

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Ind.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, December 4, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam 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.

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everybody.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 8—The Government Notices
Modernization Act (Various Acts Amended)**

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, seconded by the—*[interjection]* Oh. Okay. I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 8, The Government Notices Modernization Act, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Cox: I am pleased to rise in the House today for the introduction of Bill 8, The Government Notices Modernization Act. This bill amends The Queen's Printer Act to establish the deputy minister of the department that administers the act as the Queen's Printer of Manitoba.

The bill makes the Manitoba Gazette available to the public offline—or, no, online, I'm sorry, Madam Speaker—at no charge. The bill also amends provisions in 24 statutes that relate to the government's requirement to publish official notices. These amendments remove barriers, allowing the Manitoba Gazette to be published online, and replaces and modernizes several requirements to publish a notice or a document in a newspaper, the Manitoba Gazette or other options.

I am pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

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

**Bill 10—The Boards, Committees, Councils
and Commissions Streamlining Act
(Various Acts Amended or Repealed)**

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), that Bill 10, The Boards, Committees, Councils and Commissions Streamlining Act (Various Acts Amended or Repealed), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Pedersen: This bill amends various acts and repeals others in order to consolidate or eliminate a number of boards, committees, councils and commissions, or reduce their size.

Thank you.

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

**Bill 212—The Invasive Species
Awareness Week Act**

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): I move, seconded by the member from Swan River, that Bill 212, The Invasive Species Awareness Week Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Madam Speaker, when passed, this bill will proclaim the last full week in April as invasive species awareness week. Invasive species are any kind of plant, animal, insect or organism that is not native to the ecosystem and whose presence can cause harm.

Invasive species can have environmental, economic and health concerns. The keys to saving ecosystems from invasive species are prevention, detection and timely responses to identification.

This bill is a first step to accomplish this goal.

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

Committee—oh—committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Municipal Relations, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

24-Hour Giving Challenge

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize The Winnipeg Foundation for their great work. I would also like to welcome CEO Rick Frost and director of communications, LuAnn Lovlin, who are seated in the gallery with us today.

Thanks to the generosity of Manitobans, community foundations across our province raised an incredible \$893,448.89 during this year's 24-Hour Giving Challenge, once again demonstrating why we're the most generous province in the world.

During the 24-Hour Giving Challenge, The Winnipeg Foundation stretched a \$5 gift made to community foundations with one dollar. This year, the Province of Manitoba partnered with The Winnipeg Foundation and also contributed \$1 for every \$5 gift. Manitoba has a great history of being generous, and this year the generosity of our citizens was a great-on great display.

Along with The Winnipeg Foundation, Manitoba is home to 54 other community foundations, the most community foundations per capita in the country, 52 of which participated in this year's challenge. The results of this year should be a great source of pride for everyone across the province.

Madam Speaker, 24-Hour Giving Challenge 2017 highlights include: 1,609 gifts made during 24 hours, 500 more gifts than last year, over \$740,000 total gift value, almost \$400,000 more than last year and nearly \$150,000 stretch value, three times last year's stretch.

Since the gifts to the community foundations are endowed, Manitobans' generosity ensures permanent support for our communities. Our government is proud to deliver on the-on our Throne Speech commitment to partner with The Winnipeg Foundation and support the important work of Manitoba's community foundations.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating the dedicated staff and volunteers of The Winnipeg Foundation and the participating community foundations across the province for setting a new fundraising record in the 24-Hour Giving Challenge.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park. Oh, pardon me, the honourable Minister of Municipal Relations.

Mr. Wharton: I ask leave to have the names included in Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include the names of his guests in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

The Winnipeg Foundation Representatives: Rick Frost, LuAnn Lovlin

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Manitobans are known to be kind-hearted, generous and caring people. Manitoba has been a leader in charitable donations in Canada, demonstrating our willingness to make a difference in our communities and around the world.

* (13:40)

The Endow Manitoba 24-Hour Giving Challenge, held on November the 18th, further demonstrated Manitobans' willingness to give: 1,609 gifts were made in 24 hours to 52 community foundations who participated, seeing a total of over \$744,000 raised from citizens alone.

Manitoba is home to the most community foundations per capita in the country. We are proud to count The Winnipeg Foundation as the first such organization in Canada, which opened in 1921. Since then, more than 50 foundations across the province have been created and countless grants have been distributed. They support community initiatives that enrich Manitoba's culture, strengthen our diversity and promote our province to the world.

Events like the 24-Hour Giving Challenge are a way to ensure these community foundations can continue their positive efforts for years to come. This year, The Winnipeg Foundation and the Province of Manitoba committed to adding \$1 for every \$5 donated from the community. These donations are then invested into the local organizations and non-profits that help families and seniors meet their needs.

On behalf of my NDP team, I would like to thank and-

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the statement? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: I would just like to take a moment to thank the many Manitobans who participated in the Endow Manitoba 24-Hour Giving Challenge on November 18th. All the gifts made during the 24-Hour Giving Challenge were invested in permanent endowment funds, and the interest earned is all poured back into the communities as grants for various projects and programs.

Thanks to our province's generosity, 52 community foundations across Manitoba raised close to \$900,000, all in one day.

Madam Speaker, it is very evident how grateful Manitobans are to these foundations that continue to offer support to our communities. These supports include improvements and repairs to school playgrounds, to upgrading seniors' homes, to providing communities with medical equipment and much, much more.

This makes me so proud to be a Manitoban, and this demonstration truly defines friendly Manitoba, a province that's generosity far exceeds expectations.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Families, on a ministerial statement, and the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): December 3rd marks the date of the United Nations resolution regarding International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Twenty-five years after this important proclamation, we're still a long ways away from addressing the many barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

Disability affects more than 1 billion people on a—throughout the world, on a global basis—it's—which represents close to 15 per cent of the population. Globally, this affects health, education, economic

opportunities and results in much higher levels of poverty.

There's also a much higher risk of becoming victims of violence. Children with disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence. Adults with some form of disability are about 1.5 times more likely to be a victim of violence as well, and adults with mental health conditions are nearly four times the risk of experience violence.

The theme of this year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities is transformation towards sustainability and resilient society for all. This part of the global pledge to leave no one behind—this is the shared goal of our government and shared by all Manitobans.

We've come a long way over the last 25 years, Madam Speaker, but we still have a long way to go. We'll be keeping working together with all Manitobans to ensure that no Manitobans are left behind. We'll continue to break the barriers to prevent Manitobans with disabilities from being full participants in our society, from enjoying and experiences life for everything it has to offer. It will take time, but by rolling up our sleeves and working together on our common goal, we'll get there.

A quote from actor Christopher Reeve, who I had a opportunity to meet a number of years ago here, famously known for his role in Superman, but after being tragically injured in an accident became a very important advocate for people with disabilities. And a quote that he had said that I think makes a lot of sense, Madam Speaker, is: A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to 'preservere—to 'presere'—to preserve and, you know, the nature of things, and ensure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.

I close by saying that I'm very proud to salute the heroes in the province who persevere on a day-to-day basis, and let us mark the occasion by recommitting ourselves to helping along their journey.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): International Day of Persons with Disabilities is a day to celebrate Manitobans of all abilities who live life to the fullest. It's also a time to pay our respects to those who work hard to champion the rights of persons with disabilities and challenge policy-makers to make our province accessible for everyone. This

year's theme is transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.

We know that disabilities—disability advocates have fought through barriers and stigma to transform our province by opening up employment opportunities, increasing access to education and strengthening the health-care system. Because of their courage, Manitoba has made historic steps forward in the journey to inclusivity. This includes the accessibility of Manitoba act, which sets out to remove barriers so that all Manitobans can access and benefit from a system, service, product or environment.

We know that when barriers to inclusion are removed and persons with disabilities are empowered, our entire community benefits. But we know there is still more work to be done, and we still look to the amazing organizations in our province that ensure the rights of persons with disabilities are not forgotten. Organizations like Abilities Manitoba, Barrier-Free Manitoba and the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities are raising awareness and pushing lawmakers to help individuals with disabilities live successful, meaningful lives. Many of the people in these organizations are people who live with disabilities themselves. Their commitment to their community is worth celebrating every day, but especially today.

On behalf of our caucus, I'd like to thank those folks and communities they represent for their dedication to Manitobans with disabilities.

Miigwech.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, yesterday, Sunday, December the 3rd, was the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. It's an important day. People with disabilities have struggled for years to be recognized and to achieve societal changes so that they are fully able to participate in all areas of our world—in the community, in jobs, in their family—and so that barriers to their participation can be reduced or eliminated.

This past Friday I attended an event called Attitude Matters to recognize this international day, held at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,

with Donna Carreiro as the featured speaker. She spoke of her father, who had polio when he was one year old. It had lifelong impacts, including severe post-polio syndrome in his later years. The room went silent as she spoke. The story spoke to all of us and how we can all do more to understand and help those with disabilities. Attitude matters.

I want to mention my friend, Bonnie Bieganski, who has a disability for which she needs a wheelchair and a respirator. Like Donna's father, she has had to fight all her life and against many obstacles to get fair access. She has done so, and as a result, she graduated with a degree from the University of Winnipeg and has been fully employed for most of her life since getting her degree.

She once wrote an essay which was titled something like this: The terrible disability which isn't. Her attitude and her accomplishments are amazing. Her attitude—I salute Bonnie and all those who have disabilities, recognizing that enabling people like Bonnie to achieve access and to contribute in so many ways, including through her employment, is vital. We need all to strive every day to improve our world and, in particular, to improve how we recognize and support those who have disabilities.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I'd like to ask for leave to speak to this motion.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

* (13:50)

Mr. Fletcher: I'd like to recognize this auspicious day by discussing the fact that Manitoba is a hotbed for disability rights activists. I think of Harry Enns, Jim Derksen, Laurie Beachell: great Manitobans who have long advocated for things such as self-managed care, for accessible transportation, including Jim Derksen with his remarkable and successful fight against Via Rail to have wheelchair accessible rail cars.

