

Second Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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

Vol. LX No. 20 – 1:30 p.m., Thursday, April 10, 2008

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	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.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
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OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Carman	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
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RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
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SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	N.D.P.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 10, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 17—The Environment Amendment Act
(Permanent Ban on Building or Expanding Hog
Facilities)**

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): I move, seconded by the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), that Bill 17, The Environment Amendment Act (Permanent Ban on Building or Expanding Hog Facilities); Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement (interdiction permanente visant la construction ou l'agrandissement d'installations réservées aux porcs), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable minister.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

The motion has been passed.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Inkster?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): First reading?

Mr. Speaker: Oh, first reading of a bill? I'm sorry.

The honourable Member for Inkster, on first reading of a bill.

**Bill 223—The Non-Smokers Health Protection
Amendment Act (Protecting Children from
Second-Hand Smoke in Motor Vehicles)**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I would move, seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that Bill 223, The Non-Smokers Health Protection Amendment Act (Protecting Children from Second-Hand Smoke in Motor Vehicles), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, this bill would ban smoking in a vehicle in which a child, in the said vehicle, is. Protecting our children from second-hand smoke is what this bill is all about. I recommend that we pass this bill as soon as we can in the name of putting our children first. Thank you.

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

PETITIONS

Dividing of Trans-Canada Highway

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 seven-kilometre stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway passing through Headingley is an extremely busy stretch of road, averaging 18,000 vehicles daily.

This section of the Trans-Canada Highway is one of the few remaining stretches of undivided highway in Manitoba, and it has seen more than 100 accidents in the last two years, some of them fatal.

Manitoba's Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told a Winnipeg radio station on October 16, 2007, that when it

comes to highways projects the provincial government has a flexible response program, and we have a couple of opportunities to advance these projects in our five-year plan.

In the interests of protecting motorist safety, it is critical that the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is completed as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider making the completion of the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley in 2008 an urgent provincial government priority.

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider evaluating whether any other steps can be taken to improve motorist safety while the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is being completed.

This is signed by Alison Au, Vera Olson, Wendy Capri and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Nominee Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Immigration is critically important to the future of our province, and the 1998 federal Provincial Nominee Program is the best immigration program that Manitoba has ever had.

The government needs to recognize the unnecessary backlogs in processing PNP applications is causing additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families and friends here in Manitoba.

The current government needs to recognize the unfairness in its current policy on who qualifies to be an applicant, more specifically, by not allowing professionals such as health-care workers to be able to apply for PNP certificates in the same way a computer technician would be able to.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his government to recognize and acknowledge how important immigration is to our province by improving and strengthening the Provincial Nominee Program.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by A. Dela Cruz, A. Torres, V. Torres and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

Power Line Development

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The reasons for this petition are:

Manitoba Hydro has been forced by the NDP government to construct a third high voltage transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Lake Winnipegosis instead of the east side of Lake Winnipeg, as recommended by Manitoba Hydro.

The NDP detour is more than 400 kilometres longer than the eastern route recommended by Manitoba Hydro experts.

The line losses created by the NDP detour will result in a lost opportunity to displace dirty coal-generated electricity, which will create added and unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to an additional 57,000 vehicles on our roads.

The former chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has stated that an east-side bipole and a UNESCO World Heritage Site can co-exist contrary to NDP claims.

The NDP detour will cut through more forest than the eastern route, and will cut through threatened aspen parkland areas, unlike the eastern route.

Former member of the Legislative Assembly Elijah Harper has stated that the east-side communities are devastated by the government's decision to abandon the east-side route, stating that this decision will resign them to poverty in perpetuity.

Manitoba MKO, an organization that represents northern Manitoba First Nations chiefs, has stated that the government has acted unilaterally to abandon the eastern route without consultation with northern First Nations despite repeated requests by MKO for consultations.

The NDP detour will lead to an additional debt of at least \$400 million related to the capital cost of line construction alone, to be left to future generations of Manitobans.

The NDP detour will result in increased line losses due to friction leading to lost energy sales of between \$250 million and \$1 billion over the life of the project.

The added debt and lost sales created by the NDP detour will make every Manitoba family at least \$4,000 poorer.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to abandon the NDP detour on the basis that it will result in massive environmental, social and economic damage to Manitoba.

To urge the provincial government to consider proceeding with the route originally recommended by Manitoba Hydro, subject to necessary regulatory approvals.

This petition is signed by Rick Sprott, Gordon Simpson, Lynn Sprott and many, many other fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Personal Care Homes—Virден

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba's provincial government has a responsibility to provide quality long-term care for qualifying Manitobans.

Personal care homes in the town of Virден currently have a significant number of empty beds that cannot be filled because of a critical nursing shortage in these facilities.

In 2006, a municipally formed retention committee was promised that the Virден nursing shortage would be resolved by the fall of 2006.

Virtually all personal care homes in southwestern Manitoba are full, yet as of early October 2007, the nursing shortage in Virден is so severe that more than a quarter of the beds at Westman Nursing Home are sitting empty.

Seniors, many of whom are war veterans, are therefore being transported to other communities for care. These communities are often a long distance from Virден, and family members are forced to travel for more than two hours round trip to visit their loved ones, creating significant financial and emotional hardship for these families.

Those seniors that have been moved out of Virден have not received assurance that they will be moved back to Virден when these beds become available.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider taking serious action to fill the nursing vacancies at personal care homes in the Town of Virден and to consider reopening the beds that have been closed as a result of this nursing shortage.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider prioritizing the needs of those citizens that have been moved out of their community by committing to move those individuals back into Virден as soon as the beds become available.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by Peggy Brennand, Isabel Forrest, Joyce Heaman and many, many others.

Retired Teachers' Cost of Living Adjustment

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Since 1977, Manitoba teachers have made contributions to the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund Pension Adjustment Account, PAA, to finance a Cost of Living Adjustment, COLA, to their base pension once they retire.

Despite this significant funding, 11,000 retired teachers and 15,000 active teachers currently find themselves facing the future with little hope of a meaningful COLA.

For 2007, a COLA of only 0.63 percent was paid to retired teachers.

The COLA paid in recent years has eroded the purchasing power of teachers' pension dollars.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider adequate funding for the PAA on a long-term basis to ensure that current retired teachers, as well as all future retirees, receive a fair COLA.

Signed by Olive Phillips, Shirley Nelson, M. Shaw and many, many, many other Manitobans.

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I, too, wish to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Howard Thiessen, Margaret Penner, Ben Penner, Ben Wiebe and many, many others.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Provincial Curling Teams

Hon. Eric Robison (Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport): I have a statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure as the Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport to rise before the House to recognize the accomplishments of Manitoba's provincial curling teams over the past few months. Manitoba is known for having outstanding curlers in all categories, and we have proved it once again this season. Great respect has been earned by all provincial curling

teams including the junior men, mixed men's and women's seniors and masters' teams who did Manitoba proud at their respective national championships.

Manitobans were inspired by the determination and skill of our men's rink led by Kerry Burtnyk at the 2008 Tim Hortons Brier in Winnipeg. I'd like to extend special thanks to all the players, volunteers and fans from across the province who made the Brier such a successful and memorable event.

Particular recognition should also be paid to our junior women skipped by Kaitlyn Lawes, who won a bronze medal at the Junior Women's World Curling Championship. And, of course, this year's most impressive accomplishment belongs to the Jennifer Jones rink leading Canada to victory at the World Women's Curling Championship in B.C. They showed incredible tenacity, composure and skill in making Manitoba and Canada home to the 2008 women's world curling champions.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing the achievements of all of our 2008 provincial curling champions and in extending well-deserved congratulations. Thank you.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wouldn't want to let the opportunity pass to put words on the record in support of what the minister has just said in congratulating these great Manitoba curlers. The Jennifer Jones team, of course, kept us on the edges of our seat throughout this season doing things in a typically Manitoban way, never taking the easy route to the final but fighting and scrapping every step along the way to get there, Mr. Speaker.

So we want to just add our congratulations to those already expressed to the entire team which represented Manitoba and Canada so very well at the world women's championships: Jennifer Jones, Dawn Askin, Jill Officer and Cathy Overton-Clapham.

* (13:50)

In addition to that, we want to add our congratulations to the Manitoba junior women's team that went on to win the Canadian Junior Women's Championships and win the bronze medal at the world juniors, skipped by Kaitlyn Lawes, supported by Jenna Loder, Liz Peters, Sarah Wazney, Alex Mowat and their fifth player, M.J. McKenzie.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we're all proud and enjoyed the opportunity, and I know members from all parties were present at the MTS Centre for the Brier championships, proud of the way in which Kerry Burtnyk and his team represented our province. Of course, we would have hoped for a better outcome, but we all witnessed the extremely high calibre of individuals. We are proud as Manitobans to see the class that was exhibited by Kerry Burtnyk and his team, who are role models for many of us who curled at the great Assiniboine Memorial Curling Club back in the 1980s; Kerry Burtnyk, Dan Kammerlock, Richard Daneault, Garth Smith and their coach, Rob Meakin, who did such a great job of representing our province proudly.

In addition to that, the Doug Armour team from Souris who represented Manitoba so very well at the Master's Championship making it to the finals played in British Columbia.

We join with the minister in congratulating all of these great Manitobans, and we look forward to many more years of great Manitoba success on the national and world curling scenes.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: I want to add our congratulations, the Manitoba Liberal Party, for all the curlers in Manitoba, all those who competed in the various provincial contests and particularly, of course, to those who won the contests, and particularly Jennifer Jones and her rink who repeatedly, when they were down, came back as it were, from what looked like the impending defeat, they snatched victory time and time again to come through. We just celebrate the efforts that Jennifer Jones and her team, Kerry Burtnyk and his team and the many other teams who represented Manitoba so well. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the loge to my left where we have with us Mr. Jack Penner who is a former Member for Emerson.

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

I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today His Excellency Daniel Jouanneau,

Ambassador of France to Canada in Ottawa; Ms. Florence Jeanblanc-Risler, who is the Minister-Counsellor for Economic Affairs, Embassy Ottawa; Mr. Philippe Delacroix Consul General of France in Toronto and Mr. Raymond Poirier Honorary Consul of France in Winnipeg.

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

Also in the public gallery we have with us today Vice-Chief Guy Lonechild of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and his delegation; Chief Glen Buffalo from Day Star First Nation and Chief Norman Whitehawk, Cote First Nation, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin).

I also want to welcome you here today.

And also I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today a group of retired teachers who are the guests of the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler).

Also on behalf of all honourable members, I would like to welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Livestock Industry Government Initiatives

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Our province was built on agriculture, and today in Manitoba our livestock sector faces a crisis that is on par with the BSE crisis that hit our livestock producers a number of years ago. We all know what livestock contributes to our provincial economy, at least \$1.5 billion each and every year. Thousands of families across our province, either directly or indirectly, depend on livestock and agriculture for their economic survival and for their well-being.

Agriculture is what supports health care, education and community services across our province, Mr. Speaker. Today we have a situation where because of a variety of factors, many of which are beyond the direct control or influence of our province, low prices for livestock, rising prices for feed and other inputs, a high Canadian dollar making margins shrink and U.S. actions south of the border to attempt to restrict the flow of Canadian products into the biggest market in the world, the United States—in the midst of all of these challenges, in the midst of all of these factors that are working against

our producers, this government had a choice to make. It could choose to line up and support our producers or it could get in line to kick them, which is exactly what they did. They got in line to kick our producers when they were down.

I want to ask the Premier: Instead of getting in line to kick Manitoba producers, why won't he get in their corner and fight for them in the face of these challenges?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, as the member has clearly indicated, agriculture—not all agriculture but the livestock sector is very much challenged in terms of price and input costs today. I would point out the grain and oilseed sector, which is also part of agriculture, is doing exceptionally better than in previous years. In fact, I think farm receipts are up record amounts.

I would also point out, Mr. Speaker, that on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, the member opposite was critical throughout all the media, you know, right throughout all the media, saying that the government should not spend anything more than inflation on various programs in government.

I would also point out—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: You can howl about your inconsistency, but you're still inconsistent.

Mr. Speaker, anyone watching the Public Accounts and the year-end report would note that the largest overexpenditure in all of the provincial government was some over \$60 million in the Department of Agriculture. It represented the largest overexpenditure in government.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Doer: It represents the largest overexpenditure of any department, well beyond, 10 times beyond the "only spend at inflation rate" that the member opposite purports in some of his business speeches, Mr. Speaker.

I would also point out that the CAIS program, which includes livestock producers, was doubled in the year-end payment by this government. Instead of the budgeted amount of \$55 million, I believe it was well over \$110 million.

Now, we recognize, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need some co-operation. We have to have a little decorum in here. There will be lots of time for other members that wish to ask questions or other members that wish to answer them.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very serious situation with the livestock producers in Manitoba. There have been programs initiated outside of the CAIS program by our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). We recognize at this point the prices have gone from the May price of last year. They've fluctuated on a regular basis on a downward spiral, and we also recognize the costs, as the member indicated, have gone up. We are very concerned about it. We've raised it at the meeting at 24 Sussex with the Prime Minister. With the federal-provincial programs, we remain committed to dealing with livestock producers.

I would, though, as I point out, say that it was a \$68-million overexpenditure in our budget of the '07-08 year, and most of that money was targeted under the CAIS program to livestock, livestock producers, but we recognize some of these international prices are very challenging, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:00)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, what an amazing thing. Only the NDP could say that they can increase spending by \$4 billion since they took power, and they think it's unreasonable that we think that they should be able to meet the priorities of Manitobans by only increasing spending at the rate of inflation.

It's an absolutely unbelievable statement for the Premier to make, and they can increase spending at the rate of inflation and meet the priorities of Manitobans. All he has to do is cancel his plan to flush \$1.5 billion down the toilet with his west-side power line, cancel the \$3 million and climbing on the wasteful, ridiculous Spirited Energy campaign, bring his priorities in line with the priorities of Manitobans and recognize that the crisis in livestock has an impact for thousands of Manitoba families at a time when we're entering into a period of economic uncertainty, the IMF yesterday predicting a major global economic slowdown. We cannot afford here in Manitoba to be undermining industries that

historically, presently, and into the future are fundamental for our economic prosperity and growth.

There are families today in this province, and there's a family here represented in the gallery, losing money to the tune of \$20,000 a week. Two weeks ago when I was in Minnedosa, a father, a farm father asked me to advise him on what he should say to his kids about farming in Manitoba, what advice should he give his children. Should they stick with it, Mr. Speaker, or should they leave? I wanted to be able to say they should stay at it, but we are concerned that the direction of this government, with regulations, an unnecessary moratorium in the hog industry not based on science, contrary to what his own Clean Environment Commission was recommending, a pitiful approach in yesterday's budget—the headline says it all: "Hog and cattle producers left empty-handed."

I want to ask the Premier: What advice would he give to parents today in rural Manitoba who are asking themselves the question, what should we tell our children when they ask us, do we stick with agriculture or do we leave?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I would strongly suggest that the member opposite, again, rather than using some of the old slogans from past question periods that he's utilized in the past, stick to the facts. The facts of the matter are that international prices, as we have acknowledged, have gone up in grain and oilseeds and have gone down in terms of livestock.

