPI.

* (1350)

Auto Theft Reduction Programs Implementation

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Acting Premier. Five promises were made during the last election campaign to Manitobans to deal with what was then and still is an epidemic of auto theft—by the way, a 210 percent increase since 1991. A 9 percent decrease does not touch that kind of problem that Manitobans are having to deal with. But whatever happened to those five

promises: the incentives for antitheft devices, the auto theft surveillance task force, the auto theft prosecutor, resources from the \$2-million grant from the City of Winnipeg Police Service, the young offender auto theft work program? What happened to those? My question to the Acting Premier is: why should Manitobans now trust this government when it promises anything?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I was very interested in hearing the comments of the Minister responsible for MPI, where it is clearly indicated that the policies that have been implemented by this government are having a very positive effect on the reduction of auto theft, 9 percent in this last year. If we look March over March, minus 23 percent, it is in fact attributable to many of the programs that we have brought in.

One of the examples was brought forward in the Young Offenders Act hearings that we recently conducted where a mother had explained that she had gone with her young son to get the licence and yet could not get the licence because he had created some type of crime affecting the ratepayers of Manitoba in terms of their Autopac, and he had to pay that. In fact, I understand from MPI that MPI now gets \$9 million on a subrogated basis, on an annual basis, because of these proactive programs that our government has implemented.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Auto Theft—Deductible Policy

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): My question is to the Acting Premier. Would he explain to people like Lois and Brian Campbell, who came down to this Legislature here today to tell this government that on their \$650 vehicle they had to pay a \$500 deductible when their car was stolen, even though it was locked, parked in a parking lot under a light, would he explain to them why this government has broken five promises on auto theft when we are the auto theft capital of Canada and people are suffering the way they are?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, not only

have we not broken those promises, we have carried those promises out.

The other one relates to the auto theft unit that the Department of Justice was very proud to partner with MPI and the city of Winnipeg police. MPI transfers \$600,000 to the Winnipeg city police for an auto theft unit to in fact deal with auto crime, and that, in fact, is a very, very important aspect of reducing crime that we implemented in this last year.

Also, the point that needs to be made is that Justice co-operates with MPI by dedicating a Crown attorney. In fact, a Crown attorney has been seconded to MPI from the Crown's office to assist for the prosecution of special cases, especially organized crime, that deal with chop shops and the like that cause a tremendous burden on our ratepayers. I am very pleased to see that not only Justice has been active in this respect, but MPI has been doing an excellent job.

Auto Theft Reduction Programs Implementation

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Well, then, my question to the Minister of Justice: can he possibly explain to Manitobans how this government has been effective in dealing with auto theft when there are 30 vehicles a day roughly getting stolen in this province and when promise after promise after promise after promise made by the government, promises that it said would reduce auto theft, have been trashed? Explain that to Manitobans.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, is it not typical of the member for St. Johns to stand up and say we have broken promises but does not outline any of these promises. I have attempted very specifically to answer each and every accusation that he has made, and again, the member is wrong in making these assertions. It is just like the other day when he said to the press: I am surprised to hear that the judges had rejected a Domestic Violence Court. He was surprised when, in fact, a year ago I told him the answer in Question Period. I gave him the answer in committee. Suddenly he is surprised. This is a member who simply does not listen.

* (1355)

Point of Order

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I believe Beauchesne's indicates that answers should be brief and to the point and should deal with the subject matter. The minister has the option, as he has chosen, not to answer the question and try to obfuscate. We saw that from the Minister of Health when he blamed and went after and attacked individuals. Now the minister is going back to an incident that occurred a year ago. Perhaps he is embarrassed about it, but he can deal with that in another forum. I ask you to call him to order to deal with the question asked or not to deal with it but to continue to go on, abuse this Question Period, and Beauchesne's makes it very clear that the minister ought to deal with the subject matter as discussed.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Justice, on the same point of order.

Mr. Toews: Well, Madam Speaker, I think it is very important to explain to you in making your rulings that it is important that perhaps one of the reasons why the member is not understanding my answers is that he simply does not listen, and I think that is relevant to the questions that are being placed.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Kildonan, I would agree that the honourable member did have a point of order. I would ask the minister to keep his answer as brief as possible and deal with the question raised.

Centra Gas Purchase Purpose

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro. Again we see an expenditure, as I have indicated, of a half billion dollars-plus authorized through this particular government, yet this government has still not indicated to this Chamber why it made that particular purchase, why it felt that purchase was necessary. So I am going to give a wonderful, easy question to the Minister of

Hydro in hopes that he will be able to give a very specific answer.

What is the primary purpose for the purchase of Centra Gas?

Hon. David Newman (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Madam Speaker, it was a combination of a variety of reasons that caused this particular transaction to get the support of the government, the final terms of it, of course, still to be finalized. The approach, having been made by the West Coast president to Manitoba Hydro, the Manitoba Hydro management team and advisers scrutinized very carefully all of the opportunities that were inherent in this particular opportunity, and they concluded, on the basis of examining all of the implications, that this would be in the best interests of the owners of Manitoba Hydro, the people of Manitoba. One of the primary benefits from the integration of the two utilities would be efficiencies would result in \$12 million a year, estimated, in terms of savings to the operation. In addition to that, and probably most significantly, it makes the Manitoba combined utility a competitive force in the North American marketplace.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I ask the minister of Hydro. He now indicates to the House that Centra Gas is the one that approached the government in order to be bought out.

Can the minister indicate to this House: was Centra Gas experiencing any problems? Why was it that the government felt obligated then to go ahead and purchase it without any sort of a detailed plan for the future of that particular company in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Newman: Madam Speaker, it would be presumptuous and inappropriate for me to suggest why Michael Phelps, representing West Coast transmission, the owner of Centra, would approach Manitoba Hydro with a view to presumably trying to benefit to the maximum the shareholders of Westcoast Energy.

* (1400)

What we do know is that through a process of negotiation by the experienced business

people on both sides and the professional advisers on both sides they both came to a deal which they thought was in the best interests of each of the utilities. It was seen to be a win-win transaction. I think, with the passage of time, the honourable member for Inkster will probably see the light as well and be able to, when all of the information is released—it will be released in due course—come to the same conclusion that Hydro did and the government of the province of Manitoba.

Government Intention

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, can the minister indicate specifically: is there any indication from this government towards rural Manitobans that by purchasing Centra Gas it is the government's intentions to update and modernize the infrastructure in rural Manitoba? Is that the primary reason why they bought Centra Gas?

Hon. David Newman (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Madam Speaker, that is a legitimate kind of concern expressed by the honourable member for Inkster, and the quality of the decisions that are going to be made by the integrated utility will probably depend on the degree to which government does not intervene in good business decisions for that corporation. At the moment, however, the public is quite aware in rural Manitoba at least that a great deal of subsidization goes into the development of a distribution infrastructure for natural gas, both federal and provincial money. Now, with an integrated utility, it is going to be possible to look at what is in the public interest in the long-term big picture with both natural gas and hydro transmission being options.

But one thing is probable. It makes no sense to have a duplicated infrastructure where it would be an overall waste of limited resources in the province. It would have to be made on business cases in each situation.

Capital Investment Spending Decline

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of

Finance. In past budget documents this government has spoken in glowing terms about increases in capital investment spending, and I agree. Capital investment spending is very vital in terms of future economic growth. But now Statistics Canada has forecast a major decline in total capital spending—that is private and public combined—for Manitoba for 1999, that is a decline of 9.3 percent, ranking Manitoba the second lowest in the country, nine out of 10.

I would like to ask the minister if he could explain to this House why Manitoba is expected to have such a drastic decline in total capital spending investment, and is this an indication of a possible slowdown in the Manitoba economy in the year ahead.

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I would have thought perhaps the former minister, the member for Brandon East, would like to celebrate the many good things that are happening across the province. Manitoba has probably the most diversified economy of all the western provinces, and if he takes a look at a number of the economic indicators, Manitoba is poised to do very well into the next year.

Private Sector

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Madam Speaker, I had asked the question about total capital spending, but in terms of private capital spending, has the minister had any direct indication from the private sector about private investment spending intentions for 1999, because Statistics Canada is forecasting a major drop of 11.9 percent in private capital spending in 1999, again ranking Manitoba nine out of 10 provinces.

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, in my first answer I urged the member to take a look at all of the economic indicators, but if he wants to maybe zero in on development, I would suggest even in Brandon, if he has an opportunity to visit out there sometime soon, that he look at the many hundreds of millions of dollars that have gone into building in Brandon. The Simplot expansion, for instance, was over \$200 million. The Maple Leaf expansion, the new plant there

that I am sure he celebrates along with us, is \$112 million. He can see the private sector development in Brandon with a number of businesses and hotels opening. Certainly the economy looks very rosy in Brandon.

Mr. Leonard Evans The honourable minister reminds me of the fact that we did, the Schreyer government did expand the Brandon boundary so that all these developments are truly in the city of Brandon, and I am very pleased about that.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member, to pose his final supplementary question.

Manufacturing Sector

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Again, Madam Speaker, I ask the minister: will he acknowledge that in the manufacturing sector, a 22 percent decline is now forecast by Stats Canada for 1999. Is this not a serious portent of what is going to happen? I am not talking about the past. What about Manitoba in 1999 and the year 2000?

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I would hope that perhaps the member would take a little leadership within his caucus. I know the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) and the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) are often talking doom and gloom and how terrible things are in this province. I would simply point out that manufacturing shipments were up 7.1 percent in 1998 versus 3.1 percent for Canada; foreign exports were up 6.2 percent, the ninth consecutive annual increase. Certainly the economy in Manitoba is recognized by many of the forecasters as doing very well. I would urge the member for Brandon East to get a better understanding of those issues.

Centra Gas Purchase Legal Representation

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro. Yesterday the minister claimed that the lawyer representing Westcoast Energy was not also representing

Manitoba Hydro. I would like to table a letter sent by James Foran to the PUB on April 12, in which he said he was asked to forward this letter on behalf of Westcoast Energy and Manitoba Hydro.

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the minister: has the minister read the letter, and if so what is his explanation as to why Manitoba Hydro would be using the same lawyer as Centra Gas prior to the conclusion of negotiations over the sale of Centra Gas to Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. David Newman (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Madam Speaker, it does not sound like a very good idea to me that they would use the same lawyer to represent them in this important commercial transaction. Whether or not in this particular instance there was a meeting of the minds between some lawyer for Manitoba Hydro and the lawyer for Aikins, MacAulay about sending a letter to the Public Utilities Board, I do not know. But in light of the persistence of the member opposite on this unimportant issue, I believe I will seek from Manitoba Hydro an explanation as to why Aikins, MacAulay and Thorvaldson, through James Foran, said in the first sentence: "I have been asked to forward this letter on behalf of Westcoast Energy Inc. and Manitoba Hydro."

I will find out who made the request and why the request was made, if a request was made.

Private Hearings—Manitoba Hydro

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, it is very surprising that the minister finds it an unimportant question.

I would like to ask the minister: can the minister explain why he, as the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, did not know whether Manitoba Hydro was asking for private hearings at the PUB, because it is in the letter?

* (1410)

Hon. David Newman (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Madam Speaker, I can simply say that I

do not support Manitoba Hydro asking for private hearings. To the extent they are asking specific things of the Public Utilities Board, that was their business decision to make. To the extent that I disagree with that, that is what I am entitled to do as a minister of the Crown. I say for the record, I do not believe that Manitoba Hydro should be asking for private hearings if indeed they did.

Mr. Maloway: Madam Speaker, then to the same minister: will this minister now order Manitoba Hydro to reverse its position and request public hearings?

Mr. Newman: Madam Speaker, you can rest assured—all members of the Legislature—that this particular position of mine has been communicated to Manitoba Hydro, and they are well aware of it. I would expect that they will make a decision which is going to be respectful of whatever the Public Utilities Board decides in this matter. My expectations there are irrelevant to this matter, but my hope is that they will respect the fact that the people of Manitoba are the owners of Manitoba Hydro and I, as their representative through the government of the province of Manitoba, would hope that the maximum amount of information without jeopardizing the deal can be made timely available to the people of Manitoba.

Farm Aid Program Application Process

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, as farmers get ready to get back on the land and begin spring seeding, they are facing very serious decisions and many may not be able to continue. There has been an announcement of a Farm Aid Package for some time but the applications just got to Ag offices last week, and now we are told that it is six to eight weeks before the applications can be processed after having filed the claim. This is putting tremendous pressure on farmers.

Given that the province has contributed 40 percent of the program, I would like to ask the minister to tell this House why he has allowed this process to drag along so long, why he has allowed the applications to be so complicated,

why they are tied to NISA and why it is going to take so long to get money to the farmers.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The minister requested, I believe off the record, that the honourable member for Swan River repeat her question, and that is entirely the—

An Honourable Member: Can you read newspapers in this House?

Madam Speaker: Pardon me?

An Honourable Member: He is reading a newspaper.

Madam Speaker: —decision of the honourable member for Swan River, and she indicated she wanted to comply.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Speaker, given that this is a very serious matter, I will repeat the question. I am asking the Minister of Agriculture why the process is taking so long. Given that the province contributed 40 percent to a program, can the minister tell this House why he has allowed the process to drag on so long that applications have just been received at agricultural offices? It is going to take eight to 10 weeks to have them process it, and farmers will not get their money in time to put their crops in the ground this year.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to respond to that question, and I do apologize to the member for having been momentarily distracted. It is just today that I was getting several letters, including official letters from the Keystone Agricultural Producers organization on that very same subject, and I am reading comments to the same effect in the farm press that was preoccupying me.

I remind the honourable member that this program was designed and is administrated entirely by Ottawa. I remind honourable members that I personally and my government were criticized for being one of the last ones to enter the program. There was a reason. We understood that the program had design flaws. It had very complicated administrative fees. I have a letter here that one of our prominent

accounting firms—that certainly the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) would be familiar with—Meyers Norris, are estimating that it will cost a farmer between \$400 and \$925 in accounting fees just to make the application, and the farmer is not guaranteed that he will receive any support. So, yes, I am distressed with the program. I agree fully with the program that it is unacceptable.

Government Input

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, is the Minister of Agriculture telling us that his staff had no part in designing this program, that the provincial government had no input to the program when they have put 40 percent of the money forward? That is unacceptable. They should be having some input into this program.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Agriculture was not recognized and his comments are not on record, because I could not get the attention of the members of the House so that indeed he could put his comments on the record.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I am indebted to you for reminding me to proceed appropriately in the Chamber.

Much to my chagrin and to that of certainly my senior staff members in the Department of Agriculture, and I might say understandably to the Minister of Finance, our own Treasury Board, we were being asked to commit a very substantial amount of money in a Farm Aid Program that we had no hand in designing and in its administration. It was for that reason that I did get the authority and support from my caucus, from my government to, as an interim measure, introduce a recovery program that has been very well accepted by the farm community. Over \$22 million has already flowed in that program. Cash is out in time for seeding. We anticipated the problems in the federal program, and I am pleased to note that this government, with the support of this government, provided that emergency support.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Interlake Regional Health Authority

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, earlier this month it was announced that the Interlake Regional Health Authority received accreditation from the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation. This makes the Interlake Regional Health Authority the first regional health authority in Manitoba to receive recognition from the federal health regulator that national standards are being met. The members of the Interlake Regional Health Authority are a group with innovative ideas who are dedicated to finding ways to ensure that all components of the health care system best serve the people of the Interlake. As part of their dedication, the regional health authority chose to apply for accreditation earlier than most of the other RHAs, while the transition process is to be sure that they were meeting national standards from the very beginning. When the regional health authority system was put in place in 1997, the goal was to achieve better co-ordination of services to improve access and to allow us to make the best use of our health care resources.

With this announcement that the regional health authority has received accreditation, Manitobans can be assured that the RHA system is working. I am sure that it will not be long before all regional health authorities in Manitoba receive the same recognition. So I would commend all the members of the IRHA and the health care staff in the Interlake region on earning this distinction and for their continued dedication to providing quality health care through the Interlake area. Thank you.

* (1420)

300th Birthday of the Khalsa

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, today is April 14, the 300th birthday of Khalsa and the celebration of Sikhs the world over and Sikhs here in Manitoba. I had the honour of attending the flag-raising ceremony today at City Hall, and all of us, of

course, have worked with the Sikh community here in Manitoba and have participated in the celebration of Khalsa and more importantly the principles of Khalsa dealing with humanity, forgiveness, hope, love, equity and racial tolerance.

The history of Sikhs in Canada is one that deals with challenges: the safe passage laws that were in place and where our party federally fought against those laws at the turn of the century and through this century. Madam Speaker, even up till the early '50s Sikhs did not have the vote in Canada. In fact, our party fought very hard in the late '40s for the vote in British Columbia, the former CCF Party, to recognize that people, as members of the Commonwealth, should have the vote in our country. We still have a lot of work as a community to deal with the strengths of our community, the diversity of our community, and racism in our community. This, on the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Khalsa, we should rededicate ourselves to the principles of tolerance and the principles of understanding. Thank you very much.

Grand Rapids—Fishing Industry

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, many Manitobans are wondering why it is that this government has such an inability or unwillingness to negotiate with aboriginal people. This government is willing to spend over \$500 million buying Centra Gas and untold hundreds of millions in buying Winnipeg Hydro, but places little priority on settling issues like the fisheries dispute at Grand Rapids. No one disputes the fact that Grand Rapids Dam seriously damaged the fishing industry. The government admits that the compensation to the town and fishers is due. The majority of fishers in this province are based in northern Manitoba, and the Northern Flood treaties recognize the power projects in the North which gave this province the cheapest electricity in the western world and damaged traditional fishery and hunting areas in northern Manitoba. We are told that in the 1992 settlement with the band, it only covered damages to river fish stocks not the depletion of fish stocks in the lake itself where the vast majority of fishing occurs.