Madam Speaker, Jim Flaherty, the former Finance minister, introduced the Registered Disability Savings Plan, a plan that recognized and enabled financial empowerment for persons with disabilities and, remarkably, he ensured that the provinces would not claw back the benefits from that innovative plan.

There's Peter MacKay, who signed the UN accord on persons with disabilities when he was

Foreign Affairs minister—proud to be part of that government.

Madam Speaker, many years ago I was asked why—I was asked about my ability, and my response to that person on the radio was: I'd rather be paralyzed from the neck down than the neck up.

Madam Speaker: Further ministerial statements?

The honourable Minister of Infrastructure. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

2017 Fall Conditions Report

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I rise today to advise Manitobans about the hard work being put in by the staff of Manitoba's Hydrologic Forecast Centre.

Winter may have barely begun here in Manitoba, but these dedicated professionals are already preparing for spring, ready to address the annual concern we all have in this province about the potential for spring flooding.

Some of their hard work culminated today in the release of the 2017 Fall Conditions Report. This report provides us with an idea of moisture levels in the soil, plus water levels in rivers and lakes as the winter freeze begins.

It covers three key potential flood factors: (1) soil moisture at the time of freeze-up, (2) base flows on the rivers and water levels on lakes prior to spring runoff and (3) the long-term forecast of winter snowfall.

Of course, it's still very early and a lot can change between now and spring, but the report reveals we can be cautiously optimistic about what's facing Manitobans come spring.

Soil moisture conditions are normal to dryer than normal in most parts of the province, and the soil conditions at most of Manitoba's river basins are generally dryer than they have been in the past three years.

As we all know all too well, we shouldn't get too excited just yet. We always have to be prepared for a higher spring flooding risk if we get a lot of snow, or if there's a fast melt or some heavy rain in the spring. These things could change dramatically.

There is a chance of moderate flooding at some locations and the risk of flooding in some watersheds will be determined by river flows from my neighbours in Saskatchewan and North Dakota.

Most major lake levels are at a slightly above normal for this time or normal for this time of year, aside from Lake Winnipeg, and both Environment Canada and climate change Canada are predicting snowfall to be above normal for most of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In other words, we are not in the clear just yet.

But Manitobans can be certain that no matter what lies ahead, our government and the talented team at the Manitoba Hydrologic Forecast Centre will be well prepared to overcome whatever challenge comes our way.

Madam Speaker, stay tuned.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): As winter months continue to develop, our fall conditions report gives us some idea of what we will be expecting for water levels come spring. It's an important indicator for Manitobans who live in the areas at risk of flood.

Our risk of flooding will be dependent on weather for the coming months, and we must maintain a high level of preparedness for a higher spring flooding risk if heavy winter precipitation occurs or if a fast melt or heavy spring rainfall were to occur.

We know the tragic effects that floods can have on our communities. Families can be displaced, property can be damaged. It is important that the government always prioritize flood response and continue to invest in protection measures that mitigate the risks outlined in the fall report.

This year's report says high water flows on the Saskatchewan, Carrot, Waterhen, Dauphin and Fairford rivers are above normal, as well as most of Manitoba's major lake levels are above normal, especially Lake Manitoba. This could mean that some ice—come ice breakup, these communities may be more at risk of flooding. Other factors like snowfall and soil moisture can exacerbate these conditions.

We believe the people of Manitoba deserve strong flood protection. Our government—proud to expand Manitoba's floodway and prevent an estimated \$35 billion in flood damages. But we know that more must be done, and it's worrying to see the Premier (Mr. Pallister) abandon a plan to floodproof

susceptible roadways like Highway 75 in favour of cheaper, less sustainable projects. We know the effect of flooding on Highway 75 has for the town of Morris and surrounding communities.

All Manitobans deserve the right to feel secure and protected against the rising tide of flooding, and we urge the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to make smart investments that keep communities safe and economies strong.

Thank you.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his update—or her update on the—*[interjection]*—his update on the flood conditions as they are now. 'Flom' a flooding perspective—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: —it is good to have soil conditions which are normal to drier than normal, though, of course, many farmers on Farmer Appreciation Day, today, might like slightly weather—wetter soil conditions going into the winter.

That being said, I note that the levels on our major lakes, including Lake Winnipegosis, Dauphin Lake, Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, are above normal.

Lake Manitoba, at 812 feet, is high enough that it would be at risk of achieving flood levels with significant snow and wet weather in the next few months, as some forecasts are predicting.

Lake St. Martin is currently three feet above the normal level for this time of year and more than a foot above the 90 per cent level, the level at which it is 90 per cent of the maximum. And it is just below the flood level.

Since Lake St. Martin is a smaller lake, it is of considerable risk of flooding should we have more snow or wet weather. This is of significance for those who are just this year returning to their communities after being evacuated for more than six years.

I ask the minister and his staff to pay particular attention to Lake St. Martin in the next few months.

The evacuees do not need further disruptions in their lives after having just returned to their communities.

Thank you, merci, miigwech.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Argyle Fall Supper

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand before this House today and acknowledge a beloved prairie tradition: annual fall suppers in Manitoba.

On September 24th, the Argyle Fall Supper celebrated its 135th anniversary. In spite of a hectic season, every September for the past 135 years, one Sunday has been set aside for breaking bread with neighbours, friends and family at the Argyle Fall Supper.

Putting on a feast for entire community is not an easy feat and takes months of planning, but the supper has continued through many generations. The first supper began in 1882 and was organized by the Ladies' Aid church group and was called a fowl supper as different families would donate chickens for the meal. As years went by, the main course switched to turkeys and soon the community gathering was referred to as fall supper.

Crowds come in droves and stay—this day—very much community event. Fall suppers play an important part in bringing the community together once a year. With tradition being an important part of the supper, many of the items will—still served from the supper's early days. Homemade pumpkin pie is a staple at the annual supper as well as homemade pickles.

* (14:00)

Fall suppers are important events for rural communities. They serve—bringing residents together for some delicious home-cooked food and raise money for local organizations. I had the pleasure of attending many fall suppers and it's this time of year that I look forward to the most.

I'd like to extend my gratitude and appreciation for all those who are involved in marking a historic day in the community of Argyle, as well as the efforts of the fall supper committee who are joining us today in the gallery.

I would ask the House join me in 'congratulating' the continued efforts in celebrating family, friends and community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Thank you, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Oh, pardon me, the honourable Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Eichler: I ask leave of the House to have the names recorded in Hansard as my guests.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to record the names in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Argyle Fall Supper Committee Members: Brenda Balzer, Tracy Dunstan, Sandy Jamault, Lisa Riley

Susan Belmonte

Mr. Allum: I rise today to pay tribute to Susan Belmonte, who recently stepped down as president of the Fort Garry Community Centre. Susan was elected in April 2011, and I have come to know and respect her for her generous and selfless contribution to community life.

Fort Garry Community Centre is one of five community centre locations in Fort Garry-Riverview and is composed of two sites bisected by Pembina Highway. Both the Hobson and Derek Street sites are remarkably busy year round, with a full menu of activities for people of all ages.

On any given day there's always something going on, be it Zumba for kids—which I learned should be left for kids—yoga classes, IAM Fitness for 55 and over, as well as play groups for younger children and sports for older kids. I especially enjoy movie night as families and friends gather with blankets, pillows and popcorn to enjoy a movie classic.

Fort Garry Community Centre is also remarkable for its many 'seasonal'—seasonal festivals. Waterfest is a wonderful chance to enjoy the hottest part of the year with water slides, games and the always-popular bubble pool. Likewise, winter festival is a warm and vibrant occasion with lots of hockey, skating, sleigh rides and many other activities, and when things get a little chilly, one can head inside or over to the fire pit to enjoy some steamy hot chocolate and good conversation.

All of these activities are the byproduct of the incredible efforts of Susan Belmonte, the Fort Garry board of directors and all the volunteers who work tirelessly to build community in Fort Garry. As she assumes the role of past president, I want to thank Susan for her enormous contribution to our

community. I'm very proud to call her both a colleague and a friend.

On behalf of all the residents of Fort Garry, thank you, Susan, for making the world a better place for all of us.

St. Vital Community Centres

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, community centres are an essential part of wherever we call home. These neighbourhood hubs have long since served as a meeting place for friends, neighbours and even rivals, allowing communities to join together and enjoy good company and fun.

Through humble beginnings, the three community centres in St. Vital have all grown into the cornerstones of each neighbourhood they serve. Offering a wide range of programming from athletics to parental support, even an exciting game of bingo or two, there is something for everyone to take part in.

The Norberry-Glenlee Community Centre is a story of success that demonstrates what a grassroots group of 'individuals' are capable of. With the amalgamation of the Norberry and Glenlee community centres in 2006 and the significant renovations in 2009, a modern facility was born. Whether attending their Knight of Celebration and enjoying their fireworks display, or seeing a future baseball star hit his or her first homerun at the diamond, Norberry-Glenlee will continue to be celebrated club for generations to come.

Nestled in the heart of the Elm Park neighbourhood, the Windsor Community Centre is a place where families can call home. With its close proximity to Windsor School and a growing number of young families in the area, this club offers a warm atmosphere for children and parents to feel supported and have fun. Windsor proudly boasts being the first community centre in the area to have their indoor ice—or the—sorry, their ice ready for skating, and I can't think of a better way to kick off winter than having a friendly game of hockey or ringette on their outdoor rinks.

Servicing the community since 1948, the Glenwood Community Centre is the embodiment of what a club should be. With a focus on recreational activities that benefit personal health and wellness, Glenwood serves as a place for kids, adults and seniors to take part in programming such as hockey, bridge and yoga. The club is—has also hosted Folklorama's pavilion of Scotland in years past, and

I'd like to thank them for their ongoing support for heritage in our city.

