

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 10, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 22—The Elections Reform Act

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 22, The Elections Reform Act; Loi sur la réforme électorale, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Doer: This bill provides for the implementation of 74 recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer. It provides for an independent boundary commission report not to be amended by this Legislature, establishes an all-party committee on Senate elections with the abolition as the No. 1 priority and ensures that MLAs who are elected to one party do not and are not allowed to cross to another political party in Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? Did I hear a no? *[Agreed]*

PETITIONS

Funding for New Cancer Drugs

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Cancer is one of the leading causes of deaths of Manitobans.

Families are often forced to watch their loved ones suffer the devastating consequences of the disease for long periods of time.

New drugs such as Erbitux, Avastin, Zevalin, Rituxan, Herceptin and Eloxatin have been found to work well and offer new hope to those suffering from various forms of cancer.

Unfortunately, these innovative new treatments are often costly and remain unfunded under Manitoba's provincial health care system.

Consequently, patients and their families are often forced to make the difficult choice between paying for the treatment themselves or going without.

CancerCare Manitoba has asked for an additional \$12 million for its budget to help provide these leading-edge treatments and drugs for Manitobans.

Several other provinces have already approved these drugs and are providing them to their residents at present time.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba and the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) to consider providing CancerCare Manitoba with the appropriate funding necessary so they may provide leading-edge care for patients in the same manner as other provinces.

To request the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Health to consider accelerating the process by which new cancer treatment drugs are approved so that more Manitobans are able to be treated in the most effective manner possible.

This petition is signed by S. Huynh, Charlotte Turenne, Whitney Loewen and many others.

* (13:35)

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

Funding for New Cancer Drugs

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death of Manitobans.

Families are often forced to watch their loved ones suffer the devastating consequences of this disease for long periods of time.

New drugs such as Erbitux, Avastin, Zevalin, Rituxan, Herceptin and Eloxatin have been found to work well and offer new hope to those suffering from various forms of cancer.

Unfortunately, these innovative new treatments are often costly and remain unfunded under Manitoba's provincial health care system.

Consequently, patients and their families are often forced to make the difficult choice between paying for the treatment themselves or going without.

CancerCare Manitoba has asked for an additional \$12 million for its budget to help provide these leading-edge treatments and drugs for Manitobans.

Several other provinces have already approved these drugs and are providing them to their residents at present time.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba and the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) to consider providing CancerCare Manitoba with the appropriate funding necessary so they may provide leading-edge care for patients in the same manner as other provinces.

To request the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Health to consider accelerating the process by which new cancer treatment drugs are approved so that more Manitobans are able to be treated in the most effective manner possible.

This petition is signed by Janessa Ross, Bobbi Grey, Danielle Skipper and many, many others.

Highway 10

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

A number of head-on collisions, as well as fatal accidents, have occurred on Highway 10.

Manitobans have expressed increasing concern about the safety of Highway 10, particularly near the two schools in Forrest where there are no road crossing safety devices to ensure student safety.

Manitobans have indicated that the deplorable road condition and road width is a factor in driver and vehicle safety.

It is anticipated that there will be an increased flow of traffic on this highway in the future.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) to consider providing sufficient resources to enhance driver and vehicle safety on Highway 10.

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services to consider upgrading Highway 10.

This petition is signed by Eleanor Marnock, Shirley Davies, Karen Dmytriw and many, many others.

Crocus Investment Fund—Public Inquiry Request

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Auditor General's *Examination of the Crocus Investment Fund* indicated that as early as 2001, the government was made aware of red flags at the Crocus Investment Fund.

In 2001, Industry, Economic Development and Mines officials stated long-term plans at the Crocus Investment Fund requiring policy changes by the government were cleared by someone in "higher authority," indicating political interference at the highest level.

In 2002, an official from the Department of Finance suggested that Crocus Investment Fund's continuing requests for legislative amendments may be a sign of management issues and that an independent review of Crocus Investment Fund's operations may be in order.

Industry, Economic Development and Mines officials indicated that several requests had been made for a copy of Crocus Investment Fund's business plan, but that Crocus Investment Fund never complied with the requests.

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

As a direct result of the government ignoring the red flags, more than 33,000 Crocus investors have lost more than \$60 million.

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

The people of Manitoba want to know what occurred within the NDP government regarding Crocus, who is responsible and what needs to be done so this does not happen again.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Premier to consider calling an independent public inquiry into the Crocus Investment Fund scandal.

This petition is signed by Al Wieler, Mabel Wieler, Betty Cusson and many, many others.

* (13:40)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before we continue, I notice a couple of members have something sitting on their desk and—

An Honourable Member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On members' desks should be water, papers that you are using. Any objects that could be used as props, I ask the members to please put them on the floor or to put them in their desk.

Point of Order

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I stand on a point of order. You know, we have frequently since I have been here had flowers, plants, strawberries—

An Honourable Member: Trees.

Mr. Gerrard: —trees, minerals. What, Mr. Speaker, I would say to you is this: It is very important when we have had 31 children who have died from homicide in care that we signal in a very respectful way our concern.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Points of order are to point out to the Speaker a breach of a rule or departure of practice, not to be used for debating an issue. I kindly ask the honourable members to remove what I consider to be props in this Chamber.

* * *

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, we are trying to be very respectful to children who have died. This is very important. If the—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a time for debate. I have asked the honourable member very kindly, I have asked him, the honourable—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have asked both honourable members very kindly to remove what I consider to be props in this Chamber, and I am asking you kindly to remove those candles off your desk. We are not going to debate this.

An Honourable Member: Okay, well, I am sorry, I will not.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Then I am—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Then I am instructing the honourable member to remove the props, what I consider to be props, off his desk.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, this is not a prop. This is a sincere attempt to make sure that we recognize a very significant event in the province's history and the serious deaths that occurred. This is not a prop. This is just a sincere attempt to make sure that we remember something very important in the history of our province. I do not intend to remove this. You can remove me if you like but I will not remove this.

* (13:45)

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. In this House, we refer to practices in the House, not necessarily on a point of order talking about a specific rule of the House, but in terms of speaking to practices in this House. Now I have witnessed over my 20 years in this House where we have brought articles into this House either through a show of support to an industry, through a show of support to individuals by this Assembly, by members of this Assembly, by a minister.

As a matter of fact, I know that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), the MLA for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurschou), have from time to time distributed articles to all the members in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, as a commemoration of a significant event, a significant practice, a significant time of the year, for that matter, the spring of the year.

There is a time when we acknowledge it, Mr. Speaker, by bringing in a tree. Now that could be

used as a prop because we talk about that tree when it is sitting on our desk. As a matter of fact, the minister makes a ministerial statement about that tree when that tree is sitting on the minister's desk.

Mr. Speaker, we do the same with the strawberries that we so gratefully accept from the people of Portage la Prairie. When that basket of strawberries is on the desk, we allow the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurschou), and we have for, even when we go back to the former member, Mr. Connery. He used to stand up and make a statement in the House about the time of year that we have strawberries and, of course, that is done with respect to all members in this Chamber.

Now I do not know what the candles are about, Mr. Speaker, except for what the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) just said, but let me say this to members of this Assembly that if the Member for River Heights is just trying to draw awareness to a significant event in our province, which shows how many children have died as a result of being neglected, then I think that is a significant event. Perhaps you may want to take this matter under advisement until you understand clearly what it is the Member for River Heights was doing.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Certainly, Mr. Speaker, there is no more difficult job in this House than being Speaker of this House. When it comes to the tradition in this House of not having exhibits, there is, indeed, a long history. I have seen members who have brought in Lysol cans; instructed to remove them and in the House of Commons, dead fish. I remember a certain member bringing in a McDonald's Big Mac container and, indeed, he was asked to remove that.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the key things here is we have to respect the fact that you made a ruling and, in fact, if indeed there are objections to your ruling the appropriate mechanism for that is to appeal your ruling. But, without doing so while engaging in debate, I think the Member for River Heights has made your point because it was very clear from his comments that it was seen as a symbol, an exhibit, if you like.

The point of Parliament is, indeed, to make one's comments in discussion and debate. We are coming up to Question Period and potentially even debate on the budget. There are many opportunities that members have to bring forward matters of business for the Province in the form of resolutions, whether they be private members' resolutions or otherwise.

So there are ample opportunities to raise those concerns.

I want to stress, Mr. Speaker, that we are all sincere in this House when it comes to issues of the type that the Member for River Heights has talked about in terms of child welfare. We all care. We may disagree at times on the issues of the day as they relate to this particular matter, but I think it is important, particularly when we are talking about something as important as child welfare in this province, to focus on the issues, not on the use of exhibits and not on ways of gaining publicity. Fundamentally, regardless of what our views are, it is the welfare of the children in this province that matters the most. I think the best way to discuss this and all issues, and I am sure I speak for many members of this House, is with proper decorum.

I say, Mr. Speaker, certainly there are many MLAs in this House that do not envy the position you are placed in. But, out of respect for your office, unless the member opposite wishes to challenge your ruling, he has nothing in the way of a choice, no other choice than to follow the long-standing tradition in this House which is that if you do not agree with the Speaker's ruling, you challenge it.

Mr. Speaker, if you continue to disregard those rulings, without challenging that ruling, that indeed is in contempt of the House, and, indeed, there are mechanisms for that. I would urge you though, through you, that the Member for River Heights understands that the best way to discuss anything involving the children of this province is with proper decorum, and that means without props.

Mr. Speaker: We are turning this into a debate here. The honourable Member for Inkster, you want to add a short piece?

* (13:50)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): A very short piece, Mr. Speaker. I know the Member for River Heights feels very passionate, I am sure, about what it is that he is doing this afternoon. As someone had indicated, we would even be prepared and I know he would be prepared to provide a candle for all members of this Legislature if the government is prepared to put them on their desks. I am sure that we would be more than happy to do that.

I think we need to recognize that, in the past, you know we made reference to strawberries that were put on, trees that were put on. You know, it was

not that long ago when Inco, I believe it was, provided something we could put onto our tabletops. But, in the spirit of trying to co-operate with you, Mr. Speaker, I am going to make this suggestion that you take the matter as notice, and as a gesture of goodwill I will take my candle off my desk so that, hopefully, you will then be able to reflect on it and report back to the House.

This is a very important issue for my leader, and I would request that he be allowed to be able to have the candle on his desk for the duration of the day. We will see what comes up after we have had the opportunity to review what has taken place and to evaluate what is a prop and what is not a prop, because I can tell you from our perspective we do not see this as a prop. So, in order to appease, I am prepared to take my candle off, Mr. Speaker, but I would strongly encourage that we respect what it is that the Leader of the Liberal Party (Mr. Gerrard) is doing here and is saying, because I believe that the cause is well worth it. Thank you.

Mr. Derkach: Well, just further to that same point of order, Mr. Speaker, I want to bring members' attention to times when we celebrate events in our province, and they are not always happy events, for example, the massacre of the women in Montreal.

