

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

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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| STEFANSON, Heather | Tuxedo | P.C. |
| STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon. | Dauphin-Roblin | N.D.P. |
| SWAN, Andrew | Minto | N.D.P. |
| TAILLIEU, Mavis | Morris | P.C. |
| Vacant | Fort Whyte | P.C. |
| WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon. | Swan River | N.D.P. |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, November 22, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 16—The Corporations Amendment Act

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 16, The Corporations Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les corporations, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this bill modernizes The Corporations Act, bringing it into harmony with federal legislation. As well, it clarifies directors' duties of due diligence, removes some restrictions on company financing transactions and harmonizes with federal requirements the proportion of a corporation's board of directors who must be residents of Canada.

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

Bill 17—The Securities Amendment Act

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, on a roll here, Bill 17, The Securities Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les valeurs mobilières, be now read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Attorney General (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 17, The Securities Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this proposed legislation is designed to strengthen and improve investor rights and to enhance access to capital markets across Canada. It has been done in consultation with securities industry stakeholders, as well as other ministers across the country.

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

PETITIONS

Coverage of Insulin Pumps

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition and a good one:

Insulin pumps cost over \$6,500.

The cost of diabetes to the Manitoba government in 2005 will be approximately \$214.4 million. Each day 16 Manitobans are diagnosed with this disease compared to the national average of 11 new cases daily.

Good blood sugar control reduces or eliminates kidney failure by 50 percent, blindness by 76 percent, nerve damage by 60 percent, cardiac disease by 35 percent and even amputations.

Diabetes is an epidemic in our province and will become an unprecedented drain on our struggling health care system if we do not take action now.

The benefit of having an insulin pump is it allows the person living with this life-altering disease to obtain good sugar control and become much healthier, complication-free individuals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba to consider covering the cost of insulin pumps that are prescribed by an endocrinologist or medical doctor under the Manitoba Health Insurance Plan.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by Doug Breckman, M. Homenick, Alan Novak and many, many others.

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

Crocus Investment Fund

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 Government was made aware of serious problems involving the Crocus Fund back in 2001.

As a direct result of the government ignoring the red flags back in 2001, over 33 000 Crocus investors lost over \$60 million.

Manitoba's provincial auditor stated "We believe the department was aware of the red flags at Crocus and failed to follow up on those in a timely way."

The relationship between some union leaders, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP seem to be the primary reason as for why the government ignored the red flags.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider the need to seek clarification on why the government did not act on fixing the Crocus Fund back in 2001.

Signed by Atish Maniar, Veerbala Maniar, John Kowal and many, many others.

*(13:35)

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the annual reports of Victim Services and LERA, 2004.

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 from the Maples Collegiate Institute 23 Grade 9 students under the direction of Mrs. Dawn Wilson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub).

ORAL QUESTIONS

Maples Surgical Centre MRI Scans

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, under this Doer NDP government, wait times for diagnostic tests have skyrocketed. Manitobans do not have timely access to health care services and they are losing confidence in this NDP government's health care system. The Maples Surgical Centre has recently purchased an

MRI and will soon be able to offer MRI scans to the public.

My question to the Premier: Is he going to turn his back on patients and deny them access to these MRI scans by changing Manitoba's provincial regulations?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I believe the College of Physicians and Surgeons has not yet approved the MRI.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, under the Canada Health Act, the purchase of diagnostic tests from private clinics is not prohibited. We on this side of the House support the Canada Health Act. Patients should not be denied a service that is not prohibited under the Canada Health Act and a service that is currently available in four other provinces in Canada.

Right now, Manitobans can, and some have to, Mr. Speaker, travel to Alberta, B.C., Nova Scotia or Québec and access this service. I would ask this Premier will he be denying Manitobans access to choice right here at home.

Mr. Doer: People do have choice here in Manitoba. They now can choose between two patient-dedicated MRIs that were in existence when we came into office. We are now at six MRIs and we do have to choose. About a year ago, we chose to put public investments into Beausejour. Members opposite chose to put it into some B.C. company.

We are now looking at putting more money into the Boundary Trails hospital, Mr. Speaker. I would like to know, the member opposite, does he want all the money spent in Winnipeg, or does he want some invested outside of the Perimeter Highway.

Mr. Murray: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a non-answer to a very serious question.

I will ask the Premier again because every Manitoban knows that, under this NDP government, their plan simply is health care delayed is health care denied.

We on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, believe that you should be putting patients first, not about ideology, but how do we put patients first to ensure that they have timely access to health care right here in the province of Manitoba.

I would ask this Premier again is he going to deny Manitobans access to the Maples MRI by changing regulations in The Manitoba Health Services Insurance Act, thereby denying Manitobans

choice that is already available, Mr. Speaker, to those Manitobans in four other provinces across Canada. Is he going to do that?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we chose as a government to stop paying \$1.2 million in fines from the national government and put that into reducing the waiting lists all across Manitoba. Members opposite chose ideology and got fined for it.

Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of advice we got from—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Two MRIs, six MRIs, three times more. We are choosing now to fund, use taxpayers' money, not just in the city of Winnipeg as the member opposite has argued for under the surgical program, we put money in Beausejour and they actually opposed it. We are putting money into Boundary Trails, they are now opposing it, Mr. Speaker. I would like the members opposite to stop representing British Columbia and start representing rural Manitoba.

* (13:40)

Maples Surgical Centre MRI Scans

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Well, Mr. Speaker, we are representing patients in Manitoba. That is who we are representing.

Mr. Speaker, it is not prohibited under the Canada Health acts nor The Manitoba Health Services Insurance Act for patients to purchase diagnostic procedures from private clinics, despite what this Minister of Health said.

Under section 217 of the provincial regulations it says and I quote. "The following services are not insured services: Diagnostic examination or treatment by means of non-radiation emitting medical imaging devices, including ultrasound, unless provided in a hospital as an inpatient or outpatient service."

Mr. Speaker, a private clinic is not a hospital and therefore patients should be allowed to purchase these services. Is the Minister of Health planning to change the regulations in Manitoba to outlaw this practice?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): First of all, Mr. Speaker, as our Premier (Mr. Doer) has

responded, the MRI is not yet licensed for operation and so all of these questions are assuming a situation that is not yet the case.

Mr. Speaker, a private clinic in British Columbia just announced that they would go into business for an enrolment fee of \$1,200 and an annual fee just for primary care, not for anything advanced, not for specific scans like MRI, for example, \$2,300 a year in order to just get primary care in a private clinic. We want Manitobans to have access to primary care, secondary care, tertiary care through a public system that is efficient, effective and universally accessible.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, surely this government is not waiting for a licence to come through to take a stand on this issue. There is obviously no plan for this government. It is pathetic.

Mr. Speaker, in a Canada Health act annual report 2003-2004, it states and I quote, "MRI and CT services are considered to be insured health services when they are medically necessary for the purpose of maintaining health, preventing disease or diagnosing or treating an injury, illness or disability and are provided in a hospital or a facility providing hospital care."

Mr. Speaker, clearly this act, too, states it is not prohibited for patients to purchase MRI scans from a private clinic in Manitoba. Is the Minister of Health planning to go against the Canada Health Act by changing regulations to make this illegal? Yes or no, simple question.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, a private MRI can be used for Workers Comp, for MPI, for the Armed Forces, for people under federal jurisdiction. They are all excluded as peace persons not covered under the public insurance system of our country under the Canada Health Act.

I assume that the private operators of the clinic that seems to be such a favourite over there, Mr. Speaker, have a business case for bringing forward their MRI, and I presume that business case involves Workers Comp, MPI, the RCMP, Armed Forces, private insurance companies who wish to have MRIs done on whatever for whatever reason under their private insurance. I assume they are good enough businesspeople that they have not taken a leap of faith and have no expectation that somehow other businesses will not make theirs a profitable investment.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, we have taken a stand on this issue. I wonder what the members opposite

are waiting for, a second viewpoint opinion on whether or not this is popular in the public. I tell you it is unacceptable what these guys are doing.

Mr. Speaker, currently Québec, Nova Scotia, Alberta and B.C. offer private MRI scans to patients in those provinces. We do not believe that Manitoba patients should be denied a service that is available in other provinces. It is as simple as that. Is this government planning to deny Manitobans the right to choose how they access care for diagnostic procedures in this province? Why do they continue to put politics ahead of patients?

* (13:45)

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, let me tell the member opposite what our policy is. Our policy is that any private operator can come into Manitoba and can offer a service that we, the government and people of Manitoba, have to pay for whether it is needed or not, whether it is medically necessary or not. They are proposing open season on our health care system so that you could bring in a private hospital, you could bring in a private MRI and simply say to Manitobans, "Come and take advantage of it and the public will pay for it regardless of the cost."

We are better stewards of the public dollar than that, Mr. Speaker, and of the public sector health care system in this country that is, obviously, an enormous economic advantage to us. We would not have the kind of industrial structure that we have in this country without medicare, and we would not have the health status in this country, the neonatal mortality and morbidity rates, the life expectancy rates that are superior to the model they want us to adopt from the United States.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Tuxedo, with a new question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, we believe in putting patients first and giving them choice to timely access to care in our province. We fear that the NDP will continue to put ideology before patient care by changing the regulations.

Mr. Speaker, we would oppose these changes. Where does the government stand on this issue? Are they for or against allowing Manitoba patients the same access to choice in services that are offered in other provinces across our country?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is for is for-profit. That is what the member is for. What the member is for is for a system such as that offered by the clinic in British Columbia that wants to charge people \$2,300 a year just for primary care. That is what the member opposite is for. What the member opposite is for is for anybody who is a private entrepreneur to come in, set up shop in Manitoba and then tell the people of Manitoba that they have to pay for anything that is done in that clinic whether it is needed or not, whether it is rational or not. We are supposed to simply fork out the dollars.

Mr. Speaker, under their plan, there would not be an MRI in Brandon, there would not be one in Boundary Trails. There would not be a 64-slice CT going into Brandon. There would not be six new additional CTs in rural Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, what we are for is patient access to care in this province. What they are for is for their own ideology at the expense of patient care in this province. Shame on them. Unfortunately, under the NDP government, wait times have skyrocketed, and Manitobans are not receiving the care that this government promised and has a responsibility to deliver. This NDP government continues to put politics before patients.

Why is this government considering denying Manitobans the same rights that patients have in four other provinces across Canada?

Mr. Sale: Let us talk about wait times, Mr. Speaker. When we formed government, nine weeks for radiation therapy. Today 1.4 weeks. When we formed government, people were not getting cardiac surgery when they needed it. We not only meet the Canadian benchmarks, we beat the Canadian benchmarks on cardiac care. When they were in government, the MRI wait list, 25 weeks. We have reduced the waiting time for MRIs by over one-third, and this year it will come down further.

Mr. Speaker, we challenged WRHA to do 400 more hips and knees under our system with efficient, productive approaches to surgery. They are doing 700 surgeries this year.

Let us talk about wait times, Mr. Speaker. Let us talk about the reductions that have happened in, for example, stress tests for cardiac function: cut in half in the last 3 months. We have an incredibly good record, and we are going to make it better, including access to 30 000 MRI scans this year, up from 6400.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

* (13:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, I find it unacceptable that this Minister of Health thinks that 16 weeks to wait for MRI procedures in this province is a good thing. We will not be happy until that wait list is eliminated and that is what we are looking for. We believe that outlawing private clinics from delivering these services in Manitoba is not in the best interest of patients. It is time for this NDP government to set aside their ideology and stand up for the best interests of patients in Manitoba. Four other provinces across Canada allow patients to choose where they access diagnostic procedures. This is a serious issue in Manitoba and Manitobans deserve answers. Where does this government stand on this issue?

Mr. Sale: Well, I am interested, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite now apparently is a doctor as well as a lawyer. The Canadian Medical Association and the wait-list coalition say that six to eight weeks wait for an MRI is perfectly appropriate. Apparently she wants no wait list, no taxes and no government.

WTO Negotiations Manitoba Position

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Agriculture met with the key commodity groups, yet this minister has failed to table for this House Manitoba's position on the upcoming negotiations in Hong Kong.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister table today in this House Manitoba's position on this important issue?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, the WTO negotiations are a long process and our industry has been involved in it for some time. Our industry has been represented in these discussions from the beginning of the WTO discussions. I did meet with the industry yesterday. We had a very good discussion, and what the Manitoba industries want is to ensure that other countries that are over-subsidizing reduce their subsidies. They want increased market access, but they also want to ensure that specific groups that have the ability to have supply management and things like the Canadian Wheat Board are protected.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, with producers having gone through frost, drought, BSE, declining grain prices, our producers cannot withstand any more setbacks. Many changes, either positive or negative, could come from the upcoming WTO negotiations which will impact our producers.

Can the minister assure our producers that this government will negotiate timely transitions for any changes, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Wowchuk: These are very important negotiations for our producers, and that is why we have worked with the producers, kept them involved in the process. They have been able to put their position on the table, but this is an issue that has to be addressed all across Canada. It is not just a Manitoba position. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I will speak loudly for the producers on their issues that they raise with us. In Manitoba we strongly recognize the importance of supply management. We strongly recognize the role that the Canadian Wheat Board plays. We also recognize that subsidies in other countries are far too high and that those have to be reduced to level the playing field.

* (13:55)

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, this minister needs to be prepared for the WTO talks. Can the Minister of Agriculture table the government's WTO proposal and the plans that she has in place to assist producers with the impact of any proposals changed?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member opposite does not seem to recognize that Manitoba does not negotiate the WTO. We are a part of a team—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: I guess the members opposite do not recognize what the concept of a team is. We are going to the WTO talks as part of the Canadian team, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work with our farm industry groups, members fully aware that we met with them yesterday to put the Manitoba position together. Manitoba's producers are very concerned about the high level of domestic support that other countries have. They are concerned about market access, and the other very important key issue

is the export subsidies that other countries are providing.

The U.S. farm bill is a concern, but I can tell you that I will work with Manitoba producers and Canadian producers.