Madam Speaker, I invite all members in this House to join me as I recognize the hard work of—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for the member to complete her statement? *[Agreed]*

Mrs. Mayer: I think they're so wonderful that I want to recognize the hard work of the volunteers, the board members and staff from the St. Vital community centres.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to add into Hansard the names of those of all three community centres who are in the gallery with us today.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include those names in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Glenwood Community Centre: Shawn Fraser, Coralie Charonneau. Windsor Community Centre: Adria Mielke, Lindsay Young. Norberry-Glenlee Community Centre: Sean Fedorowich, Maria Fedorowich, Carmelle Remillard

Maples Community Centre Expansion

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): I stand today to urge this government to fulfill commitments made to the community of The Maples. I am talking about the Maples Community Centre expansion, which, in January 2016, the Manitoba government announced funds to cover one third of the cost of this important project. But now this government is renegeing on the promise made to the people of The Maples. It's a slap in the face to those who have worked hard on this project.

For nearly 40 years, the Maples Recreation Association has been providing sports, recreation and leisure programming to The Maples community. At the heart of these programs are community volunteers. These people understand that the community centre allows individuals and families the opportunity to connect to—on a deeper level and are an integral part of their community. The centre helps strengthen bonds and is an excellent resource to local information.

The Maples Community Centre now provides programs for young moms with babies, a variety of sports programs for youth and schools, leadership

and community service opportunities for young adults and seniors' active living programs, all while supporting the unique diversity of people living in The Maples.

But it is a busy, growing community, and the centre is not large enough to manage the population it serves. It must the—have the expansion to continue its great programming and services. The Maples Recreation Association and Seven Oaks School Division is putting up to \$3 million to support the expansion. They have developed a sustainable business plan, so once it gets built, they will run it with their own operating dollars.

This government retreating on a promise to the people of \$7 million to allow it to get built.

For the sake of serving and—serving the social and recreation needs of the area and diverse community, I urge this government to reconfirm the funds for the Maples Community Centre expansion and, on behalf of the community, to ask other levels of government—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

South Winnipeg Community Centres' Sports Awards

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): I love amateur sports, especially when the teams are made up of local youth who are still learning about the sport itself and developing a greater understanding of what it means to be part of a team. I have briefly spoken here in the House celebrating the volunteers in our communities and throughout our province. Without volunteers guiding, training and mentoring our young athletes in our community clubs and other local groups, the opportunities to participate in organized sport would not exist.

I was recently privileged to attend the annual volunteer awards and recognition evening for the South Winnipeg Community Centres. I watched games played by a couple of the South Winnipeg Community Centres' baseball teams and soccer teams, and I recently attended a flapjack fundraiser for one of the hockey teams. None of these types of events would occur without the commitment, the long hours and the never-quit attitude demonstrated by the volunteers who give their time, their talent and their support of youth activities.

I would 'tike' to take a moment to acknowledge the individuals who were recognized with the South Winnipeg Community Centres' 2017 Source for

Sports Volunteer of the Year awards: Kristi Venton, for softball; Brad Carson, for baseball; Craig Meub, for basketball; Ryan Arabsky, for hockey; Chris Wensel, for soccer; and Joelle Suzuki, for ringette. Additionally, Tony Staruch was presented with the community contribution award, while Conrad Nordman received the long-term service award.

These individuals are but a few of the countless friends and neighbours who give back to their community centre throughout the year by supporting the programs which develop the boys and girls at SWCC into citizens who take pride not only in their abilities as athletes and as team players, but also representing their home to the rest of the city and beyond. They make sure there is always something going on, such as this upcoming Breakfast With Santa event this Saturday at Waverley Heights.

I would like to thank all the volunteers who give of themselves to benefit our constituency. They are all winners.

*(14:10)

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce you to.

We have seated in the public gallery, from Université de Saint-Boniface, 21 political science students under the direction of Alexandre Brassard, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member of St. Boniface.

And also in the public gallery from Linden Christian School we have 42 grade 11 students under the direction of Mark Glor, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable minister—or, for the honourable Premier (Mr. Pallister).

And also seated in the public gallery we have Lisa Clarke, Lindsay Catcheway, Jonathan Fleury, and these are the guests for the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin).

On behalf of all of us here, we welcome all of you to the Manitoba Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

QuickCare Clinics Timeline for Closures

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, QuickCare clinics

serve tens of thousands of Manitobans each year: 51,000 in 2016. They're an important point of contact for health care in our communities.

Sans consultation, le Premier ministre (M. Pallister) a fermé la QuickCare Clinic à Saint-Boniface, le janvier dernier.

C'est un service de santé de moins pour les Franco-manitobains à Saint-Boniface.

Translation

Without consultation, the Premier closed the QuickCare Clinic in St. Boniface last January. It is one less health service for Franco-Manitobans in St. Boniface.

English

Then the Premier decided four of the remaining QuickCare clinics should be closing. That's one less clinic in north Winnipeg, one less clinic in Windsor Park, one less clinic in St. James, one less clinic in St. Vital.

The reason that the WRHA provided for closing front-line health-care services used by tens of thousands of Manitobans was to meet the \$83-million-cut target ordered by the Premier.

Why is the Premier ordering QuickCare clinics to close across Winnipeg?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has three more days to stop spreading misinformation in this House. I'm sure that he is up to the challenge; I have confidence in him.

I also have confidence in the decision-making of those health professionals who looked at the QuickCare clinics and said they weren't doing what they intended to do. They weren't reducing the wait times that we'd hoped in our emergency rooms.

And I was pleased that some of the initiatives that we've been taking since we've come into government were confirmed by the CIHI report, just last week, that indicated that wait times had been reduced by 28 per cent since we've come into government, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: That was a pretty wild mis-characterization of the CIHI report, but I would

assure the Minister of Health that I will spend the remaining three days standing up against this government's misguided health-care cuts.

As though the health-care cuts weren't misguided enough, this government has poured a million and a half dollars into an ad campaign trying to spin these cuts to Manitobans. They've spent hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to convince Manitobans that laying off physiotherapists and charging patients was not a cut to health-care services.

Now, Madam Speaker, we've learned that the four Winnipeg QuickCare clinics will be closing on January 1st, 2018. That's less than a month away, but this government is still trying to hide its plans for closures for Manitobans, leaving the families who rely on these clinics out in the cold, as it were. Now, families need time to plan. They need to know where to access health-care services.

Why is this government trying to hide its plans for cuts and closures from Manitoba families?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I admit I missed the first part of the honourable member's question. I think he indicated that he was very misguided, and I appreciate him giving that acknowledgement, because he has been misguided. He's been misguided in a number of different things, certainly on this question.

What he fails to realize is that many QuickCare clinics under the former NDP government were hardly open, Madam Speaker, because they were improperly staffed. People would go there for the—quote, unquote—quick care and they'd find out there was no care.

So we've made the decision, in consultation with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, to put the resources from the QuickCare clinic into the ACCESS centres—and this'll surprise the member, he won't understand it—but to actually expand the hours then so people can actually access them more readily, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: What this government's cuts and closure plan, that the Minister of Health has outlined, will mean is that families have to drive further and further away from their homes in order to access health care, which is the exact opposite of the recommendations

that experts were sending to the minister and to the Premier (Mr. Pallister).

The experts are saying that we should be doing—we should be doing everything we can to ensure that Manitobans stay healthy at home, and yet this minister and this Premier continue to move us in the opposite direction.

Now, we know that these clinics are going to close on January 1st, 2018, just a few short weeks away, and the government has not done enough to ensure that affected families who rely on these clinics will be able to stay healthy close to home.

Now, we know that this month of December is typically one of the busiest times of year for this, you know, QuickCare system. So will the Premier reverse his cuts to our community health care?

Mr. Goertzen: I'll try to explain this to the member, Madam Speaker. What was happening was people would get into their cars, and they would drive to the QuickCare clinic, and it would be closed. Or, they'd get there at 5 o'clock, and it would be closed.

Now, I don't know if that's what the member opposite—that's his definition of access to care, Madam Speaker. But moving the resources into the ACCESS centres and expanding the hours to ensure that people can actually get service a little bit later than 5 o'clock and know that the doors are actually going to be open is an increase of service.

Now, I know the member opposite, that doesn't fit his narrative, but he might want to come onside with increasing access to care to Manitobans and Winnipeggers, because that's what they expect of us, and that's what they expect of him too, Madam Speaker.

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

New Community Centres South Winnipeg Construction

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, now, because of the Minister of Health's actions, those doors will be closed forever.

Now, one way to help people stay—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —healthy close to home—*[interjection]*—is by investing in—

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Now, one way that this government could take action to help people stay close to—stay healthy close to home is by investing in recreation by constructing more community centres, particularly additional community centres in southwest Winnipeg. Like our schools, community centres are one of the ties that draw Winnipeggers and Manitobans together.

Now, the Province has frozen its funding for municipalities and eliminated programs that made for predictable and guaranteed funding, which allowed for cities like Winnipeg to be able to budget to construct more community centres.

Now, the consequences of this cut are becoming more and more apparent. The Pallister government has cut funding for sports, for arts and other services by over \$1 million in the last budget.

But will this government 'conviss'—commit to investing in a new recreational complex for south Winnipeg?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I'd like to thank the member opposite for that. We know how important it is to have sports and have activities for young individuals. Apparently—you know, most importantly, youth in Manitoba. It's not only good for their mental state but for their physical state, and it just ensures that they learn a sense of teamwork, Madam Speaker, and encourages them to be healthy throughout their entire life.

So we totally support sport in Manitoba. I am so proud of Manitobans that participate, and especially the recent Canada Summer Games that we had here in Manitoba, a roaring success.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: I'm pleased to hear of the support for sports, but would also like to hear—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Kinew: And who likes the Jets? I mean, come on, guys, let's all give ourselves a round of applause.

But the question has to do with resourcing sports in the communities properly. We know that people who live in the constituencies of St. Norbert, of Fort Richmond, even of Fort Whyte, are demanding that there be more recreational facilities in their parts of the city.

Now, the—by their own estimates, these residents calculate a ward as big as Winnipeg south should

have five more recreational and community centres. In order for this to happen, it will require investment on the part of this provincial government. This will pay off in the long run, but it does require resources today.