Last year, when the House of Commons fishery committee met at Grand Rapids, the seriousness of the situation was laid out. The minister responsible had been asked to meet with the parties involved and refused. This made the situation at Grand Rapids worse for the residents and is hurting the reputation of Manitoba Hydro across this province. Ignoring the concerns of fishers is not in the interest of anyone. If the minister is not willing to meet with the people of Grand Rapids, then the Premier should step forward and set up a meeting himself.

Frontier College

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, I would just like to extend my congratulations to Frontier College on their 100th anniversary that they held the other night. It was held at the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre where I was very proud to attend.

Frontier College has helped many, many people overcome their inabilities to read and write, and I experienced that first-hand when I was the employment counsellor supervisor for the Limestone Dam. There was a volunteer from the Frontier College who used to volunteer their time in the evenings, and many of the workers that were working on that dam 12 hours a day were faithfully going in the evenings to take the upgrading to help enable them read and write. I personally value that because my mother, who is 81 years old, cannot read or write, and I remember as a young child accompanying her to the grocery stores where she had labels off soup cans to make sure that she got the right soup that she wanted.

When they had the anniversary for Frontier College, it was also to assist the funding for Beat the Street. Beat the Street is a valuable program that does not look at colour, and its doors are open to anyone who wants to upgrade their reading and writing skills. If you walk into their offices and classrooms, you will see people from all walks of life that are finally getting a chance. It is people and organizations like that that we as citizens of Canada owe gratitude, and hopefully we will always support those kinds of programs to make one's own life and their families lives

much better anyway we can. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE (Sixth Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Doer) in amendment thereto.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to make a few comments on the throne speech, but I also am very pleased to be back here in the Legislature and have the opportunity to debate and bring forward many of the issues that are important to my constituency.

I can recall last fall when farmers were facing really great difficulties and we had raised the issue and we talked about returning to the Legislature. Members opposite, I believe it was the government House leader at that time, the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae), said there was no reason to return to the Legislature because there were not any important issues to discuss.

* (1430)

There certainly were important issues and there still are important issues, and in particular I talked today in Question Period about the farm prices, but certainly all the other issues that we faced over the winter and that we still are seeing now with the long waiting lists that patients are facing and the beds in hallways that we saw this winter. It was a shame that the government did not think that it was important that we return to this Legislature to talk about these important issues.

But we are finally back here, and we were anticipating that the government would bring forward a throne speech that would offer some vision about where they were going, and it was quite disappointing when we listened to the throne speech and saw that it was very vague

and had very little content and only a few new initiatives about how they were planning to deal with the problems and the challenges that we are facing here in this province. Particularly, when I read through this throne speech, I have to say that I was tremendously disappointed, as were rural Manitobans across the province and northerners, that this government chose not to even mention the word "agriculture" in their budget. They have talked about a forum where they are going to go out and consult with people, which they did in 1993, and now they have finally realized that there is a problem out there. Now, in 1999, they are going to go back and listen to the people again. But to think that a government would not recognize that there is a serious situation and give at least some lip service to the people of rural Manitoba and the farming community that they are recognizing that this is a problem is a disappointment that it is not mentioned in the throne speech.

I have to say, Madam Speaker, that I am very concerned about the farming community. I am very concerned about the package that has been put forward for farm aid, and I am disappointed to hear the minister say that his department had no role in developing this package. I cannot believe that provinces would completely turn over things to the federal government to design a package. I just find that quite unacceptable and hard to believe that when you are contributing 40 percent of the cost of the program, you would have no part in developing it.

But, Madam Speaker, there are serious problems with the program. The application form is very long, and as the minister indicated in his answer to me, it is quite complicated. Most people are going to have to have an accountant to fill out the forms, and it is going to be somewhere between \$400 and as high as \$900 to have this application completed. I am sure that there could have been an easier way to get these applications together to ensure that the money went to the people who most needed it, and that is the farming community, not into the accountants' hands, as is going to happen now.

But, Madam Speaker, there are other problems with the program, and had I been able to ask my other questions and had not had to

repeat my questions, I would have been able to raise with the minister the serious concern that negative margins are not covered in this disaster program when it comes to payout but that these negative margins are used to calculate the following year's averages. By doing this, if you are going to be rolling it into the following year's average, then what we are going to be doing is accelerating the reduction of the producers' gross margins and further reduce the payments from the program.

Madam Speaker, the other issue that has been brought to my attention, and one we hear the federal Minister of Agriculture talking about is that this program was developed to be in compliance with the international trade rules, but even though it was designed this way it did not force the minister to link the agricultural assistance disaster program to NISA, nor did the international trade rules require that the program exclude negative margins. So what we have under the current trade rules is that farmers can be supported up to 70 percent of their return and have no problem with international trade rules. But under this program Canadian farmers will receive far less than this level because of the flaws in the program. What I see happening and what we have heard is that many, many farmers will not qualify, and the whole purpose of the program, which was to get money into the farmers' hands, we will in fact see very few—the numbers I have heard are somewhere in the range of one in eight farmers will qualify. In fact, although we had big announcements by the federal minister of this program, in reality, the people who need the help most are not going to be benefiting.

As I see it, Madam Speaker, and from what I have looked at, it looks as though the hog producers are the ones who are going to benefit from the program the most. I think that when we looked at the number of people we have in the hog industry in Manitoba at this time, the difficulties they are facing, I think the minister has to also think about what role his government played in promoting the expansion of the hog industry and what impact the changes that we have had to single-desk selling and the move away from price transparency and what impact all of these have had on the hog industry in this province. I think we will be looking very

closely when this program starts to pay out where the majority of the money is going to go. As I see it right now, I think the majority of this money is going to end up going to the people who are in the hog industry.

As we look at the throne speech, one of the reasons for the delay of our coming back to the Legislature was because we had the whole scenario of the Monnin inquiry and the investigation into vote rigging. When we finally got that report, the government was able to come back and deliver their throne speech. But I want to take a few minutes and just talk briefly about the Monnin inquiry and the whole vote-rigging scheme. Yesterday the member for Gladstone (Mr. Rocan) offered me his apologies for what the Conservative Party did within my constituency, and I thank him for that apology. But I want to also say that I was not the victim in this whole scheme. We have to look really closely at who the victim was. The victims were the aboriginal people, who were taken advantage of and manipulated in this whole scheme. I think we have to think very carefully about that. Those are the people who have to be apologized to. The Premier (Mr. Filmon) finally did apologize to them. After some pressure, he agreed to do that. That is good. I am glad that he apologized to those people.

What we have to look at—and we have to learn a lesson from this whole scenario that took place—is that we cannot take advantage of the most vulnerable people. What we have to do is involve them in the process, make them feel welcome and invite them in, share their ideas and work at ways that we can help the most needy in this province. Our goal as legislators and government members should be to try to lift up the poorest of the poor. Our goal should not be to try to make the rich get richer. We should be trying to help the poorest of the poor get the tools that they need to play a role in society, help them get an education, ensure that they have proper health care, ensure that they have the tools to raise their children so that their children do not have to be taken away from them and they spend years looking for them and trying to bring them back into their home.

* (1440)

There are many, many things that we can do, Madam Speaker, and we should not, as I say, take advantage of them. We hear many negative things about some of our poor people and some of our aboriginal people, but rather than being critical let us work with them. I have taken that step, and I represent many aboriginal people. I visit their communities on a regular basis. After the boundaries are changed, I will be running in a constituency that has even a larger aboriginal population, and I am very concerned about how these people will make a living and how they will be able to contribute to the economy of Manitoba. I think we have to recognize that they were the first people here. They have been through difficulties, and we have to work with them.

Last night, I attended a dinner with the ambassador from Ukraine to Canada. We had a bit of history about how the Ukrainians came to Canada and the part that they have played. As I am of Ukrainian descent, I am very proud of the role that Ukrainians have played in this province and what they have done. We have many other members of the Legislature here who are also of Ukrainian descent.

We can be proud of what our people did, but we also have to be willing to help other people get back what they need and help them to play a role in society. Even if some of these people, the aboriginal people, do not want to take leading roles, our job is to ensure that they have proper housing, they have the opportunity to get an education and that children are properly fed. Those are the kinds of things that we can do. If we do those kinds of things, we will reduce the poverty in this province, Madam Speaker, and every day we can address that, it will make Manitoba a better place to live.

Madam Speaker, when I think about it, I talked about the aboriginal children, but it is all of our children. All the children in this province are very important. Most parents are trying their best, but many must now overcome the odds with their children. Can you imagine, Manitoba has the highest child poverty rate, the highest teenage pregnancy rate, the highest high school dropout rate.

Madam Speaker, we also have the highest rate of children in care, and, not surprisingly, we also have the highest increase in violent youth crime since 1990, and we have to question, is this the best we can do for our children, and what does it mean for the future well-being of the province? If we cannot offer better for our children, then we know that we are going to be in trouble down the road. So those are the things we have to think about, but when you look at this government's record on what they have done when it comes to our young children, it is not very good.

Our child care system has been destabilized, and the government has cut public school funding by \$500 per pupil. Children's welfare allowance has been cut. Children who have been raped or molested are on waiting lists in our courts for up to two years at a time. I think it is time that we put our children first, that we invest in our children. We cannot continue with the path we are on under the Filmon government, because if we continue on this path of neglecting our children, we are going to pay for it dearly down the road.

So, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that it is very important that we take this opportunity to invest in our children and ensure that they have the tools and are prepared to carry on and build a healthy economy in this province when their turn comes along. But, of course, we all know that there are poor people. I think that we have to listen to some of these poor people and some of the challenges they face. As I said, I represent many, many poor people. When others have asked young people what it means to be poor, they talk about being teased for the way they are dressed, young children who pretend they have forgotten their lunch when they have no food, young children who feel ashamed because their parents have no work. Most of all, in a rural area, many times it is young children who cannot go on field trips because their families cannot afford it.

So, Madam Speaker, one of the things that has been very neglected in this throne speech, there is no vision of what this province plans to do other than saying that child poverty will be addressed by a round table of Healthy Communities to be led by the Premier (Mr.

Filmon) himself. Well, can you imagine, this government has been in place for 11 years now, and now they are going to implement a round table to start talking about child poverty—long overdue, long overdue and something that should have been addressed much before this.

Madam Speaker, the issue of education and what is happening in our schools and the cutbacks that we have seen in education are very, very serious. Although the government likes to sing a good line, saying that they have increased the funding for education, when you look at the real dollars that are going into education, there has been a serious decline. That is why we are seeing children using books that are outdated, we are seeing teachers having no preparation time, and we are seeing a reduction in the number of courses that are offered for children. In the rural area, that is quite serious because in the smaller schools every time you cut a teacher you reduce further the opportunities for those children to get the tools that they need to prepare themselves and take up the challenges that await them.

Of course, Madam Speaker, when we talk about schools, one of the topics that always comes up is school taxes. Of course, nobody likes to pay taxes and nobody likes to see their school taxes go up, but school divisions have not had very much choice because school divisions and trustees are committed to education. When the government reduces their funding, they only have one avenue to get extra money, and that is from the property tax. So the government says, oh, we have not cut funding, but the school boards have to pass the costs on somewhere, so it ends up on taxes. The school boards become the bad guys in the middle of it, but they are the ones who are trying to keep the systems going in spite of the fact that the government continues to cut back on the funding for education.

One of the major issues that I have a concern with is certainly this government's commitment and record on health care. When you look at the government's promises, they certainly have not been kept. In 1995, the government promised to spend \$600 million on badly needed personal care homes to ease pressures on hospitals, and this promise was

trashed just a few months later and the facilities were not built.

In my constituency, this government had a promise to do renovations to the Swan River Hospital in 1992, and it was supposed to be major renovations. I remember the then Minister of Health, the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae), being in Swan River when we opened the personal care home and talking about the renovations to the new facility. Well, very shortly after that, the picture came off the wall, and the renovations did not happen. Now we have very serious problems in Swan River, where the hospital has been closed due a mould problem, and it is going to be a real inconvenience to the people of the valley for the next few years as the situation is resolved.

I want to give credit to the local administration at the hospital and the staff and the board for the tremendous job that they have done over the last little while finding alternate facilities and ensuring that we can continue to provide health care service in the Swan River Valley.

I was very pleased yesterday when the minister gave me his assurance that parents and families would not have to bear the additional transportation costs that are going to be involved in this. They would not be out of pocket additional money, but I must say I was absolutely appalled to hear the minister say that they would not consider waiving the 20 percent to build a new facility when the new facility is not coming at the request of the community. This new facility in all likelihood is having to be built because of neglect in repairs in the facility, and now to say that the community is going to have to bear the cost of that, raise the money for that 20 percent, is just quite amazing and quite disappointing in this government to say that.

* (1450)

I am also very concerned, Madam Speaker, that the government is going to use this as an excuse to downgrade the services. We the people of the Swan River Valley will be watching very closely and will be looking for a commitment from this government that they will not be reducing services, that they, in fact, will

be looking at this as an opportunity to enhance services in the Swan River area because we serve a very large area and we should be treated as a regional hospital.

So, Madam Speaker, there are some serious questions with regard to the health care facility. The other health care facility in the Swan River constituency is the hospital in Winnipegosis. Here we have a different problem, and that is a shortage of doctors. The committee at Winnipegosis has long been trying to get another doctor to Winnipegosis and were quite frustrated when the government came up with the policy that they have to pay \$3,000 before the government will help them find a doctor. In the meantime, they have told the people at Winnipegosis that they can renovate their facility so that other services can be provided there, but they cannot renovate the facility until they have found a doctor. So the government is taking money from them to find a doctor but will not allow them money to allow the renovations to go ahead. It is quite foolish and, I think, one that the government could resolve quite easily if they choose to.

The long waiting lists are having an impact on people in my constituency as well. I had a phone call from someone just yesterday who has indicated that he is waiting for a hip replacement, can hardly walk but will probably have to wait for about another year because the waiting lists for hip replacements are so long. When we look at this throne speech, I was quite amazed at the end of it where the government goes through this whole series of "My government knows it must, and it will," do various things. For example: My government knows that it must, and it will, take action in making our neighbourhoods safer. My government knows it must, and it will, continue to make our health care system accessible and responsive.

Well, I ask you, Madam Speaker, where has this government been? They have been the government for 11 years and all of a sudden they recognize that they know and they must and they will do all of these things. What have they been doing till now? They have not been addressing the concerns of Manitobans very well.

I want to just raise another issue. We have been having this discussion on Centra Gas and I could hear the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) talking about bringing Centra Gas to the Swan River Valley. Well, I want to remind him not to bother making that a promise in this election, because they made it in the last election and could not deliver on it. They could not deliver on that promise and the people in the Swan River Valley have a very aggressive committee. They are now working with the province of Saskatchewan to try to get natural gas. [interjection]

The member from Arthur-Virden says I cannot deliver. He has to remember that it was his government that made the promise and his government that has broken the promise, because they are not delivering and natural gas has not been expanded into the Swan River Valley as they had promised it would.

I want to also raise a couple of other issues that were not mentioned in the throne speech but I think that should be mentioned. The government made no mention of our natural resources and how they are managed. The government surely got egg on their face on how they have handled the whole issue of elk capture, and, thank goodness, they have now listened to the pressure of the community and have agreed not to do further capturing. I hope that the minister will agree. I hope the minister will listen. He said that there will be no more capturing in the Swan River Valley. I hope that he will live up to that word and, in fact, we will not see any more capturing of elk anywhere and that he will look at some of the recommendations that have been put forward by the people of the Swan River Valley for many, many years on how the elk problem can be addressed. There certainly are other ways to handle this issue.

There are many things that we have to do and things that can be done much better than the Conservatives have done over the past 11 years. I have talked about the things that have happened within the health care system. I have talked about the things that have happened in the education system and certainly in what we have seen with our children. We have to work at building new partnerships with aboriginals that

make good on the promises of the last decade, including promises: we have to make sure that the AJI report is implemented; we have to be sure that issues of health care are addressed. I think that there are ways to work in partnership. We do not have to close the doors.

I look at the community of Pine Creek where they presently have just built a nursing station on the reserve. I think by working together with them, there are surrounding communities that perhaps with a little bit of negotiation that services could be provided at that nursing station to other people who are in Duck Bay and in Camperville, very close to the nursing station. With that kind of co-operation, things can certainly happen.

I want to just mention briefly a couple of other issues. One of them I want to say that has happened, one of the real challenges that we are facing is transportation and railway services and the abandonment of rail lines. I hope that the government would recognize this as a serious problem and help communities in their efforts to save lines. For example, the Cowan subline, a deal has been signed with CN, and that line will be operating, hopefully. There are other lines that will be required to maintain an infrastructure, but changes have to be made to the Canada Transportation Act. It will take leadership on the part of the government.

I have certainly not heard much from the Minister of Transportation on the government side of the House moving towards improving and calling for changes to the Canada Transportation Act to ensure the short lines can operate. There is much more work to be done in that area, and governments have a role to play in talking to grain companies to see what their plans are. We have to look at ways to ensure that grain companies continue to purchase grain in the rural areas and that all the elevators are not closed down and have us move towards a main line system where most elevators will be closed in the rural areas. Those are the kinds of challenges we are facing that this government has not addressed. I look forward to having the opportunity to discuss these further when we get to the budget speech, and I look forward to seeing what kind of commitments the

government is prepared to make to ensure that we can continue to have a healthy lifestyle in the rural communities.