The input costs have gone up in terms of livestock, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the advice the member opposite has provided to the business community a couple of days ago in his Chamber of Commerce speech. We say the same thing in one meeting as we do in another. That's why we were—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the Department of Agriculture had an overexpenditure approved by the total government of over \$60 million, a 33 percent overexpenditure in the Agriculture budget that just ended two weeks ago in terms of the fiscal year. If people want to say that's nothing, I don't say that's nothing. The CAIS program was budgeted based on federal numbers of \$55 million. Again, we doubled that payment to \$110 million. We did it because we did care about the agricultural producers, particularly the livestock

producers. We don't write an extra cheque for \$55 million because we don't care.

We care about agriculture when 100 percent of the education tax was on farmland, and notwithstanding the swaggering of members opposite, we have now gone up to 70 percent removal of education tax on farmland, Mr. Speaker.

But we recognize there's more work to do. There is a serious challenge in the livestock sector. There is very good news in the grain and oilseeds sector in Manitoba. I know that families are very optimistic in the grain and oilseeds sector, but we recognize and we acknowledge the challenges in livestock. That's why we've been making payments. That's why we've been investing more. That's why the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has announced a number of other programs and that's why we've removed another 5 percent of education tax on farmland, something the members opposite never even touched.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to remind Manitobans that the budget in Manitoba has gone up by more than \$4 billion each and every year, thanks in large part to transfer payments. From the 1999 base, it's more than \$4 billion higher since they came to power, most of it coming from Ottawa.

The issue is: What are the priorities of government? The Premier says he can't manage within the rate of inflation. He has to spend more than the rate of inflation in order to meet the needs of Manitobans, even though we continue to have hallway medicine; we have struggles in our agriculture sector; crumbling roads; we have a justice system that isn't working.

Now, the fact is the Premier has the opportunity to address a sector of our society and our economy that today is hurting for a variety of factors that have nothing to do with their own fault or factors that they have any control over. The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association today indicated that the \$7.35 million referred to, the crumbs referred to in yesterday's budget, are less than the administrative costs of the program set up to administer it.

So when you look at the massive increases in spending in other areas, massive increases related to things that are out of line with the priorities of Manitobans, whether it's a wasteful hydro line that goes halfway around the province before it arrives

back in Winnipeg, Spirited Energy campaign or any number of other things that the Premier is running around the province spending money on, why not make agriculture a priority?

This is not just a matter, Mr. Speaker, of dollars and cents. It is a crisis. There are families that are hurting. In some cases, it's a matter of life and death. We know that in a time of crisis it's even reached the point in some families where individuals have taken their lives.

The crisis today is as deep as it has ever been for livestock. Why won't he step up to the plate? Instead of fighting against them, get in their corner, outline a concrete plan today to address the current crisis.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, no wonder Professor Ryan recently in the Interlake newspaper said that the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, completely fabricates everything dealing with factual information, a complete fabrication to deal with a proposed hydro line and then move it into a debate on agriculture. Some people would use the term "fabricator." Other people would use different terms when it comes to the credibility.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We're starting to skate on a little thin ice here. I think we better pick and choose our words very, very carefully. All members in the House are honourable members and they should be treated as such.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Doer: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite talks about the priorities, Mr. Speaker, in the justice system. Well, again, we put \$7.5 million and 20 more police officers into the justice system. His proposal would be 2 percent. It would be a cutback of Crown prosecutors, police officers, courts, sheriff's officers, prevention programs. That's his alternative in the media at the Chamber of Commerce. Rate of inflation for justice is a cutback in the number of police officers across Manitoba. The member opposite talks about inflation for the health-care system. Again, that would mean a layoff of hundreds of nurses again in Manitoba and a reduction in doctors.

Mr. Speaker, we spent 33 percent more than last year's budget on agriculture. It certainly doesn't deal with the international market forces, but the member opposite can't say on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday that he will spend inflation and not be

accountable for what that would do to even further devastate livestock producers in Manitoba.

Livestock Industry Government Initiatives

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Obviously, the plan is not working. It hasn't worked. That's why we have a gallery the way it is today, Mr. Speaker. They're not listening to the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 was an insult to the farm and livestock sector. Manitoba's livestock sector is facing some of the toughest challenges in recent memory, yet the budget fails to address the magnitude of the crisis.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain why he has hogtied this Minister of Agriculture, stripping her of her ability to deliver programs and services to help producers weather this crisis? He's treating her as if she's already retired.

* (14:10)

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly like to welcome the livestock producers that are here in the gallery. This is their building, and just as I welcome them into my office many times to talk about the challenges that they're facing, I welcome them here today.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious situation and a challenge that is facing the livestock producers, particularly right now the pork producers with declining prices.

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that we listened. The Manitoba Pork Council came to my office in December and said they needed cash flow; they needed some money. That's why we put in place the loan program that they asked for. The pork producers asked us for a targeted cash advance on the AgriStability program. We've done that.

Mr. Eichler: What a non-answer, Mr. Speaker. If this government was truly interested in building a vibrant agriculture sector, this minister would have surely had more clout at the Cabinet table and influence on the budget. That obviously didn't work.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier (Mr. Doer) again: Why is he muzzling this Minister of Agriculture? There's no action in the budget, no commitment to the livestock sector. Do something today, Mr. Premier.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I would ask the members opposite to look at the numbers. Look at what we budgeted last year for AgriStability and look at what we paid out. When the need was there, my colleagues in this Cabinet understood the importance and put in place the extra money.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we have budgeted on the numbers that the federal government has given us and we're hoping, as everybody is hoping, for a good year. But if there isn't a good year and if there is a need for more money, I can assure you that I will go to my colleagues in Cabinet and they will support me, and we will have the extra money there that we need for the industry.

Mr. Eichler: With all her clout in the budget yesterday, Mr. Speaker, it speaks loud and clear. It's a big zero for this year.

Mr. Speaker, the budget touts that loans are made to the livestock industry. Producers have said over and over again, loans are not the answer. The Premier refuses to call the Standing Committee on Agriculture about the trade challenges, about the challenges facing the livestock industry.

Will the Premier (Mr. Doer) do the right thing today, commit to meet with the livestock industry to discuss this crisis, or is he retiring as well?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the members again to read the budget. There's \$14 million more in this year's budget, 7 percent. What would the member opposite have done with his rate of inflation? He would have put in 2 percent. That's all they would have put in according to what he has said.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite asks us to meet with the industry. I have met with the industry. We have meetings scheduled for next week, as the Premier—the member opposite does not understand or is not willing to appreciate that we have listened to producers and we have put in place programs that the producers have asked for.

There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, there is a big challenge here and we will continue to work with the industry.

Health-Care Services Hallway Care

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): We all recall that in 1999 when this Premier (Mr. Doer) was first elected, he campaigned on a promise to do everything exactly the same as

the previous government, the previous Progressive Conservative government. He was going to do one thing differently, Mr. Speaker. The one thing he was going to do differently was he was going to fix health care and end hallway medicine.

Now, we heard today, some eight and a half years later, the story of Sandy and Joe Konechny this morning—and I think that they may want to just take a moment to stop heckling and listen to the story, Mr. Speaker—who were on the radio this morning talking about the situation facing their 86-year-old mother, Mary, who grew up in Sanford farming, worked hard her whole life, paid her taxes and found herself in a situation with congestive heart failure, at the end of last week admitted to hospital and placed in a hallway on the fourth floor of Victoria Hospital in a situation where she was told when she had to go to the washroom to do so with a bedpan in the view of many others. This is a violation of an individual's dignity that should not occur in this day and age and, particularly, more than eight years after this Premier promised to all Manitobans that he would end hallway medicine.

I want to ask the Premier what he has to say to Sandy and Joe Konechny, who are today in the gallery, about the situation facing their mother and hundreds of other Manitobans every month who find themselves in a similar situation. How does he justify his betrayal of the people of Manitoba when he promised to end this and eight and a half years later still hasn't delivered?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to answer. First and foremost, I thank the member opposite for the question, and certainly in any case where there has been a specific issue and a problem with a constituent, we encourage that member to bring that information forward and we will work very hard with the system to address it.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we need to address very carefully the source of this question, the chief of staff under Premier Gary Filmon, the father of hallway medicine. We need to remember that in January of 1999, the *Free Press* reported that an elderly woman waited 14 days on a gurney in the hospital at Concordia.

We know today, Mr. Speaker, that we're working very diligently and the numbers show us that we have brought the—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. McFadyen: I was saying to caucus this morning, I was predicting that this minister would again come back to the old attempt to score political points, wanting to debate again what happened during the 1990s, in a period of recession, in a period of recession in federal transfer cutbacks, Mr. Speaker. I said, no. I said I don't think even this Minister of Health would be so out of touch and so insensitive, when the family members are in the gallery, to try to score political points rather than address the issue that we face today, in April of 2008, eight and a half years after they took the reins of government on a promise to end hallway medicine. Not even this Minister of Health would stoop to the level of fighting old battles at a time when we have challenges in our health-care system today that need to be addressed.

They've had \$4 billion added to the budget. The federal government is pouring money into this province. They've backed up the Brinks truck. The people of Manitoba are looking to this government to manage that money and to follow through on their election commitments. They haven't done either one, Mr. Speaker, and people like Mary Konechny are suffering as a result.

I want to ask the minister—and if she wants to have a debate with Gary Filmon about the 1990s, I'm sure Professor Ryan and the University of Winnipeg will gladly set something up. I'm sure the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) will be there, and they could have an academic debate about what choices they would have made in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker, but that's not what Manitobans are interested in. That doesn't satisfy the Konechny family. They want to know why this minister, why this Premier (Mr. Doer), has betrayed Manitobans after promising to end hallway medicine more than eight years ago.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly no effort to score a political point there either.

What I want to tell, Mr. Speaker, is the truth. The truth was in 1999, the average number of patients admitted to hallways was 28. That number was 28 with headlines appearing that elderly women waited 14 days in the hallway, a hundred patients lining Winnipeg emergency room hallways, the *Winnipeg Sun*, '99.

Today, the average number, brought down by 80 percent, is four. Mr. Speaker, that's four too many

and we have to keep working. I would suggest to you that with the member opposite's suggestion about spending at the rate of inflation, we'd have to close Victoria Hospital altogether and that's a fact.

*(14:20)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, it is a remarkable thing to view a government with more than \$4 billion in extra revenue sitting in the coffers still trying to blame previous governments for the failures of the last eight years.

You know, the Minister of Health may want to speak to her Premier as she talks about 1999, ask him why he voted for the 1999 budget if they were that concerned about what was going on in that time frame.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans aren't interested in fighting old fights. They want to talk about what's happening today, tomorrow and into the future. They want to know that their government has a commitment and a focus on the future.

I want to ask the minister if she can just take the opportunity to resist the temptation to score political points and actually outline for the Konechny family and hundreds of others like them why it is that they haven't followed through on this commitment and how it is that they plan to do so in the future. Let's not go over the old debates of the past.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the issue with the particular patient and the issue of dignity we will investigate. It is a serious issue for patient care. It's one of the reasons why we wanted to make hallway medicine an issue to manage in a more effective way, to reduce—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: I would point out Victoria Hospital requires capital investment which we have pledged and budgeted for. There is some serious capital—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Also in Concordia Hospital the new emergency ward is being constructed as we speak, Mr. Speaker, to improve, again, the ability of great

staff. We have more nurses. We have more doctors. The four patients is less than the 80, but it's still not zero, and we accept that.

But the patient that is in question, that shouldn't have happened and we're going to investigate it.

Budget Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, this is the most pathetic excuse for a budget that I have ever experienced. This is not a balanced budget. It is a welfare equalization budget. The Finance Minister should be embarrassed, not proud of the fact that 40 percent of his spending comes from hardworking taxpayers in have-provinces, including Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister of Finance: Has he sent a thank-you note to the hardworking taxpayers of Saskatchewan and to the Finance Minister of Canada?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's budget thanked all Manitobans for the contribution they've made to the fastest-growing economy in Canada.

If the member would take a few minutes out of his busy schedule to read the budget and if he would look on page B13 he would see the federal transfers to Manitoba are below the Canadian average. He would also note that growth is above the Canadian average. What that means is Manitoba is on its road to prosperity. This is the first year the Manitoba economy has grown above \$50 billion of GDP. When we came into office it was \$32 billion. We've grown 57 percent under this government, a record unequalled by any government previous in the history of this province.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, if the Finance Minister looked at his own budget he'd recognize that equalization payments have grown substantially in this province. By the way, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia have no equalization payments right now in transfers. So this minister is living off the backs of hard taxpayers in Saskatchewan and other have-provinces. He can't think that this is all Manitoba born.

This is a typical NDP budget, tax and tax some more, spend and spend some more. His budget has increased by 6.2 percent from 9.2 billion to 9.8 billion, 6.2 percent. Why did this minister try to deceive Manitobans and say that there was a

3.3 percent increase in spending when he's increasing by 6.2 percent?

Mr. Selinger: The member opposite, if he would read the page I pointed out to him in the budget book, B13, he will see that the biggest transfer payment increases were due Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. The biggest transfer payments were to those provinces because the government—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a lot of guests in the gallery that came from all over to come and hear question period. They have the right to be able to hear the questions and the answers. I ask the co-operation of honourable members, please.

The honourable Minister of Finance has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: The reality is the federal government has shifted primarily to a per capita transfer model. The provinces that have gained the most money are the most populated provinces. Our equalization has remained relatively stable at about 19 to 20 percent. The reality is we're growing faster than the Canadian average on economic growth and prosperity. Our transfer payments are lower than the Canadian average.

The member has trouble digesting that because he doesn't take the time to read the budget. He just replays that old tape recorder that he had from the '90s. I hope it wasn't in the same drawer as the videotape they found in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Borotsik: What an absolute snow job, Mr. Speaker. What an absolute snow job. What the minister isn't dealing with is the equalization payments. Saskatchewan, this year, will receive no equalization. Ours have gone up by some \$300 million. We're living on the taxpayers as other taxpayers in this country.

Mr. Speaker, more taxes, more spending and more debt, gross debt, and the debt is becoming gross in this province, I might say. Yet the Finance Minister continues with his Alfred E. Neuman, what, me worry? No. Well, guess what? The minister better start worrying. He should set a course for financial disaster in this budget.

Why does the minister continue to be so smug when he knows he is placing such a huge financial burden of debt on the future generations of this province because of his spending addictions?

Mr. Selinger: The member opposite typifies what we see from members opposite. When he's in Brandon, he wants more bridges; he wants more schools; he wants more infrastructure. When he's in the Legislature, he doesn't want any more spending and he wants no more capital investments.

Our debt-to-GDP ratio has declined 30 percent since we've come in office. Our economy has grown 57 percent. Our investments in infrastructure are growing, smaller than the growth in the economy. In the result, our debt-to-GDP ratio has gone down and our credit rating has gone up. The member opposite just can't deal with reality, Mr. Speaker.

Budget Personal Exemptions

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Raising the personal exemption is better policy for low-income earners than just increasing the minimum wage. But this budget increase in personal exemption is underwhelming. It's offensive. It's insulting. So we have the worst of both worlds. Low-income earners are less well off, as the increase in personal exemption does not even keep up to inflation. Small businesses bear the burden of increased wages, which they will either pass on to the consumer or if they'll cut back on staff.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan), how can this government pat itself on the back for announcing increases that don't even keep up with inflation?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I again ask the member to consider reading the budget. Page C3, personal exemptions, up 57 percent since we've come in office. The spousal tax credit—the members opposite did nothing about it, I don't know what they've got against spouses—up 86 percent. The eligible dependent tax credit, up 86 percent.