* (14:20)

Will this government reverse course and commit to investing in a new recreational complex in south Winnipeg?

Mrs. Cox: I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question.

I've been involved in our local community centre, Gateway rec centre—I'm very proud of that community centre—one of the best in all of Winnipeg, may I add—for nearly 20 years. And I know the importance of participating in sports for our children and our youth and ensuring that they get off to the very best start in life, which is very often participating in sports. So I will continue to advocate for that.

And I just want to let the member opposite know that municipalities are funded. They have a fair say, a basket funding approach. And the City of Winnipeg has that opportunity to determine how they want to fund sporting—sports centres and City of Winnipeg community centres.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: Again, the actions that this government takes in freezing or cutting funding to municipalities make it more difficult for them to be able to budget multi-year plans such as building recreational facilities that are needed in places like south Winnipeg. We know that this sort of short-sighted decision making will cause harm in the long run.

Investments like this in recreation, in keeping people healthy in the community, will pay dividends in the long run as young people develop healthy lifestyles and older members of our community can gather to focus on their well-being. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: They provide safe and constructive outlets for people in our community to even get together for social occasions and, you know, events like the craft sale that I went to in my constituency over the weekend.

Tons of good happen from these sorts of investments, but we need this Premier (Mr. Pallister) to step up.

Will the government commit to investing in a new recreational facility in south Winnipeg?

Mrs. Cox: I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question, Madam Speaker.

Unfortunately, the members opposite made about \$100 million in promises before the next—before the last election. And Manitobans listened to them. They realized that those promises that they made weren't something that they—we could, in fact, fund as a province. I mean, they have to look at themselves in the mirror, and they will know who's responsible for the very dire financial situation we're in here in Manitoba.

Health-Care Review Release of KPMG Report

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, for over a year the Health Minister has broken his government's promise on openness and transparency to Manitobans. He pretended to commit to releasing the KPMG health report in this House, but when he had a chance to actually be transparent with the people of Manitoba, who paid \$750,000 for that report, he refused. He decided only the Premier on his trip to Costa Rica, or maybe I should say the Premier's wife, should see the report.

Why has the minister refused to reveal this report to Manitobans?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I almost feel sorry for the member opposite to say the kinds of things that he did, the kind of personal attacks, because it doesn't reflect on anybody other than on himself in this House.

And as we move towards the end of this session, Madam Speaker, the member opposite, who's now had 19 months to reflect on the different things that he did in government, the different things that he did within his own caucus and within his own Cabinet, I hope will take the opportunity to reflect on setting a better tone for all members in this House than he's demonstrated with that question.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Swan: Well, Madam Speaker, no answer from this minister.

The Premier and, I guess, this minister seem to think that they don't need to show the people of Manitoba the reports that they pay for.

And first, the Premier and this minister hid behind fake excuses why they couldn't release the other KPMG report. They're also refusing to release the wait-times task force report. Through freedom of information, we've learned the minister has had the recommendations from the task force since July and, in fact, this minister has had the full report since September. His own staff planned to release the report in late October, but the Premier and, I guess, this minister, say no.

Why is this Premier and this minister refusing to show Manitobans the very reports they've paid for?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I know for the member government must seem like an awful long time ago for him. Opposition feels like a long time ago for me too, but it wasn't that long ago when the member was the minister of Justice and commissioned something called the Adult Corrections Capacity Review Committee report, paid for with taxpayers' money.

I remember asking him several times why he wouldn't release that report. He said to me and he said to the media, and I'll quote within the media: The department made the decision not to release that sensitive information for a legitimate reason, said the member for Minto, who declined to elaborate on those reasons.

Madam Speaker, we've indicated that we'll be releasing the report in its fullness on May 30th. That member hid behind privacy of information when he was a minister. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: I will agree with the Minister of Health on one thing: the election does seem like a long time ago for Manitobans who've watched this new government dismantle our health-care system in just a year and a half and who are worried about what's coming next. The government's spending nearly \$200,000—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: —on the wait-times task force report. With KPMG, it's nearly \$1 million of reports on the health-care system that the government is refusing to

reveal. This government's never open with Manitobans. They're never willing to actually show their plans, and we know why.

Manitobans did not cut—vote for cuts to nurses and doctors. They didn't vote to close urgent-care centres and emergency rooms, and they certainly didn't vote to cut QuickCare clinics.

Will this government finally be open and reveal all of their plans for cuts to our health-care system?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, the member is well versed at do what I say not what I do. He's indicated in this House that releases—the report should be released.

We've indicated that the KPMG report will be fully released in May, but that's very different than the member opposite, who commissioned a report on capacity within our prisons and then hid, hid for months and refused to actually release it, Madam Speaker. He said that the department said that he shouldn't have to release it for sensitive information, legitimate reasons, and then he declined—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —to elaborate on the reasons.

There was a privacy lawyer at that time who said that it should be released because there was no real good reason to hide it. His name is Brian Bowman, Madam Speaker. So I guess a lot of things have changed, but I would hope—I would hope—the former Attorney General would live by his own—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ambulance Services Municipal Funding Agreement

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, the provincial government unilaterally decided to abandon a long-standing cost-sharing agreement that ensures Winnipeggers can call an ambulance when they are in need most. It means City Hall will be out more than \$7 million for this year and next.

As the City contemplates less ambulances, Winnipeg patients will be the ones to pay the price. The Minister of Health has downloaded inflationary costs onto the City while taking credit for a funding hike that our former government made and using it to justify his cut.

Will the minister commit to paying his fair share of ambulance funding?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): The member opposite insinuated at the beginning of her question, although I'm sure she didn't mean to, that 911 services may not be available. Of course, they are available today, as they always have been. They'll be available tomorrow and they'll be available in the future. So any Manitoban who requires 911 service, of course, whether they live in Winnipeg or other parts of Manitoba, should know that that service remains available for them.

They should also know that those ambulance fees have been going down under our government. We committed during the election to reduce, within our first term, those fees by half. We are well on track to do that, Madam Speaker.

So we continue to provide quality service at a better price than was ever provided under the former NDP government.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: Reneging on this agreement puts Winnipeg patients at risk, especially when you consider the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) plan to upheave and uproot the city's emergency health-care system.

The minister has hinted he would consider at the very least topping up the City's funding to cover these inflationary increases. Certainly, doing so would help the City to keep ambulance services running for the remainder of this fiscal year.

* (14:30)

The minister owes it to Winnipeg patients to be up front, so will he tell us today whether he plans on topping up the funding?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, again the member opposite—now I'm not so sure if it was a mistake or if it's becoming a trend—indicates that ambulance services may not be running 'til the end of the year. That kind of inflammatory and alarmist language, of course, is not becoming of 'emy'—any member of this House, and certainly not a member of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew).

We continue, and there will continue to be quality service provided for ambulance service, whether that's in the city of Winnipeg, whether that's in rural Manitoba. And I would just ask, Madam Speaker, that all members, on an important issue like this, one that deals with public safety and public health, choose their words very carefully.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: The Minister of Health has an obligation to ensure the City can roll out emergency services properly and adequately. Instead, like transit, his government is refusing to help Winnipeg deliver essential public services to the families who need them the most.

Winnipeg families are already grappling with the massive upheaval of emergency department closures and a myriad of other health-care cuts. Now he targets a quintessential component to emergency care, putting Manitobans at risk.

Will the Minister of Health stand up for Winnipeg families and commit to upholding his agreement with the City?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, the member opposite wasn't here, so she may not remember, but I was in this House, along with many of my colleagues who are still with me today, standing up for Winnipeggers and for Manitobans when it came to health care. We were demanding that wait times needed to be reduced, because we knew that, in emergency rooms, people were waiting too long, were waiting hours and hours and hours, and some were leaving—many were leaving without ever getting service.

So, we were here for many years before the member opposite who asked the question was here, demanding that. I'm pleased to say that we've seen some early success on that. For the first time in a very long time, wait times in ERs are going down, and we'll continue to work for even more success.

P3 Plan for School Construction Public Consultation Commitment

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Three months ago, the Pallister government contracted KPMG once again for another study. This time it was on P3s for building schools. KPMG's report is now due at the end of this month.

But under considerable pressure, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) had said previously that he would actually listen to public input with regards to this particular study and that he would conduct risk workshops to find out if there was a real business case to be made here. Yet, no meeting dates have been set and no risk workshops have been held.

Why is the minister not keeping his commitment to consult with Manitobans on P3s in this province?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the question. We certainly intend to keep our commitments under the legislation of P3s as we review the proposals that are coming forward.

But our government doesn't have a bad history when it comes to consultations. In fact, we have had the most robust consultation on finances and the budget in this province of any government ever, far better than anything that that previous government ever did.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wiebe: The KPMG RFP clearly spells out that these risk workshops need to be conducted, and, again, this is all supposed to happen before the end of the month. After being pressured, the government said it would listen to stakeholders. Presumably that means school divisions, listen to students, listen to parents and listen to communities.

But, to date, no one from these groups has been contacted. No consultations have been set up. No meetings have been set. This minister can't make a business case without actually taking—talking to those who know our education system best: those front-line workers.

So I'm asking the minister again: Why is he not consulting with Manitobans on his P3 plans for schools?

Mr. Wishart: We certainly are talking to Manitobans about P3 schools on an ongoing basis. It was part of our budget consultation, as were many other issues.

But, Madam Speaker, in 2012, they were supposed to do a colleges review. Where is it? Never done. Previous government didn't meet their obligations even beginning the process, let alone completing it. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: Real consultation means taking the time to listen to Manitobans.

The minister now claims that, in fact, that has been done through this KPMG process. I would ask that the minister would table those documents here for the House so that everybody can review the

information and see these consultations which he is now saying are taking place.

We believe that experts in the department and parents and teachers and school divisions should be listened to. The government said that—in its own RFP—that it would listen to those Manitobans, but they have not yet been contacted. Time is running out, Madam Speaker.

Why is this government refusing to listen to its own RFP and listen to Manitobans about this important issue?