We bring symbols into this House and we wear them on our lapels, Mr. Speaker. There are times when we wear ribbons in this House. There are times when we wear pins in this House. Now in any of those types of demonstrations you could say that those are in fact props, because they are props which we wear. They are worn to bring the media attention to these issues no differently than, for example, a candle maybe on each of our desks to mark the travesties of little children dying in our society.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say to you that this is not a time for just looking at what we think might be practices, because it might just embarrass somebody on the opposite side of the House. Well, that is not the important thing. The important thing here is to commemorate those children who have died senselessly in this province, and if it means that we should all put a candle on our desk, I would say perhaps we should all put a candle on our desk because that is no more insignificant than wearing a button on your lapel to commemorate the massacre of people in another legislature or wearing ribbons on your lapel to commemorate some other dramatic event in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I say with the greatest of respect for you and for your office, this is a matter that should be reviewed and this is a matter that should not just be ruled on callously and without thought to—*[interjection]* Well, I say this very sincerely because there may be oohs and aahs from the government side, but they should be bloody well embarrassed about what has gone on in this province. I say today that we need to be sensitive to what is happening in this province and if this is what it takes and if this is what we get hung up on, I think we have kind of missed our mark in terms of what we are about.

* (13:55)

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order of what I have heard, I heard the honourable member mention lapel buttons and pins. It is clear in our rule, *Beauchesne* 504, "Political buttons and similar lapel pins do not constitute an exhibit." But I want to remind all honourable members when they have made references to other items those were not of a political nature. When I heard the comment spoken by the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and also the other House leaders, it was clear that this item was brought in to illustrate a point in debate.

It was very clear that it was used to make a point. When the honourable member made it clear in the statements that I just listened to, it was very clear that it was going to be political versus a non-political event. When you talk about strawberries and other things, those are non-political events, and any item that would cause a disruption in the House could also be ruled out of order by a Speaker. That is why I ruled that the honourable member would have a choice, either put down, which you made very clear in your statement when you were addressing the point of order that it was going to be used to illustrate a point in your debate. That was very clear.

The honourable member, you have something further to add?

Mr. Gerrard: I certainly do. I believe that when there were strawberries or minerals or trees, it was there to remember and to remind us of something very important.

I think it is important, in the face of your context, your comments, to indicate my sense of the situation with regard to children who have died. I have had many calls that this not be politicized, and I am very cautious about that. That is why, rather than trying to politicize this, I have just chosen to make a

very simple reminder to all of us that all of us need to pay attention when children have died and need to do our best collectively in this Legislature to address these concerns and to work on behalf of changes for children in this province.

Mr. Speaker: Well, if you are attempting to make that point, I think you have already made that point, but I view it as an exhibit because it will be used to, and you made it very clear in your comment, illustrate a point in debate whenever you had the floor, so I ask you to remove it from your desk now. *[interjection]*

Order. I have allowed a lot of debate on this. I am now asking you to remove it from your desk. *[interjection]*

Order. We have had enough debate on it, and I have asked the honourable member to remove it from his desk. The honourable member has removed it from his desk. We will now continue on with the business of the House. We were in petitions.

Crocus Investment Fund

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would 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.

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

As a direct result of the government not acting on what it knew, over 33,000 Crocus investors have lost tens of millions of dollars.

The relationship between some union leaders, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP seems 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.

To urge the Premier and his government to cooperate in making public what really did happen.

Signed by R. Jewer, M. Dickie, J. Severyn and many, many more.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of members to the loge to my right where we have with us Mr. Binx Remnant, who is the former Clerk of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

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

* (14:00)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Minister of Family Services Resignation Request

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, in B.C., when a child dies, the government asks a judge to review the system and make recommendations on how to improve care, safety and protection of the children.

In this province, Mr. Speaker, when a child dies under the watch of this incompetent minister, the Premier does nothing. He does not call for an independent public inquiry. He does not call on this minister to be accountable for her failures. Not only is this minister abdicating her responsibility to provide care, safety and protection of her children, but the Premier is encouraging that abdication by leaving her in charge of a department that clearly she cannot handle.

My question is to the Premier. Why has he dragged his feet for almost a month and why has he refused to remove that minister?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect, I believe there are a number of concerns in British Columbia on the Child and Family Services area and literally numbers of cases have apparently gone missing. I just think that all of us are charged with the responsibilities of dealing with vulnerable children, and there is the greatest attempt of everyone in the system to ensure that the greatest care is given to the difficult cases before Child and Family Services workers.

I believe that, in British Columbia, there has been a recommendation to devolve Child and Family Services in that province. I will have to double-check that. I am just going by my memory of it.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that Judge Sinclair, in 1991, recommended devolution to the previous government. He states in his report on chapter 14: Every time an Aboriginal agency stumbles, some critics inevitably will cry out for its dismantling and a return to the old way. As we and other inquiries have concluded, the old way was neither the only way nor the best way. There is a need for ongoing support and commitment to Aboriginal child and welfare agencies that must be recognized and reaffirmed. That recommendation was made in 1991 in Manitoba and it was never implemented.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier talks about double-checking something that happened in British Columbia. The Premier does not have to double-check what happened tragically in the province of Manitoba.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, children in Manitoba are in need of care, safety and protection. The Premier has selected the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) to take on that responsibility and fulfill the mandate as Minister of Family Services. This minister has not fulfilled her duties or her legal, moral or ethical responsibility to provide care, safety and protection for children in need in Manitoba. The announcement of a face-to-face meeting made last week was an announcement not made by this minister or by this Premier.

Mr. Speaker, who is taking responsibility here? It is not the Minister of Family Services and it clearly is not this Premier. When will this Premier do the right thing and remove this minister from her portfolio so that Manitoba children can get the care and protection they so desperately need?

Mr. Doer: Well, I would point out that, in the budget, I think there is a 17 percent increase in child protection services in Manitoba, a budget that languishes in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, the—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: The minister's agencies reported out in the review last week and that is appropriate. I would point out that obviously with children and communities the best place to begin, in terms of vulnerable children, is as close to home as possible in one's family. There are regrettably some children that come to the attention of different authorities who are deemed or possibly deemed to be vulnerable,

upwards of 6,000 in our society. Professional social workers and agency representatives attempt to make the best decisions they can in terms of the balance between family care and safety of the child.

Mr. Speaker, we rely on front-line social workers and professionals every day in Manitoba. We will await some of the independent reviews of these various cases, and we will pay very, very specific attention to the various reviews we have established.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, for this Premier to stand in this Chamber and say what languishes is a budget, what languishes in this Chamber is accountability from this government to children who need to—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker, it was almost a month ago that we learned of the tragic life and death of baby Phoenix Sinclair. We learned about the circumstances in which she lived. We learned about how the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) has failed to provide little Phoenix with care, safety and protection. All we have after a month is this Premier refusing to call for an independent public inquiry, an incompetent minister in charge of Family Services and front-line workers who have led the job by taking responsibility, the responsibility that should be on this minister.

Where does that leave us in Manitoba? Not one step closer to finding out what happened to little Phoenix and the system that failed to provide her with care, safety and protection. Manitobans want to know what happened to little Phoenix. They want to know why an incompetent minister is still in charge of Family Services. They want to know when this Premier will be accountable for the lack of action, the incompetence and utter failure provided by his hand-picked Cabinet.

I ask the Premier to do the right thing today. Will he remove the Minister of Child and Family Services, that Member for Riel?

Mr. Doer: Judge Ted Hughes in British Columbia, the member opposite uses British Columbia as his take-off point for his question, had just stated this last week that B.C. needs to put an Aboriginal face on its child protection system in a—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue. I would ask members not to interrupt.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Justice Hughes has also stated that the report concludes that budget costs and constant changes stretched the child welfare. I would point out in Manitoba, and he goes on to make a number of other recommendations, there has been a 70 percent increase in the Child Protection Branch. I would point out in Manitoba, whereas in the past there were cutbacks to foster parent programs, we have enhanced those programs three times. Now no system—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have said that, with the circumstances with this young child and the tragic circumstances, we will be accountable. There will be a review of this specific case by independent officers of this Legislature. There will be a review of the overall case management, and, yes, we have said after the Chief Medical Examiner has reviewed this case that we would be open to, and I would be open to, a judicial inquiry. That is the same language I used on the Driskell case. I said that when the process was completed we would be open to a judicial inquiry. There is a judicial inquiry going on Driskell today. We are accountable.

Minister of Family Services Resignation Request

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): This Minister of Family Services inaction has never been so blatant as when she refused to account for all the children in care and those who were released from care. Fortunately, the authorities have decided it is best to check on the children. It is no wonder why we have called for this minister to resign. She does not understand her role and she does not accept her responsibility. In fact, she is an obstacle to the protection of children in Manitoba.

Will she resign today?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, within a week of learning of the tragic incident, I called for two reviews. One was the external review which will be looking at the opening, closing, transmittal and caseloads. Now members opposite did their best to

discredit this. They did their best to discredit the individuals, the Children's Advocate, the Ombudsperson and the head of psychology at MATC.

I called for a second review, a section 4 review, that same day which would look into not only the case that has been of concern lately to all Manitobans but, also, the deaths over the last two years to see if there is something we can learn. This is how we get to the answers. This is how we find the recommendations to make changes—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:10)

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, clearly this Minister of Family Services does not understand that as the head of her department she is responsible for its direction. She has shown Manitobans unequivocally that she cannot perform her role. She refused to account for the children in care and those released from care. Instead, she left those decisions to the authorities to make those decisions to look after the children. This minister is not only incompetent, she is an embarrassment. She must realize that she has failed in her duties and her responsibilities.

She must do the right thing, Mr. Speaker. She must resign. Will she resign today?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, while discussions were going on about the external review and the section 4 review, there were parallel discussions going on with the four authorities in the partnership that we struck in the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Child Welfare Initiative. We all agreed it was appropriate to take the time to work out a plan that we all felt would be most effective for the children in care, to review the open cases and to review the closed cases as well. This is the plan that was announced by the authorities acknowledging my support for it last week. This is the way this government will work with our partners around the best interests of the children of Manitoba.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind everyone that it was the authorities who made the decision to account for the children who are in care and those that left care. It was not the minister. She did not do her job. Manitobans are outraged that this minister continues to believe that she can manage her department when others believe she cannot.

Kim Edwards, Phoenix Sinclair's foster mother and guardian angel, is in the gallery today. She feels this minister cannot do her job. She is here today with a petition with over 300 signatures on it, with other people who believe this minister cannot do her job.

Will this minister listen to Kim Edwards today and to those over 300 people who signed that petition? Will she today resign?

Ms. Melnick: In a time of such a tragic incident, it is very important that we focus on finding out what happened and what the recommendations will be to make things better for the children in Manitoba. We have had members opposite heckling from across the way. We have had a concern today about a prop in the House.

I think it is very important that we respect the grief of everyone who was involved in this. The grief is genuine. The best way we can respect the incident that has happened is to find out what happened in a serious way, not in a way of props, look at the recommendations as they come in and to make the changes we believe will greatly reduce the chances of this happening again.

