

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Highway 200

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Highway 200 is paved from Winnipeg to the Canada-U.S. border except for approximately a 10-kilometre section between highways 205 and 305 which remains unpaved. School buses, farm equipment, emergency vehicles and local traffic must travel on Highway 200 which is dangerous, if not completely impassable, during wet spring weather and other times of heavy rainfall.

Due to unsafe conditions, many drivers look to alternate routes around this section when possible and time permits. The condition of the gravel road can cause serious damage to all vehicles.

Insufficient traffic counts are not truly reflective of the traffic volumes because users tend to find another route to avoid this section. Traffic counts done after spring seeding, during wet weather or during school recesses are not indicative of traffic flows.

Maintenance costs for unpaved highways are high and ongoing. It would be cost-effective to pave this section.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider paving Highway 200 between highways 205 and 305 to ensure a smooth, safe and uninterrupted use of Highway 200.

Signed by Nettie Froese, Jake Froese, Vicki Gushuliak and others.

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

Provincial Road 355

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The unsafe conditions of PR No. 355 from the western edge of Minto municipality to PR No. 270 (including the hill out of the Minnedosa valley), poses an undue risk to Manitobans who must travel on this roadway.

The steady stream of traffic on this stretch of PR No. 355, which includes automobiles such as "B" trains, mail delivery vehicles and school buses, make the roadway in its current state dangerously impassable.

Continued expansion of the regional economy in livestock development, grain storage and transportation and the proposed Mohawk Plant, puts additional strain on PR No. 355 and creates further safety concerns for motorists.

PR No. 355 experiences an increased risk in traffic flow during the spring season when there are weight restrictions on surrounding provincial trunk highways.

For several years, representatives of six municipal corporations, as well as an ad hoc citizens group have been actively lobbying the provincial government to upgrade and reconstruct the stretch of PR No. 355 at issue.

Manitobans and visitors to the province deserve a better rural highway infrastructure.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) to consider upgrading PR No. 355 from the western edge of the R.M. of Minto to PR No. 270 (including the hill out of the Minnedosa valley).

To request the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) to consider supporting the said initiative to ensure the safety of our Manitobans and all Canadians who travel along Manitoba highways.

Signed by Richard Longstaff, Janice Longstaff, Wendell Wight and others.

* (13:35)

Minimum Sitting Days for Manitoba Legislature

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba Legislature sat for only 35 days in 2003.

In 2004, there were 55 sitting days.

The number of sitting days has a direct impact on the issue of public accountability.

The Legislative Assembly provides the best forum for all MLAs to debate and ask questions of the government, and it is critical that all MLAs be provided the time needed in order for them to cover constituent and party duties.

Establishing a minimum number of sitting days could prevent the government of the day from limiting the rights of opposition members from being able to ask questions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider recognizing the need to sit for a minimum of 80 days in any given calendar year.

Signed by Leo Tolledo, Warren Tolledo and Carmelita Tolledo.

Westman Area Physician Shortage

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Westman region serving Brandon and the surrounding area has been, and will continue to be, periodically without the services of an on-call pediatrician.

As a result of the severe shortage of pediatricians to serve the Westman area, Brandon and area women with high-risk pregnancies as well as critically ill children are being forced, at even greater risk, to travel to Winnipeg for urgent medical attention.

The chiefs of the departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Family Practice and Anesthesia at the Brandon Regional Health Centre have publicly voiced their concern regarding the potentially disastrous consequences of the shortage.

Brandon physicians were shocked and angered by the lack of communication and foresight on the part of the government related to retention of a local pediatrician.

The Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) has stated that Brandon has to put its best foot forward and recruit its own doctors.

Doctors have warned that if the current situation is prolonged, it may result in further loss of services or the departure of other specialists who find the situation unmanageable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to consider taking charge and ensuring that he will improve long-term planning efforts to develop a lasting solution to the chronic problem of pediatrician and other specialist shortages in Brandon.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to treat this as the crisis that it is and consider consulting with front-line workers, particularly doctors, to find solutions.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health and the Premier of Manitoba to consider ending highway medicine now.

Signed by Irene Drinkwater, Sharon Leader, Lisa Tylipski and others.

* (13:40)

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In May 2004, 46-year-old Peter Krahn suffered a heart attack while exercising in East St. Paul and was pronounced dead just under an hour later after being transported to the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Reports show that it took nearly 18 minutes for an ambulance to arrive for Mr. Krahn.

The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency response time, whereas the City of Winnipeg uses a benchmark of 4 minutes.

Ambulance coverage for East St. Paul is provided from Selkirk, which is almost 25 kilometres away.

The municipalities of East St. Paul and West St. Paul combined have over 12 000 residents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider providing East St. Paul with local ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul.

To request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technologies such as GPS in conjunction with a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre (MTCC) which will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time.

To request the provincial government to consider ensuring that appropriate funding is provided to maintain superior response times and sustainable services.

Signed by G. Mussell, S. Mussell, K. Mussell and many others.

Provincial Road 304

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. The background of this petition is as follows:

Provincial Road 304 is the main connector road between Provincial Trunk Highway 11 and Provincial Trunk Highway 59 for residents in Pine Falls, Powerview, St. George, Great Falls, Manigotagan and Bissett who wish to travel in a southwesterly direction to Selkirk and to Winnipeg.

Provincial Road 304 from Provincial Trunk Highway 11 in a southwesterly direction, is travelled by approximately 1000 vehicles daily and shortens the travel time to Winnipeg by at least 30 minutes.

The 14 kilometres of Provincial Road 304 to the south of Provincial Trunk Highway 11 is in a very poor condition, has no shoulders and winds among granite outcroppings and through swamps, creating very dangerous and very treacherous conditions for the travelling public.

At least six people have died needlessly in the last eight years on this 14-kilometre stretch of Provincial Road 304 south of Powerview.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider rebuilding and reconstructing the 14 kilometres of Provincial Road 304 to the south of Provincial Trunk Highway 11 at the earliest opportunity.

Signed by Paul Magnan, Paul Robert and Melanie Sobering.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Agriculture Awareness Day

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, on May 6, 2004, members of this Legislature gave unanimous support to our resolution calling for the establishment of Agriculture Awareness Day. We have acted on this resolution and today we celebrated the first Agriculture Awareness Day in Manitoba. From now on, Agriculture Awareness Day will be commemorated on the third Tuesday in March.

This is an important and fitting celebration. Agriculture is one of Manitoba's top five industries, contributing approximately 11 percent annually to the provincial gross domestic product. Almost one in eleven jobs in Manitoba depends on agriculture production.

* (13:45)

Mr. Speaker, our farmers and farm families are the foundation of our rural communities and our rural people. Our young people are the future of our industry. This is why we chose to mark Agriculture Awareness Day with a Thank You Farmer contest. Grades 5 and 6 students from across the province were invited to create thank you cards for farm families. More than 57 classes responded with more than 800 cards designed.

I am pleased to announce that the winning class was from Strathclair Community School. Unfortunately, they were not able to be here today because of weather conditions, but I can assure you that we will recognize them on another occasion.

I want to thank all of the students who took the time to pay tribute to Manitoba farmers. As a special tribute, Julie and Todd Racher, Manitoba's nominees for the 2004 Canadian Outstanding Young Farmer Program, and David and Gladys Gislason, Manitoba's 2000 Red River Farm Family of the Year were also presented with cards.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of the Legislature to take the opportunity to view the cards that are on display and to join me in congratulating the

students for making the first Agriculture Awareness Day such an outstanding success. Also, thank you to the farmers for all they contribute to the economy of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I have copies of the poem that was read by David Gislason that I would like to distribute to all members of the House by the page, if you would.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by, first of all, thanking the Minister of Agriculture for her statement. In addition, I would also like to thank my colleague, the critic for Agriculture, for allowing me to respond to the statement this afternoon.

First of all, I want to congratulate and thank all of the farmers in the province of Manitoba for their contribution to the well-being of our province. Indeed, agriculture is not just a foundation of the rural communities in this province, but it is the foundation of the well-being for all of the province. Manitoba has always been an agricultural province and continues to be to a large extent.

Mr. Speaker, farm families have undergone some very serious challenges in the last couple of years. Whether it has been the drought or excessive moisture or the frosts, and then coupled with the BSE crisis, farm families have been hit extremely hard. Today, as we stand and pay tribute to those farm families who contribute to our economy, we also have to recognize that these are the families and these are the communities that need our support as legislators.

Mr. Speaker, we stood in our places in this House last Monday and we all supported a resolution that was put forward for a debate during that day. In addition, we also supported a government resolution that called upon levels of government, especially the federal government, to come forward and do something for agriculture. Yesterday, Mr. Martin, the Prime Minister of Canada, called together the Canadian cattle producers to meet with them and seek ways in which we can address the serious crisis that we have in agriculture. It is in this spirit that on this day when we raise awareness of agriculture to the families, the farmers and the people of Manitoba that we also join together as legislators to do what it is we can to support the farmers who are in need and the agriculture industry that is in need.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also mention the schools that participated in the contest. I congratulate all of the teachers, the principals, the superintendents and the students who took time in their educational schedules to ensure that agriculture was made an important part of their program. To that extent, I congratulate the students from Strathclair who were able to win the prize for the best contest and the best card. So, to that extent, I congratulate farmers, students and all Manitobans for making this an important day.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I join with other colleagues in the Legislature from all parties in making sure that we adequately recognize the importance of the agricultural community and the products that come from our farmers to the economy, to the nutrition, to the health of the people in Manitoba. I want also to say thank you and congratulate those who participated in the contest.

I want to make a comment with respect to the Healthy Kids task force and the many comments that have come forward with respect to the fact that would it not be wonderful if our children were eating and drinking less pop and junk food and eating more food produced on Manitoba farms which is very nutritious, including milk and the many other nutritional products that are produced by farmers. Of course, this would help the health of our children and the people in Manitoba as well as helping our farmers and signalling the support that we have for the farm community.

Thank you in allowing me to contribute my support and the support of the Manitoba Liberal Party for the farm community and the agricultural community in Manitoba.

* (13:50)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to

the public gallery where we have with us today from Earl Grey School 19 Grades 4, 5 and 6 students under the direction of Mrs. Donna Last. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Advanced Education and Training (Ms. McGifford).

Also in the public gallery we have with us today members of the Giffin family from Portage la Prairie's Mayfair Farm. We have Eleanor Giffin, Todd and Karen and their children Carter and Jessie. These visitors are the guests of the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurschou).

Also in the public gallery we have with us today numerous farm families. These visitors are the guests of the honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

BSE Recovery Program Government Initiatives

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we today mark Agriculture Awareness Day, a day to pay tribute to our agriculture community. I was pleased to participate in the first ever Agriculture Awareness Day ceremonies just a short while ago. Certainly while we celebrate the successes and contributions of all those in the agriculture sector, we are saddened and concerned with the worsening plight of our cattle producers and their families.

With the ongoing and indefinite closure of the American border, the situation continues to worsen. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has recognized this deepening crisis. He called cattle producers to meet with them yesterday in Calgary. He acknowledged to them that increasing slaughter capacity and marketing may not be sufficient, and that there may have to be other social programs to go along with this. He, the Prime Minister, was aware of the need for cash in the countryside.

Mr. Speaker, we have continued to call for cash advances to the cattle producers from this NDP government, and they have refused. The Prime Minister called the cattle producers. I would ask will

this Premier commit today to calling the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association, invite them in and do the right thing. Give them a cash advance.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I do believe that slaughter capacity should be increased here in Manitoba and across Canada. In fact, when we did meet with the cattle producers early on in the crisis after the cow in Alberta, we did call for an increase in slaughter capacity and marketing here in Manitoba and across the country.

We believe that the federal government was wrong not to support Rancher's Choice last spring. We have upped our own contributions to that project considerably. As the equipment continues to come across the border to process more cattle in this province, we believe the equity of the producer, the provincial equity that has been raised three times and the equity hopefully now the federal government with their announcement today in Alberta will let this plant survive and flourish here for the producers of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that when this crisis emerged in Manitoba on May 20, two years ago, it took this Premier 72 days to meet a cattle producer. That is a fact.

Mr. Speaker, we have talked about a five-point BSE strategy recovery program that would put \$40 million into increasing slaughter capacity and \$10 million to ensure that there would be upgrades to have federally inspected standards, thereby allowing our Manitoba beef to be sold throughout Canada. Without such upgrades, our Manitoba cattle producers cannot ship their beef to other provinces.

My question to the Premier is this. Will he commit today in the House in front of these cattle producers who rely so much, who ensure that we have the best beef in the world, will this Premier stand behind them? Commit today for \$40 million to increase the slaughter capacity and \$10 million to have federally inspected plants so they can sell their beef around Canada.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we have committed a cash advance of some \$20 million just last November, well, 13 and then 6 with this budget for the reduction—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (13:55)

Mr. Doer: —of education taxes on farmland.

When the member opposite talks about slaughter and federal inspectors, he will recall his plan came out in '04. The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) and our plan came out in the summer of '03, to include increasing the capacity of existing slaughter operations in Manitoba, of having more federal inspectors available to ship the beef outside of Manitoba. This is a call that we have made to the federal Ag Minister, and we believe in very strongly. We remain committed to increasing the capacity of this plant, the Rancher's Choice.

I would point out that before the BSE crisis there was a 16 000 annual slaughter of beef here in Manitoba. In 2004, there were 28 000 beef slaughtered in this province. It is not enough, but it is a considerable amount more than what was there before we announced our slaughter improvement, and I want to thank the processors and the consumers. We can do more. We will do more, and we are committed to doing more for our ranchers here in Manitoba.

CAIS Program Elimination of Deposit

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the fact of life is that this Premier loves debt. Not only is he asking cattle producers to take loans to put them further into debt, but that is exactly what he is doing with the province of Manitoba, increasing the debt. That is not what they want. Producers wanting to participate in the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program must first ante up a large cash deposit, something that throws a barrier to many producers who have difficulty in coming up with that money.

Last month a motion was passed in the House of Commons calling for the elimination of the producer cash deposit of the CAIS program. The motion was supported by MPs from the Conservative Party, from the NDP party, from the Bloc, Mr. Speaker. The federal government cannot alone remove the deposit for the CAIS. We need seven out of ten provinces to ensure that that happens.

My question is to this Premier. Will he instruct his Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) to call for the elimination of the CAIS deposit? Will he do it today, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we have agreed in essence to a similar proposal to delay the requirement from the federal government. Our Minister of Agriculture has agreed to that. We have raised the issue of CAIS on the phone. *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we have said to the Prime Minister and the federal government that our Minister of Agriculture and the other two western ministers of Agriculture all believe that the existing CAIS program is not doing what it is supposed to do for producers and for cattle producers. We have agreed to work expeditiously with the federal government to amend the program to ensure that it is much more cash sensitive to the producers who need it. We have said that to the Prime Minister. We have said that to the federal Minister of Agriculture, and I will say it to this House that that is what the Minister of Agriculture of Manitoba is committed to doing.

BSE Recovery Program Government Initiatives

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Today is Agriculture Awareness Day and as a critic of Agriculture, on behalf of the entire party, I want to begin by thanking all of our agricultural producers for an outstanding contribution to the well-being of our province.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we have an ongoing crisis in our cattle industry. Two years after the first case of BSE came out, this government has not moved on increasing slaughter capacity. Our five-point plan that we presented to Manitobans addressed the issues of slaughter capacity and real assistance for farm families.

Mr. Speaker, is the minister now prepared in light of the continued crisis and the absence of any plan from her government for farm families, will she now accept our five-point BSE recovery plan?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the member's statement, and I am ready to

put the actual facts on the table. Where members opposite are saying that we have not increased slaughter capacity in this province, I can tell you that slaughter capacity in 2002 was 16 500 animals, in 2004, it was 28 000 animals. I want to pay tribute to the many people in this province who are in the slaughter industry who have increased their capacity in order to help producers with the heavy burden they are carrying.

Members opposite should not say we have not increased slaughter capacity. Is it enough? No, Mr. Speaker, it is not enough. There is more work to be done. That is why we have put money in place. That is why we are working with people like Rancher's Choice and others to increase our slaughter capacity. Let the members opposite not say that Manitobans have not done anything. They have.

* (14:00)

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, they had one federally inspected plant in May of 2003. They have still one plant. They have not increased slaughter capacity in this province. That is wrong. Manitoba farm families are in a crisis mode. Our cattle are backing up and some are even running out of feed. We have time and time again asked this government to get on with the job instead of issuing more press releases.

Mr. Speaker, will this minister commit to immediately moving ahead on a cash advance program for livestock for our farm families?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, we have implemented a tax cut to help our producers, of which this year will put \$20 million into producers' hands. It was through Manitoba's leadership that we got a cash advance through CAIS, so producers could get cash before they fill out their CAIS applications.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has said they are going to put in place a cash advance program similar to the one that is available for grain producers. I encourage the federal government to do those things. I would encourage members opposite to look at the numbers of what we as a province have done for the beef industry and what the federal government has done. Is there more to do? Yes, definitely. We have to continue to work at increasing slaughter capacity and finding new markets for our beef, so we are not as dependent on the U.S. market. We will continue to work in that way.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, that same song she has been playing over and over again. It has been two years since the first case of BSE. Two years, and this government has still not come up with a plan for Manitoba farm families. There is still no slaughter capacity. There is still no cash advance. There is still no assistance to upgrade existing facilities to federal standards.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba farm families are still waiting for some meaningful action from this government. How much longer do we have to wait?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased that the members are consistent in their message this time. Two years ago, or a year ago, they were saying we did not need more slaughter capacity. Then they came up with a plan that we need more slaughter capacity. We have been committed from the very beginning. We have been committed, and we are working with the industry. An increase of 12 000 is important. We have to do much more—[*interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind all honourable members we have guests in the gallery. I see they are leaning forward trying to hear. I do not think they should have to do that. They came here to hear questions and answers, and I think they should be entitled to be able to hear them. I ask the cooperation of all honourable members.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognized this as a very serious situation from the day it happened. Our government has been committed and we will continue to work. Our ultimate goal is to increase slaughter capacity in this province and to find new markets so that we are not completely dependent on a country that is bound to close their borders on us. We will continue to work at it. We have put programs in place.

