

First Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| ALLAN, Nancy, Hon. | St. Vital | NDP |
| ALLUM, James | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | NDP |
| ASHTON, Steve, Hon. | Thompson | NDP |
| BJORNSON, Peter, Hon. | Gimli | NDP |
| BRAUN, Erna | Rossmere | NDP |
| BRIESE, Stuart | Agassiz | PC |
| CALDWELL, Drew | Brandon East | NDP |
| CHIEF, Kevin | Point Douglas | NDP |
| CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon. | Kildonan | NDP |
| CROTHERS, Deanne | St. James | NDP |
| CULLEN, Cliff | Spruce Woods | PC |
| DEWAR, Gregory | Selkirk | NDP |
| DRIEDGER, Myrna | Charleswood | PC |
| EICHLER, Ralph | Lakeside | PC |
| EWASKO, Wayne | Lac du Bonnet | PC |
| FRIESEN, Cameron | Morden-Winkler | PC |
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| GOERTZEN, Kelvin | Steinbach | PC |
| GRAYDON, Cliff | Emerson | PC |
| HELWER, Reg | Brandon West | PC |
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| IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon. | Fort Richmond | NDP |
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| KOSTYSHYN, Ron | Swan River | NDP |
| LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon. | Dawson Trail | NDP |
| MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon. | St. Johns | NDP |
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| MARCELINO, Flor, Hon. | Logan | NDP |
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| NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom | Interlake | NDP |
| OSWALD, Theresa, Hon. | Seine River | NDP |
| PEDERSEN, Blaine | Midland | PC |
| PETTERSEN, Clarence | Flin Flon | NDP |
| REID, Daryl, Hon. | Transcona | NDP |
| ROBINSON, Eric, Hon. | Kewatinook | NDP |
| RONDEAU, Jim, Hon. | Assiniboia | NDP |
| ROWAT, Leanne | Riding Mountain | PC |
| SARAN, Mohinder | The Maples | NDP |
| SCHULER, Ron | St. Paul | PC |
| SELBY, Erin, Hon. | Southdale | NDP |
| SELINGER, Greg, Hon. | St. Boniface | NDP |
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| STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon. | Dauphin | NDP |
| SWAN, Andrew, Hon. | Minto | NDP |
| TAILLIEU, Mavis | Morris | PC |
| WHITEHEAD, Frank | The Pas | NDP |
| WIEBE, Matt | Concordia | NDP |
| WIGHT, Melanie | Burrows | NDP |
| WISHART, Ian | Portage la Prairie | PC |
| | Kirkfield Park | |
| | St. Norbert | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, October 21, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Newborn Universal Hearing Screening Program

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

More than three in 1,000 newborns are born with educationally significant hearing loss, but Manitobans' currently-current hearing screening program does not allow for every child to be screened.

Without early detection, children are more likely to develop poor speech and language skills and also encounter social and emotional difficulties, which lead to poor academic performance.

Early diagnosis of hearing loss in newborns can make a considerable difference in a child's development because newborns can be provided with effective programs and support that foster development success—developmental success.

While most other developed countries and many Canadian provinces have a newborn hearing screening program, Manitoba is lagging behind. There are only a handful of screening programs in the province while all other newborns can be—only be tested if they have risk factors of hearing loss or if parents specifically request a test.

We petition the Legislative of—Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors to consider implementing a universal hearing screening program accessible to parents of all newborns in Manitoba.

This petition is signed by T. Celere, L. Oleszko, C. Barry and many, many other Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

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

PTH 5—Reducing Speed Limit

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Concerns continue to be raised about a number of motor vehicle accidents at the intersection of PTH No. 5 and PR No. 276 and at the intersection of PTH 5 and PR 68.

The Rural Municipality of Ste. Rose and the town of Ste. Rose have both raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about the current speed limit on the portion of PTH 5 in the vicinity of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Other stakeholders, including the Ste. Rose General Hospital, Ste. Rose and Laurier fire departments, East Parkland Medical Group and the Ste. Rose and District Community Resource Council, have also suggested that lowering the current 100-kilometre-an-hour speed limit on a portion of PTH 5 may help reduce the potential for collisions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider the importance of reducing the speed limit on PTH 5 to 80 kilometres an hour in the vicinity of the town of Ste. Rose from the west side of the Turtle River Bridge to the south side of the access to the Ste. Rose Auction Mart to help better protect motorist safety.

This petition is signed by C. Luke, C. Gudmundson, I. Delaurier and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Gaming Control Act): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the 2010-2011 Annual Report for the Manitoba Gaming Control Commission.

Mr. Speaker: I have a report for the House, too. In compliance with section 4 of the Members' Salaries, Allowances and Retirement Plans Disclosure Regulation, I am pleased to table the reports of amounts claimed and paid for members for the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I wish to introduce to and draw to the attention of members of the Assembly to the—and draw your attention to the Speaker's Gallery where we have six individuals who are serving on the Manitoba Legislative Internship Program for the 2011 and 2012 year, and they are seated in the Speaker's Gallery.

In accordance with the established practice, three interns were assigned to the government caucus and three to the official opposition caucus. Their term of employment is 10 months. They will be performing a variety of research and other tasks for private members. These interns commenced their assignments in September and will complete them in June, and they are, working with the government caucus, Ms. Leezann Freed-Lobchuk of the University of Winnipeg, Mr. Tim Johnson of the University of Winnipeg, Mr. Andrew Tod of the University of Winnipeg; working with the official opposition caucus, Ms. Anna Murawski of the University of Manitoba, Mr. Kai Olsen of the University of Winnipeg, and Ms. Susan Schipper of Queen's University.

Professor Jean Friesen looks after the academic portion of the internship. The administration of the program is carried out by our own Clerk, Patricia Chaychuk. The government caucus representatives on the Internship Administration Committee are the member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun) and the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen).

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of all members, to congratulate the interns on their appointment to the program and hope that they will have a very interesting and successful year with the Assembly. And welcome. *[applause]*

* (10:10)

I would also like to draw to attention of members of the Assembly that we have a new member of our table officers here with us today and that they will be a—and ask them to—ask you to assist me in welcoming to the table Mr. Andrea Signorelli, our newly appointed Clerk Assistant of the—Clerk of the committees. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Flooding

Independent Review of Forecasting

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): As I was saying, I want to just begin by welcoming and congratulating all members of the House, both those who are returning and those who are newly elected, and to congratulate you as well, Mr. Speaker, on your election yesterday. We'll have opportunities during the debate on the Speech from the Throne to elaborate on all of those, but I do want to congratulate everybody who has been given the great privilege of serving in this great institution.

Mr. Speaker, the flood of 2011 has been a significant issue for many Manitobans. Thousands of Manitobans were evacuated from their homes and many others have seen significant damage to property that's been very important to them, as well as farms and businesses. The Premier has indicated his own view that the flood was a very serious one and that the challenges arising from the flood are ongoing.

Over the past two months, we've seen different experts come forward saying that the Province made some significant mistakes in terms of forecasting which led to some significant mistakes in terms of floodfighting and preparation. Mr. Speaker, we are disappointed that the Speech from the Throne yesterday made no reference to an independent review of the decisions that were made with respect to this year's flood.

I want to ask the Premier: In light of the disclosures which have come public over the past couple of months, will he commit today to a full and independent review of the government's handling of the 2011 flood with particular emphasis on the errors that were made with respect to flood forecasting?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Again, welcome to everybody back in the Legislature. It's good to see everybody re-elected. We do take all of our duties with great seriousness and a sense of responsibility of our duty to the people of Manitoba.

And as I recall, we've discussed the subject before on forecasting, and the member will know that none of the forecasters in North America were able to predict a one-in-350-year event, none of the federal forecasters in Canada, none of the federal forecasters in the United States, none of the private forecasters in any jurisdiction nor provincial forecasters in any jurisdiction.

