



First Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

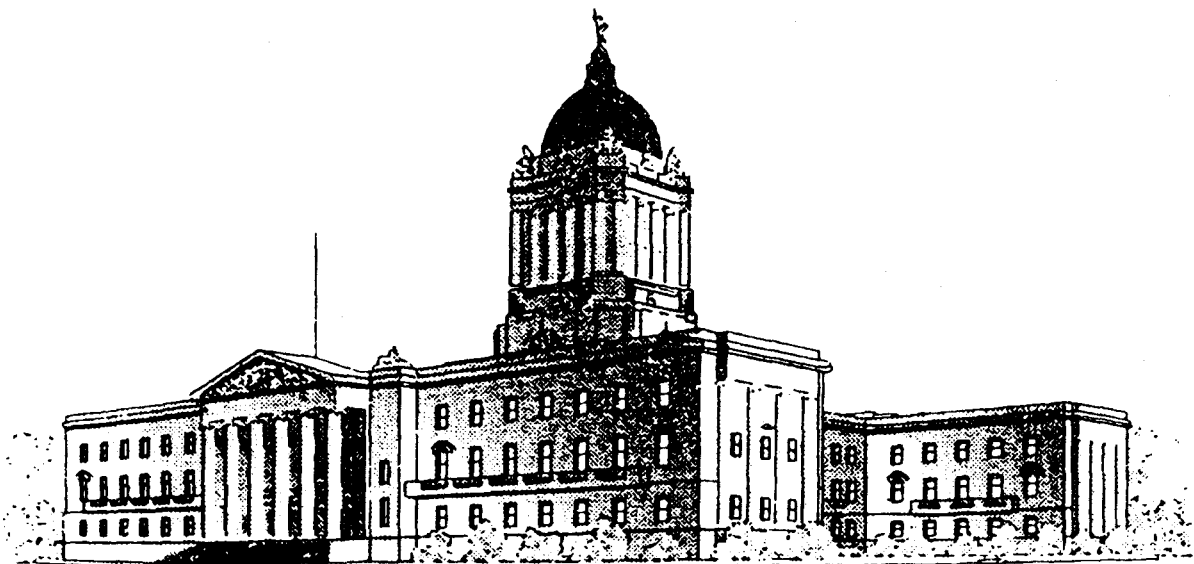
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
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WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, December 7, 1999

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Annual Report of the Government Information Systems Management Organization for the period ending March 31, 1999.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Canada's Airline Industry

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Highways and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to advise the House of our position, our activities as a provincial government related to the restructuring of the Canadian airline industry. Since coming to office, our government has been active in putting forward Manitobans' concerns about the potential impacts of airline restructuring.

We met with the proponents of the former Onex proposal and Air Canada. I wrote to the federal Minister of Transport, David Collenette, in October and met with him personally in November to outline Manitoba's concerns. We met with stakeholder groups, employee representatives and interested parties such as the Winnipeg Airports Authority. Most recently, Manitoba was one of only two provinces that made a written submission to the Standing Committee on Transport on this issue. As of Monday this week, I have also written to the president and chief executive officer of Air Canada outlining our concerns.

Our government believes there has to be three basic principles involved in any discussion over the future structure of the airline industry. These include: preservation and potential expansion of employment opportunities in Manitoba, maintenance and improvement of airline service to, from and within Manitoba, and

promotion of two carriers in competition as the preferred way to regulate the market and protect consumer interests.

Our government is concerned that current developments will not meet the principles that we feel are essential to protect the interests of Manitobans in terms of the structure of the airline industry. What is particularly concerning is the role of the federal government in facilitating the creation of a single dominant carrier. The opportunity and potential for choice that the federal government presumably offered in suspending Canada's Competition Act seemed to have been abruptly ended from the outset of this process, leaving Canadians to reluctantly accept an industry structure that is incompatible with Canada's current legislative and aviation policy environment.

The fact that the Onex proposal was withdrawn does not change the basic issue. Canadians are still faced with a process that is moving Canada toward a dominant carrier situation, a virtual monopoly carrying 80 percent to 90 percent of Canadian air travellers.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Manitoba is concerned about the impact that the airline restructuring process may have on the people of Manitoba. Despite the assurances of relatively limited job losses, the pressures to rationalize service places the 2,200 employees of Air Canada and Canadian Airlines in Manitoba at risk. In addition to existing airline and support industry employees, future employment opportunities are also at risk.

Manitoba has a tremendous potential for expanding jobs in the maintenance, financial and call centre functions. Manitobans can compete with anyone in the world, but we must be able to compete on a fair and equitable basis. Competitive air services are not a luxury for Manitoba commerce and tourism. They are essential. Any reduction in the frequency or points served or increases in fares will compromise our ability to trade.

My concern grew as the debate increasingly focused on whether this form of dominant carrier was better than that form of dominant carrier. Very little attention was given to debating what form of industry structure was best able to serve the needs of all Canadians, including employees, travellers and shippers.

The government of Manitoba does not accept that the Canadian market is too small to support two major carriers, particularly when they are participating in separate global alliances in addition to successful niche carriers such as the charter operators and independent regional carriers.

In terms of air traffic, the ICAO figures show Canada ranks fourth in the world in terms of domestic airline traffic volumes. If Canada is too small a market, then by definition so should virtually every other country in the world be in the same category. Yet we find there are eight countries with smaller domestic traffic volumes than Canada that host at least two major carriers. I list those in the statement, Mr. Speaker, and also in Mexico, with half the volume, there are two joint carriers as well.

We believe that the federal government must immediately shift its policy focus from the air carriers themselves to the consumers of air transportation. Instead, a new policy focus on consumers would lead to carriers being able to respond to what the market needs, to compete to provide the best service at the lowest price. This in turn would lead to improved service levels and enhanced employment opportunities.

* (1335)

I would like to table in this House the submission our government made to the Standing Committee on Transport on the future of the Canadian airline industry, which has already been tabled. As outlined in the presentation, we expect the federal government to adopt an air policy supported by legislative amendments or regulations which is pro-competitive, removes barriers to entry, guards against predatory behaviour and places the interests of consumers first, while also considering the needs of employees and shareholders.

If instead the federal government encourages and/or facilitates the creation of a dominant carrier, then the government of Manitoba will expect the Government of Canada to be accountable and to provide written binding guarantees assuring us that employment will be preserved, that service levels and fares will remain at competitive levels and niche carriers will be protected from abuse of dominant position.

We will be continuing to raise Manitoba's interests on this issue. As minister, I would urge all members of the Legislature to speak out on this issue and urge the federal government to ensure that an airline structure that will meet the needs of Manitoba's consumers and the many Manitoba employees of our airlines, meet those needs by making sure that those are protected under any developments, including the possible restructure of our airline industry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Darren Praznik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, we thank the Minister of Highways for that statement. I would say, however, we note that the submission of the government of Manitoba is dated November 17, 1999. We do wish that he could have provided this to the Legislative Assembly perhaps somewhat earlier, given the situation that is developing almost on a daily basis.

Two points that the minister has made, I think, on this side of the House we concur in fully and was our position when we were in fact in government and one, of course, is the need for competition in the airline industry. Ultimately, as has been proven in many, many other situations, it is competition that keeps the prices down for consumers and ensures good service within the system. So we are glad to see that this government has take the position that competition in the airline industry is of paramount importance in setting the policy for this province for the position that we take in the national discussions.

And secondly, we would concur wholeheartedly in the need for the government of Manitoba to be very watchful in this situation and use their best offices in lobbying Ottawa to ensure that Manitoba is not disadvantaged by

any position that this federal Liberal government takes. There is a long history in this province of political decision making in the airline industry on behalf of Liberal governments in Ottawa that have been to our great disadvantage. Indeed, many of us recall, going back to the early 1960s, the decision by governments to make the decisions in moving overhaul bases of Air Canada operations to Montreal. We remember as well that so much of Canada's airline operations, maintenance jobs, service jobs, as the minister has referenced, call centre jobs—which we are very glad to see the New Democrats now have come to realize the importance of call centre jobs in our economy, something that they were not supportive of when in opposition—but all of those jobs, the need for them to be located across this country in places that can be competitive.

Manitoba, particularly our capital, the city of Winnipeg, has demonstrated time and time again that in the area of airline maintenance, for example, Air Canada's work with Continental, the work that has gone on by Manitobans, working in Manitoba as part of a national airline system in servicing aircraft has meant those jobs and opportunities have come here. Our fear, and obviously that of the government of Manitoba today is that decision makers in Ottawa, within the Liberal government, will not take into account the development of those opportunities within Manitoba.

* (1340)

So we are certainly in concurrence on those two major points, and we would ask that the minister take every opportunity to ensure that all members of this House are kept informed as this debate progresses, because there is lots at stake for the people of our province, and there is certainly a common front here to be pursued. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, may I direct the attention of all honourable members to the gallery where we have from St. Andrews School forty-three Grade 5 students under the direction of Mrs. Sandra Mulholland and Mrs. Judy Maryniuk. This school is located in the

constituency of the honourable member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer).

We also have from West Kildonan Collegiate twenty-seven Grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Loren Reichert. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak).

Also, from Glenella School, we have ten Grades 11 and 12 students under the direction of Mr. Darrel Adams. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings).

On behalf of all members, I welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Health Care System Bed Openings

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak). Can the Minister of Health tell us whether the 82 beds that he promised would be open by December 1—actually, he directed them to be opened by December 1—are open and ready for patient use?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I thank the member for that question because it again allows us to discuss the issues relating to the situation that was left in Manitoba with regard to the previous government having no plan, absolutely no plan, to deal with the issues of hallway medicine.

I am very pleased that, after less than two months in office, we announced on November 22 that we would have available December 1 beds to be opened and that we would have put in place not just beds, Mr. Speaker, on a permanent basis—we would do the best we could for staff because of the legacy left us by the government—but more important, we would put in place a continuum of programs to assist people in the hallways. To that end I can indicate that, as we indicated, this would be in a staged process because, clearly, all the beds could not be up and running December 1. There is a number of beds available—[interjection]

Mr. Chomiak: You know, Mr. Speaker, for a party that did not look at a bed that they could not close, I am surprised at the difficulty—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Beuchesne 417: "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate."

Mr. Speaker, the question for the minister related directly to the 82 beds that he promised would be open on December 1. Are those beds open today or not?

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Same point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health gave an answer that was full and complete. It was the answer that was requested by the opposition. The answer was in order, Mr. Speaker, I suggest.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, may I remind all honourable ministers that answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, would you please answer the question.

*(1345)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I can inform the House that there have been some problems with respect to two hospitals at least, and beds are going to be opening there tomorrow.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the Minister of Health indicate to all Manitobans why, in fact, the eight beds that were promised to be opened on December 1 at Concordia Hospital were sitting empty this morning when there were 19 people in the hallways in Concordia Hospital?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will repeat my question because I believe that there are many in this House that may not have heard it. Can the Minister of Health tell us why, when there were well over 20 people sitting on stretchers in the hallways at Concordia Hospital this morning, and 19 of those—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, it is shameful that members of the government would try to interrupt when this question is very serious, a serious question that impacts—[interjection]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for River East was just about to put her question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a serious issue that impacts the lives of Manitobans, and I would appreciate members of the government listening carefully.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Mackintosh: On a point of order, I think we are all waiting with bated breath for the question. This is a supplementary question, and it requires no preamble. If she has a question, give a question. If she has a point of order, she can rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Laurendeau: This would be a point of order, Mr. Speaker, because the House Leader did not have a point of order. He rose just to disrupt this member as she was attempting to put her question forward. I hope that you will ask the honourable House Leader to only rise on a point of order when he actually has one.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order, may I remind all honourable members, a supplementary question should not require a preamble.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Would the honourable member for River East please put her question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is so much sensitivity on the government's side, I would like to ask the question as to what the Minister of Health is going to do for the 19 people that were waiting for admission to medical beds, sitting on stretchers in the hallways of Concordia Hospital. What is he going to do to address that issue?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, we recognized, when we came into office, it would be unacceptable to have people waiting in the hallways. Thank heavens we announced the plan to make available beds that could be opened so those people would not be in the hallways. We put in place a system-wide system that would trigger, that would be in effect across the entire system. We have made available those beds. We asked that those beds be monitored, and as a result of the serious problem that is being engaged, those beds will be triggered, will be open tomorrow so that we do not have people in the hallways, which I might add is something that has never been in place in this province for the past 11 years.

Mrs. Mitchelson: The Minister of Health has admitted that he has failed to open the beds that he promised.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health why, when the hallways at Concordia Hospital have been jam-packed for the last two or three days, he is waiting until tomorrow to open the beds.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the member is right; the hallways of Concordia Hospital have been jam-packed for the last 18 months, and that

is why we have put in place a program, after only two months in office, on November 22, to make beds available. That is why we asked the system to be managed. We have put in place the resources for a hundred beds. We put in place the resources to have 165 people receive I.V.s at home. It is curious that the plan from members opposite did not call for the opening of any permanent beds, no expanded I.V. programs. Thank heavens we have in place the ability now to put people in those beds across the system, something that has never been in place in this province.

* (1350)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Stefanson), I would just like to take a moment to introduce, sitting in the loge to my left, Brian Pallister, the former member for Portage la Prairie. I welcome him on behalf of all honourable members today.

Health Care System Bed Openings

Mr. Eric Stefanson (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) about a comment he made in September of this year, and I quote from a comment that he made. He says: First of all, those 120 beds you have already announced three or four times when you have talked about the personal care home shift.

Those are not new beds, point one, and the 120 beds that he is referring to are the 60 beds at Concordia Hospital, the 40 beds at Seven Oaks and the 20 beds at Grace General Hospital. Those are the 120 beds that he, himself, says are not new beds. Yet, a few days ago, he comes out and suggests that he is opening 138 net new beds, Mr. Speaker, to fulfill their election promise of 100 beds. Obviously, that is not the case.

So I ask the Minister of Health today: will he finally confirm and acknowledge that he is breaking his election promise, he is not opening

100 net new beds, and at most, he is opening 18 net new beds?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, obviously members opposite have trouble reading the press release, and I will try to take them through it again. When we assumed office, one of the first things I did was check with the various officials in the former minister's department and said: have they funded, was there any plan to open beds? The answer was no.

The second point is we did something that no government has done. We knew that there was a need to open beds, and we said 138 beds April 1. But, in addition, we made available, as soon as was possible under the configuration, the availability of 100 beds to deal with the crisis that would lead us into that spring period so that beds would be available when patients needed them. Those beds, which are going to be available, would be triggered for people who are in the hallways, something that has not been present in this province for a number of years as people lay in the hallways. I will continue in the next answer, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Health, when he said, on that same open-line radio program: We said 100 new full-time nurses and 100 beds in addition to the shifts that are taking place. That is a quote from the Minister of Health.

Could he tell us today what the status is of those 100 full-time nurses that he committed to have in place at the same time as these additional beds that he is now no longer opening, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Chomiak: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that after 11 years of laying off 1,000 nurses, in the first 60 days in office, members would have the audacity to actually question where we would find nurses.

When we talked about hallway medicine, we said we would do something in the first phase of our office, which was the first 60 days. We looked far and wide. We met with people in the system, and we talked to nurses. We said that we would open 100 beds and make available 100

beds as soon as possible, which we are doing, Phase I. We also said 138 beds would permanently open April 1. If there are not enough beds in the system by then, there will be more beds opened, I guarantee you that, Mr. Speaker.

* (1355)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, people get little comfort from that final comment from the Minister of Health because he has not fulfilled his first promise, and that is all we are asking him to do today. He made the commitment. He made the promise during the election. He made the promise publicly.

Point of Order

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Again, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to call the member to order. It was a supplementary question. A supplementary question requires no preamble, and here we have a speech being given by the honourable member.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Opposition House Leader, on the same.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): On the same point of order, I am sure I heard the honourable member, in his opening remarks, say, can the minister.

So I do believe he was leading with a question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. May I remind all honourable members that a supplementary question should not require a preamble.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Would the member for Kirkfield Park please put his question.

Mr. Stefanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will just repeat my last question because the member did not answer the question where he made a commitment to have 100 new full-time nurses. What is the status today of

those 100 full-time nurses that the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) publicly committed to have in place at the same time as he was putting in place these beds?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated on several occasions, when we came to office we said that there were a number of priorities we would work on. First we said we would have an initial plan on hallway medicine, which we delivered on. Then we said we would do something about frozen food, particularly reopening the contract, and we delivered on that. Then we said that we would merge the two authorities together, and we delivered on that. Then we said we would do something about the waiting lists, and despite the government's lack of action, we delivered on that.

I am asking the former government to just wait until we deliver our program on nurses. You just have to wait.

Health Care System Bed Openings

Mr. Darren Praznik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I empathize somewhat with the Minister of Health, but he misses the point. He misses the point entirely. It was out of his mouth and the mouth of his Leader that a commitment was made to Manitobans to have those additional beds in place on December 1. Not only did the minister say he would have the beds in place, but he said that he put the money in place to pay for them. Today we want him to acknowledge, so that those Manitobans waiting in the hallways of Concordia Hospital know the truth, that he has not been able to deliver on that promise.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I know members are having trouble, and I will reread the press release so that it makes it very clear: highlights of the plan include opening 138 new permanent beds by the end of April 2000. Health authorities in Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson will have the flexibility to open 100 acute care beds as soon as December 1.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Speaker, what does the minister say to those 19 people on gurneys in

Concordia Hospital today who relied on the minister's promise that is not fulfilled?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say to those people is it is unacceptable for people to be in the hallways on a day-by-day basis. Thank heavens the public of Manitoba changed governments so we could put in place a hundred beds to be available to those people throughout the system.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Speaker, I want to challenge the minister today to put on the record of the House the room numbers and classifications of all of those beds across the system that he committed to have in place on the 1st of December. Put it on the record. Tell us where those beds are and let us go find out if they are really there, because I think the truth is they will not be and are not.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting question from the member. I remember, when I was briefed by departmental officials about these beds, I always said, well, the former government kept saying they put in place swing beds, and they said they never opened them. They never funded them. They never put them in place.

* (1400)

That is why, well before the crisis period that usually arises at Christmas, well before, six weeks before, we quickly put together a plan so that hospital authorities and officials would have available beds and resources. At the time, we said it would be difficult because of nursing shortages created, but we put in place that plan.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, Beauchesne 408: "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate."

Mr. Speaker, let me say that the honourable minister has been asked: where are the beds? It

is a very simple question. Where are the beds? Tell us where they are, Mr. Minister. That is all we need to know.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable official Opposition House Leader does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, to please answer the question.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, again, because members opposite are having difficulty, let me read from the press release: "Opening 138 new permanent beds by end of April 2000. Health authorities in Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson will have the flexibility to open 100 acute care beds as soon as Dec. 1."

Mr. Speaker, we also outlined for all of the authorities locations of all of the beds across the system, which they are well aware of, and includes eight beds at Concordia, as well as a number of beds at Victoria.

World Trade Organization Minister's Objectives

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines about the World Trade Organization talks in Seattle. I wonder if the minister could outline for this House what objectives she set in terms of her attendance at the talks and were these objectives accomplished.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): Mr. Speaker, it gives me an opportunity to thank the people of Manitoba for having their confidence in our government and for myself for having the opportunity to represent our government at the World Trade Organization talks in Seattle.

Mr. Speaker, our objective was, of course, No. 1 and foremost, to raise the profile of agriculture, and that is what we did when we had an opportunity to discuss these issues with the federal minister.