Mr. Wishart: Our government makes a habit of ongoing consultation with Manitobans. We've certainly done that in many ways very formally not only in terms of the budget but in terms of green programs in the province and many other things.

Perhaps the member would like to turn to his colleague to his left and ask him where—the 2012 colleges review he seemed to be looking for.

National Pharmacare Program Government Position

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): One of my favourite activities to do as a politician is door knock so I can hear directly from my constituents, and what I am hearing is that 10 per cent of people being prescribed medications are not taking them due to affordability.

I would like to table a petition that I have started and ask the Health Minister if this provincial government has considered working with the federal government on a national Pharmacare program.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, this issue of a national Pharmacare program was a matter of discussion at the recent Health ministers' meeting in Edmonton. We had a number of different discussions. It was led by the current Health minister in Ontario. It's been a long-time passion of his. We are open, of course, to the discussion.

I indicated that to the federal minister. Of course, the federal government hasn't committed any funding to it actually, Madam Speaker, and so that is a significant hurdle. But certainly we've had discussions with the federal government and look forward to them coming to the table with actual dollars.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a supplementary question.

St. Boniface Hospital Staff Vacancies

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, this past weekend, the media reported that there were nearly 100 vacant positions needing to be filled immediately at St. Boniface Hospital because of the chaos that was created by this government.

We know that the Health Minister would like to accuse someone else, whether that's the health authorities or the federal government or the former NDP government, for their poor decisions. However, these decisions came directly from this government. As of Saturday, 70 per cent of positions have yet to be filled.

Madam Speaker, does the minister want to say anything to the health authorities or the hospitals to provide some assurance that something of this nature will not happen again?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): There are many things that we are working on to ensure they don't happen again in the health-care system, and certainly key among them is the growth of wait times in emergency rooms in Winnipeg, Madam Speaker.

We saw over the last 17 years when the former government, the NDP, were there, the wait times grew every year. And despite pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into emergency rooms and into different initiatives, which were a little bit of window dressing for the actual problem, Madam Speaker, it didn't solve the problem.

We've got a long way to go, but we are confident that the measures we are taking are going to continue to see progress. We know there needs to be progress, and we look forward to progress continuing, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary.

Northern and Rural Nurses Staffing and 24-Hour Shifts

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, last week our caucus met with nurses who told us that rural and northern hospitals are understaffed and overworked. Oftentimes, nurses are working 24-hour shifts.

* (14:40)

Madam Speaker, what is the minister doing about nurses that are reportedly being forced to work these 24-hour shifts?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, we know that there are many within our health-care system—nurses, health-care aides, other medical professionals—who work long hours, who work difficult hours, who work often in the most emotional of circumstances, and we appreciate the work they do.

I had the opportunity to meet with MNU last week as well, and I expressed that to them directly, that we appreciate the work they do.

I also, of course, expressed concern that we need a real federal partner to solve some of the problems that we have, Madam Speaker. I hope that when the member opposite went door-knocking recently and had a photo op with the Member of Parliament from her area, that—and she also took the opportunity for that Member of Parliament to try to lobby for more funding, since he is one of those who are cutting it.

Fire Prevention Initiatives Burning Ban Road Signage

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Madam Speaker, it is common in Manitoba to have fire bans in place during summertime. Knowledge of risk of fire and need to communicate these important bans is crucial.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure update this House on the action he has taken in partnership with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities to enhance these safety measures?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to note that the new burning ban signs for provincial and municipal roadways have been developed. We encourage all municipal governments to move to this new sign when alerting the public that burning bans are in place as safety measures.

The uniform-look signs convey the necessary message to passing motorists in a less distracting manner and will support online and other methods of notifications.

We are proud to work alongside the AMM, and this is a great example of the co-operation that is occurring between our government and our municipal partners.

Watershed Protection Legislation Resources for Nutrient Load Management

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Today, of course, was Farmer Appreciation Day here at the Legislature, and so, on behalf of our caucus, I wanted to thank farm organizations and farmers themselves for the wonderful reception we had today.

Now, we believe it's important for Manitobans to take measures to protect watersheds and wetlands. That's why we introduced the surface water management bill in the last session, and we note that many of our good ideas were taken and rolled into Bill 7—some might say lifted, but that's okay.

Any commitment to reducing nutrient loads, however, needs to require real supports for farmers and producers.

Will the government commit to committing to real resources for farmers and producers to protect our waterways?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I appreciate the member's support for our Bill 7. We're very proud of The Sustainable Watersheds Act and how we can manage—better manage the watershed.

I only wish that he was this concerned about the watershed when his government slashed the department of water science by 14 FTEs and \$3.1 million.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Allum: Well, Madam Speaker, farmers and producers have been waiting for action from the government for more than a year and a half. They could have acted, last session, on our bill, but instead they chose to introduce their own bill, which is fine, but the key to it is, you have to have real resources behind it in order for it to be effective.

So can the minister tell us today: What resources will be committed to protect our waterways?

Ms. Squires: I can commit to members opposite and all Manitobans that we will not be cutting, like members opposite did in the water science department, of \$3.17 million or slashing it by 14 positions. We believe in growing outcomes in our watersheds, and we're really excited to be having those conversations with our watershed districts on how we can enhance and preserve our wetlands.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Allum: Maybe it would be better if the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) got up and answered this question, because the Minister of Sustainable Development seems to always want to take the low road.

We're suggesting that farmers and producers want to make a real contribution to reducing nutrient—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —loads in our waterways, and we're saying that there are elements of Bill 7 that are quite positive—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —and productive.

But, Madam Speaker, talk's cheap. How much will the government invest in making sure that our waterways are protected? It's that simple.

Ms. Squires: Madam Speaker, members opposite never cared about results during the 17 years that they were in government. We're still cleaning up the mess that they left. We're working with municipalities to ensure that their water projects can get streamlined and to ensure that the water flow is flowing through rural Manitoba into the watersheds and ensuring that we have a nutrient reduction of that—of our water as it is entering the watersheds.

Unlike members opposite, we care about Manitoba watersheds and waterways.

Manitoba Hydro Rates Proposed Future Increases

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Today, Manitoba Hydro will ask the Public Utilities Board for a 7.9 per cent rate increase, and they made it clear that they will—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: —make the same request every year until 2024. These increases would raise the current rates by close to 60 per cent, which means a \$1,000 hydro bill would reach almost \$1,600 by '23-24.

The PUB already decided once that these massive increases weren't necessary, not justified.

Will this government respect the PUB's decision and stop the plan for massive hydro hikes?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Crown Services): I certainly appreciate the question from the party of doom and gloom. And they're always look to want to play the blame game. And I think, Madam Speaker, Manitobans know the blame is right there, and they should look in the mirror, why we're looking at increased rates from Manitoba Hydro.

Madam Speaker, I'll point out that the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: —capital investment that Manitoba Hydro made as a result of their decisions will leave us a \$25-billion debt. The debt-servicing costs on that alone, Madam Speaker: \$1.3 billion.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Lindsey: The proposed hydro rate-hike increases will hurt low-income families, forcing them to choose between cutting energy use or other basic needs like healthy food—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: We've heard from Josh Brandon, from the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, that the proposed rate-hike increases will also increase the number of families living in energy poverty by 40 per cent.

In the face of the harm that this proposed rate hikes are going to cause, will this government stop its plan for massive hydro rate hikes?

Mr. Cullen: Members opposite should have been looking in the mirror a number of years ago when they made these decisions. They were not concerned about Manitobans—not concerned about low-income Manitobans when they made those decisions.

Madam Speaker, these rate hikes will be at the hands of the previous government, no doubt about it. And the—this government—this—sorry—the opposition is not prepared to deal with risk. We know the risk factors: increase in interest rates coming. We know—talk about drought in the near future. These will have negative impacts on the bottom line at Manitoba Hydro.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Lindsey: This government's hand-picked Hydro board—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: –couldn't find enough evidence to justify a massive rate hike last August. This government even granted the PUB extra powers to investigate Hydro's finances, and they still said no to Hydro's massive rate-hike request.

Will this government respect the Public Utilities Board decision and stop the plan for massive hydro rate increases?

* (14:50)

Mr. Cullen: Obviously, we appreciate the—that it's going forward, and we certainly—Manitoba Hydro has committed millions of dollars for this process. Certainly we have a lot of intervenors coming forward who will be submitting applications to the Public Utilities Board, and we do respect that process.

The facts remain, Madam Speaker, a \$25-billion debt—by decisions were made by the previous government—will cost Manitobans each and every year \$1.3 billion alone in interest costs. Those are the decisions that were made by the previous government that we have to face, our children have to face and, in fact, our grandchildren will have to face.

Highway 8 Road Conditions Timeline for Repairs

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): We've learned that Interlake drivers are being forced to deal with cracked windshields on Highway 8. The work on the stretch of highway between Winnipeg Beach and Highway 231 was finished this fall, but now it's bumpy and littered with gravel and stones. Cracked windshields and flying stones make winter driving particularly dangerous.

What is this government going to do to fix the situation on Highway 8, and when will this be resolved?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): We understand that there are some road conditions on Highway 8 with loose stones and we would suggest that individuals drive carefully. The department is looking at it.

I'd also like to point out to the member that when, for instance, it came to Freedom Road, not a mile, not a yard, not a foot, not an inch was ever completed in 17 years, and, Madam Speaker, I want Manitobans to know not just is phase 1 complete, phase 2 now went out for tender.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Access to Health Care

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across the province.

(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

First, to urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

And second, to urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

Madam Speaker, this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across this province—across the province.

(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care; and,

(2) To urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

This petition's signed by Jacquie Sheldon, Darlene Dowse, Michelle Chornoby and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Honourable member for St. Johns, on a petition.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to the front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across the province.

(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

(2) To urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across the province.

(2) These health-care cuts—excuse me—these health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to represent clear detailed plans for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

(2) We urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiency of diagnostic testing in Manitoba health-care facilities.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member from Elmwood, on a petition.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Madam Speaker in the Chair

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across the province.