WTO Negotiations Manitoba Position

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): The minister wants to use the analogy of a team. I would assume that she sees herself as either the coach or the leader of what position Manitoba producers are going to be represented by at national discussions. She is leaving in a couple of days to provide information to the national discussion so that our position can be formulated for the WTO. Our producers do not know what this minister is going to say and she does not seem prepared to share it with those who were not at her private advisory table.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I can assure the member that the industry is well aware of the positions that we have for Manitoba. We will listen to the industry and we have listened to the industry, and we will work in their best interests to ensure that there is an increased market to access for our producers, that tariffs are reduced and that we reduce export subsidies that many people use to distort markets.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we know full well the importance of supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board for our producers. I wonder where members opposite are when it comes to Canadian Wheat Board. Are they prepared to support that? Are they prepared to support supply management? My position is clear. I—*[interjection]* a better deal for better access for our producers.

Mr. Cummings: Getting information from this minister is becoming a very painful process. She is now starting to allude to situations that she is prepared to discuss on behalf of Manitoba producers. Will she put any comments on the record that can be of comfort to producers out there about the position that she will take with her fellow ministers, or is she just going to go in there and say me too?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that members opposite are aware that this is a long process. Canada has put a position out.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:00)

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a framework that has been put out that has been published that the industry has been working on. The framework calls for substantial reductions in trade-distorting supports and that is supported by our industry. The framework calls for a reduction in tariffs and that is certainly one that we support our industry on. I can tell you that the framework also continues to call for reviews and clarifications of where supports can fit in under the agreement, but, certainly, the elimination of export subsidies is—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, again, in the interest of pulling information out of this minister, she is talking about what we believe are some legitimate international issues, but she is not talking about what she is doing to defend possible implications right here at home. I give her one more chance to put some information on the record that would be of some comfort to the producers in this province who may be impacted by what she does or does not say at the national level.

Ms. Wowchuk: I can assure the member that he does not have to worry about the industry getting information from me. I have had discussions with the industry. The industry is concerned about the level of subsidy in the United States, Mr. Speaker, and we will address those issues.

The industry is concerned that Canada may be called to give up more than other countries will have to give up. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I will be at that meeting and I will be speaking for Manitoba and Canadian producers to ensure that we do not get short-changed and give up more while other countries continue to give their high level of subsidies. Those subsidies in other countries have to be reduced, and tariffs have to be reduced for our producers as well as they export into other countries.

Foster Families Availability

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg released its barometer on poverty yesterday, and it shows 600 more kids in care than last year. The report also indicated there are not enough foster families to care for these children.

What is this minister doing to ensure that there are enough foster families to provide quality care for these children in Manitoba?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): One of the first things we did, Mr. Speaker, was restore funding to the Manitoba Foster Family Network that members had cut in its entirety during '93-94. We believe in the foster parents of Manitoba. We have also increased the rates that we pay three times since 1999. Again, they cut, we restored. We are working with the Foster Family Network and foster parents for the care of the children.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, the motto of this government is spend more, get less. Each foster family is underfunded by at least \$3,000. The number of kids in care has constantly risen from 5440 in 2000-2001 to over 6000 this year. Children are bounced around from family to family until they reach 18, and then they are left to fend for themselves.

What support will this failing NDP government provide to children in care and to foster families to alleviate this constant movement and instability of the children in its care? What is the minister doing to provide stability in the lives of these children in Manitoba?

Ms. Melnick: The first thing we did was take the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry recommendations off the shelf, blew the dust off and started to implement that. We are the only jurisdiction in the world that has legislation around the devolution of child welfare that includes culturally appropriate care, that includes kinship care, and this we have done in the best interests of all the children of Manitoba.

Child and Family Service Agencies Resources

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, there are not enough culturally appropriate foster homes in this province. We hear constantly of the shortage of workers within Child and Family Services. We hear constant concerns over the failing system and fears that harm will befall some of these children.

Mr. Speaker, CFS staff are doing their best under conditions of low morale and chaotic transitions to this new system. What is this minister doing to ensure adequate resources to the CFS staff to carry out their duties and provide supports for families and children in crisis?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that this is all a veil of the non-support of the devolution of child welfare, and shame on that member. We are working with Winnipeg Child and Family Services and the newly created authorities so that we have culturally appropriate care, culturally appropriate workers, and we are focussing on the care of the children throughout Manitoba, including the North which members opposite have never been to, and how dare she speak negatively about the foster parents in this province particularly around culturally appropriate care. She should not speak on subjects that she does not understand.

Manitoba Hydro Government Management

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, every time we turn around the government is making a grab for funds from Manitoba Hydro. When the NDP government could not balance the books, the Premier (Mr. Doer) grabbed several hundred million dollars to balance the books. When the Minister of Energy needed a political staffperson, he grabbed money from Manitoba Hydro. This fall, the government is proposing a market-distorting slush fund to subsidize natural gas purchases using dollars from hydro-electric power.

A good case, Mr. Speaker, can be made that the NDP's clutch-and-grab approach to Manitoba Hydro is the reason the utility is now asking for a 5 percent rate hike. I ask the government when will the government end the practice of grabbing money from Manitoba Hydro for political purposes, for political staff and for political slush funds.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct all of the inaccuracies in the member's question. First off, Manitoba Hydro is not getting a 5 percent rate increase. In fact, the PUB has rejected an increase, and the matter of rates will be discussed in the fall.

Secondly, the member wants us to go to the market price for natural gas, which is up more than 40 percent. We think low-income individuals who are being supported by the federal Liberal government and by our government in joint programs ought to be sheltered from the cost of dramatic, skyrocketing natural gas prices, Mr. Speaker. So, in addition to having the lowest electricity rates in North America, we are also, for the next couple of years, going to level out the rate increases for natural

gas as a result of the hedging account and the account balance, as I explained over five hours yesterday to members opposite in committee.

Natural Gas Pricing Reviews

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the NDP government is determined to micromanage Manitoba Hydro with continually changing ad hocery and regulations which vary from one day to the next. This means that Manitoba Hydro has difficulty in long-term planning. The present NDP government is also determined to use cross-subsidization to grab money from Manitoba Hydro whichever way it can and to use the funds to put in political staff or political slush funds.

My question is to the Minister of Energy (Mr. Chomiak). You know, we agree with him that the rate increases in winter may be problematic for one, but we do not agree with the continually changing landscape. Will the Minister of Energy support the Liberal proposal to move the four times a year that there would be a review of natural gas prices to May 1, July 1, September 1 and October 15 so that, in the future, there would not be winter rate increases in natural gas?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, I would refer the member to the PUB decision where, in 2001, they said that the PUB would adjust the gas rates on the basis of the market change every quarter. The proposal the member opposite is proposing would mean that we had a 40 percent rate increase on November 1 as opposed to having the two increases that are slated.

The bottom line is there is a rate freeze in hydro, as indicated by the member from Energy. Mr. Speaker, there is a rate freeze in hydro and under our bill there will be a rate freeze on February 1 for gas users who have already paid an increase in the rates that was applied by the PUB in November. You have a choice, rate freeze or rate increase. You have chosen rate increase.

* (14:10)

Natural Gas Rate-Shock Protection

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Oh, he is good at this. Mr. Speaker, he is good at distorting, provide a transition as opposed to distorting the marketplace. Using Manitoba Hydro to interfere with the marketplace is dishonest.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with former NDP Premier Ed Schreyer, who said that this is not in the long-term best interest of Manitoba Hydro and the consumers. That is what his former idol is saying. What we want is to provide targeted assistance through general revenues. We care more for our seniors than this government does. Why will you not provide targeted assistance directly through general revenues? That is the answer. Stop distorting economic realities.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, Mr. Speaker, the bill is written in short-term years because it has to deal with a short-term smoothing out of gas prices. The first objective is to have the hedging practices that were put in place a year ago not necessitate any amount of money from export sales coming in to have this rate freeze.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the rates in hydro, both in terms of electricity, are a lot lower than they are in other provinces. For example, in Ontario, where Mr. Madan is going to go, he will be paying a lot higher hydro-electric rates in the future.

Aboriginal Housing Government Initiatives

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, in light of the recently announced letter of understanding involving the federal government, the town of Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids First Nation and the provincial government, can the minister please inform the House as to the details on this very positive pilot project?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that yesterday we signed an historic agreement with the community of Grand Rapids and the federal minister.

This is a new housing model for Aboriginal people. We are doing away with the bickerfest and coming forward with a co-operative model that will be driven by the community. The federal government will do their part on reserve, we will do our part off reserve.

I would like to thank the leadership of Grand Rapids First Nation, Chief Ovide Mercredi, Mayor Buck of Grand Rapids, as well as the Honourable Joe Fontana who said he wants this to be the model of Aboriginal housing across Canada.

Economic Growth Tax Competitiveness

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, competitiveness is the single most important issue facing Manitoba and Manitoba businesses. We have said this time and time again in this Legislature, and it appears that the only person who is not listening is the Minister of Finance.

Chamber of Commerce President Dave Angus revealed that taxes need to be lowered and some eliminated and that Manitoba has a long way to go in this area. I ask the Minister of Finance why has he not made Manitoba a more tax-competitive province.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, an independent 2004 KPMG study showed Winnipeg ranked second in western Canada, ahead of Calgary, on business cost competitiveness, something never accomplished when members opposite were in government. In my next answer to his next scripted question, I will explain to him how we got there.

Mr. Hawranik: I suppose that explains, Mr. Speaker, why we are last in economic growth. We are below the national average in the last five years in this country. The third annual business leaders indexing, they indicated that business leaders have lost confidence. This bodes poorly for this province and the economy and our job growth. The business leaders gave this NDP a failing grade for their economic development efforts, and they said that the province's business climate is not competitive with the rest of Canada.

I ask the Minister of Finance why has he failed to make Manitoba competitive with the rest of Canada.

Mr. Selinger: Just to put it in perspective, Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada indicated that Manitoba will be the fourth fastest-growing province with real GDP growth of 2.9 percent in '05, completely contradicting the misinformation the member continually puts on the record.

Now how do we get there? We reduced business taxes for small business by 50 percent since '99. You did nothing while you were in office. We doubled the band of income covered under the small business rate from \$200,000 to \$400,000, a 100 percent increase. We reduced corporate taxes for the first time since the Second World War. That includes the 11 years you were in office. We have moved on

taxes in ways you never imagined when you were in power.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: Members' Statements. The honourable Member for Lakeside.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): It is not a members' statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does nobody have a members' statement? The honourable Member for Pembina.

Children's Camp International

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I rise to tell all honourable members about the event that will be taking place next year in the great constituency of Pembina.

Mr. Ray Wieler, the president of an organization called Children's Camp International is organizing an attempt to harvest 160 acres of wheat in under 12 minutes using 90 combines. By doing this he hopes to accomplish two things. First, he wants to set a world record, beating the previous record of 15 minutes 43 seconds set in Alberta in 1998, but, more importantly, he wants to raise enough money to send 100 000 of the poorest kids in southern India to Bible camps run out of the churches in that country. There the kids will have fun, make friends and receive three hot meals a day. This event will take place August 5, 2006.

Mr. Wheeler is hoping that enough people will sponsor a combine to cover the costs so that all of the proceeds from the event can go directly to the kids. Soon he will also be looking for about 200 volunteers. The winter wheat to be harvested has already been seeded and is up, thanks to donations.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all members of this House to join me in lending this effort their support and wishing Mr. Wheeler and the organization the best of luck in the most worthy endeavour. Thank you.

Chytalnia Prosvita

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to recognize the celebration this past October 29 of the 100th anniversary of Chytalnia Prosvita in Winnipeg. This association is dedicated to the betterment and enlightenment of all Ukrainians through the

preservation of their language, culture and history, specifically through the medium of reading and books.

Chytalnia Prosvita was originally formed in the 19th century in Ukraine by Ukrainian intellectuals determined to bring education and culture to the general public. Through the use of reading halls, this goal of enlightenment began to be realized. In Winnipeg, the organization started at a time when the first large influx of Ukrainian immigrants were beginning their new lives in Canada. This reality made the organization that much more important by building Ukrainian institutions that could both preserve the language and history of the past and help pass it along to future generations.

To that end, in 1918, the Chytalnia Ridna Shkola was established to help transmit this cultural heritage. With low enrolment fees and strong support from the Ukrainian community at large, a consistent student body of around 80 students was maintained at its original location where the school thrived for over 50 years. In the 1970s it moved to Andrew Mynarski School to accommodate its increasing enrolment, where it remains today.

Another important service provided for many years by the reading association was a large lending library that was composed of many notable and rare books. At a time when libraries were not as common as they are now, the Chytalnia Prosvita library provided an important service to members of the Ukrainian community.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of this House join me in congratulating Chytalnia Prosvita on their 100th anniversary celebration, commending all those involved for their efforts. Their work in the promotion of the Ukrainian language, culture and history has made a lasting impact on the Ukrainian community and the entire Winnipeg community in general.

*(14:20)

Turtle River School Division Labour Dispute

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): I wish to use my opportunity to make a statement to hopefully speak on the record on behalf of some very vulnerable young people who are constituents of mine and happen to be students attending, or not attending, Turtle River School Division.

I know the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) is probably equally as uncomfortable as I would be

finding ourselves between two feuding parties in a labour dispute. I want to clearly put it on the record in the Chamber that we have some very vulnerable young people who need aides because of their health condition in the classroom, and they are unable to attend school because those aides currently are not available because of a labour shortage, or a labour stoppage, not a labour shortage.

It has also come to my attention today, and that is the other reason why I wish to rise, that there are students who, in fact, may not be able to find their way to school through appropriate transportation during this labour stoppage. That to me says that we as leaders in this province need to be aware of the situation, first of all, and seriously consider what actions can be taken on behalf of these students, not to take sides in the labour dispute, but to take sides with these students so that they can get their education and they can move forward.

I know that there are dozens, if not hundreds, of parents out there who are very concerned about these students, as well as being concerned about the larger student population. I think it bears some significant attention within this Chamber and that is my reason for rising today. I hope the Minister of Education will carefully think about the words that I have put on the record, and perhaps he and I will be able to discuss a route to deal with it in the near future.

Magnus Eliason

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Magnus Eliason, a friend and business partner of mine, a long-time Winnipeg city councillor and a great New Democrat.