Trade Barriers Reduction

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that members opposite have in the past been staunch critics of free trade and given that many Manitoba companies have experienced record growth over the past decade due to expanded trade opportunities, could the minister advise the House on Today's NDP's position towards increasing trade and doing away with trade barriers?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has a proud record of increasing the amount of export in trade to both the United States—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Mihychuk: And I am very pleased to be leading a ministry that is taking that portfolio on and increasing the amount of trade into the United States and over to Europe and China and Taiwan and around the world.

I am very pleased to say that we recognize and want to enhance Manitoba's trading opportunities around the world.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Seeing that there are numerous labour organizations that have advocated for increased restrictions on free trade and protectionist policies, including the Manitoba Young New Democrats who marched at the corner of Portage and Main, can this minister assure the House that her government will not support restrictive policies that would negatively impact interprovincial and international trade?

Ms. Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, it gives me the opportunity to talk about trade and particularly internal trade. One of our biggest challenges is to have free trade market between provinces which try to change the market, and the worst offenders are the provinces of Ontario and Alberta that choose to subsidize businesses to the point where it is not fair for other provinces.

Pork Industry Marketing System

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, it was enlightening to see the announcement yesterday, or the article in the Free Press talking about the expansion that Schneider's was contemplating in this province. It has also been enlightening to see the large operation that Maple Leaf has built to facilitate the pork processing in this province. It has also been very enlightening to see—and I think all members in this House respect the huge investment that the primary producers, the farmers, have made in this province dealing with the pork industry and the huge expansion that has taken place in the pork industry.

I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture today whether she has had any discussions with producers and/or the industry in regard to single-desk selling in this province within the last while. I need to ask this because of the statement that she made on November 2, 1996, when she asked the then minister, the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns), the question, and I quote: Will he recognize the negative impact of his decision, the negative impact it will have on producers, and will he reverse his decision and maintain a monopoly single-desk selling for pork in this province? Is that still her position?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Mr. Speaker, the government made the decision to move away from single-desk selling, despite the opposition of the majority of the producers. I have had discussions with producers. What I have told them is that I will listen to them, and should it be their desire to have a change, they can have that.

We have always said that it will be the producers that will decide what should happen. The Conservative government did not give the producers the opportunity to have a say. If there are changes being made, it will be the producers that will decide, not government's heavy-handedness.

Mr. Jack Penner: An interesting response, and I respect the minister's wish to consult with producers. The producers are one aspect of the

hog and pork industry. There are many other aspects of the industry that I believe—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, Beauchesne Citation 410 states that supplementary questions require no preamble. In this House, as well, it has been the practice and enforced day in and day out that there be no preamble to supplementary questions.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, that you call the member to order.

Mr. Speaker: On the Government House Leader's point of order, he does have a point of order. Supplementary questions should not require a preamble.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Could you please put your question?

Mr. Jack Penner: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

I would ask then whether the minister is also going to have discussions with the industry or whether she has had discussions with the industry at the same time to ensure that the industry will in fact remain in Manitoba if she proceeds, as she stated in 1996, to maintain the single-desk selling position in this province.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I want to let the member know that, yes, in fact I have begun the process of meeting with people in the processing industry and in the production industry and have said that we will look at what the impacts of this decision of the previous government have been and what has been the impact on family farm producers.

But certainly I will talk to all aspects of the industry. I have met with some of them already, and I will continue to meet with those that are in the processing industry as well as in the production of livestock.

Mr. Jack Penner: I wonder, then, and I ask through you, Mr. Speaker, whether the minister recognizes the huge amount of investment that has been made, the quarter-of-a-billion-dollar investment in the primary sector, the hundreds of millions of dollars in the processing sector, the 1,800 jobs that Schneider's has indicated they will put in place with their desired expansion and the 1,800 jobs that the current industry has in Brandon or is proceeding to work towards in Brandon.

* (1410)

Will the minister now recognize the huge investment that is at stake here, and will she ask the questions of the producers and the industry whether they will remain and keep on expanding the industry if she reverts back to single-desk selling in this province?

Ms. Wowchuk: I am not sure where the member is coming from, why he is saying that all of this investment is at risk. Maple Leaf is built; producers are raising hogs; Schneider's is here looking at Manitoba to build here. It looks like this member has not got very much to say other than generate rumours. Yesterday it was the beef commission, and now it is another one.

Point of Order

Mr. Jack Penner: I rose yesterday because people were asking me the question on the beef commission. I rise today because of concerns in the industry. I rise in representation of the constituents and the concerns they have with this government and the position that they are taking re marketing of beef and pork in this province. The producers are asking that question. I bring those questions to this House. That accusation that I am fostering rumours is simply not true.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, the member had no point of order. He had a dispute. He was chastised for passing around information that had no grounding, and now he gets up in the House and makes a political statement. I ask you to call him to order and remind him that points of order are for raising matters of divergence from the rules of the House.

Mr. Speaker: On the honourable member's point of order, this is clearly a dispute over the facts.

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): On a new point of order, I would ask that you peruse Hansard to check exactly what the words were that the House Leader has spoken. I do believe that he has impugned motives upon my member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) by saying some of the things that he did. I would ask you to peruse Hansard very carefully to see exactly which words this member put on the record.

Mr. Speaker: On the honourable official Opposition House Leader's point of order, I do not believe he has a point of order. I believe this is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, with a question, please.

Health Care System Food Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question is for the Minister of Health about the frozen food situation.

Is it correct that the Tory frozen food system did not in any way meet the specifications in terms of quality of food, the specifications in terms of the cost and the operations of the facility or the specifications in terms of the quantity that it was supposed to produce for all the hospitals? Was it indeed a white elephant?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I thank the member for that question because it allows us to discuss in this House something very significant. I would just like to point out to the member for River Heights that, in fact, the former, former Health minister, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik), is quoted as saying that the frozen food experiment under the previous government was a mistake. It is very clear that the plan as conceived, whoever conceived it and wherever that plan was

conceived, was seriously flawed, and we are left with a very difficult situation which we are trying to manage to the best of our ability to the benefit of all Manitobans.

Mr. Gerrard: My supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Health. I gather then you are saying that it was a white elephant, it was a terrible circumstance. Am I to understand that it was a very risky enterprise when it was undertaken, it was an experiment, and that this was a high-risk—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Chomiak: Firstly, the enterprise was funded privately, which was a serious mistake because it locked in the enterprise to a 20-year agreement at market rates in the private sector when better rates could have been had under the government of Manitoba, which meant no control.

Secondly, the business plan was seriously flawed and seriously jeopardized from the start and had no possibility of actually achieving any of the profits that were so-called suggested. Thirdly, the entire plan was an experiment that had never been done in any other jurisdiction whereby one central facility was proposed by the previous government to supply frozen food not just in the nine hospitals and the personal care homes but the original plan called for it to be all across Manitoba and perhaps beyond.

Mr. Gerrard: My supplementary for the Minister of Health. You have explained that this system was worthless. My question is: why on earth would you spend \$24.5 million for security on a worthless, high-risk white elephant?

Mr. Chomiak: You know, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the same question that we had to ask ourselves, why the government would commit \$26 million of our resources and be on the hook—the Province of Manitoba, the hospitals and USSC—to the sum of \$26 million on a deal like this. When we had the opportunity to gain back control of that particular mortgage, in effect simply buy back the mortgage that we are already committed to, and save money doing it,

we took that opportunity. In addition, not only is it a fact that we not only saved money by doing that, but in addition we have now the flexibility to reconfigure and restructure the deal, if necessary, to try to enhance the benefits for all Manitobans.

Canadian Airlines International Merger

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): My question is to the Minister of Highways (Mr. Ashton). In consideration of the merger of Canadian and Air Canada—it is a major merger that affects many of our people as far as jobs and, of course, the cost of transport—what is the position of our government in regard to the merger and the content—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): I do believe I could table the document that will give the information to the member. His minister did stand up on ministerial statements today giving exactly that information to this House, so why is he standing now and wasting our time? I table the information for the honourable member.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on this point of order, the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) has gotten up and asked a question of great significance, particularly in his riding, to a member of the government. For the Opposition House Leader to get up and use that as a stepping stone for getting some point from the opposition across is inappropriate.

The member has full right to ask the question. It is too bad they did not ask the question, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. We are dealing with a point of order. It is a very serious matter.

On the point of order by the of the Opposition House Leader, he does not have a point of order. May I remind all members that all members in this Chamber have a right to ask a question.

* * *

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Highways and Government Services): I appreciate the question because, in preparing our position, one of the key elements we stress is the need to preserve jobs. I might have expected some questions from members of the opposition on this. One of the elements which was not in the statement or in our brief could have a very direct impact on jobs in this province, and that would be any raising of the ownership restrictions that are currently in place in terms of airlines.

* (1420)

We would be very concerned in this province that that would allow a significant shareholder to put pressure on the monopoly, the dominant carrier, to move jobs out of Manitoba. That has happened far too many times in the past. That is why, on that specific issue, I thank the member for the question, and our commitment is to fight against any raising of the ownership restrictions that might be a part of any airline restructuring in this province to be able to preserve Manitoba jobs.

Tax Reductions Government Priority

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance, and that from a rookie MLA who has paid taxes for 36 years. It has become apparent, since their election, that Today's NDP do not consider balanced budgets a priority for Manitoba or Manitobans.

Would the minister inform Manitobans what priority Today's NDP place on tax cuts?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): That is a great question to have as I prepare to go to Ottawa tomorrow where we put in front of the Minister of Finance for the federal government the position developed by all the ministers of Finance across the country.

As I said to the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Stefanson) on Friday, we have come forward with a balanced approach where we are

asking for a tax regime across the country that allows us to be competitive in the international marketplace while at the same time mitigating the impact on provincial revenues so that we can provide the other dimensions that are required to be competitive, and that is a first-rate education system and a quality health care system.

So that is the approach we are taking, a balanced approach, a consensus approach which has been achieved across the country, an approach that we think will allow the country to develop on an equitable basis.

Mr. Jim Penner: Mr. Speaker, does this minister support the position taken by the Manitoba Federation of Labour, that they would be reluctant to reduce taxes for Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: I think I just outlined our position very clearly to the member for Steinbach. Our view is that the tax regime we have in this country and in this province has to allow us to be competitive in the international marketplace. It also has to allow us to fund the universal programs that provide the skilled workforce, the quality human capital, the kind of people that can function in this economy, and at the same time it has to provide a health care system that will ensure that people are healthy and able to participate in the labour market and enjoy a decent quality of life.

Mr. Jim Penner: It still needs some explanation.

Budget Consultations

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): Can this minister indicate if prebudget consultation meetings, which were an important part of shaping the budgets of the prior government, will take place so that Manitobans can have input into their budget?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Budget consultation meetings will occur.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Ombudsman

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): My question is for the Minister responsible for

MPIC. Recently in public meetings held by MPIC throughout the province, it was mentioned by President Zacharias that we are looking at introducing a Fair Practices Office which will be at arm's length from the agency. This would be the company's own in-house ombudsman where people can take complaints, Zacharias said.

I would like to ask the minister if in fact this is an attempt of the government to carry out this initiative, and I would like to hear a response.

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, or I will tell the member if he is not aware, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation is a Crown corporation, so it is at arm's length from the government. So it is not our specific policy, but it is a policy of MPI to provide the fairest, most equitable services to all of the people who are unfortunate enough to have to come before the corporation as a result of injury and accident.

Yes, a Fair Practices Office is being put in place to assist those people who have claims before the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

Mr. Faurschou: A supplementary question to the Minister responsible for MPIC. If so, what is the time frame that we can expect to see this office operational?

Ms. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, very shortly.

Mr. Faurschou: A supplementary, as well, to the same minister. The staff who are going to operate out of this office, are they looking at being in-house staff or are they looking at hiring outside to give clear objectivity?

Ms. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, when the announcement is made, that will be part of the announcement. But the Fair Practices Officer, who will be in place very shortly, under the auspices of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, will be an individual who will provide fair and objective services to the people who are responsible for MPI and the people who are coming before MPI with claims—[interjection] They will not be someone who is

beholden to anyone, no matter whether the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns), or not, says something like that.

Arson Reduction Strategy Funding

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, with an average of six fires a day, Winnipeg is receiving the unfortunate title of arson capital of Canada. The city has undertaken steps recently such as its expanded garbage cleanup blitz and its community education program. The city is to be commended for taking action on this issue and putting in place funding to address the situation. However, I am concerned that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs does not appear to share the same level of concern or commitment when she was asked for a one-third cost-sharing agreement from the province.

My question to the minister is: will the government immediately commit itself to cost-sharing a portion of the \$823,500 that the City of Winnipeg announced on Friday, November 26, it will spend on short and long-term initiatives?

Hon. Jean Friesen (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that question, but I do want to separate for him the two issues of arson and the long-term rebuilding of the inner city communities of Winnipeg.

I am pleased to report that the government has, over the last few weeks, committed a number of resources to the arson issue as the province can in fact do so. The Fire Commissioner's office has provided two and subsequently an additional member in assistance to the City of Winnipeg. The Department of Justice has contributed a number of forms of assistance, ranging from the creation of a special prosecution unit to the increase in research on arson issues, to assist the city, as well as the provision of a written pamphlet that the city will be able to distribute to a wide range of households. So, in the areas of competence of the provincial government, there has been considerable and, I would say, very immediate assistance.

The longer-term issue, of course, is the rebuilding of communities in the city of

Winnipeg. We could talk, as we have in the past, about the deterioration of the inner city of Winnipeg under the previous government, 10 years of neglect, a government which paid very little attention to the rebuilding of housing or to the rebuilding of neighbourhoods. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it got to the point when the former Premier was seen in the inner city of Winnipeg, my office got phone calls. It turned out that in fact what he was doing was filming a commercial. That was not successful, and people are very clear, in fact, where to pin the blame on the inner city deterioration.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Donnelly United Church

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention a worthwhile event that occurred this December 4, 1999, in my constituency of Fort Garry. It was a grassroots event that brought together the local Fort Garry community for a worthwhile cause. A fundraiser was held at Donnelly United Church located at 1226 Waller Street. The afternoon was filled with enjoyable events such as a bazaar and an auction. The reason why this event was held was as a means for the Donnelly United Church to raise funds for much-needed renovations to the building and for other worthy projects.

I would like to extend my deepest congratulations to the Donnelly United Church community for gathering around their local church and supporting its renewal. A warm thank you is also in order for the Reverend Earl Gould for his tremendous effort in the past and his commitment to the residents of the Fort Garry constituency.

* (1430)

A community is not simply about people. A community develops around ideas, specific interests and initiatives. Structures within communities allow individuals to gather together and create ties with others. A church provides for all of these. Churches are pillars in our society that give people a reason to unite. This is why such an event as a fundraiser to build on

projects within the church community is very important. A simple bazaar and auction allows people to unite around shared interests and ideas. These events are not as straightforward as appears on the surface. Communities are created and strengthened through fundraising events such as these. It is a community event such as this one where the spirit of Manitobans shines through.

River East Collegiate Girls Volleyball

Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the River East Collegiate Kodiak girls volleyball team for winning the AAAA provincial championship three years in a row. River East Collegiate is known not only for its strong academic program; it is also known for its strong physical educational program which includes not only volleyball but also basketball, track and field, football, cross-country, curling, soccer and badminton, to name a few.

The team members of the 1999 AAAA provincial girls championships are as follows: Leanne Muldrew, Lindsay Poggemiller, Lauren Mackenzie, Lee Wedlake, Roxanna Koe, Cindy Fotti, Alisha Mushumanski, Kristy Buikema, Megan Bradshaw, Jenny Ryman, Jayne Toogood, Amy Matthews, coach John Schmidt, manager Leah Woods, and Sam York.

I would like to congratulate the team members, manager and coach not only for winning the 1999 championship but for the sportsmanship that they have displayed throughout the season. All the best to this successful team in the future. Thank you.

1999 Flood

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the severe flooding that took place in the southwestern and southeastern corners of the province during the spring of 1999 has had an enormous impact on the rural economy of Manitoba. This flooding continues to create serious financial hardship for our agricultural producers and the communities that rely heavily on a healthy agricultural economy for their own economic viability. This, when combined with the depressed grain prices our producers are

experiencing, has created a farming crisis in this province, the likes of which we have not seen since the 1930s. Yet, in the face of the continuing financial difficulties this flood created for so many Manitobans, the 1999 flood in southern Manitoba was ignored by Today's NDP government in their first throne speech. The only flood mentioned in this Speech from the Throne was the 1997 flood. Failing to address hardships southern Manitoba producers are experiencing shows the people of Manitoba just how important their economic situation is to Today's NDP government.

Edna Wilcox

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to ask my honourable colleagues to join with me in extending congratulations to Mrs. Edna Wilcox, one of Manitoba's newest centenarians. Edna was, until her recent move north of Winnipeg, my constituent and a resident of Deer Lodge Centre. Her 100th birthday on December 1 was a heartwarming celebration with friends, family, supporters and media gathering to mark the occasion and honour a much loved friend and relative. This request is a special pleasure for me because of Mrs. Wilcox's long, close friendship with Winnipeg's long-time NDP member of Parliament, Stanley Knowles.

As we approach the end of the International Year of the Older Person, I believe it is important that we, as elected representatives, recognize and appreciate the contributions of our elders. Edna, who raised her family through some of the toughest years and events of this century, still has important and considerate advice to share, and she is not often wrong. She is a spry, intelligent woman and her health and involvement give meaning to the phrase, 100 years young.

How rarely we take the time to recognize and admit the effort, wisdom and love that have gone into the contributions of Manitobans such as Edna. Please take this moment to join with me in congratulating Edna Wilcox on her 100th birthday and in wishing her many happy returns.

Agassiz Youth Centre

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I am pleased to rise in the House today to make all

members knowledgeable of the fact that recently in Portage la Prairie there was the opening of the Lakewood Unit. That is the new unit of the Agassiz Youth Centre in Portage la Prairie. The government's commitment to the Agassiz Youth Centre and work of its staff is well documented in this Chamber. The centre has been instrumental in ensuring that young offenders are not only incarcerated for their offences, but they also have access to programs that ensure that they have the tools required to succeed in society upon their release.

The additional unit that was initiated by the previous government will provide safe and secure housing for up to 20 youth that have behaviour and emotional challenges. It is designed to help young offenders regain control of their lives and become productive members of our society.

The members on this side of the House demonstrated while in government their commitment to a strong justice system, one that worked to reduce the chances of reincarceration and provided young offenders with the opportunity to become strong members of society. The Agassiz Youth Centre is an example of that commitment. I trust the new NDP government will continue this.

In addition to providing safe programs, I am pleased to note that there will be an additional 24 jobs created through the opening of this unit. As members of this Legislature know, the work of the staff at the centre is among the most challenging occupations in all of Manitoba. On behalf of my colleagues and my constituency, I would like to commend the employees of the Agassiz Youth Centre for their work on the day-to-day basis for the safety and security of all Manitobans as well as making a difference in the lives of young Manitobans who have gone awry. We wish them continued success as they begin their operations within the new Lakewood Unit at the Agassiz Youth Centre in Portage la Prairie.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I have had discussions with the

official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Laurendeau) and the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), and I believe there is unanimous consent for the following: No. 1, for the House to sit from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and again at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 9; No. 2, for the vote on the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne to be conducted immediately after Routine Proceedings on December 9; and No. 3, for the House to be adjourned on December 9 immediately following the vote on the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne until Monday, December 13.