I am very pleased that the opposition now feels that the federal government also has some responsibility. They have made announcements, Mr. Speaker. They have not delivered. We have delivered.

Crocus Fund Protection for Investors

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, in December of 2002, the Crocus Fund announced that

it had received a \$10-million investment from a Québec fund. Nowhere in the press release did it reveal that the fund was to receive a 10% guaranteed rate of return, that the fund was to get a first call on all the assets of the Crocus Fund. In fact, there was a penalty clause that might see that 10% return escalate to 20 percent. In fact, it was more of a high interest-bearing loan than an investment at all.

I would ask the Minister of Industry today if he could explain to Manitobans and particularly to people who have invested in the fund what due diligence his department undertook upon learning of this investment.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, once again I look at this as an independent fund that we set up the parameters. We set up the rules, we set up the fact that we provide 15 percent to ensure that the investments are made from Manitoba. The decisions on the investment, the decisions on the parameters of where the money comes from and where the money is delivered are made by the fund itself.

This is not a fund that is controlled by government. This is not a fund that is directed by government. This is a fund that is a labour-sponsored fund which is no different than any other fund in the province. It is a fund that operates independent of government. If you look at when these funds were set up, the Conservative minister that set these up said these funds were supposed to operate independent of government, without government interference.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I would urge the minister to actually take the time to read the act. I will quote from section 15.1(2) that the fund on a request from a minister and I quote: "Should return information on any subject connected with the business affairs, assets or liabilities of the fund that in the minister's opinion is relevant."

I would ask the minister if he did not consider that a \$10-million loan, which carried a first call on the assets, guaranteed a return of investment of at least 10 percent and a penalty clause to 20 percent, why is it that his department had no interest in it at all and just left investors in the Crocus Fund to hang out and dry. Why did his department not take any interest in this loan?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I urge the member opposite to understand how these funds are established. When the Tories set it up, when Finance Minister Clayton Manness, whom I assume the members opposite know, when he set it up, and I quote: "Rather than entrust the political interference that can sometimes swirl around decisions made, let us have some trust in our community leaders, business leaders to make the right decisions. They are the people skilled."

The prospectus says, again, that we do not have control. It is an independent fund. We set up the parameters. We set up the rules, Mr. Speaker. We establish the rules by which the funds operate. We do not direct their investments. We do not say where their return is coming from. We do not control the operation of the fund.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, once again, I would urge the minister to read the act because in fact, the government has a responsibility on behalf of Manitobans to monitor the fund. That is why they passed the amendments. That is why this House gave them the right.

Mr. Speaker, the real issue in this is why the NDP government is sitting beside idly, sitting on its seat while Crocus Fund unit holders have seen the value of their investment fall 50 percent. At the same time, preferred investors from Québec are seeing a guaranteed rate of return of 10 percent, possibly as high as 20 percent under the penalty clause. As a matter of fact, they have a first call on all of the assets in the fund.

I would ask the minister this. Instead of just reading quotes that have been prepared for him ahead of time, answer this question. What is this minister going to do to protect the unit holders in the Crocus Fund? What is he going to do to see their interest does not fall any further while this fund from Québec gets 10 percent?

Mr. Rondeau: I would hope the member opposite begins to get some of his facts correct in this case. First, the minister responsible gets information to ensure that it complies with the act. The act says whether the investments are in Manitoba. That is what that section says. I am allowed to ask for information to ensure that the investments are made in this province. That is what sections 11 and 15 deal with, and that is where I can get the information.

I would suggest that the member opposite read the act. It says I can request information that in the minister's opinion, is relevant to the administration or enforcement of the act relating to the investment in this province. That is appropriate. That is what powers I had, and that is the powers that I would exercise.

Crocus Fund Protection for Investors

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, it has become obvious that this NDP government has no interest in protecting the investments Manitobans have made in the Crocus Fund. In December, the fund issued a letter to all MLAs indicating the fund had cash reserves of \$34 million. Instead of protecting unit holders' funds by paying off the Québec loan that carries an exorbitant interest rate, the fund is eating up unit holder value by continuing to pay interest at 10 percent and possibly 20 percent. Can the minister explain why he sat back and did nothing to prevent the Québec fund from benefiting while Manitoba investors are seeing their retirement savings slashed?

*(14:10)

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, once again, the members opposite do not understand the rules of this act. First, what we do is we set up the rules where we provide a tax incentive so that money is invested in this province. We do not say where they are invested. We do not say the investment returns. We do not say whether it is a good or bad decision. In fact, the prospectus says bluntly that we do not comment on the valuations or the investments. We do not have a say in that. The members opposite may have, under their watch, done such things. We allow the market, all labour-sponsored funds, to act independent of government decisions.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans invested in the Crocus Fund in the belief that this government was looking out for their best interest and sadly they were mistaken. This NDP government has no interest in protecting Manitobans who invested in Crocus.

Why has this minister not told the Manitoba Federation of Labour, who controls this fund, to protect the investment Manitobans have made by

repaying or renegotiating the Québec loan which is this close to being loan-sharking? Why does he not do his job?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite could read their prospectus, and I ask them to open it to page 1. It says none of the securities, administrators or other departments or agencies of the government has assessed the merits of any investments in the fund. The securities administrators of the government, et cetera, make no recommendation concerning such an investment and assume no liability or obligation to any investor of the fund. We do not control the investments. We do not control where they put the money, the return of the money. We do not control the fund. We are the regulators. I will put it simply. We do not have the speed gun; we set the speed limit.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are seeing their retirement slashed in half while a Québec fund still receives a guaranteed 10% rate of return on their investment. Unit holders would like this NDP government to offer them some protection. When will this minister, when will this NDP government offer them some?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, when people make an investment in an equity fund, what we do is we control the rules of the fund. In other words, the money is invested in Manitoba. We do not tell them where to invest. We do not guarantee the investment. We do not guarantee the return. What we do is we say they have to have a prospectus. That has been looked after. We say they have to invest a certain percentage in Manitoba. That we also do. We do not control the investment. People opposite may want us to control the fund. We do not. We regulate it.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, prior to the last election, the Premier (Mr. Doer) promised that he would not close Victoria Hospital's maternity ward. On October 2002, the Minister of Health said that he would not close the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital and that no amount of evidence produced by the WRHA would change his mind. He said, and I quote, "It is not our policy to close obstetrics at Victoria."

Well, Mr. Speaker, so much for keeping their promises, a common theme of this government. Today the WRHA was forced to do the minister's dirty work and announce the closure of the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital. How can Manitobans trust this Premier when he provided nothing but false hope to expectant mothers, promising to keep the maternity ward open, then today, he turns around and allows for its closure?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Tuxedo asked a question and she has a right to hear the answer. With all this yelling back and forth I cannot even hear from here, so I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My daughter was born at Victoria, and I was very appreciative of the care but unfortunately, things change.

When we had looked at the number of births over the last eight years, Mr. Speaker, they have declined from 2150 to just over 700 this year. We have been monitoring this situation for a number of years actually and, unfortunately, we were advised recently both by the Medical Advisory Committee of the hospital, the Medical Advisory Committee of WRHA and the CEO of WRHA that at this level, this program is not sustainable without incurring risks to women's health and risks to babies' health.

So we are in the process, Mr. Speaker, of strengthening women's programs at Victoria Hospital but we have to face the inevitable, that certain numbers of births are required if they are to be safe and of the highest quality. We must take the medical advice that we are given in this regard so, regrettably, this is the advice that we must accept.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, was it not the Premier of this province that stood before Manitobans and said that a promise made is a promise kept? So much for the Premier's promise and his word in this province. Shame on this government.

Mr. Speaker, last year nurses from the Women's Health Program at the Victoria Hospital presented a letter to the former Minister of Health signed by hospital staff and members of the community urging this NDP government not to close the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, two months ago nurses again sent a letter to the new Minister of Health, yet have not even had the decency of a response. Can the Minister of Health explain why the front-line workers on this ward had to hear about the closure of this ward today on the radio?

Mr. Sale: The hospital has had a number of meetings with its medical committee. It has had meetings with its board. It has had meetings with its staff. This issue has been carefully monitored over a period of years.

I can understand the commitment of nurses to the work that they do and they do valuable and wonderful work, but at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it is not our desire that this should change. The reality is that medical advice says the situation cannot be sustained safely. Therefore, with patient safety in mind we will transition this program, but we will also strengthen women's programs at Victoria General Hospital so that there will still, hopefully, be births at that hospital through the good offices of our midwifery program. We do not enjoy this process, but medical recommendations and patient safety has to trump all other concerns in our system.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, this Premier, this Minister of Health, they have the ability today to ensure that the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital stays open, yet they do not seem to have the political will. Perhaps a new slogan for their next election campaign will be promises made and promises broken. This is outrageous.

Mr. Speaker, a year ago, my son Thomas was born at St. Boniface Hospital and at that time the maternity ward at St. Boniface Hospital was absolutely full. If one more woman had shown up who was in labour at the time, she would have been turned away.

My question for the Minister of Health is this. Where will women in labour go if St. Boniface and Health Sciences hospital maternity wards are full, now that he has broken his promise and closed the

maternity ward at Victoria Hospital? Is this how this government treats women and families in the community?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, over the past eight years, the numbers of women choosing to have births at Victoria General Hospital has fallen from 2100 to just over 700. Women have made choices on the basis of their doctors' advice, on the basis of midwives' advice and on the basis of their own sense of what is the most appropriate place for them to give birth.

We, as a government, wished this service to be maintained, and we did maintain it, but we cannot fly in the face of medical advice and the safety of patients. If the member opposite wants us to order to do something that is medically unsafe, let her say so.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, prior to the last election, this Premier promised not to close the Victoria Hospital maternity ward. That is what he said. This Premier has also said that a promise made is a promise kept. That is also what this Premier said. Manitobans want to be proud of their Premier when he makes a promise. Can this Premier tell Manitobans how can he so blatantly flip-flop?

* (14:20)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): There is no question that I would prefer and we would prefer to maintain the community option—

An Honourable Member: That is what you promised.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, there is no question that we would prefer to keep a community option for the obstetrics program at the Victoria Hospital. There is also no question that when this question was raised last year in the House, I think I recall saying to members opposite that it was open today and open tomorrow, but we had not yet received any recommendation—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: –from the board and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

There have been safety issues raised with the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale). We take the safety of patients very seriously, and the Minister of Health is working with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. The Minister of Health and the deputy minister have been in communication with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority on this issue, and we are obviously in a situation now where the advice we are getting from doctors is contrary to the community option that we would prefer to maintain. I always will deal on the basis of patient safety first, and that is what our Minister of Health is wrestling with today, Mr. Speaker.

Rural Hospitals Closures

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is looking at building a new subdivision, Waverley West, less than a mile from the Victoria Hospital.

Again, for all of Manitobans, before this election this Premier promised that they would not close the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital. The member from Seine River promised they would not close the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital. The members from Seine River, from Riel, from Fort Garry all promised that they would not close the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital. Today, and finally today, the truth comes out.

Mr. Speaker, the majority of people want to know. This Premier has gone out to rural Manitoba saying they will not close a rural hospital. Is today the beginning of the closure of rural hospitals in Manitoba?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, this resolution comes from the hospital on March 10, and it was dealt with by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. As I said, and I will say it again, the preference of the government is to maintain the community option at Victoria Hospital.

We also have to listen to the medical safety advice from people that are on the front lines of the hospital, i.e., the board of directors that is dealing

with the safety with the number of procedures, and, secondly, the recommendations from medical–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: –the medical advice we receive from medical doctors that are responsible for giving advice to the government on patient safety. This is not the first time governments have received advice based on the number of procedures and whether they can be maintained at a facility, or a program or where we have to have a higher number to ensure safety of patients.

I will remind members opposite that, in the children's cardiac pediatric care program, it was identified that we did not have the number of cardiac pediatric patients. Therefore, for patient safety reasons, not for political reasons because obviously you would prefer it in your own community, but for patient safety reasons we have allowed the programs in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta to be combined in Alberta. That is not the first time we have had to make decisions like that. Safety will always be a criterion for our Minister of Health.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is incredible that this Premier is backpedalling simply on a promise that he made. It was a promise he made to Manitobans as well as other members of the NDP. Promises made are promises kept. That is the word that this Premier says. Now, when we find out the truth that the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital is being closed, this Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) has the audacity to stand up and simply say, "Well, things have changed."

Mr. Speaker, we know from this Minister of Health how much things have changed. He cannot be trusted. The fact of life is we have heard from this Premier that they have to face the inevitable. Well, Manitobans are now hearing the inevitable from this Premier. He cannot be trusted. A promise made is a promise broken. Why does he not just stand up and admit that to Manitobans? He is going to be closing rural hospitals. He said he would not, but he is going to do it.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, last year when this matter came up in the House, on May 6, '04, I said there is no recommendation to us, to me, to close the

maternity ward of Victoria Hospital. There is none. If there was, I would read it. I would recommend strongly, the member opposite, and I will ask the Minister of Health to provide to members opposite the medical safety recommendations we are receiving.

I would prefer, and we would prefer, to maintain the community option at Victoria Hospital. Let me make that perfectly clear, but I also have to listen to recommendations that I do not necessarily want to hear, but recommendations made to us on patient safety. I will always listen to medical experts dealing with medical safety and patient safety. I will always listen to that kind of advice. That is what I said a year ago.

Children in Care Northern Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, last month a young boy from northern Manitoba who was in the Child and Family Services system was shot to death by a 13-year-old boy who was under care of Child and Family Services. Both boys had been shipped off to Winnipeg because of a severe lack of services in the North. One child is dead and another is charged. This was a preventable tragedy. Major problems were identified in the March 2004 review of the CFS shelter system by the Children's Advocate but were not addressed.

My question for the minister is this. What is her department doing about the lack of therapy and support services for children in northern Manitoba to make sure a tragedy of this magnitude never happens again?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I think we can all acknowledge that was indeed a very upsetting event. What our government is doing is carrying through with the devolution of the Child Welfare Initiative. This is a government that believes culturally appropriate services are very necessary for all of the children in Manitoba when they are in care.

We have established a northern authority, a southern authority, a Métis authority and a general authority. The devolution is continuing as we speak. We have done most of southern Manitoba and are currently rolling out northern Manitoba. We will, through the late spring and the summer, roll out

Winnipeg. We believe that we are doing everything we can to avoid a situation like this from developing again, and we will continue to work with the devolution of child welfare.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, a young boy went home in a coffin. How did a 13-year-old boy under the care of Child and Family Services get a gun? Where was the supervision? These children are being sent to private, for-profit care facilities and organizations to be poorly supervised, so poorly supervised that a child is dead. The Children's Advocate report said it was totally unacceptable to have children living in unsafe neighbourhoods in the supervision of Child and Family Services. Was this boy in CFS care, the boy who got the gun, so scared about being put in such a dangerous situation by CFS that he felt he needed to have a gun to protect himself?

I ask the minister what is she doing to investigate this situation so that nothing like it ever happens again.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, when an incident of this gravity happens, there are several steps that are taken. One is, certainly, with the Winnipeg Police Service, and another is with the Chief Medical Examiner. So we must allow those processes to take their due course.

Within the department, on the question of for-profit, we have re-established the Agency Accountability Unit. We have renamed it the Agency Accountability and Support Unit to ensure that organizations we are funding are putting the monies where they should be. Further to that, we are reinstating the quality assurance program that unfortunately was eliminated in 1998. This quality assurance program will work on issues of care, will work on issues of supervision and will work on the various issues that surround the care of these very vulnerable children within our safety network around children and care.

* (14:30)

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. The Premier (Mr. Doer) states or says, "Promises made are promises kept." The Minister of Health says, "Things

change." The Premier says, "It is safety issues." Well, we would suggest you fix the safety issues.

In fact, the medical safety recommendations can be dealt with in a positive way that you do not have to take obstetrics out of the Victoria Hospital. If the political will is there, there is no reason or rationale a bureaucrat can give that is going to justify the closure of the obstetrics at the Victoria Hospital. The former Minister of Health knows that because we sat and articulated about the benefits of community health and the benefits of obstetrics. That was then when they were in opposition. Consistency is the issue.

Will the Minister of Health make the political decision today and say that Victoria will not lose its obstetrics, that they deserve and warrant having that community service being delivered in that community?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I regret that the member opposite thinks it is appropriate to make a political decision on women's and babies' health. The Victoria General Hospital perinatal morbidity and mortality committee recommended on March 10, the following: As the perinatal morbidity and mortality committee of the Victoria General Hospital, our concerns are for standards of care for women and newborns. We are aware of critical staffing issues regarding the provision of care on the labour floor. It is clear that closure of the labour floor is inevitable. We require immediate direction from the administration of this hospital in order to mitigate risk. We manage on behalf of patients, patient safety and newborns, and that is what we are doing. We do not like it, but that is what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), on a point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order and would ask if that was a letter the minister was quoting from that he table the document.