(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

* (15:00)

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and have failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource

plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across the province.

(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

(2) The provincial government—to urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

This petition was signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across the province.

(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care; and,

(2) To urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

Madam Speaker, this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans. Thank you.

Rural EMS Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government announced a plan to close 18 EMS stations in Manitoba.

(2) The recommendation for the closures was based on a report titled Manitoba EMS System Report, issued in March 2013, that used data from 2011 that's no longer relevant.

The standard of care for EMS services in Manitoba is a 30-minute response time for 90 per cent of the population, 90 per cent of the time.

(4) The information entitled information pack for rural municipalities stated in 2012 that the 30-minute standard was reached 95.81 per cent of the time, and 95.52 per cent in 2015-2016.

The statistics show that, by moving to the proposed system, Manitobans will be receiving worse care.

(6) The proposed plan includes the closure of the Grandview EMS station and the building of two new stand-alone EMS stations in Cowan and Gilbert Plains with no provision of a cost estimate.

(7) There is a vacant Manitoba Hydro building in Grandview that was previously used to store large equipment which could allow for the deployment of ambulances.

(8) In addition to the 39-bed personal-care home in Grandview, the hospital is fully staffed with 18 beds, three full-time doctors, two nurse practitioners and a full complement of support staff, including 24-hour diagnostic services.

The Grandview EMS station employs four full-time primary-care or intermediate-care paramedics who routinely provide community education, primary- and/or intermediate-care support to emergency medical responders and other paramedicine services to assist the staff of Grandview hospital.

(10) The Grandview EMS services 1,500 people within the municipal boundary, Tootinaowaziibeeng First Nation, the southern half of the Duck Mountain Provincial Park and other outlying areas, including the communities of Gilbert Plains and Ashville.

(11) The Grandview ambulance responded to 680 calls in 2014, 571 calls in 2015 and 673 calls in 2016.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living to provide an additional 12 primary-care or intermediate-care paramedics to facilitate 24-7 coverage at the Grandview ambulance station.

(2) To urge the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living to provide a second ambulance vehicle at the Grandview station to allow for deployment to designated geo-positions.

(3) To urge that the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living make use of the vacant Manitoba

Hydro building as a garage for the two ambulance vehicles.

(4) To urge that the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living install a computer-based system in the ambulance vehicles to facilitate geo-positioning and dynamic and flexible deployment to any area covered in the proposed plan in this region.

Signed by Chantel Frasier, Pat Forrest, Anne Marcyniuk and many others.

Access to Health Care

Mr. Greg Selinger (St. Boniface): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislature, and the background to this petition is as follows:

Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, QuickCare clinics and an urgent-care centre and more are occurring across the province.

These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

And the provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals, nor citizens, for that matter, who provide direct care to patients.

The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

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

To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

And to urge the provincial government to make the real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across the province and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health-care system.

* (15:10)

Signed by Divina Cosimo, Eric Contreras, Bruce [*phonetic*] Morin and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more are occurring across the province.

These health cuts—(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, healthy—quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

Three—we petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

(2) To urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's health-care system that will provide a direct benefit to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

This is signed by Krista Deleurme, Leela [*phonetic*] Vath and Russell Elover, and many, many others.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Direct cuts to front-line health-care services, including the closure of emergency departments, intensive-care units, an urgent-care centre and more, are occurring across the province.

(2) These health cuts will drastically reduce the ability of Manitobans to access timely, quality health-care services.

(3) The provincial government made these decisions unilaterally, failing to consult with front-line health-care professionals who provide direct care to patients.

(4) The provincial government has had its main focus on the bottom line and failed to present a clear and detailed plan for the public health-care system that will actually improve and optimize patient care for Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to make a real investment in Manitoba's public health-care system that will provide direct benefits to patients, such as: increasing access to primary care, the development of a provincial health human resource plan, increasing publicly funded personal-care homes across Manitoba and increasing the efficiencies of diagnostic testing in Manitoba's health facilities.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, will you call Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 7 this afternoon.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 7—The Sustainable Watersheds Act (Various Acts Amended)

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Sustainable Development, on Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act (Various Acts Amended).

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), that Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act (Various Acts

Amended); Loi sur les bassins hydrographiques durables, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

And Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of this bill and I table that message.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister for Sustainable Development, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture, that Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act (Various Acts Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill and the message has been tabled.

Ms. Squires: As the Minister of Sustainable Development, I'm excited to bring forward legislation that will strengthen watershed planning throughout the province and provide a suite of complementary measures that build a solid framework for environmentally and economically sound decision making in Manitoba.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Bill 7 is Canada's most comprehensive watershed legislation to improve the health of our waterways. This is the first major step in our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan. It is a more holistic approach to improving climate resilience on the landscape.

We will empower the role of conservation districts and the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation to ensure water management and planning respects landowners and their unique, local landscape conditions. Watershed-based drainage and water-retention planning will help us protect our wetlands, improve water quality, reduce flooding, stop illegal drainage and reduce our carbon footprint. Our bill also enables the implementation of the Alternative Land Use Services model to help reduce flooding and improve water quality and nutrient management.

Bill 7 reflects input from a wide range of stakeholders, including the public, who participated in the consultation on three water initiatives: the GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds, the modernizing the Conservation Districts program and watershed-based drainage and water resource management in late summer of 2017.

The sustainable watersheds bill makes significant improvements to four different statutes: The Conservation Districts Act, The Water

Protection Act, The Water Rights Act and The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act.

To recognize that land use and water management is best undertaken at a watershed or basin scale, conservation districts will be renamed to watershed districts. Over time, boundaries will be updated to reflect watershed boundaries for a more holistic management. We will further consult with conservation districts and municipalities about these changes.

The bill will support our objective of building and strengthening the diverse group of stakeholders involved in land and water management. New measures will enable watershed districts to work outside their boundaries and form agreements within municipalities, agencies and indigenous communities to implement their watershed management plan and support their role in ecological-goods-and-services programming.

The change will also enable watershed districts to fund ALUS-type projects under the GROW framework. This will be key in enabling projects for the future. This program will incentivize landowners to retain water on their land rather than trying to drain it. By retaining water, vegetation in and around wetlands reduces nutrients in the water. Nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen, which got there from human and agriculture activity, are harmful to water and promote algae growth in Lake Winnipeg when in excess quantities, which then pose a problem for fish and swimmers. Water retention also helps with flood mitigation because it slows the flow of water.

Part of GROW is also the goal to stop the loss of wetlands on a net basis. Wetlands are such an important part of our environment. They sequester carbon, they reduce nutrient loading into water and they help mitigate flooding. This is why we will focus on protecting seasonal, semi-permanent and permanent wetlands and require anyone who absolutely must drain a wetland to restore in a specific ratio or provide funding for such a restoration.

Since Manitoba receives 70 per cent of its water from upstream jurisdictions, transboundary water management is critical to protecting water quality and quantity in Manitoba. The importance of transboundary water management is recognized in amendments to The Water Protection Act. New principles are established, such as the need to share information and collaborate with other jurisdictions on strategies to reduce drought and flooding and to

improve water quality. Transboundary water groups such as the Red River Basin Commission and the Assiniboine River Basin Initiative are recognized and provided with opportunities to receive technical information and financial support.

* (15:20)

Amendments to The Water Protection Act will also enable the development of nutrient targets that can be used to gauge progress towards improving water quality. The amendments will provide a means for water management groups and governments in Manitoba and other jurisdictions that share a transboundary river basin with Manitoba to measure water quality and track progress on reducing nutrient levels in water bodies.

In support of open government and improved transparency, progress toward meeting nutrient targets will be shared and reported regularly. Amendments under The Water Rights Act will streamline drainage licensing requirements to allow for the registration of low-risk, low-impact water control works, further supporting the government's commitment to reducing red tape.

We face a large surface water management challenge in Manitoba. Complaints regarding local overland flooding and surface water management challenges from agriculture producers, rural landowners and rural municipalities and conservation districts and others are frequent. Many watersheds lack a concrete plan for surface water management, including a plan to ensure maintenance, water retention and new drainage activities are managed from a watershed perspective to ensure that upstream activities do not overload downstream infrastructure.

For such low-impact projects, the bill would allow for them to be registered rather than licensed with proponents. This way they are able to proceed to construction within a short administrative review period that will be determined in the regulations. This will alleviate a lot of frustration among landowners who currently have to wait a long time for approval of minor projects. This will also free up important department resources to be focused on drainage and water projects with significant environmental consequences, rather than the more minor projects. Development of the plan will take time and will include critical input from local key stakeholders, including the new watershed districts, rural municipalities and the agriculture sector.

Amendments to The Water Rights Act also support the protection of wetland benefits, including water retention in watersheds across Manitoba. The amendments will include a new requirement for an applicant to offset the drainage of prescribed wetlands. Alternatively, an individual may choose to pay an amount to be used to restore or enhance the wetlands. Under amendments to The Water Rights Act, inspection and enforcement tools will also be modernized and offence and penalty provisions will be enhanced to be comparable to other provincial statutes. Higher fines will deter illegal drainage projects and thereby provide for a more ecological and fairer drainage system across the land.

The bill will also amend The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act to expand the definition of habitat to specifically include wetlands and enable the corporation to carry out restoration and enhancement projects related to the wetland benefits, as prescribed as The Water Rights Act. This will put Manitoba Habitat Heritage community in unique and important position to attract private funds to Manitobans and to restore wetlands. It will be a perfect complement to our GROW program.

Bill 7 will also contribute to the reduction of red tape. In addition to improving drainage licensing framework under The Water Rights Act already mentioned, amendments to The Conservation Districts Act will make the administrative process for districts much simpler. Appeals will now go directly to the municipal board with their decisions being final.

I'd like to conclude with a few quotes from various supportive stakeholders.

For example, Dimple Roy, who is the director of water policy at the International Institute for Sustainable Development, said: Sustainable Watersheds Act is a long time in the coming and I think it is a great start for Manitoba.