St. Adolphe Personal Care Home Residents' Safety

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, Manitoba Health made an unprecedented decision to relocate 41 frail and ailing Level 3 and 4 residents from St. Adolphe Personal Care Home. Even though some residents are being moved nearly 200 kilometres, the families and residents were not given any notice of the move. Some families are extremely concerned that the move could harm or even lead to the death of their loved ones.

Can the Minister of Health explain why the residents and their families were not given any notice of this unprecedented relocation?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the first duty of any minister who has the care of vulnerable people, as my colleague has shown in her actions, is to take action that is appropriate to the health and safety of vulnerable people in our health care system.

When I received information last week of a preliminary fire inspection report that indicated there were some 32 infractions of the fire code, and when I received information that of the 26 standards that we expect homes to adhere to, only eight were found to

be partially met, nine were met and the remainder were not met to any extent, I did not believe that I had any choice than to bring to the attention of both the owner and the citizens involved with the care of their families the risk to the health of the residents of the St. Adolphe Care Home.

Mrs. Stefanson: So you bring it to their attention but you give them absolutely no notification of the fact that they are going to move their residents out, the residents and their families. The community of St. Adolphe, the staff and management of the personal care home are absolutely outraged by their lack of input into this minister's decision to take frail and ailing residents from their home.

It is no secret that this government does not believe in co-operating with the private sector to deliver health care services in our province, Mr. Speaker. Why is this minister choosing to uproot the residents? Is he once again, as we have seen so many times in the past from this Minister of Health, allowing his ideology to get before the best interests of patients?

Mr. Sale: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing we do not do is play politics with the risk to seniors' lives in personal care homes. The owner of this home was given an opportunity two years ago to comply with a request to install smoke detectors in every bedroom. He did not do so. He knows there is to be an annual inspection of the sprinkler system. He did not have an annual inspection of the sprinkler system. He knows you do not block egress doors. Some doors are blocked.

The Public Trustee has acted in the safety interests of their clients. I believe the vulnerable citizens deserve the same from their families.

Mrs. Stefanson: The only thing that this government and this minister refuse to do is consult with the various stakeholders who are involved in this. The only people they consult with is their own government department.

Mr. Speaker, families and residents in the community do not want to move. The staff do not; they want to stay and work. The owners are willing to fulfill their responsibilities. They have stated that time and time again. The Minister of Health is playing politics with the lives of these seniors. He has shown that he is willing to risk their lives to preserve his ideological belief that the private sector should not be involved in the delivery of health care services.

Will the Minister of Health admit that these patients are being moved because his government wants to shut down this personal care home? Will he admit that this once again is putting ideology ahead of what is in the best interests of Manitobans?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, I remember impassioned remarks about red flags. I received a report from the Fire Commissioner that says, among other things, all of the deficiencies listed must be addressed in order to protect the life safety, not just the well-being or the comfort, but the life safety of 41 vulnerable Manitobans.

When I received this report, which I am prepared to table, I had no option but to take action. We have offered placements for every single resident. The Public Trustee has placements for every one of their residents. We have given the orders through the Fire Commissioner, the orders to the owner to comply with the very serious deficiencies that have to be remedied, Mr. Speaker.

The question of this owner not ever having been willing to sign a service purchase agreement has not been discussed either, Mr. Speaker. For three years, he has refused to sign a service purchase agreement.

* (14:20)

St. Adolphe Personal Care Home Residents' Safety

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, families are concerned about transporting vulnerable loved ones from the St. Adolphe nursing home. They have a right to voice those concerns and the minister should not dismiss them. Manitoba Health staff confirmed this morning that the operators of the facility were willing to co-operate. They also confirmed that the individual violations were minor and would be easily addressed.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Lemieux). Why did the Minister of Government Services not work with the families who raised concerns to have them addressed before we reached this stage?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the heart of any fire safety system is the enunciator panel. That is where all the fire alarms feed into. The fire alarm enunciator panel is tagged "uncertifiable" in that home. The sprinkler system requires an annual test. The last test was in 2003. The fire pump used to pressurize the system, last inspection, 2004.

Range hood fires in the kitchen, last inspection, 2004.

These are not minor infractions, Mr. Speaker. These are life safety issues, as the Fire Commissioner indicated.

Mr. Goertzen: Representatives in the minister's department said that none of these violations on their own were significant enough to take action. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, there should have been proactive work done by the Minister of Government Services to ensure that we did not get to this point with these families. The Minister of Government Services, he stands in this House and he talks glibly about moving bird baths, but when it comes to vulnerable older people in his own area, the area that he represents, he does not ensure these processes are in place to avoid this.

Why did the Minister of Government Services not stand up earlier and take proactive action so that he would not have had to get into this position, Mr. Speaker? Why did he not stand up for the residents in his own riding?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, the preliminary inspection report is dated last week in terms of when we received it. We received this report this morning in detail from the Fire Commissioner's office at our request because of the severity of the infractions.

Two emergency exit stairwells located in the south and west ends of the building require installation of a sprinkler system. The heat detectors need to be changed to smoke detectors so people do not die from smoke inhalation if there is a small fire. Emergency lighting, on and on and on in terms of infractions that this owner knew about and could have remedied long since.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Fire Commissioner said that the infractions individually would not have simply caused the problem, that they were co-operative and that they could have worked with the operators of the facility. I think the real issue here is that the Minister of Government Services has not been working on this issue, has not been addressing the issue and working proactively to ensure that we did not reach this point. He is clearly unwilling to stand up in this House today and talk about his own—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader, on a point of order?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order?

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Ashton: Question Period is to ascertain information by asking questions of government within the administrative competence of ministers. This is a privately-owned facility. The Minister of Health does have jurisdiction in terms of the care of patients. It is very obvious that members opposite have a problem with an NDP member south of Highway 1.

This is about cheap politics, Mr. Speaker. It is not about an issue that should be asked in this House. If the member has questions for the Minister of Health, he should ask them but not try and play this cheap political game when the Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) is doing a very good job representing his constituents.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Steinbach, on the same point of order?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I refer to *Beauchesne's* 409, section (6): "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government." Clearly that is recognized.

I also refer to the Government Services Web site which indicates that they are responsible for government buildings and properties which these individuals are going to be moving to. Clearly these individuals in St. Adolphe have to be moving somewhere under the purview of Government Services.

I say, Mr. Speaker, if the minister does not want to answer the question, he does not have to answer the question, but he is going to have to answer to his residents why he would not stand up for them when they needed him to.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have heard enough to make a ruling on this point of order.

On the point of order raised by the honourable Deputy Government House Leader, he does not have

a point of order. Forty-five seconds was negotiated amongst all members, and forty-five seconds was used for the preamble, also enough time to put the questions. We have always allowed a lot of leeway in the preambles. So the honourable member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, to continue.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, the patients' rooms require the installation of smoke detectors, but this is one that just absolutely boggles my mind. The facility is required to develop an emergency plan, no emergency plan in this facility for an evacuation of people in the event of a fire or other emergency.

The flame-spread rating on the ramp construction that is used for evacuation is too high. In other words, the very exit they might use in a fire may burn because the flame-spread rating is so low. I am concerned about the life safety of these residents, Mr. Speaker. I would assume that those representing southern Manitoba would be equally concerned about the life safety of the citizens of their area of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Steinbach, on a new question?

An Honourable Member: No.

Crocus Investment Fund Superfund Concept

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, on March 22 of this year, the Minister of Industry said in this House: "Once again there was no movement to create a superfund." I am quoting here. There is no superfund.

I would never accuse him of deliberately misleading this House, but I do want to ask: Why did he mislead this House about the development of a memorandum, signed by the Minister of Industry, the president of Manitoba Government Employees Union, Mr. Peter Olfert, and that agreement says: Utilizing a significant portion of the employers' pension payments for superfund purposes.

Why did he mislead this House?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should understand that our government did not put Crocus in charge of any subfunds or funds. Unlike the former Conservative

government in which you were a Cabinet minister, we did not put Mr. Umlah in charge of the Science and Technology Fund. The former Conservative government did.

What we did was we did not create a superfund. We did not put Crocus in charge of any subfunds. We did not act. That is actually what I said. We did not create a subfund. We did not create a pool of investments that Crocus was in charge of. It is entirely consistent, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, that is a blatant avoidance of the question because on March 22 of this year, the Minister of Finance jumped up in defence of the Minister of Industry, and when he was asked about the superfund using money from the employers' pension plan, he responded: That story is *Alice in Wonderland*. He is wrong. Well, I like a fairy tale, Mr. Minister of Finance, but I do not think I like the way you are telling it.

Mr. Speaker, president of the MGEU, Mr. Peter Olfert, and the Minister of Industry, the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith) signed an agreement. It says in part: Utilizing a significant portion of the employers' pension payments for superfund purposes.

Did this Minister of Finance know that Crocus was failing? Is that why he backed out of this agreement?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): The notion of a superfund was first brought forward in '94 by the Manitoba task force on capital markets. It is an idea that had been circulating for a number of years in the Manitoba community. This government decided not to proceed with it. That is why it is an *Alice in Wonderland* tale. We decided that that was not an appropriate use of the superannuation fund which itself is a superfund because it had a 14 percent return last year.

*(14:30)

Mr. Cummings: Again, Mr. Speaker, this identifies why there needs to be an inquiry into the Crocus Fund. You just saw two non-answers from ministers who were deeply involved in the activities.

Mr. Speaker, in 2004, the Minister of Finance cannot deny that he would or would not have known about this. As Minister of Finance, undeniably he would be privy to this kind of information and would have this much financial significance within government. Does he agree with the agreement that

was drawn up between the Minister of Industry of the day, the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith), and Mr. Peter Olfert, the president of the Manitoba Government Employees Union, which says they would establish a special fund utilizing a significant portion of the employers' pension payments for superfund purposes?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we obviously did not agree with it. We did not proceed with it. The member is asking for an inquiry into something that did not happen. That is why it is *Alice in Wonderland*. You do not have inquiries into things that did not happen. No superfund was proceeded with. The government did not agree to establish a superfund. All of those hypothetical questions, actually you are not really even allowed under the rules to a hypothetical question. There was no superfund, we did not act on a superfund and it did not happen. The Auditor General's report clearly states that we did not proceed with the superfund. We can confirm that again today.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Ste. Rose, on a new question?

Mr. Cummings: On a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Ste. Rose, on a point of order.

Mr. Cummings: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table this agreement for the Minister of Finance's information.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. The document has been tabled. The honourable member does not have a point of order.

Agriculture Issues Government Accountability

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Last week, during the farm rally, we heard a plea from our Manitoba farm families. Farm incomes have plummeted over the past several years to conditions that rival the Great Depression. What does the minister do? She stands there and blames our federal government for the crisis.

Mr. Speaker, may I remind the minister that two years ago we told her the CAIS program was seriously flawed and should be fixed. This minister could have negotiated a fair deal with our farm families just a few weeks ago at the ministerial

conference, but, no, she got up and abandoned our producers.

Why will this minister not stand up for our farm families here in Manitoba?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, for the member to raise this important issue and, indeed, farm families are facing very serious challenges and there are issues with regard to the CAIS program. That is why we have said to the federal minister that there are many amendments that should be made to the CAIS program to make it more user friendly, to make it bankable so that money will flow faster to the producers.

