

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

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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, Hon.	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.
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NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
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REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
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STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
VACANT	Kirkfield Park	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, November 28, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 205—The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that Bill 205, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I truly do believe that this would be a positive step forward by the government, acknowledging the value of setting the price throughout the province of Manitoba. I would ultimately argue that if we can set the price of a bottle of beer, we should be able to set the price for a litre of milk.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would go a long way in ensuring that kids up north, for example, are drinking milk as opposed to pop. I encourage all members to get behind this bill. Thank you.

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

Bill 6—The Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 6, The Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act; Loi sur la protection des régimes enregistrés d'épargne en vue de la retraite, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: I am pleased to introduce this bill today. This bill protects registered retirement savings plans, income funds and deferred profit-sharing plans from most creditors. These plans are, however, still subject to maintenance orders or enforced by the Maintenance Enforcement Program in orders respecting the division of family property.

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

PETITIONS

Headingley Foods

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The owners of Headingley Foods, a small business based in Headingley, would like to sell alcohol at their store. The distance from their location to the nearest Liquor Mart, via the Trans-Canada Highway, is 9.3 kilometres. The distance to the same Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard is 10.8 kilometres. Their application has been rejected because their store needs to be 10 kilometres away from the Liquor Mart. It is 700 metres short of this requirement using one route but 10.8 kilometres using the other.

The majority of Headingley's population lives off Roblin Boulevard and uses Roblin Boulevard to get to and from Winnipeg rather than the Trans-Canada Highway. Additionally, the highway route is often closed or too dangerous to travel in severe weather conditions. The majority of Headingley residents therefore travel to the Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard, a distance of 10.8 kilometres.

Small businesses outside Winnipeg's perimeter are vital to the prosperity of Manitoba's communities and should be supported. It is difficult for small businesses like Headingley Foods to compete with larger stores in Winnipeg, and they require added services to remain viable. Residents should be able to purchase alcohol locally rather than having to drive to the next municipality.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister charged with the administration of The Liquor Control Act (Mr. Smith), to consider allowing the owners of Headingley Foods to sell alcohol at their store, thereby supporting small business and the prosperity of rural communities in Manitoba.

This is signed by B. Gledhill, Maggie Hay, Peter Pankratz and many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

Crocus Investment Fund

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The government needs to uncover the whole truth as to what ultimately led to over 33,000 Crocus shareholders to lose tens of millions of dollars.

The provincial auditor's report, the Manitoba Securities Commission investigation, the RCMP investigation and the involvement of our courts, collectively, will not answer the questions that must be answered in regard to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

Manitobans need to know why the government ignored the many warnings that could have saved the Crocus Investment Fund.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his NDP government to co-operate in uncovering the truth in why the government did not act on what it knew and to consider calling a public inquiry on the Crocus Fund fiasco.

That is signed, Mr. Speaker, by Bill Bardwell, Carole Bardwell, Susan Collins and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the loge to my left where we have with us Mr. Harold Gilleshammer who is the former Member for Minnedosa.

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

Also, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have from Laureate Academy 11 grades 9 and 11 students under the direction of Ms. Nicole Werbicki. The school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines (Mr. Rondeau).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, it's now been two years since the collapse of the Crocus Fund which cost over 33,000 Manitobans in excess of \$60 million of their savings. To date, the combined questions from members of the opposition have totalled over 150 to the Premier (Mr. Doer) and various ministers in the government, at least 145 of which have been completely evaded.

Time after time, members in the opposition have called for an inquiry into the scandal so that Crocus shareholders once and for all can know what happened and so that they can have justice, Mr. Speaker. Now we know why the Premier and the government have refused to call that inquiry.

We are advised by highly credible sources connected to the minister's department that David Woodbury, a political adviser to the Premier, was the go-to person within government on the Crocus file. We're further advised that he communicated regularly with Crocus officials, that civil servants within government were instructed to report to Mr. Woodbury on matters related to Crocus, and that Mr. Woodbury bypassed the normal chain of command within the Department of Industry when it came to matters related to Crocus. Furthermore, we are advised by these highly credible sources that Mr. Woodbury played a lead role in attempting to bring players together to create the superfund, which fund was designed to attempt to buy time by the government and bail out what they knew then was a failing Crocus Fund.

Given these facts, will the minister confirm what is widely known within his own government, which is that a top political adviser to the Premier was actively managing the Crocus file between 2000 and up to and including the time of its collapse?

* (13:40)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report was very clear in this regard. The concept of a superfund was never proceeded with. The government refused to accept that recommendation and the fund was not proceeded

with. So the member is pursuing an issue of something that didn't happen.

What has happened, however, Mr. Speaker, is we have confirmation in a letter that the Tory caucus has been aiding and abetting the lawyers for the class-action lawsuit on the Crocus legal team. I would like the Leader of the Opposition to account to the House for why he's making government resources available for a lawsuit against the government in face of the fact that the Auditor General's report said that the government was not responsible for the performance of the fund nor the valuation of the fund.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, of all of the evasions, of all of the 150 evasions that we've heard to date from the government, that is perhaps the most shameful we have heard to date.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we have Manitobans sitting in the gallery who have lost money in the Crocus scandal. They are looking for facts. They're looking for answers. They're looking for justice.

Now, I have put some very specific factual points on the record to the minister which he has completely avoided responding to. So, given that the minister has evaded responding to questions about Mr. Woodbury's role in managing the Crocus file within government, given these evasions, and given the role that many highly credible individuals say was played by the Premier's former political adviser, will the minister today do what is right? Bring justice to Crocus shareholders and call on the Premier to hold an inquiry into this scandal before more time goes by, before Manitobans are forced to suffer even more than they already have as a result of this government's negligence.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's office has done a 245-page report on the problems at the Crocus Fund. The government has brought in two specific pieces of legislation to respond to the recommendations of the Auditor General's report. An implementation team was put together to follow up on those recommendations. One member of the implementation team was a well-respected chartered accountant, a former leading partner in a firm in town; another individual was a member of the public service. They have followed up on all those recommendations. We have brought legislation in to deal with that.

The member seems to think that a question asked and a question responded to is, in quite frankly

his arrogant interpretation, a question evaded. The questions have been raised; the questions have been answered. The recommendations have been raised; the recommendations have been answered. Why is the member using taxpayers' money to support—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, given that we have asked several times, including two questions today, specific questions about the role played by David Woodbury in the management of the Crocus file leading up to the collapse; given that David Woodbury is a member of the Premier's (Mr. Doer) inner circle, will the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak) today, in light of the fact that this scandal reaches right into the Premier's inner circle, will the Attorney General bring an Order-in-Council to Cabinet?

Will he ask the Premier to recuse himself from the discussion? Will he recommend to Cabinet that an inquiry be established immediately so that we can get the facts and so that we can do justice to those Manitobans who have suffered?

Mr. Selinger: It's always my experience that you can tell a group is getting desperate when they start kind of to pick up an individual's name and vilify him in the Legislature to get a political advantage.

All the records of the government were available to the Auditor General. He was completely, and his office was completely available to look at all these matters. The member's making salacious allegations. We know that when Crocus entered into relationships with the provincial government which resulted in \$35 million of MIOP loan losses, all of those deals were done when the member worked in the Premier's office himself. Why isn't he calling for an inquiry into the sour deals that he was behind when he worked for the previous government?

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we have made our position on the Crocus scandal clear. If we are given an opportunity to form government, which is a decision that will be made by the people of Manitoba, if we are given that opportunity we will call an inquiry. We will get the facts and we will do justice to this matter.

Three times today I have put to the minister specific allegations being made by highly credible sources from within the government and connected

to his government, allegations which I will be happy to repeat in this Chamber and elsewhere because they are credible and they are solid. Three times the minister has been given an opportunity to refute those allegations; three times the minister has not taken the opportunity to refute the allegations. So, Mr. Speaker, we will take his non-denial of those allegations as confirmation of what these credible sources are saying.

So, Mr. Speaker, given that he doesn't want to deny the allegations—*[interjection]* Well, deny the allegations. You've got a chance. If the allegations aren't true, then he's got an opportunity now to stand up and say they are not true. He's got an opportunity to call an inquiry, put his hand on the Bible.

So, in light of these significant allegations, Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the Securities Commission investigation has now effectively collapsed as a result of the Court of Appeal decision, in light of the fact that that was a key element of the government's defence as to why an inquiry wasn't required; the Premier, day in and day out has said we don't need an inquiry because the Securities Commission is looking into it. Now the Securities Commission isn't looking into it because of the Court of Appeal decision. We have people coming forward talking about the significant role played by Mr. Woodbury, a senior adviser to the Premier. Why will they not end the smokescreen, end the evasions, do what's right, shine the light on this scandal so that we can have the facts and so that we can do justice to these Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: I am always amused by the way the member acts as judge, jury and prosecutor. He draws his own conclusions from questions about a superfund that didn't proceed. So he wants to know, the member asks us to confirm information about something that didn't happen. That's a wonderful pursuit of reality, Mr. Speaker.

The member demanded that the Premier (Mr. Doer) not put a single penny in settlement monies to any of the parties who have brought forward a suit at this time. That's on the record of *Hansard* in May 9, 2006. He has since flip-flopped and he has demanded compensation, but he's only demanding compensation if an inquiry proves that the government did something wrong. But the Auditor has already said that they weren't responsible for performance or valuation. Where does he really stand?

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans and the Crocus shareholders who have lost money are not

impressed with this minister's bluster and his attempt to divert attention from what are the real issues in this scandal. I have taken the position, and this side has taken the position, very clearly, that if the government is confident in its position, the government thinks they have a strong case in a Crocus lawsuit, stop spending money on high-priced lawyers. Bring a motion to dismiss the lawsuit if you think you have got such a strong case, bring the motion.

But to date, Mr. Speaker, more than six months after the lawsuit was filed, they still haven't even brought a motion to have the lawsuit dismissed. So that tells us what they think about the strength of their case.

Given now that the minister is outraged and seems to be concerned about the fact that we are asking questions about the role played by a senior player within the government, a member of the Premier's inner circle, and he will not take the opportunity to deny the allegations, why not allow Manitobans to get at the facts? Why not call an inquiry? Why not have the truth come out and allow Manitoba taxpayers, Crocus shareholders, to know what the facts are, and go forward into retirement knowing that justice has been done?

Mr. Selinger: The member opposite says that he supports an inquiry. With taxpayers—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (13:50)

Mr. Selinger: I'm glad he's committed to spending millions of taxpayers' dollars to do something that's already been done by the Auditor General. When we amended the Auditor General's and brought in a new act in 2001, we put specific legislation in place to allow the Auditor General to look into venture capital funds that were supported by taxpayers' dollars to see where those taxpayer dollars went. That empowered the Auditor to do his 245-page report with numerous recommendations that we have followed up on.

The member now wants to spend more money to create political theatre, but he only wants to examine that period of time which excludes his period of involvement as a lawyer for Wellington West. How honourable is that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report refers to the fact that the government received red flags and ignored them. The Auditor General's report refers to the fact that information was provided to a higher authority, quote, unquote, without identifying who that individual is.

Given the unanswered questions arising from that report, given the fact that over 34,000 Manitobans are crying out for justice, given the fact that we are not afraid of an inquiry, Mr. Speaker, why won't the minister tell us why he's afraid of having an inquiry?

Mr. Selinger: Not only were we not afraid of investigating this matter, we put legislation in place to allow it to be investigated as quickly as possible with the office of the Auditor General. We provided the powers to the Auditor General to follow taxpayers' dollars wherever they go in Manitoba, including into venture capital funds.

The members opposite did not allow the Auditor General to do that. It took our reforms of 2001 to allow for this expeditious inquiry to proceed, for us to follow up on it with recommendations. If the member really was serious about protecting taxpayers' dollars, why did he sit on The Auditor General Act and not reform it for over 20 years?

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, how dare this Minister of Finance say that the Auditor General was able to tell whether or not there was culpability on the part of this government. There was no accountability on the part of the government from any of those reviews. That's why the letter that was written to the *Metro* from a resident of St. Boniface said: With a failing Crocus Fund, I want answers and I don't know who will provide them. I have invested in Manitoba. I bought the labour-sponsored Crocus funds and ENSIS because I'm self-employed, and I believe in the entrepreneurial spirit of this province. In the failing of Crocus, I want answers. I don't know who'll provide them. My patience is gone. Did the government turn a blind eye to the activities of Crocus? Without an inquiry I will never know.

Mr. Minister of Finance, you can do it. Stand up and call an inquiry.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I know the members were asleep at the switch in 2001 when we amended and reformed the Auditor General's legislation to allow for our inquiry to unfold. Perhaps

they haven't read the report. The report was very clear. The government has to take responsibility for monitoring the public policy objectives of the fund.

The Auditor's report is also very clear that the government is not responsible for either performance or valuation measures and those outcomes. Members opposite know that. They don't read the report. All they have to do is look at page 11 and they will see the conclusions drawn by the Auditor General. They refuse to do that. They want to spend millions of dollars more of taxpayers' money to go over ground already covered by the Auditor General.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, obviously the Minister of Finance skipped over page 146 where the red flags were raised time after time to this government and they ignored them.

Mr. Speaker, a letter from Leah Rensfelt was written to the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), and she said she doesn't believe her member acted—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cummings: She says that she did not believe that her representative acted in her best interest. I'm most concerned about the failure of the government in its obligation to regulate Crocus to protect the public. She implores her member, the Member for Selkirk, to seriously consider the impact this scandal has had and has continued to have on the members, investors in this fund.

The Minister of Finance can deal with the betrayal and demand that the Premier (Mr. Doer) have a public inquiry to deal with this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance again: Will he move to have an inquiry into this financial scandal?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, one of the first things we did when we discovered that this problem was occurring was we announced publicly that we would not claw back the taxpayers' money that was put into the tax credits that every investor in Crocus received. That is a value of \$11 million in Manitoba. The law has been amended not to claw that money back. That was our immediate relief to the investors in the Crocus taxpayers' fund.

We also put in place the best class-action lawsuit legislation in the country, a measure for consumer protection that specifically applies to situations like

this where the courts, through the judge, will regulate the fees that lawyers can charge as they pursue consumer satisfaction on something that they believe they were mistreated on. This never existed under the previous government. We have provided these measures of safety for Manitobans.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of Crocus investors in the gallery today, including Mr. Garnet Lee, who, along with his spouse, has had a significant amount of his retirement income tied up in Crocus investments which he cannot now access.

The Minister of Finance talks about closing the barn door after the horse is gone. All of this legislation comes in afterwards. What's he doing to bring accountability and bring some answers to Mr. Lee about where his retirement income is gone? Stand up and be accountable.

Mr. Selinger: I'd be happy to do that. We provided \$11 million of relief by not taking the clawbacks. We've changed the Auditor General's legislation to allow us speedy investigation of this matter. We brought in the class-action legislation which allows consumers to pursue satisfaction if they feel they have been mistreated by a corporation such as a venture capital fund. All these measures have been brought in during our term of office. None of these measures existed while the members opposite were in power.

The members opposite, through the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), demanded that we not put one penny of settlement monies on the table to help out Crocus investors. Now they have flip-flopped. No money last May; now they want compensation. They want taxpayers' dollars now before an election. Last May they had demanded we not put one cent in. They opposed us giving the \$11-million relief.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Many Manitobans have lost everything in the wake of the Crocus scandal and this bluster does nothing for them, Mr. Speaker. Linda Krenn, a widow who lives in Rossmere and has a limited source of income, wrote a letter stating, and I quote: I believe that the NDP should be held accountable and that there should be a full investigation into how and why we investors have been duped out of our money. Linda Krenn deserves to know what this NDP government's role

was in the downfall of Crocus. Why people have, and I quote, lost their hard-earned money.

Mr. Speaker, only a public inquiry can get to the truth about the Crocus scandal. Will the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg) do the right thing and demand that the Premier (Mr. Doer) call a public inquiry into the Crocus scandal, or will he do like this minister and bluster?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): It seems to me that the real bluster is coming from members opposite. They put no improvements into The Auditor General Act. They put no class-action lawsuits on the books. They opposed \$11 million of relief to shareholders when we moved it in front of this Legislature. Their record is a record of lots of words, no action. Our record is a record of strengthening legislation, putting money on the table to solve the problem, and making sure that citizens of Manitoba have access to the courts when they feel they have been mistreated as a class of investors or a class of consumers.