Brian Lemon, who is the general manager with Manitoba Beef Producers, said: it's a great thing for us to see the Province taking an interest and really trying to modernize the legislation. I think this bill coming forward and the Province modernizing and coming up to date with some of these things is a big signal forward.

And Scott Stephens from Ducks Unlimited Canada, who's the director for regional operations for the prairie provinces, said: We've been focused on the component around protecting wetlands, which

isn't a big surprise coming from our organization. Enabling the legislation that provides for greater protection of existing wetlands is what we've been communicating with the government for a long time, and we definitely heard from them today that they're listening and looking to do that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in conclusion, I'd like to say that this new legislation will address surface water management in a more focused and comprehensive way than ever before. It strengthens watershed base planning to move from conservation districts to watershed districts and by making drainage and water management simpler and more accountable.

It also enables the implementation of an ecological services program that will support the protection of wetlands and incentivize landowners to retain water on their properties.

I look forward to the unanimous support of this House for passage of Bill 7.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member of the following sequence: The first question will be by the official opposition critic or designate, subsequent questions asked by each independent member, remaining questions asked by any opposition members and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): And thank the minister for bringing this legislation forward. I also want to thank her for the briefing that she and her staff provided myself and the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) earlier today.

Just as a follow-up to one of the things we were discussing this morning, would the minister be willing to table a map of Manitoba showing the locations where nutrient levels are being recorded in Manitoba? It doesn't have to be right now, but just table the map for myself and any other interested member in the days ahead.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I thank members opposite for that question, and also for coming for a bill briefing and having a good conversation about this legislation. I also do want to thank all the stakeholders who participated in the consultation on the documents that helped build the framework for this legislation. And,

in regards to those maps, yes, absolutely I will provide those to you at my earliest opportunity.

Mr. Altemeyer: I thank the minister very much for that response.

Obviously, there's many areas of overlap between what the government's brought forward and what we have been looking to do as well. So, you know, a lot of times in this House things do not flow easily, but with this piece of legislation there is a nice amount of congruence.

And, again, a topic that the minister and I discussed this morning, just to put it on the record, if she could just reiterate, she mentioned the seasonal, semi-permanent and permanent wetlands. Could she just mention how those will be supported through the ALUS program and the class numbers involved?

Ms. Squires: That's an excellent question. And so the seasonal, permanent and semi-permanent wetlands, which are classified under the Ducks Unlimited classification system as class 3, 4 and 5, those ones are absolutely essential in our watershed. They are the kidneys for our watershed and we want to ensure their protection at all costs. So we are looking at a ratio.

If a landowner absolutely must drain one of those classifications of wetlands, we will be looking at offsets, perhaps a ratio of building another wetland on another portion of their land or paying a financial compensation to an entity like the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank you to the minister.

And just further to that, just so we all have it clear, a landowner who has a class 3, 4 or 5 wetland on their property would, under the funding that need being possible by this legislation could potentially access funding from the government to simply preserve the wetland that's on their property.

Ms. Squires: We are really excited about the GROW component, the GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds component of this legislation that is based on the Alternative Land Use Services framework, and it would see the compensation scheme developed so that we could incentivise farmers to enhance and preserve wetlands and ultimately be taking land out of production and setting that aside for wetlands. And that is a fundamental component of this legislation.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I wonder what effect this legislation would have on the Seal River

watershed, the Hayes River watershed; both are heritage rivers on greenstone belts which are very important for—to the mining industry Crown land.

And what is the cost of the implementation of this bill?

Ms. Squires: Well, I thank the member for the question.

And, of course, all the funding framework that we would use for either incenting farmers to be taking acres out of production and how this will actually be implemented from a—we're going to use the GROW framework, but all that will be determined and decided upon in the regulations, which we will do broad consultations on.

* (15:30)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, two points I'd ask the minister.

One is, given that phosphorus is a major problem, we've removed phosphorus or decreased the phosphorus in residential dishwasher automatic dishwasher detergents, but we still haven't addressed commercial automatic dishwasher detergents. Will the minister act on that?

And, second, the issue of enforcement and the potential use of satellite maps in order to monitor enforcement.

Ms. Squires: Those were great conversations that we'd had earlier in the bill briefing, and I thank the honourable member for attending that bill briefing. And, as I'd indicated earlier, certainly looking to expand the options available to us in terms of bringing—or eliminating phosphorus in—the use of phosphorus in all dishwashing products and really looking at how we could implement that. I understand that there are some obstacles to that. But it is something that our government is certainly looking to move forward, as we know that phosphorus reduction on Lake Winnipeg is essential. And I look forward to working with him and keeping him apprised of that.

Mr. Altemeyer: I'm wondering if the minister could inform the House what criteria her government plans to use to evaluate which projects should receive funding. Lots of different ecological services are created by different wetlands, different landscapes.

What are the ecological services that are most important to this government that they will use when deciding where to put precious dollars?

Ms. Squires: Well, as we've said, wetlands are integral to the watershed. They are the kidneys of this watershed. And we will be more or less empowering our partners, whether they're within the watershed districts, the newly formed watershed districts, to help with some of that fieldwork and working in conjunction with landowners and the municipality and ourselves, of course, to ensure that we are incentivizing the right project that will enhance the ecology of the land.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thanks to the minister for that.

Will water retention—and just to follow up on my earlier point—will keeping water on the land, water retention and nutrient removal, will those be the two main criteria that the government's looking for when they see projects come forward?

Ms. Squires: The criteria will be certainly determined and laid out in the regulations. But I can assure the member that nutrients and, you know, ensuring that nutrient runoff is lessened is a key priority for our government.

Mr. Altemeyer: Just back to The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act, I note that in the earlier version of this bill, which I brought in last year, section 3 had a specific reference that would have said, including wetlands, into the mandate and purpose of this organization. That reference seems to have been removed in section 3 of the current act, and yet, one of the reasons to update this act was to specifically empower Manitoba Habitat Heritage to be able to work on wetland projects.

So does the minister have an explanation of why that reference to wetlands specifically was removed?

Ms. Squires: We are certainly working with the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation to ensure the integrity of water in the entire watershed. And wetland restoration, enhancement and protection is a key fundamental component of that.

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, I guess I'd like to—I mean, thank the minister for that answer. I think we're on the same page.

Would she perhaps consider, then, a friendly amendment to bring it back to the original language so that it's clear in the legislation that part of the new mandate for Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is, in fact, to work on wetland projects?

Ms. Squires: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Altemeyer: I thank the minister for that positive response.

One of the areas where our previous legislation that our caucus introduced, or supported me in introducing as our environment critic, did relate to timing of the reporting stage and we did talk about this this morning.

But could the minister perhaps give us all a rationale for why the reporting on nutrient levels in Manitoba's waterways, why that has been bumped back to such a late date compared to what was originally proposed?

Ms. Squires: That was just—that decision was made to be reflective of the resources available. We know that under the former administration there were 14 full-time employees that were reduced in the water science, watershed and drainage department, and a reduction of \$3.2 million. So we're working through that to empower our department to be able to compile the data, report on the data and analyze the reports, and they are—we are committed to enhancing that through legislation for every four years, but certainly looking to release the data on the nutrient collections on a more regular basis.

Mr. Altemeyer: And I thank the minister for that answer and for her commitment to—you know, if staff resources are tight, maybe a full report every year is not possible to—but to at least provide the data set on a more regular basis, as she puts it, hopefully annual.

I would just point out, and maybe I'm wrong in this, but in section 4.0.2.3—got to love this government language we get to work in—it's on page 27, in plain—in plainer language. It looks like the first year to be reported on is 2019, but the timing of the report, it wouldn't have to be done until the December—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Ms. Squires: I didn't catch the end of the question but I'm assuming it's about the timing of the reporting of the data and we know that we certainly do not take anything for granted as to when this bill would receive passage by this House. I am certainly hopeful that it would receive unanimous support of all members and that we could anticipate the passage of this bill and the reporting of the data that would be collected as a result of this enabling legislation in very short order.

Mr. Altemeyer: Just to conclude my earlier question, under—on page 28, under timing of reports, the report under this section would have to be completed by December 31st of the year after the year which the report's talking about. So that's December 31st of 2020, but the report wouldn't have to be tabled until the Legislature is sitting again, which takes us to March or April of 2021.

Am I correct in interpreting that as the timeline of when Manitobans would first get a report on nutrient levels at various locations in Manitoba's waterways?

Ms. Squires: That is certainly an area that I'm willing to consult with Manitobans on, to see if the data is compiled on and ready to report on January 1st, according to the legislation, but waiting until a first day of a sitting, whenever that may be, in the—later on in winter. If there was a significant desire to have that report tabled immediately, I would be willing to listen to Manitobans on what they have to say in that regard.

Mr. Altemeyer: Again, I thank the minister for that answer. Just on to the conservation districts section of the act now, under the new proposal brought forward—again, very similar to what we had proposed, moving from conservation districts to watersheds—what provisions will there be in the legislation to ensure that local watershed districts are the ones making decisions about which projects to fund in their local watershed areas?

* (15:40)

Ms. Squires: We certainly do want to empower the watershed districts to be able to facilitate projects on the ground as quickly as possible. We know that we've heard loud and clear from Manitobans who are frustrated with lengthy delays for facilitating their project or getting to work on their projects, particularly when it is a small water project that's low risk, low impact. And so a lot of the—like, our regulations will stipulate what projects can proceed through a registration process as opposed to a licensing project, and the watershed districts will be empowered to have a seat at the table to help formulate some other decisions that are not as clear-cut.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time is up.

Mr. Altemeyer: Again, thank the minister for our very positive dialogue here today, I feel.

One last suggestion: I'm wondering if she would be open to giving the new watershed districts the ability to comment on any drainage application or application that's made under The Planning Act, where that application could reasonably be seen to have impact on the work that they are doing within their own watersheds. Right now, conservation districts don't have an official ability to comment. It's just based on who can form a good relationship with the relative entities. So would she be open to including that in her legislation?