In addition, I want to inform the House that Condolence motions will be considered on Monday, December 13.

* (1440)

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the House to sit from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and again at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 9? [agreed]

Is there unanimous consent for the vote on the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne to be conducted immediately after Routine Proceedings on December 9? [agreed]

Is there unanimous consent for the House to be adjourned on December 9 immediately following the vote on the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne until Monday, December 13? [agreed]

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE (Sixth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the honourable member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan), the amendment thereto proposed by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Filmon), standing in the name of the honourable member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), who has 32 minutes.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I want to continue to address the areas of the economy. I must inform the members opposite that the strong economy the province is today experiencing is due to a long-range plan and a

long-range vision, something that they have not shown to have in the early days of their administration. Let me clarify so that there is no confusion on the part of members opposite. The residents of my area are not looking for a government that is directly involved in job creation projects. What the businesses of my region expect is a government that will set policies, tax policies, debt-reduction policies that will create the environment for growth and they will do the rest.

Mr. Speaker, I noted a picture on the front page of a recent publication of the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, featuring Acrylon Plastics, a Winkler manufacturer that sells products at home and abroad. This is just one of the successful companies in my region that have made a mark for itself in Manitoba and internationally. Of course, I could spend the day listing successful companies in the entire southern region that have thrived and benefited from the economic policies and vision of the previous government. I do want to just spend a little time naming some of these: Triple E Canada of Winkler and Lode-king, Buhler Industries, 3-M, Rimer Alco, Carte International, Meridian Industries, Load Line, FSP Machinery, these are just a few of the hundreds of businesses that are located within my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, these businesses are looking for a clear signal from this government that indeed Manitoba will remain open for business in the long term, a signal that was lacking in the address from the throne. As well, the motion moved by our Leader also addressed this government's apparent lack of willingness to adhere to their election promise and balance the budget for this fiscal year. Armed with a wish list which is fitting for this Christmas season, perhaps the greatest wish list of the millennium, they have gone forward and announced their clear intention to break the very first of their election promises. It was reported that the Premier's (Mr. Doer) address to the Chamber of Commerce in which he tried to trumpet the Deloitte and Touche report, and I emphasize the word "report," was met with less than an enthusiastic response. No wonder. The honourable First Minister should perhaps spend less time attempting to fool people regarding deficits and audits and get on with the job he

was elected to do, making decisions to the betterment of all Manitobans.

The greatest legacy of the previous administration may well be—and I leave it to history to decide—the job it did in ending more than 20 consecutive years of deficit spending. Mr Speaker, Manitobans elected this government with a promise from Today's NDP that they had shed their tax-and-spend ways and were, in fact, ready to face the fiscal realities of the new millennium. Yet, on their very first throne speech, what do you hear? No commitment, no commitment, I repeat, to a reduction in taxes, other than that what the previous government had set out, and news that they would run a deficit in their very first year of governing this province since 1988. It is perhaps appropriate that shortly following this government's election came Halloween because it appears that the members opposite were simply wearing the disguise of Today's NDP.

Many of the members on this side of the House have had experience in operating large enterprises. I noted in both inaugural speeches of the honourable members for Steinbach (Mr. Jim Penner) and for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen) that they made mention of their experience and how, in both their companies, mid-term projections were often adjusted and amended to ensure that the bottom line at the end of the fiscal year was as it should be, and I would relate that to my own experience in running a business as well. There are adjustments that need to be made on an ongoing basis.

I fear that the current government of the day has spent considerably more time trying to give excuses as to why they are unwilling to balance the budget than to actually looking to make some of the difficult decisions that go along with being in government. In addition, I would like to draw attention to the section of the amendment put forward by our Leader in regard to this government's unwillingness to bring forward legislation involving welfare reform which was introduced by our administration.

This is a subject of particular importance to the residents of my constituency where it is widely felt that the best form of assistance is a job. I suspect that the members opposite feel

somehow that, by not proclaiming this legislation, they are in some way doing a favour to those able-bodied individuals currently on financial assistance. In fact, I would suggest to the members across the Chamber that they are doing exactly the opposite. It is the belief of our members and of my constituents that those who have a job realize much more from it than simply a pay cheque. They also achieve skills, social interaction, self-reliance, and the feeling of pride that accompanies it.

The legislation that we put forward was to ensure that recipients received a hand-up and that they acquired the skills and confidence needed in today's workplace. Of course, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale) would have Manitobans believe that there are no individuals currently on welfare who do not want to work. Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier in my address about the importance of members staying in touch with the people who elected them, and I would suggest that, if the member for Fort Rouge was really in touch with Manitobans, he would not repeat those words. In fact, I suspect that many of his own colleagues, judging by the responses in Question Period, would distance themselves from the member's comments.

Every Manitoban knows of, or has heard of, abuses in the system. It is impossible to have a system as large as social assistance and not have those abuses. The legislation which members across the Chamber have refused to adopt not only addresses those cases, it also embraces those individuals on assistance who truly want to contribute to society and who are looking for a way to develop and enhance their skills.

As the representative for a constituency that has companies constantly looking for employees, it is my belief that this government has passed up an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of Manitobans and has done so simply based on an ideology, and that is out of step with today's economy.

It is particularly significant at the occasion of a throne speech of a new government to draw attention to those things that have been achieved in my area during the previous government's tenure. In fact, it was with some alarm that I noted the lack of attention drawn to rural

Manitobans in the throne speech and what they could expect from government.

Indeed, one of the few initiatives of provincial jurisdiction noted in the throne speech directed at rural Manitobans living south of Winnipeg was a commitment to develop more trails. I would like to assure the new Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Friesen) that there is much more to the southern part of our province than picnics and hiking trails. In fact, the past decade has seen unprecedented growth and development in my region. I am pleased to say the biggest problem many businesses in my area are having, as I have mentioned, is finding employees to work. The policies of the previous government—lower taxes, lower debt—have helped create an environment where new businesses are coming to my region and existing ones are expanding.

I would like to draw attention to two achievements in particular that have been of great importance in my region. The first is the development of Highway No. 3 that passes through the centre of Morden. The redevelopment of this highway will be a tremendous addition to this historic community and will benefit the many tourists who visit during the annual Corn and Apple Festival and throughout the year.

As well, I would like to note the development of the Boundary Trails hospital centre, which will serve as the region's primary health care facility and help eliminate much of the duplication that existed in having two care facilities in close proximity.

These projects are just two examples of the progress that has occurred in my region under the direction of the Filmon government over the past decade. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the new government has inherited a province in which the optimism is high and the economy can only be described as firing on all cylinders. To many, this would seem to be the ideal position to be in. However, and I would challenge the members opposite to listen, there is an old adage that the hardest job to step into is one in which the previous individual was extremely successful because of the expectations that are left. And maybe just to follow on that adage, and that is

that sometimes you make some of your worst decisions during the best of times.

* (1450)

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has a very tough act to follow. Manitobans, and my residents in particular, will keep a very watchful eye on this administration to ensure that the past gains are not whittled away by Today's NDP. As a first attempt, I would suggest that the government throne speech missed the mark in many areas, some of which have I have gone in some lengths to detail. It is a speech that lacks any clear direction or agenda for the province of Manitoba. It is a document that, rather than giving confidence to the people that a clear direction and plan is in place, leaves many questions about Today's NDP.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the months ahead will be important ones in our history. The beginning of a new century marks another milestone and another benchmark in our history as a province. It is my hope that history will record that the new millennium saw our province continue to grow and prosper as it has in the past 10 years and not regress to the trappings of the past. I look forward to playing my part in ensuring that my region continues to grow, and that as a province we continue to be a place my children and grandchildren will be proud to call home. Thank you very much.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is good to be back. It is good to be back in the Legislature after an election and after a change in government. It is really good to be back on this side of the House. I am very much enjoying being on the government side and learning new responsibilities within the caucus and as part of the new government.

I want to make a few comments about the election and my new constituency of Radisson and get into talking a little bit about some of the issues of the day and some of the comments being put on the record by members opposite, as well as some of the directions of our government

and its taking and keeping our commitments that we put forward during the election.

I want to begin by congratulating you, as well as the new Speaker, Speaker Hickes, on their election and appointment to take over the management of this Chamber. So far I think that it has actually been a fairly subdued Chamber so far. There has been nothing too extraordinary that has gone in terms of the decorum and the nature of the House. Hopefully that will continue. I want to welcome the pages that are here and wish them well in their duties and also welcome back the Clerk's staff and particularly pay tribute to Binx Remnant, who has served as the Clerk for a number of years. As we learned today, he is actually the longest-serving Clerk in the Commonwealth. That is quite an achievement, to spend that much time serving the people of Manitoba in that responsible capacity and to oversee so many governments, so many speakers and so many MLAs who have come through this House. I do not know if Clerks write memoirs, but that would probably make for some pretty interesting reading.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all the citizens who live in Radisson. It was a very good election in Radisson. It was also, though, I would say, a quiet campaign. Both of the opponents—there were only three of us in Radisson. The Progressive Conservative candidate, Mr. McDonald, as well as the Liberal candidate, Betty Ann Watts, both ran good campaigns and respect the vote that was cast for all parties. I take my responsibilities quite seriously in representing the new configuration of Radisson.

I want to say good-bye to all those citizens who I have worked with for almost nine years in the areas of south Transcona, an area that I got to know quite well and got to know many of the residents there quite well as we faced many spring floods together and as we faced a number of other decisions together that affected that neighbourhood, whether it was the siting of waste facilities, whether it was the elimination of school busing and transit service, whether it was issues related to the neighbour CN with closing the access sidewalk. It seemed like that small community of south Transcona had a never-ending series of issues that faced it at the very

local community level. I wish them well with their new MLA, the MLA for Transcona.

Similarly, I want to say farewell to all the constituents I worked with who were part of the East Kildonan, Valley Gardens and East Elmwood part of Radisson under the former boundaries. There were a number of community endeavours there that we undertook together, most notably the recent establishment at the Valley Gardens Junior High of the Together for Change program. Those constituents go both to Rossmere and to Concordia.

Now my new constituency of Radisson has changed by approximately 40 percent.

Je voudrais dire un grand merci à toutes les personnes qui habitent à Windsor Park et à Saint-Boniface. Maintenant j'ai une grande population qui parle français. Donc maintenant, je voudrais parler le français dans la Chambre et dans la communauté plus souvent.

J'ai habité à Windsor Park pendant deux mois quand j'allais à l'université. J'ai habité à Windsor Park après que j'ai pris un cours de français. Je suis restée chez une femme qui faisait le cours de français avec moi à Fleury Place à Windsor Park. C'était seulement pendant deux mois, mais c'était un petit lien avec la circonscription de Windsor Park. J'ai rencontré une femme à la porte pendant l'élection et je n'ai pas parlé anglais avec elle. J'étais très surprise pendant l'élection par le nombre de personnes qui ouvraient la porte avec leur téléphone cellulaire à la main. Cette femme, qui parlait français au téléphone, a ouvert la porte et m'a dit bonjour. Après ça, elle n'a pas parlé anglais avec moi. C'est pendant l'élection que, pour la première fois, j'ai parlé français pendant toute la conversation avec quelqu'un à la porte.

Je sais qu'il y a beaucoup de personnes à Windsor Park et à Saint-Boniface qui parlent français comme première langue. Je veux faire des accommodations pour toutes les personnes pour améliorer leurs possibilités.

[Translation]

I would like to offer a big thank you to the people who live in Windsor Park and St. Boniface. Now I have a large population that

speaks French, so I would like to speak French in the Chamber and in the community more often.

I lived in Windsor Park for two months when I was going to university, after I had taken a French course. I stayed with a woman who was in my French course at Fleury Place in Windsor Park. This was only for two months, but it was a small link with the Windsor Park area. During the election, I met a woman at the door and did not speak English with her. I was very surprised by the number of people who opened the door holding a cell phone. This woman, who was speaking French on her cellphone, opened the door and said "Bonjour" to me, after which she did not speak English with me. It was during the election that I spoke French for the first time throughout an entire conversation with someone at the door.

I know that there are many people in Windsor Park and St. Boniface whose first language is French. I want to accommodate all people so as to improve their possibilities.

[English]

What I was trying to say is I will try to serve those people to the best of my ability. I welcome all of those people who have French as their first language and who want to speak French as much as possible in the community.

* (1500)

I was struck by the stability of the Windsor Park area. The new Radisson goes all the way to Fermor Avenue, all the way I believe from Springfield Road in the north all the way to Fermor Avenue down 59 Highway, and it extends as far approximately to Autumnwood and up to Elizabeth Road. In that section of Windsor Park, it is predominantly single-family homes. There are a few apartment blocks. But what really struck me as a characteristic of that neighbourhood was the stability. I met constituent and family after family who had lived in their home in Windsor Park for 30 years or more. That says a lot about the neighbourhood. There were also new families moving in, but it raises some significant questions about an aging population in that area.

There is a small, little neighbourhood, I think it is commonly known as Holden, which also is in the new Radisson, which is at the end of Marion as it intersects with 59 Highway. I know that in some ways that small community is going to replace the South Transcona neighbourhood that I have now lost to the constituency of Transcona. It is very similar. It is unserved in terms of a lot of city services, in terms of bus. They do not have paved roads and sidewalks the same as a lot of other urban areas. There are a number of issues that are going to face that community that I look forward to working on. One in particular, recently they had the City of Winnipeg take over the management of the east St. Boniface Community Club because of the aging population in that neighbourhood, there were not enough volunteers and enough interest in the new residents to create a board for the management and overseeing of the community club. So those are some of the kinds of issues that are affecting the community.

Some of the other characteristics or highlights that I noticed during the election in the Windsor Park area, and since the election, are that it is a very open community. I have been quite encouraged at the number of invitations I have had to community events with the schools, with the community club, with places like the Prendergast Centre that is a wonderful place. It is an old school that has been converted into a seniors centre, a day care centre, a child and family services resource centre. It is a hub of activity for the community. I recently enjoyed participating in their child and family services Christmas party this past weekend.

I have to say there are a number of small businesses—I think all of us probably do that during the election, we get to know people at our favourite places where we can go for a quick bite to eat during the election. I must say that the folks at Atlantic Pizza really impressed me. I really felt at home. The member for Minto (Ms. Mihychuk) was just requesting that I could speak Italian during my throne speech. Unfortunately I cannot, but I can tell you that the homemade cooking at that particular restaurant was really wonderful.

These are the kinds of things I think we remember during the election where you could go into the small establishment, family operation. You could watch the news on TV. They invite you to sit at their table. It was like being in someone's kitchen. We would talk politics, have a good salad and some good homemade food, and they would send me on my way with good wishes. I did that at a few other places as well. There was an ice cream shop, in particular, and those are the kinds of relationships that you strike up in the constituency during an election that really mean a lot, to me anyway.

The new constituency of Radisson is going to be challenging, in some ways. I am going to be dealing with two M.P.s, both the member for Transcona, Bill Blaikie, and the member for St. Boniface, Ron Duhamel, from two different parties. I am also going to be dealing with three school divisions. Part of Radisson is in the River East School Division; part of Radisson is in the St. Boniface School Division; and of course, part of Radisson is still in the Transcona-Springfield School Division.

In that Transcona area, there are a number of communities that are still in the Radisson constituency, those being Lakeside Meadows, Kildonan Estates, Kildonan Meadows, Eaglemere, Mission Gardens and what I would call the old west Transcona. All of those neighbourhoods have specific characteristics and needs of their own. During the campaign, I heard a lot of people talking about seniors housing. In the older Transcona neighbourhood, people were concerned about police presence and making sure that they get a response when they have some kind of incident they want to report.

Transportation issues are high on the agenda. Radisson continues to be a residential community that is surrounded by industry. They are surrounded also to the north by the R.M. of Springfield and their industrial area, and all those things pose significant challenges. The Regent strip and the casino, as well as the major packing plants, are in the boundaries of Radisson. I am pleased to see that there is an expansion proposed with Schneider's.

Though we know that there are also challenges that are there because of having

residential neighbourhoods so close to industrial development, at the current time we are working on getting an environmental licence for New Flyer which is located directly across the street from homes that have been there for more than 30 to 40 years. Those are the kinds of issues that I work on, on a regular basis in Radisson.

Workplace safety and health issues are very high on the agenda. The kind of work that a number of the people do in the constituency creates a lot of need for strong programs through Workers Compensation, through Employment Insurance, and specific kinds of issues in social supports like child care, where there is a real need for flexible child care for those families that have the challenge of shift work, of night shifts and not just working a regular nine-to-five job.

By and far, though, I would say, the kinds of issues that were raised during the election were health care. This government is committed to solving the crisis in health care, to ending hallway medicine. We have already released a strategy. We are committed to dealing with the waiting lists and hiring more nurses and establishing programs to attract and retrain health care professionals.

I cannot tell you the number of people at the doorstep who had stories of people in their family. One that comes to mind was a family who recently had a family member who had a blood transfusion in the hallway. It was incredible to hear how many people had been faced directly with dealing with family, having to feed them and care for them in the hallway of one of our hospitals. Many of those kinds of procedures, for example, having someone have a blood transfusion in the hallway, that was a violation of hospital policy in Manitoba a few short years ago, and it is frightening to think that now it is a matter of course that a number of these things are just a regular occurrence. It is something that we on this side of the House as part of a new government are committed to reversing, that we want to have a health care system that is based on dignity, that is based on public access, no matter where you live, no matter where you come from, that you have access to good, quality services. We know that this cannot be fixed overnight. It took the former government almost 12 years to create

some of the problems in terms of the nursing shortage, after we lost over 1,000 nurses under the former government. It is amazing that they will ask questions after being in the House only a couple of weeks and think that we have not solved the problem. So I hope that they will remember some of the mismanagement of their era in health care, the SmartHealth program, the frozen food fiasco, adding on layers of bureaucracy when we should have been trying to save money and put more resources into the front lines of health care. Those things are the challenges that we face. We look forward to working with residents.

The other thing that struck me during the election as I was going door to door were the number of nurses and other health care providers who said: they just do not listen to us. We want to create opportunities for nurses, for doctors, for other health care professionals to be able to tell us the ideas that they have. Things, for example, that were mentioned to me a number of times were having services for laboratory technology in the North, so we do not have to transport patients over and over again. I remember, when we were in opposition, the MLA for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin) asking on behalf of his constituents why they would have to be transported from northern Manitoba five, six, seven times to get surgery and have it delayed and delayed again, and the same thing for transporting people who need very routine tests. If those tests can be done in the North, it will not only create more quality jobs in those remote communities, but it will also provide better services to those residents of Manitoba.

* (1510)

I think it is important that, when we are talking about health care, we do remember that health care is also a federal, national government responsibility, and the federal government has to reinvest with the kind of projections they have now for surplus budgets. I think we cannot get into playing this tax cut game when in fact we have such a huge deficit on the social side in terms of health care as well as in education.

Education is also a very strong commitment that we have as a new government, doubling the number of college spaces over the next five

years, making post-secondary education affordable. I have to say, during the election campaign, I talked to a number of young voters who said: your party is the only one talking about the high cost of education and realizing that having a doubling of the tuition fees for colleges and over 100 percent and almost the same amount of increases in the universities is just not acceptable. The kinds of families that I represent in Radisson are being hard hit by those increases in tuition levels. Again, it is not something that provincial government can do on its own. The federal government has to put its money where its mouth is, so to speak, when they talk about high tech and when they talk about having the kind of economy where people are going to have jobs that are going to provide the level of income that we aspire to, that education has to be part of that and a big part of that.