We are going to be dealing with legislation with boundaries, and lots of people talk about parts of their constituency that is going to be leaving, they will no longer be representing. The Swan River constituency does change, but it changes with additions. There is no part of it being taken away. The change in the Swan River constituency will not be the same that other constituencies are facing.

Madam Speaker, before I conclude I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the pages to the Legislature. I hope that they find this to be a wonderful experience and a learning experience and hope that we will treat you with respect and you can learn to appreciate the atmosphere here in the House. I want to also welcome the new Sergeant-at-Arms and hope he enjoys his role here in the House.

I want to also recognize the past member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) and offer my condolences to his family and say indeed that we will miss him here in the Legislature. He brought a certain quality that will be hard to replace, and I want to extend my condolences.

Of course, Madam Speaker, one of the changes that we will be seeing in the next Legislature is one that we have been calling for for a long time. That of course is an elected Speaker, one that should have been brought in some time ago, but one that we look forward to. So that was one of the announcements that we thought was favourable in the throne speech, one that we feel should have been brought in a long time ago, and look forward to that process when we come back to this Legislature. Not everybody will be coming back to the Legislature. Some have chosen to retire and some will not come back for other reasons. So I would like to take this opportunity to say to those people who have chosen to leave after the next election that I have enjoyed working with them very much and enjoyed the acquaintances that I have made, and certainly enjoyed the debate that has gone back and forth across the House.

In closing, I must say that this throne speech is certainly a very weak document, one that appears to be a government that is tired of being government, a government that has lost their vision, a government that has just very few initiatives to put on the agenda, and one that shows that they recognize the error of their ways, because they look at all the things that they recognize that they should have done better, and now they are trying to make a commitment that they will be doing it better, but in fact it is time for this government to say that they are out of ideas and give an opportunity for another party to take over at the reigns of this province. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (1500)

Mr. James Downey (Arthur-Virden): I rise to put some comments on the record, Madam Speaker, and this may or it may not be my last opportunity to speak in this great place. I rise as an extremely proud Canadian and a proud Manitoban.

I want to say as well that every time I enter this place, whether it is this Chamber, whether it is walking up the grand staircase, or whether it is driving in off of Broadway, it gives me a tremendous sense of pride, not only because it is a great place and a magnificent building, but it is the very heart and soul of what our democratic system is all about. I say to each and every member of this Assembly, regardless of whatever group is trying to bombard or trying to force entry, they do a disservice to this beautiful place and to the meaning of what this democratic debating place is all about.

So I challenge each member, regardless of their political stripe, to maintain the sanctity of this place, to maintain this place as a place where peaceful debate, laws and rules can be debated, and the overall policies for the interests of Manitobans and Canada can be truly done so without fear or without favour. I mean that very seriously. Each and every one of us have the responsibility to defend this place. If you take that responsibility seriously you will not be playing politics with the kind of activities that we have seen at times here.

I also want to say, Madam Speaker, that I have had the privilege and I want to thank the many constituents over the years from Arthur and then Arthur-Virden. I have had the privilege with the boundary realignment to serve many communities. I want to genuinely thank those people because they truly have been good to me. They have been good to my wife, Linda, and to my son, Ryan, and to all our family. I say very genuinely: thank you for being there for us, and we have tried to do our best.

I also want to acknowledge leaders that I have had the opportunity to serve under. Premier Sterling Lyon, who was a tremendous leader of this province and, yes, although one term, put this province back on a path of responsibility, of accountability, and a direction that was to take us into the right way. Of course, the people of Manitoba decided in 1981 that that would not be the case, that they wanted to put their lot with Premier Howard Pawley. I will make a few comments as it relates to that period of time, but I think the record books clearly show how much this province suffered under the socialist doctrine of—and by the way, one of the current members who is still here is the current Leader of the NDP party, which took this province to its knees, Madam Speaker, took it to its knees.

Madam Speaker, I am extremely proud to be serving with Premier Gary Filmon and all of my colleagues over the past many years who have turned this province around. You know, I have given this speech many times and many times over, and I will say it again, that Premier Filmon said when he was elected in 1988, if there is one thing he could change in Manitoba, one thing he could change in Manitoba, he would be pleased, and that was the attitude of the people of Manitoba.

You know what, Madam Speaker, he and the caucus colleagues I have sat with have done that. We have turned the attitude of the people of Manitoba to one of being very, very positive, and I am proud to have served with every one of my colleagues who have served, those who are no longer with us and those who are here. Equally, I have been extremely proud to have served on a national level in certain activities, whether it was in internal trade which I co-

chaired with a national minister for many years, or whether it was dealing with the leadership in my time of Agriculture ministers or in any other, because there is a revolving time when ministers from provinces take the leadership role and chair those events. You have a responsibility to do things for other parts of Canada which I have been deeply honoured to be part of, this great nation.

I also want to say that I have had a tremendous opportunity, not only at national events but to be part of activities with the prime ministers of Canada and most recently Team Canada, when we toured Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. To have the Canadian flag and the Canadian national anthem played as you come off the airplane with your ministers and the business people, I can tell you that is when you brim with pride.

I am absolutely proud to be a part of that activity and to have seen the greatness and the achievements of prime ministers, whether it was John Diefenbaker, who gave the native people the right to vote, Madam Speaker, Progressive Conservative, to be part of and to have served with people—yes, I had respect for the manner in which he carried out the government, and I will put it on the record. I did not particularly like his policies and the direction he took Canada, but Pierre Elliott Trudeau was an extremely strong person. He took this country where I did not want it to go, but a tremendously powerful individual.

As was Brian Mulroney, and, you know, there is a man who today is not held in very high regard, but our trade policies that we have today, we have to say that Brian Mulroney and his government of which many ministers came from western Canada, I acknowledge that there was some good activities done. Yes, my friend Joe Clark, who is still with us and may well, and I say, may well become prime minister again, that I was extremely proud of him. In fact, he was to take this country in the right direction. Yes, I will say about the current government in Ottawa and the current Prime Minister, they have carried out a Conservative agenda. They truly have done what this country has needed. Yes, they have been hard on us, and I do not accept the fact that they cut our health care and education.

That has been hard. They could have taken money elsewhere, but they actually have delivered a Conservative agenda to some degree.

I have also been pleased to have been at the World Trade Organization meetings where I have seen such leaders, such notable leaders and great world people such as Nelson Mandela, to have heard the President of the United States and be part of a meeting with Bill Clinton. Yes, Fidel Castro was there, and, yes, Tony Blair was there, the current Prime Minister of England.

So, Madam Speaker, I have been privileged, and I have been honoured, to come from southwestern Manitoba, through the democratic system, to have been able to have served my community not only as a representative there in Manitoba but also as part of this great country. So I say thank you to those people.

On the international scene, I have been pleased to have been promoting Manitoba and to sign agreements with other jurisdictions, whether it is Jalisco, Mexico, whether it is Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, whether it is in Hunan, China, or most recently the agreement that Manitoba signed with Egypt to, for the first time ever, introduce canola products and canola crop to Egypt where there are 62 million people. I am extremely proud to have represented this province and this country to introduce such an important product to them.

Madam Speaker, we truly are world class. The World Junior Hockey tournament that was just held this last year truly put Manitoba—the junior world hockey that was held in Manitoba truly showed that we are world class. The Pan American Games, where there will be a hundred thousand people from the Americas come to play and to mix and to do business, that is world class.

I want to also say to the many employees that I have had through my different times in different departments—in fact, when somebody read out my portfolio list one time, my goodness sakes, they said that it just shows that he cannot hold a job. Well, that may have been the way it was, but every one of those jobs I felt tremendous dedication to. But to those people who have had an event in my honour, who

worked for government, to those many people who have sent me letters, and Linda, letters of thanks and congratulations and some regrets that I am leaving, others happy that I am leaving, I say thank you because it truly is a great feeling to have the many positive comments.

* (1510)

Now, for the New Democrats, I have a few words for them because I think it is important that I leave this place with them feeling just as bad about me, or not liking me as much today as when I came in here, and I will try and make sure that I accomplish that goal with this speech.

Madam Speaker, a particular acknowledgement to my colleagues because we have a government, we have elected members that not one in the time that I have been in this House have had to step aside from cabinet because of any question of their integrity or their involvement or what they have done that is untoward, and I am proud as proud can be because of that. Not one. And when the New Democratic Party can stand up and say that, I think they can be holier than thou, but they cannot. This recent issue, and I regret, I regret terribly that it happened. I regret it for everyone involved, whether they were victims, whether they were perpetrators or whatever they were; I regret it for everybody's sake, but there was not one dollar of taxpayers' money put in question, not one dollar of taxpayers' money put in question. I want everyone to pay attention to that, not one dollar.

But I can tell you, if you read the history books about the New Democratic Party, I will tell you a little bit about the New Democratic Party. I will tell you that the member for Brandon East (Mr. L. Evans) knows all about it. There were three people that worked for his Crown corporation known as McKenzie Seeds, and you know what happened? They got their money mixed up with McKenzie Seeds, and when they took it out, they did not take just their money. They took some of McKenzie Seeds money, which was taxpayers' money. What happened to those people? They went to jail. Did the member for Brandon East, did he say to them: Did you take money from McKenzie Seeds? Did he ask them that question, as they

are running at the Premier (Mr. Filmon) saying, did you ask the question? No, he did not ask the question. Do you know what Howard Pawley's answer to it was so that Mr. Evans did not have to answer to the Legislature or the public? His answer was not have a commission of inquiry; he shuffled his cabinet so Len Evans did not have to answer to the public. That is the kind of history that the NDP leave in this province.

Let me show you when Mr. Bucklaschuk was the minister of government autopac, and Mr. Doer sat in the cabinet, when somebody told somebody that they were going to get rid of Mr. Laufer, was the truth told? Mr. Laufer was the former chairman who recently sued Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation and got \$2 million. Was there an inquiry as to who told the truth to whom? No, there was not. Should there have been? There may still should be. Madam Speaker, that is the New Democrats.

Let me take you to another area where in fact it was proven that a representative of the New Democrats did lie. We had the Tritschler report where Cass-Beggs was taken before a commission of inquiry and it was proved that he lied to the committee of the Manitoba Legislature, and it cost the taxpayers millions of dollars to build Jenpeg in the wrong place at the expense of the taxpayers of Manitoba. Those are the people that lied to the people of Manitoba, and it cost us and it cost us dearly for the purposes of their staying in office, not to get to the truth, but it was for them fixing their own way in life, not in the interests of the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, you know, there was an interesting article in the Free Press recently where a couple of people signed it. I will just make a quick quote of it: "If the Free Press editors want to go after election rigging, they should look to their mentors, the NDP and the unions. Everyone knows (except, obviously, the Free Press) that in every civic election the New Democratic Party help to finance 'independent' left-wing candidates."

Those are not my words, that is signed by two people and it is in a public document. So you know they are very fast to throw stones when they live in glass houses. Let he or she

without sin throw the first stone. Well, they have thrown a lot of stones, and you know what, Madam Speaker, it may just come back on them, it may just start coming back on them.

So I apologize to the individuals if I have hurt their feelings, but I honestly believe for the new members and all those members here they should hear the kinds of people who are so holy telling us how great they are and they have never made a mistake.

I also think it is important to note that this place is a place where greatness emanates from. Let me tell you a little bit about the greatness of some of the people, and one cannot pass by a former Premier, Duff Roblin, who it has been demonstrated time and time again how important his vision was for this province, to build the floodway, to build the Asessippi Dam to put a reserve of water for Brandon and Portage and all of those communities as they grow and develop, to save the city of Winnipeg when we have had the devastation of floods, to have the vision to build the hydro power system, which is generating the tremendous wealth for this country in having the lowest power rates, to introduce, yes, a Crown corporation known as Crop Insurance, of which the NDP believe that they are the only ones who believe in Crown corporations, and the credit corporation which is also a Crown corporation, implemented by Conservative governments. They do not have a monopoly on socialism, but when it is the right thing to do, our governments have done it.

Madam Speaker, Premier Sterling Lyon, tremendous leader, but unfortunately there were some unfortunate stories told that we were going to sell Hydro, that we were going to do all kinds of things. We were going to develop a potash mine; we were going to have 800 jobs in an aluminum smelter; and we would have had a national power grid by now looking after the needs of the people of this country, but Howard Pawley and the NDP got in and were going to do it better. They blew the best opportunities that this country has ever seen.

Now, let us come to our current Premier (Mr. Filmon), who I have a tremendous amount of respect and high regard for, who has the stamina, who has the vision, and who has taken

this province even a better distance down the road of getting to prosperity. Let us deal with some of the native issues, whether it is the settling of land claims, whether it is the Northern Flood Agreement, whether it is the North Central Hydro, whether it is the \$20 million that went into the Grand Rapids forebay, of which, by the way, the NDP said: legally, we do not have to do it. But our Premier came along with a compassionate government and said: we will make some settlements with those people. [interjection] Yes, Madam Speaker, we are extremely proud; a Premier who led and saved how many thousands of people when we had the worst forest fires that this province has seen. We evacuated thousands of people. A flood that this province has not seen in over a hundred years, again, evacuated and saved every life because of the direction and the team of people who put forward their efforts. Went through the worst recession and still maintained and increased the budget for our health care system. I am proud. I am extremely proud, and that is what this place is all about—philosophical debate. I have not heard a strong philosophical debate come from the opposition members in a long time. I have not heard them stand up and give a strong philosophical approach.

One of the best things that has happened to this province is that we have put in law the balancing of the budget, and to put this government, to put this province on a sound footing where the people know that we are not going to run into terrible deficits, that we will not have a tax increase without the support of the people and that our debt will be paid off so that some day, Madam Speaker, your children and your grandchildren will not have to pay a sales tax, that there will not be the kind of tax burden that the NDP would have you and me and our children bear. That is the kind of future that I see. That is the kind of vision that this Premier and this government and my colleagues running in the election will have, that some day we will cast off the burden of taxation as we have known it in the past.

* (1520)

To have sold Manitoba Telephone System is absolutely the right thing to do. The member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) kept berating me, that I

had not been listening to my constituents, that they did not want to sell Manitoba Telephone System. I dare say, I did not have but one or two calls. He would traipse through my riding and come out with a handful of people saying that I am in trouble, I am in trouble, because I was selling MTS. Our Conservative government developed the Manitoba Telephone System. A Conservative government did the right thing to do that to provide service throughout this country, and it did the right thing to sell it because 70 percent of the business was going to be in competition with the private sector. We did not need to be in the private sector competing with our telephone system, as it is so right that our Hydro Board and our Hydro management decided to buy Centra Gas.

Now I think it is time the New Democratic Leader (Mr. Doer) stood up and said he is either for it or he is against it. The member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) will be in a lot of trouble in the next election because she has never once put in writing a request for gas for Swan River, but they will get gas, I believe, with the hydro system being part of it, far more than they ever would have with Centra Gas. I believe that commitment can be made for this next election without question, and they will get what they need.

Madam Speaker, who is telling the truth in the New Democratic Party? They talk about truth and who is not telling the truth. Is the New Democratic Party Leader telling the truth when he says that he is not going to sell Manitoba Telephone System or is the member for Thompson who berated and belittled and churned at the last session of the Legislature when we sold it? He delayed this House. He frothed at the mouth, and he said: no question, we will buy back the Manitoba Telephone System.

Whose policy do the people of Manitoba listen to? Are they going to come clean in an election campaign and stand up and say we are going to sell it or we are going to keep it? You know, Mr. Doer—I am sorry—the member for Concordia better come clean as well, as it relates to the buying of the gas company. He says from his seat today, oh, we are in agreement with the sale, but you paid too much for it. He also said

calf to me means you made a pretty good deal and you have a hydro system that is worth more. That is not making a bad deal. That is making a darn good deal.

I ask the Liberal Party, what is left of them, Madam Speaker, if they will come clean as to why they do not want us to purchase Centra. [interjection] Absolutely. It will lower the cost for the consumers of gas. It will provide opportunities for gasification of communities that have been denied it for years and years and years. It is absolutely the right thing to do.

I want to talk a little bit about the future, because that is what it is all about. Our throne speech clearly spelled out where this province was, where it is at, and where it is going. And you know what? I heard that from the Progressive Conservative Party. I have not heard anything from the New Democratic Party. They are banking on one and one issue alone, and that is that we are for some reason going to be held or put down because of the Monnin inquiry. I am sorry, you never gain support in a society by tearing down your opponent. The last time I checked, you get support by building up your own strengths. [interjection]

The member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) for some reason has something to say, being a former teacher. It is interesting to note that under his administration Flin Flon had a four-year life span any time that I can remember. Today, Flin Flon mine and smelter, after some \$200 million-and-some by the private sector and the province—and I have never heard him say thank you—will now show a 12-year life span for the young people of Flin Flon.

Madam Speaker, what about the future? Let us first of all go to the Boundaries Commission that reported that for the first time, I believe, in three reviews of our boundaries we do not lose a rural or northern boundary. The policies of this government on diversification and decentralization have worked. We have stabilized our communities. We have got the wealth creation distributed evenly throughout the province, and I am proud to be part of a government to see that happen. Yes, we have a greater rural population, and, yes, to introduce a lower tax commission to better find ways that

we can help those taxpayers is a tremendous move to look at how we can better be competitive on a global basis because that is where our competition is; it is global. I think it is also important to note in the future that the groundwork has been laid. The groundwork has been laid. We will have a more efficient government. We will have a government that continues to put the taxpayers first.

Health care: I want to talk for a minute about health care because we continue to hear about health care. First, the quality of food, and I take my hat off to anybody who works in a hospital, anybody who goes to a hospital or has anything to do with it because the only reason you go is because you need their services. Madam Speaker, I was in the Health Sciences Centre and I was looked after, but I cannot tell you that I can rave about the food that they currently had. In fact, a lot of people who are complaining about the new food system, they are still on the old food system. This food issue is a bogus argument. It is a labour issue. It is nothing to do with food; it is a labour issue, and let us call a spade a spade.