It was the flood of record in Manitoba, one of the worst we've ever seen, and the response to that in Manitoba has been monumental. There has been \$320 million of various payments made to support Manitobans to cope with this flood. These payments have already flowed to Manitobans in all the areas that were affected.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, that will come as news to those many Manitobans who have yet to receive compensation and who continue to get the runaround and confront red tape with respect to compensation.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's comments are also at odds with what one of Manitoba's most respected forecasters, Alf Warkentin, had to say quite recently. At the time that these decisions were being made, the Premier told the people of Manitoba that there was unanimity among the experts and the advisers as to the course of action that should be taken. Mr. Warkentin's more recent comments would suggest that that was not in fact the case, Mr. Warkentin's comments, along those of Professor Doering, are at odds with what the Premier told the public at the time and with what he just finished saying in this House.

And I want to ask the Premier: In light of these contradictions between what he is saying politically and what the experts are saying publicly with regard to their own views as to the forecasting and the appropriate steps, will he undertake a full independent review so that Manitobans can be satisfied that the right steps were taken, the right experts were consulted and that we learned lessons from the mistakes of the past?

Mr. Selinger: The decisions that were made with respect to the flood were never taken lightly, particular, one of the key decisions, the Hoop and Holler decision, that was at a time—that was at a time, Mr. Speaker, when our officials were telling us that there were several very important stress points on the dikes, up to 13 different places on the dikes, that were vulnerable to breaches. And those of us that had the opportunity to go out there and look at the

dikes saw the water within inches of the top. We saw mud squishing out from the lower levels of the dikes.

We, of course, made arrangements to bring the military into Manitoba, and they mounted an enormous effort with helicopters and heavy equipment to go into parts of the dikes that were no longer accessible because of the weather conditions and to buttress those dikes and to reinforce them so that a catastrophic event would not occur.

These decisions were made after all of our officials, senior officials in government, made a consensus recommendation. And after our ministers made a consensus recommendation, we acted in the best interests of managing risk for Manitobans and avoiding a catastrophic event.

And I want to commend all of the people of Manitoba, all of our officials and our ministers, for the excellent job they did during that very difficult period.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Premier's response is that it is at direct odds with the public statements being made by some of the most respected flood planners and forecasters in the province. Alf Warkentin says that he was aware at the time that the Hoop and Holler cut was unnecessary and that he provided that advice to the government. Jay Doering has since provided his own expert opinion that the forecasting was off and that many of the decisions that were made were the wrong decisions based on faulty forecasting.

Mr. Speaker, the issue here is not one of what one political party might say versus another, but it's a difference between what the experts are saying and what the Premier is now saying to Manitobans and in the House. He told Manitobans that there was a consensus at the time; we now know that that wasn't true.

Will he take steps today to rectify this discrepancy between his comments and what the experts are saying, and will he satisfy Manitobans that past mistakes won't be repeated, by holding an independent review into the mistakes of his flood mismanagement over the past 12 months?

Mr. Selinger: The flood review was—will be done and it will accept all advice from all quarters, including the member's, the citizens of Manitoba, that the member has mentioned.

And again, I have to tell him that decisions were made by taking a look at the risk factors on the

integrity of the dikes. The integrity of the dikes was in serious doubt at a time when the water was flowing in Manitoba at the highest level in recorded history in the Assiniboine Valley and along the Assiniboine River. There were up to 13 different pressure points on the dikes that were at risk of breaching and causing a catastrophic event to occur which would have done enormous damage to the communities in Manitoba along that waterway.

Our officials did come to a consensus recommendation. They listened to all the advice. They had their own internal forecasting, they had external advice. They took everything into account, and they recommended that we proceed with the Hoop and Holler breach cut in order to control the flow of the water to minimize damage on Manitobans and Manitoba communities. That decision was a consensus decision by our senior officials.

I think they made it with the best interests of Manitoba at heart. I know they made it with the best interest of Manitoba at heart, and I stand by their recommendation. I fully accept their recommendation on what they did, and I do believe we mitigated enormous amount of damage in southern Manitoba.

So as we review this matter, we will take into account all the various opinions and judgments on that, including those of our own officials who were monitoring the dikes on a 24-7 basis.

Lake Manitoba Flooding Financial Compensation for Residents

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government made a decision to intentionally flood properties around Lake Manitoba, properties that belong to landowners, ranchers and First Nations. The NDP promised to fully compensate property owners in the Lake Manitoba inundation zone, but flood victims are learning that a promise made is not necessarily a promise kept.

Mr. Speaker, why has this government now decided to not provide these affected property owners with full compensation for their losses? Why are they now breaking their promises?

* (10:20)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, in my very first response I indicated we have flowed in excess of \$320 million of payments to Manitobans affected by the flood in various ways: AgriRecovery

program, cost shared in part with the federal government—although there are elements of that program we would like them to consider cost sharing as well that we are proceeding with in any event—to help producers. We have fully compensated the people in the Hoop and Holler area, and the full compensation in that area was \$2.5 million, which shows you how well the damage was managed in that area, relatively modest compensation because there was relatively modest damage, but all the expenses that they incurred were reviewed and compensated for. We are making every effort and will continue to do so to look after Manitobans affected by the worst flood in the history of this province.

But we are also taking measures to ensure that it cannot happen again, which is why we have proceeded on an emergency basis with the channel cut in Lake St. Martin to bring down both Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba. We are proceeding with that on an emergency basis with additional resources of a hundred million dollars, and we are moving with great dispatch to ensure that people are not only compensated but we put in place measures that will mitigate this possibility in the future.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government promised to provide full compensation for things such as relocation of livestock, accessing feed, lost income, temporary wintering facilities for livestock in the Lake Manitoba flood inundation zone. The Minister of Agriculture stated in a June 30th news release, and I'll table that release, and I quote: Government will not turn its back on farmers. Farmers cannot wait any longer for help. End quote. Well, it's nearly four months later, and farmers and others are still waiting for help.

Mr. Speaker, why is this NDP government not keeping its promises? Why are landowners, ranchers and First Nations now being told they don't qualify for previously announced government programs?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, and I want—I do want to take a moment to congratulate you on becoming our Speaker.

And I do want to point out to the member for Agassiz that the words that I spoke on that day in June are as true then as they are now. We are working to make sure that farmers and ranchers and people who are impacted by this flood, all Manitobans who are impacted by this flood, are

treated fairly and they get the money that has—was announced in a number of programs.

I would ask, too, that members opposite, if they do have any sway at all with their cousins in Ottawa, to help them get on board, because those words were spoken in terms of the AgriRecovery plan that the feds haven't fully signed onto yet either, Mr. Speaker.

So we're going to continue to work with Manitobans to make darn sure that we have supports in place so that they can get back up on their feet and survive one of the worst floods in the history of our province.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, several members of the NDP caucus have indicated that they think the land will be in better shape once the flood recedes than it was before.

Mr. Speaker, the assessment on Jonas and Lydia Johnson's property in the inundation zone has dropped dramatically. Dee Dee and Darrel Armstrong are being told they don't qualify for lost income. Morgan Sigurdson is being told he doesn't qualify for costs for temporary livestock facilities. Other producers are being told to disperse their cattle herds. These people are broke. They have so little information they don't know what to appeal.

Mr. Speaker, why is this NDP government not meeting their commitment to flood victims? Were they simply election promises or do the NDP really not care about the devastation they have caused around Lake Manitoba?

Mr. Struthers: Probably what we don't need, Mr. Speaker, is more of the over-top rhetoric that we just heard from the member for Agassiz.

Very clearly, Mr. Speaker, our program, the Building and Recovery program, acknowledges the fact that it's going—this is a multi-year approach and that people will be suffering for a number of years. We've been clear with people on that.