The class-action legislation gives them direct access to the courts. It gives the judges in these cases the ability to control fees to make sure that people do not have excessive fees when they pursue a matter of justice. We have put those measures in place. The members opposite did nothing.

* (14:00)

Mr. Schuler: Today in the gallery, we have people who had invested in the Crocus Fund who want to sit in the gallery and hear some answers, instead of a minister blaming everybody instead of taking some responsibility. That is shameful, Mr. Speaker.

In a letter written to the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale), Jerry and Anne Collard implored their member of the Legislature to take action in the wake of the Crocus scandal. They asked for, and I quote, at the very least, transparency from all the parties involved in investigating the Crocus issue. It has to be brought into the open. The Collards asked their Member for Fort Rouge not to sit on the fence any longer.

Will the Member for Fort Rouge today insist that the Premier (Mr. Doer) do the right thing and call a public inquiry, or will he, too, do the bluster and blame anybody but take no responsibility? Is that what we get from these members?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, a careful observation of the Chamber would show the only finger pointing is

coming from the other side of the House right now, and the only group that has taken—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: —the only political party that has taken concrete measures to strengthen consumer protection is the party on this side of the House. We have brought in class-action lawsuit legislation. We have strengthened The Auditor General Act to pursue these matters. We have made sure that the \$11 million is not clawed back of taxpayers' money that was offered as tax credits. We have brought forward legislation to strengthen venture capital legislation in this province. We have separated monitoring from promotion. The former government had them conflated into one department. We now have monitoring in one department, promotion in another department.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, this government has done everything but the right thing and that is calling a public inquiry so that people know what the truth is. Many Manitobans have lost a lot of their security for when they retire. One individual, Mr. Wasiela, wrote to his member of the Legislature, the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick), and he wrote, I quote, "I lost most of my savings." What this individual wants is his retirement savings at least accounted for. In the Crocus scandal, what he's looking for is a public inquiry.

Will the Member for Riel do the right thing? Go to the Premier; ask for a public inquiry. Or will the Member for Riel do the same thing; bluster, blame, do anything but the right thing? Will the member do the right thing and call for a public inquiry?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite wish to spend millions of taxpayers' dollars on pursuing a public inquiry which has already been completed by the Auditor General. That is what they want to do. They want to spend more taxpayers' dollars on something where we have dozens, literally over a hundred, where we literally have over a hundred recommendations from the Auditor General. We put in place an implementation team to follow up on those recommendations.

Members opposite have been foot-dragging in this House, not trying to find solutions. They're the ones who are blustering and finger pointing. We are taking action to make sure this doesn't happen again. We took action to preserve \$11 million worth of tax credits made available to people. We took action in

2001, before this matter even came up, to make sure the Auditor General had the tools that his office needed to investigate precisely these kinds of matters, which is why we now have corrective legislation on the books.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Crocus scandal created by this NDP government has had a negative effect on Manitoba's capital markets. When Manitobans lose confidence in our venture capital markets, our economy suffers. Our businesses are not able to compete with others across the country, and they are not able to attract skilled workers or expand their businesses.

So I ask the Minister of Finance: Why has he failed to convince the Premier to call an independent public inquiry into Crocus?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): What we have done, Mr. Speaker, is we have moved with the expanded powers we made available to the Auditor General to follow up on all of his recommendations to re-secure confidence in the growth of the Manitoba economy; which is why this year it's performing above the Canadian average, which is why we have record investment in housing, which is why we have double the Canadian average private-sector investment in the province, which is why we have new private venture capital funds being created in Manitoba. All of these things have been done to continue to grow the Manitoba economy.

The members want to drag us backwards when they lost \$34 million on investments that Crocus made with the former provincial government. It was they that lost money under their loan program, under their relationships with the Crocus Investment Fund. Under our MIOF loan program, we have actually made a profit. They lost \$34 million; we've made a profit. The economy went nowhere with them; it is going up with us.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance also failed to mention that we have the only economy that has failed to perform at higher than the national average for each of the last seven years, the only economy in this country. The uncertainty created by the NDP's refusal to call an independent public inquiry into the Crocus scandal has caused Manitobans to think twice before investing in RSPs.

The Crocus scandal was revealed in 2004; and in 2005, just a year later, the number of Manitobans investing in RSPs has only increased by less than 1 percent, the second lowest in Canada.

So I ask the Minister of Finance: Why has he refused to clear the air? Why has he refused to admit responsibility for the Crocus scandal?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we actually did accept full responsibility for the monitoring of public policy objectives as recommended by the Auditor, and we moved with dispatch to make sure that we strengthened all of those functions by the two pieces of legislation we brought in that the members opposite dragged their feet on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member wants to know how we're strengthening the economy. We've seen more private venture capital money put in place, more private equity funds. We've seen more investment from the private sector in Manitoba. We're seeing record low rates of unemployment inside Manitoba. We're seeing record investment in housing and commercial properties in Manitoba.

We're seeing a province that is growing the economy. We've grown the economy by 35 percent since we've been in office, a growth of over \$12 billion. Manitobans are doing better. The only people trying to go backwards are the members opposite.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, RSP investors feel betrayed by this NDP government, and, according to Statistics Canada, they responded in 2005, a year after the Crocus scandal was revealed, by investing in RSPs at a rate well below the national average, at a rate of investment that ranked dead last in Canada.

So I ask the Minister of Finance: Why has he betrayed RSP investors, and why has he refused to admit responsibility for the Crocus scandal?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member forgets to tell the public that Manitobans have the lowest debt loads of all Canadians, as well. Manitobans are the kind of people that save their money. They invest in things that make lives better for their families. They invest in housing. They invest in education. They invest in their communities. Manitobans are among the most generous in the country when it comes to giving to the United Way and other charitable donations. Manitobans are prudent people who do not want millions of dollars of taxpayers' money

wasted on an inquiry when it's already been looked into by the Auditor General, and they tell me that every single day.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): We have now been treated to 15 more evasions on the question of why this government won't call an inquiry into Crocus. We've seen the spectacle of the members, individuals from the constituencies of Rossmere, Selkirk, Fort Rouge and St. Boniface, whose own MLAs won't even stand up for them, Mr. Speaker. While those MLAs won't stand up for those individuals in their constituencies, we will.

What we have is a common theme in the minister's answers, a major example of government mismanagement and scandal followed by new government legislation to stop them from doing it again. It's a stop-me-before-I-kill-again legislative package that they introduce every time they get into trouble, and it's absolutely bankrupt. They're bankrupt of ideas. They're absolutely incompetent, and this is what incompetent governments do. When they can't manage, they bring in bills to give the appearance that they're doing something to prevent themselves from doing that again.

Mr. Speaker, they have gone and they have hired one of the best litigators, Bill Olson, one of the most expensive lawyers in the city, who's a superb lawyer, to defend the government in this Crocus class-action lawsuit.

Why will the government not do, instead, what is right for Manitoba taxpayers, what is right for Crocus shareholders? Instead of paying thousands, tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars to lawyers, Mr. Speaker, why not do the right thing? Why not call an inquiry? Why not get justice for those shareholders who are sitting in the gallery today and who live in constituencies like Rossmere, Selkirk, Fort Rouge and St. Boniface? Why won't they stand up for their constituents? Why not have an inquiry? Why not do the right thing?

* (14:10)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite thinks he's clever. He, first of all, says that the government's spending money on lawyers, so have an inquiry and spend millions more on lawyers. That's what he's advocating.

The member is generating jobs. His approach to economic development is to have inquiries so lawyers can collect expensive fees from government. We prefer to invest in education. We prefer to invest in infrastructure. We prefer to invest in roads. We prefer to invest in health care, and we prefer to get a problem examined quickly and to solve it, and to protect Manitobans from the weak legislation the members opposite put in place.

From the \$34 million of bad deals that they put together when they were the provincial government, which dragged Crocus down, they want to spend money going backwards. We want to spend money going forward in this province.

Mr. McFadyen: Here is the fundamental difference. They want to spend money on lawyers to stonewall and block and defend the government. They want to spend money on lawyers whose mission it is to give up as little as they possibly can to Crocus shareholders. We want to spend money on an inquiry that shines light, produces the truth, gets at the facts, and brings about justice for Crocus shareholders, not stonewalling, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, given that the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Winnipeg Sun*, the *Brandon Sun* and other major media outlets in the province have all called for a public inquiry, given that Manitobans, regular Manitobans, who live in constituencies like Rossmere, Selkirk, Fort Rouge and St. Boniface want to hold an inquiry and get at the facts, why will they not listen to their constituents? Why will they not listen to major Manitoba media outlets? Why not end the stonewalling? Why not call an inquiry today? Why not get at the facts? Why not do justice for Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: The members opposite, if they would have read the 245-page report put together by the Auditor General of Manitoba, would have had the facts. They want to replay history.

The member opposite demanded that not a cent, not a single penny in settlement monies to any of the parties be brought forward out of the taxpayers' Treasury. They wanted the right thing for taxpayers in Manitoba in May. In September and October, they wanted an inquiry. They flip-flop every time the public comes to see them. They want to spend more money on an inquiry right now. We want to get to the bottom of the problem. We want to correct it, and then we want to take taxpayers' money and we want to use it. We want to use taxpayers' money, Mr.

Speaker, to grow the economy so the pie is bigger for everybody.

Mr. McFadyen: We have said that if a government is confident in its position, it should protect Manitoba taxpayers and bring a motion to dismiss the lawsuit. They haven't yet done that, Mr. Speaker, and we doubt that they ever will.

So, given that they're not confident in their position, given that we have credible people telling us about the central role in managing the Crocus file on the part of David Woodbury, a political adviser to the Premier (Mr. Doer), which brings this scandal right into the Premier's inner circle, and given that we've got every major media outlet, given that we have members of their constituencies calling for an inquiry—This is not just politicians calling for an inquiry; it is ordinary Manitobans who live in places like Rossmere, Selkirk, Fort Rouge and St. Boniface.

So, given that the minister has made it abundantly clear that he is not going to stand up for his constituents, that the other members of his party aren't going to stand up for their constituents, will he come into the hallway today? Since he is not going to call an inquiry, will he apologize to Garnet Lee, Ron Holman, Linda LeBlanc and others, Crocus shareholders, who are here? Will he look them in the eye? Will he tell them that the truth is already known? Will he tell them that they don't deserve an inquiry, and will he explain to them why he won't do justice, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: If any apologies are required, it is from the members opposite. When the member worked for the former premier, they entered into \$34 million of deals that went sour and dragged down the valuations of the Crocus Fund. That is what the Auditor General discovered. He discovered that the deals that went sour were deals that were put forward under the former government. Now the member wants to evade that. He wants to structure an inquiry that exempts everything that he did from a review and only looks at things that may have happened in the last six years.

We want the inquiry that the Auditor General proceeded with to be followed up by strong legislation, by strong action. We forgave the \$11 million. We want to make sure that the receiver general gets best value as he winds up the Crocus Fund, and that the money is returned to the shareholders as soon as possible.

Children in Care Jordan's Principle

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, it is painfully clear that for seven years this government has bungled the administration of our province's child welfare system. Responding to the external review into the child welfare system, the new Family Services Minister himself said it takes a village. What the heck happened to this village called Manitoba?

Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP government is what happened. A year ago this government was told in this Chamber to stop its practice of keeping Aboriginal children stuck in hospital in Winnipeg just because it refuses to pay for the home care that it thinks the federal government should pay for.

The external review specifically instructs this government to implement Jordan's principle and stop this practice. Why has the government not implemented Jordan's principle?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): I think the member opposite missed the government's response to the external reviews. They put forward a number of recommendations to strengthen child welfare in Manitoba on top of the enhancements that have taken place over the last few years and the devolution of child welfare. I think the member missed the announcement that we accept those recommendations as our blueprint for action as we proceed. The Changes for Children action team, the co-chairs are in place and we are pursuing some very significant changes. I'm sorry the member was looking elsewhere.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the minister is responsible. He says he's doing something, but the reality is that there are children right now in Winnipeg who can't go home to their communities because this minister has not implemented Jordan's principle. Right now, while this minister is busy doing photo-ops, is putting on his armour, is mounting his charger and is attacking the feds and everybody else, these children are stuck in Winnipeg, some in hospital because this minister is not doing his job. They can't go home to their communities.

I ask the minister: When is he going to get off his hobbyhorse and implement Jordan's principle and make sure that these children can go home to their communities as they should?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, the member has not been paying attention to the changes that are being

introduced to the child welfare system. The member has got it all wrong in terms of the issues that he is trying to raise because, first of all, in terms of the issue of children in hotels, for one, there has been action in the last couple of months. Indeed, my understanding is, with the snapshot last week, the reduction was 47 percent. We're just beginning on that journey.

But I say this to the member: How are we to take this member seriously, Mr. Speaker? How well-meaning is he when he goes around with election campaign buttons about child deaths? That's the exploitative nature of this member's questions.

Milk Fixed Prices

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, we look to a government that would actually stand up for our children and bring in policies that'll make a real difference.

We brought in a bill, or introduced a bill, last session and re-introduced it this session dealing with the setting of milk prices. Government, through regulation and law, says that if you buy a bottle of beer here in Winnipeg or you buy it up anywhere in northern Manitoba, it's going to cost you the same amount of money.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to a litre of milk, a parent will pay four or five times the price for that same litre of milk that someone in the city of Winnipeg would pay for it.

My question is for the Minister responsible for Healthy Living. Can she explain why it is that she does not support the setting of a fixed price of milk?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

We are aware of the additional challenges facing northerners in Manitoba regarding the purchasing of healthy food for their families. That's why we've increased the northern allowance for people, so we can increase their employment assistance payments so they can purchase better quality food. We have a northern strategy around healthy food.

We're working across departments, developing a strategy to look at how to support local people to encourage local production of food, examples such as community gardens. We have an initiative where we supported community members to buy freezers so

they can preserve the food they raise. We're working on the strategy.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Crocus Investment Fund

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I rise to discuss the need for an independent public inquiry into the Crocus Investment Fund. The current vehicles that the government has suggested are not sufficient to determine the government's role or culpability in the scandal, and Manitobans are not receiving the answers they deserve.

Only an independent public inquiry can force all those involved in the Crocus scandal to testify under oath. This is the only way Manitobans can find out the facts. There is no chance that the Manitoba Securities Commission, the RCMP investigation or testimony at the Public Accounts Committee will reveal how the government interfered at Crocus causing more than 33,000 Manitobans to lose more than \$60 million of retirement savings.

* (14:20)

This government has refused to call an independent public inquiry, pointing to the fact that the Manitoba Securities Commission hearing was taking place. The Manitoba Securities Commission hearing into Crocus has come to a standstill and it's now incumbent upon the government to call an independent public inquiry to determine the facts for shareholders who have lost so much in this scandal.

We have received letters from numerous Manitobans who are so frustrated with the stonewalling of this government, they have lost confidence and trust in this NDP government and in our capital markets in Manitoba. One of the troubling long-term trends in western countries is the declining levels of trust that citizens have in their public institutions. This NDP government has facilitated and increased this trend in Manitoba by refusing to take responsibility for the Crocus scandal. An independent public inquiry is the only way to restore the trust that shareholders and Manitobans, in general, have for government and make them feel that they are supported, listened to and cared about. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Funding for Highways

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, today I have

the opportunity to speak to the House about something that is important to all Manitobans and especially to the people of my constituency Gimli.

Keeping our roads in excellent condition has been and continues to be a priority of this government. I know that there are many highways that my constituents depend upon each day driving to their jobs, picking up their children from school and doing errands. The constituents of Gimli rightly expect the government to ensure that safe and well-maintained roads continue to stay high on our agenda.

I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, that this government listens to the priorities of the people of Gimli and other communities in the Capital Region and beyond. With the commitment of \$4 billion to highways over the next 10 years, this government has made a historic investment in a vitally important service. The \$400-million highway investment designated for this year will be used to improve roads throughout the province including the pavement on Highway 8 in the Winnipeg Beach-Gimli area, and likewise, the important phase two improvements in St. Andrews municipality at the intersection of Highway 9 and Highway 27 are part of this investment.