Madam Speaker, I ask the member for Interlake (Mr. C. Evans), I ask the member for Brandon East (Mr. L. Evans), the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) to check in their hospitals because you know what they have now? They have dialysis machines put there not by an NDP government, by a Conservative government to provide services to those people, and I just happened to note that there is a little problem in health care in Saskatchewan recently. That is an NDP government, those of the saviour. I am not sure whether the New Democrats are going to go and campaign for the government or for the workers. They will have a dilemma. But here is a headline: More hospital doors may close in rural Saskatchewan. That is February of this year. I checked, the last time it was a New Democratic government.

Madam Speaker, let us talk about education because I think we should put education in perspective. The member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), she is a great expert on education. I think that we should put it in this context. Get on a 747 airplane. I think the member should do that and when she is sitting on the airplane ready

to take off, the captain of the plane comes on and says: Hi, welcome to my airplane. By the way, I am a product of the New Democratic Party education system in Manitoba and I got through my Grade 12. Yes, I got through my Grade 12; I actually could only do Grade 10 math. Nobody tested me, though. Nobody tested me but I got through and I am proud of it. I actually got through my airplane pilot's training because I was a good person, and because they did not want to hold anybody back and make anybody feel bad, I got my pilot's licence. By the way, we are taking off through clouds, and I may have to do some mathematical calculations. By the way, have a nice trip. You see, that is what testing means. It means at the end of day, when people come out, they are qualified to do things.

How would you like to go in for an operation and the doctor said, I went through the NDP system; I have got Grade 12, but I can only cut your tonsils out with a Grade 10 education? How would you like that? That is the NDP way, ladies and gentlemen. Those are the policies that they stand for. We stand for people who have got qualities to present in the world in a global market, Madam Speaker. We do not want to water down the people that we produce.

Madam Speaker, the lowest unemployment in all of Canada, the lowest youth unemployment in all of Canada because the policies that Premier Filmon and this government put in place got Manitobans working.

I have to talk a little bit about marketing because I have been known to do that. In one of my first speeches here I got into a lot of doo-doo because of a comment I made, but it was a true comment then and it is a true comment today.

* (1530)

We have just seen, ladies and gentlemen, my colleagues, the biggest announcement recently of over one hundred and some million dollars being invested in Brandon for a hog plant that will create some 2,200 jobs. Do you know, Madam Speaker, that if the New Democratic Party were in office that would not be built? First of all, we had to make a change in the marketing of hogs policy where the producers

could sell to whom they wanted to, they did not have to go through a single desk. [interjection] Yes, and the NDP voted against it.

Today, we have got a group of producers who want to produce from durum wheat durum flour in southwestern Manitoba. Do you know what? They cannot do it. The Canadian Wheat Board disallows them to do it because you have to pay the same price as you would pay for the wheat if it got to Toronto. How does that create jobs on the Prairies? It ships jobs down the rail lines.

Madam Speaker, the New Democratic Party continue to argue and argue that we should not have open marketing, dual marketing for Wheat Board grains. I say save the Wheat Board. Pay a nickel a bushel for the operating costs. Pay another nickel a bushel to promote wheat internationally, but let the farmers do what they want with their grain. Go to a flour mill, go to the world market, but let them do their thing because if they do not, the Canadian Wheat Board will destroy itself.

Canola is outside of the Wheat Board. We now produce more wealth in canola and more canola crushing plants than we ever have of wheat. Canola has saved the farm and it is not marketed by a marketing agency.

Madam Speaker, I ask the members opposite to take off their blinders. I tell the members opposite to come to the real world because that is where we are at.

I have a vision as well for this province. I believe strongly that the water systems, the excessive water that drains through this province in the spring of the year has to be captured, has to be put behind structures, has to be saved for the agronomic purposes of this country, for the domestic purposes and for the industrial purposes, and, yes, for more hydro purposes. Because I also believe it is time that we looked at starting up the Conawapa dam. The world will need to have the electrical energy.

Madam Speaker, I could talk about being the Canadian, the North American centre for bus manufacturing, for the garment industry, for the food industry, for the furniture industry, for the

call centre industry, for the high-tech industry. We have it all right here. We have capital development taking place, giving people the tools to invest, to create jobs so those jobs can pay for the education and the health care needs of those people of our province. I can tell you without any question that our manufacturing sector will continue to grow and expand and explode and provide opportunities. We are adding value to almost everything except those things that come under government control, again, like the Canadian Wheat Board and that product.

Madam Speaker, it is time that we truly started thinking globally all across the map. Dams for agriculture and domestic purposes, for storage of water, yes, for use in electricity. We are entering the new millennium. We are entering the new millennium which is a very important time. It is a very important time for our young people. I say to the young people of our province, by the way, who have never had the opportunity to experience what a New Democratic Party can do to your province, it has not been that long ago that we have seen the devastation that took place in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, we are currently seeing the devastation that is taking place in British Columbia. In fact, for the member for Brandon East (Mr. L. Evans), I am extremely proud to report to him today, and this has been his big problem, that we now have virtually reversed the out-migration of the people from Manitoba. Ten years ago we saw 10,000 people moving. Today it has virtually gone to 2,000, if not less. Yes, we had a blip in 1996, which his friends in Statistics Canada cannot explain, but we have actually reversed it.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): People from British Columbia are coming back.

Mr. Downey: Madam Speaker, my colleague the Minister of Agriculture, whom I have had the privilege of sitting with for many years and he will be here when I come back, I am sure, I want to say that we believe strongly that it is time to go and encourage those young people who have left to come back because there are jobs here.

My last while in the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, the biggest challenge that I had and the current minister will have the same, is the finding of people to fill the jobs that we have. Have we ever heard the New Democratic Party stand up and say, we have done a good job on creating jobs? Have they ever given credit for anything? Do they honestly believe that what they are trying to push on the people of Manitoba actually will sell? Well, I hope they continue. I hope they continue to push hard because the harder they push, the more— [interjection] Well, I will not go there, where the Liberals are going to go.

Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks by putting on the record, again, a thank you to my wife, Linda, and son, Ryan, who have hung with me and who have been part of the team, to my constituents who have been very good to me and to our family who have been there, to my parents and to my wife's parents and all our families. It has been an exciting time. It has been sometimes a little trying but not very often, but particularly to my colleagues who are continuing in politics and in doing what is extremely honourable. I say that from the bottom of my heart to people who have dedicated their lives and will continue to dedicate their lives.

You are here because the people of Manitoba need you. You are here because the people of Canada need you. Take this province into the next millennium, because the people of Manitoba, I believe, want to vote for you. I will do everything I can to help make that happen. I will do whatever I can in the future to make sure that this province and particularly the young people have the opportunities that I have had without fear or favour of anyone putting them down, because of either a philosophical or some instrument that does not allow them to match or to meet their full potential. It is a great province. It is a great country. I have had an extremely important privilege to serve, and I thank you and all my colleagues.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): It is with rapt attention I listen to the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) describing a Manitoba that I did not recognize. Nonetheless, Madam Speaker, I am aware he gave a very impassioned

speech, and I do give him credit for his long years of service. I guess I wanted to simply say the phrase that kept running in my mind is, a good man fallen among ultra-conservatives.

I am pleased, Madam Speaker, to have the opportunity to put a few words on record in response to the government's Speech from the Throne. I welcome back all honourable members, and I am especially saddened by the fact that one of our honourable members is not here. One of our honourable members has passed on, Mr. Neil Gaudry. This leaves a void in this Chamber. Mr. Gaudry sat to my immediate left over the last few years. I got to know him quite well on a very informal level, I am sure, but on a daily basis. We shared many jokes and comments as the speeches got boring at times, and I got to know Neil on a human level. We did not always agree, and he got terribly mad at me when I said something rash about the Liberal leader once. I regret having said that because sometimes I do say things I am sometimes sorry for. I wish Mrs. Gaudry, Leona, well. I extend my sympathy and condolences of that of my family to her and her family. We know in Mr. Gaudry we have lost a strong Francophone voice and a strong representative for St. Boniface.

As well, I am pleased to see a new Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Peter Liba, read the Speech from the Throne. I wish him well. As well, I wish to welcome the new Sergeant-at-Arms, and I also welcome the new pages. I notice today we have a new one. I am glad that they are here, and I hope it is a learning experience for them. I do not particularly care if the group is gender-balanced or not. Perhaps I should care, but they seem to be a very good group.

* (1540)

Finally, my best wishes go to those in this Chamber who are not seeking re-election, including the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) who I know is a strongly committed person to his ideals and his ideology, as we are committed to our beliefs as well. Sometimes I get little hot-headed when I hear him say those kinds of things about us, but I try to say let us keep the tempers down. This also includes the

member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Vodrey) who apparently is not going to run again, and the member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay), and the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger).

The member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay) especially, the former Minister of Highways and Transportation, I am really going to miss because I did come to, I guess the word is, enjoy—I suppose it is kind of a sadistic enjoyment—Estimates, but I certainly did look forward to dealing in Estimates with the former Minister of Highways. He will no longer be there, and I guess that familiarity will be gone. I am going to miss it and I am going to miss him. I wish him well in his new career. He has done an outstanding job for the people of Manitoba. I know he is a man whom I deeply respect.

Also, Madam Speaker, I was struck the other day by the farewell speech from the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger). I thought it was a particularly strong speech from the heart, rising above basically the ideologies of this Chamber, and I think I learned an awful lot of things from that particular speech. He put things in an historical context. I was fascinated by that context. I had never realized over the last two decades how much things have changed in this Chamber. I mean I did not know that at one point somebody tried to table a dead pigeon. I did not know that at one point in this Chamber people used to call in the pages to bring in ashtrays after the session and smoke. I did not know that at the end of the session they would roll up their Hansards, tape them shut and throw them at each other, nor did I know that in 1977 the wage for an MLA was \$8,200, so things have changed. I found the speech from the member for Steinbach most forthright.

I thought to myself, why is it that you have to retire before you really speak from the heart? Could we not do this a little earlier? In fact, I could not help but notice that when the member for Steinbach spoke from the heart, honestly and fairly, treating us all as honourable members, that it was in sharp contrast to what I felt was the content of the throne speech. I am sad to say that but that is how I felt.

In the 17 pages of that document which took the Lieutenant Governor approximately half an

hour to read, I only found one reference to northern Manitoba. Those are the people whom I represent in one particular riding and the people whom I feel responsible for or responsible to, and I was disappointed by that. I will read that one reference. On page 12, paragraph 3: My government also remains committed to working with Brandon and Manitoba's rural and northern communities to find ways to make our rural economy flourish.

There is nothing wrong with that as a statement, but that is the only time northern communities are even mentioned. They were mentioned sort of in passing, and they were mentioned in conjunction with Brandon as if Brandon were an afterthought, as if rural communities were an after-afterthought and northern communities were an after-after-afterthought. I think that kind of bothers us because in the North we have become used to the benign neglect of the Tory party. I am not sure if that is due to voting behaviour or something else, but we have become used to it. So it does not surprise us that we have been shortchanged or given short shrift in this particular throne speech.

As the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) pointed out about the throne speech as well, it seemed to be based on Tory polling results. So I guess we could refer to it as the Angus Reid throne speech. Now they do indeed mention Winnipeg and they mention the Capital Region in quite a few number of pages, but they do not mention specifically northern Manitoba. Madam Speaker, we know, as I said before, the member for Transcona has pointed out that the Angus Reid poll that the Tories obviously commissioned was used to craft this throne speech. I guess their spin doctors then came up with a document called a throne speech, which is supposed to create no annoyance to anybody because I think we pointed out—well, at least four years ago roughly—that we knew what the agenda would be: squeeze the people of Manitoba, get the slush fund out there, use it just before the election. This is indeed unfolding exactly as it is.

As well, Madam Speaker, reading the throne speech, I notice a lot of rhetorical devices. I will just quote one of them that was repeated over

and over again: "My government knows it must, and it will," et cetera. That was used over and over again. That, of course, conveniently puts things into the future: "and it will,"—it has not happened yet—conveniently after the election. So it is highly likely that this Angus Reid poll does reflect what the government knows, that northern Manitobans do not have to be given much attention to because they are angry with this government. They are cynical about this government. They are not going to vote in large numbers for this government. [interjection]

The honourable member says we are not going to be so sure of that. Well, we will have to see in the election, Madam Speaker. I am only guessing. All I know is that northern Manitoba got short shrift in this document, and we are tired of being treated as second-class citizens.

Every Manitoban, I believe, knows that the Golden Boy points north, and we know the reason why it points north, because we know that the economic potential of this province can best be realized, or can largely be realized, in the future in northern Manitoba. This is not to denigrate the capital area of southern Manitoba, but we do know that the North is underdeveloped. That is where economic development should be focused. For sure, that is where not only mining but tourism should be focused, and that is not happening. Traditionally, that is where the fish and the fur came from. It headed south. That is where the minerals are coming from, and they are heading south. That is where the hydro power is coming from, and it is heading south. That is where the VLT revenues also come from, and they are heading south, and the taxes and so on.

It is the North that needs to be developed. That is where the tourism should focus, especially ecotourism, and it should be done in conjunction with aboriginal people because the fact is that these are the poorest of the poor. The fact is that there is high unemployment on reserves. The fact is that there are some serious health problems on reserves, and these people need a break. In order to unlock the wealth in northern Manitoba, we need to work together in conjunction with aboriginal people much more

than we are doing right now. In fact, right now we are not even including their unemployed people in our statistics. It is a disgrace.

It is true, Madam Speaker, that in the North some of the wealth has been unlocked, but northerners, by and large, do not share in that wealth. The minerals, as I have said before, go south; the wood goes south; the pulp, the paper, the taxes, the VLT revenues. And what do northerners get back?

We feel that we are providing the banquet and we are getting back a few crumbs. I know honourable members disagree with that, but talk to the majority of northerners, that is their point of view, and I share that.

Madam Speaker, this throne speech lacks vision, and when there is no vision, the people perish. We know that. Entire regions of northern Manitoba are at risk right now, particularly that Leaf Rapids-Lynn Lake region. I am talking about basic things, basic infrastructure, roads, railroads, airports, towns that are in the process of dying, and I am not sure whether this government cares or is going to do anything about it. It has not done very much so far.

I would also point out, Madam Speaker, that it was the Schreyer government and to some degree the Pawley government that built the northern roads and the northern airports and did focus on the North, the direction the Golden Boy points. I am serious when I talk about an entire region being at risk. Our mining sector is facing great difficulties, and as yet we have not taken any real steps to remedy that situation, unlike Saskatchewan which is taking some drastic measures to try and revive the mining sector. We take a look at Leaf Rapids and Lynn Lake, and what do we see? We see a railroad that was going to be abandoned by CN a few years ago because the federal Liberals on July 1, 1996, decided by the Transportation Act that CN could walk away from such a line. So Lynn Lake was being hamstrung in that sector. The feds were dumping the airport on the small town, a town that has lost three-quarters of its population over the last 20 years. The province will not fix 391. So what are we supposed to do? The roads are not fixed; the railroad was for sale; the airport is

being downloaded. I mean, that is not supporting northern communities.

I do not care, Madam Speaker, if this ideological or not, the simple fact is we were ignoring that region. One thing leads to another; there is a domino effect. So the infrastructure in the North needs to be upgraded. It is not being upgraded right now.

Madam Speaker, it took us a long time and it took a coalition of northerners to make sure that the railroad was not sold, that the Sherridon line is still functioning, but that was a tough battle. But Lynn Lake is not out of the woods by any means, and I will give you an example of something that happened not too terribly long ago. I was in Lynn Lake last spring with Lorne Nystrom, a federal M.P., and also Bev Desjarlais, the federal M.P. for the Churchill area of which Flin Flon is part. We talked to the people about the fact that they did not have proper banking because the one bank in town had moved out after being there for 50 years. The people were angry. They were saying how can we sustain any kind of economic development when we do not even have a bank to go to. We could not even get that particular bank to put in an automated teller machine. Eventually they did, but it took quite a battle.

* (1550)

Can you imagine a community that has no bank? What do the tourists do, because the nearest other town is a hundred kilometres away over some very, very rough roads. What do the businesses do, the citizens who have mortgages? In fact, in the case of Lynn Lake, we have NASA and Japanese scientists come there every summer for high-altitude experiments with balloons. Where do they cash their cheques? Where do they exchange money from American dollars to Canadian, and so on? As well, Lynn Lake is a centre for Pukatawagan, Brochet, Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake and so on. So moving a bank out of that place creates hardship for the entire region and is still creating hardships for the entire region.

Now, we suggested, Madam Speaker, that as a minimum we could have the Mining Reserve Fund headquartered in Lynn Lake because we

needed X number of dollars on deposit in order to allow banking to exist in that particular community, and that was turned down by this government. I do not know why. It would have been a no-cost solution. It would have saved banking for Lynn Lake and the region. The region is at risk; Lynn Lake is at risk. The Black Sturgeon Band, which is probably one of the newest First Nations in the country or about to be, is at the moment situated in Lynn Lake, but they want to develop their reserve near Hughes Lake. Hopefully, the federal government will make that possible in the near future.

Madam Speaker, Leaf Rapids is part of that same region that is at risk. By the year 2003, the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting's Ruttan mine is going to close, and when that happens the future of the town is in serious jeopardy.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Now, that is in sharp contrast to a number of years ago when Leaf Rapids was the model town of the North and perhaps of northern regions everywhere. In fact, a few years ago when we were celebrating the 25th anniversary of Leaf Rapids, I happened to be there with Ed Schreyer, who talked about 25 years earlier when he and Lily had walked the sand dunes around Leaf Rapids and were going to talk about, in this place there will be eventually an ultramodern town. So it saddens me a great deal to see that that particular community is at risk, that the provincial government, in what I think was a very sneaky way, even tried to sell the Town Centre, which includes the school and the hospital and so on.