I appreciate the names brought forward by the member for Agassiz. I appreciate the other names that he has brought forward that we have gone to great distances to follow up on, and, Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member for Agassiz to bring forward more names if there are people who are looking for some help specifically on this. I'm very proud of the overall approach we've taken in a proactive way to contact people around Lake Manitoba. I'm also very proud of the way we followed up individually with

people to make sure that they can access the programs that we have announced.

Lake Manitoba Flooding

Financial Compensation Application Process

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your recent election as Speaker.

That was the weakest answer I think he probably could have come up with. He had all summer to come up with a better answer. Mr. Speaker, all he had to do was pick up the phone and talk to some of these farm families. I mean, they call us; surely they're not afraid to call the minister.

Mr. Speaker, families hit hard by flooding on Lake Manitoba were told by this government that flood compensation would be simple to apply, easily accessible and quick to be paid out. However, this has not been the case. There are multiple applications to fill out, many departments working on files, endless red tape for victims to navigate. Yesterday on CBC Radio, the Premier admitted that the paperwork can be a challenge. That just might be the understatement of the year.

Mr. Speaker, will this government commit today to fixing these problems with its compensation packages?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We have flowed \$161 million of excess moisture insurance in a record period of time. We have—the AgriRecovery program that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) announced in June, which has not been fully supported to this point—we are still hopeful—by the federal government, has flowed \$93 million. They're—the resources are flowing.

It is a challenge to do the paperwork, which is why our officials have actively reached out to talk to producers and offer them assistance in an active way. They haven't waited for them to come in; they've gone out and contacted them, each one of them, and said, here's the programs, how can we help you apply for these programs? We will continue to do that.

If any member has a specific individual that he believes has not been treated properly or has not had access to these programs, we'd be happy to receive that information and again reach out to them and offer them the full resources of all the programs we've put in place, which to date have amounted to over \$320 million of resources having flowed out to the people of Manitoba affected by this flood.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the hardship this government is putting these families through as they wait for compensation.

Last spring the NDP government promised they would be there for the Lake Manitoba victims, yet this government has failed these families. Months have passed. Aid is slow to flow. Winter is right around the corner. Many flood victims have little or no money to protect what is left of their homes or their properties.

Let's be perfectly clear: This government's plan to deal with disaster is a disaster. We need this government to simplify the compensation process.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister responsible stand up in this House, commit today to ending this bureaucratic nightmare?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Again, more over-the-top rhetoric from the members opposite, which is absolutely not helpful in helping the very people they claim to represent on the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, we committed, when we brought forward these programs, to making sure that the money flowed to—straight to folks who needed it as fast as it could get there. And we've come through on that, and we continue to come through on that. Our determination as a government is to make sure that we see these programs right through so that they benefit the people who were actually put in harm's way in Manitoba over the past spring and summer with—which we have never seen before, the kind of unprecedented lake levels and water levels that we've been dealing with.

So we're going to follow up on individual basis as the—they're brought forward from across the way. We won't turn down any opportunity to be in contact with Manitobans brought forward and make sure that they get as much as they can out of the programs that we've announced, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Eichler: The only thing over the top is this minister not listening to the people out in rural Manitoba surrounded by Lake Manitoba. That's the over-the-top answer that we've been talking about.

Mr. Speaker, during a disaster like flooding around Lake Manitoba, the government must be there in a time of need with solid program delivery, not red tape and endless confusion. Some flood victims have had to go to the media with their cases to try and draw attention to the challenges they're

faced trying to get compensation. The First Minister finally admitted yesterday on CBC Radio that they have to take a more proactive approach.

Mr. Speaker, I ask again: Will this government admit today that they will deliver compensations programs that need an overhaul? Will this government stop revictimizing these victims? That's so unfair to them.

* (10:30)

Mr. Selinger: As I said to the member, and I know he's genuinely concerned about these producers, as we are, if he has any specific producer that he feels has not been received a proactive call—from the very outset—from the very outset, our officials have taken the initiative to contact people to make them aware of the resources there to support them, and they have contacted them, in some cases, several times to do that.

And we have flowed over \$320 million. Over \$320 million has been flowed since the spring's events. That's a remarkable amount of resources. But if there are other people that, for whatever reason, have not received a timely response to their concerns, we are prepared to follow up on it again. And I invite the member to provide us with names. Where we've had people come forward, in the media or otherwise, and say that we've taken that as a heads-up to recontact them, and to ensure they have all the information they need to apply for the programs that are available to them. We will continue to do that.

We know it's been a tremendous period of suffering. Some of these people have taken the biggest hit that they've ever taken in their lives from a natural disaster, and it's been a very traumatic time for them, which is why we put these resources in place. And we will continue to honour their suffering and find ways to respond to them. And if the member wants to be constructive, I ask him to bring forward those specific names, and we will, once again, reach out and find a way to be supportive and help them with the programs that we have.

Highway 251 Bridge Reconstruction Update

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, this spring southwest Manitoba was heavily inundated with high levels of water from runoff and torrential rains causing massive infrastructure damage throughout the region. However, the citizens

of Waskada were particularly hard hit when the Coulter bridge over the Souris River on Highway 251 collapsed due to this flooding. This has led to a minimum 12-mile detour on gravel roads not designed for the heavy industrial traffic of the region today.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Infrastructure and EMO, today, commit to protecting the safety of motorists by replacing this bridge on Highway 251 this winter?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I think the member raises an important question.

In addition to the incredible challenge that Manitobans faced with historic flooding that was widespread in geographic nature, which is continuing—and I want to stress, by the way, that there are many people who continue to be affected by the flood. And we're continuing to fight the flood with the Lake St. Martin outlet and the Lake Manitoba outlet, which we believe will make a significant difference to hundreds, if not thousands of Manitobans.

At the same time, we're still dealing with the flood. We're also dealing with the very significant impact on infrastructure. We are working on that as we speak. We have a lot of co-operation from the heavy construction industry, and I do want to indicate that we have been working on our bridges. There are a number of them have to be reconstructed. It's going to be a challenge ahead, and I certainly appreciate the inconvenience for many Manitobans, but we're committed to rebuilding our infrastructure, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, Highway 251 west of Waskada carries all of the heavy traffic from the oil industry that moves between Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as the traffic—the—such local traffic as school buses. To bring the collapsed bridge to the minister's attention, local citizens, led by Shirley Kernaghan and Betty Miller, held a rally in September on the bridge. They called for the bridge's immediate replacement, or at the very least a temporary one to be installed even for light vehicles. The oil industry and the school board have also written to the minister about this serious situation.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit today to the timely replacement of the Coulter bridge in order to protect the safety of local citizens, including

school children, and to support the local energy industry's needs?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I know I, along with other members of the Legislature, were somewhat busy doing other things in September, but I did take the time to stay in close contact with my department. I think the member knows that there are essentially two issues here. One is the overall reconstruction of that bridge and other bridges and, of course, that requires both engineering work, various environmental approvals, particularly with the federal government.

I can indicate, too, that we have, in this particular case and, in fact, a number of other situations, looked at the potential of putting temporary bridges in. The real concern has to be here in terms of safety. And any of the recommendations we have in terms of temporary bridges have been very much based on the assessment by our engineers of the particular safety. And I appreciate there may be some continuing inconvenience, but clearly the goal has to be reconstruction of our bridges that were impacted. In many cases, putting a temporary bridge in is not necessarily safe or practical. So we are taking that into account in this particular situation.

But I want to say this government is committed to reconstructing, rebuilding our infrastructure. We know that that job is going to be job No. 1 once the flood is over, and it's not over yet.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no question this bridge has to be replaced. It is collapsed. So we realize as well that there's much work to—required to recover from the 2011 flood.