An Honourable Member: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: It sure is a point of order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister, was that a signed letter you were quoting from?

Mr. Sale: No, Mr. Speaker. It was a motion from the committee, and it is not signed.

Mr. Speaker: I will accept that.

Time for Oral Questions had expired. The honourable member was up on a point of order. He does not have a point of order.

Speaker's Ruling

* (14:40)

I have a ruling for the House.

During Petitions on December 2, 2004, the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) raised a matter of privilege regarding events that had taken place in the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs earlier that day.

The honourable Member for Inkster indicated that the independent Liberal members were not going to be represented on a subcommittee that was being struck to deal with the hiring process for the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman, and he went on to describe some of the events that occurred in committee. At the conclusion of his remarks, the honourable Member for Inkster moved that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs and be reported back to this House. The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Mackintosh), the honourable Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), the honourable Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach) offered advice to the Chair. I took the matter under advisement in order to consult the procedural authorities.

There are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for the matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege. First, was the matter raised at the earliest opportunity? Second, has sufficient evidence been provided to demonstrate

that the privileges of the House have been breached, in order to warrant putting the matter to the House?

Regarding the first condition, the honourable Member for Inkster asserted that he was raising the matter at the earliest opportunity, and I accept the word of the honourable member.

Regarding the second condition, whether there is sufficient evidence that the privileges of the House have been breached, it is important to determine whether parliamentary privilege has been breached in the actions complained of.

Regarding the second condition, I must advise the House that, according to procedural authorities and rulings of Manitoba Speakers, matters of privilege that are raised in the House regarding events in committees must be raised in the House by way of a committee report. *Beauchesne* Citation 107 states "Breaches of privilege in committee may be dealt with only by the House itself on report from the committee." Marleau and Montpetit state on page 128 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* that "Speakers have consistently ruled that, except in the most extreme situations, they will only hear questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings upon presentation of a report from a committee which deals directly with the matter and not as a question of privilege raised by an individual Member."

Similarly, Speaker Rocan ruled in 1989, in 1993 and in 1994 that the opinion of the Speaker cannot be sought in the House about matters arising in committee and that it is not competent for the Speaker to exercise procedural control over committees. In these three cases, he ruled that the proper course of action to be taken is for the issue to be raised in the appropriate committee at the earliest opportunity. I have made similar rulings in the House on March 4, and May 31, 2004, where I indicated that matters of privilege raised in the House regarding events in committee must be raised in the House by way of a committee report, and that it is not appropriate for Speakers to exercise procedural control over committees.

On this basis, I must therefore rule that the matter raised does not fulfil the conditions of a *prima facie* case of privilege. However, this does not preclude the matter from being raised in the appropriate committee.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Highway 201 Bridge Closure

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, it is almost two weeks ago that the department of highways sent out a letter to some of the local communities and municipalities in my riding. They were told that the bridge on Highway 201 crossing the Red River at the Roseau First Nations community at Letellier would be closed in part and weight restrictions of 16 tonnes would be placed on that bridge. There would only be one-lane traffic allowed through that bridge.

If that in fact happens, Mr. Speaker, then the farmers that live and operate on the west side of the river will not be able to cross that bridge to get to their land during the spring seeding and harvest. They will not be able to haul their fertilizer across that bridge or their seed grain across that bridge to get to their fields.

The other thing that will be terminated will be the aggregate that is needed to supply the cement plant at Altona and Winkler with aggregate to make concrete. That will also be stopped. Those industries do not know where to get aggregate to make concrete unless they can come across that bridge.

The third part is that the farm industry, both the fertilizer plants on the east and west side of the river, the livestock industry that is dependent on getting across that bridge to the Emerson port, once the border opens, if it ever does open, to get their cattle inspected for export, would have to travel many, many miles further to get to that port.

It is also important, Mr. Speaker, that the minister was asked whether he would supply staff to come to a meeting tonight to explain to the people in that whole region why the bridge would be closed and what the methods would be and how long the bridge would be closed. He has refused to send staff to that meeting. That is unconscionable.

Agriculture Awareness Day

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to pay tribute to Manitoba's hardworking farmers today on this, Manitoba's first Agriculture Awareness Day.

Agriculture plays an indispensable role in Manitoba's economy, employing thousands of Manitobans each year. That is why, in the 2005 budget, our government has provided an additional \$3 million to build local slaughter capacity and has increased the provincial contribution to the CAIS program to \$52.5 million. Furthermore, our government has followed through on past commitments by reducing farmland education property taxes by 50 percent for 2005.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to read into the record of the Manitoba Legislature a poem written by farmer, David Gislason, of Arborg, Manitoba, that was read on the grand staircase today. David and his wife, Gladys, are constituents of mine and not too long ago were Manitoba's Farm Family of the Year.

The poem, entitled *Harvest*, is as follows: "When Autumn's muse her palette paints with patterns bright, / I look to bring the harvest home – my heart is light. / I see that from my fields I'll reap a rich reward, / For which I turn in thoughtful mood, to thank the Lord. / Winter had these wheat fields in their whitest dressed / 'Till Springtime's southern breezes bared her mother's breast. / So quickly 'neath the summer sun the seedlings grew, / And work-worn hands and heart were filled with hope anew. / And now that winter's here again, the bins are filled. / Though markets may not be just what we might have willed, / I look across the fields where last my swaths had lain - / And think of spring, when I can plant my fields again."

Mr. Speaker, I call on all members of the House today to join me in thanking Manitoba's agricultural producers for their enormous contributions to our province. You all have our deepest gratitude. Thank you.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, on the first annual Agriculture Awareness Day to talk about the issue that is affecting the youth in rural Manitoba. I have the pleasure today to recognize Jamie Kohut, who is a young farmer from the community of Souris who is attending, for the first time an event in the Legislature, and I want to welcome him and the others from my community, or my constituency. Thank you for attending today.

We have seen first-hand how they have suffered through the BSE crisis. The youth in our communities have been greatly affected by this ongoing

financial and social tragedy. Since the BSE crisis in 2003, parents are finding it financially difficult to provide their children with quality post-secondary and secondary education. The Province has failed to support these families through more effective loan programs and need-based bursaries. I am confident in the ability of the youth from rural Manitoba and feel that they are well-deserving of opportunities and commitment from government programs.

Youth should have the choice to pursue a post-secondary education, but youth wanting to stay in their rural communities must also be given opportunities and incentives. Young farmers and entrepreneurs in rural Manitoba are trying to sustain and develop their communities. A prosperous community environment and social programs provide our youth with opportunities and social strength. However, since 2003, these areas have suffered, and parents are often unable to fund their children's extra-curricular activities. This not only affects the family structure but also impacts the community spirit. The government has no vision to help or sustain or develop rural communities that are greatly dependent on agricultural sustainability.

Since the first case of BSE was discovered in 2003, the government's inaction to effectively address the crisis in rural Manitoba has sent a clear message to Manitoba's youth. The government, once again, has missed an opportunity to address the ongoing crisis in rural Manitoba and has shown a lack of commitment to provide rural youth with the opportunities they deserve.

Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to tell you that the arts are alive and well in the West End. I am proud to rise today to congratulate the outstanding performing and fine arts programs at Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute.

Daniel McIntyre is located on Wellington Avenue just west of Arlington Street. DMCI has a long tradition of academic excellence and winning sports teams, and in the last years has enjoyed a tremendous growth in its dramatic arts, dance, band, choir and vocal jazz programs.

I was very pleased that DMCI students participated in the recent Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force meeting at the Freight House. We were

entertained by the jazz choir, under the direction of Eric Hemmerling, and the rejuvenated cheerleading squad led by Carrie Meier, who is working with Jennifer Cox to continue to expand an excellent dance program. The other task force members and I also had the good fortune of meeting some of the bright and talented students who are involved in the leadership program with Brad Purpur.

The DMCI vocal jazz program was recently recognized by the awarding of a Juno grant. Jodie Borle, a local vocal jazz artist, will conduct several workshops to focus on stage presentation and vocal improvisation.

In April, Daniel Mac is putting on a musical, *DMCI Goes Broadway*, which will showcase the talents of many students in music and dance. In June, DMCI will host an art show featuring works of its many talented artists.

Mr. Speaker, the value of programs such as these cannot be overstated. They make school an enjoyable place where students look forward to returning each day, and provide students the opportunity to prove to themselves that through hard work they can and will develop their talents and perform at a high level.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the staff and administration at DMCI for their dedication to making these programs a huge success. I would also like to commend the students at Daniel Mac who have worked so hard to channel their talents and give something back to our community. Thank you.

* (14:50)

Basketball Accomplishments

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize a special group of people. Every week hundreds of youth play in organized sports. At this time, I would like to acknowledge three basketball leagues and to congratulate their respective organizers: WAAY, or the Winnipeg Athletic Association for Youth, in particular, Angel Martinez and his group; IKAW, or the International Kabayan Association of Winnipeg, in particular Jerry Medina and his group; the Lipenos Basketball League association, in particular, Manny Aranez and his group.

These people put in a phenomenal amount of time and resources in order to ensure children from across the city are playing basketball at a time when we see many kids watching television, playing video games, sitting at computers and far too often, hanging out looking for things to do, sometimes not positive things. When we see parents and others making the sacrifices they do in order to get young people out and active, it is so encouraging.

These basketball leagues bring people together and promote all sorts of positive values for our young people and their families. Whether it is these leagues or others such as cultural groups or our community clubs, I would like to express a very special thank you for the many investments that you make in our children. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Adjourned Debate (Sixth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) that this House approve, in general, the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) in amendment thereto, and the proposed motion of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and amendment thereto, and the debate remains open.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to stand today and to offer some words on the budget, but before I get into that debate, I want to turn my attention once again to this day and the fact that today we are celebrating Agriculture Awareness Day.

This is the first day of an annual event that is going to continue for the future, and I want to congratulate the member from Carman for putting the motion forward before this House and the fact that he saw the plight of agriculture and the fact that we needed to raise the awareness of the importance of agriculture in our province. It was through his efforts that today we celebrate the first awareness day for agriculture in this province.

I also want to acknowledge the farm families and their children. Today we saw, through the competition that was launched for the Thank You Farmer postcard, that there were many schools that participated. Some 57 schools participated in this event, and I am proud to say the children in our schools understand the importance of agriculture.

Maybe we have to start ensuring agriculture is not only taught in the classroom at a particular age but that it becomes part of the important curriculum that is taught to all children in this province because indeed agriculture is still the foundation of the economy of this province. Unfortunately, farmers today are facing some very, very difficult times. We have tried to encourage this government to do its part to try to ease the pain that farm families are feeling.

Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged to note that the Prime Minister summoned the Canadian cattle producers to a meeting in Calgary yesterday to talk about what it is the federal government can do to enhance its support to farm families in this country. Alberta and Ottawa have partnered in a marketing plan to expand the marketing of livestock around the world, another positive initiative that will stand us well in the future.

We turn our eyes to this provincial government, and we ask this provincial government: What have they done to ease the pain of farm families as they try to deal with this crisis issue? And it has reached a crisis proportion because the border was slammed shut for the second time, if you like. It is not the fault of farm families who raise beef in this province. It is not the fault of the rural communities who are engaged in this agriculture industry that all of a sudden their markets have been shut from them.

Mr. Speaker, I go back to how the government has responded in other crisis situations. When the bus builders in our province faced a problem, the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province immersed himself into finding a solution for that problem, and it was not very long before there was a massive amount of money thrown at that problem to ensure that we did not have a work stoppage, to ensure that families were not impacted negatively who depended on bus building to feed their families.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the farm situation, one has to ask how is this situation different from that that was faced by those families who work at our

bus manufacturing plants. I use that as one example. All of a sudden the Premier was nowhere to be found. It took some 70-some days for the Premier to meet with the farmers and the cattle producers who were facing the crisis.

Mr. Speaker, the government from that day has dithered about a solution to the problem. The farmers could advise this government as to what the solution should be, and they have through the Manitoba cattle producers association, through the Canadian cattle producers association, through the Keystone Agricultural Producers association, through AMM. All of these organizations have looked at the government and said, if you are really serious about fixing the problem in agriculture for the beef producers, then the first thing you have to do is to make sure that the negative impact is not felt by the producers. So what you do is you have to put in a cash advance program.

Traditionally, Mr. Speaker, cattle producers have not looked at government for support. They are very independent. They have always been self-sufficient. They have always looked after their own programs, but in this case you cannot expect to farmers to try and deal with a problem that is of such great magnitude that no organization in the farm scene can deal with, that even the country has trouble dealing with. So farmers look to their government, to their elected people, to the people like myself who they put into this Chamber to help them in this situation.

Mr. Speaker, in turn as an opposition party, we have looked at the government to show leadership. We looked at the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) to show leadership on how we can solve this situation. Well, lots of talk, lots of press release, but no plan. Not a single plan has been put forward on how it is that Manitobans can move forward to try to deal with this terrible problem.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister the other day came out with an announcement of some \$3 million that she was putting in to increase slaughter capacity in the province. Now that is a joke. That is a slap in the face to producers; that is a slap in the face to the industry. The minister knows, as do the producers, that you are going to do nothing with \$3 million. That amounts to, as the critic for Agriculture rightfully points out, to about \$6 for every cow that we have in this province.

Now, what are you going to do with that, Mr. Speaker? You cannot start any kind of a processing

facility. You cannot build a processing facility. You cannot even partner with anybody to build a processing facility. So what are you to do with that?

This government has hung all of its credits on Rancher's Choice. Now, Rancher's Choice is trying to do what Rancher's Choice can. They are struggling; they cannot do it alone. These are farmers who are suffering under tremendous pressure today not being able to move their livestock; and, if they move it, they are moving it at such depressed prices that they can hardly pay their bills with those dollars. Now the minister and her government expect them to find dollars somewhere to build a slaughtering plant. That is foolish. In all honesty, that is just plain old foolishness.

* (15:00)

It is the NDP way, Mr. Speaker. As long as they can wrench their hands in front of a crowd and say, "This is a terrible crisis and we will always stand by you farmers," but they never do anything. They have been forced to do a few things, but it is always in part-measure. It is never addressing the problem fully.

If the minister is serious about putting more slaughter capacity in this province, then she will take a part of that \$180 million that she announced and did not spend and dedicate it to a slaughter facility. How many dollars would we need? Our party decided that we were going to put forward a plan, so we sat down in all seriousness. We took that \$180 million the government announced and then we subtracted what they had spent. We took the difference and we said, "Now, what can we do with that difference?" What we were able to come up with was a five-point plan.

This five-point plan is not the be-all and end-all of the agriculture or the livestock industry, Mr. Speaker, but it is a beginning to address the real problems. One of the major parts of that five-point plan was that we would put \$40 million into a slaughter facility, \$40 million. I can tell you that if this government were to put \$40 million and dedicate it to ensuring that a slaughter facility was built in this province, we would have a slaughter facility ready to go in this province in the next six to eight months. That would be a real investment in the economy of our province. It would be a real investment to ensure that we, once again, are on the world scene as far as

slaughter capacity is concerned. It would ensure that we could put our beef in boxes and send it to customers around the world.

Right now, what do we do? We can slaughter beef in our abattoirs in Manitoba, but you cannot send it to Ontario. You cannot send it to Saskatchewan. You cannot send it to the United States, of course, but we cannot even send it to Nunavut. Why can we not send it there? Because our plants are not federally inspected. Out of the 29 plants we have in Manitoba, we have one plant that has capability to export because it is to the standard of federally inspected plants.

When we discussed our five-point plan, we said, "What can we do to encourage the small abattoirs while the large slaughter house is being built? What can we do to encourage smaller abattoirs to upgrade their facilities to export standards?" We said that out of that \$180 million, what was left in that pool, we could dedicate \$10 million; \$10 million would be put on the table, made available to abattoirs to be able to upgrade their facilities to federally inspected standards allowing them to ship their beef and other products outside of this province. But as it exists today, we cannot even do that, Mr. Speaker, and this minister scoffed at the idea. The money is there. It is in our budget. She announced \$180 million, she spent, what, \$30 million or \$40 million? What did she spend? *[interjection]* Ninety. So there was \$90 million left. We have spent \$40 million on a major plant. We have spent \$10 million on upgrading our facilities.

Mr. Speaker, guess what? There is still money there for producers. These farm families who cannot move their product today, these feedlots that are full of cattle that are being finished today and cannot be moved to market. You could put a cash advance program together, could you not? But what would the cash advance program mean? The minister does not even understand what a cash advance program means because she says we have a cash advance program, but where is it?

An Honourable Member: It is called put them in debt.

Mr. Derkach: Yeah. It is called go borrow money, and we will collect it from you a year from now.

Mr. Speaker, what a cash advance program, for the minister's edification, is, you take a cash advance

against your inventory. If I have a cow or an animal, a feeder that is worth nominally, let us say it is worth \$1,000, I could borrow, perhaps, 50 percent of its value. I could get a cash advance for \$500 against that animal. We have enough tags floating around in this country now that cattle are going to have to grow more ears pretty soon to tag them. Nevertheless, we could send out another set of tags and say that for every cattle beast you have on this program, we are going to ask you to tag it. So we will tag that cattle beast, and when it does go to market, the first call on that money is the cash advance program. So, if I take my cattle beast to the auction mart and it is sold for \$800, let us say it sold for \$800, well, the first \$500 that comes off there is for the cash advance program. I have already had that money and I have used that money, so I go home with \$300.