There is nothing in the throne speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that addresses the serious concerns of that region, particularly Leaf Rapids and Lynn Lake. I should mention, when we were at the 25th anniversary celebration, at the same time paid tribute to the three men who lost their lives—two of them were from South Indian Lake—in fighting forest fires in the region. Again, I hate to say: it is an extremely dry spring in the region and we should be prepared for forest fires and we should be prepared before the official season, which usually starts in May.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leaf Rapids Chamber of Commerce has suggested in the past that one of the smart things we could do is to have a mine watch for communities such as Leaf Rapids, so five years in advance we would give special incentives for mining companies to do exploration, special incentives for people to come and invest there, diversification processes so that the people of Leaf Rapids do not have to face a total shutdown in the year 2003.

Saskatchewan has such strategies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a northern Saskatchewan strategy. We do not have such a strategy in Manitoba, and I think it is high time we did. Lynn Lake and Leaf Rapids are great towns. They are hospitable towns. I have always enjoyed being there. It is a beautiful region. It has tremendous potential for growth, but we have to put up with horrible roads and for a while with a railroad that maybe would not even exist and, of course, with sporadic air service. That does not help that beautiful place very much.

The province has to start focusing on those regions because they are seriously at risk. I know the simplistic answer is: these are mining towns, the ore has run out, goodbye. Well, there is a lot you can do before the ore runs out, and we should be doing some of those things.

As I said before, this is a region of which we all should be proud, not only because of its hospitable people but of its beautiful scenery. Certainly all Northern MLAs, all four of us, and I am positive that the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) would agree with me, are proud to represent those people, and they are from all parts of Canada.

In fact, in Leaf Rapids, it is rather amusing, but I think the majority of people are from Newfoundland. I certainly enjoy representing that area. I enjoy going there and participating in the funspiels and participating in the labour socials on Labour Day and so on. The people are extremely friendly, and I am very happy to be in that region whenever I get the chance to be there.

It will be a shame if we allow that region to sort of wither on the vine. I do not understand for the life of me why we are not focusing on

finding more ore in that region, why, out of 30 geologists that the province hired, we do not have one working in that particular region, why we are not putting more money into 391, why we are not upgrading the airports a little bit more than we have been.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the throne speech does not have very much for the city of Flin Flon, which is the largest city in my riding. It is a city with not only a rich history but also a very rich cultural life. It has a beautiful community choir that teamed up with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra under Bramwell Tovey not too long ago. They put on many musicals. They are extremely popular. In fact they are going to put on a musical extravaganza called Bomber Town this April 22nd through 24th, and I look forward with my wife to be attending that performance.

The key people that pushed that, the key sparkplugs, the creative geniuses behind this are Mark and Crystal Kolt. Most people, I suppose, remember Flin Flon only as a hockey factory, and certainly the Flin Flon Bombers are well known. Names like Bobby Clarke and Reid Simpson are probably familiar to the members here.

There was major uncertainty in Flin Flon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a while ago until the Project 2012 Plus was allowed to work, I guess. The town went through a lot of stress, because there were genuinely differing points of view on how things should proceed in terms of developing the potential of that region.

There have been in the past in Flin Flon major cutbacks to education and certainly to the hospital and to all northern hospitals. The nurses are overworked, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The decentralization idea of the Tories has not worked. They decentralized a lot of people out of Flin Flon, away from Flin Flon, and that certainly does not help us.

As well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I go door to door, people have questions about the regional health authorities. Everybody supports grassroots, community-based medicine. There is not a problem about that, but they are concerned that they are stacked with Tories, that they may

become or are already being used as a buffering zone between the minister's cuts and the minister saying I do not have to take responsibility, the RHAs are responsible for that. So it becomes a buffer. People would like a little bit more transparency, especially in terms of pay and how much the regional health authority share people are getting paid, the clerks and so on, and that information has not been forthcoming.

Flin Flon was promised a personal care home before the last election. It never materialized. They did, however, close the Flin Flon/Creighton Crisis Centre.

As well, the province is extremely slow in working with Flin Flon on water and sewage and also for Channing, upgrading the water and sewage. That needs to be done.

Senior housing is a great need in Flin Flon because although it is not a big city, like many cities people are moving out of the centre, moving into the suburbs or moving around the lakes, and the seniors are dispersed far out. They really need a senior housing complex downtown Flin Flon.

Basically, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the twin concerns of Flin Flon and, in fact, for large sections of the North are an aging population and young people who have to go south and cannot find jobs in the North. They have to be educated in the south.

The aging population, the older people, have to go to the south to be diagnosed for treatment and so on, and this is a real burden on older people. It is a 12-hour bus ride. They despise the \$50 user fee. The Northern Patient Transportation system charges them the first \$50. Sometimes they have to stay more than one night, but they only get paid for one night in the hotel room and so on. There are a lot of concerns older people have about health care and the fact that they have to move south. We have often said would it not be simpler if we could bring Mohammed to the mountain; that is, bring specialists up North. That is not happening very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So our young people, as well, are trained in the south, cannot find jobs in the North.

Training them here at universities and colleges costs a lot of money. A bus ticket from here to Flin Flon is at \$150 for those kids. Air tickets, a regular rate, is about \$800. So those are some of the problems we face in northern Manitoba, specifically in Flin Flon.

There are other communities, smaller communities in my riding for which the throne speech had little good news.

An Honourable Member: It had no news.

* (1600)

Mr. Jennissen: Or no news, as the honourable colleague mentioned. Cranberry Portage, for example, which is my home town—and I am very proud to be from that town—has fallen on hard times. It is a small village with some sawmills, some tourist lodges, the main employer Tolko and the mining industry.

The absolute main employer right in the town is Frontier Collegiate Institute, which has a long and interesting history. It is a residential school, one of the few residential schools still left. It is a school that has trained and educated many aboriginal leaders over the years, in fact, including the honourable member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin). I am proud to have been associated with that institution from 1972 to 1994, for a total of 23 years.

But there is nothing in the throne speech that can lift my town out of the gloom and the spiral of going slowly, things getting worse, nothing that I can see that would make my community bounce back, and it is not for lack of trying, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It feels, and many northerners feel this way, it feels as if the south has totally forgotten us, that our future is very cloudy. In fact, the future of Frontier Collegiate Institute, the main employer, the school, may be cloudy because so many new high schools are built now in other northern communities, and that will, I think, eventually, or could eventually spell the end of that residential school, although I hope that is not the case.

Sherridon-Cold Lake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, nothing in the throne speech for that region. The unemployment rate is very high in Sherridon-

Cold Lake. The road remains a serious problem, needs major upgrading, but we are not holding our breath. It has not happened in the past. The tourist potential is huge in that area. Fishing is great. There are a few lodges, but most people are unemployed. It is a Metis community, and I happen to know virtually everyone in that community and I think I have taught pretty well half the people in that community. So I often feel good when I go to Sherridon-Cold Lake.

The Mining Reserve Fund was used to a limited degree to help fix their water system, but I think it has created some problems for them because it did not improve the water quality very much. In fact, I think it did hurt one of the creeks or one of the small rivers. People in Sherridon-Cold Lake tell me there is little future for their young people, little hope, and so this throne speech does nothing to change that, I suppose, gloomy picture.

There is nothing in this throne speech either for the Mathias Colomb First Nation, Pukatawagan. That particular First Nation has energetic leadership under Chief Shirley Castel. I know she is working hard. She has a young band council. I know they are working hard. They include people like Ralph Caribou and people like Hanson Dumas [phonetic], and I know they are working very hard to try and change things for the better in their community.

They have a new nursing station, but still very often they have to fly out sick people. It is not uncommon, at least in the past it was not uncommon to have 35 medivacs in one month. If you take a look at the cost of the medivac between \$7,000 and \$10,000, then why are we not building an access road or a link to our highway system, because that could easily be done from the Tolko logging road? We are talking about a distance of 30 kilometres. It would save us millions and millions and millions of medivac dollars, but somehow or other, despite our requests, this government has not taken that request seriously. But Hanson Dumas [phonetic] and Wally Sinclair before him are still pushing. These are the people responsible for roads, and on their behalf I ask you once again, I ask this government once again, to take seriously the need to build a short chunk of road which will allow people access not only for medicine

and for hospital care, but they would be able to get cheaper food. They can do their own shopping and so on. We are not talking about a huge chunk of construction, and it would make life so much simpler. We would save money in the long run if we did that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am proud to announce that a new school is being built at Pukatawagan. It is a \$20-million structure. I am somewhat concerned about the fact that there are some structural defects with the cement underneath the flooring. The chief is concerned about it and so am I, and I am merely putting this on record in case something should go wrong. I do not want the First Nation blamed for it. I want the federal government to be responsible for this. I hope this is being remedied. I am given to understand that it is, but I would like to have it on record.

Tomorrow the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Newman) and I will be going to South Indian Lake as South Indian Lake is being incorporated, and I look forward to being in that community as well. I have taught many students from South Indian Lake, and it is a community that has gone through trying times. It was very much a self-sufficient community a number of years ago before the hydro development. In fact, the elders in that community tell me, and I have no reason to doubt their words, that before the hydro development there were only two cases of welfare or social assistance. That is certainly not the case today.

The people there then engaged in their traditional life styles of hunting and fishing. It is a great fishing community. In fact, it was interesting when I heard the Education minister and also the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) using a slogan connected with fishing. They said that if you gave somebody a fish, it feeds them only a short while, but if you teach them how to fish it feeds them for a long while. I certainly agree with this. This as a development education slogan or strategy is well known. Well, I want you to know, those people were catching fish a long time ago and were being very successful at it. It was only the hydro development that made life very difficult for them, and in fact last year's flood caused enormous damage, both to the fishing and to the nets, a lot of erosion, a lot of problems. Also

that particular community, South Indian Lake, was promised a road as part of the flood agreement. We are still waiting for that road. It deserves an all-weather road around the lake and, hopefully, a bridge, if not a small ferry. That was promised a long time ago, and that has not materialized

There are some northern communities I would like to touch on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are the communities of Brochet, Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake. Those are very isolated communities; housing is the big issue. In the case of Brochet, they also seek compensation from I believe it is Saskatchewan, as well as this province, for the flooding of Reindeer Lake. It was not a major problem, but it did create some damage, and this is years and years ago. One of the concerns in that community is the food mail program. It costs a lot of money to send food up by plane. The federal government has changed the rules and regulations apparently, and it costs much more now to send food.

Lac Brochet—I happened to listen to Chief Dan Tuzi [phonetic] the other day at the AMC meeting held behind the Fort Garry Hotel, in the building there, and in fact incidentally listened to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) of the province apologize to aboriginal people. Chief Dan Tuzi [phonetic] was pointing out the fact that the province talks about Nunavut a lot. I know the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) mentioned Nunavut and mentioned a trade delegation to Nunavut, and that all sounds very good, but Chief Dan Tuzi [phonetic] also pointed out before we get too carried away, let us remember there are some outstanding land claims. There are some really serious concerns that not only Lac Brochet faces but also Tadoule Lake faces: housing concerns, education concerns, jobs, land claims and so on. We cannot forget merely because Nunavut became reality on April 1 that the Dene people still do claim a chunk of land north of 60. That has not gone away; that is still a reality. I think in fact the Samuel's case is still before the courts.

Winter roads are always a problem for Lac Brochet, as well as for Tadoule Lake and other places. In Tadoule Lake, I do not want to reiterate what I have spoken on before, that is

the forced relocation of the Dene people from their home to Churchill, the sad legacy that that left, but the federal government has never compensated the Dene nor even apologized for this forced relocation. We are still waiting of course for the north of 60 settlement on land. I recommend to all members of the House that they read Ila Bussidor's and Ustin Reinart's *Night Spirits*, so they can share the journey of aboriginal people, the painful journey of this particular group of aboriginal people, the people of the East, the Sayisi Dene.

Again, for the Sayisi Dene, as in other northern communities, winter roads become a problem. Some years the winter roads do not get built and the food supplies do not get in, the building supplies—at least not to the quantity that they should get in—and prices rise. It is not the fault of the people living there. Why is it that in other parts of the province the federal and the provincial governments can work together and finance winter roads, but they will not do it in that particular region? It is a concern that we have, that I have, and the people there have.

I should mention the last of my communities is Granville Lake, which is also the smallest of my communities and the most isolated, I suppose. I was very happy that the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Newman) took the effort and made the energy available to actually visit Granville Lake. I am proud that he did that because I know very few MLAs have actually been to Granville Lake. [interjection] The Deputy Speaker says he has been there. There are some wonderful people there, and I am very happy to see that water and sewage is finally being put into Granville Lake. However, they do have a list of other problems, one of them being CMHC housing, high rents and very, very poor maintenance. Winter road access is always a problem for Granville Lake as well as very poor telephone service. Those are some of the concerns of people of Granville Lake, and I see no remedy, at least in the general words of the throne speech, for that particular community.

* (1610)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this throne speech does virtually nothing for northern Manitoba, as I have said before. The speech mentions the

setting up of a lower tax commission, but it does not mention a fairer tax commission. I think it is based on the loaded questions that the Tory pollsters ask, questions to the effect of: would you prefer lower taxes as compared to something else? Of course, if you ask people would you prefer lower taxes, I think virtually everybody says yes. If you add with that, would you prefer lower taxes if it is going to impinge on your kid's education, or if it is going to affect your health care, well, then it is a different story, so we have to be very careful how these loaded questions are used or translated by spin doctors put into throne speeches.

The throne speech talks about reducing the civil service by 10 percent via attrition. As far as I know, we already have the smallest civil service in the country for a population our size, and cutting it by 10 percent will inevitably affect service. I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we need more than symbolism in the throne speech. I know that the throne speech talks about creating the Order of Manitoba with the present Premier as chancellor. It sounds like president for life in some banana republic, but anyway maybe that is not fair. But we need more than those kinds of symbolisms.

Our senior citizens are concerned about high Pharmacare deductibles, about medical services not available in the north. They hate the \$50 user fee, as I pointed out before.

Many of our injured workers are unhappy with how the Workers Compensation Board treats them, how long it takes to process claims. When they are compensated, the compensation is much smaller than it ought to be. So we talk about balancing budgets all right, but we are balancing on the back of injured workers, and that is not fair.

Ordinary families are upset about the increasing educational costs being shifted onto property taxes. An elected Speaker may rank high here, and we certainly support it, and we have some candidates in mind, I am sure, but it is not really big on the agenda of the people of northern Manitoba. Ordinary families in the north are much more concerned about why they are paying more for telephone service. The selling of MTS certainly led to that. They did

not want MTS sold. In fact they are now wondering if the Tories have developed a new economic strategy, sell low, buy high; sell MTS way too low and then buy Centra very, very high.

Now, the throne speech does mention a National Highways Program. I am very interested in that. It is something we support and I know the members opposite support as well, so there is at least one nugget there that we found in the throne speech, but I note that Mr. Collenette, the Honourable David Collenette, the Minister of Transport in Ottawa, has hinted, at least, strongly that he is willing to make available \$3.5 billion for some national highway strategy, but it is matching grants, and I think that translates roughly to about \$150 million for Manitoba, if such a strategy should be put into effect. We would have to match that by \$150 million. That is a lot of money, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is sadly needed because our road infrastructure is certainly being pounded to pieces and it cannot go much longer without a massive infusion of capital.

Talking about transportation links, which are vital not only to the province but certainly up north, perhaps more so than in the south, neither the federal government nor the provincial government has done nearly enough to safeguard those vital transportation links. The member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) pointed out the other day that we have lost 6,000 railroad jobs in this province over the last number of years. We know that the feds are downloading ports. They have already got rid of railroads, but they are downloading ports and airports as well.

There have been some major shifts in how Canadians view Canada. It has become a user-pay society, and it has some major drawbacks for ordinary Canadians and ordinary Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that the throne speech talks and promises a lot. It is optimistic. It talks about partnerships. But in the real world where I come from there is a high degree of cynicism and apathy and anger at all government, particularly at this government, and I would like to point out that in some of my northern communities only about 9, 10, 11

percent of the people bother to vote. That is because they feel disenfranchised. It reminds me, disturbingly reminds me of how things are going on south of the border here, because so few Americans turn out to vote as well. When people do that, they are basically saying: we are helpless, we cannot change anything. I think that is a message very often that this government reinforces.

Mr. Ben Sveinson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The cynicism, the apathy and the anger are fuelled by governments that break their promises. They promise you the Jets, they are not here. They promise they will not sell MTS, they do sell them. They say they are going to decentralize, they do not. They decentralize away. They promise us \$90 million in Repap roads, they never produced it. They said we would have a personal care home for Flin Flon, it never materialized. They said they will take education seriously, but I notice they cut Access and BUNTEP funding, Mr. Acting Speaker.

The honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) talks glowingly about the sanctity of this place and how our words can make a better Manitoba, a strong Manitoba. In fact, listening to him I said, well, you know, if this is Eden, we cannot change anything. If the place is perfect, why bother having government. The sad fact is it is not perfect, certainly not perfect in northern Manitoba, and this government is not doing nearly enough for northern Manitoba. It is a disgrace that we are being treated as second-class citizens. It is a disgrace that aboriginal people are treated even worse than that, and I think all Manitobans deserve better, and we had hoped better from this throne speech. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Sturgeon Creek): Mr. Acting Speaker, it is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to address the members of the House and the people of Sturgeon Creek and all Manitobans in response to this government's Speech from the Throne. It is also an honour to welcome everybody back to the Legislature.