We have asked for those changes. The federal minister says he wants to bring in a new program. If he wants to bring in a new program, he should share it with us. He has not shared that program with us, and we have made suggestions of many amendments.

Mr. Eichler: This minister was at the table three weeks ago. Where was she negotiating then, Mr. Speaker? The federal government, the Keystone Ag Producers, the National Farmers Union and many other farm organizations have recognized this problem for years as well.

Well, was the First Minister (Mr. Doer) willing to address those suffering severe economic burdens? No. He chose to hide indoors with school children singing in the hallways in the Legislature. Meanwhile, the recital occurring outside was a different tune urging this government to step up to the plate. While our province's primary industry is in a time of crisis, why does this government continue to ignore our farm families?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member to look at the budget that we have put forward and debate those issues then. Under CAIS we have doubled, we have gone from \$52 million to \$103 million into the CAIS program. We have had significant payouts in crop insurance. There are serious challenges facing the grains and oilseed sector and those challenges are world challenges, and they are there because countries like the United States and the European Union at the federal level are putting in tremendous amounts of money that are resulting in very low grain prices.

I would ask the member opposite to ask his federal counterpart, whom he knows, to see whether they are going to treat Canadian farmers the way—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: Our Minister of Agriculture has failed our Manitoba farm families in a time of crisis. Farmers are unsure what to plant, and worse yet the banks are uneasy or unwilling to finance another bad year. The federal government has predicted farm income for 2006 to be as low as \$203 million, a 67 percent decline from the previous year. This government has used the federal agriculture support dollars paid out to Manitoba farmers and kept the \$42 million it saved stuffed in its mattress rather than ensuring it went to those who desperately needed it.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture today commit to paying out the \$42 million that they owe our farm families?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I will stand beside the record of this government, my Cabinet colleagues and my caucus colleagues for the support that they have put for the agriculture industry in this province.

Our producers have gone through some very difficult challenges. The BSE crisis is one that has hit producers very hard and the low grain prices is one that is hurting our producers as well. I say to the member opposite that we do have to make changes in this industry and we are working to make changes in this industry, but we need a federal government that is going to take on the U.S. and the European Union to ensure that the playing field is level, whether that be at the WTO. If negotiations—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Minister of Family Services Resignation Request

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, the murder of baby Phoenix touched the hearts of all Manitobans. In fact, what we have witnessed over the last number of weeks is different Manitobans have responded in many different ways. As I say, this incident has touched so many lives. We all want to be able to do what we can in terms of trying to ensure that these sorts of things never happen again or at least are minimized in our province. The Leader of the Liberal Party has, in his own way, tried to send a very sincere, genuine message earlier this afternoon and believes fundamentally that it is time that this minister be relieved of her responsibilities.

The question that I have for the minister or for the Premier is: Why will he not release the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) of her responsibilities today?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Deputy Premier): If the members opposite would look at the steps that have been taken, the steps that this Minister of Family Services has taken since this terrible situation, I would say that we will all stand proudly beside the actions she has taken. There have been recommendations, there have been committees put in place and there are reviews that are going on.

I would ask the member opposite to be patient and let us get the results of this review rather than playing politics and bringing candles into the House and trying to grandstand. It is a shame that members opposite would not really take seriously this issue and work with the minister and the committees that we have put in place instead of playing politics.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier says, if we look seriously. We do need to look seriously. We are not talking about one or two or three or four or five and so on and so on deaths, homicides, children in the province that have been killed or murdered. What we are talking about are 31 children. That is unacceptable. Yes, unfortunate things will happen at times in the province which are disgusting and no one will support, but the degree in which it has been happening in that department is not acceptable. There is a need for change and that change has to take place in order to restore confidence.

My question is: Will the Deputy Premier talk with the Premier and get rid of that minister?

Ms. Wowchuk: Again, the member opposite is raising rhetoric in the House when there is a group of people who are working very seriously to address the challenges that are there. A death of a child is a very serious situation, and that is why the Minister of Family Services very quickly put in place a very competent team to look at all of the issues that are facing this department. I would ask the member opposite to be patient. The minister is doing a good job, and I would ask the member not to play politics and bring candles into the House and really just not pay any contribution to this issue by doing these kinds of things and I would say to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

*(14:40)

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the government is asking for us to be patient. We have gone beyond being patient in the province of Manitoba. Too many children have died and to say be patient, Madam Minister, we need action. We want a government

that is going to be proactive in protecting the interests of our children. That is what we want. Yes, we have run out of patience with this government and yes, the leader of my party feels passionate about this issue and that is why he brought in the candle. This government needs to do what is morally right on this issue, and it is time that the Minister of Family Services leaves her portfolio in order to ensure that there is a higher sense of confidence within this department.

We ask that the minister do the honourable thing and step down and resign from her position today.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite says that they are looking for action. I would ask the member opposite to be factual in the comments that he is making because, in fact, he is not being factual.

I want to say to this House that I have an awful lot of confidence in the department, the people that are doing the review and in the minister, in the actions she has taken. But I can tell the member opposite that when his leader calls the people that have been put in place to do this review "minions," he is not helping the situation at all. I would say I will stand beside this minister and the work she has done because she is working in the best interests of children in this province. Let the people do their work.

Fisher River Watershed Flood Prevention Action

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Spring is here and once again the flooding season is upon us. One of the chronic flood-prone areas in my constituency is the Fisher River Watershed, which severely impacts the downstream communities of Peguis and Fisher River.

We know what the previous government under Gary Filmon did in this area; absolutely nothing. Can the Minister of Water Stewardship inform the House as to the actions that this government has taken to address this serious issue?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): First of all, we did something that members opposite did not do; we visited Fisher River and Peguis. I realize, Mr. Speaker, it was criticized by the opposition critic. I admit it is out of cell phone area, but I want to make a point that the NDP vision for this province extends beyond cell phone coverage. I think it is only the Tories that see

somehow that only the areas with cell phone coverage are worth visiting.

Not only did we visit, Mr. Speaker, we have signed a federal-provincial agreement that is looking at lidar surveying. We have river crossing upgradings and lateral floodgates in the Fisher River. We care about the people of Fisher River and Peguis. This government is working in partnership with the federal government and First Nations to make things better for those two communities.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

* * *

Mr. Ashton: I wonder if there might be leave to revert to ministerial statements, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is the honourable member asking leave to revert to ministerial statements? Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If members wish to have a conversation, please use the loge.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flood Conditions

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Water Stewardship, on a ministerial statement.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Before reading my statement, I would also like to table a copy of the flood report for Manitoba for all members of the Legislature, knowing that there is a great deal of concern about spring flooding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a ministerial statement and update the House regarding Manitoba's flood situation at this time, and I certainly thank members opposite for the leave to do this so they are able to have the updated flood report available for members along with the statement.

Mr. Speaker, every year Manitobans must prepare for the potential of rising river waters, for mitigating the threat of flooding. The Province begins its planning preparation in February with the release of an outlook which is based upon assessment of snow coverage and fall soil moisture levels. We plan flood mitigation strategies in consultation with municipalities based on existing

emergency plans. We have also been in contact with our federal ministerial counterparts to keep them informed and aware of any potential for their assistance in this spring flood.

On March 24 an updated spring flooding outlook for Manitoba was released which outlined the potential for flooding in many areas of southern Manitoba. This potential was due mainly to heavy snowfall that we received early in March. I would like to table today's flood update, Mr. Speaker, which is being done at this moment. These comprehensive daily forecasts are used in partnership with other organizations and municipalities to ensure that mitigative measures are in place in a timely manner.

The 2006 spring flood, at this point, is similar to the 1996 flood and has the potential to be the fifth largest flood of this past century. Today, Manitobans are protected by the provincial flood control system, and this includes such areas as the Red River Floodway, the Portage Diversion, the Shellmouth Reservoir and the Pasquia Polder Project.

Since 1997, I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that community ring dikes at Morris, Letellier, St. Jean, Dominion City, Brunkild, St. Adolphe, Rosenort and Emerson were raised by four feet. These dikes now have permanent flood protection from the 1997 plus two feet level and internal drainage systems to deal with runoff within the dikes.

In the post-1997 Canada-Manitoba Partnership Agreement on Red River Valley Flood Protection, which is a \$130-million agreement, this included \$110 million which was spent on flood protection improvements for Red River communities and residences. This included, in 1998, designated flood area legislation amendments, all future developments to be compliant with 1997 plus two feet level; in 2002, the MIKE 11 hydrodynamic flood routing model was developed; 2004, The Manitoba Floodway Authority Act; 2004, The Red River Floodway Act; and, of course, most recently, the Amphibex ice breaker. In fact, the ice breaker is being used to mitigate the impacts of ice-jamming as we speak.

We have also taken precautionary measures. The office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Manitoba advises Manitobans on the use of water from wells or other sources, that they may be affected by flooding. We as a government have waived the fee for testing of private well owners

affected by flooding so that confidence in water quality can be maintained for homeowners.

We are also informing the public of the need for safety when navigating flood water and the related extreme increase in navigational hazards. Mr. Speaker, having seen, if I could just add, people using Sea-Doos on the Red River in the St. Jean area on Sunday, I wish people would heed the warning. That is extremely dangerous and not recommended behaviour.

Today, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and opposition leaders toured flood-affected areas. I would like to acknowledge the many members who have toured flood-affected areas. I know there are other members of the House, but the MLA for the Interlake and I toured the Interlake area, meeting with communities in the Fisher River, Peguis, Arborg, the R.M. of Bifrost. The Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) toured around Lake Winnipeg including the R.M. of St. Andrews and Breezy Point. I also visited Brandon on Sunday. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade (Mr. Smith) was in Portage, toured the Assiniboine River and Portage Diversion and met with the mayor and reeve. The Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) has toured areas including Rorketon, the R.M. of Lawrence, R.M. of Gilbert Plains, R.M. of Grandview, Roblin, Ochre River and Dauphin.

We are also very pleased with the preparedness of the City of Winnipeg, as I was able to witness firsthand with the federal minister, Minister Toews, Mayor Katz and the MLA for St. Norbert and, in fact, attended various homes in the south of the city and St. Norbert. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) and MLA for Burrows observed the same on Scotia Street. The Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) was at Sturgeon Creek meeting with residents. The MLA for Fort Garry was at the Winnipeg Canoe Club. The Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald) drove from Emerson to Winnipeg to witness the flood-affected areas. The Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) and I have either had the opportunity to observe directly or contact individuals in the Red River Valley in communities such as St. Adolphe, Ste. Agathe, Morris, St. Pierre, La Broquerie, Grande Pointe, Lorette and Emerson, and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin) has toured The Pas region.

* (14:50)

I would like to thank Manitoba Water Stewardship, Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization and the Manitoba Transportation and Government Services Department for leading a coordinated effort, and I continue to work very closely with municipalities and First Nations, Mr. Speaker, to provide ongoing information, support and resources as needed on a daily basis.