In his 1975 book *Political Warriors*, Lloyd Stinson, former leader of the CCF for 10 years and MLA for Osborne, described Magnus as follows, and I quote, "He was a reliable committee man, but his real forte was public speaking and the debating forum of the council chamber was where he excelled. His rich, resonant voice could be heard better than any other member of council and being a teacher of public speaking, Magnus knew how to prepare and deliver a speech. He did not ramble or digress from the subject. He always spoke with force and precision. Handicapped by very poor eyesight, Magnus made up for this deficiency by his native intelligence and phenomenal memory. Magnus Eliason came to City Council as a man of broad experience, having been in business in British Columbia and a political organizer and candidate in

three provinces. When he won in 1968, it was his fourteenth try for public office."

On City Council, Magnus was a conciliator. He could work with people of all political stripes to solve problems and move forward. He was well liked by both former Premier Gary Filmon and former Mayor Bill Norrie, both of whom served on City Council with Magnus.

I met Magnus in 1971. He had recently bought Stinson Insurance Agency from former CCF Leader Lloyd Stinson. Eliason Insurance Agency was a family affair with Kay Eliason, Magnus's wife of 30 years, and brother Frank and niece, Margaret Sigurdson, all working in the office. I became a customer, and then, in 1978, I bought the insurance agency from Magnus. Magnus was an excellent businessperson. He gave great service to his customers. He often stayed open late at night to help someone out. He paid the same special attention to his constituents as their city councillor.

Throughout his life, Magnus was a hardworking man. No grass grew under his feet. He was active in the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities. He worked tirelessly on behalf of the Icelandic community and in 2003, received the Order of the Falcon, Iceland's highest honour, for his efforts.

Mr. Speaker, my sincere condolences go out to his brother, Frank, his niece, Margaret Sigurdson, and her family, his niece Wanda and Yinka Opanubi and their family, his long-time friend Stephen Hjalmarsson and Magnus's special friend Betty Laing and all members of his extended family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Grandparents' Rights

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to an issue that was presented earlier today. Today, I was pleased to see grandparents from throughout Manitoba come to listen to the debate on Bill 201, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Grandparent Access).

I would like to thank the members and friends of the Grand Society and the Brandon grandparents support group. They took the time to come today anticipating a meaningful debate on this bill, but, Mr. Speaker, there was no real debate on this legislation. In order for this to be a real debate there needs to be mutual co-operation and openness from both sides of the House.

I was disappointed members opposite adjourned debate without having the courtesy to voice any opinion on this legislation. I would like to challenge members opposite to engage in an active and open debate concerning Bill 201, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act. We have not heard an alternative from this government, no amendments, nothing, Mr. Speaker.

The grandparents that were here today and all grandparents across Manitoba have the right to learn why the government is not addressing their concerns. Mr. Speaker, I ask the members opposite what harm is there in asking that the court must consider the love, affection and similar ties that exist between the child and the grandparent.

We have to trust in the discretion of the courts to judge what is in the best interest of the child. We are only asking that the significant relationship between grandparents and grandchildren are given fair consideration. Grandparents seeking access to their grandchildren deserve that right.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): In accordance with Rule 36(1), I move, seconded by the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings),

THAT the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), on behalf of all Manitobans and the agricultural community, will participate in the discussions with the federal government and provincial agricultural ministers this week to determine a negotiating position to the upcoming World Trade Organization talks.

Members of the Legislature need to provide advice to the Minister of Agriculture prior to the meeting with her provincial and federal counterparts leading up to the important WTO round of negotiations.

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable Member for Lakeside, I believe I should remind all members that under Rule 36(2), the mover of a motion on a Matter of Urgent Public Importance and one member from the other parties in the House is allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in *Beauchesne* Citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on

whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to seek leave of the House to set aside the regular business of the Assembly to deal with a matter that is of urgent public importance. There are two conditions that must be satisfied for this matter to proceed. The first requirement was to file a motion with the Speaker's office at least 90 minutes prior to the Routine Proceedings. I believe that requirement has been satisfied.

The second condition is the matter of an urgent nature. Given that the Minister of Agriculture engaged in consultations with Manitoba's commodity groups last evening, and given the minister's agricultural presentation to Manitoba's position regarding the upcoming meetings of the WTO to her provincial and federal counterparts on Thursday, November 24, it is imperative that this issue be debated today.

Additionally, due to the plight of our farmers with drought for the past year, flooding from the recent growing season, BSE, frost, declining grain prices, Manitoba producers have faced significant hardship. Producers need to be assured they have ample time as well as adequate finances to make any adjustments to their operations as may be affected by the WTO.

Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that the minister is fully informed and prepared to discuss the concerns of Manitoba producers at the upcoming federal and provincial ministers' meeting, as well as the WTO. We also want to ensure that she is prepared to negotiate a timely transition in light of the anticipated changes, whether they are positive or negative for Manitoba's producers.

* (14:30)

Furthermore, there is no other opportunity to debate this matter during the session. The WTO negotiations have not been raised in debate on legislation that is set before this House nor have there been statements, votes or motions put forward on this topic otherwise. As such, proceeding with a MUPI today is the best forum to debate this vital issue.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the WTO talks are an urgent matter. Debating this critical issue today is

timely because of the minister's travel and meeting plans with her counterparts on the WTO and the WTO itself. Debating this issue is in the best interests of Manitobans. The public is concerned about the impacts of global trade agreements, and, specifically, agricultural producers who provide the backbone of our province's economy have concerns about the impacts of the WTO on farming operations.

Mr. Speaker, I argue in favour of proceeding with this MUPI today.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, the responsibility, of course, is on the mover, the presenter of the MUPI to demonstrate and present some evidence that the public interest would be harmed if the matter was not taken into consideration on this particular day. We know that the WTO discussions have been ongoing actually for years, and, indeed, the first time we understand that the opposition raised this issue was yesterday. So I think it belies their ability to put evidence forward in any event when they suggest that it has to be dealt with on this particular day.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite know that there is development underway to bring a substantive resolution into this Chamber after full and careful consultations with industry groups, making sure that we do not just have some general discussion in this House but that we have an end product by way of a resolution backed by the Legislative Assembly, hopefully, by unanimous consent. Members opposite will be engaged in the development of that resolution. That resolution is expected to be introduced certainly in this period of time that we are meeting before Christmas.

So I leave it to you, Mr. Speaker, but I just did not hear any evidence that it was necessary in the public interest that on this particular day there be that kind of matter dealt with.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would ask for leave, if I can address this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being able to address this particular motion as brought forward by my colleague from Lakeside.

Mr. Speaker, the issue, in itself I believe does merit the Chamber setting aside a couple of hours

today in order to allow for members of this Chamber to express their thoughts on what is a very critical round of discussions that are upcoming and leading ultimately over to Asia with the World Trade Organization.

Over the last year, year and a half, we have seen so many outside factors hit our agricultural community, whether it was BSE and the impact that it had on the cattle industry or whether it was the amount of rain that we received in some areas of the province. In other areas, Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of a drought type of conditions. There are issues regarding drainage, and, you know, when the World Trade Organization meets there are going to be a lot of discussions about subsidies. We have markets like our dairy market where the whole supply management issue I believe the government is going to have to address, and hearing what the government has to say and their approach dealing with that is of critical importance to our Chamber.

Additionally, we have to be very concerned in terms of the open market for our grains, Mr. Speaker. Governments with huge treasuries that go far beyond what we have, have huge capabilities to provide tremendous subsidies that ultimately have a negative impact on our producers. In particular, I am thinking of those that produce wheat or Canola. Those other countries have been very successful at distorting the marketplace, and it because of their size and the amount of money that they are bringing into it. I truly do think that having a discussion in this area would be beneficial.

I look to the Government House Leader (Mr. Mackintosh). When we have MUIs that are introduced, and we have seen now a number of them since the last provincial election, what I have noticed is when the government believes that there is merit to having the discussion and the legislative agenda will allow for it, they will allow for leave and ease the Speaker to allow the Speaker to make a ruling that would allow for that debate to occur.

What I would suggest is that if the government sees the merit in terms of the agricultural community, and I look to the Minister of Agriculture, the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) of our province, and ask her to acknowledge the need and respect the contributions that all members might be able to have towards this debate. If there was no legislative agenda, or if the government feels that they have the time to be able to hear the debate, I would really recommend that they allow for it

through you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) should be debated today. The notice required by Rule 36(1) was provided. Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given the immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I do not doubt that this matter is one that is of serious concern to some members in this House. I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward. However, I was not persuaded that the ordinary business of the House should be set aside to deal with this issue today. Although, undoubtedly, this is a very serious issue that the member has brought forward, I do not believe that the public interest will be harmed if the business of the House is not set aside to debate the motion today.

Additionally, I would like to note that there are other avenues for members to raise this issue including questions in Question Period and raising the item—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. —including questions in Question Period and raising the item under Grievances.

Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I must rule that this matter does not meet the criteria set by our rules and precedents, and I rule the motion out of order as a Matter of Urgent Public Importance.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Emerson on a grievance?

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: On a grievance? On a grievance.

Mr. Penner: The ruling of the Speaker and also the attitude of the minister and the House Leader on the government side is something that really concerns us. The reason we are concerned is because this Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) is going to leave tomorrow for consultations with the other provincial ministers on this very matter.

So there is no opportunity for us, Mr. Speaker, to ask this government any questions on this very matter before a very significant meeting is going to happen in Canada. That position that those ministers will formulate will be the essence of what the Canadian premiers will take to Hong Kong. That is where the meeting is going to occur that is going to have a very dramatic and significant impact on not only the agricultural, but the general economics of this province. That this House leader will argue that this is not significant and we will have much time is absolutely ridiculous.

* (14:40)

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that this government has no idea what they are dealing with. This House leader knows not what he speaks of. He raises the issue of having dealt with this matter for the last number of years, and that is true. They started with a go-around and continued till today they are in Geneva. Next week they will be in Hong Kong. That is a significant indication of how important this round of meetings will be with the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province that will advise the federal minister and the chief negotiator of Canada as to what positions are important to Canada. Basically, this NDP government has today indicated clearly to Manitobans that it does not put much significance into the meeting of the premiers in the next few days.

I find it absolutely astounding that this minister would not want to hear from all members of the Legislature today before she attends that meeting what the views are of her colleagues on her side of the House, what her opposition colleagues in this Legislature would like to bring to the debate.

You know, we have agriculture that has been not only attacked by weather over the last two years, it has been attacked by tariffication. It has been attacked by huge subsidies, and the United States, up to \$90 billion they are allowed to expend under the current agreement. Look at what Europe is spending per capita on supporting their agricultural communities, and this minister sits there and argues that she does not need to hear any more as to why or what position she should take to the ministers' meeting that she is going to be attending at the end of this week.

I find it absolutely amazing that this minister today could not answer when asked very directly in this House what position she was taking to the ministerial meeting going on. She could not answer the question. You know why, Mr. Speaker? You

know why she could not answer? Because she, only yesterday, had her first meeting with the commodity groups. I understand that the poultry producers were there. The dairy producers were there. I believe the pork producers were there. The cattle producers and the Keystone Ag Producers were at this meeting and the general farm organization. Now what advice did she get from them? Whatever advice they gave her, she simply has not been able to articulate before this Legislature what that meant to her and what kind of importance she places on that before she stood in the House today and said she did not agree that there was any urgency to the debate.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when was it more urgent than it is today? We have farmers that were told at the Agricore elevator in Letellier that they would have to pay 2 cents a bushel to get rid of their barley. They would have to pay. We have not seen that since the Dirty Thirties, and this minister says, "No urgency. No big deal." We have had, over the last two years, a cattle industry that has been attacked from all sides, including BSE. Yet she says, "No big deal. There is no urgency."

We now have a trade negotiation, which is happening currently in Geneva, and discussions are going to happen in Hong Kong where the dairy industry is going to be told that the tariffs that Canada currently applies to dairy products coming into this country are going to be negotiable. The tariff on egg producers, on eggs and poultry coming into this country will be under attack. Our very institution that we have used for years to market our wheat collectively is going to be on the block, on the negotiating table. Mr. Speaker, this minister says that that is not important to her: "I do not need to hear this; I do not want to know this before I go meet with my counterparts."

What reflection of support does that indicate to the agricultural community of this province? Basically, they were told today, "You are on your own, that if this ship sinks out in the middle of the waters of nowhere, you are on your own." We are not even going to send the 20, oh, the 20 agronomists that supposedly were on Devils Lake for four weeks as the Premier (Mr. Doer) said. Then he changed his mind and said for three weeks. Then his department said, "Oh, no, they were not there three weeks. They were only there the better part of three days, and we do not know whether we can send that lifeline out to our agricultural producers because we do not know whether the length of the rope has to be four weeks, three weeks or the better part of three days."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say this to you. If our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has not prepared herself for the discussion that is going to take place with the ministers of Agriculture of this country, she will make our agricultural producers look silly, and she will portray them as paupers in a basket standing before the Grinch. That is how this Premier has portrayed our agriculture industry. He believes that the people of this province are naive enough to believe what he has told them.

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, it is time that this NDP government of Manitoba stand tall in the protection of its agricultural industry because it is one of the highest employment industries in this province. It is one of the largest contributors to the economy of this province, but paying two cents a bushel for our barley growers to get rid of it, if that is the model of this Premier, which has never happened under any other premier that I am aware of, if that is the model this Premier wants to put as a negotiating item before the international trade panel, then I pity the farmers of this province because they are being abandoned and they are going to be portrayed as paupers on their own without any baskets in their hand, and may the Grinch help them.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, on a grievance?

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): On a grievance, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am always reluctant to rise on a grievance because I believe that, as we only have one opportunity per session, it is done with the greatest of consideration as to which topic one does raise and put on the record, a reflection of not only what one holds dear personally but what one has represented in the Legislature and has been duly elected to represent.

On the issue of agriculture, we heard today in the House a very, very disappointing response to vitally important questions posed by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) and the honourable Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler). The Minister of Agriculture danced around the issue and gave us on this side of the House a very clear indication that she is not prepared for the meetings that she will be attending just two days from now.

*(14:50)

Following that up, it is just less than a month away that she will be leaving with the delegation

from Canada to represent our nation at the World Trade Organization talks in Hong Kong.