I would also like to welcome His Honour Mr. Peter Liba to his new role as Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, representing Her Majesty

the Queen, and Her Honour Mrs. Shirley Liba. It is quite fortunate to hold this position as we will be hosting our world-class event this summer, the Pan Am Games. I know that he will serve as an exemplary host to our visitors.

I have had the pleasure of knowing His Honour for quite a number of years. As a matter of fact, my wife and I—mostly my wife—used to operate a private nursery and kindergarten in our home, and the Liba children when they were young—they are now in their 30s, and some of them have their own children at school age—attended this school and always remind us that they got their start in education at the McAlpine nursery and kindergarten.

It is a great honour to be able to have the Libas in this role, and I know that they will do an exemplary job for the people of Manitoba and the Queen, whom they will be representing.

It is also a great honour to welcome our new pages back to the Legislature. I know that it is going to be a real learning experience for them and one that they will remember for probably all their lives. It is very challenging at times, and some sessions have a little more activity going than others. I know that the last session we had a year ago was certainly one that will be remembered by all of us here in this Chamber. I expect that there will be nothing like that this year. I think that we have probably come to understand and realize that that was not the way we want to see and demonstrate in this House what went on over the MTS debate.

* (1620)

I would also like to welcome back our old colleagues and the new ones.

I would like to pay tribute to a long-time colleague who is no longer with us, and it is with great sadness that we recognize the absence of Mr. Neil Gaudry which leaves a great void in our House today, Mr. Acting Speaker. I always felt that Mr. Gaudry, who represented St. Boniface, represented the Francophone community with great distinction and with honour. He was well respected in the constituency, and not only in his own constituency but throughout the Francophone

community. He represented the people of St. Boniface very well and was liked by I think pretty much every colleague in the Legislature. He had a tremendous sense of humour, and I would on behalf of my family offer my condolences to Leona and her family for these trying times that she will be experiencing I am sure over the next little while. I would hope that she feels comfortable to be able to turn to us as friends of Neil's in a time of need. We will remember Mr. Gaudry with the tremendous contributions that he has made, and certainly his mark in history will be here in this House forever.

I am proud to have the privilege to sit in this Manitoba Legislature and represent the constituency of Sturgeon Creek. I know that all members of this side of the House are dedicated to consulting with our constituents to learn first-hand what issues are of the greatest importance to Manitobans. This may be my last address as I represent a good portion of the people of Sturgeon Creek. As you may well know, Sturgeon Creek, with the boundary changes, will no longer exist if the boundaries—if we see the passing of this legislation that was presented to us by Elections Manitoba, the independent review, which is a constitutional requirement, and I believe that in all respects I think that they have done a fair and commendable job. It is not an easy task, as you can well imagine, Mr. Acting Speaker, for this to happen. Certainly there are issues that I think we could find in many respects with—that they could be certainly better in many respects. Things that I had concerns with were maintaining the communities, the catchment areas of the communities that people have been accustomed to for many, many years, and just the traditional boundaries that each community takes on within their own respective areas.

As it turns out, I have represented the Sturgeon Creek constituency for the past nine years, or almost a full nine years, and that is a constituency that started in 1969. It was the first time—and that was through the same process that we are experiencing now, through redistribution. It was at the time, in 1969, where we had a very high population within that area that we required the constituencies of Kirkfield Park, Assiniboia and Sturgeon Creek and then St. James. St.

James has been a constituency that has been in place for a long time. Sturgeon Creek has only been in existence since 1969. The first member to be elected at that particular time was my good friend J. Frank Johnston, who still lives in the constituency and often frequents this Legislature. I can tell you, Mr. Acting Speaker, Mr. J. Frank Johnston is still a Conservative today. I am proud to be able to call him as my friend and a person who is always available to give direction and suggestions in my representation to the people of Sturgeon Creek.

If I am successful in getting the nomination for the new constituency of St. James, which will take in about 53 percent of the old constituency and 37 percent of the old St. James constituency and about 5 percent, give or take, of the Wellington constituency as it is today, I will be sorry to lose the western part of Sturgeon Creek which takes in the Courts of St. James. There are 754 apartments in the Courts of St. James alone, and that population within that complex is probably larger than many small towns in rural Manitoba. Those people were always very, very supportive and attended functions and participated in activities, and were often free to come up and speak to me and share their ideas and share their concerns. It was a very, very friendly and rewarding representation on my part as far as serving those people.

I think that what has made my task in representation to these people so easy is because of the fact that I feel that I have always been in the service business all my life, and serving people is something that I have always enjoyed. The thing that has made this so rewarding is the fact of all the good things that this government has done, I have seen this government do. I have received the compliments by people in the area of St. James, Sturgeon Creek for what this government has done. That is what has made this so rewarding and easy for my part in representing the people there. Certainly our Premier, the Honourable Gary Filmon, and all my colleagues on this side of the House have been very, very co-operative in anything that I have ever had to do and any task that had to be dealt with in the constituency. They were always able to give me their co-operation and did everything possible that they could to ensure that the best things were done.

We as a government, Mr. Acting Speaker, have shown our dedication in our representation, in our work in the area of health care, and representing the constituency of Sturgeon Creek. Many of you may recall that I have mentioned this before, that the health care issues are certainly strong and felt in the community of Sturgeon Creek because it is one of the highest populations of seniors within the entire province. Certainly traditionally, and most people as they grow older, they tend to require more demand from the health care services and what is available to them. So consequently there has been some concerns with regard to that. These challenges I believe, as far as the constituency of Sturgeon Creek, have been met by this government.

You know, certainly the opposition tend to find fault in everything that is being done, but needless to say that pretty much goes without saying. I doubt very much, with this opposition over the last nine years, I have seen this, I cannot see—they have not done anything different in the past nine years. I cannot see them doing anything different in the next nine or ten years. I think they have pretty much laid their course and charted their path with regard to that. Certainly when we talk about the comments in reference to some members, the duke of darkness and the prince of doom and gloom, or whatever they are referenced, I think in many cases that is quite accurate in terms of what is being said. Certainly over the last nine years I would have to agree with that.

* (1630)

Mr. Acting Speaker, I think that when we talk about health care, as important as it is to all jurisdictions, whether it is in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, B.C. or Ontario, this is probably one of the biggest challenges that any government, not only in Manitoba or Canada or the world for that matter—this is the biggest challenge that we as governments face. When you consider that here we have in this province of 1.2 million population and a budget of \$2 billion almost, and we are a relatively small province, can you imagine if you multiplied that by the number of countries in the world where the populations are certainly significantly higher than they are in Manitoba, what that health care

budget worldwide would demand? So when you think about that—and this is one of the things that I have always put some tribute to is the fact that, with all this money that is there, you are going to get people who are attracted to the industry because of the fact that people are attracted to money.

When we talk about health care, Mr. Acting Speaker, we as a society, whether it is right or wrong, look to the medical profession as the supreme authorities when it comes to dealing with our health. The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), who is the critic for health care, stands and criticizes every minister who he has been critic to since I have been here, and the critic before him and so on and so forth. They always criticize that. Now, if they were in government, you tell me that they are going to provide the expertise other than the medical profession. They are not going to do that. They are going to get the same advice. We do not consider ourselves professional and knowledgeable enough to be able to make decisions on behalf of all Manitobans when it comes to doing things in the health care industry. We rely on people who are giving the advice. So where do you go? You go to the highest authority like in any other thing. It is the same thing in education.

The only thing that we do as a government is that we fund the institutions like the Health Sciences Centre or St. Boniface, and that is done by formulas. It has been done for years. We have increased those budgets every year. As a matter of fact, in the last 10 years, I think it is \$700 million we have increased the health care budget. Now, by increasing that, it certainly has exceeded the rate of inflation. We put more money into it, but has the health situation changed? Have the waiting lists changed in hospitals? No, they have not. Now where is the money going? We as a government—certainly the people who are in the administrative positions have been appointed to these administrative positions through boards of the various hospitals, and now we have replaced boards with the regional health authorities and the Winnipeg Health Authority and eventually that is going to change.

When you look at the upper level of administration, whether it be in education—

can talk about education that way or we can talk about health care, which I am talking about now—when you look at that, the amount of money that is spent at that level, that upper level—and they are the people who administer the funds that we give to them by way of formula. So these are the people who are making the decisions.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

I happen to know that one particular CEO of a major hospital in Winnipeg makes something in excess of \$320,000, and when you look at from the aspect of \$320,000 for the CEO, what does his assistant get? He gets something less, but probably in relation and probably significantly more than the Premier of the province would get, or an MLA, as far as we are concerned. What happens is that when they organize this level of bureaucracy which the boards have done over the years—and the Winnipeg Health Authority and the regional health authorities have yet to deal with a lot of that and that is going to take some time. It is probably going to take 10, 15 years to change that whole aspect of it. These are the things that we have to face as a government. Certainly they will be dealt with, but they will not be dealt with overnight.

Now you tell me, Madam Speaker, that the opposition are all of a sudden going to come in, as they reference the fact that they are going to be the next government. They are going to find some higher authority that is going to give them advice. Well, that is impossible. I have some difficulty and difference with the authority as it is right now because I think that we have, as I referenced, we have put \$700 million more into our health care budget but we have not fixed anything. Yes, people are living longer but they are not living any healthier, and that is the concern that I have. Unfortunately, the authority that we have, the supreme authority as far as health care is concerned, are taught to treat disease. You have heard me say this before. We should be spending more money on people by creating health within society. Until such time as society comes to the understanding that we have to take responsibility ourselves in order to deal with this challenge and when we do have disease it is merely a matter of an imbalance

within our bodies. Unfortunately, the supreme authority when it comes to health care do not understand that because they are taught to treat disease with drugs and all those things. I am not going to go into that in great detail because that could carry on for several hours in itself.

Madam Speaker, I think that from the aspect of what I am saying here with regard to these health care challenges, I think one of the biggest challenges that we as a government faced over the last number of years is the cut in transfer payments from the federal government. Certainly I do not agree that throwing more money into this is something that we should be doing, but I certainly feel that this is something that we have been doing. You do not change gears or change situations midstream, which is what the federal government basically are asking the provinces to do by cutting the transfer payments. We have had to make those funds up on our own, and we have done very well. I commend the Finance ministers and the ministers of Health that have had the vision to serve that.

I had the privilege of being able to go door to door in the constituency that I represent with the health care petitions dealing with that very issue in terms of trying to get the federal government to put more money into the health care budget. You know, constitutionally and back in the early years when the federal government and the provincial governments were equal partners to health care, that means if they pay 50 cents on the dollar, we pay 50 cents on the dollar. Now in 1998, when I was going around door to door with the health care petitions, it was amazing the number of people that did not realize that the federal government's share was only 15 cents on the dollar. You know there were a lot of people that had an opportunity and responded to these petitions in the area of Sturgeon Creek, especially around the Courts of St. James where there are a lot of elderly people at the seniors homes and things like that, and these people responded very strongly in saying, listen, this is unfair and we have to be able to deal with this. Within two weeks we had something like 19,000 people who signed these petitions. Through the efforts that I had, and certainly I had people who were working with me on this, I had one of the highest

numbers of the people who responded to these health care petitions within the whole area.

*(1640)

Another area that I wanted to talk about is, and this has been the lead question by the opposition in the last two Question Periods. This is with regard to the Deer Lodge Centre with the rethermalized foods that the people in Deer Lodge have received. This is a seniors home and certainly I have been front and centre with regard to that. I went and talked to the residents. Some were in favour, some were not. Some people liked it, some did not. Certainly they were fortunate in having a facility at Deer Lodge Centre that had good food there and good facilities, but this was one of the things that the board at the Deer Lodge Centre decided, that they are going to go with the USSC and figured that this was what they had to do and ultimately made that decision to go ahead and do that.

One of the things that a lot of people do not know, and people have not brought this out in this Chamber, was the fact that the CEO at the hospital said to me that they did make an administrative mistake when the fact is that they did not computerize the setup before they went on, which he said could take up to a month or two months before they would be able to have everything computerized. So there were lots of mix-ups with regard to patients getting the wrong meals and things like that, pureed food to somebody who had teeth and those who did not have teeth were getting corn on the cob and things like that, just little mistakes.

But one of the interesting aspects was that on the 9th of December, I had the opportunity to take the Sick and Visiting people of the Deer Lodge Centre. These are the representatives that go around to visit the veterans in the Deer Lodge Centre and actually even beyond in other facilities, but the veterans centre, maybe at home and things like that. These were people that I had a meeting with and I suggested to them that what we should do is to go and have a tour of the USSC facility. They took me up on that, and certainly on the 9th of December I, along with nine members from the Legion Sick and Visiting and other members and three members of the executive of the Manitoba Society of Seniors

also came along, after a tour of the facility, we were given a choice of a meal, which was the same meal that was being made up as we were touring, and we had an opportunity to see how they were made up and went through the whole aspect of it.

This was a report on food sampling, and I am just going to reference just some of the comments that they made. This was in the Manitoba Society of Seniors newspaper. It was the January issue, for anybody who wants to look at this: On December 7 three members of the board of directors of the Manitoba Society of Seniors—and they mention their names—were part of this tour and it was interesting to learn that—this is what they were saying—it was interesting to learn that 53 percent of the food comes from Manitoba and that the toast is prepared at Riverview Health Centre. Potatoes come from Carberry when available, and bread and buns come from a Steinbach bakery.

This was all through the heat of the debate and the local media and the papers were on this issue along with the NDP criticizing, but very few of them actually went out and really got to the bottom of this, which is what we were able to do by taking this tour.

I will just finish off here, Madam Speaker, by saying that they summed up and they said that the food served our tour group was a choice between a veal patty meal with potatoes, green beans, soup and Bundt cake, milk and juice, or pasta manicotti. The group seemed to agree that the meals served were eye-appealing, nutritional and tasty. This tour was also attended by nine members of Deer Lodge Veterans Association is what they referenced.

One of the things that I found in going to Deer Lodge Centre and having an opportunity to talk to the various people there is that I think our responsibility, or USSC's responsibility, is to ensure that they provide nutritional meals to these people. In many respects a lot of them have complaints with the fact that the food may be undercooked and undercooked because of the fact that the vegetables may be a little—they are certainly not overcooked, which, I think, is a lot healthier than the way some of these people like them cooked to mush so that there is no

nutritional value in them at all. I cannot argue with what USSC is attempting to do.

Another aspect that we have, as far as I found out with the Deer Lodge people, was the fact that a lot of these people do not understand in some respects the importance of the food when it comes to them. It comes through USSC at 10:30 in the morning for their noon meal. What happens is it is the responsibility of the facility to plug that unit in to heat the food to whatever is needed, which takes about 20 minutes to half an hour to rethermalize the food and to be ready for serving.

They talked about frozen foods. Well, the reason that they may have been frozen was because of the fact that somebody, who maybe had another agenda, forgot to plug in the unit. Naturally, if that was the case, then they were going to have frozen foods. Some of the people who were there from the legion and on this tour on the 7th of December, after they had eaten the meal—and as I mentioned to you, there were two choices of the meal that were offered to us, which is what they had in Deer Lodge or any other facility that was under the USSC program. These visiting members from the legion said, well, if this is what these people are being served—and these are people, the veterans themselves—they certainly had nothing to complain about. Those were their exact words, Madam Speaker.

I would challenge the opposition members, if they really want to speak the truth, that they should go on a tour maybe of USSC and see exactly, instead of going out and talking to the union bosses at these facilities and getting the wrong impression. I think there is something seriously wrong with that.

The issues with regard to these challenges that we will meet as we make changes in this aspect as far as food services are certainly going to be there, regardless of how hard we try. I can assure you that from what I see, as far as the colleagues on this side of the House, we are caring individuals. Certainly we are going to do the best possible job that we can to ensure that they get the best service that they possibly can and to get the best food that is available to them.

One of the things, and I think that certainly this is a lot better, and this is one of the aspects—the reference was made by some of the veterans—was the fact that Deer Lodge, I think it was on a 14-day cycle, and under this new system here they are on a 21-day cycle, which is certainly a considerable improvement for the people and the recipients of this food. Certainly, I am not going to say that all these things are perfect because nothing, from my point of view, we are going to find is perfect. There are always going to be some people that are going to complain.

It is interesting to note, Madam Speaker, that at the time I did this tour I think there was a survey that was done, and it was something like 82 percent of the people who were on this service throughout the facilities within the city of Winnipeg were in approval of the service. The food that they were getting, which was a lot different than what they were getting before, I think it was something like 57 percent or something like that, so there has definitely been an improvement in that aspect of it.

Madam Speaker, as I have indicated, the health care challenges we face go right across this country, and it is something we are as a government committed to ensure the best health care product is provided. Certainly if we look at the money aspect, if we can use that as a gauge, when we put almost 35 percent of our budget into every health care aspect as far as the people of Manitoba are concerned, I think that is certainly a measure that is worth mentioning.

*(1650)

With the advances in technology and the aging populations, our government will have new challenges and opportunities to meet, and I have no doubt that we are going to meet them. Certainly the nine years that I have been here, it has been a fairly good test of time. I think that over time, as we have increased the number of home care beds in this province by 600 beds, we are working to reduce these waiting lists. It will certainly make a considerable difference in achieving that goal in trying to find some balance within the health care challenges that we are going to meet as a government, and to promote a province as healthy living in a society

that subscribes to that rather than overextending and overburdening the medical profession to the extent that they are and the hospital institutions and so on and so forth.