Mr. Speaker, can anybody tell me what is wrong with the principle of that program? I do not think there is anything wrong with it because the grain producers use it on an annual basis. But what is wrong with it in the eyes of this government? I will tell you what is wrong. It is a philosophical ideology that is wrong because it has been proposed by the Conservatives. How could we ever accept anything the Conservatives would put forward? When we said you have got \$40 million to put towards a slaughter facility, build it, they would not do it because it was put forward by us. They are being forced by producers, by the public, to start addressing the program.

We also said one other thing in our five-point plan, that we would put dollars towards feasibility studies and marketing studies for plants that are in existence and those that want to go to expand their markets. Finally, and I am almost ready to cheer about this because the minister saw the light and what did she do? She adopted part of that program. Well, she changed it a bit, but glory be to the Lord because she has seen the light. I guess I have to be careful because we do have ministers of the cloth in the House.

I am kind of hung up on agriculture, as you can see in this Budget Address, because when you look at the budget, Mr. Speaker, and the Keystone Agricultural Producers got it right when they said, "Where is agriculture? Everywhere but in the budget." Our agriculture producers are so important to us that on the day before the budget we as a Conservative Party—and I was happy, on behalf of

the party, to put forward a matter of urgent public importance, that the government agreed with us to debate for the day. We even extended the time, which is normally two hours, in debating the MUPI. If you want to check Hansard, and I would ask that our producers go to Hansard and look at the words that were put on the record by both this party and the NDP regarding that matter of urgent public importance.

Now, I go back to talking about a matter of urgent public importance because the government agreed with us that it was a matter of urgent public importance. That is why they allowed the debate. They also, as a government, came to us and said, "Would you support a resolution that calls for some action to be taken on behalf of farmers to address this terrible problem that is being faced by farm families?" We said, "Yes, we will agree." We supported the government on that resolution, and the government, again it is all in Hansard, and I ask the public, who may be watching today, who may have some interest in this, to look back at Hansard, look at that resolution that was sent to the federal government, I presume.

Mr. Speaker, what if I was Mr. Martin and I received that resolution? If I was Mr. Mitchell, the Minister of Agriculture federally, and I received this resolution from the Manitoba Legislature and I know that tomorrow in the Manitoba Legislature there is a budget, I would be listening to the Manitoba budget to see that, in fact, their budget reflected what this resolution talked about. But did it? There was not a mention of how we were going to address this horrible BSE closed-border situation that we have. Not a word in the budget. That is abject hypocrisy because how could you be so hypocritical as to say to the federal government, "Do something for our Manitoba farmers," when you yourself are not prepared to do anything?

* (15:10)

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) did build into her budget the tax relief on farmland. That is an education tax. Why is it being built into the Agriculture budget? That is an education tax. Again, false hope, false accounting, inappropriate placement of that money because the minister was embarrassed by the fact that she did not have any money in the budget for agriculture, so she used the tax money to put in her budget to give farmers and the rural

communities the false impression of what her budget was really doing. If you take that \$20 million out, her budget stays flat. The only bump in her budget was the \$3.3 million that she announced for the slaughter facilities in this province.

Mr. Speaker, what would you say if you were the Minister of Agriculture federally and that is the kind of news you received from the Province of Manitoba? You would say, "Shame on them." You would say, "This is hypocrisy," and I would be tempted if I were the federal Minister of Agriculture to write the provincial Minister of Agriculture a pretty damning letter about her hypocritical stance on agriculture in that province. I would be asking her what commitment does she have to the farmers of Manitoba if she cannot even convince her colleagues to put anything meaningful towards attacking the BSE issue that is before those farmers in Manitoba.

There is a reason there was nothing in the budget for agriculture and BSE, and I could tell you what the reason was. This government was so confident the border would open, they were prepared to throw a party. That party was supposed to happen on the first day of the session, but the party turned out to be a wake. I regret that because we all wanted to celebrate. We all were looking forward to the border opening. We all were wanting to jump on the bandwagon to say, "Hooray. We have the border open. Now there is hope for farmers." Caught by this, the government had no response. The budget was already printed, and it was in the can. What could you do?

The minister made a feeble attempt at an announcement of \$3.3 million and she would pay for feasibility studies. Mind you, that is one plank out of our five-point plan so she has started, but she has one heck of a long way to go. I say shame on her. I say shame on her government. I say shame on the Minister of Finance for simply saying to agro Manitoba, to rural Manitoba, "You are now on your own." There were lots of announcements for northern Manitoba. Lots of announcements for the urban people of our province, and I applaud that. I say, "Hooray, but why did you leave the people in rural Manitoba high and dry? Why did you leave them on their own? Why did you leave them without any support in the budget?"

Not only is this not support for agriculture, but the minister of highways stood up in his place and

said, "It is a policy of our government to spend at least 25 percent of our budget in northern Manitoba." What about southern Manitoba, rural Manitoba, agro Manitoba? Where are they? When I drive Highway 16, when I drive Highway 21, when I drive Highway 2, and the list goes on and on, the highways are falling apart in front of our eyes. The infrastructure is deteriorating by the day. These are the roads that carry our products to market. These are the roads that carry tourism to our province. These are the roads that carry Manitobans into Winnipeg because our facilities in rural Manitoba are closing. That infrastructure is falling apart in front of our eyes.

This government should be embarrassed by what it has done to us in rural Manitoba, and I say to us in rural Manitoba because I live in rural Manitoba. I temporarily live in the city, but my home is in rural Manitoba. My family is in rural Manitoba, and we feel that rejection. We feel that absence of any support from government when we are out there. Our constituents feel it. Why should one sector suffer because the government has turned a blind eye to it? I say with a budget that you have had like we have in this province, the growth and the revenues to this province were unsurpassed this year. The highest revenues this province has seen in decades. I do not have to quote the editorials, but there was an editorial that I saw in the newspaper that had a horse upside down, or something, or backwards, and a dog.

An Honourable Member: I have never seen that.

Mr. Derkach: Well, it is there. I can show you. It has got a dog and a horse and, I think, it was called a dog-and-pony show. There was something very wrong with the pony, but I will not go there, Mr. Speaker.

I do not need to quote those editorials. Lost opportunity is what it was about. This government had an opportunity to reduce taxes meaningfully to all Manitobans. It had an opportunity to fix the health care system. It had an opportunity to completely eliminate the education tax on all residential property and on farm land, and what did it choose to do? Just balloon the spending, build bigger government and ignore Manitobans' needs.

Mr. Speaker, this government boasts about its budget. Even without hearing budgets from other provinces, we are now the highest-taxed province

west of New Brunswick. Now, that is quite a dubious honour.

An Honourable Member: That is not true.

Mr. Derkach: Now, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) says, "Not true." I refer him back to the editorial about the dog-and-pony show, and I do not think he needs to say much more than that, but—

An Honourable Member: It is just not telling the truth.

Mr. Derkach: Oh, he says the editorial did not tell the truth. Well, I think it came closer to the truth than his budget did. It came far closer to the truth than his budget did, Mr. Speaker, but then you have an admission from the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), and the Minister of Health's admission kind of rocked and shocked all of us. How could the Minister of Finance ever, ever think that we would not catch on to that and Manitobans would not catch on to it? He allowed his Minister of Health to fudge the books. A sad day for us, and for some reason I see my light blinking.

Mr. Speaker, I have been so engrossed in this speech that I have forgotten what time it is, but let me say that I would like to thank this Chamber for the opportunity to address this budget. I am saddened that the budget did not really meet its mark. I am saddened for the people of rural Manitoba. I am saddened for the farmers in this province and their families. Those little children that were today in this Legislature want a future. They want hope, but under the terms of this budget that is not going to be possible. We are starting to mortgage their future. This government is mortgaging the future of those little tots who were in this Chamber today. Shame on this government.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to put these few remarks on the record.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to put a few comments on the record with regard to Budget 2005.

I will spend the majority of my time addressing some of the comments that have been put forward by the member opposite with regard to the rural economy, but first of all, I want to say that this

government is built on four pillars: a pillar to pay down the debt, make strategic investments, cut taxes, make promises, keep promises and save for the future. If you look at all of those, it is a very balanced way to build a budget and, indeed, we have. We have increased our payment on the debt.

* (15:20)

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We have made strategic investments when we made the announcement that we are going to increase the hip and knee surgeries, where we have increased funding to the City of Winnipeg, made more funding available for highways and transportation, for water and sewer.

We have put in place a new tax sharing arrangement which will benefit all municipalities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very proud that we have been able to maintain a tuition fee freeze, 10% tuition fee reduction that has continued for five straight budgets. The members opposite listen to this, and they think these issues do not affect rural Manitoba. Well, they may not realize it, but rural Manitobans go to university. It is rural municipalities that are benefiting from our change.

The tax cuts that we have made will certainly help our rural communities as well. Saving for our future and balancing the budget is a commitment we made and we will continue. We were able to deposit \$314 million into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, an amount that far exceeds what the members opposite were able to do even when they sold the telephone system. We did not sell a Crown corporation, but we were able to put funds away in order to address issues that will come up in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with regard to the budget, I am quite surprised that the members opposite would say we did not talk about BSE in this budget. I want to quote on page 1 of the budget: "We recognize the setback cattle and ruminant producers are experiencing following the recent U.S. court decision to keep the American border closed. Through our ongoing commitment to the Repositioning the Livestock Industry Strategy we will continue to support our producers. We will work closely with our provincial and federal counterparts and the U.S. government to normalize trade and push for outcomes based on science."

It does not say BSE. Maybe the members opposite do not recognize what this relates to, but I can tell you, members opposite may not recognize it, but the farming community knows that when you are talking about the setback that the cattle and ruminant producers are experiencing, they know that this is about BSE. When you make those silly comments like that, it shows no respect for the intelligence of the people of rural Manitoba because they fully understand that our government's commitment is there, and our government's commitment will continue to be there to stand by these people, the rural community, through this difficult time.

The member opposite talked about our hope that the border would open. In reality we were all hoping that the border would open. We were hoping that we would get some normal trade back. Our producers were hoping that the border would open for animals under 30 months because they have a trading pattern and there are links to facilities south of the border that are where they want their cattle to go.

Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had hoped that we would have that change and on March 7 it would be good news. In fact, I was hoping that the price rise would continue because in that anticipation of the border opening, the price of cattle went up. I cannot believe the members opposite seem to think this is a gleeful thing, and now we have a problem with the budget, but we have addressed it. It was our first announcement out of the budget that we would be putting additional money in to help facilities move from provincial to federal standards.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year we invested in a pre-feasibility study that would collect all the data that would help those people who were interested in increasing their slaughter capacity by having the data in one place so that everybody did not have to do a pre-feasibility study. That information is available. Now we are taking the next step. In fact, even prior to this announcement, there were approvals that were made for part of the cost to help people do their feasibility study to move to a federal-provincial facility, but that was at a lower percentage that we announced on.

The members opposite talk about their plan. We were in the works; we were doing it. The commitment we made on March 6 was that we would be funding those feasibilities up to 90 percent. Some of those feasibility studies were done previously, are in

the process of being done. We made another commitment to the industry.

I can tell you that we have staff dedicated to this. When people come forward with their proposals just as any other industry comes forward, we do not have listed in the budget how much we would have available should another industry come forward and look for a loan provision to help them with their industry, but I can assure you, that ability is there. When people do their feasibility studies, when they come forward with their business plan, we will be there to work with them. I think since the announcement that the border was going to remain closed, there has been a lot more activity in the industry, because there is a huge recognition that this could be some time before the border is open, and those people that are in the slaughter industry are looking to how they can make those changes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you, as well, that I want to pay a lot of tribute to those people who do have slaughter facilities right now, and what they have done. When you look at the numbers in 2004, we were down to slaughtering 16 500 animals. We are up to 28 000. Is that enough? Of course it is not enough. We need to have the slaughter capacity so we can address the issues that are important to the producers and look at how we can re-position the industry. I can tell you that we have worked very closely with Rancher's Choice. I am very pleased that the first load of equipment has come across the border, that more equipment will be arriving in Dauphin very soon, and that work is being done to see that facility become a reality.

There is still work to do. There is no doubt there is still work to do. There is work to do on the producers' side. There is work to be done on the licensing side. But all of those issues are transpiring right now. I have to tell you that we are also working with other companies who are looking at how they might increase their slaughter capacity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite continue to talk about cash advance and that a cash advance is borrowing until such time as you can sell your product. I can tell you that we have recognized that there was a shortage of cash flow. That is why we put in place loan provisions. It is the same thing. You borrow to carry you until you can sell some animals and the producers were very appreciative of that loan that we put forward. It was Manitoba that also put

forward the proposal to get a cash advance on CAIS. Producers are now being able to take an advance on the payment that they will get from CAIS.

I can also tell this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the federal government has indicated that they are willing to look at a program for cash advance similar to the cash advance that grain producers have. That is something the members opposite have refused to recognize up until now, that the cash advance program that is there for the grain producers is a federal program. It comes under federal legislation. It does not apply to cattle, and we have been for some time asking the federal minister to change that program so it can apply to the cattle industry. In the budget, Minister Mitchell has indicated that he will move on that program and create a program for a cash advance for cattle, but not until 2006. That is not soon enough, and we have to continue to work to get them to move that program up sooner.

I have to also say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am a little frustrated with the announcements that we have been getting from the federal government. Yesterday the Prime Minister said that they have to loosen the purse strings, they have to get rid of some of the red tape. He did not announce any new money.

It is very concerning to know that the federal Agriculture Minister was here in Manitoba on September 10; he said that they would adjust the loan-loss provision for borrowing so that Rancher's Choice could use that loan-loss provision to borrow money. They have not approved that yet. Now they say they are going to make some changes.

They made an announcement that they would put cash into the hands of the other ruminant producers. The Province has paid our money. We have flowed our money for the other ruminants based on an announcement made by the federal government. The federal minister still does not have authority to flow that money to other ruminants. So this is a very serious issue, and we have to continue to work on it. We have to continue to ensure that the federal government is part of the solution as well.

*(15:30)

If you look at the amount of money that has flowed from the provincial government and how much has flowed from the federal government to

producers, the money from the Province far exceeds what the federal government has made available for producers.

With respect to the issue of CAIS deposit, I want to tell all honourable members in this House, as I have indicated previously, Manitoba has said the deposit system is not working. I remind the members opposite, and I will look for some of their quotes, in this House last year they were standing quite often and asking us to sign the Agricultural Policy Framework. They were saying sign the program. Why are you not signing the program? We had identified flaws in the agriculture program and in the CAIS program that members opposite, farm groups such as Keystone Agricultural Producers, asked us to sign.

We are now in the position where it is very difficult for farmers to put their deposit down, and a decision has to be made by March 31. The news release put out from the federal-provincial ministers' meeting was that there would be an alternate plan put forward and the announcements would come by March 31. I can tell you that it is the wish of provinces to have the CAIS deposit delayed until March 31 of '06 as it is the desire of the federal minister. The federal minister has also said he wants the deposit delayed until we come up with an alternative, but it means that producers are not going to have to put their deposit down by March 31.

Those producers who have more than their one third down can withdraw that additional money. That amendment has been made. If a producer has more than one third of their deposit there, they can withdraw. If a producer triggers a payment, and they use their one-third money, they will not have to put money back into the program until March 31, '06, or until such time as another program is developed. The member opposite says just eliminate it. You have to remember that this is a three-way partnership. We cannot just eliminate it without talking with all of the partners, and that is why another program has to be in place.

With regard to education tax, I am really pleased with the record of this government, and the members opposite should be absolutely ashamed of themselves. When they were in government, they increased the portioning on education farmland. All of these people who say they represent rural Manitoba, and they are always there defending them, they increased the portioning and the amount that farmers

had to pay on their land. It was this side of the House that decreased the portioning. It was this side of the House that has put back \$20 million this year into farmers' hands by reducing their education farm tax, far more than the member opposite. Now all of a sudden they are saying, "Take it all off," but that is not the commitment they made. They did not make the commitment to reduce or eliminate the education tax on farmland. They did not make that commitment. Look back at your election platform. It was not there. That is not what you said. We have far exceeded what we said in the election. We have delivered. We have put \$20 million back into farmers' hands this year, \$13 million last year, as well as with many other programs.

I can tell you that I am very proud of this budget. I am proud of what we have been able to do to increase support to municipalities by the creation of a fund that will distribute more money back into the Building Manitoba Fund which will increase funds that will go back to the municipalities so that they can do the work that is their responsibility.

We have added police officers to rural and northern Manitoba. I hear the members opposite talking about how they represent the rural community. Well, the members opposite forget that when they were in government, they were government for all of Manitoba just as we are government for all of Manitoba. They completely ignored the north, and now they resent the fact that we are prepared to invest into roads in northern Manitoba. On the police side, we are prepared to invest in police officers in southern Manitoba, in urban Manitoba and in rural Manitoba. With the Building Manitoba Fund, we are as prepared to work with municipalities in northern Manitoba, southern Manitoba, central Manitoba, if you want to call it rural, with all rural municipalities and with the urban centres as well. This is a government that has representation from all across the province and works for people right across the province. It is not a government that thinks only of how we can work in those communities where we have a greater representation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to just speak about my own constituency. I want to say that I am very pleased that this government was able to deliver a hospital to Swan River. Not like the Conservatives when they promised a hospital in Brandon for how many times? Several times of promises; never delivered on it. The

Conservatives said there was going to be a new hospital in Swan River, but when we took office, it was not in the plan. Their plan for Swan River was to have the temporary hospital there forever, I believe.