Our agricultural industry in Manitoba is without question the backbone of our economy here in the province of Manitoba. It provides a livelihood not only for the 2 percent of our population that are directly engaged in agricultural product production here in the province of Manitoba, but more than 11 percent on top of that derive their livelihood directly from agricultural industry here in the province of Manitoba. It is not as much as it was in the past when just a few short years ago one in five Manitobans derived their livelihood from agriculture, but that is a progression that we all see within the industry that I am very proud to say I was engaged for all of my working career prior to entry into the Legislative Assembly.

It is because we as producers are becoming more efficient in the work that we do on the farm as are those persons that are engaged in industries that take our agricultural product raw in nature and refine that to a useable, saleable, consumable product. We are very proud to say that here in Manitoba and in the nation of Canada we produce an edible product that is the least-cost product in all of the world.

Study indicates that in the province of Manitoba, in the nation of Canada, we use less time, working time to purchase our daily needs than anywhere else in the world. Two hours and twelve minutes of the average income of a Manitoban pays for that individual's daily needs as far as food is concerned. That is the least amount in all the world, and I look to other areas in the world where virtually all of the day that an individual works is consumed in just garnering enough to eat for that particular day, and we do it in a very, very minor amount of time.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, I hesitated to rise because we only have one opportunity to raise issues that we feel vitally important that are not being addressed but one fundamental comment that the minister made today was that she was part of a team. While we all recognize, having been involved in team performance, that you must carry your own weight, you have to be there and not the weakest link. You want to be there and be a part of the team contributing to the team work that will represent Canada.

I feel that our minister and our department under this NDP government is not prepared to fulfil that obligation as a team member heading to Hong Kong in less than a month. In fact, we asked the minister as

to who represents the team, who is she taking. Is she even in fact going herself to the World Trade Organization negotiations in Hong Kong? The make-up of the representation from Manitoba tells all about this government's attitude towards agriculture.

I just returned from Nova Scotia last week, and I asked the Minister of Agriculture as to their participation in the WTO talks in Hong Kong. The minister's response was that he personally did not have the expertise in all of the areas which would be discussed at the talks. So what he was doing was he was taking stakeholders along with him to the negotiations in Hong Kong. He recognized the need that those persons that are directly affected by the negotiations which are commencing in less than one month's time be the ones there participating and offering himself advice, who in turn will offer advice to our negotiators, the federal government representatives.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is deplorable that on such a vitally important issue that the minister's response today was so woefully inadequate to the questions asked. It dismays me greatly, not only as a representative of Portage la Prairie, but also as a producer engaged in agricultural production in the province.

I will also take my opportunity to express my disappointment on a couple of other issues that I have not yet seen addressed here by this government. I attended Manitoba's organization of those parties engaged in the infrastructure area, last week's annual general meeting, and it was stated that now the deficit that we are all facing as Manitobans in the area of infrastructure has risen above \$7.4 billion; \$7.4 billion. It bears repeating because this is a deficit the same as that recorded by the financial statements that are presented to the House by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). It is nowhere to be found in those documents, but it is real. It is a deficit that we must come to grips with.

This government has just, I am at a loss for words, but the government was celebrating the signing of the gas tax infrastructure agreement with the federal government that will provide a mere \$167 million over five years. I do not know if anyone would be celebrating over table scraps, as I will reference that amount of money. We send to Ottawa on just gasoline and diesel fuel more than that amount on an annual basis. So I will say, I do not know why the government is celebrating when all they are celebrating is a return of 20 cents on a dollar

paid by Manitoba in the motoring industry. I feel that again too is deplorable.

I want to also state at this time, because this infrastructure deficit is real, I would like to see the Department of Finance record the deficit in depreciation of Manitoba-owned assets, Manitoba-owned infrastructure so that the government can give a true picture to Manitobans as to what we are leaving as a legacy to our grandchildren and children of this province—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Resume Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): With regard to Private Members' Resolutions, I would like to announce that the diabetes resolution will be considered next Tuesday.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to announce that in addition to the meetings already scheduled for the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development to consider the architects and engineers bill, the committee will also meet Wednesday, November 23, at 9 a.m., Thursday at 6 p.m. *[interjection]* Yes, Wednesday morning and then Thursday night at 6.

The Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Monday, November 28, at noon, to deal with the issue of the reappointment of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

* (15:00)

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that next Tuesday, the PMR will be on diabetes and also announced that, in addition to meetings already scheduled for the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development to consider Bill 7, The Architects and Engineers Scope of Practice Dispute Settlement Act (Various Acts Amended), the committee will also meet on Wednesday, November 23, 2005, at 9 a.m., and on Thursday, November 24, 2005, at 6 p.m.

It is also announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Monday, November 28, 2005, at noon to deal with the issue of reappointment of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

Mr. Mackintosh: Would you please call bills in the order they appear on the Order Paper.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 5—The Dental Hygienists Act

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on second reading, Bill 5, The Dental Hygienists Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck). What is the will of the House?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, it has been denied to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to put a few words on the record with respect to Bill 5, The Dental Hygienists Act. Dental hygienists promote oral health through education, assessment and treatment of teeth. The practice of dental hygiene includes administering oral anesthetic, applying dental sealants, performing orthodontic and restorative procedures.

This bill creates a college of dental hygienists for the province of Manitoba similar to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The bill also creates a council to manage and conduct the business and affairs of the college. It also requires that one third of the members of the council be appointed by the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) to act as representatives of the public. The bill includes a provision allowing for requirements of registration to be waived to allow a person who is authorized to practise dental hygiene in another jurisdiction in Canada or in the United States to practise dental hygiene in the province during an emergency.

Mr. Speaker, we agree with the intent of this bill, but I cannot possibly let the issue go by without mentioning the crisis that Manitobans are facing with the current state of pediatric dental surgery in our province. On December 1, 2004, the Minister of Health issued a press release promising an additional 600 pediatric dental surgeries would be completed at Misericordia Health Centre by the end of 2005. Nearly one year ago today this Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Health made a promise to children waiting in pain that an additional 600 pediatric dental surgeries would be completed in the province by the end of this year. Last week the Minister of Health admitted that those targets may not be met.

The number of children waiting for a pediatric dental surgery in Manitoba as of July 2005 totalled 1018. Mr. Speaker, more than 1000 children continue to wait in pain for dental surgery as a result of this government's inaction despite announcements after announcements after announcements. Freedom of Information requests received last week revealed that, as of September 30, 2005, Manitoba Health was short of their 600-surgery goal at Misericordia Health Centre by 283 surgeries. Freedom of Information requests also indicated that the number of pediatric dental surgeries performed at Children's Hospital as of September 30, 2005, was far short. As a matter of fact, it was short 475 surgeries of reaching the total number of surgeries performed at the hospital from the year before. The surgical shortfalls at Misericordia Health Centre and Children's Hospital amount to a total shortfall of 758 pediatric dental surgeries as of September 30, 2005.

Maples Surgical Centre, a private clinic located in Winnipeg, submitted a proposal to the NDP government last year in which they offered to complete 900 pediatric dental surgeries a year. The government refused to even consider the proposal. If the private clinic's proposal had been accepted, the pediatric dental surgery wait list in Manitoba would have already been eliminated. If this government was really serious about reducing wait lists in this province, public-private partnerships with a delivery of health care services would have been included in the five-point plan. Promises made are promises broken in Manitoba, with respect to many areas of health care.

This Province and this Premier, of health, have failed Manitobans who are waiting in pain. They have broken the promises made a year ago to those waiting in pain, those children waiting in pain for pediatric dental surgery. Why should Manitobans believe them now? Last week, the Manitoba government promised yet again to complete an additional 200 pediatric dental surgeries per year in the Burntwood Regional Health Authority to help reduce wait lists for children in need of dental surgery. This government continues to make promises to children waiting in pain in our province that they cannot keep. This government has not fulfilled the promises it made a year ago. Why should Manitobans believe them now? These children deserve much better.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill 5, The Dental Hygienists Act, again, we agree with the intent of the bill. The bill was requested by the dental hygienists

in Manitoba, who wish to have a self-regulating body and who no longer want to be under the jurisdiction of the Dental Association. As we understand, after meeting with a representative from the minister's Department of Health, when I asked the question of who was consulted with respect to this bill, we were told that consultation has occurred with dental hygienists, the relevant educational institutions and the regional health authorities on this matter.

Again, we wish the dental hygienists well. They are a significant organization within our province that do a lot for Manitobans. I can recall the first time that I took my daughter, about a year ago, to the dentist, how incredibly friendly the dental hygienists were to her and, indeed, were very helpful to me in how to take care of my children's teeth, something that is extremely important in Manitoba. We need to make sure that children understand the importance of cleaning their teeth and understanding just how important that is towards their health.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe at this point we are prepared to move this Bill 5, The Dental Hygienists Act, on to committee. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 5, The Dental Hygienists Act.

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

Bill 6—The Dental Association Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: Bill 6, The Dental Association Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck).

What is the will of the House?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. It has been denied to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased again to put a few words on the record with respect to Bill 6, The Dental Association Amendment Act. This bill is essentially a clean-up bill. Currently, dental assistants and dental hygienists are required to be registered with the Dental Association. The dental hygienists have requested a bill making them self-governing with the creation of a college, and I just spoke previously about that bill,

Bill 5, The Dental Hygienists Act. Dental assistants have decided that it is okay for the Dental Association to continue to be their regulatory body, but there is a need to make this authority more formalized. This bill allows the dental assistants to be regulated by the Dental Association and to be subject to complaints and disciplinary procedure under the Dental Association mandate.

* (15:10)

This bill also updates some of the language of the bill, which was drafted in the 1970s and is now clearly out of date, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again with respect to this Bill 6, we agree with the intent of the bill. As we understand, once again, when I went for my briefing with one of the minister's staff from the Department of Health, I asked, because it is very important to me to understand who is consulted when they bring forward these bills, so I asked who had been consulted. They said the consultation had occurred with the Dental Association and the dental assistants. We hope that the government continues to consult with those organizations and other organizations that will be affected by various changes in this Bill 6, as well as all other bills that are brought before this House.

So, at this time, Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to move this Bill 6 on to committee. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Any other speakers? Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 6, The Dental Association Amendment Act.

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

Bill 11—The Winter Heating Cost Control Act

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on second reading on Bill 11, The Winter Heating Cost Control Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach).

What is the will of the House, for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Russell? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Conrad Santos (Wellington): It would be a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to put a few words on Bill 11, The Winter Heating Costs Control Act.

It is the purpose of this proposed legislation to protect the consumers, the people in Manitoba, from the elements when they need some heating in their homes by prohibiting further increases in natural gas prices for consumers of Centra Gas during the 2005 and 2006 winter heating season.

The winter heating season is the period of time where there is a gap, a lack of time, from the time that the Centra Gas, as a buyer, will purchase the supply of natural gas heating. There is a time lag to the ensuing time where Centra Gas sets the gas rate to be charged to the customer in order to recover the cost price paid to its western Canadian supplier of natural gas.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Centra Gas Manitoba Incorporated is a wholly owned subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro. In the transactions in the marketplace, which are taking place in the international market, there is an exchange of values when Centra Gas will be buying supplies in wholesale, so to speak, from western Canadian suppliers of natural gas. The money will flow from Centra Gas Manitoba Incorporated, as buyer, to the western Canadian supplier of gas, as wholesaler; in return, there will be gas energy flowing from Centra Gas to the pipelines to Centra Gas Incorporated. Included in that arrangement, the gas rates are set up and distribution, as to riders, in that arrangement.

Lately, because these are public utilities and it involves the welfare and general well-being of Manitobans, both Centra Gas Manitoba Incorporated and Manitoba Hydro are in the form of Crown corporations, which is a public utility institution, autonomous, at arm's length from the majority government in the province, but because they are invested with an element of public interest, they cannot just freely participate in the exchanges of value in the marketplace. There has to be some form of government regulation and intervention. So the Public Utilities Board is the independent arm of general public interest in order to have some say on how far these gas rates can go up. If these gas rates are left to the wild forces of the marketplace without any kind of regulation, the increases that Manitoba Hydro had been saying will be about a 44 percent increase, which is too high for the ordinary Manitoba

clients to pay. Therefore, it is the purpose of this legislation to allow the government, as the stewards of all the welfare of all the people in Manitoba, to limit such price increases for customers during the winter period, winter heating season, and also, in between those heating seasons, to limit and control the volatile changes in the rates.

The Public Utilities Board had approved a 6.3 increase for residential customers of gas from November 1, and this is lower than any other province, such as, for example, lower than Saskatchewan, which approved a 10 percent increase. On the other hand, the commercial rates had been separated from the residential rates as a different category and it has been set at 12 to 18 percent. This is less than half of the projected free market rates, which is a 44 percent increase.

We could see, then, that because this is a public utility corporation it is an entity that is concerned with the general welfare of the citizen. It cannot freely participate in the so-called free market forces because then it will be too difficult for ordinary Manitobans to be able to pay their heating costs during these harsh winter seasons.

We are here dealing with energy which is non-renewable and, therefore, it is limited in supply. It is a scarce resource, and, being scarce, it is so volatile in the price rates, depending on the demands during those periods and seasons of time. We know that our hydro, on the other hand, the hydro energy, the electricity as compared to the gas energy, is a renewable form of resources. The electricity there, the electric power, comes from the force of the waterfalls, and it renews itself automatically during the cycles of the season.

* (15:20)

It is written in Ecclesiastes that all the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full, never filled up and the water flows to the place beyond where they return again to the place where they came from. If we trace this flow of water out of the lakes, mist will form. It will be absorbed by the atmosphere and becomes cloud. The cloud will fall as rain or as snow depending on whether it is summer or winter. If it falls during wintertime, the snow accumulates in the surface of the ground. It builds up mounds and mounds of snow and ice in the rivers, and then when spring comes around, all this water melts and it flows into little rivulets. It is going to the river, for example, the Red River, and the Red River then goes back to the lake where it came from.

So it is a circle. It is a cycle, but in the process, when the forces of the river, the currents, are harnessed by those turbines, the force of the water in its natural state is converted into electric power. Electricity is useful for the convenience and comfort of the citizens, for the productive power of our industry, for everything such as that, as contrasted to the fossil fuel of gases or oil which are exhaustible in the sense that they are not renewable. Once they are exhausted, then they are gone, but Manitoba is so lucky that its resources of energy are a renewable form of resource in the form of electricity from the force of the water.