We have said over and over again as a new government that part of a good economic strategy has to be a strong education policy and an education strategy that is going to address particularly the needs in aboriginal communities. They have to become included, more so, and that has to be a goal of our government: raising the participation rates of aboriginal people in our colleges and universities and bringing back the levels that were there for the Access program, both the levels of participation and the levels of support, so that people can truly focus on their studies. We have to deal with the trend where many students now are working a number of jobs, and it is taking them years and years to finish their post-secondary education because they have to continue to earn money to pay for their costs outside of just the summer months in order to make it through.

I was pleased to participate in the first-ever state of the province's address to youth at the recent business and youth seminar where a number of initiatives were announced that are also going to make the connection between the K-to-12 education system as well as post-secondary education system. We want our young people to feel like they are participating citizens as they make the transition from school to work. I know that there are a lot of challenges to be addressed in dealing with curriculum, in

dealing with the standardized exams, in improving our education system, ensuring that Manitoba students are going to be prepared to move on either to school, post-secondary education, or to work.

I think that some of our initiatives and announcements and commitments during the election also struck a chord with voters in trying to deal with these standardized exams. We are making the commitment to start at the Grade 3 year. Again, I heard over and over again by residents that it just does not make sense to have that kind of testing where the parents did not get to see the results, where the classroom teacher often did not get to see the results. It just was not the kind of use of over \$3 million that is really going to get the most mileage for that kind of cost expenditure in terms of learning and in terms of improving the skills and abilities of those primary grades.

One of the other issues I mentioned earlier that is high on the list of concerns in the constituency of Radisson is public safety. I know that there have been changes made by the City of Winnipeg in terms of policing, that there was a reorganization; instead of having four divisions or zones in the northeast end of Winnipeg, there are now three. This has had a huge effect on Transcona, which often does not have the coverage of a police car. There has also been a reorganization and a centralization of the traffic units, so the only time that there is an attending police officer is if there is a fatality. I know that this is a big concern in the constituency, and a lot of people are aware of that, what has happened in terms of these reorganizations. We are awaiting a report that will speak to how to ensure that citizens are going to have the kind of police presence and the kind of police protection that they are looking for and that they deserve and, in a lot of ways, that they are paying for.

We had, I think, prior to the election, raised a lot of concerns about the rhetoric that the former government had in terms of community safety. I think that this is one area where our government is already showing that there is leadership. We had a strong proposal for a gang crime and auto theft that we are going to be

following through on as well as victims' rights and practical steps that are long overdue, like a new gang unit in the Prosecutions branch, looking at penalties for car theft.

That is on the Justice side, but we really recognize that there also have to be preventative strategies as well. That is why we want so quickly to look at how we can have schools and other facilities open on weekends and evenings so that young people can participate in recreation and positive learning and educational opportunities as an alternative to just hanging out and being influenced by peer pressure and getting involved in petty crime or vandalism and other criminal activity.

I want to make a few comments about what was to me very encouraging about this past election and our mandate going into a new government. It was clear to me that the majority of people across Manitoba were rejecting the approach by the former government and their billion-dollar promise, and they were voting to have reinvestment back into health care and education. It is incredible to me that just prior to the election and during the election that this government went on this overspending binge, that they could starve our health care and education system for so many years during their mandate, and then in this way just before the election put Manitobans in such a precarious position by trying to buy the election by having all this spending.

They always accuse us overspending and now we have, interestingly enough, even the former MLA for Brandon saying he was surprised to read of the projected deficit. I am quoting here from the Brandon Sun: where going into the election, there was no sign the province might be spending itself into a hole, he said. I had no indication like that. As Education minister, I thought we needed money for colleges and things like that and revenues based on reasonable estimates seemed to be there.

Now to have this opposition so soon after the election trying to say that it is an NDP government mismanaging the funds is completely ridiculous. I think that a lot of Manitobans do not realize what happens during

an election, that all the MLAs cease to be MLAs the day the election is called, but the cabinet and the ministers continue to function and operate the government. There must have been a lot of activity in signing off their authority through Treasury Board and spending to accumulate the kind of overspending in those months prior to the election and during the election period.

* (1520)

There were other things that people raised. As you go door to door during an election we all get to talk to a number of people. I also remember talking to one fellow who was a Conservative, and he told me how much he was disappointed in the previous government in terms of their rhetoric on high tech industries and high tech jobs and keeping them here. He had a list for me of the things that could have been done and should have been done to keep those kind of industries here and to keep those jobs here, everything from AECL to other industries and companies that design software.

When you have people like that that are going to turn away from the government, because on the one hand they are talking a good game, and they had good communications and good news releases, but when it came down to the people that were in the know, that worked in that industry, that we would meet on the doorstep, they were telling us that it was all talk and that there was really not the kind of strategy to keep those industries here that the government was trying to lead Manitobans to believe.

I also remember other families. For example, a man and a woman who live in Eaglemere, who were in such a state of crisis. They were at risk of losing their house, because they had gotten behind in taxes. It all came down to having a health care problem in the family, so that they were dealing with a number of different medications. Both the husband and the wife had health care problems. They were not able to get the kind of supports that they needed. As a result, they were in this situation where they could not make their payments on their house. I thought to myself I thought those days in Canada were gone. I thought we now had a system in Canada in our health care where people could be assured that they would get the

supports that they would need and they would not lose their home when a health care crisis struck their family.

I hope that we can, as a new government, stay in touch in the way that we do during the election. We can continue to work closely with all those organizations and residents in our communities and not forget the people that put us here, not forget that we are here to represent them. We do have to work very hard to stay in touch and stay in close contact to really understand the way that their lives are being affected by the kind of society that we live in—this high-tech, fast-paced, consumer-media-oriented society—and also how it is being affected by the decisions of government.

In closing, I want to pay special tribute and thanks to my family, to my extended family. I come from a very political family where on a regular basis we have good discussions on issues of the day. I am always confused by people when they tell me that they do not like to talk politics because I grew up in a house where it was just natural for us to be interested in and want to discuss and debate the things that were affecting our lives.

I also want to thank my immediate family, my partner, Glenn, and our daughter, Mira, who is a year and a half. We work very hard to not have her suffer by career path and by the work that I do. I want Glenn to know that his decision to stay at home with her is much appreciated in these very important early years. He is a very good advisor to me. He has some incredible insights, and his own research is never ending. I do not know anyone who reads more government reports than Glenn.

I also want to thank the number of volunteers and activists who worked on the Radisson campaign, long-time party members as well as new people that came out for the very first time to donate their time, as well as the staff that really pitched in, and my colleague Daryl Reid, the MLA for Transcona. We share a constituency office, and we shared a campaign office. It has been 10 years, and we continue to also be neighbours in this House, where we sit close together once again. I enjoy working

together with him to represent the community of Transcona.

With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to many more debates in this House and continuing to advocate on issues that are near and dear to my heart, hoping that we will move more to sustainable development as a government, that we will address the challenges that are out there in terms of poverty; that we will continue to strive to make Manitoba a more democratic place, that we will work in partnership with First Nations people and address the many challenges that face the first people of our province.

We are entering a new century, and we want to establish a new approach to government in Manitoba. We realize that we do not want to go back to the days of deficit financing; that we must live within our means, but I think that we have to put first and foremost, as our main objectives, re-establishing a very high quality health care system, ensuring young people have the education options and the other opportunities that they require to become fully participating citizens in our province and that we want all Manitobans to have a greater sense of security in their homes and in their communities, in their workplaces, and that would be throughout their whole life.

We know that we have to plan in government not as often is the case for short term but looking in the long term. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this House and as part of that group of men and women who are going to face that challenge with enthusiasm, with energy and, as our Leader likes to say, to get up every morning and to fulfill our commitments. Thank you.

Mr. Eric Stefanson (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I, too, am pleased to have this opportunity to put some comments on the record responding to the Speech from the Throne. It obviously represents an opportunity for us to touch a whole range of topics and issues that we believe are important to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I want to start by congratulating the Speaker on his election to that Chair. I, like I think

everybody in this House, believe that he will do an excellent job serving as Speaker. He certainly has the confidence of myself personally, I believe all of our caucus and this entire Chamber. We very much look forward to working with him over the weeks and months and years ahead and wish him well with the challenges that he will have keeping proper decorum, keeping us on line and keeping this House moving and working efficiently. But I am certain that he will do a very, very good job.

I also want to congratulate the Deputy Speaker as well and would echo many of the same comments. I think he too, in his role as Deputy Speaker, will also do a good job representing this House and this Chamber and the element of fairness and so on that is so important to the positions that both of you gentlemen hold.

* (1530)

I also want to offer my best wishes to the table officers and wish them well with their many challenges in terms of serving all of us in this House, in our committees, throughout this entire legislative process. I think, as we all know, that too is an extremely challenging, demanding, can be frustrating role to play, and we all wish them the best in terms of meeting the challenges that they face.

At the same time, I, like everybody in this House, want to congratulate our Clerk of the Assembly for his 17 years of excellent service to the people of Manitoba. For me personally it has been a pleasure to work with him. I have always enjoyed the working relationship that I have developed with him and wish him nothing but the best with whatever life holds for him in the future.

I too want to welcome our new pages and congratulate them on their selection. I hope that they find this position interesting, fulfilling, rewarding, all of those kinds of things. It can have varied elements from the, I will use the word "excitement" for lack of a better word, of Question Period or the element of Question Period to some of the more mundane elements of the day. But I hope that they enjoy this experience and when they look back on it after

having served here that it proves to be a rewarding experience and gives them a whole new appreciation and involvement hopefully in elements of public life.

I always tell young classes whenever I meet with any of the classes that come to tour that are from my constituency to take an interest in politics, because I think, as we all know, politics touches us every day of our lives, whether it is municipal or school divisions or provincial or federal or whatever level of government it might be. So take an interest in it but most importantly take an interest in it because at the end of the day it comes down to people. You have an opportunity to come in contact with people from all backgrounds, all walks of life, and that really is the most rewarding aspect of being involved in politics, whether you are a candidate or a volunteer or whatever role you play in terms of supporting our political process.

I, like everybody on our side, want to congratulate the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the new members of cabinet. I wish them well with their challenges, with their responsibilities. They certainly will be faced with a great deal of hard work, a number of challenges, a number of difficult issues in the weeks and months and years ahead. I certainly wish them well with those issues and with those decisions.

It is always, I think, in experiencing this for the first time being in opposition, a mixed mood you have. You certainly want our government to perform well and you want Manitoba to perform well and so on; but, of course, with the view that we would like to be back on that side as soon as possible, at the next earliest opportunity, we want them to give us some opportunities and some issues to portray a different vision for Manitoba. I am sure we will have that opportunity over the weeks and months ahead. So it is, on the one hand, that I wish them well and offer them my best, but we will certainly be continuing to hold them accountable and offering some alternatives. But, having had the opportunity to serve in various aspects, I know it takes an awful lot of commitment and an awful lot of hard work, an awful lot of dedication, and I wish each and every one of them nothing but the best with their challenges.

I, too, want to congratulate everybody who was elected in this last election, all of the MLAs, all 57, and particularly the new members because for them this is an especially exciting time, to be in this House for the very first time, to be given the opportunity to represent the people of their constituency. Those of us who are elected for not the first time can certainly remember and identify with the thrill and excitement and everything that goes with being elected for the very first time. So, while I congratulate all 57, I offer special congratulations and best wishes to the newly elected members on all sides of the House. I am particularly pleased with the five new members we have on our side of the House coming again from a good cross-section of backgrounds, community involvement, commitment to their province. I am extremely thrilled and pleased with what I have seen of the qualities and capabilities and performance of our five new members on this side of the House, whether it has been in our caucus or in any other kind of environment or forum.

I also want to congratulate our Leader, the member for Tuxedo (Mr. Filmon), for his outstanding contribution and commitment to the people of Manitoba. There will be future opportunities to talk more about the many accomplishments of our Leader, but I want to say what an honour and a privilege it has been for me to serve with him to date, particularly to serve with him in approximately nine years in government. As everybody knows, our government represented Manitoba for over 11 years. It certainly has been an honour and a privilege to serve with the member for Tuxedo, and to be a part of his vision which has been said on so many occasions to make Manitoba the very best place to live, to work, to invest and, most importantly, to raise a family. His vision and his policies will not only benefit Manitobans today, as they have had for the past few years, but they will benefit Manitobans for many, many years to come. I believe that that will continue to be recognized by Manitobans well into the future.

So, at this point in time, I offer some very brief congratulations to our Leader, and I look forward to having a future opportunity to say

more about the role he played, not only here in the province of Manitoba but indeed right across this great country and in other aspects, issues that touched our province and our country in other parts of the world.

I, too, like everybody, want to thank the people of my constituency, the people of Kirkfield Park for once again allowing me to represent them, for electing me for a third term. I have also had the privilege to represent that area on our Winnipeg City Council for three terms as well, so to date that represents about 17 years of service to the people of Kirkfield Park and the surrounding area, and that is certainly again a privilege and honour for me personally. I think it is also a very humbling experience, to go through the electoral process, to see the number of people who come out and work so hard on your behalf, that put in countless hours of dedication and door-knocking and preparation of information and phone canvassing and telephone answering and all of the things that go into an election at any level. It certainly is an honour to represent the people of that particular area, a part of Winnipeg that I have now lived in for over 26 years. I have been involved in with other community activities in our community club and had the opportunity to raise our two children. They went entirely through the school system and the community clubs, being born and raised and growing up in that part of the city of Winnipeg.

Kirkfield Park is a great community, not unlike so much of Manitoba and so many communities right across our great province. It has good community spirit; it has great community involvement. We have a number of outstanding facilities, whether it is our recreational facilities or our other community facilities. We also are home to the Winnipeg Police Academy. We are home to the St. James Museum. We, of course, are home to the Grace Hospital, which is very important to that part of our city and, indeed, all of Manitoba. We have library services and so on, so it is a wonderful community within the city of Winnipeg. I am certainly very pleased and proud to be living in that part of Winnipeg.

I want to move on now, Mr. Speaker, with some comments about the throne speech, and my

comments are not going to be so much as to what is in the speech, but more so what is not in the speech. That is the area of concern I have with the throne speech that was delivered recently and I am going to touch on three issues. Time permitting, it would be nice to cover a number of other issues, but my focus is really going to be on three areas: one, the whole issue of the commitment to fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, and so on; another issue will be the issue of our economy and the importance of our economy in terms of jobs and the revenues that government requires, and so on; and I do want to spend a few minutes commenting on some health care issues.

Financial management is something that is, I believe, of significant importance to governments at all levels and obviously extremely important for the future of our province and provinces right across Canada and the future of Canada. I do not think I can stress enough the importance of living within our means and balancing our books on a year-to-year basis.

I think in this last election it was really encouraging to see all parties running on that kind of a platform. That is something that we did not have just four or five years ago in Manitoba, something that we have not had for many years in Manitoba. I think in many respects that was extremely positive, and I think a compliment to us in terms of the leadership and vision that our provinces show in this whole area of living within our means and balancing our books. It is certainly important for the province today and well into the future to balance our books and live within our means.

* (1540)

We were one of the first provinces in all of Canada to recognize that. Going back into the late '80s, early '90s, I think most who look back at the history of provinces would recognize it was really Manitoba and New Brunswick that led the way in terms of working towards living within our means. We were one of the first provinces in Canada to actually balance our books and deliver a balanced budget. I certainly was pleased to have the opportunity back in 1995 to introduce that first balanced budget on

behalf of my colleagues, our caucus and our government at that time.

Since then we have delivered on four balanced budgets: 1995-96, 1996-97, '97-98, and '98-99. We just need to look at the most recently released Public Accounts for 1998-99 by the current Minister of Finance, and these of course are audited Public Accounts by the Provincial Auditor. It shows that our operating budget had a surplus for the year 1998-99 of \$31 million. They were budgeting a surplus of \$23 million, so we exceeded that target.

At the same time we did face some spending pressures. We were able to put some additional resources into very important spending areas such as health and other areas. In fact, if you look at some of the expenditure amounts, you will see that there were additional resources put into health and other elements of our budget.

So that represents the fourth balanced budget delivered here in the province of Manitoba. Of course, we tabled our fifth balanced budget back in April of this year. I will discuss some of the elements of that in a little more detail in a few minutes.

As well, we are paying down the debt in the province of Manitoba. We are paying it down on a schedule of less than 30 years. We are paying \$75 million a year. Last year in Manitoba we were able to double our debt payment to \$150 million. Again, I would hope everybody could recognize the importance of getting that debt down, which will reduce our interest costs and allow us to dedicate those resources in other areas.

Hopefully that is the kind of thing, whether it is your personal household, whether it is your business, whatever you are involved with, you recognize the importance of paying down that debt and freeing up those resources either for future tax reductions or for future spending requirements in areas like health and education.

Today in Canada we are the lowest cost overall government in all of Canada on a per capita basis, again a compliment to the efficiency in many aspects of the delivery of

public services right across the entire government.

As well, in terms of recognition of the fiscal performance of our government, last year the credit rating for the Province of Manitoba was increased to a AA by both Moody's and Standard and Poor's, increasing our rating to the same as the Province of Ontario, where only two provinces in Canada today, the Province of Alberta and the Province of British Columbia, have higher credit ratings.

That is a direct contrast to what happened in the 1980s when our credit rating was reduced down to an A rating because of some of the concerns expressed by those bond-rating agencies at that particular point in time. So, again, that certainly is a compliment to the overall fiscal performance of Manitoba over these last several years.

At the same time, the Province of Manitoba has been able to borrow money at the second lowest interest rate of any province in all of Canada. That again is a compliment to the fiscal and financial performance of this province over the last several years. What that basically means is people right across this country and outside of Canada are prepared to take a lower return on their investment on their bond because of the confidence they have had in the overall economic and fiscal performance of the Province of Manitoba.

In fact, when I met about a year and a half, two years ago with one of the vice-governors of the Bank of Canada, he said one of the main reasons we are enjoying interest rates at the lowest level in 30 to 40 years, and I think we can all recognize how important low interest rates are to the growth of our economy in the creation of jobs, he said one of the single most important reasons why that is happening today is because governments are finally living within their means and balancing their books. He was extremely complimentary of the government of Manitoba, our government at that time, for being a leader in that area and charting a path that all governments across Canada are now following today to various degrees.

I cannot talk about balanced budgets without referring to our balanced budget legislation that the experts have called the most comprehensive in all of Canada. That balanced budget legislation not only requires that we balance our books each and every year, it also requires that we actually pay down the debt in the province of Manitoba. There is a schedule right in that legislation that requires us to pay down our debt in less than 30 years, Mr. Speaker. It also provides protection for the taxpayers of Manitoba, where the government cannot increase personal income taxes, corporate income taxes, the payroll tax or the sales tax without going to the people of Manitoba on a province-wide referendum.

As much as the NDP supported the balanced budget legislation during this last election, that again is in direct contrast to what they did when the legislation was in fact introduced, because we all recall that at that particular point in time, the government today actually voted against that balanced budget legislation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, people like the member for Crescentwood described that balanced budget legislation, he said he is sorry to have to rise on a bill that is destined to make Manitoba the laughing stock of the financial management world.

At the time the Leader of the Opposition, the current Premier (Mr. Doer), said if you want to have people starving to death in our streets because you have a silly balanced budget legislation. That is what the NDP said back when the legislation was introduced back in 1995. They were certainly singing a different tune during the election where they supported that legislation, and we will continue to hold them accountable to that commitment.