But the Coulter bridge is only one of dozens of washouts and dilapidated highways throughout western—southwestern Manitoba which suffered its worst damage in recent memory. These citizens know, as do all Manitobans, that this NDP government has reaped the benefits of millions of dollars, if not hundreds of millions of dollars, in revenue over the last few years from the ongoing growth in the oil industry. The Department of Infrastructure has indicated it would take \$4 million and years to replace this important bridge, yet other solutions have been offered.

Mr. Speaker, out of desperation I ask, again, for these citizens: Will the minister commit to making the replacement of the collapsed Coulter bridge on Highway 251 over the Souris River an urgent priority?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think you've seen where, for example, the 2009 flood that we did undertake to reconstruct some of our significant infrastructure. We did it on an expedited basis and we will be doing that throughout the province.

And the member's quite correct: there are many other structures that have been impacted. But I want to stress a number of things here. What we have to do is we have to do an engineering assessment, and I want to indicate, by the way, that our staff and the consulting engineering community, by the way, if you want to talk about some of the unsung heroes of this flood, they've been putting in incredible hours and dealing with a lot of situations, and I want to put that on the record.

Then, Mr. Speaker, you have to go through various elements in terms of environmental approvals, many of which are not within our control, and we did, after the 2009 flood, we were able to reconstruct a number of bridges in an expedited manner. But I want to stress that it does take some time to do it right, and what we will do, we will ensure we rebuild our infrastructure but we'll make sure we do it in a safe way. We'll make sure also that we're going to be focusing on ensuring that those structures are able to withstand future flooding events, because this did change everything. In many areas of the province, this was the flood of record, in 2011, and we will be planning for the future on that basis.

Flooding Mitigation Government Record

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have heard a lot of promises and a lot of rhetoric from the NDP government over the past 12 years when it comes to flood protection. In 2003, the government promised gates at Shellmouth; they broke that promise. In 2006, they promised flood protection for Brandon; they broke that promise. In 2011, they said that they were relying on the advice of experts. It turns out now that's not true.

Today we hear new promises coming from the minister with respect to bridges. We hear promises coming with respect to compensation, and yet against the backdrop of 12 years of broken promises, Manitobans are right to be skeptical about the words that come from this government.

Will the Premier commit today to setting aside the past policies of phony, broken promises and take

real action to ensure that the mistakes of the past aren't repeated?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, they ask about the rhetoric. We've flowed—money has already been paid out in this flood event, \$320 million has already been paid out; \$320 million, and work is going on already with local municipalities on rebuilding roads, on rebuilding infrastructure, on putting in place ready-to-move homes to house people.

All of these activities have been ongoing, throughout the election period as well. Nobody in this administration stopped for a minute in responding to the flood. I cannot think of one single day in the last several months when we have not spent time ensuring that things were moving forward on the flood. We will continue to move forward on that.

The member opposite can raise the questions like he did in the election; we'll continue to serve Manitobans every single day.

Mr. McFadyen: And again, Mr. Speaker, the problem is with the gap between what the Premier says to Manitobans and what his government actually does. In 2003, they promised gates at Shellmouth. It's eight years later; the gates haven't been built. In 2006, they promised flood protection for Brandon. Five years later it still hasn't been done. In 2011 he said he had a consensus view of the experts, and now we know through Alf Warkentin that that's not the case.

Mr. Speaker, for Manitobans to have confidence in their government when it comes to following through on action to rebuild bridges which need to be done, to rebuild highways, to take future steps to protect Manitobans from flooding, they need to know there's some actual connection between what the Premier says and what his government actually does.

* (10:40)

What assurance can he provide today that the 12 years of broken promises are not going to carry on for the next four?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, if the member wants to go back and look at the 12 years of investments in flooding, over a billion dollars has been invested in floodproofing Manitoba, and that makes it a—and that made an enormous difference in the Red River Valley this spring. Communities were protected by

ring dikes. Personal property was two feet above the '97 flood level. When you drive through southern Manitoba now, there's a very unique built geography down there. Every home is on a high rise piece of property now. The dikes were included and expanded.

All of these measures have been put in place, and even though the water in the Red River Valley was extremely high this year, most people in most cases, but for a couple of hundred that were relocated, were very well protected, which allowed us to turn our attention to doing flood mitigation on the Assiniboine River where we didn't wait for a federal program. We went ahead and protected those communities along there with extra dikes. We went ahead and made sure that Brandon was protected as promised.

And with respect to the Shellmouth Dam, when the federal government dropped that project, we picked it up and have continued to move forward on that and we will deliver on it. Even when another level of government decided they no longer wanted to do it anymore, \$320 million flowed. Rhetoric from the members opposite, resources in the hands of Manitobans from this government.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the gap between what the Premier tells Manitobans and what the government actually does, he's now resorting to erroneous attacks on the federal government.

The federal government signed an agreement with the Province on Shellmouth in 2003. They followed through with land acquisition. It was the provincial responsibility to build the gates; they didn't do it. The feds lived up to their end of the bargain, the NDP didn't, Mr. Speaker, and they poisoned the relationship with the federal government that provides the most generous level of transfer payments to this province in our history, more than \$4 billion a year flowing from Ottawa to this province. For him to then turn around and attack the federal government on erroneous grounds is counterproductive. It's destructive to the relationship. It's dishonest and it's harmful to the people of Manitoba.

Will he today show leadership, Mr. Speaker, and take responsibility for his own failings rather than try to point the finger elsewhere?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the historical record is absolutely clear on the Shellmouth Dam. We will get it built. When we will get it built, as was committed

to by both the federal and provincial government. They changed the role they wanted to play with respect to that project, and we followed through and picked up the project and we'll proceed with it just like we did in Brandon, just like we did in southern Manitoba.

And, you know, in the first day back in the House, I just want to remind the members opposite, all those investments we made in floodproofing, they voted against them. I know they don't like to hear that. But the reality is we ensured those resources were in place and we have committed to further resources to flood-proof Manitoba for the future, which is why we're proceeding with the \$100-million channel project in Lake St. Martin. The member opposite also thinks that he can second guess that project as well.

The reality is we will proceed with those measures that give permanent protection to Manitobans as well as emergency protection to Manitobans. We have followed up on that: \$320 million of resources are now in the hands of Manitobans. While the members opposite want to replay the 1999 election, the '03 election, '07 election and the 2011 election, we will act in the best interests of Manitobans.

Correctional Services Prisoner Release Errors

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month two prisoners escaped from the Brandon Correctional Centre, but, you know, escaping from prison is the old-fashioned way of breaking out of prison illegally. The new way in Manitoba is just to wait for the NDP to accidentally release you, and that's exactly what happened recently when this government released a murderer out of the Headingley Correctional Centre. And then, all of a sudden, the Premier decided that this was an important issue. Even though it's been discussed for almost two years, he's suddenly said that this was something that was important to him.

Why did it take him two years and the accidental release of a murderer before he got CSI Selinger on the case, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I'm sure all honourable members know that we're to address each other by our constituencies and not by our individual names. I ask the honourable member to correct that part of the record, please.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I didn't mean to use the name of the member.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, I want to offer my congratulations to the member for Steinbach on his re-election. I know a lot of us were worried he wasn't going to make it back, but he did manage to eke through on election night. So I'm certainly glad to see him here.

But this is a very serious matter, and when there is a wrongful release as has happened in Manitoba from time to time, it is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. There are many experienced members in this Assembly that our previous Speaker has indicated that—to you that the members of the public are viewing and we have members in our Speaker's Gallery here today that are watching. We would want—not want them to have the wrong impression of this Assembly, so, please, I ask you to have some decorum as we conduct our affairs here during question period.

Mr. Swan: Yes, thank you.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, it is treated very seriously, and every time a wrongful release occurs there is an internal review done by Manitoba Justice to make sure courts and corrections work together to make the changes to try to ensure this does not happen.