When Centra Gas, because the cost is so high, will have to incur some kind of losses, then Manitoba Hydro will try to smooth out these changes in the price rates of different time periods. So they establish a fund, a stabilization fund, to protect the customers from these increases, and there will be account balancing, the balance of accounts between the holding company which is Manitoba Hydro and the wholly owned subsidiary Centra Gas.

The purpose of the fund is to provide support for the programs and services that are being provided, as well as to encourage efficiency and conservation of electricity and natural gas energy in Manitoba. In addition, it also will motivate the development of alternative sources of energy, and we are beginning to witness some of those alternative sources.

The wind is another element in the natural state of nature. Like water, the wind is there, but it can also be harnessed by technology to produce energy. It is written there, in the Good Book, the wind bloweth towards the south and then turn around and returneth towards the north, then it turn around and around continually in its own circle.

As the wind circles around, the turbines in St. Leon will be moving, and this movement will be converting the power of the wind into electricity. When there are enough of those turbines, wind turbines, then there will be sufficient amount, a quantum of energy that can be harnessed to sustain and support and complement the electric power in Manitoba. To that extent, it also will help to reduce the dependency of the industry and the homes and the commercial establishments on imported natural gas from outside the provinces. To that extent it will be good for the economy of Manitoba.

We know that we cannot live without heating in this kind of harsh geographic region. In Canada we are in the north, in North America. As human beings,

emotive, cognitive beings, we have basic needs to survive. The most basic, of course, are the physiological needs of our material physical body: the need for food, for shelter, for rest when we are tired. That is the base of the pyramid in the human society. That is the very basic need that everybody should never, never be deprived of because, without food, without water, you will have no way of surviving as a physiological, emotive human being. But then at the next level of human needs, according to Abraham Maslow, the psychologist who developed this hierarchy of human needs, after we have satisfied the basic need for physiological need for food, for shelter and for rest, then there is a safety need.

We have these safety needs from danger and the danger is not only coming from our neighbours. The danger also comes from the natural elements, the whole style, elements in the environment. The harsh winter in Manitoba is a safety net. If your house runs out of heat and you no longer can buy natural gas, you will shiver and you will probably cover yourself with blankets, piles and piles of blankets, but there will be a point when you no longer can sustain the heat in the house. You will shudder in cold, and then ultimately you get pneumonia and then you die. It is a basic need next to food.

Therefore, it is the function of government to protect its citizens from the hostile elements of the environment, and when most of the people in our province can no longer afford the high escalating cost of natural gas, then it is the duty, moral duty and obligation of government to do something about it. This government is doing something about the potentiality of a harsh winter and a very expensive heating cost of natural gas in this province.

Therefore, like paying your mortgage, you know when you buy the natural gas at a very expensive rate, very high steep rate, what the government is attempting to do is to spread out all those high costs, spread them out in a longer period of time so that it will not be too difficult for the clients to pay their bills. Similarly, when you have a mortgage, you want to pay only small instalments. What you do is you extend the time period of these payments, and then it will not be too difficult for you if you have a limited income to carry the cost of the mortgage. That is the same thing, the same principle here with respect to the cost of gas.

* (15:30)

Now, that is not the only other element. There are other alternative sources of energy. The sun is itself an enormous unending source of energy if we know and we had the technology to do it. So solar power comes from the sun and it is written, the sun also rises and the sun goes down and it hastens back to the place where it arose and it rises again.

So all of these are circular forces of nature, all of them are forces of energy. It is only because we have been harnessing them when we develop the appropriate technology to make use of all these elements, all these forces, for the convenience of our species as people, as human beings, on this planet Earth.

The Earth itself, at the core of the Earth, if you dig, dig, dig down there, in the core of the Earth there is hard stuff there, but once you penetrate the hard rocks, there will be like a volcano, there will be heat down there in the centre of the Earth. The deeper you go to the centre of the Earth, the hotter the temperature will be. There is now a technology called a geothermal pump that can extract all this heat from the bowels of the Earth in order to supply the necessary energy for buildings, residential, commercial or other purposes.

The geothermal energy in Manitoba is being harnessed now and, according to the latest information, it has doubled, at least four times the number of people going into geothermal sources of energy within the past four years. This means that Manitoba Hydro and the government in partnership are installing geothermal heat pumps much more frequently than before and many people have been assisted so that they will no longer be dependent on their gas heating bills after they invest in this geothermal heating.

The Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), I believe, and the Minister of—*[interjection]* No, this one.

An Honourable Member: Industry.

Mr. Santos: Industry and Economic Development—

An Honourable Member: And Mines.

Mr. Santos: And Mines. Oh, there is Mines. When his house was burned by accident, he got the insurance money, but the use of that money was made in a very intelligent way. In the new building that would be built there, he thought about geothermal energy. I have not seen that house. Many people have been invited in that house, but I have not

been there. I understand that this is a model, an example where, in the long run, you will save money and decrease your heating costs if you go to a geothermal form of energy generation and source of heating in the home.

Of course, it is best when you have a newly built home. You cannot do that in the old homes, especially in the North End or in the West End. You have to dig, dig and where will the rest of the house go? It is very difficult to do that with old homes and old houses.

One more advantage of avoiding the fossil fuel sources of energy like oil and gas is that there is no by-product in the geothermal heating that pollutes the environment. There is no other by-product there like carbon dioxide. But, if you burn oil as you will notice when all the cars are running in the streets, they make this kind of dark exhaust, and if you smell those things, you accumulate them in your lungs. When you do, either you get pneumonia or other forms of sickness or it shortens your life.

It is the same thing like smoking. Even if you are a non-smoker, if you always inhale all that exhaust in the streets, your lungs will be dark.

An Honourable Member: What about marijuana?

Mr. Santos: What about marijuana? Well, they say in a small amount, a very, very small amount—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Santos: I read about it. I am not experimenting on it. I am not trying it like Clinton. There are people who suffer from cancer or other kinds of debilitating disease, and they find some comfort and some kind of relief when they use little amounts of this. That is the reason why in Flin Flon in the mines there that they can no longer use for anything, they grow these things.

If it authorized, it should be legal to grow it down there in the mines, but to grow it in your homes in a residential area will be illegal, and it should be, and people are being caught if they violate the rules.

It is possible if the rates stay high for natural gas, there are many consumers that have to use this natural gas, but they have no money to pay for it. It is very probable and it is almost inevitable that bills will pile up, but Centra Gas cannot collect. How can you squeeze water from a stone? *[interjection]* Only one can do that, not us. *[interjection]* Yes, there was a stone there when the people in Egypt were fleeing

and had nothing to drink. They tapped at the rock and fresh water flowed. That water is the water of life, clean water.

Water is the symbol of life. It is the symbol of life. You can live for a longer period of time if you lack only the solid food, as long as you have some form of water, but once water is denied in your system, only a couple of days you will go and die. Why? Because our body is composed of mostly water. Almost 90 percent or over of our body is water. To prove it, when somebody dies and they go to the incinerator and the ashes are there, you can pick up the ashes and put it in a little container. All the rest is water.

* (15:40)

Some people, because their loved ones loved them so much, carry this little container in their home wherever they go, because that is the icon that serves as a symbol of the person whom they love.

So what the government is doing here is a very commendable action. It is really the duty of government to act as stewards of the general welfare and interests of all the people, especially if it is basic, such as the need for survival. Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): It is my pleasure to put on the record my comments on Bill 11. As usual, I will not follow the same philosophical bent of my good friend and my neighbour, the Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos). I am going to talk more specifically about the reasons for this bill and the impact of this bill on the people of Minto, whom I am so privileged to represent in this Legislature.

Now, I know that, for the members of the opposition, they do not find their way into that area very often, despite my offer for lunch, which none of the members have taken me up on. Minto starts almost directly north of this Chamber. It runs from Balmoral Street out to St. James Street through what we would call the West End of the city of Winnipeg. As we look from Balmoral Street to Arlington Street, it is a mix of apartments and homes. From Arlington west to St. James Street, it is almost all single-family homes. If I could use one expression to describe the housing stock in Minto, it would be old and older. Many of the homes in Minto were built almost a hundred years ago. Even the newest homes in Minto, which you will find in the north-western part of the constituency, Valour Road, Ashburn, are still more than 50 years old. Certainly, they were built in a

different time and built to very, very different energy efficiency standards.

For the people of Minto, there really are not the same opportunities to embrace alternative energy as there are for many other people in the province of Manitoba. Now, we have heard other speakers talk about the different great alternatives that are now available for people who want to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels, on traditional fuels. Unfortunately, those do not work especially well for the good people of Minto. I am very excited about the advent of geothermal energy in the province of Manitoba and, frankly, people in Minto are as well. But it is not going to work in their homes, at least until the science develops to some great extent, because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, most of the lots in Minto are 25-foot lots. They have small front yards, small back yards. At the present time, converting to geothermal simply is not something that people of Minto can do, but they still support it. They are very pleased to have a government which recognizes the advent of geothermal.

As well, of course, the people of Minto are industrious, but none of them are running around and putting up windmills on their roofs because, again, it is not something you do in the middle of the city of Winnipeg, but, certainly, they support the incredible developments of wind energy elsewhere in the province, of course, in rural Manitoba which is benefiting so much from this new source of energy. So, again, the people of Minto are excited about a government which supports wind, but it is not going to help them with their problem this winter.

There are some other developments which are occurring in hydro-electricity, and I understand even this week there is some interest in new kinds of turbines that can go into waterways. Instead of building a traditional dam, I understand there is some development of turbines which actually go into the river and can provide local generation of hydro-electricity. Now, Omand's Creek is a lovely waterway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I have spent a lot of time down there with my family, with my constituents. I do not think we are going to be building any hydro capacity in Omand's Creek, which is the only flowing waterway in Minto.

An Honourable Member: It would be a challenge.

Mr. Swan: The Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), I rarely agree with him, but he acknowledges it would be a challenge, and that is true.

Having said that, the people of Minto are, certainly, excited about a government which is supporting Manitoba Hydro in some incredible developments in hydro-electricity and continuing to build on this renewable energy source. Now, the good people of Minto are all very interested in solar energy as a possibility. If you have got a 25-foot lot, that does not leave a lot of room for a south-facing roof, so, until the cost of photocells decreases greatly, I do not expect there are going to be very many people in Minto that are going to be running out to use photocells to provide some of their heating.

So the people of Minto, the great majority of them, are pretty much reliant on natural gas for their heating, and, of course, they are also Hydro subscribers and rely on hydro-electricity. People in Minto have conventional furnaces in many cases. They have old windows. They have old doors. They have old insulation in their walls. Many people have uninsulated basements, and I can speak about all those things from personal experience with my own home built in 1912. So there are certainly some opportunities for people in Minto to reduce the amount of energy they consume, but the number of alternative sources they can use at this time, given the circumstances, is quite limited.

Before I talk about this government's bill and the position that we are taking on this side of the House, I want to spend a few minutes talking about what I have heard from the other members of this House, the opposition parties on this bill. It is difficult to understand where my friends in the Progressive Conservative Party stand on this issue, and it appears that they are opposed to our publicly owned hydro-electric utility supporting Manitobans in taking steps to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels. They appear—

An Honourable Member: That is today.

Mr. Swan: The Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) says, "That is today." This could change tomorrow, or it could change the day after that. But let it be said that the Progressive Conservative Party has stood up in this House and has opposed the good things which Manitoba Hydro is doing to make Manitoba more energy efficient.

And what of the Liberal Party of Manitoba? Well, what of the Liberal Party of Manitoba is a question that people ask many times, and we heard the leader of that party, the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), stand up in this House and suggest that market forces should simply dictate the

price of natural gas, which would result in a 44-percent increase in the price of natural gas. When I hear Liberal and Conservative members stand up, the only justification they can come up with is, well, if this bill passes, you are encouraging people to waste fossil fuels, to waste natural gas.

I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a reality check is in order. It is unclear what the opposition members think is going to happen if the natural gas prices are controlled, as we are suggesting would happen with Bill 11. Do they really think that the people of Ashburn Street are going to purposely leave their windows open? Do they think people on Victor Street are going to leave their doors open and waste energy? Do they think people on Lipton Street are going to turn up the heat inappropriately? That is nonsense. The people of Minto, whether the price of gas is 9 cents per kilojoule, or whatever it may be, are going to do the best they can to reduce the amount of gas they are using and reduce their costs.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The simple fact is that given the spike in energy prices, it is not reasonable to expect people in Minto or Wellington or Transcona or Elmwood or any other constituency in this province to be able to do that work so quickly as to avoid the tremendous increases in natural gas.

Now, in my own constituency office, Mr. Speaker, I cannot keep those Manitoba Hydro brochures in stock. Hydro provides free brochures on different ways that people can improve the energy efficiency of their homes and their apartment buildings and I cannot keep them in stock. People come in and they are interested to see what Hydro has to say.

In the past winter, I held two Power Smart meetings in Minto, and I was very pleased they were attended by approximately 200 people. There were two tremendous presenters from Manitoba Hydro, Ed Nichiporick and Martin Eyolfson, who gave straightforward, factual, understandable advice to people in Minto about how they could conserve energy within their homes.

The 200 people who came to those meetings were not tire kickers. They were not people just looking for an evening out. These were Minto residents very serious about energy conservation, who wanted to learn about high-efficiency furnaces, who wanted to learn about weather stripping, about windows, about doors, about insulating their

basements and insulating their roofs. Each of those meetings went on for some two hours. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I got the sense that here were 200 Minto residents who were prepared to go out there, put some money into the improvement of their homes, who were certainly interested in saving energy.

* (15:50)

Certainly, people are excited that Power Smart offers low-cost loans to people who do not have the money in their pockets to go and make those investments. Certainly, through the help of Manitoba Hydro, people can borrow money to make those improvements, pay it back on their Hydro bill at a very reasonable rate of interest. As well, our friends in the federal government do throw in money. There is a grant which is available for people who go and have an assessment done of their home's energy efficiency and then take steps to improve it. Those grants do not cover the entire cost of the improvements or the repairs, but they certainly help.