Manitoba Water Stewardship staff continue to monitor water levels across the province. Again, thank you to the municipal and provincial staff who have been working, and I might add, around the clock, diligently throughout the spring and once again, thanks to members of this House for giving me leave to be able to read this very important statement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for the résumé that he has provided for this House today in regard to the flooding and flood events that are going on in Manitoba today.

I think it is important to note that when one looks at the history of flooding in the province of Manitoba and actions that previous governments have taken, and I look at the actions taken in 1997, and when you compare them with the actions taken today by this government, one must realize how absolutely inadequately prepared this government was to deal with the Red River flood.

I will give you some examples, Mr. Speaker. When one first heard that there might be a flood event in the Red River Valley, one need only tune in to KFGO in Fargo and realize what the significance of the flood might be because they were just on a daily basis or an hourly basis giving updates to what the flood in Fargo was going to be. Everybody in this province knows, at least those living in the southern part of the province, when Fargo has a flood event, we in Manitoba will experience, at some point in the near future, a flood event.

Secondly, I want to say that in 1997, after the flood event of 1997, there was an agreement struck between North Dakota and Minnesota that would ensure that communications would be done on a regular basis in case of the event of another flood. That, I would suppose, should have happened this year. I wonder, though, whether the Premier (Mr. Doer) and/or the minister had their communications devices turned off or whether maybe they do not watch TV or listen to radios because certainly they

would have known that we would have a significant flood event.

I want to congratulate the municipalities for the work that they have done in virtually every community in Manitoba that might experience a flood event. They were prepared. They had their emergency management processes in place. However, I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that the minister was sadly nowhere in sight when we looked at the current flooding and flood event.

I want to also acknowledge the fact that there is currently a situation in southern Manitoba, north of Ste. Agathe and south of Winnipeg, where dikes have collapsed because of the high water levels we have retained in the Red River. In the Red River between Ste. Agathe and Winnipeg, the dikes collapsed and those people have begged this Province to repair those dikes and fix them so they would not be in danger.

Mr. Speaker, I challenge you to go out to two miles north of Ste. Agathe and look at those dikes, and they have fallen into the river and those properties are exposed and this Province has refused to participate in the repair of those dikes. Here they say in their document that they have taken adequate measures. I want to also say that the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald) drove from Emerson to Winnipeg. Wow. The Member for Emerson drives it twice a day.

The Member for Emerson also recognizes that we had a huge snow pack in the Red River Valley and I understand, Mr. Speaker, from information that I have received—I want to say that the information I have received is that there were no snow pack measurements done this winter, and therefore this minister and his government were simply not aware of how deep the snow pack was from here to Emerson. I would suggest that next time they go, they at least switch their lights on that they are able to see the amount of snow.

Maybe the lights should go on all across that government on that side. Maybe all of the ministers might want to switch their lights on and just take a look at what is needed and how badly misinformed they kept the people of Manitoba and how badly they are prepared, how inadequately the Province of Manitoba is prepared to handle this flood event. Should this have been a major event, then we would have very significant damage. I would suggest to the minister that he might well want to take a trip out to

St. Jean with me today and look at what is happening at St. Jean to the bridges—

An Honourable Member: I was there yesterday. Where were you? Where were you yesterday? I was there yesterday.

Mr. Penner: Well, Mr. Speaker, he asked: Where were you yesterday? I was in St. Jean yesterday. I was in Morris yesterday. I was in Emerson yesterday and I wonder where he was.

I would like to know whether the minister ordered the backhoes onto the bridge at Emerson to try and poke the elm trees under the bridge. There were two backhoes there since Wednesday. The water was so high the debris is piled up six feet high on the south side of the bridge. I think that is clearly an indication that this minister has been nowhere close and has given no clear direction to his department as to action that needed to be taken.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you could canvass the House to see if I would have leave just to respond to the ministerial statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Mr. Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to discuss this particular issue with my leader earlier today and, first and foremost, I would express appreciation on his part for the government taking into consideration that he should be involved in the flight. I understand that they actually went on a helicopter flight just to get a better sense of the degree to which the water is covering our province in certain areas. I know he appreciated that gesture.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think that through floods from the past we tend to learn things and set up dikes and so forth that have really helped us to go through this particular one. But all I really would like to do is just pay a special tribute to the many, many volunteers that have in fact been out there doing some flood protection for our province and also to those dedicated civil servants who have also been doing an outstanding job making sure that

any sort of flood potential is minimized in our province.

Thank you again for the opportunity to say a few words.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Non-Timber Forest Products

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I salute the efforts of creative and dedicated individuals in Lynn Lake and throughout the North for developing a non-timber forest products industry.

The growing non-timber forest products industry uses plant and animal materials such as wild mushrooms, tree sap, berries, flowers and medicinal herbs. These materials are used to produce food, cosmetics and medicinal and decorative products. Northern products such as lingonberry fruit leather, birch wine, birch syrup and mint tea are allowing people across the world to sample the unique flavours of our northern forests.

Mr. Speaker, the new industry can offer sustainable economic growth to many northern Manitoba communities. It diversifies the northern economy which for a long time has been dominated by mining and forestry. The non-timber forest products industry is especially helpful for the economies of small isolated northern communities.

Progressive communities such as Lynn Lake, in partnership with government initiatives such as the Food Development Centre and the Northern Forest Diversification Centre, are bringing sustainable resource development and economic growth to the North.

Mr. Speaker, this emerging industry will not solve all of the economic and social problems affecting our northern communities. However, it offers solutions to some of these problems by providing Aboriginal economic development, food security and resource and land use management. With the support of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, the Land of Little Sticks Boreal Harvesters Association based in Lynn Lake will be able to develop a regionally focussed non-timber forest products incubator centre. This will go a long way towards positioning Lynn Lake and the region as the hub of the non-timber forest products industry.

I salute Mark Matiassek, the community economic development officer in Lynn Lake, the mayor and council and all of the creative and

energetic northerners who are working to develop this promising young industry. Thank you.

Agriculture Income Crisis

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Thank you for the opportunity to speak for a couple of minutes on the very serious current agriculture income crisis we have in Manitoba.

* (15:00)

I think last week, Mr. Speaker, it was really brought to the front when we had hundreds of Manitoba farmers show up in front of the Legislature grounds. It really shows the level of frustration that is out there in our farm community. Quite frankly, not only are farmers frustrated, but this crisis is being found throughout the entire province in our rural communities.

Clearly the issue here really is a decline in revenue that our farm communities are facing. We have also seen in conjunction with that a very high increase in expenses that farmers are facing. So, in fact, the federal government has indicated that this year alone we could have a 67 percent decrease in our income across the farm community in Manitoba. At the heels of this, Mr. Speaker, is the last three years we have had dramatic decreases in farm income. So when you talk about a 67 percent decrease, it just really shows the stress level that is out there this year.

We have seen a lot of auction sales out there this spring and, really, who is going to be left to run these family farms, Mr. Speaker? I think it is time that this government steps up to the plate and realizes the serious issue we have in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Agriculture Services Corporation, the former crop insurance program, of course, the coverages have really decreased there. We have a decrease in the bushel rates, tonnages per acre that are now allowed and, of course, the decrease in the farm prices. We have seen a real loss in the actual revenue that people can expect from the crop insurance program, so our input costs are hardly going to be covered by the crop insurance program.

Second of all, the government always hangs their hat on the CAIS program. We know the horror stories that are out there in the CAIS program, Mr. Speaker, a two-year lag in trying to get any funding out of there. It is not a program that is bankable. The federal Minister of Agriculture has said to the provinces: Step up to the plate, the ball is in your

court, bring some ideas forward, help our rural producers in Manitoba. Thank you very much.

Assiniboine Credit Union

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of an outstanding Manitoba company, the Assiniboine Credit Union.

For over half a century this credit union has well served the interests and needs of all Manitobans. Created in the 1940s, the Assiniboine Credit Union has shown itself to be both a unique financial institution and a strong community player. Transcending the usual nostrums of corporate responsibility, this credit union has struck a rare and unique blend between the interests of the community and the interests of its members.

Their secret is simple, Mr. Speaker. The Assiniboine Credit Union recognizes that their achievements are rooted in the success of the wider community. The work of this credit union has been acknowledged by numerous institutions and organizations. *Maclean's* magazine named Assiniboine Credit Union one of the top 100 employers in Canada for 2006, and the Ethical Funds Company awarded it the 2005 Credit Union Sustainability Award for investing in a socially responsible manner.

I am proud to count myself as one of the over 57,000 members. The members have combined assets worth over a billion dollars, proving the Assiniboine Credit Union has demonstrated how a good financial and a commitment to social development work hand in hand.

The Fort Richmond branch of the Assiniboine Credit Union is an excellent example of a financial institution that exemplifies banking with the heart.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in saluting a Manitoba success story. The presence of the Assiniboine Credit Union has enriched our province's economic and community life. Most importantly, they have fulfilled their founding principle: Not for profit, not for charity, but for service. Manitobans have been well served. Thank you.

Phoenix Sinclair

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Last month, Manitobans learned of the tragic story of Phoenix Sinclair, a five-year-old girl with a long history of involvement with Manitoba's Child and Family

Services, who went missing in June 2005 and remained unnoticed until her death was reported to authorities this March. Given the troubling circumstances surrounding this child's death and the questions of whether more children at risk may have fallen through the cracks, you have to wonder why it took the Department of Family Services almost four weeks before it announced it would revisit the case files of all the children who have not had recent contact with CFS.

Was the minister reluctant to move because she had initially denied the official opposition's repeated requests for immediate review of all CFS case files? In fact, anyone with a little common sense would have questioned why an eight-year-old boy chose to hang himself just three days before returning to his family, how a 23-month-old disabled child could spend 18 months of his life in good health while in foster care only to die bruised and neglected just five months after being returned to his parents and why a five-year-old girl known to CFS could vanish and go unnoticed in death for nine months.

Since taking power, the NDP government has received warnings from three provincial judges, the provincial Auditor General, the Manitoba Child Advocate, the Chief Medical Examiner, the Manitoba Government Employees Union and front-line social workers.

So why is it that everyone but the government recognized the red flags in CFS? Why is the Premier (Mr. Doer) refusing to call a public inquiry into the death of Phoenix Sinclair and the child welfare system that failed her? Is it not the minister's responsibility to ensure that standards are maintained throughout CFS, that appropriate funding is provided and that all funds are used appropriately? When something goes wrong, it is the minister's responsibility to immediately assess the situation and fully address the problem. Unfortunately, unlike most government departments, ignoring a problem in the Department of Family Services can have grave human consequences. Thank you.

Community Newspapers Day

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, a year ago the House adopted a resolution making April 17 Community Newspapers Day in Manitoba. In celebration of this day, I rise to salute the good work that is done every day by community newspapers across the province.

Community newspapers perform an invaluable service to our province. They keep Manitobans informed of local news, provide advertising space to local businesses and community groups and are an important forum for discussion and debate.