With such an ambitious, unprecedented plan, this is just the beginning. Over the last few years this government has proven itself more than willing to work on behalf of everyday Manitobans regardless of where they live. This is a government that invested in the Amphibex to alleviate overland flooding and beat ice jams during spring thaw. This is a government that has more than doubled the budget for drainage initiatives stretching up through the Interlake.

I am proud to be part of a government that listens to the priorities of its constituents, and I am honoured that I have the opportunity to represent the people of Gimli with respect to such important issues as these. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Honourable Member: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): I wonder if you could provide clarification. It sounded more to me, Mr. Speaker, like the

minister was giving a ministerial statement as opposed to a private member's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, according to Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Rules, *Orders and Forms of Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba*, "Members' Statements, Restrictions on Scope, 26(2): A Minister of the Crown may not use the time allotted for Members' Statements to comment on government policy or ministerial or departmental action." So the honourable member does have a point of order.

I would caution members on their use of members' statements in the future.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: We will now go to members' statements.

Crocus Investment Fund

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, 33,000 Manitobans, over \$60 million, and no answers from government for two years. This is the record of this government on the Crocus file.

Mr. Speaker, investors rallied at the Legislature here a month or so ago to express their frustration and to seek answers about Crocus. Well, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) did emerge from his office for a few seconds to try to feebly defend his government's record and quickly exited as soon as he was finished.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), my leader, went out to the crowd and indicated to them that, when we become government, we, in fact, will call a public inquiry into Crocus so that those Manitobans who lost so much money in Crocus will finally have some answers.

If the government is convinced that they have no culpability in any of this, they would do the right thing and call a public inquiry into Crocus themselves. But, Mr. Speaker, they fear a public inquiry because they know that they had their hand in the cookie jar.

This rally that we had in front of the Legislature by the Crocus investors was a rally and a symbol of what democracy is all about. Mr. Speaker, people deserve answers. But, in fact, they have invested money, and it has been lost, and government has responsibility for it. These investors were simply

asking for answers. That's all. Yet, today, the government—we saw the Minister of Finance, today, stand in his place and continually deny to give those investors what they deserve, to give Manitobans what they deserve and that is an answer to what government's role was in the tremendous losses that occurred under Crocus.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for this government to embrace the principles of democracy and to listen to the shareholders of Crocus. I call on this government today to rethink their position and to call a public inquiry into the scandal that has plagued Manitobans and this government for the last two years.

Manitoba Telephone System

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on a subject that is very important to me. In the first week of November, 10 years ago, the weather was very similar to today's weather with snow falling softly on the ground and thoughts of Christmas close at hand. Ten years ago, I was not a member of a political party, nor was I related to anyone who was employed by the Manitoba Telephone System. I was the mother of two young children, a wife, employed full time and committed to volunteering to make my community better.

At 1 a.m., I appeared as the last speaker before the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources, knowing that, at 6:30 a.m., I would need to get up to wake my children to ensure they were at their before-school program in time for me to be at work for 8:30 a.m.

Étant un service public, la Société de téléphone du Manitoba appartenait à tous les Manitobains. Presque soixante-dix pour cent de tous les Manitobans et quatre-vingt pour cent des habitants en région rurale étaient contre la privatisation mais le gouvernement Filmon nous a ignorés et a continué avec la vente malgré nos soucis.

Translation

As a public utility, the Manitoba Telephone System belonged to all Manitobans. Nearly 70 percent of all Manitobans and 80 percent of rural Manitobans opposed the privatization, yet the Filmon government ignored us and continued with the sale in spite of our concerns.

English

Today is the 10-year anniversary of the sale and the privatization of MTS. At the hearings, I reflected the concerns of Manitobans about the plan to sell a

public utility all Manitobans owned. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, all my fears have come true. Rural telephone rates have increased by 79 percent since 1996, and urban rates by 64 percent.

How dare they talk about democracy. Ten years ago, Manitoba telephone rates were the lowest in the country. Today, they are the second highest.

Monsieur le Président, je suis fière d'être de ce côté de la Chambre.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand on this side of the House.

English

I am proud to belong to a party that is concerned about the fate of families. While we cannot change the past, or repurchase MTS—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Honourable Member for Steinbach.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I had recognized the honourable Member for Steinbach.

Crocus Investment Fund

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker. I rise to mourn the loss of the activist spirit of the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), who says that 10 years ago she took up a cause, but, now, when 33,000 Crocus investors have lost money, she sits quietly in her seat, where 10 years ago she seemed to think that there was a cause worth fighting for.

Now that she's an elected member of the government she chooses to say nothing. She chooses to say nothing about the constituents in her riding who have lost thousands and thousands of dollars, whose retirement is at stake. I think it's very disappointing, Mr. Speaker, that at one time she had the spirit to fight for what she believed in, but today she's been silenced by her government and presumably by her Premier (Mr. Doer).

* (14:30)

It seems that there's a lot of members on that side who used to have spirit but have now been silenced, who won't speak up for their constituents. We heard about the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg), the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale) and the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), who won't do anything now to stand up for

the thousands and thousands of people who've lost money. So, today, Mr. Speaker, let us also mark this as an anniversary. Let us mark it as an anniversary of the day that those members lost their fighting spirit.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, just indicating for the record that we will be continuing with the Throne Speech debate today, but prior to that, in accordance with rule 31(8), I would like to announce that next Tuesday the private members' resolution that will be considered will be the resolution of the Cross Lake cadet program sponsored by the honourable Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen).

Mr. Speaker: It's been announced that next Tuesday the private members' resolution that will be considered will be the resolution of the Cross Lake cadet program sponsored by the honourable Member for Flin Flon.

That's for the advice of the House. Now we'll go to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE (Seventh Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick),

THAT the following address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor:

We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at this Fifth Session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislature of Manitoba.

And the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), standing in the name of the honourable Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), who has 29 minutes remaining.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): It is my pleasure to rise to continue my comments with respect to our government's latest Throne Speech for the Fifth Session of this Thirty-Eighth Legislature that His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor delivered to the Legislative Assembly and to the people of Manitoba on November 15. I want to add some comments with respect to that particular Throne Speech which I'm

quite proud to be a part of, and the work of our government. I must say that our Throne Speeches and our budgets just keep getting better and better every year that we deliver them.

I am quite proud of the work that our Premier (Mr. Doer) and our ministers have done to improve the conditions for the people of Manitoba, regardless of where those Manitobans might live in our province. We have a number of issues that I'd like to talk a bit about with respect to the comments that, I believe, if I understand correctly right now, we're dealing with the amendment that the Member for Kirkfield Park, or I should say, the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen) put forward with respect to the government's Throne Speech wherein they moved amendments to our Throne Speech. I want to look at the comments that were made here and just pick up on a few of the key pieces that the Member for Fort Whyte had mentioned in his amendments to our Throne Speech, that we failed to ensure the promised level of flood protection for the people of Manitoba and for the people of Winnipeg.

We're in the middle of construction of the greater Winnipeg floodway. I don't understand how you can say, we're promising to keep our commitment to the people of this area and provide the flood protection necessary. That flood occurred in 1997 that put the city at risk, and it took this government coming into office to take the steps necessary to start the construction of the floodway. So that work is underway.

The economic development opportunities. Have you checked the prices of your houses here in the province of Manitoba lately to find out how well the housing prices are doing here? The value is increasing, Mr. Speaker. So the value of our housing stock is increasing in the province. We're having more homes constructed. We're hitting record highs of construction in the province.

Our young people are coming back to the province. The people who are here are staying here in this province, Mr. Speaker, and we have more and growing economic opportunities for the people of this province that we're proud of.

An Honourable Member: They're leaving by the truckload.

Mr. Reid: Well, it's interesting that our population is growing, yet the members opposite fail to see that that is occurring. I know during our Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, we made commitments, because we're

rapidly approaching the target that we had set for ourselves of some 10,000 new immigrants to the province of Manitoba. That is the target we set, and we're quickly approaching that target, so we have taken the next step to say that in setting targets for ourself, we'd like to double that immigration for people coming to the province of Manitoba. You'll see the signs even in the newspaper today about businesses looking for more people. So we're trying to grow not only the pie for all the people in Manitoba, but we're bringing more people to the province to increase those opportunities.

It will be interesting to see whether or not members opposite actually support and vote for this Throne Speech because I know this Throne Speech makes commitments. I just look to the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Lemieux) here and the announcement that we made just yesterday. I know members perhaps had a hard time coming to the Legislature today considering all the snow, but we made announcements about the purchase of new sanding and snowplough trucks for the province of Manitoba.

I remember being the critic for highways and transportation during the 1990s, Mr. Speaker, and there was not a single piece of new equipment, from recollection here, that was purchased by the previous government towards renewing the maintenance fleet, the highway fleet in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, it took this government to recognize that the average age of that fleet needed to be decreased, and we needed to increase the reliability of that maintenance equipment for our road system in the province. I'm proud of the fact of our Minister of Infrastructure making the announcement on behalf of our government to make sure that Manitobans, wherever they might live in our province, have the ability to travel about the province. So we have made that commitment into that infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, we have announced that we're going to begin the construction of the Conawapa hydro-electric dam on top of the Wuskwatim hydro-electric dam. I have to think back—I've been here about 16 years and about nine and a half of those were in opposition, I can't remember one single announcement by the Tories with respect to hydro-electric development other than to say that they were cancelling the Conawapa project. So they were a party and a government of the day, the dark days of the 1990s, where they did not proceed with any

hydro-electric development in the province. We, in partnership with our First Nations communities, are moving forward with the development of hydro-electricity in our province. We're creating job opportunities for the people of Manitoba and, in particular, the First Nations people of Manitoba, something that we are proud of, working in partnership with Manitobans wherever they might live in this province.

We have committed as a provincial government, Mr. Speaker, to invest some \$4 billion in our highway infrastructure in the province, \$4 billion in our highway infrastructure in this province. The Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) and the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) and I had the opportunity to travel the province of Manitoba, consulting with Manitobans, as a part of the 2020 Manitoba transportation review. We listened to Manitobans quite clearly, and the recommendations were that we had to make investments into our highways and road infrastructures in this province. This government listened to the recommendations that the people of Manitoba were making, and we have increased our budget to some \$400 million a year, more than even the 2020 report called for. We're proud of our government and the fact that they have recognized by way of our \$4-billion announcement over 10 years to increase our investment in our highways and road infrastructure in our province.

* (14:40)

Mr. Speaker, we have provided for a 60 percent tuition tax rebate. Now, I know members opposite are critical of that, but the objective here is to provide a quality education at a reasonable and affordable price for our young people in this province to encourage them to get the education they want and we want for them because they are our children after all. We want them to stay in this province, to get that education, and to go out into the workforce and be productive citizens in our province. We think that that tuition tax rebate, in addition to our other education incentives, will encourage young people to stay in the education system.

Mr. Speaker, our latest Throne Speech commits to the people of Manitoba that we are going to restore the public transit funding program, the 50-50 cost-sharing program that the previous Conservative government had cut during the 1990s, the dark days of the Tories and the dark days for the people of Manitoba when the Tory government cut that

particular funding support for public transit in this province. Our government has committed to restore that 50-50 public transit grant sharing—

An Honourable Member: Is that the 50-50 plan? It was a good plan. Where did the million dollars go, Daryl?

Mr. Reid: Well, I see that the member opposite doesn't support that, but, perhaps, when she gives her comments to the Throne Speech, she will be able to explain to her constituents why it is not a good idea to make an investment into public transit. But this government believes that we need to make that investment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have indicated that we are going to provide a \$2,000 rebate for hybrid automobiles in this province for those people in Manitoba that purchase these types of vehicles. We will provide an incentive to ensure that we can move towards an environmentally friendly transportation system in our province, in addition to the grant we are providing for public transportation.

It is interesting to note, too, that, over the last seven years, our government has accomplished much with respect to education. It started in 1999-2000, Mr. Speaker, in our first budget when we recognized that education was such a key and critical component to the future of Manitoba, where we lowered tuition costs for the young people in our province by 10 percent, and then we froze those tuition fees at those levels. Even till this day those tuition fees are frozen for those folks. Even my own children are going to school and are taking advantage of those programs. I know many members of this Legislative Assembly have children, and many other Manitobans have children who are enrolled in post-secondary education. It is a benefit for our young people because it gives them the affordable opportunity to get their education at the same time that they will then move into their job opportunities here within our province.

We have taken the steps, Mr. Speaker, to rebuild, as a part of our Throne Speech, this session, and in previous sessions, to rebuild the health care that was decimated by the Tories during the 1990s. It was very clear that their objective during the 1990s was to erode and undermine public confidence in public health care in our province. They were well on the way to doing that with the loss of some 1,864 nurses in the province of Manitoba during the Tory years. They cut doctor-training spaces to about 65. It doesn't even keep up with the growing demand of

doctors in our province, and yet they cut back the training spaces for doctors. Everybody in this province knows that it takes seven to 10 years to train a doctor, and yet the Tories cut back on the number of doctor-training spaces.

Mr. Speaker, talking to one of my constituents last night, in visiting my constituent at his home, he was telling me that the number of doctors now enrolled, I think he told me, was 101 doctors now enrolled in the medical college. So we have erased the dark days, or at least we have taken steps to erase the dark days of the Tories and increase the number of doctors in training, but everyone knows it will take a number of years for those doctors to actually enter into the health care system, but we are well on the way to solving that challenge.

We have increased the number of nurses in training. We are graduating some 800 nurses a year now. They are going into our health care system. We haven't totally erased the number that the Tories decimated by their cuts in firings of nurses in this province, Mr. Speaker, but we are well on the way to restoring the number of nurses in our health care system.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, coming into office that one of the first challenges in my community was that we had no ambulance assigned to my community, right? As a part of the city of Winnipeg, no ambulance was assigned for a population of some 30,000 or 35,000 people. Yet we recognized that challenge as a government, and we have gone out and purchased some 160 new ambulances, I believe it is, assigned to various communities of the province. My community of Transcona is one of those communities to benefit. We have now provided that service for people. We have put in place a central dispatch system so that, no matter where Manitobans are, they will have access to those emergency services.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know, and I listen to my colleague the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick) mentioning that this is the, unfortunately, 10th anniversary of the loss of our publicly owned Manitoba Telephone System, a dark day in the history of our province. I remember it quite vividly, the debate that occurred in this province—*[interjection]* I know the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) laughs about it because she perhaps profited by the share sales that her family participated in or she herself participated in.

I know, Mr. Speaker, and I remember the headlines that were in the newspapers about the stockbrokers that were selling the MTS shares at for-sale prices and making huge profits for the stockbrokers and the new Jaguars and Lexuses that they were buying, Mercedes that they were buying as a result of their increased wealth, and lo and behold, what happens to the premier of the day? The Conservative premier of the day ends up working for one of the lead stockbroker firms in the city here that was responsible for selling the Manitoba Telephone System shares.

So it's interesting to see that the Premier Filmon of the day indicated that he wasn't going to sell the phone company and then he flip-flopped and he sold the company right after the election campaign, misled—some people would say he went a little further than just misleading the people of Manitoba. It's unparliamentary for me to use the word I would like to use, Mr. Speaker, but it's a dark day that the Manitoba Telephone System was lost.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

In fact, the phone rates for the people of my community have gone up, on average, some 64 percent as a result of the sale of the Manitoba Telephone System. The interesting part is that the Conservative Party, who purports to value the opinions and what happens to the people of rural Manitoba, have disadvantaged the people of rural Manitoba when the phone rates in rural Manitoba in some areas have gone up as high as 118 percent. Now if that isn't sticking your finger in the eye of the people that elect you, I don't know what is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they obviously didn't listen to what the people of Manitoba were saying.

I know the current Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen), has indicated that he was instrumental in selling the Manitoba Telephone System and that he was a key adviser to Premier Filmon at the time that he wanted to get rid of that publicly owned Crown utility. I have no doubt in my mind that the objective of the Conservative Party—God forbid if they are ever elected to government again—would be to sell our publicly owned Manitoba Hydro. That is the part that worries and scares most Manitobans: you can't trust Conservatives because they misled you once about the telephone system, and they will obviously mislead you again with respect to Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I note that the members opposite, when the announcement was made with

respect to another one of our Crown utilities, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, didn't take the opportunity to stand up in this Legislature and talk about the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation and the fine value that that is for the people of Manitoba.