Of course, very recently Manitoba Hydro, through its Power Smart program, indicated a further rebate of up to 100 percent of the cost of insulation materials, not only for electric-heated homes, but also natural gas-heated homes, which will allow an additional 120 000 homeowners to get \$500 rebates to upgrade their insulation levels to reduce their consumption of energy, whether it is natural gas or hydro. Now, certainly, the Power Smart program is something people in Minto are very excited about. Power Smart is a leader not only in Canada, but a leader in North America.

Manitoba Hydro and this government have had the foresight to expand the residential efficiency programs through Power Smart and Manitobans, including those in Minto, have responded enthusiastically. It bears noting, Mr. Speaker, that Manitoba went from ninth place to first place in this country in terms of Canadian energy efficiency activities. In the last three years, more than 70 000 Manitoba families, including a good share of those in Minto, have participated in various Power Smart programs and that has had many, many positive effects. It saved Manitobans energy, it has reduced their home heating bills and it has also boosted the local economy and boosted local employment at the same time.

Certainly, this is all good, because every cubic foot of gas that we do not have buy from Alberta means less money flowing out of our province, and every watt of hydro that we can save through Power

Smart here in Manitoba is another watt of electricity that we can sell to our friends in Minnesota, in North Dakota, in South Dakota, Nebraska and now, of course, the good people of Ontario, as we saw the day the Throne Speech came down.

Now, certainly, one of the other exciting things for the people of Minto is that Bill 11 is going to provide some specific assistance for Manitoba Hydro to work with community groups to ensure that low-income homes and neighbourhoods are better able to reduce their heat loss and have greater access to alternatives. Certainly, that fits very well in Minto, which is one of the beneficiaries of this government's incredibly successful Neighbourhoods Alive! program. Neighbourhoods Alive! came in shortly after this government was elected in 1999. In the Minto constituency, it includes what we would call the Spence neighbourhood from Sherbrook, from Maryland, east to Balmoral Street. Of course, in June, we were very excited to announce a great expansion of Neighbourhoods Alive! to take in the Daniel McIntyre and the St. Matthew communities which includes everyone in Minto living east of Ingersoll Street. Tremendous opportunities and, certainly, allowing the Power Smart to target low-income neighbourhoods, low-income households, is going to provide some tremendous energy savings for people in that area. So, certainly, this is a good bill and I suppose there is still time for the opposition parties to turn around, recognize that and vote with us, but we will see what happens.

When I look at The Winter Heating Cost Control Act, Bill 11, I look at the preamble to see some of the facts and some of the assumptions on which this bill is based and, frankly, it is very difficult to argue with what is contained in the preamble. The first thing was that Centra Gas Manitoba "purchases natural gas to supply the needs of consumers in Manitoba." Well, certainly, that is a fact and I do not expect anybody is going to question that. The act also states that "Centra Gas makes no profit on the sale of natural gas commodity to its Manitoba customers but only passes on to them the cost that it incurs in purchasing natural gas." Again, that is true. Centra Gas simply passes on the cost of the product that it buys to consumers.

The third WHEREAS in the preamble states that "price fluctuations occur between the date Centra Gas purchases natural gas and the date it sets the rate to recover its costs from its customers." Well, of course, that is true. There has been a spike unlike anything that we have seen in history with the natural

gas prices. Again, I do not think there is any disagreement on that fact.

The fourth part of the preamble says that "Centra Gas has the ability to account for those price fluctuations through the use of various deferral and gas balancing accounts." Indeed, Mr. Speaker, that is what Centra Gas has done with a great deal of success, which has protected Manitoba consumers as far as can reasonably be expected, although, of course, with the spike in gas prices, unless other steps are taken, that will become a problem by the end of the winter.

The next item in the preamble is that "the Province of Manitoba and the Public Utilities Board consider that the hardship that Centra Gas customers experience from escalating natural gas prices can be alleviated somewhat by deferring price increases." Well, maybe here is where the difference is, because those of us on our side of the House accept that. We accept what the Public Utilities Board says, and it says that we should take some steps to alleviate the problem by deferring price increases. *[interjection]*

I hear the Liberal member from Inkster, upset about this, because, clearly, he would follow his leader, the member from River Heights's lead, and he would say, "Fine, let us leave it to the market," and I am going to be very happy in the next election to be knocking on some doors in Inkster and telling them how their member of the Legislature would support a 44-percent increase in their natural gas bills. Then, when that happens, of course, when we do have a New Democrat member from Inkster, the people in that area will have much, much more reasonable representation in this House.

Now, the next item, of course, is that the Public Utilities Board has ordered Centra Gas to take steps to enhance space heat retention and heating efficiency for reasons related to customer costs, the environment and gas system viability. So the Public Utilities Board is certainly aware of the successes of Power Smart, but has given a clear direction to this government to do more, to take Power Smart and to make sure that it is available for everyone in the province of Manitoba and encourage people to save energy, whether it is hydro, whether it is gas and, certainly, encourage people to consider alternate forms of energy.

Finally, of course, the Public Utilities Board has encouraged Manitoba Hydro to explore the possibility of using its electricity export revenues to fund programs that encourage consumers to reduce

their levels and patterns of energy consumption. So we are taking a small percentage of our sales of electricity to our friends to the south of us, to the east of us, perhaps, one day, to the west of us, and use that to save energy in Manitoba, save Manitobans some money on their bills, and encourage the development of these alternate sources of energy.

When I look at the preamble to this bill, it seems pretty clear to me. Certainly, the purposes of the act are also very clear. Section 2 of this act says: "The purposes of this Act are (a) to protect consumers from the impact of rising heating costs during the winter season;"—something which my opposition friends do not seem to understand—"and (b) to provide support for programs and services (i) for electricity and natural gas energy efficiency, enhance space heat retention and heating efficiency; and (ii) for developing alternatives to natural gas, in order to ensure that sufficient and sustainable energy resources are available in the future."

I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that any opposition member can truly claim there is any problem with the purposes of this act. Their point, of course, is "Well, we like what you are doing, but we do not like the way you are doing it," which has been the Liberal position on many, many great things that we have done. Well, I suppose we will hear from the Progressive Conservative members when it is time for them to cast their vote, with Manitobans or against Manitobans, on that issue.

Certainly, for the people of Minto, they are very, very interested in all the great things that are happening in terms of energy in this province. They are excited about Manitoba Hydro. They are pleased that we continue to have a strong publicly owned utility that is there for all Manitobans, not just a privileged few. They are happy to have a government which supports their efforts to increase the efficiency of their homes, to increase the efficiency of the insulation, the R value on their windows and their doors, their insulation. They have the confidence that this government is, certainly, looking out for them and, at the end of the day, everyone knows that natural gas prices can be expected to continue to rise, hopefully, nothing like the spike we have seen this year.

People know that pursuing further alternatives is necessary but, Mr. Speaker, the people of Minto, as I said at the beginning of this speech, certainly have a limited number of options available to them. They do not begrudge other Manitobans. They do not

begrudge Manitobans in rural Manitoba who have the chance to use geothermal heating systems to use Power Smart to put in smart energy. *[interjection]*

* (16:00)

No, I hear the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) who now—I do not know if he is upset with the fact that Manitoba is the leader in geothermal energy. That may very well be the case.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that people in Minto support all different sources of energy in the province. They support people in Ste. Rose who may choose to put in geothermal heating. People in Minto and the other inner-city constituencies do not throw up their hands and say, "Well, what is in it for me," because what is in it for all of us as Manitobans is less reliance on fossil fuels, more development of alternative sources of energy which truly does benefit all of us.

Again, we do not begrudge the fact that the wind turbines are going up in rural Manitoba because it only makes sense that that is where it happens. That is great that we have farmers who are now earning money from the rights to have those turbines erected on their property. That is great. People in Minto are not going to complain about that because they see that is part of the bigger picture, the development of alternative sources of energy as being a good thing for this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think I have put forward the importance of this bill to people who I am lucky to represent in this Legislature. Certainly, they will be watching to see how the opposition parties deal with this bill. They will be expecting the opposition parties to deal with the reality, deal with their reality, and vote in favour of Bill 11 which is going to, first of all, cushion the rate shock which would otherwise occur and also encourage Manitobans to move forward and deal with the energy sources of the future.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I will conclude this dissertation, if you will, on the effects of Bill 11 on the people of Minto. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Any other speakers?

When this matter is again before the House, it will remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach).

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on House business. I would like to revise an announcement, flesh out an announcement made earlier today regarding the Social and Economic Development Committee and its consideration of Bill 7.

In addition to the meetings called for today at 3 and 6 p.m., the committee will also meet, as I said earlier, tomorrow, Wednesday, but from 9 until noon, from 3 until 5 and then again at six o'clock, and, if necessary, the committee will also meet on Thursday, November 24, at six o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: To revise an announcement made earlier today regarding the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development and its consideration of Bill 7, The Architects and Engineers Scope of Practice Dispute Settlement Act (Various Acts Amended), in addition to the meetings called for today at 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., the committee will also meet on Wednesday, November 23, 2005, from 9 a.m. until noon, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and at 6 p.m. If necessary, the committee will also meet on Thursday, November 24, 2005, at 6 p.m.

We will move on with Orders of the Day.

Bill 12—The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: We will now call Bill 12, The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck).

What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina?

An Honourable Member: Stand.

Mr. Speaker: Stand? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Any speakers? Okay, we will move on.

Bill 15—The Emergency Measures Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: We will move on to Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina.

What is the will of the House? Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Pembina? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Any speakers? Okay, it will remain standing.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 13—The Conservation Districts Amendment Act

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux), that Bill 13, The Conservation Districts Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thought it would be appropriate to put a few comments on the record in moving this bill for second reading, because any time I get a chance to talk about conservation districts in this province, the conservation district movement, it is a great opportunity to put on the record the degree to which Manitoba is a leader in terms of conservation districts across North America.

Mr. Speaker, I want to state that I have had that verified at the last conservation districts convention in Brandon by the national president of the U.S. equivalent of conservation districts. Quite frankly, when he was aware of the degree to which our conservation districts have built on, are now decades, history, in terms of conservation districts, and have had the ability to really be leaders in terms of watershed-based planning, and a variety of activities that would make many U.S. equivalent conservation districts envious, it struck me that here in Manitoba, once again, we are leading the way.

Mr. Speaker, there is long history of conservation districts, a number of decades, but I think I am particularly pleased to put on the record that not only do we have a proud history that, under the leadership of, certainly, this government, and the very progressive municipal governments throughout this province that are very much the backbone of the conservation districts, we have now gone from nine to 17 conservation districts across the province of Manitoba in six years. We have nearly doubled it. In fact, the majority of rural Manitoba now has a conservation district base. In fact, I was very pleased to announce our most recent conservation district right in the heart of the Interlake, in Arborg, Manitoba, again, in a region of the province that now is becoming very much a part, through the East Interlake Conservation District, part of that

tremendous model in terms of how we deal with the many challenges we are faced with.

I want to put on the record that, at that meeting, I gave particular credit to the Member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), who has been an outspoken supporter of conservation districts. Anybody who has ever read *The Interlake Spectator*, you will see, quite frankly, the letters to the editor column for a while were pretty well owned by the MLA for the Interlake, who had the courage to fight for what he believed in terms of conservation districts and work with his local communities and work with some tremendous leadership, to the point now, Mr. Speaker, that the Interlake, that very important part of the province, is part of our CD growth across the province.

I cannot underestimate the significance of this because, to go from nine to 17, that is nearly doubling the number of conservation districts since 1999. It is not all because of the efforts of this government. Certainly, there is a lot of community effort that has gone into this, Mr. Speaker. But, you know, I think we also have to indicate very clearly that this was, in fact, early on, one of the hallmarks of our government, and that is in terms of having a broad comprehensive approach to watershed-based planning and to the many other activities of conservation districts, because I always stress that it is more than just the water base that is important, there are many other activities.

I also want to note, by the way, that we have brought the responsibilities for conservation districts into the Department of Water Stewardship. I want to put on the record that, because of the origin being based with, in this particular case, the municipal leadership, for many years it resided with the IGA department and its forerunner, I want to state it created some confusion, Mr. Speaker. I always used to say, as Minister of Conservation, that it confused people, quite significantly, when I would have to explain that I was not responsible for conservation districts. Indeed, when parts of the Conservation Department came over to Water Stewardship along with parts of other departments, I think it was a very wise move that under, in fact, the first Canadian Department of Water Stewardship in this particular case, we included conservation districts.

* (16:10)

Now, Mr. Speaker, Bill 13 may seem like a minor amendment, but I think it is part of that bigger growth of conservation districts, particularly the

degree to which we are now seeing more and more citizen involvement working with the many dedicated municipal leaders and the excellent staff that is out there in terms of our conservation districts. Indeed, the amendment establishes the ability of the Conservation District Commission to have a public interest representative.

What I want to put on the record is that, as we roll out the next step of Manitoba's water strategy, and in particular as we roll out the next step under The Water Protection Act, we are going to be dealing with watershed-based planning. I have always said, and this government has always said, that we will have conservation districts as a key building block behind watershed-based planning.

I mean, when you think about it, Mr. Speaker, while conservation districts do not naturally coincide in every case with a single watershed, many of them in fact involve a number of watersheds. The reality is, the bottom line is that we already have watershed-based planning at the conservation district level in many areas of the province.

I want to stress that each CD is very unique. I have said this publicly, that I do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach. What is good for southeast Manitoba may not be good for southwest Manitoba or the Interlake or the Parklands. So you see conservation districts, for example, that are very involved in discussions over drainage, in parts of the province. In other parts of the province, perhaps less so. You will see conservation districts that are very concerned about the need for enforcement and improvements in licensing in terms of water-based activities. In other areas of the province, perhaps less so. Each and every conservation district is very unique.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity at the last conservation districts convention to start a bit of a tradition that will be no stranger to anybody that has attended AMM meetings. I set up a bear pit as minister responsible to have some open discussion because I do value the feedback from the conservation districts. I made it very clear that our vision as a government and our vision collectively as a province is very much based on the basic element of watershed-based planning that starts from the understanding that you have to have a comprehensive approach, but you also have to have local people as part of that planning process. That is what conservation districts are particularly good at.

Mr. Speaker, conservation districts ensure that there is the local input, there is that local sense, there is that democratic input. When I mention that this bill brings in a public interest's ability to have an appointment at the commission level, I think it is something we can look at with conservation districts as well in terms of broadening their representation because, quite frankly, there is no shortage of people who are interested in getting involved with any of our conservation districts.