Back in May, I indicated that the level was unacceptable. That's why we've asked an expert from Alberta to provide some expertise, to provide the best practices going on across the country to make sure that our court system works with our corrections system to try and minimize the chance of this very, very serious issue reoccurring in Manitoba.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's been almost two years and this government can't seem to figure out how to keep people in jail who are supposed to stay in jail. The police do a good job. They go and arrest people. They pick them up. They bring them in to the courts, and the NDP just releases the murderers. That is something that they have to live with, but they don't have any idea how to change the system.

I've asked the minister whether or not he'll commit to ensuring that when an accidental release happens, that it becomes public, that they disclose it to the public either when it happens or after the

individual is re-arrested if the police think that's a better way to go for tactical reasons.

Will the Premier (Mr. Selinger) or the Minister of Justice commit to ensuring that when an accidental release happens, it is made public and public disclosure so we can have confidence in the Justice system, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, what the member for Steinbach does not understand is that when this unfortunate type of incident happens, job No. 1 is making sure that the individual is brought back into custody.

I do want to commend the RCMP and the city police for their hard work and, of course, this latest incident, they were able to bring the person back into custody. We trust the police. When this happens the police are notified immediately. And you know, Mr. Speaker, unlike the member for Steinbach, who maybe thinks he's smarter than the police, we give the police control. They decide the best way to get those individuals back into custody. If the police believe that the public interest is served by making a public notification, they will do it. If the police believe that the best way to get the person back into custody is to not make a notification and put all their efforts in getting the person back into custody, that's what they do. We respect that. I'm not sure why the member for Steinbach doesn't.

Mr. Goertzen: I respect clearly the public's right to know when public safety, Mr. Speaker. This Attorney General and this Premier (Mr. Selinger) could simply have notification when the accidental release happens or after the individual is apprehended. There's nothing stopping them from doing it. The Premier said that he was concerned about this situation. Well, now they're bringing in an expert from Alberta. Well, I like people from Alberta, but I don't think we need to bring somebody else in to tell you how to keep people in jail.

But now that we're going to have the report, will you at least commit? If the Premier is serious—he said he was serious—is he going to commit to releasing that report when it's brought forward so we can see what the problem is and what the fix is going to be, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Swan: Well, let me repeat, Mr. Speaker, we are not going to put politics ahead of public safety, and we'll continue to trust the police. We'll continue to trust the police to do what they believe is best for public safety in the province of Manitoba. We will,

when we receive the report, we will make the necessary changes to keep improving the system.

The real question I will have is when we move ahead and there will be additional investments in the budget, I'll be very interested next spring to see whether, for once, the member for Steinbach and the Progressive Conservatives vote on the side of the police, vote on the side of Crown prosecutors, and vote on the side of public safety instead of voting against every investment we've made over the past 12 years. I'll be watching. We'll be watching. People of Manitoba will be watching, Mr. Speaker.

* (10:50)

Cancer Patients Treatment and Medication Costs

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in the recent election and in the Throne Speech, the government has said, and I quote, that it will be making cancer treatment and support drugs free. Now, each day that passes without this being implemented, Manitobans with cancer will suffer and some people will die because they can't afford these new drugs.

I ask the Premier: Will he act immediately to ensure that cancer treatment and support drugs are made available free to Manitobans?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member from River Heights has endorsed our election commitment to make drugs available to cancer patients when they're not in hospitals so they can be in the comfort of their homes and closer to their families when they're fighting this tremendously devastating disease.

The member opposite will remember that we were the government that brought in palliative care drugs outside of the hospitals so that people in the terminal stages of their life or—have had the drugs available to them so that they could mitigate any suffering that they're going through. We will follow through on this promise; the member can be assured of that. We will transform the treatment centres that are in rural Manitoba into full cancer treatment centres.

We will ensure that Manitobans' cancer treatment process is the best in Canada from the moment of detection to treatment, and we will make CancerCare a centre of excellence in this province. So the member can be assured that we'll follow through on all of these promises we made.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I can't understand why the Premier is not fulfilling his commitment today. You know people are going to suffer. There are probably some people who are going to die because this commitment is not made today.

And I have another concern as well. The Premier has said he will make all cancer treatment and support drugs free. And yet we know that many of the new cancer drugs don't even make it onto the Premier's Pharmacare list for a long, long time. Indeed, Manitoba has one of the longest wait periods for drugs to get onto Pharmacare, and during this time of waiting too many Manitobans are being denied access to effective and valuable cancer drugs.

I ask: Will the Premier agree to include all these new cancer drugs as free to patients with cancer as soon as the drugs have been proved effective and useful?

Mr. Selinger: We actually make these decisions in consultation with practising physicians. When they recommend a drug to be on the formulary because it's the most effective way to provide treatment and the most cost-effective way to ensure Manitobans are looked after with respect to the treatments they need, we will follow that. We're not going to just do it because the member up—jumps up and says all drugs should be free. That actually—might actually make—*[interjection]* That might actually make it harder for people to get access to the drugs they need.

The drugs on the formulary that are available for CancerCare patients in Manitoba will be made free to people suffering from that disease outside of the hospital setting. And the drugs that will be selected for that will be the ones that are recommended to us by physicians and experts on the drugs that are the most appropriate and the most effective in treating cancer in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, now the Premier may have won the election, but he certainly doesn't have *carte blanche*.

Mr. Speaker, in the election the Premier said he would cover all cancer drugs. In the Throne Speech the Premier said he would make all cancer drugs free, and now the Premier is waffling. He's giving himself a loophole; he's giving himself an exit strategy from his province—promise.

I ask the Premier, how can he so renege—how can he so renege—on completely fulfilling his promise today? This is a big, important commitment. It is just such renegeing on promises that is putting

our medicare system at risk. I—surely the Premier will reverse himself right now and commit today to completely fulfill his promise and make all cancer drugs and support drugs free to cancer patients. Will he?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for the question, because it's absolutely clear we will follow through on the election promise we made. All the drugs that have been approved as being safe and effective in treating cancer in Manitoba will be made available free to patients outside of the hospitals, and the member opposite knows that we will follow through on that. If he wants to arbitrarily start broadening the amount of drugs that are made available without having them properly reviewed for safety, without having them properly reviewed for effectiveness, I would consider that a very reckless commitment on his part.

We will follow through on the election promise. Drugs that are approved and have gone through the proper process and have been approved by people that are practising in this field, physicians and other experts, will be made available free to all Manitobans that are suffering from cancer outside of hospital facilities. We will honour that commitment. The member knows that, and we will follow through on it.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw to attention of members of the Assembly, Mr. Binx Remnant who is here sitting in a loge to my right. On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you. *[applause]*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Reg Alcock

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'm rising today to solemnly acknowledge the passing of former member of the Legislative Assembly and Member of Parliament, and, of course, Winnipeg community leader and friend, Reg Alcock.

From 1988 to 1992, Mr. Alcock acted as the Liberal MLA for Osborne where he served as the Official Opposition House Leader and Finance critic. In the last year in his time as an MLA he made the decision to enter federal politics. He was successfully elected as the Member of Parliament for Winnipeg South.

Mr. Speaker, he was one of the first members of Parliament to make extensive use of Web technology and other innovative means of communicating with voters and constituents. He was known as an exceptionally hard-working politician and minister and an innovative public servant.

We recall that during the flood of 1997 he transformed his campaign office into a volunteer relief centre, was actively involved in sandbagging and evacuation efforts on behalf of people in the province of Manitoba. Mr. Alcock served many positions in Parliament over the years, including Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, president of the Treasury Board and political minister responsible for Manitoba.

On a personal level, I was honoured to have many discussions and interactions with Reg Alcock over the years in his capacity as the lead federal minister for Manitoba and also in his more recent capacity as a member of the faculty at the University of Manitoba. He was kind enough to invite me to speak to a couple of his classes at the U of M, and was also free in offering his advice and perspective on matters of politics and public policy, and, in particular, on matters relating to accountability of government and Crown corporations in particular. I benefitted greatly from his input and advice. I enjoyed the warmth of his personality and his friendship.