We've taken a balanced approach. We've removed low-income Manitobans from the tax rolls. We've increased the minimum wage. The personal disposable income and the purchasing power of Manitobans has gone up over 10 percent. When they were in office, disposable purchasing power went down 6 percent.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Labour and Immigration has any leadership aspirations, maybe she should take opportunities to get up and answer questions when they're posed to her.

This week our leader put forward our budget priorities and we wanted to see the basic personal exemption increase to that level of Saskatchewan. This would have put more money in the pockets of low-income earners while allowing small businesses to remain viable at times of future economic uncertainty.

So, again, I'll ask the Minister of Labour and Immigration: How can she justify adding to the burden faced by small businesspeople at a time of economic uncertainty?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour and Immigration has asked me to ask the question. She wants guys with grey hair to have a chance and I'm prepared to do that. I thank her for that opportunity today.

The small-business tax rate in Manitoba is the lowest in Canada. Beat that.

* (14:30)

Budget Tuition Fees

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in the last election, NDP candidates, MLAs, Cabinet ministers campaigned from door-to-door to urge people to vote for the NDP to continue and maintain the tuition freeze, but what happened? It wasn't a minor item; it was a major part of the pitch for votes, as this document I table shows.

In yesterday's budget, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his party announced that they would increase tuition fees in 2009 and thus break the solemn promise that they made during the campaign. I ask the Premier to apologize to those who made the mistake of believing him and his party last year.

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): I thank the member for the question, because it does give me the opportunity to clarify the information he has. That is, on Monday, indeed, I made an announcement that we would extend the tuition freeze which we had implemented in '07-08 to '08-09. Indeed, that is what we have done.

We have also committed to the appointment of a commissioner who will examine post-secondary education and give his advice.

But I have some very good news for the member opposite, and that is, this morning I was at University of Manitoba. He'll be—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

**Election Promises
Government Record**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the NDP and their party and the Premier are losing a lot of credibility because they're trying to weasel out of the promise to have a tuition freeze continue. Interestingly, Liberals are gaining credibility because the NDP are plagiarizing the Liberal policies, taking up what we believe was the best approach.

But let's place it, let's look at it this way. The tuition freeze is only one of many, many broken NDP promises. They promised to end hallway medicine, broken; promised to have Ranchers Choice and the hemp plant in Dauphin, broken; promised to help the hog industry, broken. Oh, my goodness. I ask the Premier to apologize for all these broken promises.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, a number of journalists in the last election campaign reviewed 25 of the promises that we made in the '03 campaign and they independently came to the conclusion that we had kept—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: —that 24 out of the 25 were kept, and the average, the promise of 10 percent on education tax reductions was only nine. That was the one we didn't keep. We disagree with that, but that was their finding.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out in terms of universities, the member opposite sat at the Cabinet table and absolutely eviscerated post-secondary education in Canada. He had a choice. He could have voted for the budget to cut money for universities, or he could have voted against it. He voted for it. His record is known by Manitobans.

**Jordan's Principle
Implementation**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans, and students particularly, and hog people, know that the Premier just keeps on breaking promises. In the gallery today are Tricia and Gordon Kell who can tell you about a trail of broken NDP promises. The NDP health-care and family services systems have been so ineffective in helping the Kell family that, time and time again, the only place that they could have help was from the police or the fire

department. It's terrible when the police and fire departments have to provide health or family service services in this province.

Frankly, the Premier's credibility is in tatters. When will the Premier start to implement Jordan's Principle properly so that families like the Kell family don't get caught between two departments and get proper services?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): We have been very responsive to all Manitobans. The commitments that we have made in the last two years in mental health and addictions includes \$40 million, \$40 million that add to a continuum of care, a continuum of care that talks about prevention, intervention and support services.

Most recently, what we have done is we have opened up an acquired brain injury facility in Thompson, Manitoba, which will provide rehabilitation services. This same facility will be opening up very soon in Selkirk.

We'll continue to work with Manitobans to provide a quality of service. We'll continue to listen. Is our work done? No, it's not. We will continue to make those improvements.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Livestock Industry

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's livestock sector is facing some of its toughest challenges in recent memory, yet the budget fails to acknowledge the magnitude of the crisis. This government has the gall to say that it is, and I quote, committed to ensuring Manitoba producers receive support to maintain their farm business today, when there is not one single new announcement aimed at helping the cattle or pork industries weather these challenges.

Mr. Speaker, the budget touts to loans being made to the hog industry, yet producers have repeatedly said more loans are not the answer. The budget recycled old announcements aimed at cattle producers that aren't delivering either. In fact, budget 2008 puts our province's long-term economy at risk by not dealing with major downturn in the livestock industry.

As Manitoba Cattle Producers Association president, Martin Unrau, said: Agriculture as a primary industry is the real driver of Manitoba's

economy. Livestock represents half of the total value of the agricultural sector. The cattle industry puts over \$500 million into the provincial economy each year, and if we lose our province's cattle industry to complacency, it is only a matter of time before everyone in Manitoba begins to feel the economic hit.

It's time this government took a serious look at how it's dealing with livestock producers and listens to what they really need, as this sector is in serious trouble. The government is trying to make us believe that Manitoba is well positioned to face the coming economic downturn, but its inaction in the livestock industry tells another story.

Failure to develop strategies to address the challenges in the livestock sector will be to the detriment of our farm families and to all those businesses and industries around this province that service this sector. That will be to no one's benefit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Domino Project

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise before the House today to recognize the Domino project and to congratulate the University of Manitoba on the great work they are doing in revitalizing their Fort Garry campus. Established in 1877, the University of Manitoba was western Canada's first university and, as such, it is an important part of our history.

Our government has today announced its commitment to invest \$47 million over three years in the redevelopment of the Fort Garry campus. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am proud to be a part of a government that recognizes the need to support post-secondary education.

Over the next five years, the University of Manitoba will be embarking on an ambitious plan that will restructure several of the university's key facilities. The plan is called the Domino project because it will address major space and infrastructure challenges on campus in such a way that, like dominos falling, the resolution of one challenge will lead to the resolution of another. As one of Manitoba's largest campus redevelopments, the Domino project will also provide students, faculty and staff with the facilities and technology they need to succeed and thrive.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Manitoba government will have supported over half a billion dollars of capital projects since 1999 because we believe that investing in universities is tantamount to investing in Manitoba's future.

Once again, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to commend University of Manitoba's President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Emőke Szathmáry and the university's faculty and staff on their efforts in taking this innovative step that will renew the historic Fort Garry campus and make sure that history plays a part in the future of western Canada's first university. Thank you very much.

* (14:40)

Portage Terriers

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon and to offer congratulations to the Portage Terriers, the Turnbull Cup winners and the Manitoba Junior Hockey League champions, winning the final series against the Winnipeg Saints.

However, this team will not be resting on this major accomplishment as they will soon be preparing to take on the challenge of the Saskatchewan winners in their quest for the Anavet Cup. The Terriers entered the post-season having captured another Sherwood Division title, but faced a very determined first round opponent in the Swan Valley Stampeders, whom they defeated in a physical seven-game series.

The tribulations of this challenging opening round served the Terriers well as, throughout the next two rounds, they also disposed of the Dauphin Kings in four straight and were able to contain the explosive Winnipeg Saints, securing that win in five games.

With an explosive offence behind team captain Mike Audino and a very physical defence backstopped by playoff MVP winner, goaltender Cody Pollon, the team received important contributions from all positions throughout the team.

I would also like to recognize the Portage coach, Blake Spiller, and all his staff who deserve the credit for their leadership, team preparation, game strategies, which have shown so highly successful, especially containing the regular season champ Winnipeg Saints.

Madam Deputy Speaker, throughout the season, Portage la Prairie residents have shown the Portage Terriers their loyal support, especially in the last,

final rounds where we saw a great deal of the town of Portage la Prairie make the trek to Winnipeg to support the team.

In closing—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired. Does the honourable have leave to finish his statement?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Faurschou: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of all honourable members of this Legislative Assembly, the very best of luck to the Portage Terriers in their quest for the Anavet Cup in Saskatchewan. Thank you very much.

Point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Faurschou: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like leave of the House to include the roster of the Portage Terriers in *Hansard*.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Leave? Leave has been granted.

Gavin McHale, Cody Pollon, Cam Canart, Cody Johnson, Darren Miller, Mike Audino, James Cain, Tyler Moore, Ryan Audino, Alex Boyd, Rob Roteliuk, Tanner Irwin, Eric Delong, Phil Letkeman, Preston McLeod, Luke MacInnis, A.J. Spiller, Carson Rowat, Jeremy Dawes, Jordan Kerr, Cory More, Kyle Fischer, Riley Nixdorf, Blake Spiller, Paul Harland, Jim Tkachyk, Frank Harding, Len Robinson, Dennis McNish, Keaton Wolf, Jesse Peters, Geno Romanow, Harry Funk, Bruce McCallum, Dillon Vrooman.

Community Newspapers

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Madam Deputy Speaker, an important part of a well-functioning and healthy democracy is a free press. I have always been impressed with the wide variety of papers that can be found in the riding of Flin Flon. The *Flin Flon Reminder* has been a staple in the community for over 60 years and also publishes *Cottage North* magazine in conjunction with the *Reminder*.

Flin Flon has a rich history of producing quality local newspapers. People may remember the *Flin*

Flon Times Magazine and the *Flin Flon Miner*. Local newspapers weave themselves into the very fabric of our communities and keep folks connected to each other. As an MLA, I believe it is extremely important to start my day with a read of the local papers to make sure I remain connected to events happening all over the north.

New, independent newspapers are also springing up in my constituency. After Mona Forsyth and her family stopped publishing the *Snow Lake News*, Marc Jackson felt that there was still a need for a community paper, prompting him to take his online paper and start creating a print edition called *The Underground Press*. *The Underground Press* is helping the residents of Snow Lake and other northerners to stay connected and is bringing them various viewpoints on issues from at home and around the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a paper that has a front-page story about a mother staying in touch with her son serving in Afghanistan is a paper with its finger on the pulse of the community. Many members of this House will be quite familiar with *north roots* magazine. Published six times a year in Flin Flon, *north roots* has branded itself as a major source of information north of 53 in Canada. Featuring articles of particular interest to northerners, the magazine is available all over northern Manitoba.

My community is truly fortunate to have such a rich variety of regular print magazines. I would ask that all honourable members join with me in recognizing community and regional newspapers and magazines for the excellent work they do keeping neighbours informed. They provide an important forum for discussion and debate and truly are an essential part of defining who we are as Manitobans.

Jordan's Principle

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): For a long time, I have campaigned to have Jordan's Principle implemented. For too many years the NDP government provided lip service to Jordan's Principle but have repeatedly failed to follow it with action. Jordan's Principle is that the child's interest be considered first, and that bickering between governments or bickering between government departments should never prevent the interests of the child being considered first.

In the gallery today is a good example. Tricia and Gord Kell have been doing everything they

could possibly do to look after their child, Tammy, a child with special needs. Tammy has a complex medical history, and it must be acknowledged she is difficult to look after. But, at the same time, it is very sad when health care and family services delivery in Manitoba have deteriorated so much that people like the Kell family, who need health care or family services, have no choice but to call the police department or the fire department to deal with a health care or a family services issue. The NDP should be ashamed that the situation has deteriorated to this point. There should be immediate action taken to implement Jordan's Principle with regard to the Kell family. For two years, Tricia and Gord Kell have been shuttled back and forth between the Health and the Child and Family Services departments. It is time to put their daughter Tammy first and to make sure changes are made to enable good health care and family services support for Tammy.

Philippine Trade Mission

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): I rise today to draw the attention of all honourable members to the government's successful trade mission to the Philippines this past winter. Along with the Premier (Mr. Doer), I had the privilege of joining business and community leaders on this trip which sought to strengthen and reinforce the bonds between Manitoba and the Philippines.

In the area of immigration, the Premier signed a memorandum of understanding with Secretary Arturo Brion of the Department of Labour and Employment in the Philippines. The memorandum seeks to protect immigrant workers by building better connections between Filipino applicants and potential employers in Manitoba in developing guidelines regulating immigration recruiters in accordance with both Manitoba policies and Philippine law.

In addition to immigration, trade is another key area that connects our province to the Philippines. Madam Deputy Speaker, two-way trade between Manitoba and the Philippines totalled \$29 million in 2006, with wheat, iron and steel articles, pork and processed foods being only some of the major Manitoba exports destined for that country.

This trade mission did much to foster an even greater relationship between Manitoba businesses and industries and their Philippine counterparts and is part of our broader strategy to increase and diversify our export markets. On behalf of all

members of this House, I would like to congratulate the Premier and the Manitoba business community on a successful mission to the Philippines. The new ties that were formed and the existing connections that were reinforced will only serve to strengthen this already great province. Thank you.

Community Newspapers

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): It is with pleasure I rise today to recognize Community Newspaper Day, which is celebrated here in Manitoba next week on April 17. This will be the fourth Community Newspaper Day since I first proposed it in a private member's resolution. I am happy to say that the government supported it even though it was not a resolution that they brought forward.

I was very happy to attend the 89th Better Newspapers Competition Awards Banquet last Saturday, April 5, and reconnect with some old friends. As a former owner and publisher of the *Headingley Headliner* and member of the Manitoba Community Newspaper Association, it is very rewarding to see the association honour its members and their excellent work in our communities. It brought back good memories of my time in the newspaper business.

Community newspapers are the hearts of our communities, connecting advertisers' products to consumers, people to local upcoming events and issues, relaying news of past events and providing a historical record of the life and times of the community. People are connected to their community newspaper like no other medium. There are 45 community newspapers in the Manitoba Newspaper Association and many, many other ethnic community newspapers which reflect the multicultural nature of our province. Nothing brings communities closer than a newspaper directly for and by a cultural community.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all those newspapers and staff who won awards last Saturday night and to congratulate all of those who are involved in community newspapers, cultural newspapers here in Manitoba for the great service they provide to the people of Manitoba.

Please celebrate your day on April 17 and know we here in the Legislature appreciate and applaud your work. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

CancerCare Manitoba

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): As part of Cancer Awareness Month I would like to draw attention to an ally in the fight against cancer. Since April of 1930, CancerCare Manitoba has been providing quality services to individuals and families with many forms of cancer. They have been part of the healing process for thousands of Manitobans. Their community-minded approach to health and healing makes them both warm and approachable for patients, friends and family. They fully understand that care involves a community of people that work together toward a common goal and have made that the cornerstone of their identity.

CancerCare has been at the forefront of cancer research and prevention for over 75 years. They attract some of the brightest research minds in the world and are part of a network of Manitoba health research organizations that engage in lifesaving research every day. The Canadian Cancer Society estimates that in 2007, 6,000 Manitobans were diagnosed with some form of cancer. The efforts made by researchers save lives and improve treatment options for patients and families.

Madam Deputy Speaker, CancerCare provides a huge range of services from nutrition to Aboriginal services to care for people in and outside of urban centres.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

They are anticipating the needs of all segments of Manitoba and working collaboratively with patients to provide quality care.

I would ask all honourable members to join with me in congratulating all the employees and volunteers at CancerCare Manitoba for making a real and meaningful difference in the lives of Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Royal Manitoba Winter Fair

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, another successful Royal Manitoba Winter Fair has drawn to a close. The Royal saw over 118,000 guests visit this prestigious event, and it is safe to say all visitors left satisfied and definitely entertained. Some of the guests included members of this Legislature, and I would like to thank those members for attending.