An Honourable Member: What happened in the last year?

Mr. Stefanson: I will get there in just a minute. Be patient. Be patient. We will certainly be holding them accountable for living within that balanced budget legislation and fulfilling that election promise that they made to Manitobans, that they will respect the balanced budget legislation and work towards balanced budgets here in the province of Manitoba.

I state the obvious. I hope I state the obvious, that budgets, I think as we all know in our household or in our business or in government, are a financial plan that is put in place at the start of the year. Another thing I hope we all recognize is that any budget, whether it is our household or our business or government, has to be managed day in and day out. That is why we have a number of processes in place. That is why we have a Treasury Board Committee of Cabinet which deals with all of the expenditures of government on a weekly basis, or certainly when we were there that Committee of Cabinet meets at a minimum of every week. Once you get into the budget process, that Committee of Cabinet meets day in and day out working on the budget. So that is part of a process to continue to work at managing the budget, to manage and control your expenditures throughout the year.

A budget is not simply something that you put in place and go into cruise control or throw up your hands and think because a document was submitted at one point in time it automatically is going to unfold 365 days later. If you do not continue to work at that budget, do not continue to manage it, do not continue to deal with the issues, obviously that budget can go in a number of different directions.

I want to talk about the recent review that was commissioned by the current government, Mr. Speaker, and this is the Deloitte and Touche review compiled November 17 of this year. I think it is important to recognize what this document is at this particular point in time. It is a compilation of expenditure requests coming from within the various departments and some of the organizations that are funded by the government of Manitoba. That is what it is. In fact, the accounting firm itself makes that point in many cases throughout the report. In fact, if you were to go, as one example, to page 7 of the report, this group, Deloitte and Touche, states very clearly that given the current and existing focus of the budgetary and statutory frameworks on the consolidated fund, this is the perspective that has been adopted for the purposes of producing a quick snapshot of the province's financial position requested by the government for this interim report.

The same report goes on to talk about, on page 5, if members have an opportunity to read it: however, we have not conducted a verification process with respect to expenditure or revenue projections for individual departments and programs.

So what this report represents, in many cases, is a compilation of future expenditure projections coming from a number of departments and a number of organizations that are funded by departments, organizations like our hospital authorities and like individual hospitals. So that is not uncommon. We faced these kinds of things in every single budget that we brought down over the last 11 years. Every budget had pressures of one type or another, had pressures on expenditure, had different adjustments to revenue. In some years our revenues exceeded our projections and in other years we had revenue reductions in some areas. That is all part of managing your budget and still living within your means. If you have the commitment to live within your means, then you work hard at it to make sure that it happens, and you take the appropriate steps to ensure that it happens.

When I look at the government today, they have a number of options available to them in terms of continuing to address the 1999-2000 budget and making sure that this budget is in fact balanced and they fulfil the commitment that they made to Manitobans. Obviously in some areas expenditures will lapse. That does happen in some departmental areas where, because of various circumstances, the money is not required because of timing issues or whatever it might be. So, again, expenditures can lapse in certain areas.

* (1550)

There is the whole issue of controlling your expenditures and looking at what steps you can take to live within your means, and that comes down to issues like having a vacancy rate target if you need to do that during the year, establishing a target for all of your departments to say: this is going to be the vacancy rate and work toward living within that vacancy rate thereby saving us X amount of money.

As well, when it comes to the hospitals, I am hoping and assuming that the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) has said to those hospitals and those health authorities: give me the financial impact of living within your means. And once he or she gets that information—in this case, he gets that information—then they can start to assess whether or not steps can be made to reduce some of those requests and requirements and relate it to what impact it will have on patient services right across Manitoba.

Those are all prudent, responsible things that you have to be doing if you are going to manage your budget. As well, there is the whole issue of revenue. It is interesting that when the members opposite were in opposition they always criticized us for understating our revenue. We were always criticized: you are understating, you are low-balling, you are being too conservative, and so on and so forth. I notice in this Deloitte and Touche report here, when we talk about revenue—if you go to page 9 of the report, this is a quote on page 9—that: Manitoba Finance is currently of the view that the revenue will not be eroded by this revised forecast but may very well be increased beyond the \$41.7 million reflected.

Now I know that the government will be receiving revised revenue numbers very shortly. They will be receiving revised numbers from the federal government, if they have not received those already, on personal income tax and corporate income tax and equalization. We are anxiously awaiting to see the performance of those numbers, and based on Manitoba's strong economy, I think that there is a good likelihood that our revenues as well will be stronger than originally forecast.

Of course, at the end of the day, there is always our savings account, our Fiscal Stabilization Account, that still has some \$270 million in it. That is an account, by the way, which again the NDP opposed. Going back a few years they were always telling us: spend that money, spend the money, drain it out of that account. I think it was spent 10 times over by members opposite when they were in opposition. Thankfully, we were responsible with that account. That account today has

approximately \$270 million, and one area that it can be utilized for, to offset an expenditure, is in the whole area of supporting the farmers in southwest Manitoba.

We said, when we announced our support for farmers in southwest Manitoba, our first priority was to get the federal government on board to support farmers in that region, something that the federal government should be doing. I think we all agree on that, but we also indicated that—if for whatever reason the federal government did not come on board, something that we would disagree with, and we would certainly state our case as to why we were still going to support the people of that region and the farmers in that part of our province—we would take the money out of our savings account.

When you look at the Deloitte and Touche report, it shows the expenditure. It does not show the opportunity to take the \$66 million out of the savings account that has been accumulated entirely throughout the mandate of our government over the last 11 and a half years. So there are options and opportunities that are available to the government to deal with the 1999 budget, and I can only encourage them to fulfill their commitment to balance the budget, something that we support, something that all Manitobans support, and if we were the government, we would be balancing the 1999-2000 budget.

I want to touch on a comment made by the current Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), where he attempted to distance himself from the current 1999 budget on a radio program that I happened to be on with him saying it is not their budget. I remind the current Minister of Finance and all of his colleagues that the NDP for the first time—I do not know if it was the first time ever or first time in a long time—voted for it, the 1999 budget. Every single member of the NDP stood up when they were on this side of the House. They all stood up and they voted for the 1999 budget.

The NDP in this last election supported the balanced budget legislation, ran on a mandate of balancing the books and supporting the legislation. The NDP supported some of the

issues addressed right here in the Deloitte and Touche report, Mr. Speaker. They supported the settlement reached with the nurses, they supported the arbitration reached with the doctors and so on. I believe they also supported, judging by the resolution recently passed, the financial support for farmers in southwestern Manitoba. So, again, for the current Minister of Finance to try and say that the 1999-2000 budget is not their budget, they have no ownership, no responsibility to it, I say that is absolutely, totally incorrect, inappropriate, and he and his colleagues should get on with governing the province for this year, taking responsibility and being sure that they balance the books for the year 1999-2000.

When I talk about finances, you do not need to take my word about the reputation that Manitoba achieved over the last several years. I got a long list here, and I will not read all of them, but a long list of the financial community and nothing but accolades about the Province of Manitoba over these last several years. I will read a couple because I know the member for Minto (Ms. Mihychuk), formerly for St. James, is extremely interested in hearing what the financial community and the investment dealers and so on say about Manitoba's finances over these last two years.

The Bank of Montreal, just in August of this year, talked about the province's fiscal situation is sustainable, that our debt levels are low, the debt to GDP ratio is on a downward track and tax rates are coming down. Manitoba has the third lowest debt to GDP ratio among the provinces and will likely move into second place by the end of the current fiscal year as the debt falls even lower, Mr. Speaker.

The TD quarterly economic forecast in June said Manitoba is to lead the western provinces in 1999. Manitoba's economy, the least reliant on resource-based industries among the western provinces. It is expected to post the strongest growth in the West in 1999.

The Investment Dealers Association in May of this year said Manitoba public finances remain on solid ground. In fact that same organization, that is an organization that represents all of the investment dealers from

across Canada, they just last year said that Manitoba has the best managed finances in all of Canada in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker. That is not me saying that; that is the Investment Dealers Association of Canada.

I could go on and read quotes from Wood Gundy and the Conference Board of Canada, but rather than do that I will certainly encourage members to get copies of all these and read it for themselves. I do want to quote a comment or two made by organizations like Moody's Investors when they upgraded the Province of Manitoba in September of 1998 to AA rating. They said that this rating upgrade reflects Manitoba's strengthened fiscal performance as evidenced by consecutive budgetary surpluses commencing in fiscal 1996 year ending March 31 and the expectation that the fiscal balance will be maintained for the medium term as required by the province's balanced budget legislation.

The buoyant provincial economy, they talk about the continued progress in lowering the provincial debt burden in accordance with the government's clearly defined debt retirement plan. That was Moody's. Similarly, Standard and Poor's when they upgraded the Province of Manitoba in September of 1998, they said, and I quote: The rating change recognizes the government's ongoing efforts to improve the province's financial position. Manitoba has achieved recurring balanced operations since 1996, strong budget legislation, the accumulation of contingency reserves and prudent fiscal planning should maintain favourable budgetary performance over the medium term.

That is what bond-rating agencies were saying about the Province of Manitoba and our fiscal performance over these last many years.

I want to move on, Mr. Speaker, to talk about our economy for a few minutes, which I know is of interest to all members, particularly the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines (Ms. Mihychuk). I would hope we can all appreciate the importance of a strong economy, what it means for jobs for all Manitobans, jobs for our youth, opportunities for our youth. A strong economy gives governments the revenues to

provide the quality health care, the quality education and so on. So I would hope that it is something that we are all committed to, doing everything that we can to achieve a strong, vibrant economy in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I could go on at length outlining just what has happened to Manitoba's economy over the last few years. In fact, just the other day we had the November numbers for Manitoba, and as I mentioned in a question on Friday, Manitoba's unemployment rate is 5.3 percent in November, second lowest in Canada, year-to-date employment up 11,300, a record number of Manitobans employed at 561,900. Manitoba over the last several years has really been doing extremely well when it has come to our economic performance. In fact, if you take the last four full years—and I am sure 1999 would also show the same, but we have compiled the final year-end statistics for the period 1995 to 1998. If you go through all of these, and again, unfortunately, I will not have the time to outline all of them, but to give you a sense of what was happening in Manitoba for that four-year period from 1995 to 98, when it came to economic growth, our rate of real economic growth outpaced the national average in every single one of those years. It is set to do the same thing again in 1999.

* (1600)

When it came to jobs over that period, Manitoba's job growth outpaced the national average two out of the four years. All of the jobs were in full-time jobs and we had job growth of 34,200. When it came to the unemployment rate over that period, our rate went down to 5.6 percent, tied for the lowest in all of Canada.

When it came to capital investment, private capital investment in Manitoba had grown faster than the national average in every single one of those years, reaching an all-time high of \$3.9 billion. When it came to export gains, which have been a key source of growth for the province, the total value of foreign exports reached almost \$8 billion in 1998, a 75 percent gain in that four-year period, the third highest growth in all of Canada and twice the growth of all of Canada.

When it came to manufacturing, Manitoba's manufacturing sector has been a major force. The total value of manufacturing shipments grew faster than the national average in every single one of those last three years and again had the second largest provincial increase over that period.

When it came to consumer spending, Manitoba retail sales over the last four years grew faster than anywhere else in Canada except Alberta. Between 1995 and '98 we grew by 26 percent and Canada grew by only 19 percent.

Those are just some of the economic statistics, Mr. Speaker, and I could go on at length, but I think I make the point that our economy has performed extremely well over these last several years, and that really is a compliment to all Manitobans, particularly the Manitobans who are out there adapting to the challenges, taking the risks, investing their money, creating the jobs. They are the ones that are making all of this happen here in the province of Manitoba. But having said that, there is no doubt that the provincial government has a role to play in terms of the competitive atmosphere, the competitive climate that we can create and obviously supporting education, training, quality health, infrastructure, and so on.

I want to touch on the issue of competitiveness because during our 11 years one issue that comes into play is the whole issue of taxes. Over that 11-year period on a net basis, from 1988 to 1999, taxes are down on a net basis after you factor in the overall decreases plus some adjustments that were put in place in the early '90s in tobacco taxes and elsewhere. The net annual reduction in taxes to Manitobans is \$247.1 million each and every year. There is no doubt that that had an impact in terms of our ability to compete and to create jobs. Over and above that there were a number of temporary measures that total another \$138 million, and those are temporary measures like the new small business tax holiday, the Mineral Exploration Incentive Program, the oil and gas production tax rate reduction, the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, and so on. Those were temporary provisions that were put in place that created a tremendous stimulus here in the province of Manitoba, creating more economic opportunities

and more jobs, Mr. Speaker, when you look at some of our tax credits like the research and development tax credit which has had a significant impact on research and development in our province, like the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit which has been a part of that incredible growth in manufacturing investment, and like the film industry tax credit which has seen that industry grow from \$10 million, just a few years ago, to close to a hundred million dollars today.

So my comment for members opposite is that you can play a significant role. I know in the throne speech you refer to education, and I acknowledge education is an important element of our economy and contributes significantly to our economy, but it is still only one element. That is what I am reminding members across to be cognizant of all of these elements and to be a part of addressing all of these elements. When you look at this throne speech, there is virtually very little, if any, mention at all of the importance of addressing issues like tax reductions.

In fact, just to conclude on the issue of taxes, I just outlined for you the significant reductions in taxes over our mandate. In fact, if you look at personal income tax alone, back in 1988 our tax rate was 54 percent. On January 1, 2000, as a result of our changes, that tax rate is going to be down to 47 percent. You contrast all of that to what happened from 1982 to '87 under the old NDP. Mr. Speaker, they increased a number of taxes, and the total annual increase of those taxes I believe amounted to some \$800 million. Again, I could list all of them, whether it was the payroll tax or the sales tax or the capital tax or the diesel fuel tax, and that list goes on and on. So I certainly hope that the new Today's NDP will not be repeating what we saw in the 1980s under the previous NDP government.

Other areas where government can play a role is in the whole area of access to capital. We have seen significant growth in opportunity in terms of accessing capital. We know that businesses need capital to invest to create jobs, and that is why we were a part of creating the Crocus Fund, which today has over a hundred million dollars to invest in Manitoba businesses,

the ENSIS Fund, another labour-sponsored venture fund that is investing here in Manitoba, why we supported other venture capital funds to be sure that businesses and individuals had access to the capital that they need to invest to create the jobs and see our economy continue to grow and prosper.

So there are a number of things that can be done and should be done by the government to keep our economy growing.

I happened to notice a release that just came out from the government today, and I am sure the member for Minto (Ms. Mihychuk) is interested in this. They are talking about call centres. I know members opposite were—I know the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) is interested in this as well—somewhat critical of call centres. I think some of their colleagues called them McJobs and were critical of any support or any encouragement to bring these kinds of jobs to Manitoba, but now I notice in this press release, probably put out by the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines—that right in this press release, Today's NDP, today's government, says: Since 1994, call centre jobs in Manitoba have increased by an estimated 1,000 per year. There are currently about 8,000 Manitobans employed in the industry. Call centres in the province generate approximately \$184 million in salaries annually. Well, I say to them thank you very much for the compliment for us being a part of seeing that significant growth in jobs and in economic opportunities for Manitobans and Manitoba families. That is in a release just put out today by the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines (Ms. Mihychuk).

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a comment or two about health care before my time runs out. We have been asking some questions of late. I notice that a major part of what the current Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) is doing is really fulfilling the comprehensive health care plan that we had put in place prior to the election. In fact, they made a handful of promises during the election. Those are the commitments that are not being fulfilled. But the majority of initiatives that are underway are initiatives that were underway in this health care plan. I know I will have the opportunity to speak to this at a future date, and I look forward

to talking about health care and the number of positive initiatives that were outlined in our document.

I also want to just quickly touch on—there was a recent article in one of our papers that talked about the last 18 months having four major events, talked about the Brier, talked about the 1998 Grey Cup, talked about the world record-setting World Junior Hockey Championships, and it talked about the Pan Am Games. We were proud to be a part of supporting those initiatives along with thousands and thousands of Manitobans. The real compliment goes to the volunteers, the people who worked day in and day out to do an absolutely outstanding job of showcasing Manitoba, not only across Canada, but throughout the world. So we were certainly proud to represent Manitobans with those very important initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to conclude by thanking the people who supported me in this last election: my campaign workers, my volunteers, my executive, my election team, all of the people of Kirkfield Park.

I would be remiss not to thank my personal family, my immediate family and my extended family for their ongoing support and commitment.

It truly is one of the greatest opportunities one can have to be elected by the public to represent them at any level of government. It can be an extremely rewarding and positive experience for all of us, and it certainly is a humbling experience.

I am very honoured and privileged and pleased to have the opportunity to be back here representing the people of Kirkfield Park. I thank you for the opportunity to make those few comments.

*(1610)

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I first of all wish to congratulate you for your new position—I think that reflects well on our House—as our first elected Speaker. I am confident that you will guide this House into a successful

session this year and in the future through the whole governance of our party during the session, which started actually on September 21.

I am very honoured and pleased to be the representative of the new riding of Minto. Minto is a riding that basically consists of the west end, a riding that actually represents an area that is more homogenous than my previous riding, which was composed of two very distinct communities, the old St. James riding and the west end. Now I am very fortunate to be in the true west end. There are still parts of it, some would argue, have been disjointed north of Wellington between Wellington and Notre Dame. That section, unfortunately, is in another riding, but they too are represented by a strong member, who is, in fact, our Deputy Speaker and holds that area that still considers it the west end and the other part known as Weston. Those communities have a lot of things in common as well.

It is basically a working-class community, a lot of people, families, young families, seniors, a community that is very multicultural, Mr. Speaker. That is reflected in our constituents but also in the businesses that are found in the west end.

I would invite all members to enjoy our multicultural community on Ellice and Sargent in particular, where you can get foods from around the world, some of the best, served right here. It is a challenge. I represent that. I feel there is a certain obligation to try those foods and, being from an ethnic background that sincerely loves food, this is a challenge.

Not only that, but I happen to be appointed the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines, and that first part of my portfolio, I sort of call I am the minister of banquets. So I get to go to a lot of banquets in the morning, noon, cocktail parties in the evening, and business is done in these social events as well as in meetings. I look to spread this happiness, but be careful, as there are certain obligations that can be challenging. So I have also taken on a rigorous program of going to my alma mater, the University of Winnipeg, where I am a regular jogger. So it is a scheduling problem, but I do go there. They have a wonderful track at the University of

Winnipeg, available to all members of the community, and it is something that people should check out if they have the opportunity.

The community has a very large ethnic representation, Portuguese, Filipino. We have a number of ethnic community centres. The Portuguese, Lebanese, Irish, the Swedish are all found within the riding of Minto. In addition, it is what I believe to be one of those gems of Winnipeg. The west end, in particular, has the attribute of being convenient to virtually everything in the city. It is within walking distance of work, it has affordable housing, it has good neighbours, and it is a good place to raise a family, Mr. Speaker.

Just last Saturday, I had the opportunity to officially open our constituency office on Sargent Avenue. At that event, we shared the constituency office with two other levels of government. We have the opportunity to share with the federal member, Pat Martin, myself as the provincial representative, and our city councillor, Harvey Smith. This not only is cost effective, it provides better service for the community by expanding the number of hours of the day, providing service for constituents so that they do not have to go to three separate centres. It just makes plain sense, and I would encourage other members to take that opportunity if possible. We were very fortunate to have over 200 people attend that opening, and I look forward to providing them with good, reliable and extended service to our community.