As I look around the Manitoba Legislature, I realize that there are members of this Legislature who have had some significant exposure in the past to conservation districts. Certainly, the Member for Portage and I have had this discussion about, certainly, his involvement.

I want to stress the success of conservation districts comes very much from the local participation, and we are seeing a lot of very innovative ideas coming out through local people coming up with local solutions to the kind of challenges that we are all faced with. Whether it be the excellent work that is being done in terms of repair and protection, whether it be some of the excellent work that has been done in co-operation with our farming communities, whether it be in terms of the recognition, that there has to be a broader focus, that we have to look beyond point sources and look at the overall watershed, we are seeing conservation districts leading the way. I can tell you there is no shortage of creative ideas coming.

Mr. Speaker, the key element as we move into watershed-based planning is the fact, to my mind, that conservation districts will be the key building blocks. Now, in areas of the province that do not have conservation districts, there will be watershed-based planning. That is part of The Water Protection Act that was passed in this House.

But I believe that the conservation district movements can and will continue to grow because they will provide very much that basic framework; in fact, it is referenced in the act. But, more importantly, they are doing watershed-based planning already. It varies across the province the degree to which that planning has been put in place, recognizing, of course, that we have had CDs that have a longer history than others. I mean, we have, as I indicated earlier, gone from nine to 17 since 1999. Those additional CDs, the new CDs, are very much growing and developing, Mr. Speaker, but, you

know, the bottom line here is the CD movement has a particular opportunity here to provide, I think, the kind of guidance and the kind of public credibility that is necessary for our watershed-based planning.

Believe me, Mr. Speaker, anybody that is aware of what happens with conservation districts will tell you, there is no shortage of people that would like to be involved in conservation districts. In fact, any minister responsible for appointing the provincial appointee often has to look at all sorts of potential names that are put forward, solicited or unsolicited. I think it is important to note that I see some significant opportunity here to improve the terms of that.

Now, the vision, I think, of the next five or 10 years is going to be very much one of watershed-based planning. I referenced that and I really want to spend a couple of minutes in reflecting on that, Mr. Speaker. Let us be very clear. Unless we deal with the entire watershed, and in many cases watersheds that cross into Saskatchewan, cross into Alberta, cross into the United States, cross into Ontario, we will never be able to deal with the challenges we are facing right now.

Take Lake Winnipeg, and I use Lake Winnipeg as an example, but there are other perhaps smaller versions of Lake Winnipeg throughout the province and other unique water quality challenges. But what happened to Lake Winnipeg did not happen overnight. It happened over a 30-year period in terms of some of the challenges we are dealing with, particularly in terms of nutrients. It will not be solved overnight, either, but it particularly will not be solved unless we are all part of the solution.

I do want to put on the record that I have said very clearly it is not going to be one sector or one region of this province. It is certainly not going to be urban versus rural. It is not going to be solved by finger pointing. The bottom line is it is going to be solved by us all working together.

There are some encouraging signs. I want to put on the record when it comes to Lake Winnipeg, quite frankly, we already have some very significant moves, the establishment of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, which has brought together a wide variety of perspectives. We have clearly set the targets, in this particular case, the 10 percent reduction of nutrients. The IJC has been involved in ensuring that both North Dakota and Minnesota have shared in the Red River Valley those 10 percent targeted reductions.

Probably the most significant area we have moved on, Mr. Speaker, is in terms of the city of Winnipeg. The City of Winnipeg waste water treatment facilities are going to be licensed. The first one is already licensed. By the end of 2006, we will have achieved a 10 percent reduction in terms of nutrients for the city of Winnipeg. By the time that we have all of the plants licensed and all of the treatment in place, you will have a point source, the single largest point source, which is responsible for a contribution of anywhere in the range of about 6 percent of the nutrients in Lake Winnipeg, and, Mr. Speaker, it will be reduced to as little as 2 percent. When you consider we are taking a 10 percent overall targeted reduction, that results in a 4 percent reduction. That is significant.

When you look at the challenges with eutrophication, the algae blooms we have seen in the last number of years, we have to make progress, and we have started already with the city of Winnipeg. I want to credit the City of Winnipeg. I think it is unfortunate, by the way, that the licensing process did not take place in 1992 when it was supposed to take place. In fact, the previous government chose to ignore the clear recommendation from the CEC to have licensing hearings in 1992.

Mr. Speaker, in 2002, we started that process, and it has now taken an NDP government to get licensing in place and proper waste water treatment for the city of Winnipeg. By the way, the kind of waste water treatment we are putting in place will also involve the phasing out of the combined sewer overflow system.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I want to note that on the Assiniboine River, if you look at the level of waste water treatment in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, they have been ahead of us. It has now taken this process, the CEC process, spearheaded by the Member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin) when he was the Conservation Minister at the time—I was Conservation Minister when the report was received—for the licensing of the waste water facilities in the city of Winnipeg, something that should have been done in the 1990s.

* (16:20)

Mr. Speaker, we have moved elsewhere, too. I find it rather interesting as we look at discussions today with the potential plant here in Winnipeg that, when the previous government had the opportunity to make some very important decisions with the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon, they followed a

process that did not involve full public participation and did not result in the kind of treatment that, certainly, should have been considered at the time.

I want to put on the record that if and when there is a second shift, because the Clean Environment Commission's hearings, put in place by this government, there will be, and this is not an oxymoron, improved waste water quality at the Maple Leaf plant, because this government has understood the fact that you cannot have development without having protection of the environment in both the city of Winnipeg and in terms of Maple Leaf and, quite frankly, any activity that has to take place. But the previous government had a habit of not only short-circuiting the licensing process, but, in the case of the city of Winnipeg, they did not even go with licensing.

The City of Winnipeg, the single largest contributor to nutrients in terms of Lake Winnipeg, did not have to go to a licensing process. So, Mr. Speaker, when members opposite get up on issues, as they like to do ever so often—and they like to pretend that the 1990s did not exist; I do not blame them because a lot of us would like to forget the 1990s—you know, it is the same people, it is the same party and they ignored the need for licensing of the city of Winnipeg waste water facilities. They did not have full public hearings in terms of the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon. Well, we have learned from their mistakes, and we are putting in place that kind of licensing and the kind of environmental protection that Manitobans would expect.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that as we look at other developments, as Minister of Water Stewardship, I will stress again the need for us to be vigilant in each and every case because there are going to be more hearings in terms of developments that will take place and more challenges, such as the water quality management zones. But, you know, I want to note there that the members opposite, after passing the water quality management zones, have now been again getting into the blame game, the finger pointing, and I want to put on the record again there is no one sector that is going to be the solution. There is no one sector that is the problem. We are all part of the problem.

You know I say this every time I get a chance, Mr. Speaker, I sort of use this at public meetings and I do not know if I can use this in the Legislature but, you know, I will use it anyway. *[interjection]* Thank you very much to members opposite but, you know,

the reality is, and if there is anybody in the Legislature that has not taken a shower over the last six months or flushed a toilet, they are not part of the problem. They are probably also sitting off in a corner by themselves way away from other members, but, you know, the reality is as soon as you flush a toilet you are part of the challenge that we are faced with, and if you take a shower, in terms of the water consumption that takes place, about a hundred litres.

So you know you flush a toilet and you are part of that proverbial problem. So I say to members opposite—*[interjection]* I am part of the problem of flushing the toilet and taking showers. I can assure the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) that this is the Manitoba Legislature. Now, if it were Ottawa, I know things stink in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, but it is nothing to do with not taking a shower. It think it has to do with a certain scandal that I am sure the Member for Inkster does not want to talk about. I know the NDP, Liberal—you know we are not hugging Liberals in Ottawa anymore. I think the Gomery report may have something to do with that. *[interjection]*

I am getting distracted by the Member for Inkster. As much as I would love to talk about what stinks in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the fact that, quite frankly, here in Manitoba, we are all part of the challenge and we are all part of the solution. It is a serious issue because, quite frankly, a single flush of a toilet is, even in terms of water consumption, about 18 litres. You know, the average supply in a developing country which has a good supply of fresh water, an acceptable supply is considered to be about 20 litres. So one flush of a toilet is in that category.

Our domestic consumption is about 200 litres per person. Our total consumption in Manitoba is close to 400 litres per person, and that makes us the biggest consumers of water in the country. It also puts us in second place right along side our friends and neighbours in the U.S., who are the biggest consumers of water in the world, per capita. Developing countries use much less, but even developed countries in Europe use half or even a third, and I point to the fact that you can make a difference and we are going to make a difference, Mr. Speaker.

Barrie, Ontario, they were able to cut through some very aggressive conservation measures, their consumption down to 60 litres per day per person.

When you consider that is not even a third of what our consumption is here in the province of Manitoba, I think we can make a lot of progress, but, you know, we can only make progress if we are all part of it.

That is why I think it is important as we look at the work that the conservation districts are doing to recognize how non-partisan they are, how they bring together people from all different political persuasions, because people understand the need to protect our water, the need to work to protect our environment, and that should be the approach that I would suggest should be put forward in terms of our water challenges.

Now, I was somewhat encouraged on The Water Protection Act, for example, when it was passed unanimously. It took a while, but it passed unanimously. You know why I think the Liberals both voted the same way on that? I know it is difficult at times, Mr. Speaker. I remember when they were a three-person caucus. It was useful. They had somebody to break the ties, especially on the MTS sale. I will not get into MTS, but one in favour, one Liberal against and one abstaining or sitting on the fence. The Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) says he was on the right side on that one. He was. He was on the right side, not the right side politically, but the right side of the issue.

I do think, Mr. Speaker, there is a good reason. Certainly, over the years, I have received support from many, I was going to say Liberals, but they are kind of former Liberals because they have voted NDP so many times I think they have long forgotten that deep, dark secret of being a Liberal, but it is because there are many people across the province who, I think, at times, will sit there and say, whether they are NDP or not, they will actually give this government and previous governments credit for being on the right track.

I will tell you, I hear this in terms of water all the time. I hear a lot of people saying, "We do not agree with you on everything; we do not agree with you on this area or what you are doing in this area," but they do agree with the fact that we have indicated very clearly it is a priority by establishing the department, moving ahead with additional resources, drinking water officers for example, 16 new inspectors in terms of manure and mortalities regulations.

We have done that, Mr. Speaker, but it is not just a question of resources. I think it is because we put forward what I see collectively is the vision of the people of Manitoba in terms of water, which is that

we have got to leave it in better shape than we found it. If we do not, we are going to have more and more Lake Winnipegs. We are going to have more and more challenges across the province.

I want to stress again that partnership is the key. We cannot do it alone. Certainly, as a provincial government, not only can we not do it alone, even if we had the best resource allocation that you can ever imagine, we do not necessarily have the credibility at the grass roots level and the perspective that goes with people that live in the area who are part of, say, a municipal council or part of the many organizations that participate in conservation districts.

These are people that bring tremendous experience. I want to stress, by the way, that one of the areas I want to see some real development with in conservation districts in the future is taking some of the best practice. There are some really exciting things happening with our conservation districts in this province. I am not even going to single out one particular conservation district. I want to stress the fact that we are seeing unique things happening all across the province.

I also want to note, by the way, the degree to which we are looking internationally too, and I want to really commend the work that has been taking place. We have been supportive of it, both financially and, certainly, in terms of our encouragement, and that is in the Roseau River which crosses the international boundary and is, I think, a very excellent example of how we are actually seeing a conservation district-style approach, in this case, on an international basis.

Now that is going to be the future, by the way. That is going to be how we are going to achieve those targets set by the IJC in terms of nutrient reduction. There are a lot of exciting things happening in other jurisdictions. The state of Minnesota has been particularly aggressive, very similar to us in terms of nutrient reduction. I think that is very encouraging.

We have, I think, all sorts of prospects with Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We need to be working with Ontario. It is a major contributor through the Winnipeg River system to nutrients. There are some established structures, the Prairie Provinces Water Board, which deals with allocation and testing issues between Alberta and Saskatchewan.

In fact, I note that the Assiniboine River is actually a relatively small contributor to nutrient overload in Lake Winnipeg, but I want to stress too that we also have to look within our own province to extend our involvement.

* (16:30)

I want to say very clearly that I want to see a very significant role for First Nations because, in many areas of the province, and, certainly, in the Interlake this is very much the case. The Member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) has been very vocal in terms of this. Many Aboriginal communities, many First Nations communities are not necessarily within the jurisdiction of the Province, are right there part of the watershed. They are faced with the same challenges. We are working with those communities. I want to put on the record in particular the work we have been doing with the Fisher River, with Peguis which has faced perennial flooding and the fact that it has taken the Province to get in and take a leadership role in terms of that. We will continue to do that.

I want to put it on the record if I can, Mr. Speaker, that I think we have a challenge. We saw just recently in Kashechewan where you saw a lot of attention on water-based issues in Ontario in a First Nations community. But we have got communities throughout Manitoba, First Nations communities, that are faced with flooding, that are faced with all sorts of challenges with their water systems, and in many cases they do not have their regulatory framework that we do. They do not have the capital resources. I certainly know in the First Nations communities that I am most knowledgeable of, there are huge needs that are out there. I think we have to, as we look at any of our conservation districts, the watershed-based planning or any of the water issues, we have to recognize the need.

As we go into the First Nations focus and the Aboriginal focus of the First Ministers' Conference, I am hoping that there will be some real leadership shown nationally on water-based issues because we will have tremendous difficulties continuing in First Nations communities unless we get a national commitment.

I throw that down as a challenge to the federal government because they have to be part of the solution as well. They are a part of the jurisdictional element of it, both in terms of First Nations, but also in terms of the overlap of federal environmental regulations, fisheries and oceans.

So I throw that challenge. Whether it be in terms of Lake Winnipeg or any of the issues we are dealing with, I look forward to the federal government being part of the solution. Quite frankly, we are at the stage in this province, if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I really wanted, as I conclude my remarks, to stress a couple of things. First of all, when I talk about vision, yes, it is the vision of our government. Part of it is to extend the conservation districts; we have been doing that. But I think it is the vision of most Manitobans. I say most Manitobans because members opposite at times, I think, are somewhat confused when it comes to water issues. You know, they are not sure. They certainly shy away from any discussion of their record in the 1990s and for good reason.