The Royal Manitoba Winter Fair is one of western Canada's largest agricultural events and the

largest annual event held in Brandon. It is one of only two fairs in Canada to receive Royal designation. The Monday night opening ceremonies were convened by the Queen's representative in Manitoba, Lieutenant-Governor John Harvard, and included a very personal and poignant message delivered by soldiers from CFB Shilo who are currently stationed in Afghanistan.

The Royal Manitoba Winter Fair brings together young and old, rural and urban residents in a spirit of celebration. From the Grand Prix horse jumping to the heavy horse hitches, from the super dogs to the agricultural trade show there was truly something for everyone.

I was most impressed with the exhibition "Through the Farm Gate." This is an agricultural awareness program that allows the fairgoer to truly appreciate the professionalism and the sophistication of agricultural production.

I would like to thank Karen Oliver and her staff, Terry Klassen, the chairman of the Winter Fair and hundreds of volunteers for their tireless efforts for once again providing a world-class exhibition.

See you all next year at the fair. Thank you.

Air Force 101

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians think about the Air Force and NORAD, places like Cold Lake and North Bay often come to mind. I was pleased to be part of a delegation of 10 elected officials, including the MLAs for St. James and Minto, who attended Air Force 101, an awareness seminar organized by the 1 Canadian Air Division and Canadian NORAD Region Headquarters located in St. James. The day's activities showcased the important role that Manitoba plays in Canada's Air Force.

We were given excellent presentations by Colonel Scott Howden, Major General Marcel Duval and Captain Brian Morrisette about the connection between our Air Servicemen and women and the communities that they live in. The Air Force plays an important role both economically and socially in Manitoba.

The Air Force put on a search and rescue parachuting demonstration for us. Watching the highly trained and incredibly professional Air Force soldiers co-ordinate a search and rescue drill was

truly impressive. It reminded us that come wind, rain or snow, our Air Force is ready to offer a helping hand to Manitobans in need.

We flew in the hold of a Hercules aircraft to Portage la Prairie where we were given a tour of Manitoba's cutting edge flight training facilities at Southport Aerospace Centre. This very modern site is essential to the training of Air Force pilots and is easily one of the best in the world. Many of us were able to try our hand/eye co-ordination on the helicopter and jet flight simulators. On the return flight, I flew on the flight deck, which was fascinating.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank organizer Colonel Scott Howden and all the presenters of Air Force 101. Learning about the many roles of Canadian Armed Forces personnel at 17 Wing was an interesting and educational experience for which we thank them.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): In accordance with rule 36(1), I move, seconded by the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), that the regularly scheduled business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the extreme challenges facing Manitoba's pork and cattle sectors, including factors such as low commodity prices, the impact of the high Canadian dollar, rising input costs, the pending country-of-origin labelling and the extension of the moratorium on the hog industry.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Just before recognizing the honourable member, I remind all members, under rule 36(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member for the other parties in the House is allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately. As stated in *Beauchesne's* citation 390: urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion.

In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. McFadyen: My understanding is that there is agreement among House leaders to support the motion. But I do want to put a few words on the record in order to fully explain the basis for the motion today, Mr. Speaker.

We, today, have a situation where families operating within the livestock sector here in Manitoba are losing sums of money at dramatic rates that will create the potential for imminent bankruptcy and the forced change that will come about as families are required to leave the farm, to sell their operations or to leave in a state of bankruptcy or insolvency as a result of the variety of factors that are having an impact on this very important sector.

I don't think very many Manitobans will require convincing of the significance of the livestock sector to our provincial economy and to our province more generally. More than \$1.5 billion every year normally will be contributed to the economy of Manitoba as a result of the livestock sector. We know that there are thousands of Manitoba families that rely for their livelihood on the health of this sector. There are many outside of the city of Winnipeg and outside of the city of Brandon, but also many within Winnipeg and Brandon who make their living either directly or indirectly on livestock. So, when the livestock industry is in crisis, it has an impact that ripples throughout our province.

Mr. Speaker, the indications that we are getting today from producers around our province is that the crisis they face today is at least on par with the BSE crisis of a number of years ago in terms of the extreme financial distress being felt by many families. It could be a matter, in many cases, of days before decisions are going to have to be made by producers as to whether they carry on or whether they throw in the towel.

There are also other urgent decisions that they face, Mr. Speaker. We've heard concerns, of course, about what happens in a surplus environment with livestock, what plans might be in place in the event of a worst case scenario that everybody would want to avoid, of finding ourselves in a situation of having to cull livestock.

* (15:00)

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a variety of things that we face, decisions to be made by a variety of players that are significant. The economic pressure, obviously, is dramatic. We know, if families are required to leave their farms and leave their

communities, that this will have a negative impact on the stores and the other businesses that depend on the healthy incomes of these families. So it'll put pressure on stores, other small businesses throughout our province if livestock producers are put out of business. So it is a significant challenge. We know what the factors are that are driving it: low prices for livestock on the markets, rising prices for feed and other inputs, a high Canadian dollar and actions south of the border today that are designed to keep Canadian products out of the United States. By that I am referring to the country-of-origin labelling proposal that is coming forward which will require labelling that could have the impact of very dramatically negatively impacting the sale of Canadian products within the United States, which is the world's largest market.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have almost a perfect storm of negative factors facing the industry and in the midst of that we have a provincial government that has a variety of areas that has control over. It controls taxes and spending. It has to make decisions related to regulation of the industry and a variety of other factors that are significant that can make the difference between survival and bankruptcy for many families. So the urgency, I think, can't be overstated when we consider the rate at which money is being lost, the decisions that need to be made within hours if not days for many families and many producers and the need for immediate government action, the development and communication of a plan that will help offset some of these other negative forces that are having such an impact on Manitoba families.

So we want to use the opportunity to debate all of these considerations, to call on the government to be more aggressive and more supportive, to get in the corner of farmers as opposed to working against them. Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the urgency of the matter is significant and that the motion ought to be granted. Thank you.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, as the government, we have responsibility to the entire province. We have elected members from the north, from rural Manitoba and from the cities, so the responsibility of representation of all Manitoba rests on our shoulders. That's one of the reasons for our balanced budget and our balanced approach. I look forward to members opposite supporting that balanced approach that sees significant resources into the agricultural community.

Almost every day, in fact every day in this House, members stand up and, depending on who's in the gallery, it's crisis for this, crisis for that, crisis for this. With respect to the agricultural sector and the livestock sector, there is a genuine crisis out there. Lives are being affected every day and we recognize that as a government. So we concur with a motion being introduced by members opposite, notwithstanding that we're in the middle of budget debate and in fact, the Leader of the Opposition's next scheduled to speak in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, and notwithstanding that we have a very important legislative session and a budget that deals with the expenditures of this province to pass. Notwithstanding that, we recognize farm families form a bedrock in this province. Historically, they have and they will into the future, albeit the ever-changing nature of our agriculture sector, notwithstanding that, the adaptations that have been made by our rural communities have not been able to overcome some of the international matters specifically dealing with the Canadian dollar, with prices and with predatory kinds of developments from particularly the United States. So we welcome the opportunity of having this debate in the Legislature.

We'd prefer to sit late so we can maintain this as a budget day to argue and to debate matters of the budget that are important to all Manitobans. Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, we believe that—and we would concur in the resolution that calls for an immediate debate because when it comes to the agricultural community, I suggest it's not a partisan issue. Family farms and Manitoban livestock producers, pork producers, grain producers, we're all one team, and we're pulling together, I think. I urge all members to speak on behalf of this issue and the complex issues and support our livestock sector.

So, Mr. Speaker, we would concur and agree in the debate taking place on this very important matter. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition should be debated today. The notion required by rule 36(1) was provided. Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter. Ordinarily, this matter would be ruled out of order on

the basis that there are other opportunities available to debate the matter—but given that there appears to be a willingness to debate the matter today, despite the procedural shortcomings, I shall put the question to the House.

Is there agreement to debate the motion for a matter of urgent public importance? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

There is agreement. The House will proceed to have a debate on the issue, and, as indicated in the rules, the debate expires at the end of two hours. Nor can it continue past the adjournment hour. So we will now proceed. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Mr. McFadyen: I would first like to acknowledge and thank the House leaders from the other parties represented in the Legislature for their agreement that this matter is sufficiently urgent to require the setting aside of the normal procedures of this Legislature in order to deal with the matter this afternoon. I appreciate the comments of the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) in support of this.

But I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that I do take some exception to what, I think, the Member for Kildonan was implying with some of the comments he made when he initially rose on this point. His suggestion was that, by bringing forward this matter on behalf of agriculture in Manitoba, we were somehow merely representing a special interest group. The fact is, we don't view agriculture in Manitoba as a special interest group. We view agriculture in Manitoba as the backbone of our economy and the fundamental building block that not only historically built this great province, but has, since that time, provided to all Manitobans a foundation for economic prosperity, spin-off activities that have created opportunities and jobs for literally tens of thousands of Manitobans, have put food on our table, and who can imagine anything more fundamental and more significant than those who make their living putting food on the table of Manitobans. The most basic necessity, necessities of life, are provided to us as Manitobans by our agricultural producers.

So, for the NDP to try to characterize farmers in Manitoba as a special interest group, and to try to suggest that they don't deserve the same level of commitment and attention from this Legislature, I

think, is indicative of an NDP government that demonstrates, time and again, a lack of concern for our rural economy, a lack of commitment to dealing with agriculture, an unwillingness to stand up and fight when what our producers need today is a Premier and a government that's ready to stand up and fight in their corner to ensure that they can see their way through the present crisis, Mr. Speaker. All of us in this House understand and have a profound appreciation for the work that is done by farmers across our province, whether it's in livestock, whether it's in grains, or any other area of production or packing or any other area that's related to agriculture in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I would say, venture a guess, that a significant majority of members in this House have a direct connection to agriculture in one way or another, either because they've engaged in it themselves personally or because they are descendants of those who worked the land in our province, or are directly related to those who work the land in our province. So all of us, I think, and even those members that don't have that direct relationship I think know and understand how important agriculture is to our province.

* (15:10)

This is not a partisan issue. It's a matter that crosses party lines. If one looks back through the history of our province, you will find that members from different parties came together at different times. There was a coalition government formed in the 1940s to deal both with the challenges of war, but also the crisis in agriculture, where members were prepared to set aside partisan differences to work together within a government that was dedicated and committed to preserving the well-being of our rural communities and fighting to ensure that agriculture could be successful and agriculture could prosper and survive into the future.

Now is such a time in our history again where we face crisis, after the challenges of BSE which wiped out an entire cycle in livestock for our province. We face yet another crisis arising from the factors that have already been identified. We all know that agriculture, much like other businesses, is a cyclical industry. There are good years and there are bad years, Mr. Speaker. When producers go through those good years, we know what they do. They put away money in rainy day accounts. They pay down their debt. They prepare themselves for

challenging years, which we know in Manitoba are always not very far around the corner.

But what happened in recent history is that those up years that were supposed to come did not materialize because the BSE crisis mowed down this sector in our province at a time when many producers were expecting an upturn, in terms of prices, in terms of profits and other opportunities, to take that extra revenue and put it toward debt repayment, put it toward planning for the future, investing in new facilities, investing in new barns and new products that would ensure that they were ready and able to weather the next downturn, whenever it may come. That point in the cycle didn't occur. So what happened is that farmers who were already knocked back as a result of the earlier downturn, then, expecting better prices and better prospects, were disadvantaged by the BSE crisis and expecting and hoping for better times.

Now, here we find ourselves today, Mr. Speaker. At a time when many had hoped for optimism and had hoped for a positive period within the cycle, we are again knocked back as a result of the factors that have already been discussed, factors beyond the control of producers: prices on markets, over which they have little or no control, which are down; input costs which are up, including grain, fertilizer and other inputs that are required; a tax regime in Manitoba that's uncompetitive compared to other provinces.

They can talk all they like about what they've done with the \$4 billion in new revenue from Ottawa, but we can't just look at the crumbs that have been spread around to agriculture out of that massive \$4-billion windfall from Ottawa. We also have to look at how we compare to other provinces and other states and other jurisdictions we compete with, and, by almost any measure, our taxes are not competitive.

We have a situation where new regulations are coming every day. Those regulations are motivated by some good things. It's not the motivation or the objective behind them that we argue with. We in Manitoba all know about the importance of a clean environment. But it's the way in which they've been introduced: the lack of consultation with producers, the lack of partnership to acknowledge the fact that, with new regulations and new requirements to change practices, costs go up at a time when many producers are losing money. So it's one more thing, one more way of piling on top of producers, of

kicking them when they're down that they simply cannot afford in the current environment.

So, what we would say to the government is, instead of an adversarial approach, adopt an approach of partnership, put the money in place that has been promised previously and not delivered on in yesterday's budget, to work with producers with incentives to change practices and arrive at better environmental practices to preserve our waterways for future generations, but also acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that today is hardly the starting point for this process of change, that producers across our province for years, if not decades, have been adapting and changing their practices as more information has become available about the downstream impact of different practices, have been changing and adapting and improving their practices as they become more and more aware. As the sciences become better, as knowledge has become more readily available, many have taken dramatic steps to change their practices to protect our environment. That needs to be acknowledged today, in addition to the fact that there is, of course, more work to be done, in a spirit of partnership, though, not one of punishment.

So what I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that the government has an urgent need to step to the plate, to get in the corner of producers rather than working against them, to be partners rather than adversaries, to come forward with specific, concrete plans laid out as quickly as possible so the producers have certainty about what their income is going to be, how they're going to meet the crisis that they today face, and so that they can say to their children, look them straight in the eye and be able to say to their children that agriculture has a rosy future here in Manitoba, notwithstanding our present challenges, we've got a government that's in our corner, that's prepared to help us through the current crisis, stick with it, that agriculture is the way of the future.

Mr. Speaker, we need to be able to say to our producers that they can look their children in the eye and say with all confidence and hope that this is a great industry. There will be ups and downs, but you've got a government that's in your corner here in Manitoba, that you should stay with it, and continue to do what generations before you have done. That is work in the most noble profession that one can imagine, working the land to put food on the tables of Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise on the matter of urgent public importance and indicate that our caucus certainly supported the proposal to have, in the middle of the budget debate, the matter of the livestock industry.

I would again reiterate that the agricultural sector generally, in terms of the oil and grain seeds, is doing quite well. In fact, unprecedented prices and income is in rural and agricultural Manitoba in the grain and oilseed sector. In the livestock sector the opposite is the case. There is truly a challenge in the sense that the world and North American commodity prices for pork are below the cost of production. It's a point that the premiers of all three western provinces made during our discussions of the impact of the high dollar at 24 Sussex with our Prime Minister.

I would also point out that it's a point that the Minister of Agriculture raises on a continuous basis with the other ministers of Agriculture dealing with this issue. I would also like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the issue of country of origin, which has also been referenced by the member opposite, has been a challenge that we have been dealing for some time.

To some degree the situation in United States has gone from no consensus about how this would proceed to a consensus. We did meet with the chair of the agriculture committee, Collin Peterson, who is, in fact, a person we've dealt with before. We've actually dealt with him because he had a Flyer plant in Crookston, which is a constituency that he represents in Congress, very admirably. He also represents a number of farmers in Minnesota.