On December 5, just last weekend, I also had the opportunity to host my fifth Christmas parade reception where we give out a few treats, homemade cookies and hot chocolate, to the community. It was a good parade, bigger than it has been in the past. There were more floats, but it could be I think an opportunity to really present what is available in Winnipeg and can be further enhanced in terms of its participation by business and nongovernment and government representatives. So I would encourage people to come out and also, in particular, to participate in the Santa Claus Parade.

This weekend was also an opportunity to go to the HOP AGM, and HOP stands for home ownership partnership. It is a program which is

sponsored by the WDA, by the Real Estate Board, and by the Winnipeg securities commission. Monies are made available to families by renovating homes, mostly in the west end, and I believe they said six or eight homes on Home Street have been purchased, renovated and then sold to families that are, by definition, low income and first-time homeowners. They must be eligible to receive a CMHC mortgage at 5 percent and can take 50 percent of that off by sweat equity, so it does make it affordable. It is still a challenge for some families to find the deposit, including there are additional fees, as we all know, of land titles and legal fees that add up, but it has provided the opportunity for many families to purchase their first home. In fact, those families were at the reception on Saturday, and it was a pleasure to see a partnership between government and business and the community working. That is a positive step.

In terms of home renewal, I am pleased to be part of a government which has made a commitment to invest in the older neighbourhoods of Winnipeg. Not only does it make sense for the people who live in those ridings or in those communities, but it makes sense for those communities that surround the older parts of Winnipeg and for those that are indeed not part of Winnipeg at all. A healthy, strong and vibrant core is important to all Manitobans.

One of the challenges that we are facing, and it has not been very common—in fact, there was really one major fire in our area and that had to do with the Chan Medical Clinic [phonetic]. Previous to that, there were isolated cases and mostly garbage bin fires and other things, but we really had not been hit by this rash of fires which is very, very unfortunate to the city of Winnipeg.

Because of that incident, I called a community meeting and we had the opportunity to bring together the levels of government, as well as a psychologist from the Winnipeg School Division, as well as the police, Fire Department, the city councillor and myself, to discuss some of the proactive things that we could do in our neighbourhood and that includes informing people on how to secure their residences and make sure that sheds and garages are properly secured, that lighting is available, that there is no

garbage or debris left around because that provides an opportunity for people to torch it.

In addition, it was pointed out that the city had made available during the month of November a pickup program which took larger articles that were left abandoned beside garages or in lanes. This program was then extended, but during the month of November we committed to take a fire patrol made up of our office as well as community representatives to go up and down the riding to check both front streets and back for any material that could possibly be a source of a fire.

So we are pleased to say that we did that work and had the opportunity to inform homeowners of this option and will continue to work proactively with community members in dealing with the challenges in our community.

In addition to that, I had an opportunity to mail out to the community reminding them of the various measures that could be taken and reminding them that there is a law requiring all residences and buildings, businesses, to have clear numbering on the front and the back of their building. This by-law has been in effect for some time, and we wanted to point out that indeed that was a requirement of every homeowner, to have that prominently displayed in the back of their properties.

It has been just over two months that I have been in the position of Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines, and it has been a busy two months. It has been a real opportunity. I am very honoured and pleased to be in the position. Quite frankly, it has been a learning curve. I do enjoy a challenge and it has been that, to say the least. The opportunity to meet many prominent people and many visionaries and entrepreneurs has been an honour for me, and I look forward to that.

* (1620)

I have been going out and meeting with community groups, with business groups, with Chambers across Manitoba, and have been well received. Our message is basically that the good things that are happening in Manitoba will continue. We look for their support and we

continue to work with them to make Manitoba a profitable and good place for Manitobans to do business and to work in.

Unemployment levels are low. Business endorsement is strong. The bond ratings are continuing in a very strong mode for the new government, which I think is a very strong signal, somewhat critical of the previous government's lack of financial responsibility during the last year, but they are confident that our government will put us back on the road of financial management, and I am confident that we will.

In terms of trade, my first trade meeting was held in Seattle, and I have to say that was an experience that I will never forget. I have had the opportunity to joke a little bit about Seattle being a riot, but it was, in all sincerity, I think, a sign of hope really. The protesters, for the most part, were very sincere, creative. There were a lot of young people there who were interested in politics, interested about world trade. You know, we have not seen that type of passion since the '60s, and at that time I was a little bit too young. I was a bystander. I was about 10. So this was my first opportunity. It is kind of a different footing. Instead of being with the protesters, I was one of the establishment because I was representing Manitoba in the World Trade Organization. So it was an interesting position, but I have no qualms in saying that I was there and really felt that Manitoba had a lot on the table.

Agriculture, export subsidies were on the agenda. They are very important for Manitoba. In fact, Canada, in terms of export subsidies or in terms of agricultural subsidies, supports its farmers to the tune of 9 cents to the dollar. The Americans are at approximately 35 cents to each dollar, and the European market is up at 66 cents to every dollar. The point would be that our Canadian farmers, in particular our prairie farmers, are being particularly hard hit. So it was a real disappointment when I stood with the members from the Canadian delegation and from many other countries, mostly third world and developing countries, who really wanted to go to the table at the WTO because it provided an opportunity to try and raise these important issues with the two major leading countries or

groups; those are the Americans and the European Union. I am confident those issues will continue in other venues.

I have to say that the WTO as my first trade meeting was an eye opener. It was worthwhile, and provinces were represented. B.C. had a delegation of, I believe, one minister; Alberta had a minister; Saskatchewan had two ministers present. I was able to represent Manitoba. Quebec, I think, had seven in their delegation. The opportunity, of course, is to meet with the federal ministers who are at the front line. That is an important component of all of the trade negotiations.

I would urge Manitoba to continue to play an active role in these types of negotiations because it is important to be there and keep the focus on the important issues for Manitoba. We will continue to work towards expanding export and trade. We have seen a steady growth in exports from Manitoba. We will continue to actively try to enhance export activities.

In terms of mining, it has been a busy two months. We have successfully signed the first aboriginal mining protocol in Canada and, as far as I know, in North America, a protocol that was hung up by mistrust by the previous government and aboriginal communities. There was a blockage in terms of negotiations, and that whole protocol was going nowhere. We are very pleased to say that we have been working co-operatively with First Nations, have signed the protocol, and look forward to doing mining with communities, with aboriginal communities and in the North in a much more harmonious relationship.

In addition, we hosted our annual convention, the best ever, highest attendance at the mining convention. I understand from organizers that there were more sponsors at the trade show than ever in the past. In addition, more business was done in the Manitoba mines convention this year than has ever been done in the past. There was a real buzz in the mining convention at a time where mineral prices are still quite depressed. I have to say that it is very optimistic and very positive-looking for the mineral industry in Manitoba.

In addition, I had the opportunity to go and visit the communities of Leaf Rapids, Lynn Lake and Flin Flon. I think we were up north within two weeks of being appointed, and I took my deputy minister. This is a new portfolio for him, very pleased that he was able to do that, and he is learning mining as quickly as I am trying to learn industry and trade. It has been very fascinating. We also, at that time, took the director of Geological Services to those regions, because that is an area that is facing the closure of two mines, both in Leaf Rapids and in Lynn Lake. They are both heavily reliant on the mineral industry as an economic base. Diversification is absolutely essential. For that reason our government has pledged to hold a mining task force that will convene in the spring or next year—anyway we are hoping to start it in the spring, but it may be fall by the time we organize it—that will include industry, community, First Nations as well as government at the table talking about the mineral industry, the North, and having an economic development plan that is going to work for the long term.

In addition, I had the opportunity to visit the mineral industry head offices that are located in Toronto, to go and reach out to them, to talk about the advantage of doing mining in Manitoba. Those were extremely successful meetings that we had there, and I intend to continue to reach out to the mineral industry to promote our advantage.

Just last week I had, while in Seattle, on Wednesday, the opportunity to go to Spokane, Washington, where the Northwest Mining Association meets on an annual basis. Delegates there were expected to reach about 2,500 people were to register for that convention. They represent the mineral industry from Canada, the U.S., the whole western region. I would probably say for both nations, the mineral industry goes to that convention.

The number of delegates was down somewhat. There has been a reduction in the amount of interest in the U.S. There have been certain pressures on the industry in the U.S. I was there to again address delegates on the advantage of coming to Manitoba, that indeed we have found a process of working with First Nations and environmentalists that is endorsed

by all parties, and that is a first for any jurisdiction in North America.

So I am hopeful that we will see even more opportunities for mining in Manitoba. The first two months of office have been busy, and we hope to continue the good work in the future. As we deal with challenges, I am confident that we have a strong team representing the people of Manitoba as they never have before, with more women in our cabinet, with First Nations in cabinet, with multicultural representatives in our caucus. I would like to just say that we have representatives from the North, from rural, from the south and from urban Manitoba, which makes us a strong and competent team that I know Manitobans have confidence in and support.

* (1630)

I look forward to resolving some of the issues as promised in our election campaign in terms of health care, education and financial management. Those commitments were made in the election campaign and will be fulfilled.

Finally, I would like to just thank all of the volunteers who worked on my campaign, my family for putting up with me and helping, and for all of the community support that I get. I really appreciate it, and I hope that I am able to fulfill all of my obligations, even with my new role as minister. So I want to thank everybody who helped and continues to help, especially to my two little daughters, Hannah, who is now two, and Sarah, who is four, and my son, 17, and he still forgives me, I think. So to everybody who helped on the election, my thanks, and for your patience, thank you.

Mrs. Louise Dacquay (Seine River): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to publicly congratulate you on your election as Speaker. Although this can be a very challenging position, and I think I can certainly attest to that, I am confident that you will rise to every occasion and every challenge. I sincerely hope that all members of the Assembly recognize the sacrifices a Speaker makes: no voting privileges, no speeches or opportunities to speak on the record on behalf of your constituents, as well as no daily contact with

party members of your affiliation and an ongoing feeling of being part of the entire team.

You have already demonstrated, Mr. Speaker, that you are fair, and you are to be congratulated for a job well done. I support an elected Speaker, and I am pleased that the Manitoba Assembly has changed the rules. I do, however, have a concern, and that is that a rule change, in my opinion, is required to afford the Speaker the authority that is afforded the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speakers in all other provincial jurisdictions. Manitoba is the only Canadian jurisdiction that permits the challenge of every single Speaker's ruling without a substantive motion. Mr. Speaker, on your behalf, I would ask for the co-operation of all members in reviewing the current Manitoba practice.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of all of our table officers. I had the distinct privilege and pleasure of working with them over the last four years and a few months, and I can certainly tell you that they work many long hours. They have to change many game plans at the will and whim of the members of this Legislature, and I am not sure that all members recognize the commitment and dedication of our table officers. It is extremely extraordinary the diligence with which they function on a daily basis and, particularly when we are in speed-up, a lot of pressure.

I would also like to recognize our Clerk, Mr. Binx Remnant, who is the longest-serving Clerk in the Commonwealth. Thank you, Binx, for your dedication and commitment and the expertise you have afforded to all members of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly over the last 17 years.

I would also like to welcome the pages and wish you well. I trust that this will be an invaluable learning experience for you.

I would like to also extend a special welcome to all newly elected members of the Manitoba Legislature. This is, indeed, an honourable profession, and let us never forget, as my colleague for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith) so eloquently stated, that we are the 57 leaders of this wonderful province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I would be very remiss if I did not express my sincere appreciation to our Leader for the opportunities that he has afforded me since my election to this Legislature in 1990 and for his strong leadership. In my eyes, he will always be my Premier.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to have been re-elected as the MLA for the Seine River constituency for three consecutive terms. I want to thank my constituents for their vote of confidence. I am committed to working diligently on their behalf and to responding to the needs of my constituents. In my opinion, the best part of the role of an MLA is the opportunity to meet and work with our constituents. I also want to thank all the many volunteers that worked so diligently on my campaign, as well as thank my family, in particular my husband, who expended probably as many hours a day on my campaign as I did in his ongoing role as my signed chairperson.

Today I feel somewhat like my new colleagues in that I am speaking for the very first time. Until last week, when I gave a member's statement, it had been four years since I spoke in this Chamber on any issue on the record. I might just use my entire 40 minutes today to compensate for all that lost time.

When I first ran in 1990, Seine River constituency was a brand-new constituency because of redistribution. Because of the very rapid growth, my boundaries changed again in this most recent election in 1999. In fact, prior to the change in the boundaries, Seine River constituency had the largest number of electors in any constituency in Manitoba. In the most recent election, I lost approximately one-third of my previous voters. Seine River constituency continues to grow and development is ongoing.

Seine River has both an urban and a rural component. South of the Perimeter, better known as St. Germain, is definitely rural and has an agricultural base. There are several large market garden operations and several U-pick vegetable farms, and I am sure some of the members of this House have indeed availed themselves of the services of those operations in my constituency.

* (1640)

The urban portion of my constituency is extremely family-oriented, full of very many young families, a number of whom are first-time homeowners, and they are very actively involved in our community centre, the Dakota Community Club. This is the largest community centre in Winnipeg and without doubt the busiest. The recent addition of two large indoor rinks has been well received as they are booked well into 2001 on a year-round basis. The community centre has a large group of very dedicated and hardworking volunteers, and, Mr. Speaker, they are to be complimented for improving the quality of the lives of our children.

I would now like to put a few words on the record in relation to the recent throne speech. We listened intently to the Speech from the Throne, hoping to hear what plans this new government had to ensure that Manitoba's economy would continue to prosper and grow. Unfortunately for all Manitobans, especially Manitoba's business community, Today's NDP felt that the future of the province's economy was not important enough to merit more than three lines in the throne speech, and in those three lines, Mr. Speaker, Today's NDP failed to offer a plan for Manitoba's economic future.

In order for this government to provide the public services that all Manitobans need and deserve, our economy must continue to expand. In the last 10 years, government revenues have increased by more than \$1 billion despite massive cutbacks in federal transfer payments. That increase in revenue, due to the expansion and growth of our provincial economy, allowed us to invest in important public services such as health care, education and improvements to the province's infrastructure. The role of government is to help create an environment in which business can succeed. A strong and growing economy allows government to invest in education, to invest in health care and to also invest in our community. Running a deficit this year certainly will not help Manitoba's business community continue to keep Manitoba's economy as strong as it has been over the last few years.

The Premier (Mr. Doer) promised during the election campaign to take a balanced approach when dealing with business and labour. Balance, however, does not mean completely ignoring the business sector in Manitoba. This government must listen to and work with Manitoba's business community to ensure that our economy remains strong. So Today's NDP must come up with definite plans and a clear vision for managing the economy's considerable strength. They would do well to carefully examine the economic policies developed under our administration knowing that our government did much to make Manitoba an economic powerhouse. In fact, the strength of the provincial economy as cultivated by the previous administration was confirmed when the province retained its AA3 rating from the Moody's Investors Services of New York. The retention of this credit rating is in no small part due to the previous government's efforts to restore positive financial performance and to diversify the provincial economy following years of neglect at the hands of previous NDP administrations.

Manitobans are feeling particularly buoyant about the economy. Repeated balanced budgets and the sound fiscal policies practised by the former administration paved the way for record growth and development and clear sailing ahead. All around Manitoba, businesses are looking for workers. The service sector, the construction sector, high-skilled, high-tech positions are going wanting as the economy continues to thrive. The provincial economy continues to experience strong retail sales and an increase in export sales. From woodworkers to accountants, to engineers, to hog-barn managers, to computer programmers, Manitoba workers are in high demand. Help Wanted signs abound.

Mr. Speaker, the previous administration had a concrete plan to make sure Manitoba's economic ship was enjoying a smooth ride. We have clear evidence of how well that plan works. We need only look at Manitoba's diversified economy and its low unemployment rate. Consecutive surplus budgets, no major tax increases and a plan to pay off the province's accumulated debt all serve to send a message: Manitoba is open for business.

Throughout the election campaign, the No. 1 issue in my constituency of Seine River was taxes, both property taxes and income taxes. Once again in the throne speech, there was no mention of any plan for reducing taxes, particularly income taxes. In fact, Today's NDP is taking credit for the 1.5 percent reduction in income taxes which our administration had guaranteed in the last budget. Let us hope that Today's NDP will continue with the fine fiscal plans charted by the previous administration. Perish the thought that yesterday's NDP, well known for the fact that it had no definite plans, should seize control of the wheel and wreck Manitoba's currently buoyant economic ship on the rocky shores of fiscal mismanagement.

As a former educator, I also listened intently to what the throne speech had or did not have to say about education in Manitoba. In recent days, I have had the opportunity to listen to the Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Caldwell) as he provided his spin to his government's Speech from the Throne. I would like to join my colleagues in expressing my concerns about how the new administration intends to finance education in Manitoba. Today's NDP has indicated that they will be "providing stable and predictable funding in accord with economic growth."

Well, when one listens to the comments made by the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell), you are reminded of the fact that the NDP are currently in the process of defining exactly what constitutes economic growth. Again, they are attempting to discover another loophole through which to crawl.

May I remind the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) that during our administration we, in our 1998-99 budget, provided a 2.2 percent increase; in our 1999-2000 budget, we provided a further 2.6 percent increase; and we made a commitment to increase overall education funding again in 2000-2001 by a minimum of 2 percent.

Unlike members opposite, we did not scramble to redefine economic growth. Instead our administration provided school divisions with the ability to plan in advance by making a

commitment of a minimum 2 percent increase in the following budget year.

By forcing school divisions to wait until the new government tries to decide what they mean by economic growth, the new government is failing to provide students and educators with any measure of stability. In order to plan effectively, school divisions need to be able to do some long-term planning. If Today's NDP administration is not going to clarify what type of funding will be made available to school divisions, these divisions will be hamstrung when it comes to their long-term development plans.

It would appear that Today's NDP have no definite plans about how to manage the education system other than to issue directives aimed at scuttling the effective programs offered by the previous administration.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to add a few comments regarding the decision by Today's NDP to cancel Grade 3 standards tests. The parents that I have spoken to in my constituency, and I have not solicited these phone calls, are not supportive of this decision. In fact, in the recent newsletter I received yesterday, the St. Vital School Division has indicated it will continue to administer the Grade 6 math test and the Senior 1 English language arts test as divisional tests. At the Grade 6 level, the test will count for 15 percent of the student's final mark. At the Senior 1 level, it will count for 20 percent. Senior 4 students in all St. Vital School Division schools will write the provincial examinations in the prescribed subjects of mathematics and English language arts.

* (1650)

I know that parents want to be regularly informed of how well their children are doing in school. Standards tests are an important tool in assessing children's progress and allowing for prompt remedial action.

As a former councillor with the City of Winnipeg, I was also disturbed by the lack of consideration given to civic issues in the throne speech. The throne speech indicated that major urban centres such as Winnipeg and Brandon

face serious challenges and that Winnipeg's downtown commercial areas and its older neighbourhoods need revitalization. However, once again, Today's NDP had no definite plan for how to deal with these serious issues.

You vaguely indicate that you will work in close consultation with local residents and concentrate the resources of all three levels of government. Does this mean you will be lobbying the federal government for a new infrastructure works program in order to continue the improvements made in past years? I am sure your administration has some plans for improving our urban areas, but you seem extremely slow to share them with Manitobans.