When we took office, we saw that, we changed it and we have delivered and will open a hospital in Swan River in record time. I am also pleased that we will also be able to deliver dialysis service in Swan River as we have in other communities. We have a dialysis strategy. We are able to put investment into northern Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and into rural Manitoba, and I am particularly pleased that we will be able to have dialysis treatment in Swan River that will improve the quality of life for those people who have the misfortune to have kidney failure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well, if you look at this budget, we have talked about health care and the need for more services. In this budget we are funding for 20 new ambulances, and most of these ambulances are in rural Manitoba. That will bring the total number to 120 new ambulances that we have purchased since 2001, a significant investment that we are prepared to make.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite talk about our government not caring about agriculture. I am proud of the budget that we have brought forward. We have the commitment to invest the \$20 million. We have increases to the CAIS program. We have made changes to crop insurance that the producers have asked for. We are hiring organic specialists. I am proud of the reorganization that we are doing in this department and listening to producers, what they want and how we can deliver services better.

Members opposite talked about us closing down services in rural Manitoba. In fact, we are enhancing them, because we believe there is an opportunity for economic development and value-added. So there is growth in the department. There are new people to work with the organic industry. There are new specialists that will be hired to work with other sectors. There is a new chief veterinarian that is going to be hired very shortly. We are working in many sectors to improve the quality of life and hope we can have value-added.

I hope the members opposite will recognize what we have done in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that they, rather than being critical, will

recognize how important it is and will vote for the budget so we can have some of those things happen. I hope that we can all work together in the processing industry as they look for opportunities to value-add, as they look for opportunities to bring their facilities from provincial to federal standards so that we can access that new market. It is a very important issue. We do not have the industry, but I would encourage the members opposite to look at their record. I would encourage them to look at what happened in Manitoba during the Gary Filmon years.

If you look at where slaughter capacity was in 1997 and how it went down through the various years, in 1987 we had 241 slaughter capacity spaces. By the end of the Filmon years, in 1999, Manitoba slaughter capacity was only 19 600. Did it go down gradually? Yes, but they should never say that they did anything to improve the slaughter capacity. Had the members opposite done their work and stabilized that slaughter capacity as they say they are so committed to, we would not be down to the numbers that we are, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (15:40)

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few comments, I want to say that I am very pleased with this budget. I hope the members opposite will look at it and recognize that the pillars that we are basing this on is the right place to be. Read page one. We do talk about the slaughter industry. Read the other pages where we talk about the crop insurance. Read the other pages where we talk about the reorganization of the Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives Department, and vote for a budget that will help rural Manitobans.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was going to make a comment about wind and wind farms. After the speech I heard, I will, however, refrain from that analogy. However, sitting here and listening, maybe there is a reason why my haircut is the way it is. I am not sure.

Anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I count it a privilege to be able to speak and to put a few comments on record regarding the budget. Before I do that, however, though, I just want to mention a few things, and those are last year, or rather last week, we recognized the four RCMP officers who had been slain and certainly that was a devastation for us as a country.

It was during that time and on the weekend where in our community we lost two young people in a tragic highway accident. I knew the parents of these young people, Ralph and Jocelyn Fehr. Ralph is a part owner of the Elias Woodwork and Manufacturing plant. So I just want to, on behalf of the constituents of Pembina, send them our condolences and our prayers, and our thoughts continue to go with them. These were young people who were energetic, working hard, their hearts were in the right place, and so it was tragic to see this take place. However, I know that as time goes on, the family continues to cope and will cope in the future as well.

To the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let us start off by saying that for Manitobans, this year's budget represents a lost opportunity. They missed a chance for this government to use its financial windfall to completely eliminate education taxes. You could have done it, and you did not do it. You could have done this on the farm properties and on residential properties. Instead, the government chose to spend over \$500 million of this new money, while allowing Manitoba's total debt obligation to climb by over \$526 million to over \$20 billion.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hear the members opposite talk about, okay, we talk about the debt increasing in the province of Manitoba. "However," they say, "we have equity." I have heard a number of the speakers on the opposite side say, "We have equity." It reminds me of a TV commercial that I heard. It was actually several months ago, where this little five-year-old boy is walking around the house and he is looking underneath the bed, he is looking underneath the sofa, underneath the furniture, and his father comes in and asks him, "Son, what are you doing?" He says, "I am looking for equity." The father was somewhat astounded. He says, "So, what do you mean?" "Well," he says, "I heard on the radio that equity is cash." It sort of reminds me of the same thing as what the members opposite are saying that, somehow, this equity is all translated into cash.

The same phenomenon is taking place here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I find it somewhat interesting that they would say that we continue to borrow, we can continue to raise the debt of the province, we have got equity here, but the point is, it has to be paid back by someone and it is going to be our kids and our grandchildren. I am afraid that our grandchildren are going to be caught up in this web. Then the other thing they continue to say is, "Well, our

credit rating, our bond rating, is going up." Well, just a minute, for those of you who have been involved in the banking institution, you know how that one works. I happened to have the privilege of being involved in the banking institution, on a board of directors, for a number of years. I know how that works. My goodness, they look at it as the ability to pay. When they look at the province, they say, "Of course," the bankers in New York are looking at the province and saying, "you have to raise taxes just to keep on collecting."

That is exactly what is taking place here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So this whole thing about the bond ratings that they have in the banking institutions, I find it very interesting that they would highlight this while they continue to increase the debt in the province of Manitoba. So I just believe that the members opposite, while they talk and toot and blow their horn and say, "Oh, things are all going well," when you have increased revenues the way they are out here, they should be going well. So why, then, would you continue to increase the debt in the province of Manitoba?

My colleague the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) just gave an eloquent speech on the whole agricultural scene out there. Well, the point has been raised and has been raised numerous times today and other days, but we have one federally inspected packing plant within this province. One, it happens to be in my constituency. Thank goodness that at least we do have one, but where is the commitment of this government to assist other packing houses in order to get their accreditation so they can move from provincial status to federal?

My discussion with others who want to be there and, in fact, as late as this morning the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) had been in touch with a packing industry that was looking for accreditation. The Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau) says, "Oh, just tell him to come across." He was across. His bureaucrats told him, "You have got to do this, this, this." By the time all was said and done, he would have had to rebuild his whole plant. Listen, the responsibility is with this government in order to provide the background and the base that they can go in that direction.

The direction that the government has gone regarding the whole agricultural scene is devastating to the farmers. I met a cattle farmer on the weekend,

and he says, "The way I read the budget—" we did talk about the budget, but he says, "When I read the budget and I read the things that are taking place, I guess what the government is telling me is I do not know how to farm."

I looked at him and I said, "Sir, you know how to farm. The fact that we are in the situation that we are in within the province of Manitoba with the BSE is not your fault." He does an excellent job. He runs a large feedlot. He does an excellent job of feeding these cattle, of preparing them for market, but he does not have a market.

We have indicated to the government of the day, we indicated this right at the outset, that we need packing facilities so that we are not totally dependent on the U.S. market, and so you have an obligation to move in that direction.

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) was just standing, and I guess she was patting herself and her government on the back for all the things that they had done. Well, what has taken place? Tell me, what? As far as a farmer is concerned, and those who are dealing with the BSE issue, nothing. It is always these things that are pending. That reminds me of the promises that are made.

Last week I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) about the promise. This was back in November, the promise of an added 35 hip replacements, an added 30 knee replacements, which is great. That is wonderful. However, how many of those to date have taken place? The answer still is the same. It is zero.

An Honourable Member: Not true. Not true.

Mr. Dyck: The Minister of Agriculture says it is not true. Then she is calling the people working in that facility—

An Honourable Member: Fibbers.

Mr. Dyck: —fibbers, as my colleague has indicated. They will start on that program on April 1, but they, at this point in time, have not been able to access funds in order to deliver. But what happens? Meanwhile, the Minister of Health comes in and announces another 80 hip replacements over two years. That is wonderful; however, they have not

even started in their first commitment, and that is my point.

You go out there, you make announcement after announcement, you have press release after press release, and people out there are wondering why are these things taking place and nothing is happening.

I have a lady back in my constituency. She has now waited for three years for a hip replacement. Three years. She called me and she said that they had now indicated that possibly she will be able to have this surgery to take place in June. However, there was a provision: you had better not call back, or else you may fall further down the list.

* (15:50)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not satisfactory. That is not the health care system that this government promised us back in '99. May I remind the members opposite they said, "We can fix health care in six months for \$15 million." The waiting lists are worse than they have ever been. What I am saying is, please, when you go out there and you make an announcement, live up to your commitment.

Today talking about health, the Victoria Hospital, commitments made, definitely the program would not be shut down. What have we seen today? We have seen that the Premier (Mr. Doer) of the province has not kept his word, nor has the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), and they had made a commitment to this community.

I would say that 700 births in a year, that is more than two a day, or about two a day, is not all that bad. My goodness, why would you shut down a program in an area in the city of Winnipeg that is continuing to grow?

Another area I want to talk about is the whole area, and I know that a number of the members have been talking about the unionization which has taken place on the floodway. I find it very interesting that this government, although maybe I should not find it so interesting, would force unionization to take place.

We had an all-party resolution where members from both sides went to the Ukraine to help to make sure that there would be a democratic process take place in those elections. I think that is wonderful. We

talk about democracy. We talk about the ability for people to be able to vote, to be able to use this secret ballot. I think that is a great, great idea, but somehow when we come back to Manitoba here, that is a little bit different. We will take away the secret ballot regarding unionization. We will just sort of eliminate that. To me that is hypocrisy. On the one hand, we are trying to encourage another country to adopt that process, but on the other hand out here, well, that is different.

Then you add insult to injury. This whole process of where now the unions, or rather those people who work on the floodway, will be paying the unions \$7,000 an hour in union fees. If we were in government and we would have proposed, and we would have come out and said, "First of all, the only people who can bid on this project are people who do not belong to unions." Then, secondarily, we would have said, "Further to that, we are going to collect \$7,000 for every hour that is being worked there, and we are going to ask you to donate that to charity." The members opposite would have been crying, "Foul. This is terrible."

What have they done? They have done the same thing by forcing people to do something. That is not democracy in my books, but, on the other hand, this is NDP socialist philosophy. I guess if that is the direction they feel the province needs to go, that is their privilege. They are in government. I do recognize the fact that democracy has taken place and they were elected to be government, but I find it hypocritical that they would use that process.

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) was talking about the fact, and she was applauding it, that they had in fact frozen tuition fees again. For the students that is great. However, I do have to talk, and I have children who have been at university. For our kids, it was not the greatest expense, the tuition fee. That was not the greatest expense. It was the fact that they had to pay for room and board because we live in rural Manitoba. When they came to Winnipeg to get their university education, that was an added cost.

I would suggest to this government that if they truly wanted to treat people across the province equally, in an equitable fashion, they would have looked at somehow assisting those students coming to university from rural Manitoba, assist them in some way with their room and board. I would think

that would be the best way to go when you look at the whole area of post-secondary education for all Manitobans. Added to the university freeze which the Minister of Agriculture was talking about, as I have indicated, I think there needs to be equality. They could do that in the form of tax relief for these students, or maybe an incentive program which would allow the students to stay within the province which would, in fact, indicate to them that there are a number of years that we would like to have you stay out here, that you can use the education that you have received here and, yet, a tax rebate in some fashion. It could be worked out. The semantics of that is something that could be done, but it would certainly equalize things for rural Manitobans.

Further to education, Mr. Deputy Speaker—oh, the member was going to get up and continue. I just needed to have a little drink of water here.

An Honourable Member: But it is clean water.

Mr. Dyck: It is clean water, all right. The minister of industry, trade indicated it was clean water, and I appreciate the fact that it is clean water, yes. We want to keep it that way within the province of Manitoba.

The other thing I wanted to mention was regarding my own constituency. I want to indicate we are appreciative of the fact that the school, we expect, will be built this year, but I want to indicate that as we are looking at expanding the facilities for those people involved in education in the Garden Valley School Division, our needs continue to grow. We have a student enrolment which continues to grow and, at this point and time, we have over 600 students who are housed in huts, and the conditions are not that what we would like to see. So, as the community continues to grow, continues to expand, we need to have the resources out there which would allow that to take place. So, as I have indicated to the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), as the contracts are being let, that certainly we need to, in the allotment of the monies for that school, recognize the fact that costs have gone up dramatically since two years ago when they announced it, so consequently that backfill needs to take place. So I encourage the minister to do that in order to facilitate and to help the school division in the work that they are doing.

The other area of resources for the local constituency, as I have indicated, our community

continues to grow, to expand, and so with that are also the infrastructure needs in our area. I have indicated a number of times, this was to the minister of highways, that as the community continues to grow, we do need the resources, the four-laning of Highway 32. It is a provincial road, and it is the responsibility of the provincial government. However, the provincial government is doing nothing in order to assist them. In fact, this year we needed to put in some stop lights just in order to assist the community, and the Province was not forthcoming in money. They were not prepared to put any money into it, and so the city of Winkler had to put the funds forward in order to install these. Not only was it on Highway 32, but also on Highway 14. So, when the minister talks about the money that is out there, the money they are going to be allocating for highways, I wish that he would not forget the infrastructure needs in southern Manitoba.

The Minister of Agriculture indicated fairly clearly that they were going for the total province, that they were governing for all the province. Well, I would suggest that southern Manitoba has been somewhat neglected in the last while. Should they continue to spend money throughout the province? Absolutely. But I would indicate that there needs to be a formula which looks at also the contributions made from the local area.

So, with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see that my little light is starting to blink here, and so I want to thank you for the opportunity to put a few comments on the record.

I believe that, again, this government has missed its opportunities in where they have allocated the dollars. They have had a huge windfall of monies which have come as a result of the work that the previous government did, which is now reflected in the revenues that have come to the province. So I encourage them to spend the money wisely.

* (16:00)

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I rise here to speak to Budget 2005, which, once again, was presented by the most capable Minister of Finance we have, the Honourable Greg Selinger. I would like to offer him my congratulations for delivering a budget that is balanced in meeting the needs of all Manitobans. I am also pleased to state that this is the budget which is balanced according to the legislated act led by

previous governments and also under the summary of financial statements.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is firmly rooted in the four pillars of fiscal responsibility: paying down the debt by \$110 million this year, making strategic investments which are written in detail on this particular document and reducing taxes. In the last six years, a total of half a billion dollars has been reduced in taxes and saving for the future by putting \$314 million into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Budget 2005 is the second straight budget that is projected to balance and pay down debt with no draw from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. It will be the first in a 10-year history of the balanced budget legislation.

A lot of my colleagues have spoken about the other features, other details on the budget. I would like to take a little different approach, particularly in response to the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) who spoke about a family, a kid, looking for equity and cash. I had been here for the last two years as an elected member. I come from a business background, and I must speak, that understanding finance, which is debt and equity, is not that easy or not that complicated, but to a business person, to a person who knows finance, it is very simple. A Standard & Poor's, or other organizations that will give you the rating, would not give you the rating only because of the thinking that you can go and raise taxes. They give you a rating based on your fiscal strength. I am honestly a little puzzled about the comments coming from that side which speak about the bad shape of the fiscal strength of our province which has created a \$10-billion economy, and, if you look at the replacement costs of the assets, it is enormous. Such agencies, which are international agencies, do not rate the government's fiscal strength on its capabilities of raising taxes. That is absolutely not right.

If you look at a model, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was raised in a family with strong values. I come from a family that my parents were teachers and they raised us, their children, with fundamentally two, three things as priority. Health, our education and our basic living responsibility was No. 1. If you look at a government model and see how the government should set up systems to govern the society, your priorities must not be mixed. I clearly understand that. I, my constituents in Radisson and most Manitobans, could clearly understand that in a society where we live, we must look after the basic

needs of people first. I think it is very important to understand that if you can borrow on your strengths to pay back, there is nothing wrong to borrow and even have a debt, which we are, in fact, paying down debt. I do not think we are in that situation, but I personally think it is irresponsible for a society or a government to think that you keep on selling assets and paying not even debt but that putting that in a deposit so that you spend that and then finally you go broke.

I would like to give us a little example on this which even my 10-year-old granddaughter will understand. You have a \$100,000 home and you need windows to be fixed which are bad, which can bring in cold air. You go and borrow \$15,000 against that house which has equity, borrow that \$15,000, fix the windows; it enhances the value of the house, which appreciates, and, at the end, when you leave, you sell that house; you recover that money.

I think one of the scenarios here is simply to say no, according to the suggestions. I am really disturbed about the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray), who is supposed to be coming from a business background. He would suggest that, no, it is best that you sell your house, sell your car, sell your contents, sell all your furniture, go and rent a house, go and rent a car, and go rent furniture and then live. At the end, when you leave the world, you have left nothing for your children.

So the member from Pembina said, "Who will pay?" If you have that model, there will be nothing left for the future generation. We have this model where we have developed, we have invested for the future, we have a better society, we have healthy children, we have a healthy education, we have got a much, much better quality of life. If you look at these values, and then if you see you have enough of resources to pay down the debt, where those resources come from is the vision, and that is what I call economic vision, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the past, when I came here in the early seventies, Edward Schreyer was building Manitoba Hydro. At that time, I recall the then-Leader of the Opposition had a column in the *Free Press*, and he called "these socialist jobs up north." Manitoba Hydro was being built and these were socialist jobs. Those socialist jobs have created millions of dollars of revenues and economy to the province today, that

now we are trying to find out how that revenue is going to relieve us.

I personally believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you are the equity owner, if you are the owner of a business, you have the right to collect dividends. Manitobans are all owners of the Crown assets which are in the billions of dollars. Manitoba Hydro today is worth billions of dollars. We will not sell Manitoba Hydro. We will not sell like they sold Manitoba Telephone System, took all that money, put it in the rainy day fund and did not even pay their debt. But that money was left to be spent.