Now we have, I think it's seven out of the last eight years that the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation has either frozen or lowered rates for Manitobans. In fact, I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have just announced again that we're going to be issuing our second rebate to Manitobans with respect to the premiums that are paid, something that we're quite proud of. That's in addition to the 2.6 percent premium reduction that Manitobans are going to see on their premiums in this coming year and that we have shown Manitobans that we can manage Crown corporations in this province very effectively and efficiently for the benefit of all Manitobans.

I'm quite proud of the fact that Manitoba Public Insurance continues to be a high value for the people of Manitoba and provides competitive insurance rates and high value product and services for the people of Manitoba with respect to insurance of automobiles in this province. So we have shown Manitobans quite clearly that we can manage very efficiently and to the benefit of all Manitobans through our Crown corporations.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened to the comments that members opposite were making with respect to—they like to call themselves the blue party, but I've noticed lately even the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) has been indicating that he wants us to start paying more attention to Lake Manitoba. Well we have brought in legislation and regulations through our Water Stewardship Department to try and protect water quality, and I'll give our Premier full credit. Our Premier recognized many years ago that we needed to take steps, and that's why the Premier introduced, to our province, the Water Stewardship Department because we recognized how important water was to our province and for the health and well-being of all Manitobans.

* (14:50)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Tories now are saying that, well, we shouldn't take those steps at water regulations to protect the quality of our water and that we should abandon all of those steps. In fact, I listened to members of the Manitoba Pork Council even saying that we should scrap all our plans with respect to the water quality management zones in

this province and that we should push those decisions 15 years—this is on public record; it's not a secret—push those regulations 15 years into the future and perhaps studying it then with respect to water quality and water protection in our province. We think that's the wrong step. You wait 15 years and you won't have to worry about the quality of water because you'll be having distilled water the only product you have in this province.

Perhaps the objective of the members opposite is to make more business for their business community friends, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we want to protect water quality from source to the tap, and we think the steps that we are taking as a government through our water quality management zones and our phosphorus and nitrogen regulations are going to take those steps necessary.

I wouldn't suggest for a minute that there's only one particular component of our society, or our province, that's responsible for the degradation of water in this province because I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all have a role to play in protecting water in this province. But I look at the Member for Lakeside who said that he wants the government to start paying attention to Lake Manitoba water quality now. Well, it's nice for him to come on board now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we've been taking these steps for some years now.

Perhaps the Tories themselves are trying to convince Manitobans that they're a little bit green around the edges—

An Honourable Member: Green with envy.

Mr. Reid: Perhaps they are green with envy, but the only thing that I know that is blue-green, because the Tories like to consider themselves the blue party with a bit of green around the edges—the only thing that I know that's like that is cyanobacteria, most commonly known as pond scum. Those bacteria are considered to be blue-green, and there are neurotoxins and hepatoxins that are involved with the cyanobacteria. Of course, everybody knows that this blue-green algae is part of the problem in our lakes caused by high nitrogen and phosphate levels that we're taking steps to correct, and this government recognizes we need to take those steps. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, everybody knows that anything that is blue-green is foul smelling and toxic to life in this province. So we now have to take the steps necessary to protect not only the wildlife but the human population of this province, and we need

to take the steps now, not wait 15 years as some members opposite are suggesting we need to do.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know there are other members of my caucus and members of the opposition that would like to speak, so I'll try and wrap up my comments, but I listen to the comments that members opposite have made about the Wheat Board.

Some might say why is a member of an urban riding concerned about the Wheat Board, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, I have in my time as an adult had the opportunity to work on farms, friends who own farms and operate combines and other pieces of equipment on those, so I know just a small amount about farming and have talked to many folks who have and own farms and operate farms.

I've also talked to people in this city and in my community that happen to work as part of the Wheat Board operations, and they are very concerned for the jobs that are at risk as a result of the decision of the federal government, supported by this Conservative opposition, to try and eliminate the single-desk selling that is going to erase and eliminate those job opportunities.

I know members opposite are opposed to a vote or a plebiscite for the farmers of this province with respect to both wheat and barley, and I say that they are wrong. They should have supported our motion, and we will make sure that Manitobans, no matter where they live, on farms or whether they live in the cities, are aware of the decisions that the Conservative Party has made to eliminate those opportunities for Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We will make Manitobans aware of that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also look at the fact that the federal government, supported by this Conservative opposition here in Manitoba, is opposed to child care in this country and took the steps necessary to break a contract, a legal, binding contract that provided funding for the child care spaces in our province, and I know that there are families disadvantaged by that decision.

One of the facts that my colleagues here in this Legislature might not know is that the current federal government, again supported, no doubt, by the provincial Conservative opposition, has hired an American citizen to be a part of the NAFTA free trade advisory panel. I refer to the fact that the Prime Minister has hired the president and CEO of CN Rail, an American citizen, to act as an adviser to the

Canadian government on international trade matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now, it's interesting that you'd choose an American to advise a Canadian government on trade with your American partners. I often wonder where this is going to lead and what decisions are going to be made on the part of the federal government now that they have Americans advising the Canadian government on what we should do with our trade with the Americans. So that'll be interesting, and we'll be keeping our eye on that one for the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to water, I'll just go back to that for a minute, because this has affected, not only all Manitobans—I know my colleague, the Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) has made comment with respect to hog production in this province and how it's going to affect the people of this province. In particular, the plant that is proposed for my area, I have said publicly, and I will say on the record here in this Legislature, that I am opposed to the location that has been chosen for this plant. I make no secret about that. I have my residents in my community, whom I have consulted widely and broadly about this, and we will make sure that we continue to represent the interests of the people of my community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm quite proud of the fact that the people of Transcona have shown confidence in me and have allowed me to be their representative for the last 16 years, and that, once again, when we go to the people of Manitoba to seek their support, the people of Transcona will have their opportunity to again cast their say on the progress that our government has made on so many different fronts, a government that I'm proud to be a part of, and a government that has shown that we can lead the way in new and innovative ideas and opportunities for the people of Manitoba and grow this province the way we want to grow this province for the benefit of all the people.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to have my comment with respect to our government's Throne Speech, and I look forward to other opportunities to speak on behalf of the people of Transcona.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Deputy Speaker, first, I would like to welcome the new Clerk Assistant to the Assembly. It's certainly a pleasure to have you, and we'll certainly enjoy your time with us. Also, I would like to welcome the pages and the

interns that are new to staff and the rest of the staff that is just starting in this fall session.

Mostly, I want to thank the people from Lakeside, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to serve them, bring their issues forward and most front to the Assembly of Manitoba which is most important, that we bring those issues forward.

I also want to pay tribute to the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), who has done just a tremendous job in his time serving his people. We all know how that campaign went last week; there's a replacement, and we'll certainly welcome him to our caucus after the next election. Also, I want to pay tribute to the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), who also was elected back in 1988, two years, just after the Member for Ste. Rose, who's also done just an exceptional great job, and sharing his stories with us what he has accomplished and what he's not accomplished over the past few years. We all know that it's a trying process, and that we do want to do the best job that we possibly can while we're members of this Assembly.

I also want to congratulate the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale) on the time he's served, from 1995. I know that it has been a long time in this House compared to the rest of the members. I know that he's tried desperately to take matters into his own hands. We look back to the Child and Family Services and the fiasco that he caused there, and we look at Health, and while he was minister he made us dead last, so something he's leaving with a legacy. There's no doubt about that. But we won't go into all the hardships that just he has caused. It's more the government that is at fault when you look at the overall picture.

I do want to talk about the "Doer-nothing" of the Throne Speech and the debate. Since my election in 2003, I've heard how this great Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) was the leader and has nothing to offer, is nothing but the truth, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This member's leadership has brought mounting debt to the people of this province with his mismanagement, leading from one disaster to another. Also, the Member for Concordia promised to fix our health care system with six months and \$15 million. He stood in this very House and said, and I quote, "We have zero people in the hallway." I say shame on this member.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Crocus is another issue that the Member for Concordia has misled us on. He's claimed that everything was clean as a whistle. He

had asked that 34,000 Manitobans—excuse me. I'm getting choked up over the comments from the Member for Concordia.

* (15:00)

Some \$60 million of losses was resulting from the gross mismanagement on this issue alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that the Member for Concordia has taken the issues in many different areas and tried to bring them to the forefront of this province. Really, what he's done is just misled Manitobans one time after the after.

The Throne Speech, when we look at it overall, I know the Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) promised to look after our ranchers and farm families when BSE broke out back almost three years ago now, almost four. What did she do? She offered loans to our farmers and put them more in debt. Instead of building slaughter facilities, she simply talked about it for three years, accomplishing nothing. She imposed a \$2-backdoor tax on our producers and we called for meeting after meeting. Finally the minister realized that she had made a mistake by not making it voluntary and also refundable. We're very proud of the fact that the Member for Swan River did, in fact, listen to the producers, listen to the auction marts, listen to the farmers and make it, indeed, voluntary.

We do question, however, the fact that they're having almost \$250,000 in administration fees that is going to be going to nothing but the bureaucrats and the people appointed by the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), who are not accountable to anyone but to her. They set their own salaries; they set their own administration. We find that strange whenever they don't have to be accountable to anyone other than themselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'm also wondering why the Member for Swan River—I would note that we heard nothing on agriculture in this Throne Speech other than she wanted to talk about the Canadian Wheat Board. She called for a provincial plebiscite on a federal issue while ignoring her provincial responsibilities to follow through on biofuel development consultation or increased slaughter capacity.

She made a trip down to Ottawa just a few weeks ago, went on a committee and told that committee that the Province was prepared to hold a provincial plebiscite that would cost about \$16,000. The following week her boss went on radio to say that it would cost thousands more; in fact, in the

neighbourhood of \$200,000. I seriously doubt whether either one of them knows what they're talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, net farm incomes have been at an all-time low for far too long, with a loss of \$185 million in 2005. Manitoba suffered the largest decline in the entire country. With the exception of British Columbia, every other province has gained in 2005. Indeed, with regard to meaningful support programs for our farm families, what does this minister do? She continues to support the ill-conceived CAIS program. In the Throne Speech, the Member for Swan River called it the Canadian Agricultural Income support program. In fact, actually it is called the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program. The fact that they cannot even get the name right speaks volumes about the contempt they have for this province's primary industry.

With a new federal government elected this past year, the Minister of Agriculture had an opportunity, a chance to stand up for farmers and eliminate the poorly managed relief program. But her pride wouldn't let her admit that she'd made a mistake. She'd rather had farm families deal with the complicated rules and time-consuming paperwork than admit there are problems with their program. Shame on her, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The NDP inadequacies go on even further, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Clean water for our province is a goal we all share. We thought things were progressing well when this government established the soil pH levels as a result of several meetings with the Ministers of Water Stewardship, Conservation and Agriculture. This government met with farm groups on Friday to tell them they were making progress. Then, on the other hand, the shoe dropped and dropped the ball on the hog producers. They called the hog producers back the following Wednesday and told them there was an immediate moratorium on the hog industry, totally blind-siding our stakeholders, this as usual with no consultation with our producers.

A recent survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found 54 percent of agribusiness found environmental regulations the biggest problem they faced from government. I can only imagine how much worse they'd find with this moratorium bringing the industry down, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) even had the gall to tell CBC that tremendous economic growth in the hog industry made it prudent to call a halt to this industry. How ridiculous. This government has convicted the swine industry for all the phosphorus in our rivers and lakes. Might I suggest to this government, look at the big picture for once and not run a successful industry out of town.

I know the province of Saskatchewan is open for business. I know the Minister of Agriculture, Mark Wartman, has gladly said they will take advantage of the opportunities this government shuns. Make no mistake, the NDP government is sending a message to all Canadians that Manitoba is closed for business. I say, shame on this government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could go on about the inaccuracies of this government, and I know that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) or the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province has made it very clear that they are not open for business. Saskatchewan, on the other hand, has made it very clear that they are open for business. We are very concerned about whether or not the processing plant will move forward within the province of Manitoba. Also, the growth of the hog industry within the province of Manitoba, and also the other livestock sectors, again, are in question about whether or not they are going to be next.

This speech did nothing to say anything for rural Manitobans, but in closing I would like to add it does little for the province and this city as a whole. Manitoba deserves more, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like the NDP to know I for one will work hard to see that they do get more. Thank you.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne at the opening of the Fifth Session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislature of the Province of Manitoba read by the Honourable John Harvard, P.C., O.M., Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Manitoba.

I would like to thank all staff and officers of this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the Clerk and table officers to the Sergeant-at-Arms, without whose direction and support many of us would flounder. I would also like to welcome the new Clerk. I am sure you will enjoy your colleagues. It is a strong team. I hope you enjoy us a little bit, too.

As well, the *Hansard* staff needs to be recognized for their critical job of ensuring all words spoken in the Chamber are kept accurate. Heaven knows, they've covered my mistakes, and others in this House, I know full well, appreciate their accurate recording.

To you, the Speaker, for his adept and even-handed handling of the business presented in this House in the past, and I am sure, into the future.

I would also just like to pay a tribute to the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale). I feel very privileged to have been elected in here when he was still here and minister. I certainly utilized every opportunity to request his opinion and advice, and I am very grateful for that. He will be sorely missed.

To our new pages, whose energy and enthusiasm is apparent to all, we hope your experience enriches your lives as much as you do ours. To our interns, upon whom we rely so heavily to produce whatever we need, often on an instant notice, we hope you realize how much we appreciate you in case we fail to let you know regularly.

I want to add my words of support and praise that this government so well deserves. Our Premier is the most popular in Canada, and for good reason. I am proud of what he and my colleagues have done to enrich and expand the opportunities for all Manitobans to improve their quality of life.

It has been exciting to watch our government push forward steadily and sure-footedly in fulfilling our commitments made in and since 1999. I feel privileged to have been elected in the year our party became government, as I have enjoyed being at the ground-level of the rebuilding of a province fiscally, economically, socially, educationally and ecologically, and for that opportunity I wish to thank the voters of the St. James constituency.

* (15:10)

In the Throne Speech, one year is mentioned over and over again, 1999. That was the end of the 1990s and the end of the dark days. That was the year that Manitobans turned their collective backs on the politics of pessimism and neglect, and embraced the politics of optimism and revitalization put forward by today's New Democrats. Together, with Manitobans of all backgrounds, we are renewing, revitalizing and redeveloping our city centres, college and university campuses, and hospitals and infrastructure.

We are making investments that will benefit our citizens for generations to come. In our hospitals in Winnipeg, Brandon, Gimli and Morden-Winkler, new facilities. Emergency and operating rooms have been opened; new primary health centres have been developed, and new dialysis facilities have been opened beyond the city of Winnipeg.

Now, locally, I was proud to have been at hand in September at the opening of the new Movement Disorders Clinic as part of the Deer Lodge Centre. I believe this didn't get nearly the attention it did, so I'm going to take a few moments to inform people of exactly what a wonderful new building we have here.

This facility is the revitalized Women's Tribute Building at the corner of Woodlawn Street and Portage Avenue. In 1999, when I was elected, it was brought to my attention that it had been lying empty for some time, and what was the intent? I didn't know. I researched it, and when I found out its history, I was just horrified. I can't believe that it had been left sitting for 14 years. I was just aghast at the disregard and the disrespect in neglecting this building for over a decade.

This building was built for the soldiers of the Great War. This was a disrespect to their memory and, I believe, a disrespect to the women of Manitoba who took 14 years to build this building. I guess today it angers me even more when I realize that they're starting to recognize the Great War, that they have just recently, and I must point out it was the NDP, federally, that was able to pass the bill that will allow a state burial for the last Great War veteran when he dies. So to me it was like kicking over a tombstone. So I was only too happy to take on the job of trying to get it restored.

Just for your own interest, and I'm sure people will feel as strongly as I do if you have a little hint of what did happen. It was 90 years ago. It was in 1917 when the first organizational meeting led by Harriet Walker, who worked in a newsroom, saw pictures of the war dead coming back, and was intent on doing something to pay tribute to those fighting in the Great War.