This year, the Manitoba Community Newspapers Association celebrates its 86th year. This organization represents 46 community newspapers with a combined weekly circulation of over 350,000 households and over 514,000 readers. Over the course of its long history, this organization has adapted successfully and continues to grow. This year, MCNA introduced new technologies to make its member newspapers more competitive and accessible to advertisers nationwide.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the community newspaper that services my constituency, *The Interlake Spectator*. The *Spectator* performs an exceptional service keeping Interlake residents informed of local issues and events. It is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public.

I have developed a good relationship with reporters such as Cindy McKay and editorial staff such as Jim Mosher, and I am grateful to the *Spectator* for giving me the opportunity to express my views and keep the constituents informed on what is happening in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members, I thank the MCNA and its member newspapers for their service to Manitoba. They are an integral part of communities across the province. I urge all members to celebrate April 17 by lending further support to their local community newspaper. Thank you.

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 regular scheduled business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, the dire state of Manitoba's agriculture economy, its impact on the lives of farm families, rural communities and the economy of our province as a whole and the provincial government's abdication of responsibility and commitment to one of the largest economic sectors in our province.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I recognize 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 are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

*(15:10)

As stated in *Beauchesne's* 390, "urgency" in this context means the urgency of the 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, or 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: I rise this afternoon to seek leave of the House to set aside the regular schedule of business of the Assembly to deal with the matter that is of urgent and 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 that the matter is of an urgent nature. The compounding challenges of production and trade that farmers and producers have faced in previous years have led to the crisis they are now experiencing. The lack of funding has created precarious financial situations for many producers and families. The lack of leadership we have seen from this Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has added only to their struggles.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government, the Minister of Agriculture, has asked the provincial ministers to scrap or immediately modify the CAIS program. This NDP minister has time and time, repeatedly, been asked to make these changes. However, the government has continually dragged its feet, and we are now seeing the results.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba crop receipts in 2005 dropped by \$500 million, the biggest financial hit in the entire country. The federal government predicts that our province's 2006 farm income could fall 67 percent to barely \$203 million, the lowest ever return. Additionally, the regulatory burdens imposed by the previous federal government and the current provincial government only leads to a loss of productivity, negative growth and the lack of competitiveness in the agri-food markets.

The timing of government assistance is also a problem. The previous federal government found itself hopelessly delayed in issuing payments to producers and farmers, but when the money finally arrived the complexity of the calculations attached the wrong values to farm operations. Farmers were forced to return portions of it to the government.

In Manitoba, in 2003, there were over 12,000 applications processed under the CAIS program. Less than half of them received a payment. Of those who did receive payment, 50 percent indicated that it was inadequate to address their challenges.

As the decline in the farming income continues that faced by producers even during the Great Depression, it becomes abundantly clear that the CAIS, as it currently exists under the programs, does not provide an effective long-term solution. Worse than the Great Depression. Our farmers are truly suffering out there. Farmers are suffering from inadequate income stabilization programs, unable to address disastrous situations. A calculation formula new to determine the provincial portion of the CAIS payment has allowed this government to hang on to \$42 million rather than distribute it to farmers who desperately need it for their survival. Mr. Speaker, \$42 million that should go to farmers is sitting in the provincial coffers. That is shameful.

The new federal government is following through on its promise to revise the CAIS program, make it easier for Canada's producers to get the assistance that they desperately need. We, on this side of the House, encourage the provincial government to follow suit by living up to its promises to support farmers, revitalize Manitoba's agricultural economy and preserve our rural heritage. Despite the alarming forecast and continued negative income for farmers by as much as \$37,000 per farm, the Doer government has not outlined an effective plan for moving our agricultural industry forward. Their solution is another loan program to assist farmers in making economic environmental improvements to their operations.

Mr. Speaker, farmers want incentives. They want to know that their government trusts them to make the right decisions when it comes to choices to the environmental stewardship. What they do not want are more loans to help them adapt to the ever-burdensome regulations at a time of severe, depressed income. During times like this, we need to see some leadership and immediate action from the government. During times like this, Manitoba

farmers need assurances. During times like this, producers in Manitoba need access to new opportunities in their industry. The government cannot view financial assistance for producers as a stopgap or measure or handout, but it must view this as an investment in their future and the future of agriculture in Manitoba.

Farmers do not want handouts. The agriculture industry cannot function on subsidies and loan programs alone. It must be allowed to evolve into new market opportunities for the industry.

We are pleased that the new federal government has promised to support efficient production planning and market-based returns to our producers. It has also pledged to seek improved market access for Canadian agricultural markets for products, especially in lieu of emerging markets. They have recognized the need for an effective program of research and development that would target these new opportunities throughout the world. This action shows vision for agriculture in Canada and serves as an excellent example to this NDP government on how to work with farmers and producers, how to assist them in a practical way that meets their current needs and provides leadership, future and vision for this industry.

This government needs to follow the lead of our new federal government in developing strategies for promoting value-added opportunities for producers, as well. The Manitoba government needs to work with farmers to create strategies that would shorten the distance between the farmer and the consumer. Whether the two methods of direct selling or on-farm processing, agriculture value-adding can help increase profit margins for the producer and, in turn, contribute to Manitoba's economy.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the state of farming in Manitoba is in desperate need. Debating this critical issue today is timely because of its recent rallies of farmers and producers from across Canada and the province as well. Furthermore, debating this issue is in the best interest of Manitobans, our farm families, farmers, producers. Rural and urban communities both are concerned about the impacts of the ongoing struggles they are facing and questioning the viability of farming within this great province of Manitoba. This industry affects all Manitoba citizens, whether it is in the country or in the cities. Agriculture is the linchpin of this province's economic health. We need all Manitobans to sit up

and take notice of what farming means to the province of Manitoba and Canada as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, there are very serious challenges facing Manitoba farmers and producers. It is imperative that the Legislative Assembly debate these challenges and provide workable solutions now so that the farmers and producers can maintain their operations, stabilize their operations and have a future in farming in Manitoba. As such, I argue in favour of proceeding with this MUPI today.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of our party on this matter of urgent public importance so put forth by the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind members opposite that we have probably one of the best opportunities available to us today to discuss this matter, in fact, any matter, and it is called the budget. I point out that the budget would allow the member opposite to stand in his place and speak at length. It would allow other members, including myself—I have been waiting weeks to give my comments on the budget. I know that fine lines develop over time, but I am ready and willing and anxious, so are all members of the government side of this House, to talk about the budget, and that is where you discuss matters such as this.

I suspect that there is another reason tactically why members opposite have decided to go in this way, because they know the budget is available. I guess, Mr. Speaker, I think that probably it has very much to do with the fact that—have you noticed what a difference three months make? I have never heard so much praise from members opposite about a federal government, not since the Mulroney government was in power. You know, the member opposite went out of his way, I do not know, 10, 11, 12 times about the new federal government, the new federal government, the new federal government.

* (15:20)

Mr. Speaker, you know, when the former Liberal government was in for 12 years, they could do no right as far as members opposite were concerned. Now the new Conservative government is in, they can do no wrong. They have not done anything yet, absolutely nothing in terms of agriculture. I think it was ironic the first day, the Throne Speech was there, and there were farmers protesting against who

in Ottawa? Against the new Conservative federal government.

What a difference a matter of weeks makes, Mr. Speaker. No mention of that. No mention of that by the opposition. This is no pun intended, but I am sure members opposite do not intend to be the farm team for the federal Conservative government because, you know what? They know that the real farm team is on this side of the House working for farmers, as we have done since 1999, not with this 180-degree turn kind of rhetoric we see from members opposite.

Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? It does not matter if it is a federal Liberal government or a federal Conservative government, even if there was a federal NDP government, this government would be speaking out for farmers.

Our tune does not change with one election, and before members opposite sing the "Hallelujah Chorus" for the Stephen Harper government—I still must admit I have some difficulty saying that phrase, Mr. Speaker—we will work with that government, but to suggest that somehow everything was bad a few months ago and everything is good now, farmers do not want that kind of rhetoric. What they want is real action, and our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has delivered it time after time after time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if they wanted to get into debate on the budget, they could talk about, not just the many initiatives in the Department of Agriculture, but how about the fact that it took an NDP government to reinstate funding for drainage. There is a significant increase in the budget for drainage. Members opposite in their '93 budget slashed the drainage budget in this province, slashed it, Mr. Speaker. It took an NDP government to reinstate funding for maintenance and also, indeed, for the construction of new drainage in this province.

It goes beyond that. The work we have done with conservation districts is very important to our farm community. We have nearly doubled the number of conservation districts in this province. Again, if members opposite had the temerity to actually debate the budget, they would have to deal with that, but, you know, I think I know why they put forward this, what we often call a MUPI. It is because they do not have to vote on it. You, Mr. Speaker, get to decide based on its merit, and I think one of the main reasons they do not want to debate this in the budget is because, at the end of the day, they are either going to have to vote for a budget that does more for rural Manitoba, does more for our

farm community than anything they ever did in the 11 years they were in government.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? I know their program, the Member for Lakeside's (Mr. Eichler) program where the federal government, it is like Liberal government bad, Conservative government good. Do you notice that, Mr. Speaker? Not one name—*[interjection]* Well, members opposite are applauding, so it is not too much of a secret. It is like they have this kind of knee-jerk reaction. If it is an NDP budget, it has got to be bad. It does not matter if there is more for the farm community. It does not matter if there is more for drainage.

Well, you know what? They may be stuck in that kind of knee-jerk mode, Mr. Speaker, but farmers expect better, and that is why we are really proud of the work that our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has done diligently since 1999, because we do not just put out rhetoric like members opposite. We do not go and immediately defend the federal Conservative government. We will be just as determined in working with the federal Conservative government as we were with the federal Liberal government.

I will just finish by saying members opposite wanted to debate important farm issues. They have the opportunity. It is called a budget and I sure hope, Mr. Speaker, that they will choose that option, no matter what your ruling on the MUPI is, because if they are really concerned about farmers, ringing the bells as they have done the last number of weeks with the exception of the last two weeks, that does not help farmers. That is not any sign of respect for our farm community.

They have a choice, Mr. Speaker. It is coming up later on and I hope they will choose to debate these important issues on the budget and then we will see where they vote on the provincial budget.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, may I ask for leave again just to put a few words on the record?

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the motion that has been presented in front of us now. In fact, I would ultimately suggest to you that all parties recognized the importance of agriculture

when the BSE crisis was there. In fact, our records will clearly show that there was a debate that occurred as a result of all political parties inside this Chamber being supportive of that debate.

What I see is again the opposition party is providing an avenue for members of this Chamber to be able to debate once again a critical issue by having an emergency debate, because quite often people will make reference to, well, budget debate or whatever debate. What we want to see is some focussed attention in regard to the farmers of our province and the plight that they are currently under, Mr. Speaker.

There are some very serious issues. Some would say the drainage issues, the crop insurance. You know, there are millions of dollars that was withheld from the province in terms of some of those CAIS payments, Mr. Speaker, from what I understand. I believe that by allowing for this debate to occur that we will provide the government to get on the record very clearly as to what they have been doing over the last couple of years. I think that there would be a great deal of benefit. *[interjection]*

Well, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) asks if I would ask agriculture questions. Mr. Speaker, there are many different issues that are facing the province, and I can assure many farmers have invested in the Crocus Fund. There is a great deal of concern that farmers have that go even beyond the farm, but I want to remain focussed just on the agricultural issues.