* (15:20)

I say that, in terms of the livestock debate because in Manitoba we have some four million weanlings, 1.3 million weanlings go to Minnesota. Of course, we are very concerned. We are very concerned, and I know all Manitobans are about the impact of an obvious situation with weanlings changing on the country of origin. In fact, I raised this with the former Agriculture Secretary, Mike Johanns, on behalf of Manitobans, a person who is the former governor of Nebraska. We pointed out to him that you can't have a weanling born in Manitoba for four weeks, finished in Minnesota and then processed in the Twin Cities or in Mankato. What is that pig? How are you going to label that pig in terms of when it's processed. It's obviously, in our view, primarily processed and completed by an American producer, but it is born in Canada. Obviously, we

believe that some of the proposals of the pork council and their legal counsels have been putting forward in Washington are proposals that we would support, to have lines that do recognize the integrated nature of agriculture, Canadian and American product with one label, rather than having separate lines for a Canadian weanling, that would have to be processed as a Canadian weanling finished in the United States as a separate processing line, separate from a line dealing with only the American hogs, Mr. Speaker, or only a Canadian-born hog that is produced in the United States.

This is another further challenge to producers. We don't know what the outcome of that was and I did not predict what it would be.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the government itself, we do participate in federal-provincial agricultural income support programs. In fact, we budgeted some \$55 million last year, and I think we spent over \$110 million. In fact, that money flowed at the end of the fiscal year. It flowed to producers because of the CAIS program. It was the largest overexpenditure. In fact, we didn't follow the advice, the downtown advice, of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) when he says only spend in inflation. That's what he says to the downtown business brokers; that's what he says downtown. What he says out in the farm gate is something different. We have said, we're consistently saying, in fact, when I met with a business group last night, I said, yes, we did overspend. We had to overspend. We overspent primarily in agriculture. The largest percentage of overexpenditure was actually for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and agriculture.

Secondly, I do believe, Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite would know, that we have to put in our budget the numbers the federal government requires us to put in for CAIS. We can't pull them out of thin air. I know members opposite like to have numbers pulled out of thin air. *[interjection]* I'm sure the member opposite will have a chance to speak, and he will know what agricultural supports he put in place for grain and oilseed producers in the '90s, and he will also know and tell the farmers that he did nothing, absolutely nothing, zero, zilch on education tax on farmland. He would swagger around rural Manitoba, he would say we're friends of the agricultural producers. He did zero. In fact, members opposite raised education taxes on farmers in Manitoba.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying that applies to most members opposite: they're all hat and no cattle. I think for members opposite, when it comes to education tax on farmland, they did nothing. We have removed in this budget 70 percent. Having said that, there is a real challenge on the cost of production for livestock producers. It's a double whammy for cattle producers because of the BSE situation of a few years ago. It is serious for hog producers.

We will continue to match the federal government. We expect the CAIS program will require more money to flow to livestock producers and less money to flow to grain producers because the prices started to go up 18 months ago. One of the problems of the federal-provincial programs, I would admit in this House, is it's not agile enough. There's still the grain prices—or the income's double for grain and oilseeds producers. There's still cheques going out, and there's not enough money left for livestock producers when things really get very difficult. I've said that again to the national government.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the \$20 million we put into food processing, money in Brandon, to have more value-added agriculture here closer to home for producers is important. We put money into Neepawa, into the Neepawa plant, again to clean up a lagoon that has been left basically neglected over the decades. And again, we think that will increase the capacity of producers, for livestock producers, closer to home, which of course does reduce one of the costs for producers to have the production facilities closer to home. We have put in low-interest and not-very-immediate loan programs for agricultural producers, some \$60 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we followed the advice of the downtown brokers' advice from the member opposite, we would be giving \$2 million to producers—no, \$4 million, that's the inflation, that's what he recommends to us when he's trying to impress his business friends, but, when he's going to talk to the farm gate, he has a different position. We say the same thing both in the House and outside of the House, and that's why I'm proud to work with our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) and acknowledge there are challenges in the hog sector.

It's international prices and international costs. It's got nothing to do with any action in this House. You can trace the situation from the May high, May of '07 high last year, to where it is today and that's why we're supporting this emergency resolution—or

the MUPI—today to talk about our support for agricultural livestock producers and recognize that more needs to be done. Thank you.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Today, the gallery saw people from the pork producers association, cattle producers, dairy producers, members from the Keystone Ag Producers, members from the Insurance Brokers Association, financial institutions, feed companies, trucking companies, machinery dealerships, electricians, truck and car dealerships, tire shops and many others.

When we look at the livestock sector of what it has for an impact within the province of Manitoba is huge. Some \$2 billion is impacted within the province of Manitoba, thousands and hundreds of thousands of jobs are directly or indirectly involved one way or the other within these particular two livestock sectors that we're talking about here today. When we talk about the crisis that's been brought forward, Mr. Speaker, it's real, it's sincere. Yesterday alone, a 3,000-sow operation in Steinbach was forced into receivership and closed.

What we see from the government in the past when they talk about the money that was spent, \$55 million that was budgeted. They spent \$100 million, they say, in 2006-2007. That's what they're here for. That's what safety-net programs are for. Whenever you have a crisis, whenever you have a safety-net program, those are meant to take up the slack. Obviously there wasn't enough slack cut for the livestock producers, otherwise we wouldn't be seeing them going today.

The livestock sector is losing producers each and every day. The Manitoba Cattle Producers just the day before yesterday put out a press release talking about ploughing up and selling off the cows and using that land that's normally pasture land, marginal land in many cases, in order to create more land for grains and oil seeds rather than using that land, in fact, for the way it was intended for and that was for pasture.

What we also have not seen from this government is the fact that there hasn't been enough consultation with the producer groups. We have not heard—in fact, when you go back to BSE in May of 2003, it was some 200 days before the First Minister (Mr. Doer) decided he wanted to meet with the cattle producers. Shameful. I don't know when the last time he met with the cattle producers or the pork producers or the Keystone Ag society. I know the

minister's been there. Unfortunately, what we've seen from the minister was nothing in the budget yesterday or the day before. They talk about the increases that they had. Unfortunately, that's not enough to tell these people in the gallery that this is what we mean for viable operations, viable money that's going to be there tomorrow and the next day in order to help them secure their livelihoods for their family.

Also, when we talk about what the government is doing in regard to COOL, what we saw was the leader of this province go down and talk to the previous Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Johanns, as he talked about, but we needed action. We needed the *[inaudible]* between the provincial and the federal government in order to ensure that Manitobans were protected. What they did, they went and they did spend some \$20 million—announced it. Whether they spent it or not, they're really good at announcements and press releases. But we have an industry that they tried to save with the Ranchers Choice which they put money into and that was a flop. They're not good managers; they don't do the consultation.

We called two years ago for the Agriculture committee to be called. What did they do? It hasn't been called since 2001. They didn't call it. We've had situation, crisis after crisis. What does the government do? They've got all the ideas. Well, I'll tell you what. I don't have all the right ideas and obviously they don't have all the right ideas. But we do listen to our producers. *[interjection]*

* (15:30)

Yes. I think that they're making a mockery of the situation when it's not a funny situation. You tell the producers. Laugh all you want, but you tell those producers in this gallery the very fact that you think you know it all. I'll tell you what, you don't, and neither do I. The sooner we learn to consult—*[interjection]*

The Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) seems to think that maybe I'm right, I don't know it all. I certainly don't pretend to, but what I do believe is in consultation. Call the Ag committee, get the good ideas out there that will survive.

Yes, this is a huge project. We don't have to do this by ourselves. We have our federal cousins. We have other provinces. This is not just about Manitoba. This is about Canada. This is about saving downtown jobs, jobs with electricians, warehouses

that store this equipment, the food, the groceries, the trucks, the cars, the tires. The list goes on and on.

The sooner this government realizes that it's just not about talking about going on within the organization of just the swine or the cattle. The spin-offs are phenomenal. When we talk about the low commodity prices and the high skyrocketing dollar and the input costs to meet their financial obligations, what we're seeing now is a 500-pound sow bringing roughly about six cents. So they get \$30 for a 500-pound sow. It's going to cost them more than that in fuel to deliver that sow to the processing plant. That's pretty sad, pretty sad, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at a 200-pound gilt that brings 60 cents—I don't think it's even that high, I believe it's—

An Honourable Member: Forty-five.

Mr. Eichler: Forty-five, thanks, Ron, but I don't think that's even probably right.

By the time they deliver that hog to Iowa it's around \$45 net for that pig—*[interjection]* Yes, that's \$45 net. So he's a little bit right on that. But \$45 net, and now you put the feed in there, the capital costs, all the rest of these, it certainly is not a viable operation.

So what we need to do is get the government onside to bring in meaningful, predictable, stable programs. These bankers are going to be secure. Farmers feel secure. Then can go and get their loans in order to stay afloat, because they can't go on the way they are.

The Leader of the NDP party, he talked about the education tax. Well, I can tell you this, one thing they have forgotten—I do know that they did get consultation on this. The KAP organization has been calling for the government to eliminate the tax on agriculture buildings. They had an opportunity to do that yesterday. They didn't do it, Mr. Speaker, a very easy thing they could have done.

Whenever the farmer goes to the bank—look at the cash advances, the rate of assessment from the municipality for tax purposes of what they're allowed to borrow, not the true cost of that building. A \$3-million building may be assessed at 2. That's all they're going to be able to get out of it because that's the way the formula sets.

Another thing that could have been easily done, they talk about tax rebate. We've talked about this

before, Mr. Speaker. It's not a tough idea. All you have to do, rather than do the rebate program, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) could take a cheque over to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and simply make that transition. Farmers don't have enough money to pay their tax bills, especially now, the livestock sector in particular. They don't have enough money to pay that tax bill in order to wait for the rebate back from the provincial government. So they could have done something that was not a big thing. In fact, it costs maybe 50 cents to write that cheque. In fact, if the minister walks down the hall, or gives it to me, I'll do it for her. It won't even cost that much. I don't have a problem with that.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that we certainly would like to see the government, they could have done yesterday in their budget, was look at the need of making sure that whenever these programs are announced that they are paid out in a timely manner. They talk about the cull program. They announced some \$60 million. Talk to the producers, go up there and talk to them and find out how many cheques have actually been sent. I can tell you the forms aren't even available until Monday.

You announce a program, you flow the cash. What a unique idea. Who would have ever thought of that? Well, no, we'll wait until it's available and then make sure—well, we'll take credit for it anyway, and then, guess what? I'll tell you what. On Tuesday, they'll put out another press announcement saying, hey, we've got \$60 million going to flow to the hog producers alone.

They talk about loans for the cattle producers. They don't want any more debt, Mr. Speaker. They can't afford any more debt. They're in debt up to their ears. During BSE, instead of going to the cash advance program that we had suggested as our party, what did they do? They loaned them \$50,000 a piece. Many of those producers can't even pay that money back. Also, what they did is they took their home quarter as security. These producers have nothing. They have nothing to fall back on. They're going to take their homes, take their livelihood. In fact, I remember when growing up on my farm, my farm said Eichler and Son. I wonder how many signs we're going to see in the future about Eichler and Son. I find that very disturbing.

In closing, I know there are a number of people that do want to speak and my light is blinking, but I do want to ask this government: Do the right thing.

Have the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province meet with those producers that are struggling, get a plan in place that's going to work and do it today. Do it today.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Indeed, I am pleased to be able to speak on this important issue today. It's one that has been very challenging, particularly for the livestock sector for the cattle and pork producers. As the Premier said, the grain prices are up and when the grain prices are up that creates additional pressures for the livestock producers because the cost of their feed goes up. And that's only one of the challenges. It's the cost of feed; it's the high Canadian dollar; it's the country-of-origin legislation that's in place.

The member opposite talks about consultation and I want to say to him that, as I said earlier today, I believe very much in working with the industry and consulting with them. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is as a result of consultation with the pork industry that we were able to make some changes. It was as a result of consultation with Manitoba cattle producers that we were able to make some announcements.

There are a basket of programs under the APF. AgriStability, AgriInvest programs, AgriInsurance, all of those programs are there. They are what were the old CAIS and Crop Insurance programs. As they were changed, there was a lot of consultation both by the federal and the provincial governments to try to make changes to the programs to meet the needs. Are they perfect programs? No. Programs, you will always have to continue to make changes, but changes that had been made have allowed for a better cash flow and money to flow more quickly.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I wanted to, Madam Deputy Speaker, mention, as I said, that we had had meetings with the pork producers. In December the pork producers came to my office and said we have a cash flow problem. We need some loans. We're very afraid of programs that are going to cause trade challenges, but we think that loans will work. That is why we made \$60 million available at a very attractive interest rate, available for the pork producers. In fact, Karl Kynoch, the chairman of the Manitoba pork producers, said the government has shown confidence in the industry and that's going to go a long way in restoring the confidence in a lot of the feed associations like the banking associations. It's going to reaffirm the

confidence of this industry, reassure the confidence that this industry is going to be here for the long haul.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we worked with them on that one. The pork producers asked us to make changes in the targeted advance from AgriStability and, in fact, we made the application to the federal government for the '07, and that allowed advance money to go. Just yesterday we announced, again, at the request of the pork producers that the targeted advance from AgriInvest be made available and that is an advance payment on their '08 AgriStability program.

The member opposite talked about the cull sow program and how it's not working and how we don't know how to handle it. I hope he will read these comments that I'm making. I would tell him that he should look at the announcement. That is a federal program. That is a federal program that's being administered by the Canadian Pork Council, I believe, and they are working out the details. That is not a provincial program. So, if he has some criticism of how quickly the money from the Cull Breeding Swine Program is flowing, the \$225 a sow, then he should call his federal counterparts and say to them that he's not happy with the way the money from that program is flowing.

* (15:40)

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is a federal program, and I hope that's one of the programs that are also part of the mix. Producers have to make some decisions as to whether they want to take that money or not.

I also want to say that the cattle producers are in the audience today, and again, we've met with them and they came to us and asked for some cash assistance. Were we able to provide the amount of cash assistance that they wanted? No, we weren't able to provide as much as they wanted. But, again, I will say we had to be very conscious of trade challenges. What did the cattle producers ask us for? They asked us for a mustering fee to help them with their costs. We put that in place. They asked for an extension of BSE loan. We put that in place for them and deferred the principal for another three years. There is an advanced payment program, the federal program that's available where they can get advanced payments. And we did make a payment of \$14.7 million directly to the ruminant industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the places that I believe, because of country-of-origin labelling, which is causing very severe problems—and I'm concerned with the contracts that are being deferred right now. One of the things we have to do is look at how we can have solutions at home and increase slaughter capacity in this province. That's why we put the funds that we have both into Neepawa and into the Maple Leaf plant so that we can move the second shift, get more slaughter capacity here. Then, if you can finish your hogs here, you do not have to worry about live animals crossing the border. We also put additional money into developing new markets because we have to look beyond the U.S. for markets for these products.

As well, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) talked about farmers and the role they play in the environment. I want to recognize our farmers, of good stewards of the land. He also said that when science changes, the producers have to change, and that's true. There is different science than there was out there a few years ago. But I want to give credit to our producers for moving towards zero till and saving soil in this province, Madam Deputy Speaker. But, as science changes, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the industry has to change, and that is why we have made money available. There is a nutrient management financial assistance package. This package will help producers make the changes that they have to make with regard to the livestock manure mortalities and management regulation. Those are the kinds of things that government does to work together with the industry. As members opposite said, as science changes, as there's more information about how there are new ways that we can deal with nutrient load, there have to be adaptations, and that's why we have put money in place there.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we've also put money into environmental farm plans. I want to commend the producers in this province for the uptake that we have seen with over 5,000 Manitoba farmers developing their environmental farm plans. This affects approximately 8.2 million acres and \$17.9 million has been paid to producers under this program, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As I said, there are programs that are in place and we have to look at how we can adapt and make money flow more quickly, as members opposite have said. We have to sit down with the producers now. We have to look at country-of-origin labelling. I want the producers to know that the Premier (Mr.