I look forward to being the critic for matters pertaining to Culture, Heritage and Tourism, and the Status of Women, as well as multiculturalism. Over the course of the previous administration much had been done to protect and promote our considerable arts, cultural and historical resources. Our growing arts and cultural industries employ thousands of Manitobans making an annual contribution to the province's gross domestic product of nearly half a million dollars and created jobs for 19,000 Manitobans. Our government was proud to support organizations such as the province's many arts and theatre groups and the multitude of groups putting on festivals around Manitoba. Anyone who has been to events such as Folklorama, the Ukrainian Festival, the Fringe Festival or the Folk Festival knows that, in addition to attracting Manitobans, these festivals draw thousands of visitors from outside the province, visitors who also require food and lodging and whose presence contributes to the overall health of the provincial economy. I hope the new administration continues to support arts and cultural organizations knowing the positive impact they have on all Manitobans.

Another area that the previous administration supported with great success, I might add, was the development of the province's fledgling film, sound and publishing industry. We know that for every dollar spent by the film industry, there is a \$2.18 benefit to Manitoba's economy. During the past 10 years, the Manitoba film industry has grown from \$1 million to \$25 million annually. The previous

administration recognized the province's considerable advantages for the film industry, including our unique geographic location, our beautiful shooting locations and our considerable pool of local talent and chose to cultivate this industry. Manitoba Film and Sound has been instrumental in fostering an infrastructure and environment to promote the province's film and sound industry. All around the province, movies and television shows are being shot and these shoots provide a considerable economic boost to the province. I trust that the new administration will maintain the highly successful Manitoba film and video production tax credit knowing that it has done so much for the development of the local film industry.

I was also disturbed to see that your recent throne speech makes no direct mention of how you intend to help Manitoba women. While in opposition, you continually thundered that not enough was being done to help women, yet your very first throne speech makes absolutely no mention of programs targeted at Manitoba women. Considering that nine members of your caucus are women, including five female cabinet ministers, I find this to be most disturbing. I believe it is absolutely crucial for government to work in partnership with all sectors of society in the advancement of women's equality.

Over the past few years, much has been accomplished in terms of helping Manitoba women and their families. I would urge Today's NDP government to build upon the many positive initiatives brought forward by our previous administration knowing that these types of initiatives are extremely important to women and their families. As an example, under the previous administration, the Women's Directorate, in co-operation with groups such as the RCMP and the Winnipeg Police, launched the Keeping Safe at Work program to help those who work alone or who travel to and from work alone. In co-operation with the Child and Youth Secretariat, the Women's Directorate developed the Manitoba strategy on youth prostitution to help young prostitutes.

The Victims' Rights and Consequential Amendments Act was proclaimed earlier this year. This legislation gives victims a voice and

sets a high standard for addressing their needs in a caring, compassionate and respectful manner.

Under our administration, funding to rural victims services was increased, as was funding to the Criminal Injuries Compensation program. Manitoba was also the first jurisdiction in Canada to announce the victims first emergency cellular telephone program for victims of stalking or domestic violence. Staff in the Crown attorney's Family Violence unit was also doubled. Manitoba also passed tough antistalking legislation designed to protect all Manitobans from unwanted and inappropriate action.

Under our administration, a variety of programs were also offered to help women wishing to upgrade their skills. For example, Mr. Speaker, the Training for Tomorrow Scholarship Awards Program offered scholarships to women entering two-year diploma courses in math, science and technology-related areas in high demand at the province's three colleges.

The Power Up computer training program for Manitoba women was also launched by this government. It provides free computer training to women in various communities throughout the province and has already been a tremendous success. Mr. Speaker, this was a wonderful initiative. We are all aware of the importance of computer literacy in today's world. One's ability to move ahead in the workforce is now largely contingent on their familiarity with computers and related technology.

Members on this side of the House, during their reign as government, also targeted a number of initiatives aimed at improving the health and well-being of Manitoba women and their families. Additional funding was provided to help deliver more accessible, portable and flexible childcare options for Manitoba families. The province provided funding to 31 agencies including shelters and women's resource centres that offer support and follow-up to women and children.

The province-wide Breast Cancer Screening Program, complete with mobile mammography units, has been screening greater numbers of

women for breast cancer than ever before. This is an issue that I personally am extremely interested in, having lost my own mother to cancer. I am hopeful that members of Today's NDP will give my private member's resolution related to breast cancer unanimous support. This resolution is the first resolution that will be dealt with on Monday next in private members' hour, and I will speak at length at that time on this very important topic.

* (1700)

Women involved in running their own businesses benefited from the previous government's Business Start Program and the Rural Entrepreneur Assistance program. A women's entrepreneurial consultant was also made available to provide help with business plans, market research and other details. I hope the new administration will continue programs such as these and look for new ways to help female entrepreneurs prosper.

These are but a few of the very important initiatives implemented under the previous administration to help make sure Manitoba's women, children and families are safer. I look forward to working with Today's NDP to make sure we find more ways to make our society safer. I would like to challenge Today's NDP to make sure that women are not forgotten in upcoming government programs and that the successful programs of the previous administration are continued.

Mr. Speaker, Today's NDP throne speech was so vague and lacking that, as I listened to the debate from members opposite, I was surprised that so few members spoke in support of the throne speech or, in fact, even mentioned it at all. Even some members of Today's NDP cabinet overlooked passing comment on the throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents have told me repeatedly that they are very concerned about most of the policies of Today's NDP government. They want Today's NDP government to start governing, and, more importantly, they want members on this side of the House to hold Today's NDP accountable.

Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we plan to do. Thank you.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure and honour to be able to rise and address the Speech from the Throne. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to my colleagues in the Chamber and how I became the MLA for La Verendrye constituency.

But before offering some remarks on my constituency and the recent Speech from the Throne, firstly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your recent election, and the Deputy Speaker.

Please accept my sincere and generous congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, as you assume the high office as chief presider over the Chamber.

You are the first person to be elected to the role, and I had the pleasure of meeting your brother, John, the deputy minister in the new government of Nunavut, as well as the other people from the Nunavut delegation who were here a few weeks ago who mentioned to me how proud they are of you, Mr. Speaker. I am confident that you will serve in this Chamber with great dignity and with great distinction. I look forward to working with you in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to all elected MLAs, especially to all first-time new MLAs. I know Mr. Jim Penner from the Steinbach constituency, who is the critic for Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and I also would like to sincerely congratulate him. I had the opportunity to meet him and I know a lot of constituents in the area. He is highly respected and many people have said a lot of nice things about him and know that he will serve them well.

I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Penner a number of years ago. I was a salesperson for Proctor & Gamble's company at that time, and I had a chance to meet him, and he and his employees—

An Honourable Member: Did he buy from you?

Mr. Lemieux: And he bought a lot from me, by the way.

But being a first-time MLA has its challenges. In my case, I was somewhat familiar with this beautiful building. For a short period of time in the early '80s, I was an executive assistant to the Minister of Finance, and I had an opportunity to work in the building. So I was not totally new to this particular location, but at the same time, Mr. Speaker, I am still in awe of being in this building. It is such a beautiful building, and not only that, I think that the emphasis that people put on us being here is extremely important.

I was a schoolteacher in a former life, just prior to being elected, and I know the students that I had taught for a number of years, we used to run mock elections in school, whether it was high school or junior high, and what was often mentioned to me is the behaviour of members in the Legislature. I made a commitment to my students, as well as to my constituents, that I would certainly attempt to treat all members in the Chamber with respect and try to view their opinions as being constructive in one way or another. I know that all people elected to this Chamber have a great deal of pressure on them to deliver for their constituents. I think, as you have pointed out, Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions with regard to the decorum in this Chamber, it is important that what we put across to the public outside is extremely important. I think our behaviour in this Chamber reflects that.

I think that when I first was going to run for provincial politics, my constituents as well as others, the first comments that they made to me was: why do you want to be a politician, why do you even want to go there? It is like a bunch of people just fighting in a sandbox, and really it seems like they are just a bunch of kids that do not know what they are doing or where they are going. I guess I made a commitment at that time should I enter provincial politics or politics of any kind that I would try to not participate in a lot of bad-mouthing of members opposite.

But I know at times it becomes extremely difficult, because, after all, one made a comparison to the practice of law, or others where it is adversarial in a sense, everyone has their political views. Members opposite have their views as to the goal that they wish to attain, hopefully, for the betterment of the province and for the people of Manitoba.

I guess on that note, I just want to mention Mr. Ben Sveinson, the former MLA for La Verendrye. I do not know him that well. I have had an opportunity to meet him on a number of occasions, and I know that the campaign that was run in La Verendrye was a clean campaign in the sense that no one was bad-mouthing any candidate or any political party. We put forward our platform and our view, and we let the electorate decide which view and which vision they would view as being the one they wanted to see going into the new century.

I would like to say that I know Mr. Sveinson was here, I believe, I can be corrected, eight to nine years in the Chamber. I am beginning to find out the hardship that it creates sometimes on your family, time commitments and so on. So I would really sincerely like to pass on, I guess, not necessarily a thanks but certainly from the constituents of La Verendrye, even though he was not re-elected, people there do feel that he did certainly serve his time. He took time away from his family and his children and so on to do the best job he possibly could. So I would like to put it certainly on the record that he did the best job he possibly could.

I guess at this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments with regard to my constituency of La Verendrye. La Verendrye is a constituency that is not necessarily unique compared to other constituencies, but it stretches from the Ontario border where Falcon Lake, West Hawk is located. As you move west, there are communities such as Hadashville, Prawda, Richer, Ste. Anne, Giroux, Lorette, Grande Pointe, Ile des Chenes, St. Adolphe. It stretches all the way from Ontario border to Winnipeg and then south down the Red River to St. Adolphe.

*(1710)

Our constituency is made up of Francophone communities, as I mentioned, Mennonite, Metis

population. So there is quite a cross-section, a multicultural cross-section of our population. There are a large number of people who work in Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker, and they commute every day. They are dependent on the jobs in Winnipeg for their livelihood in order to support their families and so on. There are nurses, doctors, lawyers, teachers and so on that work in the city, as well as out in the constituency.

La Verendrye is a relatively new constituency with regard to its borders presently. As I mentioned before, a lot of people do work in Winnipeg, but also we have a lot of small business as well as the agribusiness. People who farm in that constituency are certainly a people that have been very, very resilient. You are talking about the agricultural business where people have had to, over the last number of years, look at different forms of supplementing their income, besides just being involved in agriculture or small business. It has created a bit of a hardship on them, but, as I mentioned, the people in La Verendrye are very resilient, no different than other Manitobans.

Just a quick comment, Mr. Speaker, before I go on to a number of different issues and to address the throne speech. I just want to say that I will give you and my constituents maybe a bit of a brief background about myself. As I mentioned, I have taught school and I was a school teacher for approximately 15 years or so. I have had the opportunity to work in adult education in the field of workplace safety and health for the provincial government.

As mentioned, I was in sales previously. Also, I had an opportunity to be drafted by a professional hockey team and had a short career with regard to professional athletics. So I have had a cross-section of employment. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, I feel that this certainly has stood me in good stead because it has given me an opportunity to meet a great many people with a varied opinion with regard to politics and the approach that a politician or a political party should take.

My involvement with regard to being involved with the NDP goes back to the mid-'70s. When I came back from the United States, there was a politician by the name of Ed

Schreyer who was running to be Premier of Manitoba. I was interested in another alternative besides the two old-line parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. I took a look at this particular party, and I thought that the values of this party, the ideals behind this party wanting to be a party that believes that whatever one wants for themselves they wish for all, certainly hit a cord with me and is something that has stuck with me. I believe that, to this day, and most New Democrats firmly believe that. It is part of their being.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I would like to make a few comments with regard to the throne speech. I know that, of members opposite, a few have made comments that members on this side or on the government side have not commented with regard to the throne speech. I would like to just comment briefly, if I might, at least with regard to a few points. Many have heard it and, hopefully, at the risk of being repetitive, I would like to be able to mention a few points. I will try to be brief with regard to those points.

The speech outlined the government's plans and priorities, led by improvements to the health care system, economic opportunities for the young and security in Manitoba homes, workplaces and communities in general. Now just on that particular point, Mr. Speaker, throughout the election campaign and knocking on doors, there were not, I do not believe—well, there may have been a few, but very few households that when I went to the doorstep, the No. 1 issue was concern with regard to health care. There are many individuals, when I went to the doorstep, they were concerned about their loved ones or themselves going into a hospital and having long waiting lists or being on a long waiting list prior to entering hospital, or after the detection of some disease, whether it be cancer or other, that it took a long time to be treated.

Now everyone realizes, to be fair to the previous government, there are no easy answers and that it is a difficult, difficult situation that we as a government also have found ourselves in. Health care is extremely complicated; I think everyone would agree on that particular point, but in my particular case, an incentive for me to run in the provincial election was my mother-in-law, who lives with us, who has actually lived

with us for close to 22 years. She suffered an aneurysm, and then we took her into our home and she has lived with us, but one day she was experiencing a lot of chest pain. So we brought her into a hospital in Winnipeg. She had to sit in the corridor close to four days on a stretcher in the hallway.

So, as a personal example, Mr. Speaker, this was an example that I thought this is just not right, and I heard other Manitobans saying the same thing. This is not the way Manitobans feel that a health care system should be run. That certainly gave me a lot of impetus with regard to looking at and trying to find some answers with regard to: is there a better way? Is there a different way that governments can approach health care? Is there a different way that we can treat citizens of Manitoba?

Mr. Speaker, that particular incident with regard to my mother-in-law certainly helped me make my mind up with regard to a direction that I should go and attempt to certainly have some input with regard to what may take place on this side of the House, but one knows, and certainly members opposite know, that when you run in politics, there is no guarantee. Of course, you may win personally, but there is no guarantee that you may elect enough members to form government. So, by that point, I guess I made a commitment at that time. Whether my party was going to be successful in the provincial election or not, I made a commitment that I would do my utmost to try to have some input into the process, whether it be on the government side or on the side of the opposition.

I just want to comment, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Speech from the Throne a little bit further. I just want to say that the speech also promised long-term economic measures, including a summit on the future of the Manitoba economy that will allow business, labour and government to forge a new strategy for economic development. Again, along the lines of what I was talking about before about how, yes, we can be adversarial, but on the other hand there are stereotypes out there that have certain parties belonging and stating that certain parties are only labour or certain parties are only big business, which I am sure members opposite would agree that labels like that and stereotypes

like that do not make Manitoba a better place. What they do, they might make short-term newsreel highlights or news clips, but certainly for the betterment of Manitoba, they do not serve members opposite or ourselves in any way.

So I would just like to say that on that particular note, with regard to that note in the Speech from the Throne, that we are planning on having a summit, trying to bring all parties together, and trying to be inclusive. I believe the Premier (Mr. Doer) has stated this on numerous occasions that we are attempting to be inclusive. Some people find that word, well, not necessarily offensive, but I guess maybe it is an overused term that people often throw out. By that, I mean that, by being inclusive, we want people to have input into what government wants to do and what government is planning on doing, and make sure everyone has a say in the direction the government is going to go. So I am really pleased to see that the Speech from the Throne addressed that, that the summit on Manitoba economy is about to take place.

* (1720)

The speech also reviewed plans for the health care system, and one was to institute a strategy for ending the treatment of patients in hallways, reducing waiting lists for diagnostic tests and surgery, training and hiring of full-time nurses, and establish of new programs to attract and retain health care professionals in northern and rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, just on that note, I just want to say that some of my colleagues have made comments about the firing of nurses and so on. I am not going to get into that. I am just saying that what I am going to talk about is that, because I mentioned that health care is a difficult issue to deal with, there are no easy solutions, but I believe we do have a plan in place, and I know that we are going to proceed in a methodical way. We are going to make a number of different changes that the people of Manitoba are going to judge us on, the changes that are going to be made, and they are going to see about the positive results that we are going to be instituting. So the proof will be in the pudding. We are going to show Manitobans that we do have a plan and we do have a way of

addressing the health care concerns in our province.

"Today the best economic policy for any province is a strong education policy," read the Lieutenant-Governor. As a result, the speech emphasized commitments to double college spaces over the next five years. For example, Mr. Speaker, just on that note alone, there are many, many students that I taught not only in my own constituency but students that I have taught in the public school system in Winnipeg who have commented that university for them is not the be-all, end-all. There are many students who are not interested in going to university, for whatever reason. One may be that they want to receive a guarantee of employment, for example, and they feel that going to Red River Community College will give them that opportunity, that the moment that they get out of community college after a two-year or three-year degree that they will be able to start bringing in income, whether it be for a new home, an automobile and whatever they wish to spend the money on. But university is not the be-all, end-all for them. So increasing spaces in the community college is extremely important because it addresses a concern that many young people wish to have alternatives basically to further their own careers, whichever that may be. So community colleges and the doubling of the spaces truly helps that.

Make post-secondary education more affordable. I have an 18-year-old daughter who is attending university for the first time. In my particular case, we can afford to send my daughter to university. My partner, my wife, is a lawyer, and so we are able to do that. There are many, many students who graduated with my daughter who are unable to do that. It is not all economics, I guess, to be fair, but a lot of it is. Some students do not want to attend university but many who do cannot afford to. So this government is trying to address that by mentioning it certainly in the Speech from the Throne, but obviously through an upcoming budget and a budgetary process that hopefully will be addressing those situations.

I, for one, know that there are many young people today who are flipping hamburgers at McDonald's, which, not to denigrate that profession or to say that that is bad, I am saying

that there are a lot of young people who are extremely bright and should have a lot of options open to them. If we are going to be looking ahead in the next century and wanting to know where Manitoba is going or where Canada is going, we have to look at our young people. I think young people have been overlooked and not overlooked just in the last 10 years or 12 years. They have been overlooked I think for quite a while.

I think we really have to address that concern because, in my own case with my own children, they talk about politics, for example, they talk about how they really do not care whether or not they vote. They are not interested. They are not buying into the system as it is now. They just feel left out, not only in the political arena or with regard to politics, but they feel left out of our economic system.

So somehow in some way we have to address these concerns, Mr. Speaker, because, after all, the young people are our future. I feel that we have a plan to address that. Once again, going into a budgetary process, and so on, we will be revealing, as one of my colleagues said, stay tuned. There will be many, many initiatives that are going to be forthcoming, and we will try to address those problems and concerns.

So, Mr. Speaker, a couple of other things with regard to economic policy and education: provide stable investment to public schools; make math and reading skill assessments available to parents at the beginning of Grade 3.

With regard to providing stable investments, within my constituency I have the Seine River School Division, I have the Francophone School Division, I have the Hanover School Division and Agassiz as well. So I have four school divisions within my constituency.

All school divisions were extremely concerned about the funding that they were receiving. It is very easy, as was pointed out by the candidate that I was running against, to say that kids are starving for school books and textbooks and that there are not enough textbooks to go around and that it is unfair to use that kind of an example. But being in the public school system, I was faced with this particular

issue myself. I mean, I was in a classroom that had to share 20 textbooks with three different classrooms. You had to have a little trolley, which you passed them around on. Now, the textbooks, it was, I guess, a policy of the school that stated that the textbooks should not leave the school. The parents were complaining because the textbooks, you know, how were they going to do their homework, and so on. So it is something as concrete as that, and I know often much has been made of selling chocolates to repair computers and to purchase textbooks but that is the reality and I know those decisions are made at a school level. School divisions have a certain amount of funding, but that is the reality that I faced. I am trying to deal with students and parents, or was trying to, on a daily basis and had this continually thrown at me, why, why can we not get materials in our school. Why are we not being provided with the tools for our children to improve?