Mr. Speaker, when we had the BSE crisis, we were afforded the opportunity to get on the record and make some very strong statements, all sides of this House. Over the last year or year and a half or so, we have seen the government has actually dropped the ball in terms of addressing the issue of the cattle industry in our province, in a very clear and succinct way that they have done that. And one member says, well, tell us how. It is slaughter, you know. The opportunity that the government had to ensure that there was going to be slaughter production in Manitoba has been lost.

I do not want to say that I am an expert on agriculture, but I will acknowledge that inside this Chamber we have a great number of experts that deal, day in and day out, with agricultural issues. The minister herself has indicated that farmers are indeed facing a crisis and they are looking for leadership. I believe this is something which the Minister of Agriculture has said. Well, I would ultimately argue

that the Minister of Agriculture should then allow for the debate to occur. If she believes that there is a crisis, what does the Minister of Agriculture fear about this Chamber, just spending two hours, Mr. Speaker, two hours, 12, 14 speakers to be able to stand up and voice their concerns, including hers? If we recognized it in previous times, because I recognize that you are in an awkward spot, but if the consensus of this Chamber was to allow for us to have that debate, that debate, I believe, would be healthy, healthy for Manitoba, in particular, healthy for our farming community.

So my challenge is to the Minister of Agriculture and the Acting Government House Leader to recognize that the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) has brought forward a very important issue, that our farmers would welcome, I believe, the debate. I applaud the member for bringing forward the initiative, and I ask the government to act on the initiative brought forward by the Member for Lakeside and believe, Mr. Speaker, that this is, in fact, the most appropriate time to allow for this debate to occur.

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

I do not doubt that this matter is one that is of serious concern to members, as agriculture is an economic activity that is of vital importance to our province. 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. Additionally, I would like to note that there are other avenues for members to raise this issue, including questions in Question Period, raising the item under Members' Statements and raising the issue during the budget debate. Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I rule the motion out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order or matter of privilege? *[interjection]*

Order. On a point of order or matter of privilege?

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Just to challenge your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:30)

Mr. Speaker: MUIPs are not challengeable. That is in our rules.

Mr. Derkach: I knew that.

Mr. Speaker: They are not challengeable.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am wondering if you would canvass the House to see if, in fact, you would give leave to allow the debate to occur this afternoon, given the very nature of the issue.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot do that. I have made a ruling for the House, so I cannot put it to the House. Order. I have decided the matter for the House by my ruling.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order or a matter of privilege?

Mr. Derkach: No, on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order? Okay, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I know that in this House in previous times we have always allowed for a debate of this kind to go on if there is consent from the minister and indeed from the House members of the government.

Mr. Speaker, we have done this in previous times on numerous occasions, and specifically with agriculture, we have done this in the past. So, although you have ruled on this matter of urgent public importance, I am wondering that, with consent of the House, whether or not we could allow for this debate to carry on since this is—I guess what I would want to point out to the minister is that, had she been in Yorkton about a week and a half ago or two weeks ago—

Mr. Speaker: Order. You are now debating the issue.

Mr. Derkach: I would point out to her that this matter—

Mr. Speaker: Very quickly.

Mr. Derkach: —is of urgency, Mr. Speaker, and it was the federal minister at that time who expressed that, indeed, it is time for farmers to become engaged, and if the farmers are going to be engaged, then why should not we, in the Legislature, become engaged as well?

So, for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I am wondering whether the minister would consent to have a debate of this magnitude take an hour or an hour and a half now until the House rises, to take that time—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: —to debate—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The honourable member is partially correct. When the House does agree to debate a MUPI that is brought forward before I make a ruling, that is usually stated very clearly in the 10-minute time that members have. Right now, I have made a ruling. It is not up for challenge and it cannot be debated, and that is what is happening here right now. Even if the minister was willing to entertain it, it is too late because I have already made my ruling. If the minister was willing, it would have been made very clear when the members have their 10 minute—and if you check back Hansard and the records, then we will see where the Government House Leader in their 10-minute allocation have said at that time that they were willing to allow debate to take place.

So that is just for clarification of the House, but right now, the matter is—order. But right now the decision has already been made, and there is no vehicle for a challenge to take place on the ruling of a MUPI.

Point of Order

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I wonder, Sir, listening to all the debate that has taken place here, I am rising on a point of order, *Beauchesne* 454.

Mr. Speaker: Let me clarify for—order. The honourable member is rising on a point of order?

Okay, the honourable Member for Carman, on a point of order.

Mr. Rocan: *Beauchesne* 454(1) states that "the proceedings between the rising of a Member to move a motion and the ascertainment by the Speaker of the decision of the House constitute a debate, and this

process affords an opportunity for, and usually involves, discussion although a decision may be reached without discussion."

I am just wondering, Sir, if the discussion that I have heard taking place to do with the MUPI, if we have not reached some sort of a discussion, whether to the affirmative or to the negative, and the comments that were just put forward by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) that he thought that maybe we could have a particular debate on this issue, and I am rising on *Beauchesne* 454, wondering if that rule would apply.

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

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker, I certainly respect the Member for Carman's knowledge of the rules and his creativity on this matter, this alleged point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I point out that our rules have been very clear, and, in fact, matters of public importance were at one time appealable to the House. We made a conscious decision. All parties in this House were part of that decision to change the rules, and that decision now is that it is entirely within the purview of the Speaker. That is something that has been decided for very good reasons, and if there is a suggestion that we revert to the old system, indeed that should be something that should be discussed by the Rules Committee.

But the point of that was to allow what essentially, with matters of urgent public importance, is the role of the Speaker in determining not whether it is a matter worthy of debate or not, but indeed whether there are other opportunities. Indeed, as you indicated in your preface to the comments that were put forward by all members of the House, the key issue is to establish the urgency and the lack of other opportunity for debate in the House.

Mr. Speaker, we not only have budget debate before us, we have grievances; we have opposition days. I point out that both grievances and opposition days have also been amended over the last number of years in terms of our rules. Grievances at one time were attached to the Supply motion, which is indeed the origin and parliamentary procedure of grievances. That is no longer the case, so all members have the opportunity to proceed with a grievance.

Indeed, we have also established the right of opposition parties to bring in Opposition Day motions, something that did not exist prior, Mr. Speaker, to the change in the rules with regard to matters of urgent public importance. So the key element here, I would like to point out is, No. 1, the rule changes that we now are essentially dealing with. The result of that has indeed been put forward as part of a series of rule changes to provide other venues for this matter.

Point No. 2, Mr. Speaker, it is very clear under our rules that supersede *Beauchesne*, as you know, Mr. Speaker, and as the Member for Carman knows in terms of matters of urgent public importance, *Beauchesne* is certainly used in the interpretation, but there are many provisions of *Beauchesne* that are related to the evolution of parliamentary procedure in Ottawa in the House of Commons. Indeed, if we look at other roots, journals in terms of parliamentary procedure, you will find some where the Parliament at the House of Commons in Britain, that there are different evolutions. But the evolution in this House has been very clear, and that is that matters of urgent public importance are not subject to appeal and not subject to further debate once the Speaker makes that ruling.

You have also ruled on the subsidiary question of whether indeed leave can be asked for, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, that is, quite frankly, all part of the debate and consideration in terms of our matter of urgent public importance. In fact, that is where indication is given whether there is leave of the House, and with all due respect to the Member for Carman, I would suggest that you take this matter under advisement.

I have enough respect for the Member for Carman's knowledge of parliamentary procedure as a former Speaker of the House, even though I believe that there was not a legitimate point of order, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that you may wish to take that under advisement and review indeed whether there is even a grain of truth in the member's argument because I know it was a creative argument, perhaps worthy at least of some consideration before, I am sure, coming to the final conclusion that it was not a point of order.

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

Mr. Derkach: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what the Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) has attempted to do was to provide an opportunity for this House and for members in this Chamber to debate an issue that is of grave concern to Manitobans.

* (15:40)

Mr. Speaker, I do not think you need to listen too long to any radio station before you get the impression that rural Canada, not just rural Manitoba but rural Canada, is in somewhat of a difficult circumstance especially as it relates to agriculture. This was our opportunity today, with the consent of government, of course, to allow for a debate to go on in this House for the next hour and a half to express the views of people who have talked to us in the last two weeks about what the agricultural and the rural economic community really is.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I see that newspapers call the minister lame, that seems to me to indicate that there needs to be some recognition that this is an important debate. Now the Member for Carman in his point of order has opened the door to allow the government to consent to a debate in this Chamber.

Now what is the minister afraid of, what is the Acting House Leader afraid of? That this is not a good utilization of time? I mean, the Acting House Leader just stood up and made a silly statement about, you know, the importance of debating and the rules. Well, I know what the rules are, Mr. Speaker, because I was part of them, as was he, but he also has to recognize that with consent in the House, with leave of the House, the House can go into any debate that it chooses. You simply have to have leave of the House to do that.

Now, Mr. Speaker is not going to say, no, the Assembly cannot debate that because I will not allow it. Mr. Speaker says if there is a will in this House, then we can do anything. We have watched the House wind down. We have watched the House wind down within hours because there was a will on both sides of the House to do that.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen in a case of crisis, when we had the 1997 flood, that indeed there was an opportunity for members in the Chamber, both sides of the House, to agree that we should have a debate on it and that debate ensued.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do not see what the problem here is this afternoon to follow the Member for Carman's (Mr. Rocan) point of order to allow for that

debate to carry on here this afternoon, and the minister might want to pay a little attention to that because it is her reputation that is on the line here, but the Member for Carman has just offered her an olive branch.

He has offered her the opportunity to be able to open the door with unanimous consent of the House to go into a debate on a matter that is not just provincially urgent but is urgent nationally, Mr. Speaker. We are entering a period of time, in two weeks, or at most three, farmers should be in the field. But will they be in the fields?

When we see the projections, Mr. Speaker, that this could be the worst year in terms of farm income since the 1930s, does that not send a signal to the Legislative Assembly of our province that this is an issue that should be debated on the floor of this Chamber?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Carman in his point of order has clearly indicated that there is an opportunity for all of us to engage if we really want to, and I think we should take seriously that member's point of order and I think it is in order and what that we should follow.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Carman, for the clarification of all members of the House, this is for clarification, under Rule 454, and it is called "Rules of Debate," citation *Beauchesne*, "Rules of Debate," and that is where you could do what the Member for Carman was saying. But we have negotiated our own rules pertaining to MUIPs which would override what is stated in *Beauchesne* because Manitoba practice takes precedence first. So that is for clarification of the House.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: I have to backtrack a little bit because, in my eagerness to please members of this House, I had not concluded my address to the point of order that was initially raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach).