Doer) has raised this. I was in Ottawa. I talked to the federal minister about this. The federal minister has indicated that he's not prepared to do a NAFTA challenge now, until the rule comes out. I think he's wrong. I think that Canada should lead and do a NAFTA challenge because we are seeing the impacts right now of contracts being cancelled. But we have to work with the federal government on this. The federal minister is the one that we can lobby, and we've lobbied, but this is a federal issue. I, again, have said to the producers, give us the information about those contracts that have been cancelled and let's put the evidence together that there is an impact right now. We know there's an impact. We have to show the federal government where that impact is.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the members opposite talked about ideas, and we have met with the pork producers. We will be meeting with the producers on Monday, and we will be meeting with the pork producers again on Tuesday to look at what the challenges are and to look at what the solutions can be. We've worked with them in the past. We've made changes to programs. We've listened to them. We've put funds in place for them when they've asked and made suggestions. We will continue to work with them because we value this industry. It is important to the economy of this province and all of us have to recognize that agriculture is important for our environment. Agriculture contributes very much to this economy.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I believe the Minister of Agriculture's had her chance to put words on the record. I think they rang pretty hollow for those regions around Manitoba, and I don't know that anything she has to add through heckling will make those comments any more fulsome.

I want to begin by commending the Manitoba Pork Council for the work that they have done on this difficult issue in trying to work on behalf of their producers as they are elected to do all of the executive and the directors who, each and every day, are advocating on behalf of the many producers throughout Manitoba. Also, to our Agriculture critic, the Member for the Interlake, who has spent a good deal of time working on this particular crisis situation and ensuring that the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, if the Minister of Agriculture wants to have a debate, I would suggest she save some of her newfound purpose and speak to the producers instead of trying to sit in the House here

and try to score political points on a crisis situation here in Manitoba.

You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the NDP have come into this House repeatedly and said that this particular industry needs to be changed. I would say that in speaking to producers—

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, Minister of Agriculture.

Ms. Wowchuk: Just on a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was trying to help the member out. He said the critic was from the Interlake. In fact, the critic is from Lakeside.

Mr. Goertzen: On the same point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: On the same point of order, Member for Steinbach.

Mr. Goertzen: I correct myself. The Member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) has never stood up for farmers.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That was clearly not a point of order, however, I think the matter is settled.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Indeed, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) has worked hard on these issues.

You know, the NDP like to point at sometimes through areas—there are a few areas of the province that are really growing here because there aren't many areas that are economically growing within the province. Often, they like to point to the region that I represent and the region that other members represent, but they don't want to talk about, perhaps, some of the reasons why that growth is there. I would say to you to ever come to the region and speak to people within the area, they would say that the livestock industry is a significant part of why there's growth and development in Steinbach, Hanover, Niverville and throughout the southeastern part of the region. You could look at some of the development that's happened, whether it's daycare or whether it's swimming pools and you would find that there's recognition that companies like Hytek and Puratone, because of the producers that they work with have had an instrumental part in building those communities.

This is a government who likes to stand up whether it's during the budget or other times and point toward health-care facilities, a new cancer facility that was paid for, half with private dollars, that came into the Steinbach community—half with private dollars. Many of those dollars would have flowed as a result of the livestock industry that was flourishing, but they don't want to speak about how important that part of it is.

*(15:50)

We recognize, as members of the Progressive Conservatives, that there are international challenges involved here. We know that the drive towards ethanol has pushed up the fuel prices and that that is part of the concerns and the challenges that livestock producers are dealing with each and every day. I know in talking to a United States congressman that that particular country is looking at other forms of biofuel. They're looking at cellulosic ethanol. Within the recent energy bill that was brought forward in the United States, there's a huge push for cellulosic ethanol to use by-products of food. I would support that because I don't believe, in the long run, it's sustainable to be putting food into your tailpipes. You need to look at other forms of biofuel, and I know that, through that development, there is a longer-term hope for producers in Manitoba.

We also recognize that there are international trade challenges involved here. When we talk about COOL, as every member who's spoken today has, I do believe that there needs to be some sort of intervention using NAFTA to ensure that this is seen as a trade issue.

I recognize that the federal government has looked at this issue, and I believe they are going to do the right thing. When you sign a trade agreement, that trade agreement has to be there to protect you when you need it most, and I look forward to there being a challenge under NAFTA on the issue of COOL. I look forward to supporting the government and the pork producers in that.

But you have to understand there is provincial responsibility here. It's not all about other levels of government. I have a vision someday, it's a bad vision, but perhaps the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) will run federally someday for politics and if, heaven forbid, she was ever elected, I imagine her first speech in Parliament would be, well, it's all the provincial government's responsibility. We can't do anything here in Ottawa. You know, that's the

typical response of this government is to look to somebody else to blame. But there is nobody else to blame when you look at the CEC report and what this government did with it.

They took a report that most farmers didn't oppose the CEC review because the livestock industry, whether it's the producers in the hog industry or more generally, believe and know that they operate a clean industry. They looked at the CEC opportunity as a way to bring forward and show that they operate in a clean industry, and in fact, when you look at the CEC, what it did was ask for more reports. It said that this government didn't have the evidence to say that it was the livestock industry that was causing significant problems in Lake Winnipeg.

But this Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) decided to take the report that didn't point towards a moratorium, and, for political reasons, put in a moratorium, and the Minister of Agriculture says, well, the moratorium really doesn't matter because these industries weren't looking to expand anyway.

Let me tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, what the moratorium did was take away the last ray of hope that many of these producers had. Those who have made it said, well, maybe, in the long term, COOL will be challenged. Maybe in the long term there will be things other than ethanol, that we'll be looking at cellulosic biofuels. It took away their hope because there was a signal from their government that said we don't support your industry under any environment. It doesn't matter if there are short-term pressures. It doesn't matter if there are long-term pressures. The moratorium is a signal that there's no hope for this industry in the future, and that's the great shame for this government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard the Minister of Agriculture, in question period today, in response to one of the questions, say, well, if there's a need for more support, if this isn't a good year for those in the livestock industry and the pork producers in particular, if there's a need for longer-term support after this year, we'll look at it. Well, that's a promise that she's never going to have to keep because it's not likely there are going to be many more producers left in the province if this isn't a good year.

We don't need her to make promises for the next year's budget. We don't need her to say, well, we'll maybe look it at it in the fall. Many of these producers won't be here in the fall to cash in on that

promise, even if she stands by it, Madam Deputy Speaker. We need that support in the industry today.

There is longer-term hope within the industry. We hope that the prices will go up. There are some indications that they might in the longer term. We hope that there is some movement on COOL through NAFTA challenges. We hope that there are other ways that we can produce fuel that don't involve wheat and corn production, but in the meantime, there needs to be an injection of support to ensure that these farmers, these men and women, make it through until that time.

This is a very personal story. We talk about it being an industry and, yes, it is an industry, but there are people behind every one of those farm gates, individuals, individuals who come to my office on a weekly basis and say, I used to produce food for the world, and now I don't know if I can put food on the table for my own family.

People whom I met from my own region last week, sitting at the dinner at the Pork Council, who said, we might have to close in two to three weeks, and the wife on this operation said, you know, I'm most concerned because people might think that we're bad operators, that we're not good producers. They're blaming themselves when they don't have hope because this government has put in regulations. It's put in moratoriums when they're already facing so many other pressures, and on the day when the producers were here, it took this Minister of Conservation the nerve to stand up and introduce legislation to enshrine a moratorium, which was an enshrining of a lack of hope for this industry. What an insult, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I look at this government and I ask, in a heartfelt way, because this is important, because there are people behind every one of these stories, because I have constituents who are hurting like they've never hurt before, because I have families who say, you know, this is what we've done all our lives, this is what we wanted to do all our lives, and we don't know if we can make it another two or three weeks. This is an industry that has tremendous potential here, continues to have potential in the province of Manitoba. Yes, this is about an industry. Yes, this is about a province, but more than anything this is about people. If this government wants to stand up ever and say that they care about Manitobans, this is the time for them to show it.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to add comments—

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the honourable Minister for Transportation.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Madam Deputy Speaker, both my colleague and I rose at the same time and it looked maybe like we were leaving the Chamber, but I was rising to speak. I would ask the opposition, because we're going back and forth, if they would offer me this opportunity to pass some comments on with regard to the MUPI. I would really appreciate their co-operation on this. There was no intent for us to leave. Since we've been going back and forth and being very co-operative, I would ask their indulgence with this matter. Thank you.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Deputy Speaker, on the same point of order, provided that I do not lose my right to speak on this matter, I would be happy to relinquish my position now to the minister of highways. However, I should note that the reason I did get up was because nobody was getting up on the other side of the House. I understood this is a back-and-forth situation. Nobody was getting up, so therefore I got up and was recognized.

Once again, if I do not lose my place to speak, I would be happy to allow the minister of highways and Transportation to speak, and I will speak after him.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Agreed? [*Agreed*]

By agreement of the House, the honourable Minister of Transportation will speak, and then the honourable Member for Russell.

Mr. Lemieux: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do appreciate it. I want to thank the Member for Russell for allowing me to speak in advance of his comments. You did make the right decision in identifying the Member for Russell from standing. It looked like we were leaving the Chamber. So I do thank the Member for Russell for allowing me to make a few comments. I won't be too long, but I do thank him for that very, very much.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we're pleased to be looking at this matter of urgent public importance in the middle of the budget debate. I guess where I'd

like to start, as a rural MLA, is to talk about investments in the livestock industry in rural Manitoba that we've made. The government understands the livestock industry in Manitoba and across Canada has been under significant pressure. I think we all agree with regard to that matter, and our government is committed to ensuring Manitoba producers receive support to maintain their farm businesses today and position the sector for future profitability.

Our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has met on many, many, many, many different occasions with many sectors in the agriculture community and will continue to do so, as she just pointed out in her comments. Our government prides itself in consultation and talking to people, not only within my own portfolio with regard to roads and highways and bridges and so on for communities, but also in rural Manitoba with regard to the agricultural sector.

This government recognizes that the livestock sector is facing drastic changes and challenges due to soaring feed costs, low livestock prices and impacts of the higher Canadian dollar. It has been repeated many times by members on both sides of the House, and this is why we increased support for the agriculture industry by nearly \$7 million over and above the '07-08 budget estimate. The importance of this sector to our government and to the province, we recognize and acknowledge that.

* (16:00)

This is 33 percent more than we originally budgeted. Madam Deputy Speaker, we did this because we knew Manitoba producers needed serious help and we couldn't wait for the budget of '08 to be released. Now, I know members opposite will probably, in all likelihood, vote against this budget as they voted against the '07 budget and so on. There are a lot of, and I don't want to get into the partisan politics of this, but there are many good things in this budget as there was in '07 with regard to agriculture. We did put additional funds with regard to trying to help Manitoba producers who needed the serious help.

The \$70-million extra expenditure came through a series of announcements in the months prior to this budget. It is on top of the \$250 million support for Manitoba agriculture in the past year. The \$70-million support includes \$60 million in loan supports available to hog producers to assist producers facing the cash flow challenges that they have; \$11.8 million, approximately, towards the

upgraded Neepawa's industrial waste water treatment plant which allows Hytek to expand its Springhill Farms and processing operation. Also, Brandon's industrial waste-water treatment facility will also receive \$15.5 million in upgrades, and 7.8 of that from the province, allowing Maple Leaf Foods to expand its operations that will also increase provincial hog processing capacity in the province. We also deferred principal payments on BSE recovery loans for three years; invested \$14.7 million cost-shared with the feds—their political cousins in Ottawa—to support cattle producers dealing with high feed costs, the declining livestock prices and the high Canadian dollar.

This Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) for the Province of Manitoba has worked closely with the agricultural community. We know the challenges that everyone is experiencing with regard to the livestock industry. Really, when people are making comments with regard to agriculture, we all know, at least in rural Manitoba, and my colleagues, certainly, in all constituencies, recognize that not all sectors in agriculture are being faced with hardships. We talked about the seed producers, and the grain and oil seeds producers are doing quite fine, thank you. We know they have their challenges as well in different years, but we're there to support them. Our Minister of Agriculture has been there for a number of years now and knows them well, and they know her, that she stands up for the farm community and the industry throughout Manitoba, and I would sure want to take advantage of this opportunity to thank her, as we all should, Madam Deputy Speaker, with the hard work that she has done year in, year out, for rural Manitoba and the farming community.

Budget 2008 provides the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation with an \$8.8 million to reflect rising crop values as well. We know that over five years, from '03 to '07, Manitoba contributed almost \$450 million to the stabilization programs that we have.

Also in budget 2008 the Farmland School Tax Rebate increases to 70 percent in 2008. The Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), the MLA for Gimli, should be thanked for this, for his co-operation with regard to looking at farmland school tax rebates for the agricultural community, and his hard work going up from 65 percent in '07 and 33 percent in '04.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) made a comment with regard the Member for Interlake (Mr.

Nevakshonoff) and, quite frankly, I think it was a cheap shot, but let me just say that the Member for Interlake at one time in question period, he was the one who's asking more questions in agriculture than the agriculture critic from the opposition. It's really unfair to make comments about the Member for Interlake—we all care about agriculture in this Chamber and for the MLA for Steinbach—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lemieux: —to make derogatory remarks about the MLA for Interlake when he cares just as equally—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Madam Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

Mr. Eichler: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, when the member puts on the record information that's not factual, then he shouldn't put it on. The Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) has not asked more questions than we have on this side of the House. Since 2003 we've asked 194 questions, and they shouldn't put misinformation on the record. Shame on them. If they want to do the right thing, they should be doing the thing like putting the right information. *[interjection]*

So say you're sorry.

Madam Deputy Speaker: This is clearly not a point of order. This is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Lemieux: Madam Deputy Speaker, the point I was trying to make when I was interrupted by some catcalls across the way was just that we all care about agriculture as well as all other sectors in this province.

To point out one member over another that they care less or don't speak up for a particular group is inaccurate. I was just pointing the fact out that the Member for Interlake cares dearly about the agricultural community, whether it be dealing with drainage, whether it's roads that connect those communities, as well as many others. It's not to take away from the critic from the opposition with regard to his passion toward this area. I'm just pointing out the fact that we all care deeply about this sector, as we are trying to point out.

I just want to say, quite frankly, in conclusion, that we hear about the rate of inflation with regard to what the opposition keeps talking about, that we shouldn't be putting more dollars in that, and that's approximately about \$4 million to producers, which is a pittance, quite frankly. I want to tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on this side of the House we say the same thing in town as we say out of town. Then, when we hear people making comments to the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and other groups, and then those comments change by going to a restaurant or a garage, coffee shop, some place in rural Manitoba, and the differences in comments, the rural community and the farming community of Manitoba can see through that, and they have.