If you look at what is happening today, Manitoba Telephone System, if it were ours, we would have been perhaps a billion dollars richer. But, no, it was given away to some people. It is in the pockets of a few people. Manitoba Hydro today is worth billions of dollars. If there is a choice, sell Manitoba Hydro, take the billions of dollars, pay some debt, put it in the Stabilization Fund and, 10 years from now, the rates will go 10 times higher. Some of them will not be able to afford it, and you will have a very destructive society.

One is trying to build; another is trying to destroy. That is the difference. The Leader of the Opposition says, "Yes, we have philosophical differences between both parties." Absolutely right, we have. One looks at people's choice; the other looks at the corporate choice. Making money is important, but the purpose of making money is more important. Therefore, we must see a government model which this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has developed: paying down debt, looking at the future, building society, making health care work, making education work, opening more schools, building better infrastructure. These are some of the things that are required, and still the budget is balanced.

So it is something that I feel very happy, very proud that the management of this side has been extremely, extremely good compared to what the perception given by the opposition is. There is something called perception and there is something called fact. Perception is something that can be seen by people who do not really understand, but I am really shocked that some of them come from the business background on that side. They should understand that there is fact and there is an opinion. An opinion could be that we are not in good shape.

The fact is we are in very good shape. That is how the rating of Standard & Poor's and some other international agencies from the top of the world have rated us, to be upgraded. I think that there are a lot of things that we have done which are worth noting down.

* (16:10)

But I would say that the immigration, which is a very important factor for any society, I remember in the nineties that people were fleeing, all my children left. We had 18 Jhas in Winnipeg; only 2 are left now, me and my wife. So I think that it was the nineties that they were all leaving. Now, I see people are trying to come back here. So there is an investment climate. There is a positive climate. There are positive figures happening in the society. It is because we are building it.

When you do this kind of thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then you attract people. Manitoba is not the best climate-wise. It is cold, it has mosquitoes in summer. But look at 10 000 immigrants who are planning to be here. I can assure you that we will get 10 000 more people coming here. So net immigration had not happened, now it is happening. I think that these are some of the things that one has to see is why it happens. Because of the attitude, because of the plan that the government has set up.

The strategic investments in our capital city are evident in Budget 2005. Funding to the city of Winnipeg increased by 8 percent. The Winnipeg Transit operating fund increased by \$2.5 million and a six-year plan to invest \$500 million into renewal of Winnipeg's infrastructure has been introduced. All these investments are protected with the \$56-million expansion of the Red River floodway, the largest infrastructure project in Winnipeg's history. Twenty new officers for the Winnipeg police force were also announced in this budget. So we are looking at all the positive signs of expenditure investment, which are essential to build a society.

Budget 2005 also strives to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal and northern communities with a new investment in the University College of the North, increased transit grants for Flin Flon and Thompson and increased funding for northern municipalities.

We also have done a remarkable job in promoting research and development in education.

The strategic investments in our economy present an attempt to provide opportunities for our youth, as well as enabling a better quality of life for Manitobans. Budget 2005 continues to grow the economy by providing new investments in education and research, such as a \$1-million commitment for the Asper Research Centre and an extension of the Manitoba Research and Innovation Fund to 2010 of \$1 million for biomedical commercialization and the continued implementation of Manitoba's seven-point study for economic growth.

Now I must say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I had the opportunity to ride the first green bus with the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak) at Red River College. This was a thrilling experience to ride that bus which is running on hydrogen fuel cell technology. So this is very futuristic. We have encouraged that kind of investment, research and development, which was a reality. It was not supposed to be a fact a few years back, but I and the minister, and a few others, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) was there. We were in the bus. It was driven and it was a marvellous feeling to see that a new futuristic technology was applied and implemented.

Two manufacturing firms, both of which happen to be in the Radisson constituency, New Flyer Industries and Kraus Global, have developed the technology that has been applied in making that bus, which will be eventually be the role model for the future society because we cannot keep on taking the Earth for granted forever.

So, if you look at the future, if you look at the vision, you will be appreciating that these are some of the things that have happened with this side of government, thinking future, thinking development, thinking of applying technology into manufacturing. These are some of the things that I take great pride in that our side has done.

Also, in the health care, I hear the opposition all the time crying about health care. I think that we have experienced for the last few years that the number of doctors have been increased, enrolment is higher. As I mentioned last time, also, that my children left during that time because my daughter said to me at that time that, "I will be the first unemployed radiologist in Manitoba if I stay." So she left for Washington. She is there now. At that time, there were no doctors, no nurses, in fact, who

even thought to remain here. Now, today, we have more doctors; we have more nurses; we have more MRIs; we have more CT scanners. So we are developing health care, but the instant solution required is not possible. These are things that will take time. We are in the right process, and we are moving ahead in the right direction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am proud to announce that Budget 2005 pays down debt, makes vast strategic investments and continues to implement tax savings for Manitobans. This sound fiscal planning is made historic with a \$314-million deposit into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. For the second year in a row, there is no budgetary withdrawal from the rainy day fund. This budget even manages to save for our future prosperity with this historic deposit, second only to a deposit made following the sale of a major Crown corporation. We have not sold a Crown corporation to pay \$314 million to the rainy day fund.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am proud to stand in support of this budget, and I look forward to receiving support from all members of the opposite side. They should come forward and say, "Yes, this is a bold budget; this is a good budget, and let us support it," rather than oppose something on the principles that the member from Pembina said. I would say let us go back and re-examine the ideals of why you want to sell a Crown corporation, why you want to sell assets and destroy your future. It is more detrimental than what we are trying to do. We will not sell Crown corporations. We will not do anything that has been done in the past, cut and destroy society for the future. We are building the society for our children, our grandchildren and our future.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the people of the great constituency of Carman to comment on the once-in-a-generation chance that this NDP government missed with the 2005 budget.

Before I begin, I would like to extend my sincere condolences to the families of those RCMP officers who were killed in the line of duty by a senseless act of violence. Their acts of bravery and dedication to the safety of their communities will forever be remembered.

I would also like to mention that I recently had the pleasure of attending a trade mission to France's

Alsace region with the Premier (Mr. Doer), the honourable Minister responsible for French Language Services (Mr. Selinger) and members of Manitoba's Francophone rural business community.

Je sais que les représentants qui ont fait partie de la délégation ont bien représenté et bien promu notre province. C'est grâce à leurs efforts, leur vision et leur travail qu'un lien de commerce est maintenant établi entre nos communautés rurales et nos amis de la France.

Translation

I know that the representatives who were part of the delegation represented and promoted our province well. It is thanks to their efforts, their vision and their work that a trade link is now established between our rural communities and our friends in France.

English

I look forward to the economic dividends that this newly established economic relationship will bring to the province of Manitoba. I would also like to thank those who are part of this delegation for making this possible.

I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I would like to thank the Prime Minister of Canada and no other than my dear, good friend, the President of the Treasury Board, Mr. Reg Alcock, for making this budget palatable for many individuals. I think that at this time we need a great big thank you to those individuals who cared enough about this province to make sure that we were looked after with the financial resources.

* (16:20)

At a time of historic provincial revenues, this NDP government had the opportunity to provide hardworking Manitobans across this province with a vision and a plan that would ensure a strong and prosperous future for our province. This government had a once-in-a-generation chance to put Manitoba on the path to becoming a have province.

This government had a once-in-a-generation chance to say to our young people that in the future Manitoba will be a province that can attract investment and business, that is competitive and above all, full of opportunity for our future generations. Yet, with this budget, this NDP government chose to

ignore this golden opportunity and instead continued to feed its ravenous spending habit.

Our young people are the greatest asset of this province. They are bright, motivated and well aware of the opportunities available to them. They are also able to read between the lines of this NDP's budget propaganda and realize that this government lacks a vision and commitment required to ensure that Manitoba will be home to the best opportunity and quality of life in Canada. With this budget, this NDP government has lost an opportunity. With this budget, middle-income Manitobans will remain the highest-taxed Canadians west of New Brunswick.

This Finance Minister will talk on and on about how his government is lowering taxes, but this government's tax relief, while welcome, is far from meaningful. Under this proposed budget, a two-income family of four earning \$40,000 will save about \$11 in taxes. If this family wanted to obtain a paper copy of the 2005 budget, it will cost them \$25 plus taxes. The \$11 that this family experiences in tax relief will not even cover half the cost of a printed copy of the budget.

"Hurry up and wait," Mr. Deputy Speaker, describes the business tax relief in this budget. While the budget announced a 0.5% reduction in the corporate income tax rate, it will not come into effect until July 1, 2006, some 16 months away. While it is a positive step in the right direction, it is hardly a welcoming, open-for-business sign that our young entrepreneurs and university graduates are looking for. When you combine the floodway master labour agreement which states that all workers, including those not from a union, must pay union dues or the equivalent, and as a result, some \$7,000 per hour will flow to unions from the pockets of hardworking Manitobans.

This NDP does not put out the welcome mat for our young people hoping to make a living in our province. The message these meagre tax relief measures sends to our young people is clear. If you choose to remain in Manitoba, you will continue to be one of the highest-taxed Canadians west of New Brunswick and you will continue to have less money in your pocket.

If you choose to own a business in Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will have to wait a long time for minimal tax relief.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

If you choose to work in Manitoba, you will be subject to rigid labour laws and may be forced to pay union dues even if you are not a union member.

This budget does all but chase young Manitobans out of our province. Without a long-term tax relief strategy, Manitoba is losing the competitive race. If nothing changes, the end result will be the loss of our best and brightest to other, more competitive provinces.

Where is the long-term, economic strategy, Mr. Speaker? The fact of the matter is the only strategy of this government is to spend, spend, spend and then rely on raiding Manitoba Hydro and federal equalization payments to balance its budget. It is of great concern that Manitoba is now the only western province that remains heavily reliant on equalization payments to balance its budget. Worse still, this budget speech created the false impression that this NDP government deposited \$314 million back into the rainy day fund. In fact, \$155 million is federal government funding—thank you, Reg—for future health care spending. While \$150 million is a repayment of money temporarily borrowed from the fund, that was supposed to be put back almost three years ago.

Mr. Speaker, since 1999, the provincial debt has increased over 30 percent. The provincial debt is now at \$20 billion or close to it; \$17,000 for every man, woman and child, equivalent to an increase of almost \$2,500 since taking office.

Worse still, the NDP ran a \$614-million deficit last year that they tried to pass off as a small surplus. Even the Auditor General has stated that the NDP's financial reporting portrays a misleading by omission picture of our province's finances. The fact of the matter is that our province's finances are cause for great concern. This government had \$524 million in new revenues last year. The Finance Minister was presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set Manitoba on the path to becoming a have province by making meaningful debt and deficit reductions. Instead, this NDP government decided to continue to feed its ever-growing spending habit and to rely on equalization payments to balance its budget.

In doing so, this government is mortgaging the future of our province. This government has forced a costly burden upon the shoulders of our young Manitobans because it is they who will have to face the consequences of the out-of-control spending legacy of this NDP government. It is they who will have to face the debt and deficits created by this government, and it is they who will have to endure the have-not status of the province of Manitoba thanks to this NDP government.

The have-not status of our province is far from the only challenge young Manitobans will have to endure thanks to this NDP administration. The reputation of Manitoba as a safe place to live and raise a family has diminished considerably since this government took office in 1999.

En 2004, Winnipeg était reconnu à travers le Canada pas pour ses festivals, pas pour ses attractions et pas pour sa qualité de vie, mais malheureusement pour ses meurtres. La réalité est que Winnipeg était le capital des meurtres au Canada avec 34 personnes tuées. De plus, le Manitoba était témoin à des taux de vol d'automobiles hors pair. Plus que 13 000 automobiles ont été volées à Winnipeg en 2004. Cela représente une augmentation de plus que 5 000 depuis 2002. Présentement, nous voyons qu'une autre bande, les Bandidos ont décidé d'établir une présence dans notre province, et la semaine passée, un membre des Hells Angels a été tiré dessus dans un établissement sur l'avenue Corydon.

Translation

In 2004, Winnipeg was recognized throughout Canada not for its festivals, not for its attractions and not for its quality of life, but unfortunately for its murders. The reality is that Winnipeg was the murder capital of Canada with 34 persons killed. Furthermore, Manitoba was witness to an exceptional level of automobile theft. Over 13 000 cars were stolen in Winnipeg in 2004. This represents an increase of more than 5000 since 2002. We currently see that another gang, the Bandidos have decided to set up in our province, and last week a member of the Hells Angels was shot in an establishment on Corydon Avenue.

English

Mr. Speaker, nowhere in this budget do we see detailed plans aimed at addressing the increasing crime rates in our province. There are no plans in this budget that deal with the growing number of illegal grow-ops and drug labs, and there are no plans to deal with curbing the illegal activities of gangs and the currency of guns, drugs, and violence that they trade in. While 54 police officers for Winnipeg and rural Manitoba have been promised over the next two years, it is not nearly enough considering Manitoba has one of the highest offences-for-officer ratios in the country. Worse still, many of these officers are to be funded through gambling revenues.

While on one hand this government has been rolling out the welcome mat for gangs in this province, its other hand should be helping young Manitobans pack their bags for greener pastures because they do not want to live in a province with record murder rates awash with gang violence, grow-ops, and auto theft.

Avec ce budget, le gouvernement NPD avait la chance d'offrir de l'espoir au Manitoba rural. Notre secteur agricole et nos producteurs de bovins ont fait face à une crise quotidienne depuis la confirmation du cas de vache folle en mai 2003. La frontière reste encore fermée aux bovins canadiens et la capacité d'abattage au Manitoba n'a pas augmenté de façon considérable. C'est incroyable, alors, que l'ESB n'est pas mentionné même une fois dans le discours du budget.

Translation

With this budget, the NDP government had the opportunity to provide hope to rural Manitoba. Our agricultural sector and our cattle producers have faced a daily crisis since the confirmation of the case of mad cow disease in May 2003. The border continues to remain closed to Canadian cattle and Manitoba's slaughter capacity has not increased in any significant way. So it is incredible that BSE is not mentioned even once in the budget speech.

English

If this budget is supposed to be about balancing priorities, the admission of the word BSE is telling us just where the priorities of this government lie and that is not with rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, the \$3 million promised by this NDP government falls drastically short of the \$40 million required for meaningful increase in slaughter capacity in this province. We on this side of the House have presented our five-point BSE recovery plan to this NDP government last year and they finally appear to be listening. But Manitobans are still left wondering, are still left asking, "Where is a long-term economic vision that will ensure the future sustainability of our agricultural sector? Where is a plan that will show our young people that there is a future for them in agriculture in this province?"

* (16:30)

Rural Manitoba is full of proud individuals who want to see our province grow, prosper and be the best it can really be. Rural Manitoba is on the cutting edge of technological innovation.

Cela fut démontré par l'annonce l'année passée de la construction de la première centrale éolienne du Manitoba à Saint-Léon, et c'est seulement le commencement. Saint-Léon ou les environs accueilleront bientôt un deuxième projet de tours éoliennes, ce qui porte à 120 le nombre de tours éoliennes prévues pour le Manitoba.

Translation

This was demonstrated by the announcement last year of the construction of the first wind farm in Manitoba at St. Leon, and this is just the beginning. St. Leon or the surrounding area will soon be welcoming a second wind turbine project, which brings to 120 the number of wind turbines planned for Manitoba.

English

While not only generating tremendous economic gain for rural economies and jobs for rural Manitoba, these wind farms signal to the rest of Canada and to the rest of the world that rural Manitoba takes environmental concerns and green energy to heart, and that rural Manitoba will do what it takes to ensure our communities remain healthy for our children for many years to come. With the international reputation and attention that these wind farms will gather for our province, one has to wonder why this NDP government could not have fully committed to helping out our rural communities by completely eliminating school taxes on residential

farmland. This government had the fiscal capacity to do so, yet instead chose to feed its spending habit and continue to download the funding debacle of our education system to our school boards.

I must give some credit where credit is due. A newly announced Building Manitoba Fund in this budget will be welcome news to our rural municipalities. The slated \$100 million from fuel tax and other sources will help address infrastructure concerns of Manitoba's towns and communities. When steps are made in the right direction, the impacts on Manitoba, whether big or small, are positive and most welcome.

The Evergreen and Parkview Manor apartments in Carman are an example of this government moving in the right direction. Thanks to Manitoba Housing and the efforts of the honourable member from Riel, the tenants of these apartment blocks will receive new flooring, windows, kitchens, lights and washrooms this spring. Eight of the suites will be renovated to accommodate larger living spaces and the hallway will have an air exchange installed in it with air conditioning. I would like to extend my thanks to the minister for helping to undertake this initiative and I was extremely pleased that the honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) was open to this type of discussion, which made it easier to facilitate the appropriate steps required to see this project to fruition. The entire community of Carman is pleased that these apartments will be renovated to better suit the seniors living in the community.

Nothing is more telling of this government's commitment to its future generations than the investments it makes in Manitoba's post-secondary institutions. With this budget, the Finance Minister (Mr. Selinger) has again demonstrated to students across our province that he is willing to let our universities and colleges struggle and neglect giving them the freedom and funding they require to develop as quality institutions of higher learning. There is more to providing quality education than simply freezing tuition fees. While the increase of \$12 million in support for colleges and universities is welcome, it falls short of the \$17 million they require.