And that point I also made for clarification of the House, and this is for clarification of the House, was also pertaining to the rule where we had negotiated what we can do with MUIPs. It is very clear in there that the Speaker's ruling is final, and that, when there has been debate on MUIPs that were brought forward, it was agreement by members. It was very

clear that they made the agreement during the 10 minutes they had.

Then, because that was a willingness of the House, we debated the motion. But this time I heard no willingness, and so I have made my ruling. So that should take care of all the matters that are before the House. That is for the clarification of all members of the House. *[interjection]*

I clarified his point of order. *[interjection]* Pardon me?

An Honourable Member: Did I, or did I not, have a point of order?

Mr. Speaker: I explained it to you, for clarification.

An Honourable Member: I had a point of order?

Mr. Speaker: I clarified the point of order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: I was explaining the clear process because a point of order is a departure of the rules or the practices of the House. So, obviously, there was some misunderstanding. There was some misunderstanding of our processes in the House, so I was making it very clear to the members what the processes are.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a new point of order?

Mr. Derkach: On a new point of order, Mr. Speaker. Why, I have just heard the most creative ruling on a point of order in my life. I commend you for that.

But, Mr. Speaker, on a new point of order. This Chamber deals with issues in Manitoba on the basis of precedents, on the basis of Manitoba practice, and on the basis of consent from members in this Chamber to deal on issues. Today, we are seeking to be able to debate an issue that is of critical and urgent importance to Manitobans and that is the farm crises in the grains and oilseeds and livestock sector.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that the minister is sensitive and she will not, she will not want this debate to go on. Shame on her. Shame on her. But, for the people out there in Manitoba to whom we can send copies of Hansard, to the people who we can send, to the leaders in the agriculture sector, I was speaking, just for your information, the reason I raise this point of order is because I was speaking to some farm leaders, just as recently as Friday, Saturday and Sunday, who told me that one of the most important

issues when we come back into the Chamber today was to raise the issue of the farm crisis facing rural Manitoba.

Now this is a national crisis; it is not just a Manitoba crisis. Had the minister been in Yorkton when the federal minister was there, and there were 850 farmers at that meeting, she would have heard very clearly from the Minister of Agriculture federally who said: It is time to change the CAIS program, but I cannot change it because I need the support and the approval of provinces, which I do not have.

Now the point, Mr. Speaker, is that today is a very important day for us to be able to deal with this situation and because of the precedent that we have established in the past where parties can agree to do anything in the House, there is no reason why we cannot have a debate on agriculture ensue in this Chamber today, because we have done that in the past. We have waived some of the rules of this House to be able to do that by unanimous consent. We have allowed for a debate that is so critical to the livelihood of Manitobans that it would be important to make sure that we who are representing the people of this province have an opportunity to express those sentiments in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are clearly into debate here. *[interjection]*

Order. A point of order is to point out to the Speaker a breach of a rule or a departure of Manitoba practices. I have not heard that yet, and I am sure the honourable member will draw that to my attention very shortly.

* (15:50)

Mr. Derkach: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and I am coming to that, because the departure of the practice is that, in the past, in many instances, on many occasions, we have waived the strict rules by either the agreement between House leaders, the agreement between parties right on this floor, to be able to deal with an issue of critical importance.

Mr. Speaker, today we see that that practice we have engaged in previously has been denied. I guess, I ask the government: Is it because they do not have a large presence in rural Manitoba that they do not want to debate this issue, that it is not important to them? Is it because they do not have representatives in rural Manitoba that does not allow them the opportunity to debate this?

The Manitoba practice is that we can do in this Chamber what is important for the people of Manitoba. A departure from that practice is what we see the government doing today, and that is not agreeing to extend its good will in the House to be able to debate this very critical and urgent matter for the good of Manitoba families, for the good of rural communities, for the good of those farm families who today do not know where to turn. The minister can sit in her glib way and think that this is not important, and she will do this at her own demise because Manitoba farm families will not tolerate this.

Mr. Speaker, the four farm leaders that I heard from this weekend gave me one message, and that was this is the most critical issue facing Manitobans today. We need to have it debated on the floor of the Legislature. The federal government is prepared, as I understand it, to make changes to make sure that money flows very quickly into the hands of farm families. This minister has kept—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Ashton: The same alleged point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, first of all, if there was any doubt what is happening here, it is basically, I think, shown by what happened prior to the March break, and that is that members opposite are obviously looking for an opportunity to ring the bells. You know, again, there are a thousand and one ways in the rules that one can proceed and one can, if one chooses, to do that. *[interjection]* They like to heckle. Unfortunately, they do not like to speak on the budget. That is what this is really all about.

Mr. Speaker, before they get up, and we saw it again, sort of the arrogance of members opposite when it comes to rural Manitoba. Is it not funny, this has got two agendas here. One is to defend the federal Conservatives. They have not even been in for three months, and they are already up being the mouthpieces for the federal Conservative Party. But you know what it really comes down to is they have to find every opportunity to take shots at the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) or rural members. We saw earlier, the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) on another issue.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite have real difficulty with recognizing the fact that rural Manitobans can see through the opposition's rhetoric.

In this particular case, they have an opportunity to debate whatever they want. I am scheduled from our side to be the first speaker. I will even defer to the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), the critic, if we get into budget debate so he can say whatever he wants. He can defend the federal Tories all he wants. But we will do that. *[interjection]*

Now, the member tries to interrupt his alleged point of order with another alleged point of order. Mr. Speaker, if they want to ring the bells, if they want to find some way of doing that, surely they can find a more creative way than this, what they have done the last 45 minutes or so, which is they had a ruling on a matter of urgent public importance. You ruled, Mr. Speaker, that there was every opportunity for consideration of the matter, and that is not appealable, it is not votable. We all agree to that. So they can huff and they can puff all they want and they can send out all the Hansards they want, but let us see what happens over the next hour and five minutes, because I would suggest the most appropriate thing would be to dismiss this rather—

An Honourable Member: Bogus.

Mr. Ashton: Bogus. You want to talk about lame. This, Mr. Speaker, is a lame point of order. Then we will see whether they want to ring the bells on this or find some other excuse, or whether they are prepared to debate the budget. We are prepared to debate the budget. If they have anything to say on agriculture, let us move on to the budget. Let us talk about what this government is doing for rural and farm families which is we put forward a budget we want to vote on which will bring more money to farm families. They want to block it. That is the reality politically. Let us get on with the budget debate.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not see this as a lame point of order. What I see is the importance of recognizing that the Legislative Assembly collectively, through leave, can allow for a debate to occur. I think that all we need to do is just reflect in terms of the past tradition of this Chamber. The tradition of this Chamber has a very clear record that where there has been a will by all parties of this Chamber, that debates or rules have been accommodated or changed to the degree that would allow for the will of the Chamber to ultimately prevail. That would go even beyond the Chamber into committee rooms.

I, as I am sure most if not all members of this Chamber, have witnessed the will of this Chamber override what the agenda of the day might be. What I

see is the Opposition House Leader wanting to see the debate of agriculture talked about today, and he has also provided us with good reasoning as to why it is that it should be allowed. He has pointed out a rule that I think is very important, and that rule is found in tradition of this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) carries a great deal of influence because if, in fact, she felt that agriculture was important to the degree in which it was worthy of some focussed debate, that she would indeed acknowledge that and allow for the debate to occur. The concern that I have is that a ruling, from what I can tell from the Chair prematurely, would indicate that we do not have the authority to allow for debate to proceed. I do believe that we do have the authority if, in fact, it is the unanimous consent of this Legislature to allow for a debate to proceed. In good part, what I heard from the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) is that this is something that is worthy of debate, and at the very least the Legislature should be canvassed to see if, in fact, there is support for that debate.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, it would go a long way in terms of facilitating that debate, I would recognize, if the minister responsible for Agriculture would do likewise in acknowledging, as members of the opposition have, the importance of our farming community by allowing that debate to proceed. The Government House Leader seems to be more focussed on bell ringing than he does in terms of having the debate on agriculture inside this Chamber. I would suggest to you that his priority is wrong. We should focus on our farmers today, as is being suggested now from the opposition. The only ones who seem to be preventing that or standing in the way are the Minister of Agriculture and the government of the day.

So, if that is the case, they should stand up and they should say, we do not want that debate to occur, not hide behind you, Mr. Speaker, but stand up and say what it is that they believe should be happening in regard to agriculture. We are on the record as saying that we want the debate to occur. The Minister of Agriculture should then stand up and say, we do not want that debate to occur, as opposed to hiding behind your Chair.

So, in that sense, I believe that the Member for Russell does have a point of order. The point of order, in part, from what I can tell, is, in fact, that we need to have the authority through the unanimous

consent of this Chamber to allow that debate to occur. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (16:00)

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he does not have a point of order. I have made it clear to the House, or at least I thought I had made it clear to the House, but, obviously, I did not make it clear enough. I would like to just caution members when they are bringing forward points of order on Speaker's rulings, be careful not to challenge them.

I heard the honourable member make a statement about I was premature in making my judgment. I would be very careful when you are choosing your words because I do not think any member would want to challenge the authority of the Chair, reflect on the Chair. That is just a caution to members.

I have to rule that the honourable member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I in any way reflected on the Chair, it was not my intent to do so and I apologize for that, but, with the greatest of respect, I do challenge your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been challenged.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in support of sustaining the ruling of the Chair, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to sustaining the ruling of the Chair, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Derkach: Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Order. Sixty minutes has expired. Please shut the bells off.

The question before the House is shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Aglugub, Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Brick, Caldwell, Dewar, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lathlin, Lemieux, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Reid, Robinson, Rondeau, Sale, Schellenberg, Selinger, Smith, Struthers, Swan, Wowchuk.

Nays

Cullen, Cummings, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Eichler, Faurschou, Goertzen, Hawranik, Lamoureux, Maguire, Mitchelson, Murray, Penner, Reimer, Rowat, Stefanson, Taillieu.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 29, Nays 18.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been sustained.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 10, 2006

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Agriculture Issues Eichler; Wowchuk	1426
Bill 22–The Elections Reform Act Doer	1415	Fisher River Watershed Nevakshonoff; Ashton	1428
Petitions		Ministerial Statements	
Funding for New Cancer Drugs Reimer	1415	Flood Conditions Ashton	1429
Stefanson	1415	Penner	1430
Highway 10 Rowat	1416	Lamoureux	1431
Crocus Investment Fund–Public Inquiry Request Maguire	1416	Members' Statements	
Crocus Investment Fund Lamoureux	1420	Non-Timber Forest Products Jennissen	1432
Oral Questions		Agriculture Income Crisis Cullen	1432
Minister of Family Services Murray; Doer	1420	Assiniboine Credit Union Brick	1433
Taillieu; Melnick	1422	Phoenix Sinclair Rowat	1433
Lamoureux; Wowchuk	1427	Community Newspapers Day Nevakshonoff	1433
St. Adolphe Personal Care Home Stefanson; Sale	1423	Matter of Urgent Public Importance	
Goertzen; Sale	1424	Eichler	1434
Crocus Investment Fund Cummings; Rondeau	1425	Ashton	1436
Cummings; Selinger	1426	Lamoureux	1437