You know, I just want to say that this is truly, the hog industry is very important to this province, not only the jobs it creates, but as a government we have been there to stand up beside farmers in this province of Manitoba. We know there are challenges that exist with regard to many of the issues that they face. This government has stood side by side, whether it's people dealing with the high Canadian dollar, or other challenges that people have faced in this province, whether they are industries that are located in Winnipeg, or whether they are in Steinbach, or whether they are in Thompson, or in Dauphin and throughout this province of Manitoba, I just want to conclude by saying we have the best Agriculture minister in Canada, and she is there for farmers across this province.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased this afternoon to rise and put a few remarks on the record with regard to this very serious issue in the province of Manitoba today, and specifically as it relates to the agricultural sector and what the provincial government's responsibility might be in this matter. Now I have listened carefully to the remarks of the Premier (Mr. Doer), the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), the minister of highways and Transportation, and I want to remind members opposite that, when in Manitoba there was a crisis in the bus building industry, it took the Premier a matter of a few short days to make a decision to forward millions of dollars, something in the neighbourhood of \$20 million, into that industry over a matter of a weekend in order to ensure that those jobs and that the industry was not lost in this province.

Now, I want to ask the House what difference there is between that type of industry that employs

those important Manitobans and this industry in Manitoba that employs more workers, employs more people, affects more families than even the industry that the Premier saved within a few days. Madam Deputy Speaker, all we're asking for is fairness. We have a crisis looming in this province. Farm families are going out of business.

All of us understand that if you go out of business on the farm you don't get into it overnight. This has been a lifetime for many family farms to build their farms to where they are today. Those people have contributed to the economy of this province in immeasurable ways. All you have to do is look at what has happened in the southeast corner of this province. Despite the fact that the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) brings in draconian legislation that will stop any expansion, any redevelopment of existing facilities—

Some Honourable Members: Wrong.

Mr. Derkach: I've read the bill.

An Honourable Member: Dead wrong.

* (16:10)

Mr. Derkach: Well, I hope we'll have that debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, because in this province today I have never seen legislation in this House presented in the way that it was this afternoon. I can go back 23 years and I have never seen any draconian legislation of this kind brought into this House, which is prohibition. This is prohibition, the prohibiting of the advancement of a livestock sector in a quadrant of this province.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can understand why the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) refused to stand to explain the bill or to talk to it. He was too embarrassed personally to do it, and I will predict that this will haunt this Member for Dauphin for the rest of his political career. We will make sure that that will happen, and that will be a short time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I can understand why there are members on the opposite side of the House who, from the day that we tried to ensure that a livestock industry was viable in this province, when we were in government, this Minister of Agriculture, her boss, the Premier today, were against it from the very day. They made all kinds of comments that were negative to the expansion of the hog industry in this province and the livestock industry in this province. I can see where she's coming from. I can

understand where she's coming from. If there is any growth in this province, it is despite the fact that we have a Minister of Agriculture who doesn't understand the issues in agriculture, who acts in ways that are negative to the industry in every respect and, all she can do is point at the federal government when she gets herself into trouble.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, all you have to do is go around the province and ask anyone what they think of the progress this Minister of Agriculture has made, and they stop at the notion, because there hasn't been any. Any progress that this province has made has been made despite the actions of this government, in spite of the action of this government. I don't care if it's manure management. I don't care if it's trying to impose regulations and the Gestapo police on agriculture producers from this government. *[interjection]* And shame, he says. Shame on you. Shame on this government. Shame on the Member for Thompson for taking the attitude that they have. If you don't like it, too bad, because that's the way it is. That's just the way it is.

You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Thompson, who likes to shout and make all kinds of things, who used to drag coffins around this Legislature one time in his life, can't give me any lessons about demonstration and about political correctness, because all he has to do is think back to the days when he used to drag coffins around this Legislature.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a situation in agriculture today that really needs addressing. We don't need this province's police that they have hired to regulate the industry, because this industry has tried to abide by every regulation any government has put in front of it. Today they are probably the best operators of an industry that you will find anywhere in North America. We are proud of them, but they need help. They don't need it tomorrow, they don't need it next week, they don't need it next month, they need it now. If the government and this Premier were capable of ensuring the workers at the bus plant in Manitoba had the support they needed and the industry had the support they needed over a weekend, Madam Deputy Speaker, why can't he act in that expedient fashion with a crisis that is looming in the rural part of this province?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I point to the budget yesterday. The budget yesterday. I'm not going to talk about what happened last year, what happened the year before, what happened five years ago. Let's

look at what happened yesterday in this House and the budget. Where was the statement that reflected the hurt that the people in the livestock sector are feeling? Where was that? Now she says, oh, we put millions of dollars in, ta-da, ta-da, ta-da, and on and on we go. But that is all federal money. The provincial money is because of an agreement that was reached between the federal government and the provincial government. It is not an initiative of this government alone. This government alone has had no initiatives. It simply is dragged kicking and screaming into a situation because it is embarrassed by what happens in other jurisdictions. That's the reality.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker, I go back to ask you about rural development. Where is rural development today? It has been wiped off the slate of government. There is no rural development. There is no economic development happening outside of this province, and finally the minister woke up. You know, Rural Forum that was started back in the '90s was started on the premise that we wanted to celebrate the successes of rural Manitoba. We wanted to explore the opportunities that are out there in food processing, in manufacturing, in education and all of those aspects and all of the sectors of society. Finally, this year, the minister of rural development woke up and she said, we're going to rename the Rural Forum, because now we're going to call it seeking opportunities. Well, that's what Rural Forum was all about from day one. Good morning, Madam Minister. It's good to have you on track. Finally, after nine years, the minister smelled the coffee and has gotten on track. It has taken a little while, but that's okay. We'll give you the time and see how it goes.

Mr. Speaker, today we asked for a MUPI because there is a serious crisis looming in this province. We have a livestock sector in this province that is in grave danger, and if this minister wants to do anything positive, then she should look at some of the programs that have been implemented by other jurisdictions. Then, perhaps, she would have some insight into what really has to happen in order to help farm families and those who are involved in the livestock sector. If we don't save this industry today, I would have to say that we will never regain the momentum that this industry built for this province on an economic basis, and people will leave this province.

We have seen that before. In the cattle industry, I remember, when Billy Uruski was the Minister of Agriculture and came up with a cow-calf program that destroyed this province. Not only did our cattle leave the province, but our barley left the province, and so did our children leave the province. Mr. Speaker, over time, we've been able to gain some of that back.

I'm asking the minister today not to allow that to happen in this livestock sector, not to have history repeat itself in that negative way again, but to make sure that, on Monday or Tuesday, she sits down with the livestock sector in this province and she meets with them and, together, not her alone, but with that livestock sector, she seriously seeks out those kinds of solutions that are required for the help of this industry, so—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my comments, I just want to note that I had hoped that when we had some degree of consensus here that this was important enough to put aside one of the single most important debates in our legislative session, the budget, that we might rise above, perhaps, the give and take, Mr. Speaker. But, you know what? The Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), I think, owes the people of this province an apology. That wasn't a speech. It doesn't even rate being called a rant.

But for him to get up and talk about Gestapo is absolutely unacceptable. There are people in this province that survived the Gestapo, the Nazis, Mr. Speaker. To compare civil servants who will be doing a job, you know what? That may be demagoguery that makes him feel good. It may appeal to the 19-and-shrinking PC caucus, but that's not Manitoba in the year 2008.

He should withdraw those comments. He should withdraw them, Mr. Speaker.

I want to note that perhaps he was led on a bit by the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen). I mean, I was waiting for some sense of rising above, Mr. Speaker, but his comments about the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff)—the Member for Steinbach, I guess, has some difficulty distinguishing between the Member for Interlake and the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), perhaps, all of us who live kind of north of Steinbach. Maybe we all look alike. Maybe we all sound alike. Maybe we all act

alike. I don't know, but I think the Member for Steinbach perhaps should get to know some of the members of his caucus. Really, that wasn't rising above the fray either.

As I looked at members opposite in their approach, you know what I loved? It was the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen). He tried this earlier, this kind of, I mean, he would start talking about how we should take more of a non-partisan approach. Then he would just go straight into the lowest level partisan common denominator you could imagine.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that perhaps members are frustrated. I can understand why they might be frustrated, but you know what? A bit of advice here, if you really thought that you were going to gain something by getting up and talking about Gestapo and the kind of cheap political attacks—you know, I got up today because I don't have a single livestock producer in my riding, but as a Manitoban and as a member of this Legislature I care about producers and the situation they're facing. I care about them.

* (16:20)

By the way, Mr. Speaker, just in case members opposite want to pat themselves on the back and sort of flail away, I want to put a couple of things on the record. I always look to the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) because what I always find interesting about members opposite is there are two things that are really verging on hypocrisy with the way they approach things. Today, you'd think that if they were in government, from their rhetoric, they would be signing cheques tomorrow. Right? But, you know what? This is the one day when there are people in the gallery so they have to put on a good performance, but their leader a few days ago said that they want to have increases at the rate of inflation. Well, what was the increase in the Agriculture budget last year? Significantly above the rate of inflation.

Mr. Speaker, by the way, did they vote for the budget last year? They voted against it. The reality is, you want to help farmers in this province, it's not with rhetoric on the one day in the year they're in the gallery. It's by voting on the budget that gives them the money they need.

Let's talk about the livestock industry for a moment. Are there more hogs? Are there more cattle being produced in the province today compared to 1999? Yes, Mr. Speaker. We've had a significant

increase in not only the level of production but the value-added that's out there. So this simplistic black-and-white argument they put forward that somehow this government is against the industry—and there are people, by the way, out there who've criticized us for not being against the industry. There are people who don't want any production. We have understood one thing, though, and that is you've got to have sustainable production.

The Tories, by the way, showed their true colours, Mr. Speaker, time and time again: People inspect to make sure we follow livestock regulations with the Gestapo. We heard that earlier. They voted against additional inspection in terms of our drainage licensing. In all, they oppose that.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Arthur-Virden, on a point of order?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Just to be factual. Just to correct the minister in regard to his discussion in what he refers to as civil servants in this province. The civil servants in this province are doing excellent work in what they've been directed to do, but the minister—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind members that points of order should not be used for the means of debate. The honourable member's point of order is not a point of order; it's a dispute over the facts.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) either explaining or withdrawing his comments, not a colleague trying to do it for him.

But, you know, the reality is in this province, Mr. Speaker, that we've seen a significant increase in the agricultural value-added and to the members opposite, by the way, it's interesting because some of their comments I think show the degree to which they don't get what's happening in this province. I was concerned when the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) did get into some of the background of what's affecting the livestock industry in terms of the cost of feed and whatnot. But we're talking in this

province about what's good about biodiesel. We're already focussing on ensuring that the feed for biodiesel is not from food products; it's from by-products. We're aware of that.

The Member for Steinbach talked about going to NAFTA. Well, we understand one thing. NAFTA sure didn't work on softwood lumber, did it, Mr. Speaker? So we have been down in Washington directly. Our Premier's (Mr. Doer) been there time and time again for Manitoba farmers because we understand how it really works.

Mr. Speaker, you know what? We have seen the supports when they're necessary, and I'm really pleased in this province today to see they have dramatically improved the situation for our grain and oilseeds producers. It wasn't that long ago that we were seeing drastic situations in the agricultural community, and we were there. You know, it's interesting. You don't believe me—check the Agriculture budget under the NDP today. Check it each and every year we've been in office, and then go back to 1999 and '98 and '97. Because where I come from in this province, they don't judge you by what you say, they judge you by what you do.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is they are much better at the rhetoric, the members opposite, when it comes to farmers, whether it be livestock producers or other. They are much better maybe at the rhetoric even in terms of a lot of the issues that are out there, but I don't know one single issue ranging from support to farmers to investment in our transportation system, and, in terms of rural economic development, maybe they should take a trip out to Neepawa, to Minnedosa, to Brandon, and see where the province has been a partner in rural economic development. Maybe the members opposite should take a trip to Steinbach and Morden and Winkler and see that they underestimate the way in which the rural economy is resilient. So let's put it on the record. You want talk; you got the members opposite. You want action; you have the NDP.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this matter of urgent public importance and, first of all, to say that it is a matter in which urgent action is needed, not the fancy rhetoric of the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton).

I think it's sort of telling that it was a few years ago that the members on the other side were singing the praises of the hog industry and how well it was growing. Today, when the hog industry is having trouble, up stands the Minister of Conservation (Mr.

Struthers) and says: I'm introducing Bill 17; now that the industry has been fattened, we're going to kill it.

The approach that the government is taking to this industry is shameful. The reality is that the government didn't do its job with the hog industry, working with the industry, making sure that things were done in the way that they should be done, that we're moving forward to the eco-economy. Now having failed, and having failed in their promises to clean up Lake Winnipeg, they're getting desperate, and they need somebody to yell at, to shout at, to hammer at. Who are they going after as their whipping boy? The hog industry. What a transition from praise to burying in such a short time, and a sad, sad day and a sad, sad approach.

Let us acknowledge, all of us, that the cattle industry and the hog industry in this province are going through very tough times. Those tough times are a result, in part, of the very low prices for the cattle and the hogs, but also, of course, rather high prices, at the moment, for the feed that's needed for the hogs and the cattle. At a time like this, the government needs to be there with an approach which is going to help see the light at the end of the tunnel and show a direction of vision of where we need to be going and how we're going to get there.

One of the opportunities which was there yesterday in the budget but which was not taken was, as we had suggested, for cattle producers to help them, put in the budget the immediate implementation of a province-wide ALUS program, designed, modified in the Blanchard model so that it actually works for cattle producers. Cattle producers have a lot of marsh, riparian habitat and wooded areas. This is one way of helping them recognize that, indeed, it is time to support farmers for the environmental goods and services that they deliver for the benefit of all of us. The failure of the government to recognize that the provision of environmental services is worth something is a failure of this government to put the value that we need to have on the environment and a clean environment. Manitobans are ready to come forward, but this government is not ready.

* (16:30)

We have suggested options, in the run-up to the budget, which the government neglected to look at. In Australia, in British Columbia, around the world, people are recognizing that there is now a market for carbon offsets. Farmers in Manitoba have a lot of potential carbon offsets to offer for sale around the

world, but you need a program which is going to certify those carbon offsets. We should be working with Keystone Agricultural Producers and others and have a program so that the farmers of Manitoba can be selling what they're doing, reducing greenhouse gases for the benefit of the world, to the world. An export market that you've totally neglected which is there for our farmers because you haven't done your job.

We have argued that the tax on farmland, the property tax, should be completely eliminated, not this fiddling away that the government is doing. We have argued for some time that the PST on farm buildings should be removed, the farm inputs, and we support the implementation on an urgent basis of a task force to be able to work with people and to provide solutions to people in the hog and the cattle industry.

You know, in the hog industry itself there are, as I've said, some difficult times, but this is not a time to be dashing and putting the industry in a moratorium, a straitjacket. This is a time to be working with the industry in a flexible way to improve the environment as well as to improve the industry and the opportunities for the industry.

As Manitobans know, we have been the party above all other parties in terms of promoting the health of our environment in our province, cleaning up Lake Winnipeg, doing this on the basis of good solid science, getting rid of phosphate in automatic dishwasher detergents. Everyone can make a difference. The NDP are doing about half the job in about twice the time with their bill, but at least it is a step following the Liberal leadership.

We're getting some national movement. We should have been faster. We should have done it better, but the reality is that we need to take a forward-thinking approach when it comes to environmental issues and we need to use a science-based approach in order to do that.

We need to be looking at intensive work on small watersheds like Killarney Lake and its watershed and applying then the work from there to show that you can reduce phosphorus and clean up the algal problem to the larger Lake Winnipeg watershed. We need to do it not just on one, but on a variety of small watersheds because there are variations. But this government has not been interested in supporting that kind of intensive work, in spite of the fact that we've been calling on it for some time to do this.