Madam Speaker, this government has also done a considerable amount in respecting our senior citizens with regard to observing International Year of Older Persons in 1999, and this is an incredible celebration. We are recognizing the efforts of those people that helped build this province to what it is today. Those that were born ahead of us worked very hard to develop the land and to start companies, to build the economic engines that drive this province and to develop opportunities for our children and for ourselves.

We can learn from our seniors, Madam Speaker, our families and our communities and benefit from what they have to offer, and certainly I often will take the time to spend time talking to the senior residents in the constituency that I represent. Certainly they are very free with advice and it is always very good advice.

To further show our respect to our senior citizens though, the government recently introduced the elder abuse hotline and the public information campaign, both of which will inform the public about the unacceptable issue that we face in society today. I am sure that this is something that has always gone on. This is not something that is new. We just probably did not hear about a lot of these things, but we will not stand for any physical or psychological or financial abuse of our seniors. I commend the minister and our government for the position that they are taking on this issue.

The young people of Manitoba are also considered very important—Madam Speaker, you have demonstrated to me that I have two minutes left to speak. I just wondered whether there was an error in your calculation or your clock is running a little fast. Maybe you oiled it up a little bit more than you should have before I started to speak. Well, I did not know that I was speaking that slow, but certainly it has been a great privilege for me to be able to speak on the throne speech, and certainly there are issues here that I would like to have addressed.

One of the things that I really enjoyed, and I pay tribute to the St. Andrews Society and the Scottish societies that have certainly supported me over the years in bringing in Tartan Day on April 6 to the province of Manitoba. Unfortunately, we did not have an opportunity to enjoy that celebration this year, and there were a lot of plans that went into it.

I would just like to remind the members opposite, as they supported what was going on, on the 6th of April and seemed to condone that type of action, they also removed a lot of people who came here or wanted to come here to celebrate Tartan Day, which is something that they were deprived of. I do apologize to these organizations on behalf of everybody here in the Legislature, Madam Speaker, for that happening, but that will go on next year.

Madam Speaker, I know that my time has expired, and I will have another opportunity to put some more comments on the record. Thank you.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): As the other departing members, I anticipate this being my last opportunity to speak to a throne speech. I am going to ask for great latitude, because I have not prepared a speech. I will be speaking from the heart. It will be melancholy. It will be reflective of what the past six years have meant to me and the people around me. I hope there will be a thread here, talking about good representation, partisanship, and the honour involved and the respect for all members of this Legislature.

First of all, I would like to mention the new Lieutenant Governor, Peter Liba. I wish him best of luck in his new position. Yvon Dumont has done a wonderful job as Lieutenant Governor and I am sure Peter Liba will carry on many of the things that Yvon Dumont has started and will start his own projects. I look forward to him serving as the Queen's representative in Manitoba.

I was disappointed, and I wanted to take the high ground, but I have to say I was disappointed when he was here for the opening of the throne speech, there were a number of members whom I noticed chose not to sing God

Save the Queen, and that was very disappointing. As long as we are in this system, parliamentary system that is based on a monarchy, I think we should respect that position, respect the Queen's representatives, so I think we should be very cognizant of the fact that we are under a monarchy.

Next, I would like to welcome the pages. I hope you have an interesting time. I have run into a number of former pages here, some of whom are using my name as a reference on their job applications, and I can tell you that, speaking on their behalf, many of them enjoyed what they did. They learned a great deal. There were times here where some of the pages, when things got a little bit loud and boisterous, it was a challenging position. We appreciate the service you provide for us, and I hope it is a benefit to you.

Next of all, I would like to welcome the new Sergeant-at-Arms, Mac Allen. I knew the present Sergeant-at-Arms back when he was still on the police force. When I started on the police force, he was a patrol sergeant in the traffic division, and he used to drive around the city of Winnipeg in his traffic motorcycle wearing a big heavy leather coat.

I have told this story to some people, and I still remember when I was going through recruit class, we used to go to class for half a day and then they would put us out on the street for half a day. I remember coming in and I had given out a parking ticket, and patrol sergeant Mac Allen, in front of a number of other officers, indicated we are going to have Show and Tell now. We are going to show Kowalski how to tell time, because I had improperly written the wrong time on the parking ticket.

* (1700)

The benefit to me was after that experience, an embarrassment, I do not think I ever wrote the wrong time on any document in the 25 years I have been on the Winnipeg Police Service. So I thank him for the help he gave me there. I wish him good luck in this position and I hope he enjoys it. I am sure he will show great honour and dignity to the position.

Next of all, in the six years that I have been here there are many people in this building who have helped me, and sometimes I do not think some of the members appreciate it. I have never had the experience of being in a large caucus. At the most, I have been a caucus of seven with limited resources, so I think maybe out of sympathy sometimes some of the staff have maybe bended the rules, have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help me in my position as the representative for The Maples. I want to thank the Clerk and the Clerk's office, the Journals Clerk, the Hansard staff, the maintenance staff, the security staff who many times when I am here late at night have been both there for conversation, company, and assistance.

Also, I would like to thank my colleagues here. I found that even though we are from different parties, many times I have gotten advice and help from members of the other parties, as well as members from my own party.

Now to get here required a great deal of effort, and two of the people who I would like to thank—and I am keeping in mind that this is being recorded in Hansard and maybe 25 years from now, maybe 50 years from now my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren will be reading this, so it is as much for their edification as for anyone else. I want them to know that my parents, their future grandparents, how much they helped me to get here. I am not talking just about the help they gave me in the election but the work ethic that they taught me, the morals, the principles that they instilled upon me, most important that I was as good as any other person that enabled me to stand up here and represent the people from The Maples.

An Honourable Member: And Mom makes great perogies.

Mr. Kowalski: Kevin, who is a great fan of my mom's perogies and was my campaign manager, ate many of them in my first campaign. The member for Inkster gives credit to my mom's perogy-making abilities.

Then, of course, my wife, some of you may know that my wife and I have been living separate and apart for three years now, but I still

consider her my best friend and confidante. I have to say that during this process I could have not gotten to this point without her help and assistance. I am not talking just as an MLA, but in my career when I was doing community service, she was there to help and support me, to advise me. Quite often when I would be intemperate, as I have a tendency to be sometimes, she was the calming influence. Quite often I heard the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger) say that he thought his wife got more votes for him than he did, and I have to say the same thing about my wife Ellen.

We share our interests in the community of The Maples. We raised our daughter there. It is the only village that she has known, the village of The Maples. She shares an interest in youth. We do not always agree on everything. She comes from Souris, Manitoba, which was Walter Dinsdale country, so sometimes maybe she is a little bit more right-wing than I am, but, as I said, many times she stayed at home and put her own career aspirations aside, her own political aspirations aside, her own community service aspirations so I could do what I have done, and I hope some day that I will be able to help her in the same way that she has helped me.

My daughter Tanya, well, since she was 12 years old, I have been in politics, and she is now 18 and in university. I still remember when I first got elected, she was teased at school a little bit that now you are rich because your daddy is an MLA—yes, public perception as to us politicians. In fact, I had taken a cut in pay between being a school trustee and a police officer to take this position. But there were benefits. She said there were a number of times she was at parties and that, and she was offered drugs and that, and she said she knew that other kids were looking at her to see what would the MLA's daughter do. Maybe that helped her make the right decision sometimes, and I would like to think that she had the benefit of that. The other day when I talked about that she might be a little bit prouder to say that I am a police officer than a politician, that was not to say that she has ever been ashamed of me. I have always had her support and hope I can support her in the same way. So, for Tanya, thank you for all the support you have given.

Next, my colleague from Inkster. If there is any person that I would choose to be my cruiser car partner, it would be the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux). He is not the largest member in stature, but as one of my first partners on the police force, Graham La Grandeur [phonetic], used to say, it is not the size of the dog in a fight, it is the size of the fight in the dog. Kevin has heart. I hope some day that he gets all the respect, which is a great deal of respect, from the party which he belongs to, that we belong to. I think he is still the most undervalued asset to the Liberal Party of Manitoba, and I hope some day the Liberal Party acknowledges that, where we would be without his participation, and I hope some day he will receive that.

Many members who have spoken before me have talked about my colleague, the late Neil Gaudry. I will not pretend that Neil Gaudry and I did not have our difficult times. Neil and I had our disputes but we also had our good times, and maybe that could serve as a lesson to all of us, that when we use intemperate words, take intemperate actions, the ramifications. Neil passed away and I hope that some of the difficulties between us, we were able to patch them up to some extent, not to the fullest extent. I hope some day that things that he did to me will be truly forgiven and things that I did to him will be truly forgiven. I wish his wife Leona and his family best wishes. If anything is a lesson to all of us in this Legislature—that we are human beings, and some day all of us will no longer be MLAs, and we will see each other in the street, we will see each other in business, we will see each other in the nursing home, you know, I hope that we can look each other straight in the eye and be proud of what we did and not feel any shame as to what we said to each other.

My next thank you is to the voters of The Maples, who have twice given me the mandate to represent them. Maybe in arrogance I could say I feel that the support is still there for me, but I had to make this decision to go back to the police force for personal reasons. My leave of absence runs out, and politics is not a secure future, police work is. I came into politics for a while to do some good things. I hope I have had a benefit to my community and to Manitoba. Now it is time to go back to the security of the

police force. I could tell you that a number of people are very disappointed and have actually almost been angry with me for making this decision, but I am not irreplaceable. I am sure there are other good people that will carry on some of the work I have started and start things that will benefit the community.

* (1710)

During the time that I have been an MLA, the part of the job that I have enjoyed the most is being a community leader. The part of the job that I enjoyed most was the projects that were done in The Maples. In each one of those projects, I was, if nothing else, the lightning rod for the people who were able to do the things that come together. One of the strongest was Doug Simpson. It would not matter what community project, whether it was to open up a police store front office, whether it was to start The Maples Youth Services Canada Project, no matter what project, Doug was there as a volunteer, an active community member, along with Ken Jensen and Mohindar Singh. They are all people that like in most communities there are a few people who do most of the volunteer work. I would like to thank them for giving me the opportunity to show leadership in those projects.

You know, talking about Neil Gaudry, it reminds me that we, as 57 people in here, are like a family. The member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) had a baby during this time. We have had a death. We have had marriages. We have had separations. You know, we are like any large family. I know from the Kowalski family, where there are 12 brothers and sisters, and the Kolczycki family on my mother's side, that they are an example. I have been to many family events where there were large discussions. I would not actually call them fist fights, but by the end of the day, they were close, and if anybody tried to say anything negative about anybody in the family, the rest of the family would come to their defence. I hope that as a family in the profession of politicians, as individuals, we are all respected in our communities and people respect us, but as a profession, sometimes the respect for politicians has gone down. I said that in my Matter of Privilege earlier in this session. I still believe it.

If you listed a number of professions and asked them to rank which ones they respected most, unfortunately politicians are lower than they should be, because I have a lot of respect for the people who, when it comes to say who will be the leaders of our community, that are willing to put their names forward, who are willing to stand here and have everything they say put on record for history, to be criticized, to put forward an idea, to put so much of their lives into this. I have a lot of respect for the individuals who represent their communities here, but as politicians we have to do something to raise the public's perception of the honour and dignity for public service.

When I was elected in '93, I was elected along with Norma McCormick, Harold Schellenberg, the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh), and the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson). After this election, if the voters return them, the member for St. Johns and the member for Rupertsland will be the only two remaining ones, so I wish them best luck and to continue serving the people they represent. I have to say that the member for Rupertsland always makes me feel guilty because I remember when I first stood here on my first throne speech I talked about the conduct of members and about the heckling and I said that I would never do that. Well, I think if anyone has been listening, I think I have not kept that commitment, but the member for Rupertsland, to the most part, I do not think I have ever heard him heckle, and I see every time he stands up to ask a question, this Chamber is silent because he gets the respect because he gives the respect, and I think he gives them great latitude because he shows respect for this Chamber so he gets it back. Maybe that is an example for all of us. If we want to be listened to and heard and our ideas be acknowledged, we should show respect for this institution.

As the MLA for The Maples, some of the things that I am proud that I have been involved in, the No. 1 thing was working with the youth of The Maples. It did not matter if it was with The Maples Youth Justice Committee or the Youth Services Canada project that we ran for two years, I have enjoyed working with the young people of The Maples. The work ethic that many of them who come from immigrant

parents that they bring to our community, the passion that they do whatever they do, I have really enjoyed. They made me feel a lot younger, so I have enjoyed that.

The member for Inkster reminds me about the antiracism projects that The Maples Collegiate has done, from the antiracism walk that they have done every year from The Maples Collegiate to the Legislature to the conference that they have had, but I can tell you, that was one of the goals I had that I was not able to accomplish. I was looking to help racial harmony in The Maples. Although we have people from all over the world living in The Maples, from the Philippines, from India, from Poland, from the Slavic countries, you would think that because we all live as neighbours that we would all learn to live well with each other, but in fact we still have racial solitudes. I think knowing from past history of the Ukrainian immigration, the Polish immigration in the country, I think the only thing that is going to solve that is just time, as different generations integrate into the community and the community learns more about them, but that is something that I wish I could have been more successful with.

I could tell you that, as an MLA, I have never been that partisan as an MLA here. I can tell you, during my darker days here, when I was having trouble with the leader, Ginny Hasselfield, I seriously considered becoming a member of the opposition or a member of the government party, and when I recently did a survey of the people in The Maples, I asked the question: do you agree or disagree that politicians are too partisan and spend too much time representing their political parties? Madam Speaker, 82 percent of the people said: yes, politicians are too partisan. Then I asked: which of the following should be the first consideration of an elected MLA when deciding how to vote in the Legislature? Policy of political party? That only received 5 percent of the responses. Personal opinion and beliefs of the MLA? Only 12 percent. Wishes of the majority of constituents? Madam Speaker, 84 percent. So I do not make apologies for not being that partisan. I remember a quote, and I do not remember who said it. It was one of the former presidents of the United States who said:

He who serves his community serves his party best. I think we should all remember that. When we are representing our constituents, the best interests of our constituents, we are in fact helping our political parties, and that should be our first consideration.

Sometimes the world seems topsy-turvy as far as political parties. Does it really matter? If I look at what is going on in Saskatchewan right now, I heard today—the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and I were coming back from City Hall, and we were listening to an interview—they had the nurses' union in Regina. She was talking how the provincial government in the last eight years has failed to listen to the social activist groups, has failed to listen to the unions because they were only focused on deficit cutting. I thought, what province am I in? Was this the Manitoba Nurses' Union? No, this was the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. And then I look in Manitoba, and here we have a Conservative government nationalizing a gas company. I said, okay, that is usually what a socialist government does. Okay.

When I look across the country at the different provincial governments, does it really matter which party is in power? Regardless of what the philosophical base, in governing, governments are doing what has to be done. We are affected by global forces. You know, really, regardless of our philosophical basis, whether it is Roy Romanow in Saskatchewan, whether it is Jean Chretien in Ottawa or whether it is—

* (1720)

An Honourable Member: Brian Mulroney

Mr. Kowalski: Brian Mulroney, all of them are doing similar things. So, again, I think I will never apologize for not being that partisan. I will look, always do what I think is in the best interests of my constituents and what is in the best interests of Manitoba. I would encourage all people to do that because sometimes I feel that as elected politicians, sometimes we are nothing more than cannon fodder for the movers and shakers in our political parties. They get the patronage; they get the contracts. We are the ones that are put up front, while others get the rewards and that. Often our political parties are

telling us what to say, which directions to go. Then we look at someone else who has raised a lot of funds, and they get the glory positions, the Senate seats, the government contracts, whether it be provincial or federal. So remember—and I should not be lecturing to the honourable members here—but remember your first loyalty should be to your constituents and the people who elect you because you are serving your party well when you look after your constituents.

I can say that there are parts of this job of being an MLA that I have really enjoyed. I have not enjoyed being a critic. That is the part of the job I hated most because I have a tendency to try to get people to like me. So why would I want to point to someone whom I like and say you are doing everything wrong? I guess this is probably politically incorrect, but the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) in many ways, I think—many of the things he is doing, he is doing very well in the justice system. I have been active in the justice system as a volunteer, as a police officer, and I have seen what the Minister of Justice has done with the youth justice committees. The support he has given to them has allowed them to expand, to receive notoriety, to get more trained opportunities, and I think that they feel that they have the support of the Minister of Justice.

I look at things that are happening as far as family group conferencing, things that are happening as far as restorative justice programs. Where I really felt it was having an impact, and possibly an impact on some of the things that I have been saying here on the greater society, was when I went to the forum at Valley Gardens in the Valley Gardens area that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) put on about the young offenders legislation.

I was expecting to hear in these public forums a lot of victims to talk about bringing back the lash, coming on with more stern—there are a lot more young people out for longer periods of time. In fact, that is not what came from the public. That is not what came at all. I attended the one at Burton Cummings, and there was a familiar theme. People talked about looking at the root causes of crime. They saw the futility of locking young people up in training grounds for crime. They talked about

other ways of looking at crime other than that, if you punish them hard enough, they will not commit crimes. So I was heartened by that.

I would caution the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) right now. Some time ago I read the autobiography of Bob Rae. He talked about the difference between a party of protest or a party in power. He talked about how easy it is in opposition to agree with every special interest group, to agree with every professional union, to agree with every lobby group; but then, once you are in power, all of a sudden you have to start looking, you have limits. You cannot be everybody's best friend. Bob Rae saw what happened. He saw what happened when financial conditions were difficult. He had to say no to some of the unions and how the unions turned on him. So I would caution the Leader of the Opposition to be careful what he is saying to the unions. Be careful what he is saying to the special interest groups, because if he is forming government he could end up being in the same position that Bob Rae was in Ontario.