It was in 1917 that they had the "Foundation Tribute Night," starting with a parade of over 3,000 men and women in uniform, and ending at the Walker Theatre where they managed to raise, if you can appreciate back in those days, almost \$10,000. Some was pledged and some was donated. It took

another 10 years for the Canadian Legion Branch to be opened, and it was their contribution and support that eventually led, but not for another 6 years, to the actual tendering of the contract. Incidentally, it was Northwood and Chivers who were the architects, who were also World War I veterans. That's probably the only upside I could see is that they not only lived, they were able to contribute to their own restoration.

The cornerstone was laid on July of 1931, 14 years later. It was then used for 55 years, and in 1986, it was closed by the Valour Road branch. It was used for a variety of things, but the biggest talk was a parking lot. There's a group of women that managed to save it from that, but it nevertheless was left to deteriorate.

In 1987, Deer Lodge purchased it from the foundation. In 1999, like I said, when I was elected, I, with the assistance of Councillor Peter De Smedt actually, was able to get the city to do a feasibility study, which was positive. Actually, in 2000, Patrick Swayze and his crew decided to use it for a movie shoot and it was in such decrepit condition, that they required some safety issues to be done. Our government once again jumped in, and thanks to our honourable now-Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) enabled a movie shoot there.

In 2001, the Women's Tribute Memorial Lodge Committee, a volunteer group, was formed and the rest is history. It was in September that we had the ribbon cutting of the Movement Disorders Clinic, the first of its kind in Manitoba, bringing diagnosis, treatment, research and hope to thousands living with neurological disorders. It's a one-stop solution to the complex treatment of these debilitating conditions. The Movement Disorders Clinic provides timely and convenient neurological treatment to approximately 5,000 patients annually. It has been identified as a high priority in Manitoba and is expected to attract a host of visiting and permanent neurologists to the province.

Our goal is providing excellence in neurological care while reducing the waiting period for treatment from eight months to only two months. The clinic provides a valuable link between the community in Deer Lodge while bringing together specialized health care professionals to provide an integrated-care approach for patients. Our veterans, to whom this tribute was built, would be proud, I believe, to have the monument not only saved but providing a valuable, valuable service to their community.

These new facilities and other investments in health care have resulted in a reduction of wait times in a large number of areas of health care. Orthopedic surgery, elective CT, elective MRI and bone density testing are a few such areas.

When we first came into government, waits for life-saving treatment, such as cancer radiation therapy and cardiac surgery, were unacceptably long. We focussed on ensuring those wait times were reduced. Today, the wait time for radiation therapy in Manitoba is one week compared to six weeks in 1999. The median wait for all cardiac surgeries is down to 13 days.

I just want—it seems a good spot to add—I know that my colleague from Burrows here has already read the entirety, but I can't help but think something this good deserves repeating: Even better news. This is Vic Grant on November 22; he says: But setting the politics aside, even better news, *The Globe and Mail*, a national newspaper, tells the rest of the country that, while many provinces are struggling mightily with wait times for cancer treatment, our province, Manitoba, is leading the way and currently provides the quickest response time in the nation.

* (15:20)

In addition to its commitment to health care, I congratulate this government for its commitment to the needs of Manitoba's children by introducing legislation to enshrine Manitoba's leading Healthy Child strategy and will continue to work with communities and families to deliver its five-year plan for strengthening child care options. In fact, the Healthy Child strategy has been recognized by the Health Council of Canada as the recommended strategy for other provinces to adopt. Many other groups have recognized our government's progress in making this province a leader in helping children and families, including the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, which noted that Manitoba's child poverty rate is the lowest that it has been in 15 years. There is still much work to be done, but this significant decrease is certainly encouraging. The council's executive director credits much of this increase to the provincial government's decision to end the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement, giving \$14 million a year back to families who can make use of this support. More than 20,000 people have been eliminated from the provincial income tax roles since 1999 and minimum wage has increased by 26.6 percent since 2000.

This government has committed itself to hold the federal government to its commitment to the children of Manitoba and expect that commitment to be honoured. As well, a new program will be introduced to provide every child born in Manitoba with an early start on reading. The public library system will be extended with added funding from municipalities and will be provided with enhanced programs to families on literacy, nutrition and positive parenting. An adult literacy act will be introduced to help prevent adult Manitobans from being left behind due to a lack of reading skills.

The expansion of community recreation facilities across Manitoba and the expansion of the trail network in the province will help to promote the healthy lifestyles so necessary for a productive life. All these initiatives recognize what all Manitoba parents know in their hearts: that active, healthy, literate children who are loved and cared for and are an integral part of the fulfilling lives we all want for our children are the cornerstone for the development of a strong and compassionate province.

Education, both public and post-secondary, are essential ingredients to the development of a strong, revitalized, compassionate and optimistic Manitoba, and this government is committed to both public and post-secondary education. This is apparent in the fact that over the past seven years funding has been provided for 10 new schools, 13 replacement schools, 48 additions to schools and over 600 renovation projects of schools. Meanwhile, in partnership with the private sector in both the cities of Winnipeg and Brandon, we have seen the construction and revitalization of the Engineering and Information Technology Complex at the University of Manitoba, the construction of a new downtown campus for Red River College and the first phase of the relocation of Assiniboine Community College.

While we have made progress in keeping our young people, we will continue with policies that provide affordable, accessible education opportunities and hope for the future. These policies of hope will be augmented by a new initiative designed to encourage our youth to put down roots in Manitoba. For the first time in Manitoba history, all post-secondary students who stay and work in the province will receive a 60 percent tax rebate on their tuition fees.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had the honour of being the MLA for St. James since 1999. During that

time I have met and engaged in conversation with countless groups and individuals who live in my constituency. To a person, what they want is a rewarding life for themselves and their families. What they want is to live and work productively. What they want is for there to be effective infrastructure in place to support, enhance and revitalize their efforts. What they want is a provincial government that takes its responsibilities to Manitobans seriously and recognizes that the wishes, wants and needs of all of us count. They are prepared to work for this, not only for themselves but also for their communities. These are the people who give of their time and efforts in volunteering with a wide range of organizations both small and large. These are the businesses who give their time and resources to help such organizations in fundraising, and these are the people who look to the future with optimism. In St. James alone I can list so many of these organizations and individuals, I am afraid to leave any out. But just last weekend I attended the Peak of the Market fundraiser for the Cancer Society. They have also done much to relieve poverty as well over the years. Our local food stores, Family Foods, Foodfare, frequently donate for events in our community; firefighters team up with Safeway; volunteers keep our Aviation Museum flying with energy and enthusiasm; gold wings and silver wings sparkle in a myriad of ways helping others at the airport; Friends of Bruce Park keep our green spaces and creek healthy and are now teaming up with Rotary to further enhance and stabilize the park entrance.

Other service clubs like Kinsmen and Optimist continually help in a variety of projects all over the community, as do our Legion. The St. James Rods picked a project teacher to help clean up the environment. Our schools' parent councils work hard. Our students do outreach to other schools and community needs. For instance, our St. James Collegiate students, in consultation with the Legion, just completely restored the cenotaph at Bruce Park over a three-year period. Silver Heights students have provided bands at fundraisers for literacy and elementary schools, like Assiniboine provided the choirs. Many hardworking parents put much effort into keeping our recreational facilities and programs running, which of course contributes to a healthy lifestyle so necessary to a productive life. Not to forget our St. James Anglican Church, running a much needed Lighthouse. I cannot say enough for the volunteers that provide a safe place to keep our children busy and out of trouble.

The Manitoba family resource centre provides many volunteers to help primarily with the military families, but they also help many people in our communities and the military themselves have joined in many civic improvements.

For seniors, I have to mention the Age and Opportunity, our seniors centre, where seniors provide countless hours of volunteer work. And our pet shelters like D'Arcy's ARC.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are just some of the people who look to the future with optimism and who revitalize me every day just for having known them. As Vic Grant said in his comments on "Excuse Me!", November 22: We've got things pretty good in this province. Not too big but not too small either. Yes, we have other warts to contend with, and we bleat and whine about a lot of things, but generally speaking we have it pretty good here, and our valleys are never too deep and our peaks are never too high. It's refreshing every once in a while to think about the good things, the positives this province has to offer. It's a respite from digging up the negatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, former politics of pessimism and neglect before 1999 have been overwhelmed by the politics of optimism and revitalization of the Today's NDP. The province is moving again. Since 1999 Manitoba has become a better place, and with the current plans by our government, as expressed in the Throne Speech, it will be even better tomorrow. I am incredibly proud to support this Throne Speech. Thank you.

* (15:30)

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I rise for the eighth time to speak to a Throne Speech. I do consider it an honour to be able to address this Chamber as I think all of us should who have been chosen to represent our communities here in the Manitoba Legislature. I wish to begin my comments by first of all thanking the residents of the R.M. of Springfield and the R.M. of East St. Paul. Over the years I've had the opportunity to attend many events in my community and Tanya, my wife, and our children, Brigitta, Stefan and Corina, are always received and welcomed as friends, are just treated in the most terrific manner by our constituents, and I would like to thank them for the kindness they have shown to myself, to Tanya and our children.

I would like to mention to this House that we are once again going to have the Springfield Christmas

open house. That'll be Thursday, November 30, at 7 p.m., in Kin Place Health Complex in Oakbank. We've had it now running for over 20 years. It was started by my predecessor, Glen Findlay, and continued to this day by myself. We are looking at having all kinds of festivities. We are having the vocal group from the Oakbank United Church. We are looking at having a lot of presentations. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) and his family are going to be there. I understand that some of my members of parliament are going to see if they can be in attendance.

We also, at that time, are planning on honouring, as I've done in previous years, those individuals who've served our communities, whether it was as reeve, councillor, school trustee, and either decided to retire or were not returned. They will be honoured that night as well.

I understand that my staff has put in an urgent call to the North Pole, and there will be a special guest attending the Christmas open house. I don't want to give it away, but he wears a red suit and has a big sackful of candies and gifts and stuff, but, anyway—so you have to wait until Thursday to find out who that special guest is. Again, I would like to welcome all members to attend, and we are looking forward to a great celebration.

I also would like to thank the Springfield Progressive Conservative Association for, once again, nominating me as their candidate in the next provincial general election. I've now been nominated for the third time. They are always very generous and very gracious in their support of myself as their candidate. I would like to thank my association president, Lucas Golebiowski, and the rest of the executive in Springfield for their hard work that they do on behalf of the association.

I also would like to take this opportunity to thank my staff from over the past year, Matthew Pruse, who is here as my legislative assistant, who moved on to work for the YMCA. He's now working at the Rady centre, I believe, now doing life-guarding work there. He did a lot of hard work for myself and for the people of Springfield working at the Legislature here, and, certainly, do miss him. He did a great job for us. We certainly appreciate it, and wish him all the best in whatever endeavours he takes to pursue.

I'd like to welcome Kelly McCrae, who came on as my new legislative assistant. He's done a magnificent job. He's here from Brandon, and has

settled in and is working very hard down in the office making sure that all the issues that we have to deal with as legislators are taken care of.

I'd also like to welcome Ardit Cook, who's now working in my constituency office as a constituency assistant. She is a dynamic individual, lives in Oakbank. Her family has deep roots in the community. I am really pleased that she has agreed to accept the position, and am looking forward to many more years of her serving the people of Springfield, East St. Paul in the office.

As many would know, Gayle Dowler has been in the office since my predecessor Glen Findlay was there. She's decided to step back a little bit. She's still going to do the books, but Gayle is always a treasured individual in our community. She is loved and respected, and I am pleased that she is still going to stay on in my office. She is just an amazing wealth of information, and is truly loved and appreciated by our community.

Before I move on to my few comments on the Throne Speech, I also would like to comment to my colleagues, Jack Penner and Glen Cummings, who made that very courageous decision to decide not to contest the nominations in their constituencies and, instead, have decided that they are going to move on to bigger and better things. I would like to congratulate both of them for the work that they've done in the Manitoba Legislature on behalf of the constituents. They have served many, many years and have served this Chamber well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to turn my attention to the Throne Speech and, of course, the amendment that we are actually speaking to today. The Throne Speech was a bit of a misnomer. It read or sounded a lot more like a budget than a Throne Speech, and I'm sure that had nothing to do with the impending election. Members across the way shake their heads and say, no, no, it wouldn't have anything to do with that. But it was quite surprising in that the Throne Speech, first of all, was probably more political than I remember the previous seven being, and it included massive spending. That's a concern for Manitobans, massive spending with seemingly no plan on continuing on with projects like the floodway in their current form. Only this budget could spin that they're over budget and have to slash the project as somehow being on budget, on time. This is a government that would take an eight-year-old bridge, destroy it, build in its place a new bridge and then allow 40-year-old derelict bridges to stand

and somehow find that Manitobans would be in agreement with that kind of mismanagement, that kind of poor planning.

We've seen the same kind of planning when it comes to health care. My favourite is where the Premier (Mr. Doer) went to a press conference and was asked about people in the hallways and said, we don't have hallway medicine, and had to shamefully admit that he was not in touch nor in tune with what was going on. In fact, people have had to lie down on the floors in emergencies because there weren't any beds left even in emergency wards. We know that it's a chronic problem. With the amount of money that has been poured into it—again, massive spending but no plan—it has proven that this government has outstayed its welcome. It really is time for a change in Manitoba.

When it comes to education, we're increasingly hearing about schools. We know that there's one school, and my colleague from Pembina mentions that he's got something like 600 students who are right now being educated in huts, and there seems to be no plan to rectify the situation. We know that there are a lot of different issues in education that are not being dealt with by this government and certainly not being addressed by the Throne Speech, another failing. Again, we see massive spending, no plan.

The other issue is with crime prevention. We've seen the government basically throw its hands in the air, say, we recognize that there's a serious problem, and walk away from it. It's come to the point of an epidemic. We know that Manitobans are getting crime fatigue because they just live with it day in, day out, and seemingly we have a tired, exhausted government that's not prepared to deal with those issues.

We then have agriculture. This is a government that would rather spend all day debating federal issues rather than even broaching on touching an issue, even one issue, that's within their purview in agriculture. They've allowed our farmers to flounder. When asked to deal with the issues, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) chooses to ignore them. We have basically farmers who've just thrown their hands in the air and have declared that this government is useless when it comes to standing up for agriculture.

The list goes on and on. Yes, there are an awful lot of massive spending announcements, yet no plan. We see an awful lot of money being spent, money that comes from transfers from the federal

government, yet no wealth creation, no growth creation. It's all basically government money being spent with no plan. That's why I think it's important that this House take the opportunity to look very clearly, very closely at the amendment for the House, vote for it and vote against this Throne Speech because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it bodes poorly for Manitoba. If all the spending were to happen that they committed to—and we have known for awhile that members on the other side more than likely have no intention of living up to all those commitments—they certainly would cause an awful lot of debt in this province, debt that we would never get out from under, if that were the case.

* (15:40)

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would again say to this House, the amendment is the right way to go. It lays out the difficulties we have with this Throne Speech and I would recommend that this House vote for it. I believe that, after the next election, Manitobans are going to look at what disastrous government they've had for the last eight years and are going to vote for change. Until then, the best we can do is hold this government to account for its massive spending with no plan, heavy debt and problems on areas; yet, they seem to be far too tired to deal with them.

With those few comments on the record, I'd like to allow someone else to have the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to be able to share some thoughts on the recent Throne Speech by our provincial NDP government. What struck me the most while listening to the Throne Speech is how many very positive stories we have to share here in Manitoba these days. Many citizens, of course, have never heard of these successes, largely because of the constant negativity directed at all governments, generally, these days, both in the media and elsewhere. So let me address this directly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The notion that all political parties are the same is a myth, and so is the belief that getting involved is a waste of time. Indeed, my comments will highlight numerous instances where citizens are having a profound impact on the work and direction of our government, as it should be. In the end, I hope to make it absolutely clear that governments do matter,

and who is in charge of a government matters even more.