Reg was a strong inspirational leader, a mobilizing force both locally and nationally. His contributions to political life nationally and here in Manitoba are significant, and we've lost a significant presence within our community. The members of our caucus are saddened by his passing, and our condolences go out to his family at this difficult time. Thank you.

Flooding Update

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, this year thousands of Manitobans have experienced unprecedented levels of flooding. Damage to homes, farmland, roads and cottages was widespread and many Manitobans are still unable to return to their communities. The effects continue to be particularly felt in the Interlake.

Our government has met this unprecedented flooding with significant financial assistance to support those affected by this year's record flood. Support has already flowed to residents, cottage owners and producers through the Building and

Recovery Action Plan and the AgriRecovery program, and staff continued to work to flow funds to families as quickly as possible. Water remains high and there is still a long road ahead in this flood fight for many Manitoba families and communities.

Our government continues to assist municipalities in the Interlake and across the province as they work to rebuild and restore access for residents. We also continued to help residents from around Lake St. Martin and other displaced families get established in temporary housing as we work towards longer term arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen first-hand the personal toll that this year's flooding has had on Manitobans who live near Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. Hundreds of people have had to abandon their homes and livelihoods due to high water levels on both lakes and the threat of flooding well into 2012. This past summer we initiated the Lake St. Martin emergency channel to more quickly bring the level of the lakes down. It is with the residents of the Interlake in mind that I commend the over 130 dedicated workers who are currently constructing the Lake St. Martin emergency channel.

* (11:00)

Thanks to the hard work of the crews involved, the channel is on track to be finished by next month. Crews have worked hard in remote difficult conditions and their accomplishments in a very short time frame have been impressive.

This year's flooding has shown the resiliency of the residents of the Interlake. Repeatedly, adversity has been overcome by neighbours and communities banding together to fight this flooding. I'm proud to thank all of those who have been involved in these admirable efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Small Business Week

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to acknowledge Small Business Week in Manitoba.

In 1979, the Business Development Bank of Canada has organized Small Business Week enabling Canadian entrepreneurs to share success stories, talk to leading business experts and exchange innovative ideas.

The theme of this year's Small Business Week is "Power Up Your Business, Invest, Innovate and

Grow," which, I think, speaks to the activities and strategies of Manitoba's small businesses. Manitoba has approximately 102,000 small businesses representing 97 per cent of all businesses in the province. Without our medium and small businesses, we would miss out on countless unique products and services, tens of thousands of Manitobans would be without jobs, and so many community and charity organizations would be without constant supporters.

Mr. Speaker, there are many great reasons for us all to be enthusiastic about Manitoba's small businesses and to celebrate Small Business Week. A small business community that is allowed to flourish contributes to the growth and health of Manitoba's economy and creates jobs.

Earlier this year, the Canadian federal government proclaimed 2011 the Year of the Entrepreneur, and in June Manitoba followed suit, proclaiming 2011 to be the Year of the Entrepreneur in our province as well.

With continued uncertainty with the global economy, the Province has the responsibility to act immediately to assist businesses and families any way they can. While steps have been taken to address red tape, they are simply not enough. We need to make it easier for small businesses to focus on their core business instead of paperwork. Encouraging and supporting small businesses will provide a tremendous benefit to our economy.

I would like to recognize Small Business Week and applaud the contributions made by the many small businesses here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Brandon Health-Care Services Funding

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): During the recent election campaign, Mr. Speaker, the government recommitted itself to improving the health and well-being of Manitobans in Brandon and the Westman region. The government has a long history of improving and upgrading health-care services in the region, and I want to highlight two more of these important initiatives for members of the House.

First, by investing \$12 million towards expanding and upgrading the Brandon Regional Health Centre's medical ward, we will be helping ensure access to care for Brandon and Westman residents. Offering a full range of medical services, this upgrade of the health centre will expand the

number of beds available to 60 and help relieve pressure on front-line health-care staff. This investment builds on the \$58 million previously invested to rebuild the Brandon Regional Health Centre and more recent investments to build the state-of-the-art Westman Lab in the west-in Manitoba CancerCare centre, including for the first time ever radiation therapy outside of the city of Winnipeg and closer to home for western Manitobans.

In addition, we will be improving access to health care in Brandon by putting another ambulance on the road during peak periods. Firefighter paramedics are one of the hardest working and most important duties within the health-care system. This yearly \$400,000 commitment to fully staff another ambulance will put a fifth ambulance on the road to meet to the needs of families in Brandon and Westman.

As the city of Brandon is a growing community, with such growth comes the need to adapt and change services. These expansions to services will help the city to meet its needs in the present and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, these initiatives build upon our commitment to improving health-care access for Manitobans in the city of Brandon and in western Manitoba. These announcements represent a long-term commitment to the health and well-being of everyone in the region, and I am proud to offer my enthusiastic support for these projects. Thank you.

Waste Reduction Week

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): This week is Waste Reduction Week and all across Canada a coalition of 13 recycling councils and sister organizations are co-ordinating initiatives that teach Canadians about waste and its environmental and social ramifications.

This year's Waste Reduction Week theme "Too Good To Waste" centres on conveying an appreciation for the riches-ricness and beauty of our diverse world and the importance of working toward ecological sustainability by conserving resources and engaging in socially responsible waste practices.

We here in Manitoba are doing our part to promote curbing wasteful consumption and destruction but we could and should be doing more. Per capita, Manitobans generate about one tonne of

waste each year, yet, two-thirds of household waste can be recycled or composted.

In recognition of these necessary efforts and in celebration of this week, our schools, businesses, municipalities, organizations and individuals across the province are starting recycling programs, installing composting boxes, joining bike-to-work clubs and going bagless while grocery shopping.

To celebrate Waste Reduction Week and work toward a more sustainable future, Manitoba's Green Action Centre has provided several information packages, tips and outlets for Manitobans to get involved in this important endeavour. Travelling actively and in a green manner: biking, using public transportation or taking a carpool and buying locally produced food when available, are just two small measures that everyone can take in order to make our province less wasteful and more environmentally friendly.

I encourage everyone to find out more, take action, get inspired and begin the small steps toward cutting down on waste.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS THRONE SPEECH DEBATE (First Day of Debate)

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Kostyshyn),

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

We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at this First Session of the Fortieth Legislature of Manitoba.

Motion presented.

Ms. Crothers: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate you on your election.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to represent and assist the people of St. James and, before I go any further, I would like to thank some people for their support and guidance throughout my journey to my own new position. I am thankful for the support from those that volunteered their time and worked with me to earn this seat.

I would also like to express my very sincere appreciation to the honourable members of Southdale, Minto and Assiniboia, who have given me advice, support through the campaign and their time. To the other members of the caucus who have been extremely kind and encouraged me along the way, I thank you as well.

I also wish to say a few words to the previous MLA of St. James, unfortunately, who's not here, Bonnie Korzeniowski. Bonnie, for your dedication to our constituency, your good work there, your involvement in my campaign and concern for my well-being throughout, I thank you sincerely.

To my parents, Jack and Jeanette Mallard and my in-laws, Dave and Connie Crothers, who were with me over the election, thank you. And, although my husband, Blake Crothers, is unable to be here, I wish to acknowledge his engagement and effort throughout the entirety of my campaign to help me succeed at the cost of several of his friendships and very nearly our marriage. My children, Rowan Crothers and Imogen Crothers, who tolerated the many days when they saw me for only a few hours, thank you for your willingness to take this leap with me.