The University of Manitoba is presently cutting 2 percent from their operating budget. The University of Winnipeg may have to cancel repairs to its

infrastructure initiatives and Brandon University will leave several faculty positions vacant and is at risk of losing its entire athletic department, including the well-known Brandon Bobcats. Without providing the provincial grants that would give universities and colleges the necessary resources to fill teaching vacancies with quality professors and to cover their infrastructure and operating costs, the value of degrees obtained from Manitoba's post-secondary institutions will be of less and less value to potential employers. A 2.5% grant increase would do little to ensure students across our province will be provided with top-notch education.

With this budget, the government had an opportunity to make Manitoba a place where our university students would look forward to staying after they graduated. They will not stay in a have-not province. This NDP government had historic revenues last year and an ample opportunity to adequately fund Manitoba universities and colleges. Yet, with this budget, they have short-changed our post-secondary institutions and have short-changed the future of our province.

With this budget, the Doer government once again raised Pharmacare deductibles by an average of 5 percent. Since taking office, this government has raised Pharmacare deductibles 20 percent. Sick Manitobans, many of them seniors, will be unable to afford the drugs that they need thanks to these measures. Young Manitobans are seeing the added hardships that these decisions are having on their parents and grandparents. They are seeing what this NDP's commitment to improving our health care system really means.

Since this government took office, health care spending has increased over \$1.3 billion to \$3.4 billion annually. That works out to just over \$9 million being spent on health care each and every single day in this province. Yet, with such massive amounts of money going into the health care system, where are the results? Well, Mr. Speaker, we can find results on the Trans-Canada Highway as expectant moms are forced to take ambulances to Winnipeg to have their babies because there are no pediatricians available in the Westman region.

We can find results in hospital hallways and waiting rooms as wait lists for hip and knee surgeries have increased to approximately 2500, with some of these individuals waiting over two years for surgery.

This is all happening at a time when this NDP government received over \$200 million—thank you Reg—in new, federal health care funding. The waiting lists are growing in this province and administrative costs have skyrocketed. Just how much they have skyrocketed, we do not know.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand up today and put on the record my reasons for supporting Budget 2005. Like many of my friends on this side of the House, it is very difficult to limit the comments because there is so much good news in this budget and so much good news for the people of Manitoba. I would like to focus on a few areas, to talk about how the balanced approach of this government benefits, not only the people of Minto, but the people of Manitoba as a whole. I would like to talk about four areas.

First of all, I am going to speak about how this government has created wealth by reinvesting in the inner city of Winnipeg. I would like to talk about the benefits of our publicly owned hydro utility. I would like to talk about the wise investments we are making to deter young people from criminal activity. I would also like to talk about the policies to ensure that every young Manitoban, wherever in this province they may grow up, has the right to obtain a quality education and take their place in a skilled and healthy workforce. These are the things that matter to the people of Minto. These are the things that matter to real Manitobans.

I would like to start with housing, Mr. Speaker. In the past six years, the housing market in Winnipeg, the inner city of Winnipeg, has turned around and, after 11 long years of stagnation, of neglect, and of decay of the Tory government, the neighbourhoods surrounding the core area have been reborn through the leadership of the provincial government which has shown interest in rebuilding our inner city.

I would like to speak first about individual homes. It is no secret, Mr. Speaker, that is something many people in our province aspire to owning. For many Manitobans, their home is their largest investment and in the 1990s, under the former Filmon government, people saw their investments not only stagnate but falter because the former government turned its back on neighbourhoods such as the Spence area which I share with my colleague the MLA for Wolseley.

The work of many in the inner city of the previous government was limited to finding ways to cut people off social assistance and setting up welfare snitch lines. Policies of firing nurses, of frustrating teachers, and worst of all, disillusioning young people resulted in people moving away from Winnipeg and moving away from Manitoba, leaving us with a shrinking and aging population, but, Mr. Speaker, in the last six years, we have seen the return and the rebirth of housing, both as a result and as a driver of the strengthening of Manitoba's economy.

We have seen many homes built and renovated through a combination of public and private investment. The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, of which the government is a proud partner, has been responsible for building and renovating many homes, many in conjunction with non-profit groups and faith communities. A tremendous example is the Housing Opportunity Partnership or HOP which is a not-for-profit, inner-city housing program dedicated to reclaiming houses, streets and neighbourhoods by acquiring homes in need of repair, upgrading them, and selling them to new homeowners.

*(16:40)

Mr. Speaker, HOP alone has renovated over 50 homes in the Spence neighbourhood, and they have been part of a spectacular increase in investment, both in the public and the private sector.

The project was actually begun by the Winnipeg Real Estate Board. It was enlightened self-interest. Certainly, realtors have benefited from quicker turnover, increased commissions. We have all benefited by reinvestment in the inner city.

How successful, Mr. Speaker, has this been? Incredibly so. Of course, the members of HOP are realtors, so they should know. If we look at HOP's Web site they tell us that since 1999, which is a rather important year for most of us, the average resale home price in the multiple listing service area HOP has targeted has gone up by nearly 100 percent. A 100% increase is spectacular.

What does this really mean for Manitobans? Well, if we look at the Spence neighbourhood, there are approximately 4000 homes. If we consider the average home has gone from \$40,000 to \$80,000, that is the effect of a \$40,000 increase in wealth for

each homeowner in Spence. If we look at the number of homes in Spence, that is an increase in wealth of \$160 million in one inner-city neighbourhood alone. That is billions of dollars across the province of new wealth that simply never would have been created under a Tory government.

It is big numbers, but what does it mean for an individual? Well, an increase in value in somebody's home gives them the benefit of an ability to finance and refinance at lower rates of interest. It gives them an ability and it gives them a reason to improve their homes. It gives them a reason to stay, and it allows us, Mr. Speaker, to win back areas street by street. There is a benefit for the entire city of Winnipeg by an increase in property assessments, and we continue to see growth with this budget.

On this side of the House, we grow wealth by investing in our communities, and I am proud this budget continues to commit increased money for government assistance in creating safe and affordable housing.

Now the second area I would like to discuss is our public hydro utility. I have been interested as some opposition members have stood up and they have criticized Manitoba's plan to help our country meet its Kyoto targets. I know that they are opposed to Kyoto, first of all, because they do not believe that there is any issue out there that needs to be resolved, and, secondly, they do not seem to appreciate that moving our province toward assisting Canada in meeting the Kyoto targets is the right thing to do for the province of Manitoba.

If it does not have a Kyoto stamp on it, Mr. Speaker, the members on the other side of the House do not seem to recognize it. We have the largest opportunity to create a greener and more prosperous Manitoba through an efficient, expanding, enlightened and publicly owned hydro utility right here in our province, and that is building our province's clean energy advantage.

We have heard from many others about the huge benefits: the jobs, the development, the sales. Again, I would like to step back and consider what our investment in our public utility is doing for the individual homeowners and landlords in Minto.

In the past couple of months, I have had two meetings with Manitoba Hydro for the Power Smart program. Over 160 people came out to discuss the Hydro programs provided. Our publicly owned utility offers the Power Smart program to reduce the amount of electricity that we are using so we can sell it for profit to our friends in America and very soon in Ontario, and also so that we can become less reliant on natural gas from our friends in Alberta.

I curled just last week, Mr. Speaker, against a constituent at the Thistle Curling Club who attended the Power Smart meeting. He and his family are now investing in a new furnace with financing from Manitoba Hydro. Putting in a new furnace in a drafty inner-city home, which I am proud to own, can result in spectacular savings, up to a third of heating bills.

Power Smart and Manitoba Hydro do not only benefit those of us in the inner city. We also learned at the Power Smart meeting about the benefits of geothermal power. We learned that one unit of power can actually generate three to four units of energy.

Mr. Speaker, there is no benefit to individual homeowners in Minto because the 25-foot lot size does not allow at this date for geothermal power. However, elsewhere in the province we see geothermal power becoming a very, very important part of our system. I have friends who built a home near Ste. Geneviève and they had nothing but co-operation from Manitoba Hydro as they put in a state-of-the-art geothermal system.

Unfortunately, of course, they had to deal with a private telephone utility that gave them nothing but trouble, but, certainly, with Manitoba Hydro, they were able to have complete co-operation. Our Hydro employees, of course, told us of businesses also taking advantage of the Power Smart program. They told us in particular of a business in Oak Bluff within the area of the member from Morris. They are building a new facility able to access loans and even grants to put geothermal in their brand-new building. The people of Minto certainly celebrate that. We celebrate the development across the province.

How about our friend in Arthur-Virden who has the Alchem plant which has been built in his riding? Well, Alchem stands for Alberta chemical. They chose to build their new plant, not in Alberta, but in Manitoba because of our cheap and abundant power.

The people of Minto know that Manitoba Hydro is a driver of growth, whether it is an old house on Lipton Street, whether it is a new plant in Virden, or whether it is building a state-of-the-art power dam at Wuskwatim.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about the effect of this budget in the area of justice for the people in Minto. I am proud this budget continues to support and develop innovative justice programs. There is increased money for Lighthouses, including a new Lighthouse in the Spence area. There is also a fairly new Lighthouse in east St. James, and that is in addition to the Lighthouse already existing at Isaac Brock Community Club.

I hear my friend, the member from Steinbach, who wants to talk about justice, and we hear him in the House. Of course, as I travel through his community, it is a beautiful community. Steinbach is a lovely place lined with flowers and it is a place where, as I enter, I see there are many, many places for redemption around his community, but of course the member from Steinbach does not have to go that far to get redemption. He can stand up next week in this House and he can get political redemption when he stands up and votes for 53 more police officers. He opposed 40 in the Throne Speech. Hopefully, he will find redemption in a few days' time and be able to stand up and be able to face the people in his community.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased travelling across the province with the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force, to learn about the benefits of the Lighthouses program, and some of the other innovative justice programs, to children's health. There is certainly a connection, and it is not limited to the inner city of Winnipeg. We heard from great people at Dauphin Friendship Centre. We heard from great people with the Thompson Boys and Girls Club about Lighthouses being part of a healthy strategy for our children.

It allows delivery of programming in a way which fits an individual community. Justice provides up to \$1,000 a month if matched by community resources. We do not create anything new. We use existing resources, school gyms, community clubs, cultural centres. There is some ability to pay staff. It is also assisted by volunteers who are interested in giving back to the community and, also, to build their résumés to continue to work and help people in

the future. Because of this investment, we are taking kids off the street. It is a small investment paying big dividends.

I am proud, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to invest in the Turnabout program, in which we work with children under the age of 12. Of course, under federal law, children under 12 cannot be charged under the current Youth Criminal Justice Act. It used to be police officers had no choice but to drop off these children at home. Instead, with the Turnabout program, there is an opportunity to match children who have run afoul of the law with existing resources. Again, it is not about creating new structures, it is not about creating new facilities, but it is about taking advantage of the talents and the skills we already have in our community. We know that diverting children and getting at the root of the problem is what justice is all about.

I am going to talk briefly, again, about the new police officers. We hear people on the other side of the House saying, "Well, they will not be out on the street next week." Of course they will not because we have to train them, and that is ongoing. We heard the chief of the Winnipeg Police Service telling us there are 23 recruits currently being trained at the police academy. We are ready to step out and increase the number of police on the streets of Minto to assist justice enforcement in this city.

I suppose it should not be surprising, Mr. Speaker, because these are also the people standing up in the House day after day and wondering why there are challenges in finding doctors, not only in Winnipeg, but in some rural communities. These are the ones, it was the former Tory government, who slashed the number of spaces in medical school. What did they think was going to happen? It reminds me, of course, of sea monkeys in the back of the comic book where you could simply order a pet, add some water, and there you had your new doctors or your new nurses. It takes time to train professionals. We understand it, and they do not.

* (16:50)

Now, Mr. Speaker, this budget continues to invest in education, not just K to 12, but education from birth to the completion of post-secondary education. Again, we can pull out the statistics. I will leave that to others in my caucus. But what does this mean for individuals? Well, we know there is

support for preschool children in Minto, Healthy Child programs and support for parent-child coalitions. In the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force, I have heard much about the programs and the benefits.

In our area of Minto, my daughter Catriona and I had the chance to go to a program called Wiggle and Giggle and Munch, a wonderful program at John M. King School on Ellice Avenue, at which we did an activity, we danced, we did some crafts, we sang some songs and we had a healthy snack and we received some nutrition information. There were certainly diverse communities involved, diverse families, and it is just one example of another modest investment that many on the other side of the House would simply never understand.

We are working to increase the number of safe and quality day care spaces, to remove barriers to people working, and to make sure that children at preschools and day cares also receive quality care. I am proud we are investing in our public education system for the further increase in funding to schools for the sixth consecutive year. I know the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) has the numbers at his fingertips of just how far we have come compared to the 11 years under the Tories.

What does this mean in Minto? It means capital improvements to Sargent Park School in the heart of Minto, but it is only one of many spread across the province without regard to how people in that area vote.

We have seen improvements in infrastructure in school yards at Isaac Brock School, Clifton School, Sargent Park School. We are seeing teachers getting the respect they deserve investing back in their communities and participating in programs at inner-city schools such as John M. King and Wellington. We want every opportunity for our young people to pursue post-secondary education, not just in Minto but across the province.

In Minto, our children attend great public schools: Daniel Mac, Tec Voc. They can go to Gordon Bell. Some of them go to Kelvin. There is no barrier in the education they receive in their preparation or training. But the cost of post-secondary education is certainly an issue.

I am very, very proud that this government has continued the tuition freeze after a 10% reduction to

ensure that post-secondary education is within the grasp of people who live in my part of the province. And there are those on the other side who think we should close the doors we have opened since 1990, who would tell the 33% increase in students that they do not have the right to be in post-secondary education. We disagree. We know that training our people provides a well-trained skilled workforce that is going to lead our province ahead. I could continue on for a long time.

I want, as the Member for Minto, working with so many wonderful ethnic communities, to celebrate the continued investment in immigration and the increased investment in settlement services.

I want to celebrate the decrease in social assistance recipients, not because of the stick that used to be wielded by the Filmon government, but the carrot of increased opportunities, an increased minimum wage and a resulting increased overall industrial wage.

I want to celebrate the decrease in workplace injuries, celebrate the decrease in labour unrest, but I will stop there.

I am pleased to put my comments on the record in support of the budget, not just for the great people of Minto, but for the benefit of all Manitobans. I am going to be pleased to stand up next week and vote for the budget, and I hope that my friends on the other side will find redemption as well.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand up and put a few words on the record in regard to either the Throne Speech or the budget that was just presented. Usually, I have had the honour and the privilege in following the member from Elmwood. It just seems that that is always the sequence of events as we go through the order of speaking. It is always interesting to follow him because of his rancour, his outbursts of bravado about the great NDP government and everything that he is associated with and all his rhetoric and his statistics that he likes to throw forth. Yet I find it just as exciting to be following the newest member in the House who stands up for the first time to speak on the budget. No reflection on the member, I am sure that he represents his area well, but I can see the familiarity of the inbred, all the media hype and all the statistics that he has been bombarded with. He has become a clone of all these comments and

directions that they say this great NDP is going. I would like to see some individuality and some pizzazz, not the same old rhetoric about going back to 1990. I mean, where did he get those lines?

When he came into this Chamber, he was fresh and new with ideas and vigour. He had a vision for his community and for his constituency of Minto, and what did they do, those terrible spinners and people over there? They beat him down. They brainwashed him with all that NDP stuff about what they are doing for everybody, supplying everything, the be-all, the Big Brother. You know, the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan), his individuality, I can feel it. It has to have come forth, but they are stifling him. You know the spinners. I can just see them, whether he was doing it when he was on the list to speak, then all the communicators: "Bud, you have to say this. You have to say this," and "Do not forget 1990" and all that stuff.

I know what will happen, he will start to realize that what he wants to do for his constituents is much more important than the big, overall picture this NDP government is always trying to bring forth and pound into their members and have them sit back there and just nod and agree to everything the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) brings forth or the Premier (Mr. Doer) talks about and you get these bobbing heads in the background, just like on the back of a car when they are there.

I was there, but I know that time will prevail for the Member for Minto, and I congratulate him on his election in the riding of Minto. I am sure that he will do a good job in representing his constituents, but I will expect him to be a little bit more innovative in his approach to a lot of those things because he does have the capability to do a lot more things. He is a nice guy, but do not get browbeaten with all that stuff about what they are telling you about. There is a certain individuality and a certain truth that you have to have that you keep your head high. I just wanted to start that off by giving the minister—

Some Honourable Members: Your time is up.

Mr. Reimer: Oh, no, my light is still solid; I still have time. I have had the great honour and the great privilege of representing the area of Southdale in southeast Winnipeg for a few years now, and I must say that it is a wonderful area to represent. I think it is an area that is recognized because of the fact that it

is a growing area. It is a new area, there is a lot of new growth in my area, there is a need for schools. I talked to the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) and pleaded with him to look at it in a very profound manner in trying to bring forth solutions to the overcrowding in the areas of south St. Vital and the riding of River East, no, pardon me, Seine River and some of those other areas.

I know there is a problem there but the minister looks at it in a very profound area and says that they do not have a solution for it. These are some of the things that I have been faced with in my constituency: the school problem in Island Lakes and Royal Wood, the fact of the amount of new homes that are coming into my constituency. There are at least 700 from what I understand, 700 or 800 new homes that are going to be coming in there in the next few years. This is going to put a tremendous pressure on the social infrastructure of schools and playgrounds, recreation areas and even some of the roads that have to be accommodated in that particular area.