With so much excellent news to report, I have chosen to organize around the theme of sustainable development. This reflects our government's increasing efforts to integrate social, economic and environmental factors when decisions are made. This has not always been the case in Manitoba. The Conservatives held power in this province from 1990 to 1999, and a very different mindset prevailed. Given that the current leader of the provincial Conservatives was chief of staff to former Premier Filmon during that time, and, especially, given some of the policy statements he and his colleagues have been making of late, it is quite clear that the Conservatives are still very much stuck in that era. Manitobans, meanwhile, and their new NDP government have moved on to a far more positive, inclusive and just vision for our collective future.

Due to time constraints, this is a speech purely about content, about real government accomplishments for real people in their day-to-day lives. Besides, in what may have been his departing speech last week as an MLA, the retiring and most honourable Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale), who has been my friend, colleague and mentor in so many ways, has set the bar for eloquence and intelligence high enough that it will be a good number of years before I attempt the same.

Now, let me begin with just a few highlights on the Manitoba economy.

Employment and labour force participation. On Aboriginal participation in the economy, the NDP has formal agreements with Aboriginal people on the Northern Development Strategy, the Aboriginal Education Action Plan, the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, and a new approach to northern hydro development that gives full decision-making powers and partnership opportunities to local communities. Nothing like this ever happened while the Conservatives were in power.

On job creation, under the NDP, Manitoba has created an average of 6,483 jobs per year. More than half of those jobs were created in the private sector. This is a 126 percent improvement over the Conservative era of the 1990s.

On unemployment rates, the NDP has reduced unemployment by 17 percent since 1999. Last year, our average monthly unemployment rate of 4.8

percent was the lowest in Manitoba since 1976. I was in grade 2 back then.

On youth unemployment rates, Manitoba's was the second lowest in Canada last year and more youth are working today in Manitoba than at any time in the 1990s.

On training on the job, there are 1,200 more apprenticeship opportunities now than there were in 1999.

On population growth, Manitoba has recorded a net gain of over 6,600 people between 2000 and 2006, compared to a net loss of over 9,700 people during the previous six years of Conservative rule.

On immigration, the NDP will this year achieve our goal of welcoming 10,000 people to Manitoba, compared to the 2,000 or so who came here, on average, each year during the Conservative regime. Our Throne Speech commits the NDP to double this increase to 20,000 immigrants per year, a tenfold improvement over the Conservative era.

On retaining young people, Manitoba has increased every year since 1999 the number of young people living here for a total gain of 11,000. This reverses a Conservative era when Manitoba lost almost twice as many young people as we gained.

Infrastructure and investment. On infrastructure, the NDP in six years increased the budget for infrastructure from \$167 million to over \$400 million per year, a 125 percent increase. In contrast, the Conservatives took \$200 million away from citizens by increasing the gas tax by 2.5 cents a litre, but they only managed to improve the infrastructure budget by \$1 million each year. The NDP Throne Speech commits our government to the largest investment in infrastructure in Manitoba's history of \$4 billion over the next 10 years.

On investment, Statistics Canada projects that Manitoba this year will lead all provinces in capital investment with over 14 percent growth, more than double the national average of 6.1 percent.

On film production, Manitoba has become the fastest growing film centre in Canada, with annual production activity in the \$100-million range. Not so under the Conservatives.

Government finances. On fiscal responsibility, the NDP has brought in seven consecutive, balanced budgets.

On debt repayment, the NDP has paid off \$704 million in general purpose debt and pension liabilities. In contrast, the Conservatives kept the entire pension liability off the books while in office, creating a \$2.9 billion problem that is now being addressed responsibly.

On credit rating upgrades, the NDP has received four credit rating upgrades from bond agencies such as Moody's, saving millions of citizen tax dollars in interest charges. The NDP's reduction of Manitoba's debt to GDP ratio by 20 percent has been a key factor in receiving these important upgrades.

On progressive purchasing policies, the NDP has implemented the first no-sweat procurement policy in all of Canada to ensure that clothing for government employees is not made with child labour. In their decade of governance in the 1990s, the Conservatives did not see fit to address this.

Income and tax relief: On disposal income, Manitobans under the NDP have seen their personal disposal income increased by 23.5 percent in the last seven years. During their final seven years in office, the Conservatives only increased this by 15.1 percent, less than two thirds the level achieved by our government.

On tax relief for businesses, the Manitoba NDP recognizes that most citizens employed in the private sector are with small- and medium-sized businesses. As of January 1, 2007, the small business tax will become the second lowest in Canada at 3 percent, compared to the second-highest rate of 8 percent under the Conservatives.

On property tax relief, the NDP has reinstated property tax credits that were removed by the Conservatives, who also offloaded education funding in the 1990s to such an extent that school property taxes increased by an average of 60 percent across Manitoba.

On property tax relief for seniors, the NDP further increased the tax credit for seniors to \$800.

For a better Winnipeg: On downtown revitalization, the NDP has brought new life to the heart of Winnipeg, with new and environmentally-friendly buildings and services such as the Red River College Princess Street Campus, the Millennium Library, MTS Centre and the new corporate headquarters of Manitoba Hydro. Boarded-up buildings on Portage Avenue and record levels of destructive arson in the inner city were the dismal legacy of the Conservatives in this regard.

On inner city renewal, in 2000 the NDP created the Neighbourhoods Alive! program in seven pilot communities across Manitoba, through local neighbourhood renewal corporations such as the West Broadway Development Corporation and the Spence Neighbourhood Association. Citizens and local agencies have been at the forefront in determining where over \$26 million in community projects should be allocated to meet local priorities and needs.

Groups like Art City, Crossways, Cornish Child Care Centre, Day Nursery Centre, the Good Food Club, West End Cultural Centre, St. Matthews-Maryland Healthy Living project, and the West End women's resource centre are just a few whose invaluable work has been made possible through Neighbourhoods Alive! In 2005, the NDP expanded the Neighbourhoods Alive! program to include almost the entire inner city of Winnipeg.

On public transit, two successive budget increases by the NDP previously, combined with a new Throne Speech commitment of \$12.6 million will restore the original 50-50 cost-sharing agreement with municipalities for public transit that the Tories unilaterally cancelled in 1993.

On flood protection, this spring we'll see the Winnipeg floodway expansion project spearheaded by the NDP come in on time and on budget for its interim goal of protection from a 1-in-300-year flood. The NDP government has insisted that workers on the floodway be paid union wages, and that some of the jobs created be set aside as training opportunities for workers learning a new trade. To put it mildly, the current provincial Conservatives have opposed both of these features on the floodway project, making clear they have no solutions to the current labour shortages and do not support living wages for workers, never mind the fact that the fully completed floodway project will protect Winnipeg against a 1-in-700-year flood.

* (15:50)

Economic engines for the public good. On the Canadian Wheat Board, the NDP governments of both Manitoba and Saskatchewan are pledging to hold a vote for all grain farmers on the future of their single-desk marketing board. True to form, the provincial Conservatives are in lock step with the bullying and undemocratic behaviour of their federal counterparts, as they attempt to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board and turn Canada's lucrative grain trade

over to the control of foreign, multinational corporations.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

On the Conawapa Dam, the NDP committed in the Throne Speech to build the 1250 megawatt Conawapa Dam. To put that in perspective, Manitoba's entire grid capacity to generate electricity, right now, is a little over 5000 megawatts. Conawapa will be the largest hydro-electric project ever built in Manitoba. Construction alone will create 13,000 person-years of employment, and because of the local geography, there will be very little flooding. A \$60-million pre-project training program is already in place to maximize employment opportunities for Aboriginal and northern residents. This is, actually, the second time an NDP government has pursued Conawapa because the Conservatives foolishly mothballed this lucrative project in the 1990s, just as the provincial Liberals have closed the Limestone dam which has yielded billions in export revenue.

On the financing of future Manitoba hydro projects, the NDP is building new hydro-electric wind and conservation capacity in our province using public money. Meanwhile, the Conservative leader has mused openly about how he would use public-private partnerships to finance these projects. This would be just another blatant abuse of citizens' money, since no private investor can match the low borrowing rate available to Crown corporations through government.

On Crown corporations themselves, the NDP believes these precious assets of the public good should remain in public hands by and for the benefit of Manitobans. The Conservatives want these benefits to only flow to wealthy investors, even if they reside outside of Manitoba. Where the NDP has passed legislation requiring a full public referendum should any future government attempt to privatize a Crown corporation like Manitoba Hydro, the Conservatives sold off the formerly publicly owned Manitoba Telephone System, after promising in the 1995 election they wouldn't do this. Indeed, just two months after they won that election, the Conservatives had no less than six brokerage firms working on the privatization scheme, which ended with a pathetic initial offering of \$13 per share which everyone knew was a complete giveaway. Fast forward to today, and MTS shares are still at the \$44 value they reached within weeks of privatization, while the cost of basic phone rates has increased 64

percent for Manitobans. In hindsight, voting for the Conservative Party in that election amounted to hiring someone to steal from you.

Mr. Speaker, I shift now to report just some of the highlights and upcoming goals of our government in the improvement of society.

Poverty reduction: On child poverty, Statistics Canada indicates that the number of children living in low-income families has decreased by over 32 percent between 1999 and 2004. While we all agree it is still too high, Manitoba's rate of child poverty under the NDP is the lowest it has been in over a decade, and our province is no longer the child poverty capital of Canada as it was under the Conservatives.

On child poverty in families headed by single women, the same Statistics Canada report shows Manitoba has reduced poverty in this category by over 37 percent between 1999 and 2004, the second-largest decrease in Canada.

On overall poverty, Statistics Canada reports a 25 percent reduction in poverty across all age groups between 1999 and 2004. This means that, since the NDP was elected, 33,000 fewer people are now living in poverty, and 17,000 of those are children.

Child care and family services: On child care, the NDP has increased funding by 107 percent since 2000, with 6,668 newly funded spaces, and a 21 percent salary increase for staff. The Manitoba NDP was, also, the first province to sign a national child care agreement with the Government of Canada, an agreement which the federal Conservatives have since reneged on and refuse to honour.

On child and family services, the NDP implemented the recommendation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry to devolve responsibility for child welfare agencies to Aboriginal agencies. This process and the new agencies it produced were recently vindicated by recent reports from the Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate. Fully, 90 percent of the AJI recommendations have been or are being implemented by the NDP. By comparison, the printed copy of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry waiting for the new NDP Justice Minister after the 1999 election was still in its original wrapping and had never been opened by the Conservatives.

On child protection, the NDP in the Throne Speech has allocated \$42 million to focus on prevention, early intervention, caseload reduction and more funding for foster parents. The

Conservatives, while in office, cut funding to foster parents.

Health: On expanding public health care, the NDP has absorbed the once-private Pan Am Clinic into the public health care system so that it now sees 50,000 people per year who would otherwise be in emergency rooms. The Conservatives, meanwhile, continue to call for public health care in Manitoba to be privatized into a U.S.-style system that only treats patients based on the size of their chequebooks rather than the severity of their illness.

On illness prevention, the NDP established Manitoba's first ever Ministry of Healthy Living to help Manitobans avoid illness and injury altogether, something the Conservatives never considered. Initiatives, so far, include a prostate cancer awareness campaign, a cervical cancer screening program, a fall prevention strategy for seniors and an expanded and more environmentally friendly mosquito control program for reducing West Nile virus.

On active living, the NDP, this year, provided \$1 million to the Manitoba Recreational Trails Association, and, just earlier this month, additional funding was announced to support construction of a new cycling-walking trail as an alternative to Pembina Highway. New healthy food guidelines for schools have also been implemented as just one of the results coming from the NDP's Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force.

On healthy children, the NDP has created the innovative Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, which has been recommended by the Health Council of Canada as a model that other jurisdictions should follow. A Healthy Baby prenatal nutrition benefit to over 24,000 low-income women, FASD prevention and family support programs, and 26 parent-child coalitions covering all areas in Manitoba have all resulted from our Healthy Child model.

On community health care, the NDP has provided significant funding to local community health care agencies such as Clinic, Resource Assistance for Youth, Clubhouse, Nine Circles and Wolseley Family Place. Innovative community health projects in the inner city during the Conservative era were almost non-existent due to funding cuts and freezes.

On doctors, the NDP has increased the number of doctors practising in Manitoba to 2,242. This is over 200 more than the Conservatives had in 1999.

On training more doctors, the Conservatives cut the number of medical school places from 85 to 70 per year. Under the NDP government, there are now 100 medical school places for training more doctors.

On foreign-trained doctors, the NDP has created a new program to assess the medical knowledge and clinical skills of foreign-trained physicians so that those who qualify can begin practising in Manitoba as soon as possible. This wasn't done under the Conservatives.

On nurses, there are now 1,300 more nurses practising in Manitoba than in 1999. It is interesting to note that one Mr. Don Orchard, the person who fired 1,000 nurses when he was the Conservative Health Minister in Manitoba, has been hired by the current Conservative leader to be a primary policy adviser.

On training more nurses, the NDP has more than quadrupled the number of nurses graduating to 818 each year. In 1999 the Conservatives only graduated 201 nurses.

On the expansion of health facilities, the NDP has, to date, invested \$1 billion to build or modernize 66 health care facilities since 1999. Just this morning, in my constituency, I attended the official opening of the new patient waiting centre at the Misericordia Urgent Care Centre. Under the Conservatives, operating rooms at the Health Sciences Centre were at risk of losing their accreditation because of infestations of fruit flies and other significant deficiencies.

On keeping your word on expanding health facilities, the Conservatives announced seven different times that they were going to build a new hospital in Brandon, and they said the same thing multiple times about expanding the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg. They did neither in a decade of government. The NDP has now built both facilities with a \$100-million expansion at the Health Sciences Centre being the largest health capital project in Manitoba's history.

On cancer treatment waiting times, *The Globe and Mail* recently cited the Manitoba NDP as, quote, a "Shining Star" for reducing cancer wait times to one week for the 300 citizens needing this lifesaving service each month. Cancer wait times were seven to eight weeks long in 1998 under the Conservatives.

On hip and knee surgeries, over 3,700 people had their operation for hip or knee last year, a 40 percent increase over last year alone.

On diagnostic tests, the NDP has quadrupled the number of MRIs and doubled the number of CT scans performed in Manitoba each year.

On expanding wait list priorities, the NDP in Manitoba is the only government in Canada to commit to reducing wait times for mental health, sleep disorders, pain management and children's dental surgeries.

On children's dental surgeries, the NDP has, in one year, reduced the wait list by 60 percent.

On Home Care, the NDP has increased funding by over 38 percent, whereas the Conservatives started to privatize the entire Home Care system so that wealthy investors could profit from the legitimate home care needs of Manitobans.

On affordable housing, the NDP has built 4,900 new or renovated homes for Manitoba families and individuals. In my constituency alone, over 400 units and an additional 48 rooms have been built in the West Broadway neighbourhood, with a further 720 units and 55 rooms built in the neighbouring communities of Spence, Daniel McIntyre and St. Matthews, which I proudly share with my NDP colleague, the honourable Member for Minto (Mr. Swan). That is over 1,220 families and individuals who now have access to affordable housing, who wouldn't likely have got it under the Conservatives, who built very little, if any, affordable housing as of the mid-1990s.

* (16:00)

On Manitoba Housing, the NDP, after gaining power in the 1999 election, immediately cancelled an existing Conservative plan to sell off all of Manitoba Housing's units to the private sector with little or no protections for residents.

On controlling rents in the private sector, the NDP has ensured rent controls are in place every year since 1999, and our new \$7.8-million Manitoba Shelter Benefit will see over three times as many people living in private rental accommodation qualify for assistance.

Public education: On public K-to-12 education, the NDP has exceeded its promise to fund education at the rate of economic growth. Funding has increased by over 20 percent for a net investment of

\$600 million since 1999. In 10 years, the Conservative net investment in education was only \$7 million, and had they won the 1999 election, they were preparing to install TV commercials in classrooms.

On capital funding for public K-to-12 education, the NDP has invested \$378 million in school buildings for 10 new schools, 13 replacement schools, 48 additions, and more than 600 renovation projects. This investment is already \$188 million more than what the Conservatives did in their previous six years.

On high school graduation rates, the current rate stands at 83 percent compared to 73 percent in 1999.

On school safety, the NDP has implemented the Safe Schools Charter while the Conservatives never acknowledged there were safety issues in the schools.