*(11:10)

If I were to outline my experience, my education, my personal interests and my familial background, I don't think anyone would declare: that woman should be an MLA. I don't think anything in my past would have indicated that someday I would be standing here in this room, in this capacity, before all of you. In fact, it has come as quite a surprise to many people I know, and it has, in truth, surprised even me. And yet over the past few months I have found myself better prepared than I had first imagined I might be. As I met with people and exchanged ideas, I discovered that my experience as an adult literacy instructor has increased my empathy for those who deal with challenges that I may not struggle with myself.

The experience I gained working as an EAL instructor abroad and in Canada has taught me how to be more creative in both problem-solving and in the way that I communicate with others. That opportunity has also shown me countless examples of what sacrifice looks like, as those new to our country take a huge leap of faith and give themselves over to a new life in Canada and increasingly in Manitoba. There are more and more new immigrants settling in St. James who are politically engaged and

eager to become citizens. I feel especially encouraged by their interest, even though they aren't yet voters. Most of the newcomers I spoke with on the doorstep understood, valued, and desired the ability to vote.

In university I majored in cultural studies, and even the least sensible students in that program hedged their bets and minored in something else so they would have something to fall back on. Not me, and I'm glad I didn't, because that education gave me a broader view on people and how culture can determine our interactions with one another. It also taught me to try and see beyond my own assumptions and life experience to hear others and value their experiences as much as I value my own. That lesson was reinforced by what I learned within my own family. As a few of you may know, I grew up in a Conservative household, at least on my father's side. My father's commitment to the party of his choice is firm. He supports his party visibly at campaign time, financially throughout the year, and vocally in our family home. He is friends with the local Conservative MP. They regularly communicate by email on the issues of the day and even take an annual hunting trip.

Growing up, I never considered a career in politics, but I did dream of being a jazz singer. Neither profession really makes sense since I suffer from severe stage fright, yet here I stand. On paper my experience does not appear to set me up well for a life in politics. Fortunately, for me a life in politics isn't the goal I'm aiming for, but an opportunity to try and better the lives of the people in my community certainly is. And to that end perhaps my experience, in particular my family experience, has prepared me well. While we didn't always agree on political issues in my house, the example set by both my mother and father was that discussions were calm, considered, and civil, and, as a result, once it was over, we could still get along. I plan on following in my father's footsteps, at least in this regard.

I suspect that many of the choices I have made are not the ones my father expected me to make; my mother, perhaps. Yet when my dad found out that I was running for the NDP he was very supportive. My parents were with me on election night. My diehard Conservative dad was so nervous he had his first drink at about three in the afternoon. And even though he helped me celebrate my success later that evening I'm pretty sure he was feeling a little bit guilty about it.

Despite the unlikely circumstances that brought me here, I feel my interactions with the people of St. James fuel my drive to promote all of my constituents' interests and listen to their concerns, regardless of their political affiliations. I feel so fortunate that St. James is the constituency I am here to represent. I came to St. James as a newlywed from Ontario. My husband and I knew very little about the community, but we were smitten with an old character home on a quiet street. It was this house, a much more affordable home than we could have hoped to buy in Ontario, which made us commit to St. James. However, it was not long before we realized how fortunate we were to have landed here. From the community services such as schools, community clubs, and small family-run businesses, to the location, the access to green spaces, walking and bike paths, this community has a lot to offer.

St. James feels like a small town within the city. People who have grown up in St. James, and then left to pursue other opportunities, will often come back when they decide they want to raise a family. As I canvassed, I heard that on the doorstep daily.

It also is the kind of community where roots run deep, and those that have lived in St. James for most of their lives, who decide to sell their homes and look for a smaller place, usually decide to stay in the neighbourhood. It's the quality of life that impacts people so deeply in my constituency.

There is also another side to St. James that makes representing it so unique. A few blocks away from family homes and play areas, we can find nationwide brands and bargains, and stroll through the destination shopping centre that is Polo Park. There is also the new terminal at the Richardson International Airport, which is scheduled to officially open at the end of the month.

As I said before, my husband and I are originally from Ontario, and when we announced that we were moving to Manitoba due to a job offer, the initial response from family and friends was puzzlement. "What's in Winnipeg?" was the usual question. And after living here, my answer to that question is, "What isn't?" We have enjoyed a lower cost of living in a home that we wouldn't have been able to afford in Ontario, and that lower cost of living provided us with enough elbow room to invest in our home through updates, which make our home more efficient and environmentally friendly. We pay far less in auto insurance than we had to previously, even with spotless driving records, and when we had

our two children we had excellent midwifery care, both in hospital and at home in St. James.

My second child, my daughter, was born with a hemangioma over her eye. It was quite serious, and the pediatrician and ophthalmologist were both very concerned that she would lose her vision if it wasn't treated immediately. The traditional treatment had side effects that were possibly dangerous to her, as she was still an infant at the time, and neither my husband nor I were confident about the usual approach. I am stubborn and my husband is tenacious. We learned of a study in France that showed a drug traditionally used to treat heart conditions, which worked effectively to shrink large hemangiomas. My husband was able to contact the French physician, who put us in touch with a Canadian doctor who was beginning to use that treatment in Québec. That physician gave us the name of a specialist here in Manitoba. Through our persistence, and the willingness of local physicians and specialists to try this approach, our daughter became one of the first children in Manitoba to receive a new, but safe, treatment for hemangiomas. Her treatment had low-risk side effects and drastically reduced the size of the hemangioma, allowing her vision to be saved.

From the time my daughter's hemangioma was determined to be a danger to her vision, to the time a plan was put in place that allowed my daughter and I to enter hospital so she could be monitored continuously, took less than four days. This was at the height of the N1H1 pandemic, I might add. Those four days before she was admitted to hospital were filled with specialist appointments and tests. This was the medical care we received in Manitoba for our daughter. For a couple, with two young children and no immediate family or close friends, this meant everything. The type of care we received had a profound impact on us, and while we strive to increase the quality of health care for Manitobans, I have every confidence that we are on the right track and well on our way.

Life really is good in Manitoba, and life really is good in St. James. I am very excited about the possibilities in my constituency. The ideas that were born on the door-stepping conversation with constituents are the ones that will have the most impact in my community. I look forward to having a role in these developments, whether it is increasing support to community clubs for better services and more programming, creating more daycare spaces and improving wage and benefits for those that are

employed in the care of our children, or working to increase affordable housing for seniors.

Over the next four years I hope to prove that an unlikely background is my strength, and will better enable me to serve the people of St. James. I am also certain that the encouragement and mentoring I have already 'ceived' from many of the honourable—other honourable members will prove invaluable in the coming term.

* (11:20)

In closing, I'd like to relate an incident that happened when I was canvassing. I spoke with a gentleman in my constituency who follows provincial politics quite closely and takes the time to read *Hansard*. As we stood on his front steps, he told me that he knew a few Cabinet ministers himself, and then he leaned forward and said—with some disappointment—you know, they're just like us. Is that a bad thing, I asked somewhat surprised, that they have foibles and strengths like the rest of us? He seemed to think it might be, but I find it rather reassuring. If you can't relate to the people you have elected to represent you, how good will they be at relating to you and taking care of your needs? So, hello, fellow St. Jamesian who lives on Ferry Road. If you are reading this in *Hansard*, I am, indeed, speaking to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Kostyshyn (Swan River): First of all, Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your recent elections, and we look forward to working with you.

I am pleased to rise to second the motion today. Mr. Speaker, I am most honoured and humbled today to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne as a newly elected MLA for the Swan River constituency. I would like to extend my gratitude to my campaign manager, volunteers and family members for their dedication, time and efforts during the campaign to help me get elected.