* (17:00)

I think there has to be a recognition that there is room for an area that has to grow and to be accommodated with the area of schools and things like that, of expansion or even maybe new schools. I am not advocating that we look at some new schools in the area, but I think somewhere along the line we will. But the expansion of existing schools is something that has to be looked at in the near future. Those are the types of things that I getting lobbied for in my constituency. I think it is very, very necessary to bring those things forward because constituency events and constituency concerns are something that we as elected officials should always be paramount about. Granted, there is the overall picture of what government is doing and the direction it is taking, but I think we are elected to try and help our constituents and that is always, I think, something that we have to be aware at all times when we are addressing ourselves in the House and trying to get some recognition of how we can help not only the people in our constituents, but the people of Manitoba.

The other area that I am having some concern about, and I have had some meetings, in fact, the meetings were in regard to a centre we have in our constituency called the Prendergast Centre. What has

happened in that Prendergast Centre, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a building there that is owned by the Department of Education, and the Department of Education back in 1982 got into an agreement with what is called the Prendergast Centre Association. The school has been downsized, if you want, or taken out of its school function, but it was still owned by the Department of Education, so it was leased to the Prendergast Centre Association and they started to use it as a community centre, in a sense, for the area. It has grown to be a very, very successful area. In fact, it accommodates well over 300 children in day care. It services, through the Windsor Park and Southdale support group, 36 members. It has a Francophone seniors centre of 85 people and then it has another seniors centre serving 134 seniors. There is a staff of about 56 that are involved with this Prendergast Centre. It has become a very, very valuable addition in our community, and it serves an awful lot of residents in the area.

The board itself has been very diligent in trying to keep costs down, to maintain the building, to look after problems and the situations that have arisen in the building. They have been able to keep it very viable and functioning in a very productive manner for the day care centre and for the people that it serves, the seniors and some of the other user groups for that particular centre.

What has happened though, Mr. Speaker, is the building is an older building. As I mentioned it was turned over in 1982, so that is quite a few years ago. The school board and the Department of Education were responsible for the major structure on the building, which was the roof, the support structures and the heating and the furnace and the mechanical area. That was part of their lease that the group had with the Department of Education.

They wanted to renew the lease, Mr. Speaker, and what has happened is that the department has said, "Okay, we will renew the lease, but you are now going to be responsible for all the major structures of this building. You are going to be responsible for the roof. You are going to be responsible for the heating system and any major structural defects in the building." So in essence what has happened is that this group has looked after this building for the Department of Education since 1982. The Department of Education has just let it go on its merry way without really having any type of input of structural funding or repairs. The group has

been able to maintain it along the way. Now that the lease is expired and they want to renew the lease to the association, they are saying to the association, "Well, we will renew the lease, but you are now faced with the cost of repairing the roof, which is around \$250,000, a new heating system which could be upwards of \$100,000 and structural repairs and things like that, in that nature."

Mr. Speaker, it is totally unrealistic for the Department of Education to hand over this building and their obligations. They are just dumping back into the community. But it is not totally out of character with the Department of Education and this government. They would like to take credit for a lot of the things that happened in the community, but when it comes down to responsibility, they will download it onto the community. The community, then, has to be forced with some sort of decision.

I know that this centre here has indicated that they definitely cannot afford to take upon those financial burdens, and they are looking at a very, very drastic situation where they may just have to close the doors on this. It would be up to this government and the Department of Education to address the situation very profoundly to make sure that this place stays open. They are very, very cognizant of what they are putting in that lease and the offload that they are doing to this centre.

I know I will be talking to the minister in regard to trying to get a recognition of the problems that are here, realizing that there could be a very major disruption for an awful lot of parents, children, workers and people in this particular centre that are being served in my constituency called the Prendergast Centre.

So those are some things that I think, as an elected member of the Legislature, that you have to be cognizant of; those are some of the areas in your constituency that need attention. I bring those to the attention of the House; I bring those to the attention of the minister. I think that those are things that should be addressed, just as I have done numerous times about the schooling in my constituency. I guess I will continue to do those things because I feel that those are very, very important things in my constituency.

There are important things that go on in the whole general nature of Manitoba that we are also

responsible for, but I think that, as always, our responsibility is to our constituents and trying to help whatever we can to try to get either a solution or a direction or a reasonable solution to the problem. These are some of the things that are faced in my end of the city.

I know some of my colleagues in government are faced with the same types of things, and I would suspect, and I would hope, that they are doing the same type of lobbying for the facilities and the services that they feel are needed in their constituency, particularly the members for Seine River and St. Vital, Riel, those areas there.

We are faced with the same situation of expanding for children and the need for recreational facilities, and I would expect that I would have an ally in trying—and the Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) also—to get a lot of these things done in our area because it is good for the whole community. The community is just not Southdale; the community is southeast Winnipeg. I would hope there is a willingness to work co-operatively in trying to come to some sort of solution on this stuff.

I have to make a comment. I mentioned earlier about the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan) making a comment about housing development in his area and the new growth that is happening through some of the new homes that are being built there in the Spence area, and the partnership they have with the Real Estate Board. I happened to be the minister at the time when this program was announced, and it was through our initiative that a lot of this happened. I am glad that the Member for Minto made comment to it because it is a successful model that we instituted and they have kept up with, and I give them credit for doing that.

I just wanted to put it on record that it was not necessarily the NDP that started that program; it was our program. They have expanded it; they have continued it, which is good. There was a need for it. I have always been a proponent of self-endowment in the community and self-fulfilment of community endeavours and community groups, a ground swell of work that begins in the community, so that there is a recognition by people, self-worth in the community, and it works. I have seen that happen in other areas. I am a little disappointed that it has not been expanded in Manitoba Housing where the tenants' associations have been taking more direct

involvement with some of the housing projects. I am not that critic anymore, but I still do remember and am a proponent of tenant-managed associations and tenant-managed public housing, so that there is a greater awareness and a greater sense of pride that comes with being part of decision making within their own complex. Those are some of the things that I think are very, very important.

* (17:10)

I should point out that my new critic responsibilities are in Culture, Heritage and Tourism, and Seniors. I still have got the Seniors portfolio as a critic, and I must say that in this budget, which was just brought down, this government thought it was wise to hit the seniors again. In one of the few user fees that was announced in the budget, where does it go? After seniors. They have to pay more, another 5 percent, for their medication and drugs. That is 20 percent in the last four years that they have tacked on to the seniors, the most vulnerable part of our community.

When they talk about the tax cuts, they make a big deal about the tax cuts that they have initiated in their budget, and there are some. There is a little bit there; just little slivers. It is just like a piece of prosciutto ham, you know, very, very thin. That is what they give the people. I just wanted to point out that when they talk about tax cuts, they talk about a single person, a senior, let us say a senior making \$20,000. The great savings that this government has instituted is \$11 a year or 3 cents a day. That is what it comes down to for a senior on a \$20,000 fixed income. If we have a senior that is fortunate to have \$30,000 of income, it doubles; they get a saving of 6 cents a day. That is not very much. I do not even know what that buys anymore. I do not think you can buy a stick of gum for 6 cents. If you are a family of four, it amounts to 16 cents a day; there you might get a package of gum.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of other things to say. We have pointed out that there is over a half a million dollars of new revenue that has come into the government. Some of that, definitely, could have gone toward eliminating the education portion on property tax; that is something that we have advocated. That is something that we believe very strongly in, that this government should be moving toward. There is no reason at all why this could not have been done this year or along this path over the

next short while. The opportunity was there. The opportunity is still there, but they have increased their spending by over 6 percent.

We are talking about the increase in debt. They have increased our debt now into the billions and billions of dollars. We talked about total obligations now that are more than \$20 billion in the provincial debt. These are numbers that are approximately \$17,000 for every man, woman and child in this province, Mr. Speaker.

There are a lot of things that we could talk about. We talked about health care, that the cost has gone up. In the short time that I have been here speaking for, say, approximately 20 minutes, the health care budget expenditure of almost \$130,000 was spent during the 20 minutes that I have been speaking on the Throne Speech.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things that we could talk about in regard to this budget, in the sense that the opportunity was there. We know that in Justice we see more press announcements than we see action from this Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh). We see press announcements for anything and everything that comes out, but we do not see the action. We see a lot of things that are happening, but, I think, there are other things that we could talk about.

The member across the way says, "What else do we want to talk about?" I would love to speak longer. I know that we are, sort of, limiting our time. You just get into it, but you cannot do it. You cannot do it in the short time that we have. It is something that we are not going to be voting for. We will not be voting for this budget. The members opposite are applauding me for not voting for it, and I appreciate that. I can see their point too. There are a lot of them over there that are uncomfortable with it, too; they feel uncomfortable. I am going to say to them, "Come on over, come on over." Thank you.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister responsible for Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to take the brief moments I have left today to speak in favour of this budget. I want to begin, of course, by saying that I am very appreciative as always to the constituents of Seine River for affording me this opportunity to represent them in the Legislature and to have a chance to speak in support of this wonderful budget.

Certainly, we can see in this budget that we continue to work hard as a government. We continue to fulfil our commitments, and we are very, very proud of that. I can hear chirping from the member opposite, the member from Steinbach. I would suggest that I have a few items that I may wish to address that may be of particular interest to his ears as I address a little later in my speaking, what I perceive to be a glaring lack of vision on the opposite side of the House. That is, Mr. Speaker, my hope that what I am witnessing is a glaring lack of vision on the opposite side of the House, and not, in fact, what some may claim to be a sinister plan by members opposite.

I prefer to just think that it is, indeed, a lack of vision, but I will speak to that later after I talk about this very strong budget, Mr. Speaker, and the four pillars on which this budget is grounded and founded. Certainly, we see in this budget that our government continues to pay down debt, and this is important to Manitobans. Our debt payment has, of course, increased from \$96 million to \$110 million, and we are very proud of that.

We maintain our commitment and our plan to address Manitoba's pension liability, and this is of great concern to all Manitobans, something that was sorely neglected in years past. We are very pleased to say that we show commitment in this budget to addressing this. Indeed, as we pay down this debt, we can see that there is no draw from the so-named rainy day fund. This is worthy of note once again that we are able to meet the challenges year over year and indeed this year no draw from the rainy day fund.

I also want to make mention, of course, of the second founding, grounding pillar of this budget, and that is, we are making strategic investments, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister responsible for Seniors and the Minister responsible for Healthy Living, I was very pleased to see progress that is being made in committing to more hip and knee surgeries. This government in the past has made a very strong commitment to issues that are life-and-death issues, like cardiac care and cancer lists. We have shown dramatic progress in reducing those waiting lists. Now we proceed, of course, to quality-of-life types of waiting lists. The commitment that we have shown for more hip and knee surgeries, I know, is going to mean a lot to Manitobans, older Manitobans

and young Manitobans, so that their quality of life can be improved as soon as possible.

We are very pleased to see a funding increase for the city of Winnipeg. We are pleased to see funding for highways, transit, and water systems, the very kind of infrastructures that make our daily lives easier to live, safer. We are very proud of our commitment to that. Certainly, as the representative from a community that consists almost entirely, Mr. Speaker, of homes and yards and schools, to see that our government has committed the 10% tuition reduction for the fifth straight year is something that means very, very much. The sixth straight year, sorry, a little tongue-tied there. We are very, very pleased about that.

An Honourable Member: It is easier to say when it is 10.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, it will be much easier to say when it is 10, but we are very, very proud about that. We are very happy about the significant increases in this budget for education. I am not just talking about capital, Mr. Speaker, of course, we can see capital investments in education being made everywhere, but the continued commitment of increase in funding at the rate of economic growth compared to those dark days we saw in the nineties, the zeros, the minus twos.

* (17:20)

I was a teacher in the education system in those times when teachers were accused of not having real commitment. The students bore the brunt of the cut in funds. Those were dark, dark days. I have said before, and I will say it again, the sun, certainly, has come out in education under this government.

Also, I am very, very pleased about the investment that we are making in Justice. Certainly, the record-breaking increase in law enforcement, we are very pleased about that. We know that members opposite who speak often about issues in Justice are going to get right behind that part of the budget, and they are going to vote for that. I cannot imagine how a member opposite would vote against that, and it will, indeed, be shocking if that should happen.

An Honourable Member: How is that maternity ward doing?

Ms. Oswald: I hear the member opposite from Steinbach making reference to Victoria General Hospital. News that broke today about a change in programming there, and I was very astonished earlier to hear not only members opposite in their omnipresent heckling, but the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) of all people, making a political issue over something that concerns the safety of women and babies. I could not believe my ears that there would be an effort of political hay to be made when medical doctors are making recommendations about numbers of deliveries at Victoria General Hospital and the very safety of those moms and those babies. That members opposite from both parties, I add, would suggest that this is a political kind of decision that should be made, I say shame on them, Mr. Speaker, that they think that that kind of a decision should be made in that way. It is absolutely shocking.

Moving right along, the third pillar of our budget, Mr. Speaker, and that is cutting taxes. Six-year tax reductions totalling \$500 million. A new \$30-million reduction in the education support levy on residential property. An average homeowner saves \$120 on a typical house of \$125,000. These are dollars that are meaningful to Manitobans, real dollars. Personal income taxes cut by another \$30 million. A 19% cut in middle-income taxes since 1999. I know that these are the kinds of values and the kinds of things that members opposite truly care about, and I will look forward to them leaping to their feet to vote for this budget with unbridled enthusiasm, because we know that these are the very core values that the members opposite care about.

The fourth pillar, Mr. Speaker, saving for the future. A \$314-million deposit into the fiscal stabilization fund. Indeed, our budget is balanced under balanced budget law, their law, incidentally, a law that they used, as others have suggested, to make excuses for taking funding out of important things like health care and education, but we balanced it. It drives them crazy, and we see that every day. Certainly, I suggested to you earlier on that I was very concerned about what I perceived to be a glaring lack of vision from members opposite. That was really the most positive spin that I could put on it, because I think if we had shined a light on it a different way, what we might see is, in fact, a sinister plan. We hear members opposite talking about wanting every nickel of education funding off property tax. They want no capital tax. They want no

payroll tax. I think it adds up in the end to over \$1 billion—[interjection] \$1 billion and some. They want all of this to happen.

What concerns me, Mr. Speaker, is when I looked back to an election budget from members opposite, what I saw was a meagre 1 percent in health care funding. They think that it is a great idea to take \$1 billion out of the system and say that they will put a little drop back in the bucket. Maybe they would have to go back to some of their tactics, like firing a thousand nurses. Maybe that would be one of their solutions. I do not know. That sounds a little bit more to me like a sinister plan than a lack of vision, but I remain optimistic that all we have here is a lack of vision.

I hear the member opposite, most recently the member from Southdale, but also I have heard the member from Tuxedo make reference to Pharmacare and an increase in Pharmacare fees. Certainly, we know that the increase in drugs in our health care system is perhaps the single greatest cost, and we have to ensure that this is a sustainable program. That is why we have invested \$28 million, an increase of 16 percent, into ensuring that this can be a sustainable system. At the same time, we have increased the number of drugs.

I remember and will say with absolute pride that I witnessed the very fetching picture of the member from Tuxedo with her two children in the *Winnipeg Free Press* imploring the government to cover vaccines that are now being covered in our Pharmacare system. So one day we want vaccines to be covered, but the next day we want to take a billion dollars or more out of the system. It is hard to tell: Is this a lack of vision or a sinister plan? I just do not know.

Then we get on to the subject, perhaps, of their plan for education, remembering, of course, their wanting to take every nickel, every dime off of property owners. All I can find for their vision, their education plan, Mr. Speaker, was what I saw in the 2003 election, when perhaps their best idea for saving money in health care after they had extracted a billion or more dollars, was this: "Maybe we will do a little something like cut art or music or physical education or band." Maybe this is their great education plan. It sounds like a sinister plan to me, but perhaps it is only a glaring lack of vision.

They talk about educational reform, but taking away programs, the very programs that assist our young people in becoming very profound and deep and very good-thinking individuals, these are the kinds of programs that they want to get rid of. So, certainly, again I have to say that we have a budget that has four solid pillars on which it is founded: paying down debt, making a strategic investment, cutting taxes, and saving for the future, while we are investing in justice, we are investing in the environment. We continue our commitment to education, to post-secondary education, where we care about culture, heritage, and tourism. We continue to make investments in health care to improve the quality of lives of all Manitobans.

I look to members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and what I hear and what I see is just an appalling lack of vision, and that is, hopefully, what it is because if, in fact, with a plan like 1 percent for health care, firing a thousand nurses, voting against increasing police in our community, tax cuts that take all of the money off property tax so that all we can do in our education system is cut art and music and band and phys ed from our young students' lives, if this is in fact what it is, if it is a sinister plan, I think that we are in even more grave danger than having an opposition that merely has a lack of vision.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will say to you again I support this budget. There is so much in this budget that will enable each and every member, including the member from Southdale, including the member from Inkster and including the member from Steinbach, that will offer them opportunity after opportunity to leap to their feet in support of this budget that it will be shocking if we do not see full and unanimous support of this budget coming up.

With that, again I will thank the people of Seine River and suggest that I look forward to members opposite supporting us on this and really so many matters in future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I, too, have a number of words that I would like to get on the record in regard to this budget. I must say I am not wearing the same rose-coloured glasses that members from Minto and our south end of the city are wearing there, from Seine River. I have these glasses that kind of see the truth, and I have often heard the remark: The truth will set you free.

I hope to talk a little bit more about the truth tomorrow, immediately following Question Period, when I get the opportunity to talk about some of the numbers.

You know, I am going to talk a lot about the provincial auditor. The provincial auditor has a lot different opinions on—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Inkster will have 29 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

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