On innovation in education, the NDP Throne Speech announced that a new, alternative high school diploma will be developed to recognize both work experience and academic credentials.

On the role of music and art in the K-to-12 system, our NDP Education Minister hosts multiple student music concerts here in the Legislature every year and proudly displays student artwork in his Cabinet office. During the 2003 election, the Conservatives indicated they would cancel art and music classes in our schools to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy.

Post-secondary education: On post-secondary education, the NDP reduced and then froze tuition to 10 percent below 1999 levels. Our Throne Speech commits us to a new 60 percent tuition rebate for all post-secondary students, both university and college, who stay in Manitoba. Under the Conservatives, tuition skyrocketed and there was no rebate program, and I would know because while the current Conservative Leader was sitting on the U of Manitoba Board of Governors approving those higher tuition fees, I was a student at that same university.

On accessibility to post-secondary education, the NDP has created the University College of the North, and there has been a 41 percent increase in Aboriginal enrolment since 1999. The Conservative government, in contrast, cut funding to access programs designed to help people conquer

significant barriers as they strove to attain a higher education.

On post-secondary education affordability, the NDP has established an annual \$6-million bursary fund for lower-income students and an additional \$2-million bursary for graduate students.

On post-secondary education enrolment, Manitoba's 40 percent gain is the largest enrolment increase in the country since 1999. Enrolment actually declined under the Conservatives.

On capital funding for post-secondary education, the NDP has invested over \$160 million in new buildings and equipment at Manitoba universities and colleges. The most recent of these investments is for a new science complex in my constituency at the University of Winnipeg which will achieve a lead gold standard in environmental design. During my time on campus at the U of M in the Conservative 1990s, the engineering building, of all places, had a leaky roof. Enough said.

Workplace safety benefits and equality: On workplace safety, the NDP's injury prevention programs have reduced on-the-job injuries and fatalities by 19 percent compared to the Conservative record. We have also introduced new legislation to modernize and strengthen the Employment Standards Code.

On strikes and lockouts, the reform of The Labour Relations Act, completed by the NDP in 2000, has resulted in a 60 percent reduction in the number of work days lost by both employees and employers due to strikes and lockouts. In 2005, Manitoba had the least number of days lost to strikes and lockouts of any province except PEI.

On the Workers Compensation Board, the NDP is expanding, as of January 1, 2007, the number and type of industries covered by the WCB for the first time since the 1960s.

On the minimum wage, the NDP has raised the minimum wage every single year and by one-third overall since 1999, as of April 1, 2007, when it will be \$8 an hour compared to \$6 an hour under the Conservatives.

Justice: On crime rates, Manitoba's crime rate last year dropped more than any other province and now stands at the lowest level of crime in our province since 1988.

On a balanced approach, the NDP has adopted a three-pronged approach that includes prevention, police presence and consequences.

On crime prevention, the NDP implemented the Turnabout and Lighthouses programs for youth. To date, 90 percent of the youth under the age of 12, targeted by the Turnabout program, have not re-offended, and the program is viewed as a leading model across Canada. The 45 Lighthouses now operating in Manitoba have offered a safe and fun place for over 345,000 kids to play, and the Throne Speech commits the NDP to add five more, for a total of 50. The Conservatives did none of these things to prevent crimes from happening in the first place.

On policing, the NDP has provided funding for 125 additional police officers in Manitoba, 46 of whom are already on patrol in the streets of Winnipeg. Funding for police was flat or declining under the Conservatives, but the Throne Speech commits the NDP to further increases for police in the next budget.

On consequences, the NDP has increased funding for prosecutors by 80 percent above the level of Conservative support for this in 1999, including a new and very popular community prosecutor for Winnipeg's downtown. The NDP has also launched a new Spotlight program to provide intensive supervision to youth involved in gangs so they may transition back to school, work and dealing with substance abuse issues.

On drinking and driving, the NDP government in Manitoba for 2006 has been recognized for the second time in a row by Mothers Against Drunk Driving as having the toughest antdrinking and driving laws in Canada. We also received the highest rate ever of an A minus in the history of their evaluations.

On reducing child pornography, the cybertip.ca program launched by the Manitoba NDP has so far shut down over 1,100 Web sites, resulted in 20 arrests and has now been expanded nationwide. The Conservatives did not make child pornography a priority throughout the 1990s in this regard.

On the role of citizens in public safety, the NDP passed The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, which enables citizens to confidentially report the addresses of any properties they suspect are being used for criminal activity. This innovative

legislation has, as of June 2006, shut down 100, sorry, as of the present day has shut down 196 problem properties coupled with over 90 arrests. The Conservative legislation in this regard, which they proposed but was thankfully never passed into law, would have required citizens concerned about community safety to pursue such matters on their own through the courts, with no provision of confidentiality.

Supporting vulnerable persons: On the importance of persons with disabilities the NDP established Manitoba's first Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities (Mr. Mackintosh), and we have increased annual funding for community living by \$17 million. The Conservatives didn't do this.

On accessibility to the Manitoba Legislature, the NDP Throne Speech committed the government to construct a new permanent ramp made of Manitoba Tyndall stone for the front doors of the Manitoba Legislature. The Conservatives didn't do this.

On improved safety for seniors, the NDP created the Safety Aid Program to provide low income seniors in all parts of Manitoba with basic safety devices and forgivable loans for minor home security improvements. The Conservatives didn't do this.

On support for seniors' independent living, the NDP is implementing a new \$98-million Aging in Place strategy that will provide 1,100 new affordable housing units for seniors in urban, rural, Aboriginal and northern communities. The Conservatives didn't do this.

On Handi-Transit, the NDP Throne Speech dedicates \$5.4 million to replace Handi-Transit vehicles in 64 communities across Manitoba. The Conservatives didn't do this.

On alternative financial services, the NDP has brought in new regulations on the payday loan industry and also provided funding for a new community financial service centre so inner-city citizens can have access to banking services and apply for micro credit loans. Contrast this with the failure of both the provincial Conservatives and Liberals who blocked the passage of these and other valuable initiatives during the last session by excessively ringing the bells at the Legislature.

Democracy and human rights: On recognizing human rights the NDP amended over 100 pieces of legislation to remove the historic and systemic discrimination against same sex persons and couples. The Conservatives betrayed their earlier commitment

to support this and voted against recognizing the human rights of thousands of Manitoba citizens.

On representative democracy, the NDP caucus members include two Cree cabinet ministers. The Speaker of the House is the first Inuit ever to serve in that role in Manitoba. A Métis is our caucus Whip. One of our two members of Philippine heritage is Deputy Speaker while the other is a legislative assistant as is the first East Indian member ever elected in Manitoba. Fully one-third of our cabinet ministers are women; meanwhile, the only Conservative member of Métis heritage and the only one in their caucus that's fully bilingual was internally ousted at his nomination meeting recently and summed up his feelings to the media, saying all the knives in his back have Tory written on them.

On electoral democracy, the NDP was the first province to make it illegal for any business, union or other organization to donate funds to any political party and limits on how much an individual can donate are also now in place. These actions have returned our elections to the proper principle of one citizen, one vote rather than the one dollar, one vote approach of the Conservatives in the vote-rigging scandal of the former Conservative government, with one of the darkest chapters in the history of democracy in our province.

* (16:10)

Mr. Speaker, I note that the available time is almost complete, so I must defer to a later venue my summary of our government's numerous environmental accomplishments, many of which have been high profile and international in scope. Clearly, the Manitoba NDP has an outstanding record in office, but I believe it is our positive vision of a sustainable, equitable and prosperous future for our province that will inspire Manitobans when they next go to the polls.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I think in this last diatribe that we've just listened to, we learned one thing, that is that the honourable member is capable of reading what someone else has written for him. *[interjection]* I think the member doth protest too much.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Wolseley, on a point of order?

Mr. Altemeyer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, just to correct the record, I write all of my own

speeches. I finished this one at three o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Wolseley, I remind members that points of order are to point out to the Speaker a breach of a rule or departure of a practice, not to be used for debate. The honourable member does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, that was not so much a point of order as it was a protest. As I said, the member doth protest too much.

I am pleased to enter into this debate today because I think that we need to, in fact, tell the people of Manitoba exactly what it is this government is up to. I don't know that Manitobans need much convincing because, over the past seven years, they have watched the government increase the debt of every Manitoban insurmountably. We have watched a government that has received untold revenues from the federal government simply spend them, you know, without any attention to what prudent management should be. We've watched the government that has actually stolen money from corporations such as Manitoba Hydro to try and balance their books because they have a spending habit. They don't understand management. They don't understand what fiscal responsibility is all about.

You know, as members of the Legislature, we come through this place hoping to make a mark on the province. All of us work together, sometimes in opposition to one another, because that's the nature of the parliamentary system, but we live for a few nanoseconds, if you like, in the history of a province, here in this Legislature, trying to make sure that we leave the province in better state than it was when we came in.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that we have worked with each other as minorities, working with one another, you know, a multicultural kind of community here, representing what Manitoba is really like. That's how we have people in Manitoba elect us to this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, you yourself are of Inuit origin. I'm of Ukrainian ancestral origin. There are members here of Aboriginal descent, members of Métis descent, members of German origin, members of the Mennonite community, and it goes on and on. But

together we try to work in a way which reflects what the Manitoba mosaic is all about and in a way in which we can make a difference to the lives of the people who have put us here to make that difference.

Mr. Speaker, we have working with us in this Chamber also members who are sitting at the table. These are staff of the government of the province, or staff of this Legislature, I should say. But they, in fact, work for the people of Manitoba. I want to say and pay a tribute to them because, regardless of who's in government, regardless of who sits in your chair, these are people who actually provide an incredible service to us as legislators and to the people of Manitoba. I want to say thank you to the Clerk and all of her staff for the tremendous service that they have given to this Assembly over the course of time.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we have wonderful young people who serve as our pages. At each session we introduce new pages to our session. I want, first of all, to welcome them to this Assembly and to thank them for the service that they provide to us as legislative members. I know from time to time that debate gets somewhat out of hand and these young people may think, well, what is this all about? Is this truly democracy? But, yes, it is. It's the way in which we as a province and a democratic country do our business, and to these young people it may seem strange at times, but it is the way that laws in this country are made. So I want to thank them, as young pages serving our needs here in this Chamber, thank them for the services that they provide to us, to each and every one of us as members of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we also have the Sergeant-at-Arms and his staff who do a tremendous job in terms of ensuring that there's decorum in this House, and, indeed, if they are ever called upon they can exercise their responsibility as well. To them, thank you for providing the service that they do, and, of course, to the *Hansard* staff who record all of the comments that are put on record. I say thank you to them for the work that they do.

Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech talked about a number of topics. They touched so many topics that one really had to pay attention as to what was new in the Throne Speech. But, as the NDP has done so well in the past, they have sort of regurgitated all of those promises that they had made before. One example is the promise of a dialysis unit back in my community. I think this is about the second Throne Speech where I heard a promise of a dialysis unit in my

community. We have gone through about three ministers of Health who made this promise and today there is no dialysis unit in my community. People are moving out of the community because they have to move into a community where there is a dialysis unit because many people live on dialysis three times a week and perhaps even more. This is typical of the way the NDP have approached promises to Manitobans. They will make one promise and then they will repeat it and repeat it and repeat it, yet there is no action to follow up on that Throne Speech.

Mr. Speaker, I learned something else in this Throne Speech, that this government is a bunch of thieves. They have robbed ideas, but thankfully those are good ideas. They have robbed them from members of this side of the House who put them before this Legislature, but at least I can tell you that our agenda as Conservatives here is being fulfilled because the good ideas that we bring forward, the NDP are finally starting to attach themselves to those ideas and make announcements about them.

The latest one was just yesterday afternoon, when the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) introduced legislation into this House regarding grandparents' rights. Now, that's good legislation and I'll congratulate the Minister of Family Services, who was the former House Leader, and I have to tell you I'm just being reminded by my honourable friend who is the critic of Justice that while being Minister of Justice this minister also used to borrow my colleague's ideas and bring them forward. Those were good ideas. I won't say that he borrowed them because I don't think he's going to want to give them back. So what do you call it when one takes and doesn't return? That's pilfering.

Well Mr. Speaker, I have to talk about the grandparents' rights because the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat)—and that bill shouldn't be known as the grandparents' rights bill. It should probably be renamed as the Rowat bill because this is the bill that came from the Member for Minnedosa, originated there. She worked so hard with grandparents across this province to make sure that they convinced the government that this was the right thing to do. But had the government done the right thing, they would have accepted her proposed bill that she put forward to the House and they would have accepted it as the bill that would reflect what grandparents' rights should be. Then we would truly have good legislation.

But they did not want to give her any credit for it, and so they stole the idea, they stole the concept, introduced it as their own legislation, and today I think Manitobans see through that. There was a good article on CJOB this morning, when I heard the newscaster give credit to the Member for Minnedosa for bringing this new creative legislation to the government, and then they adopted it. So congratulations to the Member for Minnedosa for working so hard and convincing the government that this, in fact, was the right thing to do.

The government would've been wise to pay attention to duties that it has and responsibilities that it has within the government of Manitoba's purview. Instead, Mr. Speaker, we saw, as we oftentimes do, finger pointing at everybody else and then diverting attention from the task at hand here in Manitoba to issues that were outside the purview, outside the responsibility of the government of Manitoba.

I speak, Mr. Speaker, about the Canadian Wheat Board. When the federal government ran in its campaign, one of the things that they ran on was that they would end the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board. There was plenty of time during that debate for this government, if you like, as independent members, as legislators, to make their comments known. But, during that period of time, there wasn't a comment made with regard to what the position of the government that was running for office then would be when they formed government regarding the Canadian Wheat Board. So once the action started, there was a reaction from the great Premier (Mr. Doer) of our province who, together with his colleague in Ottawa, the Leader of the NDP party there, and as well the Liberals, attack the policy position of the current federal government.

If you recall, there was a livestock checkoff introduced by this government, but during that debate that we had in this House on that levy, Mr. Speaker, which is actually a tax, a \$2-a-head tax, on cattle being sold in Manitoba, the Manitoba Cattle Producers, the Canadian cattle association, farmers from all around the province, said to the minister, if you're going to do this, then put it out for a plebiscite to Manitobans. They said, let us have a voice on this issue.

She would not agree with this. The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) insisted that she was right. She had been talking to somebody, and I think it was the Farmers' Union and Mr. Tait, perhaps. She had determined that he was the best and they were

the best representatives of farmers in Manitoba, and that farmers should not even be consulted on this issue because she brought in the policy position before she talked to farmers anywhere in the province of Manitoba. She may have consulted with the Farmers' Union, but outside of that she did not consult with the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association. She did not consult with the Canadian cattle association. She only consulted perhaps with the Farmers' Union.

If they were so concerned that the democratic principle should be preserved in this province, then why did they not have a vote on the levy that she was forcing on cattle producers? How hypocritical it is for them and for this Minister of Agriculture to insist that the federal government should have a plebiscite on the Canadian Wheat Board and then to herself deny that privilege to farmers, to livestock producers in this province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

And if she wanted to, any farmer who did not have cattle, any farmer who didn't produce livestock, shouldn't have gotten a vote, and that would've been fine. If she wanted to go to just the livestock producers of our province, have them voice their opinion on her ill-conceived tax, we would've been fine with that. But how hypocritical it is for her to say, no, you can't have a vote on this tax that we're introducing in the province but, yes, you should have a vote on a federal matter. Manitobans see right through that.

In their Throne Speech and in subsequent actions, this government said that they will have a plebiscite on the Canadian Wheat Board whether the federal government has one or not. But what's the question going to be? What's the question going to be? Mr. Speaker, knowing them they'll follow the National Farmers' Union in terms of what the question should be. Did they put the alternative out before producers in Manitoba? Did they put what the alternatives should be in terms of the vote? And they did not.

Mr. Speaker, all of this is such hypocrisy that I think Manitobans can see through it very clearly. That's been the typical way in which this government has conducted itself.

The other issue that it introduced, which is a bit ludicrous, if I can say, is that they committed themselves to building Conawapa. But when is Conawapa going to come into operation, 2019 or something like that? Well, it's easy for anybody to make those kinds of pie-in-the-sky promises when it

knows that the Premier (Mr. Doer) is not going to be around to fulfil that commitment. This government will not be around to fulfil that commitment. Well, those are silly promises. They're following the way of Paul Martin.