And so the approach that we are going to have with regard to stable funding to school divisions, allowing them to plan, allowing them to be able to make decisions, not only this year but they know down the road that they are going to be able to plan that whatever programs they are wishing to implement and changes that they want to implement they are able to plan. They cannot plan, if one year they are going to get a minus 2 and the next year they are going to get a plus 1 and the following year a minus 3 and the following year a plus 2 in increases. So, when we talk about stable funding, we are trying to address that concern, a concern we continually heard, not just during the election campaign, that we came up with an election gimmick to try to address this, but it is something that we have continually heard for the past number of years.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to comment further, if I might, just to create new opportunities for youth-at-risk committing crimes and so on and safe places to play and learn and I think, not I think, I know that my Leader and the Premier (Mr. Doer) of the province has stated and commented about how we should be keeping gymnasiums in schools, for example, open in the evening for students and children. Now some schools are and many are not and the reason for that, we are certainly looking into that to find out why young people in a lot of communities are

not having access to gymnasiums in schools, whether it is a funding issue, whether or not divisions are charging different parents groups for using those gymnasiums, but we are going to determine that and we are going to have young people having access to those schools. In my own home community, the Roman Catholic church, the other night, was trashed. Young people broke into the church, they used fire extinguishers, they sprayed the church, they destroyed it and they hang around the church and the graveyard drinking beer and so on.

Now, the easy comment to make is that these kids are useless, they are a bunch of bums, they are a bunch of no-goods, and the reality of the fact is that a lot of these children are in the minority, many of them are absolutely excellent young people. They just need the opportunity. They have to have a place, for example, like a gymnasium that is available to them where they can make use of their talents and make use of that youthful exuberance and not get into a lot of trouble because they have no avenues open to them. This government is going to attempt to address that. Once again we are going to determine how widespread this is, with regard to the lack of access to school gymnasiums, and try to address that concern. As was mentioned in the throne speech, that is one item that we are hoping to address. The youth of our province, it is extremely important that we address this concern.

* (1730)

Also, what was mentioned in the throne speech is to further improve public safety, and the government committed to establishing a new gang unit in the Prosecutions branch to introduce stiffer penalties for car theft, improve compensation to victims of crime, to guarantee the right to victim impact statements and to strengthen the enforcement of Workplace Safety and Health regulations. Just with regard to the last item I had mentioned with regard to safety and health, I mentioned that I had worked as a civil servant and I had worked in the department of Workplace Safety and Health for five years. I was an education co-ordinator, but I had the opportunity to work with a number of safety inspectors and so on.

Now, the questions that should be asked with regard to different departments of government, one being the branch of Workplace Safety and Health of the Department of Labour, is how many inspections are you doing? How many inspectors do you have out there who are actually doing inspections? This is a policy that comes from government, whether or not you have inspectors working on BSI or whether or not you have inspectors out there in the field inspecting construction sites or whether or not you have them inspecting different worksites to see not only that those workplaces are safe but that employees can do their jobs in a safe manner.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue just briefly, if I might, before my concluding remarks. I would just like to comment on a couple of other points in the Speech from the Throne, that being that the government said that it will follow through with a 1.5 percent reduction on personal income tax on January 1, and also further reduce property and small business taxes, continue to press for the restoration of the national farm program, to provide help to local initiatives to stem neighbourhood decline, improve housing and economic opportunities and conduct an annual review of the minimum wage.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government is not going to be raising minimum wages just one week or one month or six months prior to an election. We are going to try to address the minimum wage issue on an annual basis. Now, I think to be fair, the minimum wage in the province—I made reference to people flipping hamburgers at McDonald's, and that, as I mentioned, is not meant to be a disparaging remark. It is meant that there are a lot of people who work part time these days, and there are people who work only four hours a day. Many employers wish to hire people on a part-time basis. Whatever the motive is, there are many people on part-time work, and many people are dependent on the minimum wage in this province. So it is imperative that they have some idea of what government is going to do with regard to the minimum wage, with regard to their livelihood, that they can have some kind of planning in place.

It is not just those individuals who are at the upper end of the income scale but that the people who are on minimum wage, who work in a lot of those part-time jobs, are able to plan their lives, who I guess have a feeling that they do not know when their next raise is coming. They are not sure whether or not to make an investment, to make some changes to their homes, to improve their homes and thereby improve the living standard of their family. This way, at least if there is a plan for minimum wage review on an orderly basis, they can certainly work their lives around that, and there are many, many people who are dependent on minimum wage in this province.

Also, Mr. Speaker, just before, as I mentioned, making my concluding remarks, I just want to comment on: Manitobans will be given a direct say in any proposed sale of Crown corporations. Citizens' input will be increased into the decisions of regional health authorities and environmental licensing, and corporate and union contributions to political parties will be eliminated.

With regard to Crown corporations—[interjection] Well, as members opposite say, privatize, privatize, but, Mr. Speaker, I have my own opinions as to where the members opposite were going to find a billion dollars that they promised during the election campaign.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is possible to retract a certain statement that was made, but about 20 minutes earlier I made a comment how I would not get into this. I can see how difficult it might be.

I believe in my concluding remarks that I just want to say that I do appreciate the good will of members opposite. I have had an opportunity to meet many of them. They have their vision on which way the province should go. We have ours. We have a plan. We have a plan that we believe in concrete goals that are achievable, and we truly believe that our goals are achievable. The Speech from the Throne addressed a number of those issues and they will be achieved by working together with Manitobans in a common purpose of building a

better future for ourselves and our children. So thank you, Mr. Speaker, very much.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I deem my election to this Thirty-seventh Legislative Assembly of Manitoba by the constituents of Arthur-Virden to be a great honour. I believe it very much a privilege to represent citizens in any democracy.

But, before I continue, I want to congratulate you on your November 18 success as the first elected Speaker in Manitoba's history. I am sure that your previous experience as an MLA in this House will be exemplified as you carry out the rules of this House. I want to assure you that it is my wish, and I am sure that of all members, to work with you to have this Legislature operate for the betterment of our citizens. I must thank you for correcting me on the procedures of this House, Sir, as I challenged the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for criticizing my former colleague from Arthur-Virden by using his proper name. I will endeavour to follow these rules as I expect all to do. At least I have refrained from referring to you, Mr. Speaker, as Madam Speaker. I look forward to your continued support and guidance to ensure this Assembly functions as it should.

I would also like to take a moment to congratulate Mr. Binx Remnant. I have found that since I got here that is a very intriguing name, but I would like to thank Binx and his legislative staff for the orientation process that they put us through as well as make commendation to his efforts in the Legislature and congratulate him on his upcoming retirement.

I would like to congratulate the interns and the pages, particularly one young Rebecca Turner whom I did not know before coming to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. She is from Matheson Island and had the dubious honour of babysitting my two grandsons on occasion as my son works there.

* (1740)

It is with great pleasure today that I rise for the second time before this Assembly and reply to this government's throne speech and to continue the journey of representation of citizens

that I have experienced over the last 15 to 20 years in various elected organizational and agricultural industry capacities. As I begin this inaugural address, I want to as well congratulate all members for their election to the Manitoba Legislature. I am sure it is your goal to represent your constituents to the best of your abilities as it is mine to represent the fine citizens of Arthur-Virden. Of course that means all citizens, not just those who voted for us. We must work hard to keep Manitoba strong and attract more citizens to our fine province to live, to raise their families and to establish businesses wherever and whenever possible.

My fear, Mr. Speaker, having heard last week's throne speech, is that this government is lacking a plan, as we have seen in the agricultural discussion, to provide the economic stability created through our last government's four consecutive deficit-free budgets. I know that I must be cognizant of representing all citizens of Arthur-Virden, but I do want to express my heartfelt thanks to those who elected me and pay a special tribute to those on my election and nomination campaigns that worked so hard to make it possible for me to be here today, especially my campaign manager, Debbie Frye [phonetic], and my Virden office manager, Maxine Heritage [phonetic]. One can never become complacent or take people for granted. An elected official must always listen to the needs of his or her constituents.

As I said earlier, I have had the privilege of working with many community and agriculturally based organizations, from being a delegate to Manitoba Pool Elevators for eight years, a founding member of Keystone Agricultural Producers, the Manitoba Farm Business Association president in the mid-'80s, two elected terms with the Canadian Wheat Board's advisory committee, two appointed terms as public governor of the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange, to several years as the director of the Canada Grains Council.

Perhaps my greatest time commitment away from our farming operation was while I was president of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association from 1995 to 1998. The Wheat Growers Association is, and I say quite

proudly, western Canada's largest volunteer farm organization.

The greatest honour for my wife, Beryl, and myself was in being chosen to represent mid-Canada in the Outstanding Young Farmer competition in 1986. In fact, it was with great regret that, due to the throne speech timing, I had to forgo being a judge at the '99 annual competition held in Regina on November 25 and 26. However, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner), as his son was chosen to represent our region this year. While I am at it, I would like to mention another colleague of mine, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurshou) and his wife, Lori, who were the representatives in 1995.

Mr. Speaker, I only make mention of these involvements to provide an historical perspective of my activities, but here and now I want to make it abundantly clear that as of September 21 my responsibilities are to the citizens of Arthur-Virden and to the specific needs of our region. I acknowledge that I am one of 57 members elected to implement the wishes of the citizens of Manitoba and provide leadership when and where it is required to meet those wishes.

Mr. Speaker, I believe in sound economic policy and balanced budget legislation, but I also believe that our health care system, our educational programs, and the security of our communities are essential to continuing a bright future in Manitoba and therefore in Arthur-Virden as well. The rhetoric and back-peddalling on their balanced budget election promise, which I have witnessed from the throne speech and the early days of this government's new old-style governing, is not what the people of Manitoba elected them to do.

I will have more on Manitoba's needs later, but before I continue, Mr. Speaker, I want to say how much of an honour it is to be elected as the member for Arthur-Virden, given that my predecessor, the Honourable James Downey, held this seat for the past 22 years. Whether all of you agreed with all of his exploits and endeavours in this House or not, I am sure you will all agree that such dedication should be honoured and recognized. To those of you who were present in this House last spring, your

nonpartisan recognition of his tenure and kind words said it all.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The Honourable James Downey was appointed Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism in 1993. He began his political career in '77, winning a nomination held in the Reston school, whereupon he was appointed Minister of Agriculture and a member of the Treasury Board through 1981. Pardon me, you have certainly changed, Mr. Speaker.

An Honourable Member: You know, they always get prettier at closing time.

Mr. Maguire: While in opposition, he served in the many critic roles, including Agriculture, Municipal Affairs, Native Affairs, McKenzie Seeds and deputy critic to Crown Investments and Natural Resources.

It is fine to see that my Springfield member has still got a sense of humour.

In 1988 he became Minister of Northern Affairs, responsible for aboriginal affairs, and the Communities Economic Development Fund Act, to name a few, including the Manitoba Oil and Gas Corporation. He added Seniors to his care in 1989 before becoming Deputy Premier in 1990. He was the Minister of Rural Development in 1991 before becoming Minister of Energy in 1992.

Prior to his elected life, James and Linda Downey farmed near Melita and founded the Melita Auction Mart. I have gone into this detail to emphasize the dedication of Mr. Downey and his family in serving not only the citizens of Arthur-Virden, but in his ministerial responsibilities all the citizens of Manitoba. Certainly citizens of Arthur-Virden have been quite proud to have had the Deputy Premier of Manitoba represent our constituency throughout the '90s. I would like to add my congratulations to Mr. Downey and make special mention of his wife Linda and son Ryan. We all know politics needs family support.

I have also emphasized the former member for Arthur-Virden's responsibility to Manitobans so that all can see how difficult it would be to fill

Mr. Downey's shoes. I believe it is much more responsible for me to step forward with my own footsteps and work towards a new imprint that the citizens of Arthur-Virden elected me to make on their behalf.

I have lived and farmed in Arthur-Virden all my life. Before attaining my diploma in agriculture at the University of Manitoba, I completed my high school in Hartney after the school was reduced in size at Elgin. Arthur-Virden is the most southwesterly constituency in Manitoba, consuming 11 municipalities and many rural communities. Arthur-Virden borders Saskatchewan from the southwest corner to where No. 1 Highway crosses the Saskatchewan border and juts east along the northern borders of the municipalities of Woodworth and Wallace before proceeding south along the east side of Woodworth, Sifton, Cameron, before jogging east to take in the municipality of Morton with the U.S. border being our southern extremity.

At this time, I would like to say a special welcome to the citizens of Morton and the town of Boissevain as new members to Arthur-Virden as a result of last spring's redistribution of boundaries. I would like to congratulate the town of Boissevain on winning the national award for beautification in communities of its class in 1999 in a competition that was nationwide. I look forward to representing you with the same dexterity as the rest of our region.

Arthur-Virden historically has been referred to as the dry southwest. I will have more to say on this later. Agriculture is our main industry, although we also have the bulk of Manitoba's oil industry. Tourism is continuously growing, and bed-and-breakfast entrepreneurs are providing more opportunities to extend the esthetics of that down-home rural living for anyone to experience.

Arthur-Virden has a real mix of soils from sand to clay and the various crops and livestock operations to fit the terrain. Our farmers produce cereals, oilseeds, pulse crops, forages, beef, pork, dairy and poultry, even some bison and elk.

In the south we have the Turtle Mountains and the International Peace Gardens, complete

with its floral beauty, but also music, drama, and track and field camps each summer. White-tailed deer are prevalent throughout the constituency. The migration of geese and ducks through this flyway is a noticeable and sometimes damaging annual occurrence and starting to be more of an industry in itself.

The Assiniboine River meanders from the north to the east of our constituency, while the Souris River crosses the U.S. border south of Melita before leaving the constituency a short distance north of Hartney to meet the Assiniboine. We must work with our Saskatchewan neighbours to manage the streams flowing into Manitoba to join the Souris River. Whether it is Whitewater, Metigoshe or Oak Lakes, each has its own unique value. We must manage these tributaries and our underground aquifers with sound plans for their sustainable future so that they are an asset to our region, not a liability.

* (1750)

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The irony of speaking of the southwest as dry is that, regardless of rainfall, there is much water to take care of, and how we handle its flow both naturally and mechanically will be the challenge for our future. I believe, as many of our constituents do, that we must use water as a resource, but this may involve some or many policy initiatives and much public input before a plan is developed for future needs. I challenge the provincial government to come forward with a water use plan for all of Manitoba.

So whether it is our scenic geography or community events such as 4-H rallies, golf tournaments, bonspiels, arts and craft shows and sales, drama club performances, centennials, millennium celebrations, rodeos, powwows or museums, parks and fairs, I urge you to visit our friendly southwest hospitality. Particular mention must be made of the citizens of Virden, who will be hosting the Manitoba Summer Games in the year 2000, the first in the new millennium.

Mr. Speaker, I have entered into the political arena based on a profound desire to help build a

brighter future for our children, the people of Arthur-Virden and all Manitobans. While I may be new to this Assembly, I certainly am not new to politics. I have farmed all my life in the Elgin area and have learned to appreciate at a very young age that farming and the grain industry is 15 percent protein and 85 percent politics. Last week, trade ministers from around the world gathered in Seattle, Washington, to discuss the next round of world trade issues. Grain subsidies from the United States and the European Union must be placed on the highest priority to start reducing and eventually eliminating this trade-distorting practice.

The level of subsidies that our friends to the south receive borders on ludicrous, and in Europe it is even worse. Eventually Canadian policies for dairy and poultry products, for genetically modified food and wheat exports, will all be put into play as the organization's 134 members meet. Domestic and export subsidies must be stopped.

I will be pressing this government to influence the federal Liberals on the elimination of these subsidies that affect the farming community. However, until such time as this elimination is accomplished, I believe that support for our agricultural producers should be forthcoming. While this may mean moving toward U.S. and E.C. support, for purposes of not being left behind, it may also take the form of less red tape and restructuring our farmers or supporting more value-added infrastructure to better accommodate the moves to diversification occurring on our farms today. This is particularly true in Arthur-Virden at this time. As you all know, most of the unseeded million acres that occurred in Manitoba last spring are located in Arthur-Virden. Never has this many acres not been seeded in our history.

Diversification needs capital. Our farmers are moving into beef, pork, peas, beans, lentils, corn, specialty wheats, potatoes and other crops and livestock enterprises, as much as in any other region, but such moves require capital. With the excess rainfall of spring, combined with the complete loss of the Crow benefit, many farmers cannot complete this move. Fellow members, this region has experienced a disaster from excessive rainfall not unlike the

Red River flood of 1997 or the ice storm of Quebec. The previous government of Manitoba supported unseeded acres with a \$50 unseeded acreage payment. I urge today's government to either take supportive action for this region's farmers and small businesses in the hardest hit southwest region and/or press the uncaring federal Liberals to acknowledge this disaster of nature and come through for these citizens as was done in other natural disasters in Canada, thereby supporting the unification of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech stated, and I quote: by working together as a single community, Manitobans overcame the Flood of the Century and hosted the Americas as only we can. With the same spirit, we can meet the challenges that we now face in health care and education and in making our citizens more secure in their homes. While there is no doubt that health care, education and security are priorities in our society at any time, this government made no mention of the flood of southwest Manitoba in 1999 as opposed to several references to a flood, albeit severe, that occurred two and a half years ago. I applaud their efforts to seek a trade equalization payment, but if no crop was grown, the price does not matter. Apart from these efforts, a long-term or dependable program of farm support is required, and southwest Manitoba still requires to be treated equitably with other regions which have experienced disaster in Canada.

The Agricultural Income Disaster program, better known as AIDA, is not responsive to a natural disaster and has become a disaster itself. We need changes, and we need them now. The stress level that has infected much of southwestern Manitoba, because of this natural disaster and low commodity prices, is at an all-time high, and I challenge this government to provide more counselling for stress relief to avoid family break-ups and other potential hardships. After all, governing is caring about people and being an example to our peers.

My late father used to say that meeting a stranger is just an opportunity to make another friend. As I look across the floor today, I realize that I may not be able to make friends with everyone, but I do hope that we can all work towards the benefit of all Manitobans, both

urban and rural, to ensure this province has a brilliant future. That future starts with our children. Ensuring our children have the opportunity to obtain an education, to develop a career and to raise their families right here in Manitoba should be the most paramount item on this government's agenda. The brain drain must stop. I believe in risk, profit and enterprise opportunity. We must foster an environment to cultivate all trades that keep our young people in this province.

We must encourage processing to add more value to the crops that our farmers produce, hopefully in partnerships or new-generation co-operatives, as was proposed by the Prairie Pasta Producers in Melita. These ventures must gain farmers more value as we take more control of our production beyond the farm gate. Farmers must be allowed more freedom to market their own products. This does not mean dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board in wheat, but western farmers are not on a level playing field with other farmers in Canada. Ontario farmers can now sell their wheat directly to whomever they wish through their board with no buy-back obligation.

At about two hours ago, Mr. Speaker, malt barley was worth \$3.60 a bushel Canadian FOB Bottineau, North Dakota, 15 miles from the hardest hit farmers in my constituency. Our system will eventually pay them \$2.60, one dollar of which will come, not this January 1, but January 1, 2001. Today's government of Manitoba must seek support from other prairie governments to allow farmers to add value through using available marketing opportunities as well as through processing. Farmers are merely asking for a choice in today's world. Even the new president of the Canadian Wheat Board has acknowledged that their own internal surveys reveal the majority of farmers do not want a monopoly running the system.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Arthur-Virden will have 20 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, December 7, 1999

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