I want to acknowledge and thank my wife, Judy, for her unwavering support and I'm very proud to have her here today, and I would love to have the caucus appreciate my wife up in the audience. I could not imagine facing the task before me without her. Our daughters, Jennifer and Melissa never doubted my success and have been a long-time distant cheerleader supporters for us. Unfortunately, they live—one lives in Calgary and the other one in

Gander, Newfoundland, so long-distance phone calls was the highlight of the evening every night.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank those colleagues of this House who took the time to share their wisdom, their experience and time and energy to be with me during the campaign. This was their victory as much as mine. Thank you to all of you, my colleagues.

I would like to take my—I would like to thank the constituency from the Swan River riding for their greatest support for all electing me to serve as their representative in the government. I am humbled by their faith and trust and still will work hard to represent them for the best of my abilities. I would particularly like to acknowledge the residents of the Aboriginal and Métis communities for their warm reception during the campaign.

The success of my journey would have to be without the—acknowledging of the former honourable minister, Rosann Wowchuk. Her strengths, encouragement and determination and wisdom continues to inspire me. After spending 14,000 kilometres on the campaign, truly, I truly appreciate her energy and her loyalty to her people in her constituency. And let me tell you—this is not even in the speech here but it just comes to mind—that after you spend 14,000 kilometres and numerous hours, you really get to know a person in a different level, and, in all honesty, she has the heart of an elephant—very large—and a very caring person to the people of her constituency but also to the province of Manitoba and Canada.

My interest in public service evolved over the lifetime being watched by my grandfather and father who served also as councillors in the RM of Mossey River. As a third generation municipal official, I've served in this capacity as a councillor and reeve for the past 20 years. This time has allowed me to be involved in various organizations, giving me the experience and ties that led me to be what I am today. Specifically, I was honoured to serve as the associated Manitoba municipality representative for the Parkland rural district, which reinforced my interests and commitment to provide leadership and assistance to Manitobans.

As chair of the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association, I was proud to be the voice of 17 conservation districts as we moved towards improving the vision and the educational components of the conservation district movements.

Surface water management is becoming a key necessity in Manitoba. This past year has demonstrated the importance of dealing with Mother Nature's adverse weather patterns. I had the privilege of sitting on the Conservation Districts Commission which involved seeking additional funding for projects and strengthening community partnerships to improve the natural environment for the betterment of all Manitobans. The Conservation Districts Commission is comprised of public appointees, representatives from the MCDA, AMM, the deputy ministers from Conservation, Agriculture, Intergovernmental Affairs, Health and Infrastructure and Transportation. My interest in conservation districts began through my work with the Intermountain Conservation in 1990. The structure of the IMCD, CDC, and any conservation district organizations provides a strong dialogue between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments as well between rural and urban residents.

I had the privilege of chairing the Manitoba veterinarian task force report which resulted in recommendations being forward providing long-term veterinarian services in rural and urban residents. The importance of maintaining veterinarians in the province is crucial to all aspects of food and animal safety.

With my past 30 years' experience in agriculture both in grain and cattle, I have realized the importance of accessing veterinarian services. As a cattle producers that have struggled through the economic hardships of the BSE, the young beef producers are faced with challenges of remaining on the agriculture industry, reinforcing the necessary of veterinarians. Modern technology may identify potential disease outbreaks and minimizing financial hardships for all producers.

With the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board, our grain producers could be faced with wheat and barley profitability challenges in regards to geographic locations and as well as the size of the operations. Small grain farmers may be faced with additional challenges due to the volume of grain produced and their ability to market it. I am proud to be a member of the government who stood up for the wheat board and the farmers of Manitoba.

Manitoba commercial fishers are facing 'unprecedented' challenges with rising costs and high dollar, changing markets, and weather issues ranging from floods-flooding to drought. Our government's priority is to ensure strong, healthy, fresh water fish

industry and maximizing returns for all fishers. To this, our government committed in the election to numerous initiatives to support the industry, including freight subsidies to designated areas, appointment of trade specialists to identify new markets and support greater opportunities for fishers to market non-quota or raw fish. Our government is also committed to make it easier for licensed commercial fishers to hire helpers, matching wages up to \$750 a season, ensuring higher employment and improving financial viability of the industry.

Agriculture's a key component to Manitoba's economy. We need to focus on returning young agriculture producers to keep the industry viable. Working together to create links between urbanites and rural communities would help in fostering a clear appreciation and understanding of the industry and its role in our province, culture, and economy.

* (11:30)

Our continual commitment to education opportunities in the province will enable our young people to develop more skills required to enter the workforce. Our commitment to post-secondary training facilities such as the University College of the North, the two—the new regional centres in Swan River, Grand Rapids and Easterville will allow students to remain in their communities while they obtain their education.

One of the issues—and many of them were—but No. 1 issue during the campaign was health care. The clear message was bring health care closer to our constituencies, minimizing travel times, associated cost. We, the government, have committed to provide telehealth in the communities of Ethelbert, Winnipegosis, Benito, Camperville and Waterhen. An announcement was made to provide funding toward a project utilizing air ambulance to transport patients to Winnipeg in place of ground ambulance. This would free up the ambulance to be used locally rather than being used to transporting patients to larger centres.

Alongside this commitment is to provide an MRI for Dauphin. So that would also minimize Manitobans to travel from rural or northern communities longer distances. We have also committed to ensuring all Manitobans have a family doctor in Swan River, and we are moving forward with plans for a recreation and a wellness centre, alongside a new community health clinic which will include a nurse practitioner. We help—to achieve these goals, we pledge to double the training spaces

for nurse practitioners and offer free tuition to students who agree to work in the rural communities like Swan River. I am also pleased that our government offers recent nursing graduates a return service grants for the relocation to areas in rural and northern Manitobas. Initiatives like this means that our constituents will receive quality health care at home instead of having to go to a larger centre for care.

Working together to improve cell phone and high-speed Internet access in the constituency is very important to me. Both services have become a basic necessities but are not available to everyone. Communities such as Crane River, the RM of Swan—the RM of Lawrence, Winnipegosis, RM of Mossey River, Camperville, Duck Bay, Pine Creek, RM of Mountain, just to name some areas, would greatly benefit from increased access to cell phones and high-speed Internet. Without proper cell care service, safety is compromised. In emergency situations away from home or even when ground line service is unavailable, constituents are unable to move swiftly to communicate with emergency personnel. Lack of high-speed Internet prevents any broadening or expanding of home-based businesses as well as allowing the sharing and gathering of information among members of the community.

These sorts of projects in rural areas alongside the new Bipole III transmission line will not only bring development to the countryside but also help spur local economy by providing jobs during the construction stage, as well, additional income to—in this project will bring to the province of Manitoba and will benefit Manitoba's—Manitobans because of Manitoba's hydro strong public mandate.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of being here today for two reasons. First is because the people of the Swan River constituency gave me their support. I will be internal grateful to them for this opportunity, and, as well, as to my family, friends and colleagues and volunteers for their love and support. It is because of them that I'm here today, and I couldn't have done it without them.

The second reason I'm standing here today, because I know that we have a job to do. I have signed up for the job because I knew I was joining a group of people who are committed of getting things done. Agriculture is essential to the character and landscape of this province. It is also 'integral' part of Manitoba's economy.

We must work together to support our farmers and ensure opportunities to our rural communities for years to come. This is why our continued commitment to building on education, apprenticeships, skill training in rural Manitoba is so important. Working together we will enable our young people to develop skills required to enter into the workforce. We all must continue to work together to ensure high-quality health care services for rural areas and for the people all over the province.

I believe that Manitoba is a great place to live, work, and raise a family, and I am proud to stand here alongside my fellow New Democrats and indeed all the members of this House. We all share one thing in common. We are here because we care about making Manitoba a better place to live, and I eagerly anticipate the next four years as keeping Manitoba moving forward and keep investing in things like family care about.

In closing, I would like once again to say what an honour it is to be here today to represent the people of the Swan River constituency and to be serving all Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will and pleasure of the House to call it 12:30? *[Agreed]*

This House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, October 21, 2011

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