I remember the federal Liberal Prime Minister of Canada making promises well into 2010, 2020, making promises that that's what he was going to do for this country. Well, Mr. Speaker, is Paul Martin around today? Is his government around today? No. Take a lesson. I say to this Premier, to the ministers on the opposite side of the House, take a lesson from what happened to Paul Martin because you are going to follow that same fate. You are not going to be around to fulfil those empty promises that you are making.

I say to this government look after the needs of Manitobans today. Look after what you should be paying attention to today. There are people in this province who are crying out for assistance. They're crying out for some help from this government, but this government is ignoring them. I take exception to the fact that we have children in this province today who are being sent bills from this government that they owe for things, like ambulance rides to a hospital. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine a child in this province getting a bill from the government because that child was taken to a hospital?

Well, the government said, well, we're going to fix that; we're going to fix that. When are they going to fix that? Well, they said, we're going to fix that; we're going to make sure that ambulance interfacility transfers are looked after. Congratulations, we've been calling for that for the last seven years.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have to give credit to the former Minister of Health. From time to time, he and I did not see things the same way, but in this instant, he understood that this wasn't fair to rural Manitobans. He understood that there had to be a change. He called it a stupid policy and he was right. Finally, after being coaxed from this side of the House for so long, by being coaxed by Manitobans for so long, he did the right thing.

He should be taking a bow for that, not the current Minister of Health because all she had was the opportunity to announce it. It was the former minister who did the work. So I give him some credit in that regard. I know that he and I have not seen eye to eye on many issues, Mr. Speaker, but there is one thing that we had agreed on, that this is a matter that

should be looked after, and I give him credit for looking after it.

But, Mr. Speaker, the health care system in this province stinks. It stinks from the point of view of how government is addressing the issues in health care. The professionals in our system are working as hard as they can. They are doing everything they can, but they can't do it without some support from the government, and that's where it lacks. How many hospitals has this government closed in rural Manitoba, and for what reason? We have hospitals on the west side of the province that don't exist anymore. They can't offer emergency services because this government would not supply the needed resources to have those hospitals operate.

Mr. Speaker, today, we say that in rural Manitoba it's okay if you wait for an hour for an ambulance. If you have a heart attack, it's okay in rural Manitoba if you have to wait for an hour to get an ambulance. But there is a two-standard system. In the city of Winnipeg, you can get ambulance service within 10 minutes. In rural Manitoba, you have to wait for an hour. That is unacceptable and there has been a call for a review of the regional health authorities by this side of the House for the last seven years. We have called for this government to do a review of the regional health authorities because something is wrong in the system.

It took seven years for this government to finally listen to this side of the House, and this year they announced in their Throne Speech a management review of the regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker.

* (16:30)

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hour being 4:30 p.m., pursuant to rule 45(4), I am interrupting the proceedings in order to put the question on the motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), that is, the amendment to the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Do members wish to have the amendment read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Okay.

The motion reads:

THAT the Motion be amended by adding at the end the following words:

But this House regrets

- (a) the government's failure to provide meaningful and competitive tax relief for Manitobans; and
 - (b) the government's failure to provide foster placements for the unprecedented number of children in care housed in hotels; and
 - (c) the government's failure to acknowledge that hallway medicine still exists in Manitoba, and that it has now progressed to a crisis in Winnipeg's emergency rooms due to a critical shortage of doctors; and
 - (d) the government's failure to implement an effective strategy to reduce wait times for diagnostic testing, surgical procedures and appointments with specialists; and
 - (e) the government's failure to address the critical shortage of health care professionals, which is crippling the ability of the system to provide timely access to care; and
 - (f) the government's failure to keep rural emergency rooms open despite promising to do so, forcing Manitobans to travel crumbling highways to access emergency care; and
 - (g) the government's failure to offer assurances to students and parents that educational outcomes and greater accountability in the education system are a high priority; and
 - (h) the government's failure to call an independent public inquiry into the Crocus Investment Fund scandal, which resulted in 34,000 Manitobans losing more than \$60 million; and
 - (i) the government's failure to ensure prudent expenditure of taxpayers' dollars, spending millions of dollars on rebranding campaigns and pre-election advertising; and
 - (j) the government's failure to support the construction of a new transmission line for hydroelectricity on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, which will cost Hydro ratepayers over \$500 million; and
 - (k) the government's failure to implement a long-term provincial strategy to recruit and retain police officers; and
 - (l) the government's failure to crack down on auto thieves and gang activity; and
 - (m) the government's failure to address court backlogs and the flourishing remand culture in Manitoba; and
 - (n) the government's failure to focus on the competitiveness of our post-secondary institutions compared to others across the country; and
 - (o) the government's failure to provide a strategy to promote growth in Manitoba's agricultural economy, focusing instead on issues under federal jurisdiction; and
 - (p) the government's failure to implement a plan to market by-products of the biofuel production process; and
 - (q) the government's failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and
 - (r) the government's failure to acknowledge that it was Manitoba Progressive Conservatives who announced ideas for rebates on hybrid vehicles, an external review of the regionalization of health care and grandparents' rights legislation; and
 - (s) the government's failure to ensure the promised level of flood protection for the City of Winnipeg; and
 - (t) the government's failure to provide better economic development opportunities for rural and northern Manitoba; and
 - (u) the government's failure to create a competitive environment that encourages private sector businesses to come to Manitoba and spur job creation and economic growth; and
 - (v) the government's failure to address the out-migration of Manitobans, especially our youth.
- AND HAS THEREBY lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House.
- Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?
- Some Honourable Members:** Yes.
- Some Honourable Members:** No.
- Voice Vote**
- Mr. Speaker:** All those in favour of the amendment, say yea.
- Some Honourable Members:** Yea.
- Mr. Speaker:** All those opposed to the amendment, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): I request a recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

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

Order. The question before the House is the motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), that is, the amendment to the motion for their address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

* (16:40)

Division

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

Yea

Cullen, Cummings, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Eichler, Faurschou, Gerrard, Goertzen, Hawranik, Lamoureux, Maguire, McFadyen, Penner, Reimer, Schuler, Stefanson, Taillieu.

Nay

Aglugub, Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Brick, Caldwell, Chomiak, Dewar, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Reid, Rondeau, Sale, Santos, Selinger, Smith, Struthers, Swan, Wowchuk.

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

Mr. Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it five o'clock?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? Okay. We will revert to the main motion, and the last speaker was from the official opposition, so now we will go to the—*[interjection]* Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Russell, on a point of order?

Mr. Derkach: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am rising on the Throne Speech. I don't believe I'd used up my time, and I was still speaking when the vote was called.

Mr. Speaker: For the clarification of the House, when a member is speaking and it's time to call the vote, that is considered as the time the member took for the member's speech, whether it's 30 minutes or whether it's one minute. That's the time that was allowed.

If the member wished to continue his speech or if he continued to speak, it would be a new speaking on the main motion, but that would have to be negotiated with the House or by leave of the House. The agreement that I have with the House leaders is that I would go back and forth from the official opposition to government and government to the opposition, back and forth, and that the time that the member—it's constituted as speaking to the Speech from the Throne.

So the member would have to ask for leave. That's the only way that I would be able to deal with it.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, since I still had some things I wanted to say with regard to the Throne Speech, to comment on the Throne Speech that was presented, I'm going to ask if the House would give me leave to conclude my remarks.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for the honourable member to conclude his comments that he had been making when he was speaking to the amendment, because now we will be addressing the main motion. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Russell, to continue.

Mr. Derkach: I do thank the side of the government for allowing me the next few minutes to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker. I will try not to use too much time because I know there are other members who want to address the Throne Speech, and I need to give them some opportunity as well.

Mr. Speaker, let me continue with where our health care system is at. I was talking about rural health and about the fact that this government has, in fact, closed a number of hospitals in their tenure. Closing hospitals affects a community severely. I think that those of us who live in rural Manitoba, who have experienced the closure of hospitals,

understand how it impacts on our families, on our neighbours, and, most specifically, on the very young and the elderly. It is not fair for anybody living in a small community where there has been a hospital, where there has been an emergency service, to all of a sudden have that yanked from them because the government feels that it is more important to put their money into a larger facility.

We need those tertiary facilities. We need the large facilities. We need the regional centres, but we also need to be fair to Manitobans and to provide for them the best health care system we can in their local communities. For years we have been able to do that, but recently, under regionalization, and in the last four years after the 2003 election, this government decided to move to close some of those facilities. They blame it on the doctors; they blame it on the human resources, Mr. Speaker, but they never take any responsibility for this themselves.

Mr. Speaker, the hospital at Erickson, the hospital in Birtle, the hospital in Rossburn, the hospital in Rivers, all of those facilities on the west side of this province have technically been closed. They provide services for transition for patients, but they do not provide the services which were available to them prior to this government coming into office.

So, when I said we welcome the review of the regional health authorities, that review has to be done by somebody who has an outside view of what health care should be. That has to be done by somebody who has some experience, and an imminent person who can analyze the regional health care authorities and then give government and give the people of Manitoba some information regarding how we can improve the facilities in this province. Although we have waited for it for a long time, I am truly hopeful that this government will undertake to do a proper review.

But, Mr. Speaker, even this review may not happen because we are at the end of a mandate of a government. This has been sort of the swan song, if you like, of this government in terms of a Throne Speech before they go to the people of Manitoba for a new mandate. I think from what we have been hearing around the province, this government does not have a long time in office. Manitobans are tired of them. They are showing that they are a tired government. They don't have any new ideas. They are using ideas from whomever they can, including

the opposition. They have run out of steam, and I think Manitobans understand that.

I would like to just comment on something that is a little more political, Mr. Speaker. We have seen a revitalization, if you like, of our party in this province. I think the article in the newspaper that was talking about more than 20,000 members in our party recently, as compared to about 10,000 or 11,000 in the New Democratic Party, speaks well for the fact that we have a leader and a party that is ready to take the reins of government, and ready to do what it is that Manitobans expect of a government, something this government has failed to do.

Mr. Speaker, because I come from a rural setting, I want to talk for a minute about rural development. Rural development is important for the people living outside of the city because that is the only vehicle that is available to them to help to kick-start their enterprises, their businesses. Government needs to be there to provide the infrastructure, to provide that kick-start for these small businesses to grow. Without that, businesses will have a difficult time establishing and remaining viable in our province.

* (16:50)

Mr. Speaker, that speaks to the youth in our province because, unless we have opportunities outside of this city and in this province in general, youth will not stay. Now, the government introduced a tax-free tuition, if you like, or tuition rebate that we, in fact, had put on our agenda in 1999 and in 2003. Finally, this government has committed to it. That is not good enough. That is one step, but the bigger step is that we have to provide opportunities. We have to establish an economic climate in our province where we are going to attract investors to this province, where we are going to attract investment into industry, into manufacturing, into business. That is the only way that we will keep young people in our province. This government has failed to do that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they can talk about, you know, retaining new Canadians in Manitoba, but even those people only stay for a little while and then they move on, because the opportunities under this administration are just not there. This government does not understand that.

So, in conclusion, because I know there is somebody else who wants to speak to the Throne

Speech, Mr. Speaker, I would say that, although this Throne Speech tried to provide a hope, if you like, that things will be better down the road, the hope is quickly dashed when people look at the track record of this government. I'm not even going to get into, in any depth, the Crocus issue, because that is a scandal that we will get to the bottom of, whether it's under this government or whether it is when we form government, because Manitobans deserve answers to these questions that they have put before the government.

So, Mr. Speaker, I regret that I will not be able to support the Throne Speech that was delivered by this government. I look forward to the next few months when we can really go out to Manitobans and ask them to pass judgment on this government, ask them for a mandate for this side of the House to finally take office and give Manitobans the kind of government that Manitobans truly deserve. Thank you.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): It is a privilege to rise in the Manitoba Legislature and speak to the Throne Speech introduced by the Doer government a few short days ago. This Throne Speech represents our eighth since coming to office, and, building on those previous statements, continues to build upon the work already done while charting a solid course for the future of our province.

Before commencing my remarks, however, I must extend my sincere thanks to the citizens of Brandon East for their advice, encouragement and ongoing support of my work here at the Legislature. It is an absolute honour to serve Brandon East, to champion initiatives which help improve the quality of life for all who live in Brandon, and to work hard each and every day to build a better community for all who call Brandon home.

Mr. Speaker, this Throne Speech continues to address the concerns and aspirations of all Manitobans. This Throne Speech addresses the priorities of Manitobans, important priorities like health care, education, infrastructure, community renewal, crime and safety, economic development and improving the quality of life for all Manitobans, wherever they live in our province. This Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, builds upon the Doer government's commitment to build not only a better Manitoba, but also a better Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, health care was identified as a priority of this government upon our election in 1999. Our first decision as a government was to

build the Brandon Regional Health Centre, a \$60-million redevelopment in Brandon East, a development which was announced and cancelled seven times over 11 years by the former Filmon government, a government staffed by the current leader of that party, the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen).

Health care in Brandon has seen unprecedented investment over the last seven years. We now have the first MRI outside of the Perimeter Highway, a downtown health access centre, the renewal of the Westman Laboratory and, in this Throne Speech, the development of a linear accelerator at Brandon Regional Health Centre which will aid cancer patients immeasurably now and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, educational excellence is also a priority of this government, and has been since 1999. During our time in office, we have seen the development of the health sciences and Aboriginal counselling building at Brandon University; major infrastructure renewal at Neelin High School, Linden Lanes, and J.R. Reid, as well as other schools throughout the city of Brandon; and, most recently, the development of Assiniboine Community College at the former Brandon Mental Health Centre site, a development which will solidify Brandon's reputation as a centre for post-secondary, educational excellence in western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is also a priority of this government. In this Throne Speech, we have a major announcement undertaking the twinning of the 18th Street Bridge over the Assiniboine River, a \$17-million development. We have also, in terms of infrastructure, repaved this past fall 1st Street, Richmond Avenue and 18th Street in the city of Brandon, providing for major infrastructure improvement on urban roadways in Brandon, and as we move forward in years to come, we will be undertaking major renewal of the wastewater treatment facility in Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, community renewal and neighbourhood renewal have also been a priority of our government since forming office. In 1999-2000, we brought to Brandon the first ever residential Neighbourhood Renewal program through the Neighbourhoods Alive! initiative. That program has undertaken major renewal of parks and playgrounds in Brandon, major renewal of homeowner property through the Front and Paint program for low-income property owners, has been involved in the renewal of some 700 housing units in Brandon and has provided

training opportunities for countless individuals in the downtown core area of the city of Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, we've also restored funding for friendship centres throughout Manitoba but also in Brandon, something that was cancelled by the former Filmon government, we're fond of reminding Manitobans, which was staffed by the current leader of the Tory party in Manitoba, the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen).

The environment is also a major concern of those of us who sit on this side of the House on government benches. We have recently in this Throne Speech announced a pause on the construction of hog barns in the province pending a public review by the Clean Environment Commission. We've also undertaken in Manitoba in the last number of years major development of wind farms throughout the province of Manitoba to harness wind power for the hydro grid. Of course, Mr. Speaker, probably one of the most significant policy initiatives that we've undertaken is the proposal to dedicate the east side of Lake Winnipeg as a UNESCO world heritage site, something that has global implications.

Mr. Speaker, this Throne Speech addressed the issue of interfacility ambulance fees, the restoration of support for Manitobans who have to undertake interfacility ambulance transportation in the province. We've increased transit funding to a 50

percent cost-sharing arrangement, a cost-sharing arrangement that was cancelled by the former Filmon government, again staffed by the Member for Fort Whyte.

This Throne Speech builds upon the tuition freeze by providing tax incentives for graduates who remain in Manitoba in the years after they complete their university education.

Crime and safety is another major initiative that has been undertaken by this government through the Neighbourhood Renewal program, the support of the Citizens on Patrol in Brandon and, as well, in increased funding for police services and police protection in Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, as it's reaching five o'clock, I'm going to conclude my remarks. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, yes—

Some Honourable Members: Five o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it five o'clock? [Agreed]

So, when this matter is again before the House, the debate will remain open.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, November 28, 2006

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