The government should be helping the industry make the transition. We should be supporting—you know, there are opportunities, for example, in methane capture. Well, we should be investing. That methane capture is worth on the international carbon trading market some significant dollars to farmers, but this government is totally neglecting the opportunities which are there and getting behind.

Is the government going to put a moratorium on the airline industry because it produces greenhouse gases? Is the government going to put a moratorium on the automobile industry because it produces greenhouse gases? You know, hopefully not, but you never know with this government. The reality is that there are much better approaches to working with an industry to make sure that the transition is being made.

There are lots of things that need to be done. This government is failing this province time and time again. We need that all-party task force. We need to get to work on some solutions helping the producers as well as making sure that the environment is well looked after. This government at the moment is doing neither—sad.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I'm really very pleased that this matter of urgent public importance has come forward today. I congratulate those who worked to bring it to the floor here at the Manitoba Legislature.

I think that is a very important part of the work that we do as people who've been elected to represent all Manitobans, including the farm community which has contributed so much to our provincial economy, not just today and not just into the future, but throughout the history of our great province. At the inception of our province in 1870, agriculture was a huge industry, a huge part of the industry here in Manitoba and, through the generations, has continued to be a huge and key component of our province's overall economic performance. Mr. Speaker, it's not the only one, but it is certainly a key and important sector here in Manitoba. Within that key and important sector, I believe the hog industry is also a key and important part of that sector.

Mr. Speaker, in this debate here in the House this afternoon, I think we saw, indeed, two visions, two very distinct visions of how we approach rural Manitoba. I think we saw visions put forward, in some cases eloquently, in some cases not so eloquently, from members in this House. I am really glad that the vision that is expressed on this side of

the House very much differs from the backwards vision that I see coming from members across the way. We on this side of the House understand. I think we're willing to put our mouths and put our money where our mouths are when it comes to putting money to our vision.

Mr. Speaker, nobody, nobody in this country has stood up for farmers like our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) here in Manitoba. *[interjection]* Again, we see the smart remarks and the laughing from the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and members from—*[interjection]* Yeah. It goes both ways. You know, they need to take this seriously. Absolutely. With such an important key sector that we're talking here today, I don't think we need to hear the kind of laughing and giggling that I see from members opposite.

So, Mr. Speaker, we need to recommit ourselves in this House to be serious about helping not just pork producers, not just farmers, but those of us who live in rural Manitoba. We depend on this. Our little communities depend on this. We can no longer afford in most of the parts of this province to see the kind of depopulation that we've been seeing. We all know, in this Legislature, at least we should know, what kind of impacts decisions that are worldwide decisions have on our constituents. Things like the dollar. When the dollar was at 65 cents in this country, there was a whole different impact on the little communities in my riding than there is now when the dollar is at par. Members opposite can ignore that if they like, but it's reality out there.

Mr. Speaker, before the Americans start talking about the country-of-origin labelling, we have to understand what that impact is. You know, I hear from members opposite—maybe they flunked out of grade 9 social studies—but there is a division of authority in this country. Our Constitution is based on it. We have to work together with the federal government, not play goofy little political games like I saw going on earlier today from members opposite. Go back to the grade 9 history books, go back to your grade 9 teachers, ask them who's got responsibility for what. International trade is federal, but we're going to work with the federal government because it's important to our producers as we have been all along. It's easy to talk from Springfield, but it's much more meaningful to actually act when you're in government. I'll take this side over his side anytime.

Mr. Speaker, what the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) has done very clearly this week has shown that he likes the political side of this as well. He likes to be able to go to the Chamber of Commerce, he likes to be able to go to downtown business community, and play the old Sterling Lyon, acute, protracted restraint kind of an approach: 2 percent, my friends, 2 percent. We've got to rail them all in, rein them in. Two percent. That would be a cut. Let's be clear about that. That would be a huge cut in the amount of money that's gone to farmers in our province. He can't have it both ways.

*(16:40)

Do you know what else he said? It's come through very clear here today. You know what else he said, Mr. Speaker? Not just we're going to cut to 2 percent, you're going to wait until budget time till you get any of it. That's unacceptable.

When Manitoba Pork came and talked to our minister, she responded without waiting for the budget. That's leadership. That's responsibility. You're being irresponsible. I mean, to come into this House and tell us that you're here for the farmer. I don't believe it. You can feign that kind of indignation. You can feign that kind of support, but I think it's phony, Mr. Speaker. I absolute think it's phony. Earlier here, I heard a comment that there's a lot more hat and not much cattle over there. I think that's a perfect way to describe members opposite who pretend to be concerned about farmers in this province. It's a phony-baloney approach.

Were we supposed to wait till budget day when the Manitoba cattle producers came in and talked to us about a mustering fee? What would you have said if the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) had said, oh, come back and talk to me when the budget's done? Come see me in April. She moved right away. She didn't wait for you. She didn't wait for anybody. She moved forward and she helped cattle producers. You'd have told them to wait till budget day and settle for 2 percent. Not good enough. Not good enough. *[interjection]*

Well, the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), he can nitpick and he can pull away at the fabric all he likes, but in the big picture, in the big question, he failed his producers. He's failing them today. He continues to fail them. Our Minister of Agriculture went to bat for them. Our Minister of Agriculture said to cattle producers, she said to pork producers, she said to poultry producers, she said to all the

producers that have come to her desk, I'll help you; I'll work for you.

If it means I have to take on the federal government, she's done that too. Then, Mr. Speaker, what she puts up with, the catcalls from across the way about pawning it off on the feds. Well, again, go back to the grade 9 social studies book; crack it open; take a good look at it. You may have failed the course back in grade 9, but do it again. Take a look at it.

Mr. Speaker, this government in its budget last year set an amount that we committed to to support Manitoba farmers, including pork producers. Not only did we meet that commitment in the budget line, we exceeded it. Do you know why it was exceeded? Because producers came to us and they said things have been changing. Things have been changing. Even in agriculture, even from the day that that budget was passed to today, things have changed in agriculture. I think we can all agree to that, and they haven't gotten better. They keep moving downward.

In response to the high dollar, in response to increasing input into costs, in response to the world market—the world market that isn't helping—our minister said yes. Our minister listened to the farmers that came to her and she responded. We responded yesterday in the budget. Our friends across the way can ignore that if they like, but it's in there. It's in black and white, and it's more than 2 percent, which is what their leader would put into agriculture.

I don't think we need any lessons from anybody across the way when it comes to representing farmers. We'll act; they can talk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I'm very pleased to be able to stand and speak about this matter of most urgent public importance today because it is a crisis in Manitoba, not only in the pork industry, but I think as we examine it further it's going to extend throughout our province, and it's going to touch all of us in many ways.

I want to commend our leader and our agricultural critic, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), for all the work that they've done in bringing this to the forefront because we certainly would not have seen this come up from the government. We, certainly, on this side of the House have a deep knowledge of understanding with our

rural members, many who are involved in the agricultural business and many who connect on a regular basis with producers in their constituencies, and I include myself in that.

Here we see the member, the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), when he introduced his kill bill today, he couldn't even speak to the bill. He was too afraid to stand up and speak to the bill. He remained in his seat. Then we see him wait until the gallery empties out before he gets up to speak on this matter of urgent public importance, which, then, just shows how fearful he really is and how he lacks the knowledge and understanding of the agricultural industry and fears the repercussions from the agricultural community.

Mr. Speaker, we all would not argue that agriculture has been the backbone of our province, what has built this great province, started with people moving here and bringing families with them to get pieces of land to start farming and to build the economy of this province. Now we are going to see rural Manitoba really, really deeply affected by what this government's policies are.

We have a moratorium placed on the hog industry. I can remember a year ago, when they first introduced this pause on hog producers, going to speak to a fellow in Rosenort who had just come here to this country, looking with hope and opportunity to build his business. He purchased a hog operation and looked to build that as a legacy to his sons and his family. Not was he long in this province, maybe a month, and they place a pause on the hog business. He said to me, well, what am I to do now? What hope do I have? When will this be lifted? Can anybody tell me whether I will be able to sustain my business here in rural Manitoba or whether my family will be able to continue here? I said to him, I certainly hope that you would be able to support and contain and maintain your family in rural Manitoba because we need, that's the kind of people we need in rural Manitoba, but, sadly, I could not give him any guarantees because of the NDP government's policies here in Manitoba.

When you look at what's happening, Mr. Speaker, you have a hog industry in crisis. I think that a lot of us here, even if we don't live on the farm, we are well connected to people. We have family or friends at least that we know that live in rural communities. So it affects all of us in ways that will eventually be known, because not only do we have an industry, a hog industry in crisis, we have other

areas of the agricultural businesses in crisis. Many of these are small business people. They face other uncertainties. Certainly, we know about the challenges that they face with the low commodity prices, high input prices and how that is affecting them in a negative way.

When farm families are affected in a negative way, what does that do to the small communities that are there to support the farm families? You have the agribusinesses, the input dealers, chemical and fertilizer dealers, the people that produce the equipment to sell to industries, the grocery stores and the restaurants that support the people that live in the area that do the agricultural business. Once we see hog operations and other businesses in agriculture failing in rural Manitoba, we see other businesses start to fail. When those businesses start to fail, we gradually see the eroding of our economic base in Manitoba. Then it starts to affect us in the cities. We start to see head offices say, well, we can't locate here in Manitoba. People start to move away. That affects the tax base in Manitoba. When you don't have a tax base in Manitoba, you don't have social programs in Manitoba. It's just a trickling down of the negative effects that this government is imposing on industries like the hog industry.

* (16:50)

I listen to people like James Hofer at the Starlight Hutterite Colony. I have many Hutterite colonies in my constituency, and they are hog producers, but they're very innovative in diversity and manufacturing as well, but they have a strong base in hog production. You know, we can take a lesson from some of their business practices, I can certainly tell you that. They are good stewards of the land and they are good farmers, employing good farm practices, and they contribute significantly to our food production here in the province. But I can tell you that, when some of these people say, well, we'll just have to move, we'll have to relocate somewhere else—now, on the surface, you might say, well, we want you to move someplace else because we don't want hogs in the Capital Region, but I can tell you if they move that affects the businesses that are in our rural communities that support their business and rely on their business. It is a chain reaction, a negative chain reaction that will crumble, will crumble the economy of this province if we do not take the time and effort to support the hog industry.

As I think the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) said, it didn't take 48 hours, I think he said, for the Premier (Mr. Doer) to step in when New Flyer Industries was in trouble. But, as we've seen in the past, even with the BSE crisis, how long did it take before the minister even went and met with producers? We were counting the days. It was over 200 days. Months went by, months went by before he actually met with the producers. Again, we see this disconnect between the government ministers and the people that are affected so dramatically through this crisis, Mr. Speaker.

To bring in a bill, to bring in, as I said before, the kill bill, the moratorium and enshrine it in legislation just flies in the face of economic development in our rural communities again. We need the hog industry. We cannot say to these people, you cannot expand your hog operations. It just brings to mind what the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) said—the family farm, the sustainability of the family farm. He was in business with his father. How many fathers now are going to be able to pass their family farms to their sons and daughters who want to maintain a lifestyle in rural Manitoba? When rural Manitoba fails, which this government is determined that it will by putting these terrible policies in place and killing the pork industry and killing the beef industry as they've done, then we'll see a depopulation of rural Manitoba. We need, in rural Manitoba, to have our communities there. We need the supports. We need the schools. We need the rural hospitals. We need the local rural businesses to maintain all of those things in our Manitoba.

You know, it has a dramatic effect on all small businesses. Farms are small businesses, but, certainly, all small businesses that are in rural Manitoba face extinction under the policies of the NDP.

I know there was some discussion today on country-of-origin labelling. I recall going to a farm seminar in 2004 where country-of-origin labelling was—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time's up.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to this issue and to put on the record some actual facts, which I know the members on the other side of the House have had some difficulty in doing. We've heard from the First Minister (Mr. Doer); we've heard from our excellent Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) today; the Minister for

Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux); the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton); and, indeed, the Minister for Conservation (Mr. Struthers). Perhaps I can add some perspectives, certainly, as a city of Winnipeg MLA, but also someone who's very interested and very engaged in attracting economic development to this province and making sure that all of our industries, including our agricultural industry, can be as strong as possible. I'm not sure where the members opposite were, but they should know, if they were active in their communities, that there were some tremendous announcements just last month which are going to secure the future of the hog industry here in Manitoba.

Indeed, first I can talk about the \$11.8 million that is being provided towards the upgrade of Neepawa's industrial waste-water treatment, which would allow for a great Manitoba company, Hytek, to expand its Springhill processing operation and thereby increase provincial hog processing capacity. I think it's a real feather in this province's cap that a great company here in Manitoba shows the confidence in Manitoba and can work with our provincial government and our federal partners to expand a facility, not only to preserve the jobs in Neepawa, but, in fact, to expand the number of jobs and provide more opportunities for people in western Manitoba. I haven't heard anything from the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese). I presume that he is pleased to see that development in his constituency. I don't expect I'll hear anything from him.

The very same day, Mr. Speaker, there was more good news for western Manitoba, good news for rural Manitoba, and that was the announcement that Brandon's industrial waste-water treatment facility would also receive \$15.5 million in upgrades, \$7.8 million of that from the Province of Manitoba, which will allow Maple Leaf Foods to expand its operations and which will also increase provincial hog processing capacity in Manitoba. This will also allow Maple Leaf Foods not only to preserve but actually to increase the number of workers here in the province of Manitoba.

I realize, perhaps, that adding value to our agricultural products in Manitoba is not something that interests the members on the other side, but it certainly interests those of us on this side of the House. Again, I'm very pleased that Maple Leaf has seen the value and the strength of the economy in

Manitoba. They've indicated their confidence that producers in Manitoba can and will continue to provide a supply of hogs and we can, indeed, add value right here in Manitoba, not in Saskatchewan, not in Alberta, but right here at home.

At the same time, of course, there was an announcement made of investments of \$14.7 million cost-shared with the federal government to support cattle producers during these difficult times. We know there's a decline in livestock prices. Of course, we know there's a high Canadian dollar. We did not wait for the budget. We took action last month listening to producers, and we provided meaningful supports to our livestock producers here in the province of Manitoba.

Now, if I can just move on. I know that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) often gives us history lessons, and today he wanted to give us a bit of the history of farming in Manitoba. It's passing strange, if I can use that term, that the member opposite, who had so much to say about the history of farming failed to mention that, indeed, it was the Conservatives who did away with single-desk selling of pork in Manitoba. So a support that would have been there to help producers through tough times was taken away because of their right-wing ideology.

It's also interesting today—today, of course, on the eve of, I'm certain, a very enthralling convention—they want to pretend they're on the side of agriculture. Not one single member on that side of the House has stood up to their Conservative cousins in Ottawa to go against the federal government's undemocratic means to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. Not one word from members opposite. Shame on them.

An Honourable Member: Shame.

Mr. Swan: Today, here on the eve of their convention—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always very notable when I've touched a nerve because today, in advance of their convention, they are trying to be tough and on the side of farmers, but when all of

them had the chance to stand up and do something, they remained silent and I say, shame on them. That's why we're the government that supports all Manitobans, not just those in certain constituencies or certain areas. We stand for all producers. We stand for all Manitobans.

As my time is growing shy, Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the work that our excellent Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk)

has been doing to continue with an aggressive strategy—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Pursuant to provisions of rule 36(6), the debate on this matter is terminated.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 10, 2008

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