I referenced today in my comments the fact that they did not have much really to talk about. I find it amazing that even when we finally got them on board on The Water Protection Act, it did not take long before they are firing off press releases saying that the sky was falling and because of drafts of regulations that were put out, this was going to do all this and that and the other thing.

I have a lot of respect for people who have been responding and raising concerns about water quality management zones and various aspects of The Water Protection Act. But you know what, I trust the Manitobans. Manitobans can take the proposals. They can put forward their ideas, and we have proven will listen. We put in the act that we would have to have consultation on regulations.

Members opposite will criticize us sometimes. If we move too quickly, they will say we did not consult. If we do not consult, we move too quickly. You cannot win with members opposite. I would say, quite frankly, I am going to be interested to see how this vote on this bill. I am assuming they are going to vote for it. But I hope that it has more commitment than The Water Protection Act, because I really think they sat down, I think they really wanted to vote against, quite frankly. I read their speeches. I sat in here month after month after month. They wanted to vote against one of the most progressive pieces of legislation in the history of the management of watershed-based issues, The Water Protection Act, a leader across the country.

There was no progressive in the PC. It was all this conservative, actually I think it was pretty reactionary stuff. They just could not bring

themselves—I remember the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), his quotes are seared in my mind. He talked about the Gestapo at one time. He talked about civil servants doing their job in terms of this, Mr. Speaker. These regulations that were just Soviet-style central planning. You know, he actually voted for it in the end by the way. I am not sure which Member for Emerson was speaking.

But they are still out there. They come in this Legislature. When they stand before the broader public interests and the broader public, they hastily put on their water jackets. They put on a tie quickly, and now they are going to talk the talk, but they do not walk the walk when it comes to water. It has taken an NDP government to bring in the water strategy, The Water Protection Act, and an NDP government that has gone from 9 to 17 conservation districts. We have almost doubled it, and I tell you what, I am sure we will definitely double it by the end of this term in government.

So, again, when you think about water issues in this province, it is the NDP vision, and I say it is our vision as a province. No thanks to members opposite. I will be interested to see what they have to say on conservation districts because I suspect they are going to get up and say, "Well, we just did not get around to it, you know. Like we were going to do something. We, we, you know." Whatever. I mean they have been doing that for the last six years in opposition. They always think of themselves as a government in exile, right, you know, it is like the White Russians off in London, you know, I can picture them sort of sipping on the champagne.

They recently went through some internal difficulties as a party, and I love the quote today from the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) talking about members opposite not knowing about the team approach. The look on the Leader of the Opposition's (Mr. Murray) face was priceless. I wish that could be recorded in Hansard. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, they have spent the last six years, they have been sort of me-tooing on water. Sometimes they try and hammer us for not doing enough. Manitobans know better. They cut the well testing. They cut drainage. They did nothing in terms of the city of Winnipeg waste water. It took an NDP government to bring in the right regulations, to bring in more resources, you know, and an NDP government that is fixing up the drainage system in rural Manitoba. So I want to put it on the record, because CDs are very much a part of the rural fabric,

but it is an NDP government that is expanding the conservation districts.

So you know what? Tories can talk all they want about rural Manitoba, and you know what? Boy, do they talk. They are just the absolute, the top, in terms of lip service to rural Manitoba, but I say one thing and I say it every chance I get anywhere in the province and, by the way, I do not care whether it is in the parklands or whether it is in the southeast, I do not care if I am in Brandon or in Ste. Anne, the bottom line is the same thing, six years into our mandate, the NDP has done more for rural Manitoba by working with rural Manitobans than the Tories did, more than they could even imagine in the 11 years they were in government. I say conservation districts are one of the best examples of this. It took an NDP government to nearly double the number of conservation districts. Mr. Speaker, we have done more in the last six years by working with rural Manitobans than the Conservatives would ever dream of.

I just want to see what they are going to say on this bill. If it is the Member for Portage (Mr. Faurshou), he is probably the only member across the way that I would say had some real understanding of conservation districts at the grassroots level, and I do appreciate that, but I am waiting for him to get up and say, I am suspecting he is going to get up in probably a one-minute speech saying, "The NDP government has done a great job on conservation districts. This is a great bill. We are going to vote for it." I get the feeling they are going to keep this going for another six months, like they did on The Water Protection Act. They will grudgingly get up and vote for it, Mr. Speaker, and then they will criticize it after that, just like they have done with The Water Protection Act. I am beginning to kind of know the end. It is like a regular script over on the other side, Mr. Speaker, because they do not like to show their true colours.

The fact is they do not have much of a record on water issues in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker. Either they will do the right thing right now, and I do not know if the Member for Portage feels this enthusiasm to get up and say it right now, I am sure if the member from Portage was to say what he really wanted to say, not what some researcher in the dark rooms of the Conservative caucus has typed up for him, which probably is going to criticize the NDP government trying to wreck off the conservation districts, I bet you the member of Portage is going to get up and say, "Hallelujah. We have got movement on the

conservation districts, and it is thanks to the NDP," because, quite frankly, any reasonable and objective Manitoban, that is exactly what they would be saying. I know the Member for Portage is reasonable. Well, most days, he has his moments in Question Period like all opposition members do and, having been in opposition, I do not just mean this party.

* (16:40)

But, you know, seriously, this is a good bill. This is a good movement, and I use that phrase because conservation districts are a movement or a model for North America. We have nearly doubled the number of conservation districts and, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to members opposite that they should fasten their seatbelts and watch out because there is a lot more to come. This government is committed to watershed management, and we are going to make up for whatever happened in the 1990s by ensuring that we build on this huge progress.

We have got much accomplished, more to do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I know the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) has encouraged me to act in a certain fashion or manner, but I may disappoint him in this regard. The one thing he did say that is true is that it is a fast-running train, and if one is not trying to really watch the shells move across the minister's desk as he uses different terminology, then, yes, Mr. Speaker, one will get confused and not keep up with this minister between the water stewardship protection act and then The Conservation Districts Act and then the amendments to both and appointments and repeals.

On repeals, we were trying to figure out what the minister is actually talking about on his commission, because it was not just a few short months ago that he abolished The Water Commission Act here in the province of Manitoba, where, indeed, persons had representation and had gainful input into water issues here in the province of Manitoba. On that commission, we as legislators had opportunity to sit and be engaged at that level to make certain that on the issue of water, which is vitally important to every single person here in the province of Manitoba, that an elected representative was involved and also brought to that table the resources to make certain that each and every issue brought before the commission was thoroughly evaluated, and now that no longer is the case.

However, what the minister is bringing to the table today is another commission whose duties have water as a primary concern under The Conservation Districts Act, and, again, it is leaving it to the minister's prerogative as to who might or might not have the expertise or, shall we say, the enthusiasm for water or passion perhaps in my case for this topic. In any event, this act is placed before us to create and provide for the appointment of persons to the commission which will be responsible for the regulation, implementation of The Conservation Districts Act.

The members and the composition of the act I see now have been changed. It was formerly seven members. Now we are going to nine, and it is something that I have always looked to this minister as wanting to bring more persons on board, which is not a bad idea, but we see from this NDP government a bloating of boards and commissions through their last six years, and who knows how many hundreds upon hundreds of persons are now channelled into boards and commissions under the New Democratic Party's term in office.

But let us get right down to brass tacks. The minister opened the door pretty wide on a whole host of water issues that I feel compelled to address. The minister is, well, somewhat complimentary of the members on this side of the House and their initiative to create the conservation districts in the province of Manitoba with the mandate effectively to co-ordinate drainage issues where many municipalities were finding more than they could handle as independent municipalities, and brought together a co-ordinating body that would look to the drainage issues that were related to one specific watercourse, which was a very, very good plan. I want to compliment the former Filmon administration there for their participation and support.

That is where I want to get to the point of support. Yes, we have seen an increase in the number of conservation districts in the province of Manitoba from nine to 17, but I want to ask the minister when we get to committee as to the support that these conservation districts get from the Province. I recall very vividly, as a founding member of the very first conservation district of the province of Manitoba, the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District, I am very proud to have that in my history, it is something that all of us in and around the Whitemud Watershed, or Whitemud River, are very proud of, because we worked very co-operatively and in a co-ordinated fashion to improve the drainage concerns

that we as producers and, certainly, as municipalities were charged with the responsibility of providing better, enhanced drainage for water, that particular conservation district received from the Province resources from the Department of Agriculture, from the Department of Rural Development, from the Department of Natural Resources, personnel, funding, whatever the conservation district needed, the government was there. Mr. Speaker, that, I can say unequivocally, is no longer the case.

During the public hearings in regard to the Water Protection Act, it was clear from the representation from members that have served on conservation district boards that this government has increased the number of districts but has woefully inadequately provided resources and funding for their operation. When the question was asked of the representative of the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District as to the level of support for the planning of the district and the water drainage projects that needed to be constructed, the Province virtually paid for the entire study. From the study was derived a working plan and, again, that was paid for virtually in its entirety by the Province.

Then, admittedly, persons that are located within the conservation district, and the taxes being paid to the municipalities, then the Province looked to the participating rural municipalities and towns that they would be the beneficiaries of improved drainage, that it was to their part a responsibility for the construction and capital cost. But then, again, it was not entirely borne by the local authorities. The Province was there in most cases at 50 percent and, in some cases, up to 75 percent of the actual capital cost for a particular project. I know that in the enthusiasm from the various departments, whether it be Rural Development or Natural Resources or Agriculture, the government was always there to help out the conservation districts. That, sadly, is not the case today. If you go to any conservation district committee meeting, you will hear the refrain that they are underfunded and have no money for any of the projects that they feel need to be carried through on.

*(16:50)

This past year there are areas within the Whitemud Conservation District that received in excess of 30 inches of rainfall in the growing season. Mr. Speaker, that is far and beyond any normal rainfall, and, I understand, by Environment Canada

records, the second wettest growing season recorded by Environment Canada.

So, obviously, we were challenged as producers and as municipalities and the Emergency Management Organization was challenged as well. At one point in time, I understood, just around the constituency of Portage la Prairie, which is covered in part by the Whitemud Conservation District, there were more than 4000 claims that had yet to be processed by the EMO. Mr. Speaker, that is an example of the need for continuous due diligence on behalf of the provincial government to support the efforts of the conservation districts in their charge to improve drainage and to prevent inundation of property within those areas.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that although the minister heralds the accomplishments of the New Democratic Party as it pertains to the conservation districts in the province of Manitoba and almost doubling their number, the government has almost abandoned the conservation districts when it comes to funding because where the pie was split nine ways back in 1999, it is now split 17 ways because the budget, in my own calculations, has not even kept up with inflation. So they are really dealing with dollars that cannot even be compared to 1999 funding.

I think the minister should be challenged to represent his—I recognize that he is an individual that takes a great deal of pride in his responsibilities as Water Stewardship Minister. I know that he will carry forward with the enthusiasm and gusto, as he displayed in the House today as he participated in second reading of Bill 13, The Conservation Districts Amendment Act. I hope that he carries that into Executive Council and even further and beyond the Executive Council right into the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Selinger) office to encourage and, yes, convince the Finance Minister that the conservation districts need added resources because the work that they are responsible for is vitally needed.

Now, I know The Conservation Districts Amendment Act is before us, but the minister did make comment on other acts that I will say are still yet unresolved. In my own mind, The Water Protection Act, as I mentioned at the outset, I was not convinced that we needed to dispense with the commission and repeal that act because I felt that the water commission was an excellent body with the resources to carry out their responsibilities. Now the commission, as the act addresses here, again, without

resource may be ineffective and not able to carry out the responsibilities that the minister has so well described and virtues extolled today in his address to this Assembly.

I want to ask the minister, although he cannot reply, but I hope that, at the time of his address when we do get to public hearings on this bill, he is able to recognize that conservation districts, while initially charged with the responsibility for improving drainage, we have to be concerned also with drought. The Whitemud Conservation District has worked recently in co-operation with a number of irrigators to use the drainage ditches that have been constructed for spring run-off in and during the summer growing period to actually provide flow of water to ponds for irrigation purposes. Although this was discussed at length as not really, truly being within the mandate of the conservation districts, it was recognized as important to stakeholders and so I want to credit the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District for once again showing its leadership and providing for the recharge of Rat Creek and, ultimately, off-stream storage for irrigation purposes, so that is greatly appreciated by persons growing potatoes and the need for irrigation, as prescribed in their contract with McCain's and Simplot processing plants located in Portage la Prairie.

Now, Mr. Speaker, having said that, I want to emphasize that this government is spending over a million dollars a year in the Department of Conservation strictly to monitor and to provide to other departments of government guidance in the area of climate change. Climate change is recognized by this government as an important issue, an important issue. Over the weekend, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* had the headline "Drought Threat Looms over Prairies" and this, I know, is known to this government as an important issue. But what is this government really doing to address the issue of drought? They are so totally consumed with getting water through the water courses here in the province

and out into saltwater. They are investing more than two thirds of a billion dollars on the Red River Floodway.

Mr. Speaker, it was recommended that the Red River Floodway needed to be enhanced, to have a greater capacity. But what the failing of this government was that they did not incorporate this into the engineering study that was commissioned, as to whether or not the dam at Ste. Agathe and/or the redevelopment of the Red River Floodway were the only two options that the government allowed to be studied. Is that something that is very wise? I mean, I have asked that question of an elementary class. An elementary class came back and said, "Why would you limit yourself to just a very small area. Does not rain fall in other areas? Are there not other river systems, creeks, dry ravines that contribute to the Red River and the water that flows down that watercourse?" Absolutely, and this is coming from persons in Grade 6.

Yet this government, with all its expertise and, certainly, over on the opposite benches there are school teachers, well-educated people, why, then, would they limit themselves to look only at the Red River Floodway and/or the Ste. Agathe dam? Why would they not consider a dam to hold back waters, potentially, on the Boyne or on the Morris River or on the Pembina River or additional water storage on the Assiniboine? You know, these questions are still yet unanswered, and yet we are forging ahead to spend over \$600 million, with a headline stating that climate change is going to directly affect the province of Manitoba. I might just add—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members about using exhibits when they are making their speeches. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 10 minutes.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, November 22, 2005

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