Today I had an opportunity to look at the latest brochure, the franking piece that my colleague from Inkster is going to put out, and it is about health care in Manitoba. It is headed by saying that all parties in government are having difficulty with health care. He has some quotes. From PC Ontario, he has quoted from the Toronto Star: Health cuts killed my wife, grieving husband wants an inquest. Then in NDP Saskatchewan, Tumour victim claims MRI tests denied, from the Regina Leader Post. From the Liberals in Newfoundland, Nurses walk the picket line for improved working conditions.

So, once again, we have to look at partisanship and how it affects us all. The other pleasure I have had as an MLA, of course, is you attend a number of cultural events, and I have gone from the Buddhist temple to—I have gone to eat foods that I had no idea what was in them. It has been a wonderful experience actually. One group that I have come to be very close to is the Sikh community in The Maples. In fact, I and the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and the Minister of Immigration, Herb Dhaliwal, were given the robe of honour at the Sikh temple. We have done some work in there. The member for

Inkster and I have recently contributed to a literacy program that will be run at the Sikh temple for ESL classes, and I have had the opportunity to help the Sikh seniors find a meeting place in The Maples.

I am leaving this place optimistic. I do not want to be doom and gloom about the future. Especially young people, I think they need to hear optimistic comments. As I said, one of the things that made me optimistic was attending the Valley Gardens justice forum and hearing the enlightened debate from the public. The other thing is I drive around The Maples right now and the number of help wanted signs I see. I have never seen so many help wanted signs in my life. Some people could comment that they are low-paying service jobs, but they are jobs, and for many people they can make a difference. For every low-paying service job, if there is enough of them, it is going to create higher paying jobs. When I was first elected in '93, many of the people who walked into my constituency office, many of the problems that they had, when I really examined what was at the root of them it was unemployment. Many of the social ills are cured with a job. Right now, in fact, you see help wanted signs all over. In fact, what is happening is some of the people who pay people at minimum wage and do not treat their employees well are finding that they will have to change their policies because there is such a demand for employees that they have to treat their employees well, go above the minimum wage. So job creation has a benefit, not only to the financial economy of my community of The Maples but to the social climate in The Maples.

I also want to speak about the boundaries. I know I started this session with a matter of privilege, and as I said then it was a matter of principle that we should not have an election on old boundaries that are undemocratic. Every day I am still concerned that it could still happen. People are having nomination meetings. There is no guarantee that a government member could not change his or her view and end up voting against the government as in a snap election on old boundaries. So I still encourage the opposition to co-operate fully to pass that boundaries legislation as soon as possible.

I have another note here about special interest groups. It was something that the

member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) pointed out to me, the difference between Ed Schreyer when he was the Premier and Howard Pawley, and how Ed Schreyer did seem to have the ability to say no to special interest groups but Howard Pawley did not. As a result, we were put in some difficult financial positions under his administration.

So I want to wish all the members here good luck in the future. They have a very important task to take this province into the next millennium. It is funny, I thought every speech would start with something about the next millennium. In fact, I am quite pleased that people have not worn out that phrase. We are going into a new century and whoever is elected, re-elected, has an important task. I encourage you to represent your constituents and the province, sometimes put your partisan politics behind to do what is best for the province of Manitoba. Thank you.

* (1730)

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, certainly it is my honour to rise today before the members of this Legislature and respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Before I begin, I certainly would like to pay tribute to the late Neil Gaudry, the member for St. Boniface, who was our colleague and certainly our friend. Mr. Gaudry was certainly an exemplary member of this Legislature and will be remembered for his dedication and tireless work on behalf of the people of St. Boniface and the Francophone community in Manitoba.

In the coming months the people of Manitoba, like those around the world, will be planning celebrations to mark the start of a new millennium. As they look toward the future, Manitobans can also celebrate being citizens of a province that has grown stronger and more prosperous each year. From the moment our government took office we have worked in partnership with Manitobans to make our province the best place to live, to work, to invest and the best place to raise a family. I am proud to say that we have reached many of our goals and have done so always listening to the people

of this province and maintaining a focus on their priorities—a strong economy, quality health care, safe communities and opportunities for our young people.

So as we begin our Fifth Session of the Thirty-sixth Legislature, our government has set out on a road map for building upon our previous successes and ensuring that Manitobans remain strong well into the new millennium. We recognize that our province is at a strategic junction in its development. To meet the challenges of today and continue on a road of growth and prosperity, we must focus on the future and on policies that will move us forward, and to bring this province to the strong economic state that we applaud today, our government made a commitment to eliminate the deficits and tackle the debt load, and we have kept this commitment.

This year, we will introduce our fifth consecutive balanced budget, and, Madam Speaker, we have begun to make payments on our debt. Our government recognized the importance of firm fiscal management, of living within our means. We understand that we must spend our resources efficiently today—

An Honourable Member: Wisely.

Mr. Helwer: —and wisely, in order to secure long-term wealth and to pass on a strong and prosperous province to the next generation. Wise fiscal management has allowed our government to maintain a freeze on all major taxes for the last 11 years, and this is the longest running tax freeze in Canada, and Manitobans today enjoy one of the lowest tax regimes in the country.

Through legislation, we have ensured that our future decision to raise major taxes lies in the hands of all Manitobans. Our government recognizes the people of this province as partners in governing, and we believe that they should have a say over how their hard-earned income is spent. We do believe that they should never again be subject to the high taxes and the deficit spending that took place during the NDP regime.

By putting our financial house in order, our government has contributed to an environment

that has supported impressive economic growth in Manitoba. In 1998, Manitoba tied with Alberta for the lowest unemployment rate in the country, 5.7 percent, which is also the lowest unemployment rate that Manitoba has seen in the last 18 years. In the first months of 1999, we continue to post the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, and our youth unemployment rate is also the lowest in the country, at about 10 percent, far below the national average of 15.1 percent.

Another sign of the health of our economy is that all Manitoba's job creation has been found in the private sector, with particularly strong growth in manufacturing. In fact, our province today ranks third in manufacturing job creation in Canada. Our strong performance in job creation goes hand in hand with the fact that Manitoba's private sector has experienced seven consecutive years of steady growth of new capital investments, and this investment has helped our economy continue to diversify over the past year and is fueling a strong export sector. In 1998, our global exports rose by 6.2 percent over the previous year, and for five consecutive years this province has outpaced the national average in export growths. In fact, Manitoba was the only western province to post export growth in 1998.

Within the Gimli constituency, Madam Speaker, economic growth has also been quite evident. For example, building permits have increased this past year in the town of Teulon, also in the Rural Municipality of Rockwood, and in the town of Stonewall. Building permits have actually almost doubled in the R.M. of Rockwood from 1997, and they have seen increases for the last 10 years in the R.M. of Rockwood and the town of Stonewall. Stonewall is still our fastest growing community in Manitoba.

So our government's management of the budget, taxes and debt reduction has allowed us to continue to expand our investment in those areas most important to all Manitobans: health care, children and families, and education.

Madam Speaker, 90 percent of each additional dollar that our government has put into program expenditure increase over the past

11 years has gone towards these priority areas. Health care is the No. 1 spending priority in the budget. Our government has embarked on several important initiatives to ensure Manitobans enjoy a first-class health care system now and in the future.

Recognizing that early detection and treatment are key to reducing the number of deaths from breast cancer, in 1995 our government began the Manitoba Breast Screening Program for women. This year the program took an important step forward with the addition of two mobile mammography units that have been taking the screening program to women in Manitoba's rural communities.

This initiative has already reached over 4,000 women in 24 rural and northern communities, and this entire program is expected to screen 33,000 women in 1999. As outlined in the throne speech, our government is taking steps to prepare a health care system to meet the challenges of an aging population. The reality for the coming years is that there will be a greater need for long-term health care beds in Manitoba, and we must start planning today to ensure that the best possible use is made of available space.

* (1740)

Increasing the capacity of our long-term care centres means a space within our hospitals can be directed to acute care and easing problems of overcrowding. In the course of this year, some 650 new long-term health care beds have been approved for construction. In addition, over \$170 million has been committed to capital projects to renovate existing health care facilities and to build new care centres.

In my constituency of Gimli, the funding is supporting the conversion of the Johnson Memorial Hospital in Gimli to provide more functional space within the facility. Other important projects around the province include the installation of a dialysis unit at the Ashern hospital and the construction of new personal care homes in several rural communities, such as Oakbank and Fisher Branch in the Interlake area.

Within Winnipeg, major projects at Misericordia and the Concordia will create some

240 long-term care beds. The recent advancements in medical technology have revolutionized the delivery of health care and have opened up new possibilities for diagnosis and for treatment. To ensure that Manitobans in all corners of this province have access to the latest medical technology, this year our government provided an additional \$5 million to the regional health authorities, this on top of the annual commitment of some \$22 million for specialized equipment purchases. This is for state-of-the-art equipment to enhance the medical monitoring, diagnosis, surgery, and also for cancer treatment.

With this funding, Manitobans can be assured that they are achieving the most up-to-date care from their health care system. During this session, our government will continue with important health care reforms that will ensure the system best serves Manitobans well into the next millennium. New legislation for nurses, physiotherapists will better reflect their roles in today's health care system and will take the positive step of enhancing public representation on their governing bodies.

Madam Speaker, ensuring a healthy and happy start in life for all of Manitoba's children is another goal our government has worked diligently to meet and to continue to hold as a major priority. This year the BabyFirst program expanded to reach infants and their families in all parts of the province, including those in the Interlake, where the program is being operated by the Interlake Regional Health Authority. BabyFirst provides outreach services to parents of children at risk and teaches them the skills that they need to care for an infant.

Just last week our government announced some funding of \$2.7 million to give Manitoba children an improved access to physiotherapy, occupational speech and language therapy, including another \$125,000 for the Interlake Regional Health Authority. Madam Speaker, these kinds of programs offer children with disabilities more independence and greater opportunities to participate in their schools and in their communities.

The overall health of our province in the future will depend on how we educate and how

we prepare our young people to be leaders in our communities for our industries and for our governments. This is why our government continues to make education a top priority. In fact, our spending on education and training is second only to health, and our government has made it a priority to target resources to those areas that will best prepare our young people to compete and succeed in the workforce of the future.

As we have heard in the throne speech, the information technology software sectors in Manitoba are expanding, as is the use of computers and technology in all areas of the economy. For these reasons, our schools must offer students access to the latest technology and also offer them the opportunity to develop strong computer skills from an early age. Funding increases by our government are bringing about more computers in the classroom, providing additional Internet linkages so our students can learn to master the World Wide Web, and helping students acquire curriculum-based technology.

Students in my constituency will benefit from a \$48,000 grant to the Interlake School Division, which is for wiring and cabling in schools to support more computers and computer networks, and \$40,000 in funding to establish a science and technology resource centre at Stonewall Collegiate.

Madam Speaker, we know that the quality of our children's education also depends on the environment that we can offer them inside their schools. Renovations, upgrading and replacement of aging facilities are important to providing a top-notch education to our children. Through the capital support program, an addition will soon be made available to the Stonewall Collegiate, and other major renovations that will be made are in the works for the Gimli Early/Middle Years School. The Gimli program is under the Aging Buildings Program. Our government is also committed to building a new elementary school at Winnipeg Beach in the coming year. The tenders for that one should be out shortly.

So our government recognizes that the successful education of our young people must

involve a partnership between the province, schools and parents. Madam Speaker, we have worked hard to strengthen the role of parents in school-based decision making through the creation of advisory councils, by providing information to parents through newsletters, parent guides on curriculum, and regular meetings with parent groups. In fact, just this last month, I had the pleasure of attending a meeting along with our Minister of Education, the Honourable Mr. McCrae, with parents to hear their ideas for improvement of the education system. This meeting was held in Stonewall. This feedback will help us to shape future initiatives, so they will best meet the needs of our children.

So as the use of technology in the home and workplace continues to expand, we must continue to shift toward a knowledge-based economy. The idea that education should not end at high school graduation becomes even more important. Providing Manitobans with opportunities for post-secondary education and training will not only help them to find meaningful work but will help Manitoba to attract highly skilled industry, contributing to the overall wealth of our province. As outlined in the throne speech, Madam Speaker, our government is working to expand and enhance opportunities for skills upgrading and to ensure that critical skill shortages are addressed.

Our government also recognized that our young people need positive incentives to encourage them to pursue a post-secondary education, so we have committed another \$25 million over the next five years to the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative. This fund will match contributions by private donors and corporate partners and will benefit up to 10,000 college and university students each year, and this funding will go a long way toward keeping our best and our brightest students right here in Manitoba.

* (1750)

Keeping our top students in Manitoba as they enter the workforce is another important goal for ensuring a strong future for this province. We must be able to offer them challenging and diverse job opportunities, which

means that we must continue to do what we can do as a government to support the continuing expansion and diversification of our economy.

Our government has committed to lower taxes to ensure that Manitoba remains competitive in today's global economy. Without this change, Manitoba will lose new industries to other jurisdictions, and along with that we will lose the most skilled and educated members of our workforce. So, Madam Speaker, an additional way that we can help to ensure that our province continues to attract new industry and investment is to invest in Manitoba's infrastructure.

Our government has made a strong commitment to improving our highways, which is evident in several highway projects over the last year in the Gimli constituency. Some \$2.6 million was invested in widening and resurfacing Highway 9 from Willow Creek north to Gimli. A \$3-million upgrading of a 16-kilometre section of Highway 8 from Clandeboye to Highway 17 was completed, and Highway 67 to Oak Hammock was built at a cost of \$1.1 million. These highway projects, Madam Speaker, are all very important to us and to all Manitobans and like the many others that have been completed around the province not only support the further expansion of industry but also make our roads safer and create more jobs for Manitobans. It is estimated that our investment in highway construction over the next two years will generate some 3,500 jobs in this province.

Another important infrastructure project completed in the past year was the twinning of Brookside Blvd. from Inkster north to the Perimeter Highway. This was a joint project of the province, the City of Winnipeg and the federal government under the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Works Program. This project will facilitate the movement of cargo to and from the Winnipeg International Airport helping our efforts to establish Winnipeg and the surrounding area as an international transportation and distribution hub. So the completion of this project was also welcomed by many of my constituents who use Brookside Blvd. as a main travel route in and out of Winnipeg. The expansion to four lanes has

reduced the congestion on this route and has made it safer for the growing commuter and truck traffic that is using this road.

For the coming year our government has made it a priority to secure the renewal of the National Infrastructure Program. Projects like Brookside Blvd. demonstrate the achievements that can be made with the federal-provincial co-operation, but we have a long way to eliminate our infrastructure deficit. Along the same lines we will also continue to lobby the federal government on a new national highways program and to start supporting the development of Manitoba highways, which are our key component in the further expansion of industry and trade.

Our government has always recognized that a strong economic future for this province must also involve rural Manitobans. My constituents have seen this support in our funding to the Interlake Development Corporation and through many programs such as the Rural Economic Development Initiative and the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund.

To give you just one example, this past year DGH Engineering Ltd. received a grant of \$40,000 through the SDIF for a project to test the effectiveness of a hog or swine waste treatment currently that is used at a feeder barn in the Interlake area. This type of project was successful in Taiwan. The process has the potential to reduce odour and also lower nitrogen content in manure. DGH will study its adaptability and cost effectiveness for use in Canada.

So, with the rapid growth in the hog industry in recent years, this kind of research can help us to continue with economic development while protecting our environment for future generations.

Business entrepreneurs in rural Manitoba received a helping hand from our government this year with the opening of several Canada-Manitoba business service centres around the province, including the Interlake area located at Gimli and at Ashern. These centres provide books, magazines, videos on business free of

charge, and a computer is available onsite to access business websites and information online.

Rural entrepreneurs and businesses face unique challenges in establishing themselves in today's competitive marketplace, but, by making information more accessible, these centres enhance their chances of success.

The agricultural industry is of great importance to the health of the rural economy. This year some farmers did experience some difficulties with prices for grain and hogs, which are dipping very low, but our government continued to stand behind Manitoba's producers to ensure that they could weather this temporary downturn.

In December we introduced this \$25-million loan program, which is administered through the Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corporation. That gives farmers access to the cash that they need to prepare for the upcoming season. In February we joined the federal-provincial Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance program with a commitment of \$62 million in aid over the next two years for our hardest hit farmers.

Despite the hardships that were faced this year by some sectors of the agricultural industry, we also saw continuing diversification and success in Manitoba with the nontraditional crops, and, Madam Speaker, Manitoba is now the second largest potato producer, the largest edible bean producer in Canada. Last year saw some 27 Manitoba farmers began to grow, were the first to grow the commercial hemp in this province. Production of this versatile crop is expected to grow dramatically in the coming years and promises to be an alternative crop. We are glad to see that the hemp processing plant that will process the fibre, and also the seed, will be built in Dauphin this year, and we think that is great to see that, and that will help many farmers to diversify.

Madam Speaker, in order for me to complete my speech prior to six o'clock, I just want to mention that in the upcoming session our government has pledged to work in co-operation with all members of this House to ensure the early and smooth passage of The Electoral Divisions Amendment Act. Changes to the

Gimli constituency boundaries will move the Rural Municipality of Rockwood and the towns of Teulon, Stonewall, Stony Mountain, and Balmoral from the Gimli constituency while adding the rest of the R.M. of St. Andrews and also the R.M. of West St. Paul.

I would just like to express my appreciation to these communities and organizations and businesses and individuals in these areas with whom I have had the opportunity to work in the past nine years. I also look forward to forging new partnerships with the people of West St. Paul and also of St. Andrews who will become

part of the Gimli constituency with the passage of the new boundaries.

Can I just take a moment, Madam Speaker, to recognize the four members who have chosen to retire this year?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer) will have 11 minutes remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 14, 1999

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