Ms. Squires: I'm certainly open to consulting on that. It certainly does make sense, as we move towards a more holistic watershed-based approach, that the watersheds are going to be keeping an eye on all the water that is moving within that watershed district and will be well informed to make suggestions and recommendations. And so I'm certainly willing to consult on the member's suggestion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There—time for debate.

Any speakers?

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I'm glad to stand up today and offer some further comments on the bill that we have before us. I want to thank the minister, again, for the briefing that she and her staff provided myself and other interested parties this morning and thank her as well for the, I think, very productive back and forth we just had in the Q and A section on the act. Most of the time, when people watch government or see government in action, it usually involves a lot of us screaming and yelling at each other, and that does happen. It will undoubtedly happen again. But there are times, and I think it's important for the public to know, that there are times when that's not the case and when there is considerable overlap in terms of a common objective that all of us can see will benefit our province.

Our government, of course, previously was working on this issue very closely and had brought forward our version of this legislation. And it, unfortunately, did not pass before the dissolution moment and we headed into the election. As the opposition critic, I was then pleased to reintroduce that act with a few areas that were tightened up, some things that I thought made it a stronger and more functional piece of legislation. And the

government at the time indicated they would not be passing it and would be bringing in their own legislation. I believe the previous minister even said that—she promised that the new legislation would be stronger than what I had brought in. And I was like, well, great, if that's true. No arguments here. I'm not sure that that happened, but, again, when we have such a large amount of congruency, the phrase comes to mind: the perfect is the enemy of the good.

And so I'm honestly pleased to see that the government has now brought in their own legislation, and we'll see how the discussions between House leaders proceed in terms of timing and how quickly it might be passed. Certainly, when we were in government and when I was working on my version of this bill, there was a lot of groundwork that had been done already with a wide variety of stakeholders to have input on what we were talking about, to find that ever precious and sometimes difficult common ground. And I want to thank those members of our previous government who did that work, whether they were ministers or political staff or civil servants. And the government has copied and built on a lot of that work. There's whole sections of their act which are more or less carbon copies of what we had proposed. That's just the sign of a good idea that I think everyone is recognizing needs to be implemented.

In the question and answers that we just had, the minister and I, I did touch on a few of the areas where I think this bill could be further improved and I was encouraged to hear she's open to the possibility of some amendments that perhaps she would want to bring forward or perhaps that I would bring forward so we can talk about that further.

One of the areas where there's probably the most noticeable difference between what I had proposed and what we have here today does relate to the timing of reports on what our nutrient situation is like in Manitoba's waterways. To my mind, this is an exceptionally important issue, not just within Manitoba but, as the minister noted, a huge proportion of the nutrients that end up in our province, that end up in our lakes, actually originate from elsewhere. And I am of the belief that being able to track the nutrients at various borders, whether it's the Saskatchewan border, the Ontario border or the US border, is a very important thing so that we know what is happening as the water enters into Manitoba and then also we need to have monitoring stations within our own province at various intervals

along the way, to see how we are doing on the very same regard.

And I'm not quite sure that I understand yet why the government has put such a delayed process in place for this. The first year that would be required for public reporting is 2019, so that's the first data set that would be made publicly available under this legislation.

The report would not have to be completed internally by the government until the end of the following year, so that takes us all the way to December 31st of 2020, and then that report might not end up being tabled publicly until the legislature has started sitting again in the spring of 2021, if we stick to our normal sessional calendar. So we're at, you know, early December of 2017 and it won't be until March of 2021 before citizens of Manitoba will have access to information that is being collected right now.

There are nutrient monitoring stations all over Manitoba and that data is collected every year by the staff, by the civil servants, and analyzed, presumably, and reports sent to the minister, so I'm not quite sure why the government is reticent to have a speedier time frame. And I also feel that the commitment or the requirement in this version of the law for the government to only have to report every four years on average results also is a little less than what I think we need in order to make good decisions and see how the situation is evolving in Manitoba's waterways.

All of us know that our lakes can be very severely impacted and already have been by excess nutrients that we are generating in different ways, and that are coming to our province from outside of Manitoba. I would hope that saving these lakes would be a priority for the government and to just have one report come out every four years, admittedly that was a provision in our previous government's bill. I didn't think that was good enough, so I changed it to be annual reporting. And certainly you can have pretty wide fluctuations from one year to the next, if you have a wet year followed by a dry year but, you know, having the annual reporting can certainly help explain those variations in the data set and I do think the data set deserves to be made public so that all of us can see what's going on and we can see how much progress has been made or how much farther we still have to go.

* (15:50)

So that would be one area where I certainly have to register a bit of disappointment in terms of what has been tabled today with Bill 7. And there are some other elements of the legislation, which I touched on in my question and answer, where I think the bill could be further improved. But, overall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said from the outset, this is largely the same legislation that our government had prepared. It's largely the same legislation that I had brought forward. It is only unfortunate that we have lost a couple of years unnecessarily where good work could've been happening on the land using this new framework.

But I do want to compliment and commend the government for bringing it forward, and I look forward to working with the minister on some ways where perhaps we can mutually improve this legislation for the betterment of current and future generations.

So thank you very much.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): It is quite a privilege to stand up and speak to this bill. It is a— it's a responsible bill, and my municipal government and my agriculture background looks at all the components of this bill, and it really addresses a number of issues in terms of water. So I do want to congratulate the Minister of Sustainable Development (Ms. Squires), the current one and the former one, on bringing the legislation forward. So—and it's long overdue in terms of what's actually happening on the ground in municipalities, what's happening on the ground in a lot of rural [*inaudible*]. This is long overdue, and it—and the approach does bring a real comprehensive action plan to dealing with a number of the water issues we're all facing. And I've used the term before as a shared responsibility, and it's—the water quality is not something that we should be pointing fingers at, but we should all be looking towards solutions on how to better the water for our kids and on—our kids after that. So it's really, really important.

So, yes, the bill does make amendments to the four acts: The Conservation Districts Act and The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act and The Water Protection Act and The Water Rights Act. Again, my background from rural Manitoba, water has been a challenge since probably the start of the development of Manitoba is dealing with water issues, and in our region, it's—that was what agriculture producers did. They carved an economy out of the bush and they had water issues and they drained it and they made

land productive, and everybody benefited from that. Everybody benefited not just in the food supply but in the—in all the other advances that we've had as a society. That was—that's the—really the story of agriculture and the story of land management and the story of water management. So it's been going on since the very beginning. And, of course, on the municipal level, water doesn't know boundaries. It doesn't know municipal boundaries, it knows watersheds, and it knows that it runs towards a common point, and there's a lot of variety of interests within that watershed that contribute to the water quality, so.

But again, the improvements that we've made in terms of water drainage and land management, I don't think anybody realistically wants to go back in time to the way it was 100 years ago. So, you know, we live in a pretty good world, a First World country with a lot of good things. So we need to be working now on sustainable water solutions for the future. Again, we've got a lot of years of progress in land development, and now we have to look for ways to slow water down, improve water quality, evaluate nutrient loading, evaluate the speed of water, and this sustainable watershed plan is the right approach towards fixing that.

The watersheds are considered the most ecologically and administer the appropriate unit for managing water, and water doesn't care. Again, it doesn't care about municipal boundaries at all. The watersheds are a host of variety of activities. It would drain to a common place. And we need to update and upgrade systems and build capacity to slow water down, to increase and preserve wildlife habitat and improve water quality. This is all the parts that go into this new Sustainable Watersheds Act.

So the first part, again, is the 'waterment'—watershed management strategy. This bill sets up, essentially, a new authority that really, essentially, operates overtop of local politics, local concerns, and works on watershed planning at a different plane, a plane that's based on the boundaries of the watershed. And this system—again, it doesn't get clogged down by a lot of the day-to-day 'pollocks' that—politics that can happen with water, even whether it was agriculture or municipal level or even funding of larger projects.

This new plan encompasses a number of municipalities over a larger geographic area, and it's— you just have the ability to tackle some of these

major challenges in water infrastructure and green infrastructure that are needed to slow water down, to properly evaluate water. And, again, it's—it working towards the interests of all the stakeholders, whether you're sitting on the—at the lake in a cottage or you're up at the other end of the—at the beginning of the watershed, whether it's agriculture or whether it's in the park—

An Honourable Member: The headwaters.

Mr. Michaleski: At the headwaters. Thank you very much. And I was looking for that word.

So—but, really, a lot of the problems in the watersheds are—they're complex, and some of them are easy to solve, but not necessarily municipal problems, because it might be a problem that came from the adjacent municipality. This is where it needs to—this new authority doesn't look at the boundaries. It just looks at solving the problems in a comprehensive and inclusive way.

So that's part 1 of The Sustainable Watersheds Act, the second part being the habitat heritage act. And that's the role of the Manitoba heritage—or, Habitat Heritage Corporation, as their role has been in conserving and enhancing wetlands or wildlife. And they're going to be brought in, and part of their mandate is to work with the wetlands, so—and they've been doing a good job for 30 years, and they carry out wetland restoration and enhancement projects. And they're a non-profit Crown corporation that focuses on private land solutions, which is the one dimension that's—often muddies watershed planning, is when it comes to private landowners, agricultural producers. This group is able to bridge solutions with the stakeholders, the agriculture stakeholders, the landowner stakeholders, to find solutions. So we—and they do that working in partnership with the landowners, and they use voluntary, farm-friendly conservation initiatives.

And I know of—in my area, there's a number of areas within my constituency where this practice has been used, and it's good to expand on this when it comes to preserving wetlands.

So the key is to work with ag. And again, ag wants to be as much a part of the solution as anybody. They're very, very responsible in what they try to do, and they want to be part of the solution. They don't want—they would *[inaudible]*

* (16:00)

Now, the third part is The Water Protection Act, and this is about measuring results. And, really, if you're going to be doing a lot of work in terms of water quality and preserving wetlands, and you're trying to make those positive impacts into water quality, the first thing you've got to do is make sure that you're monitoring your results and checking the progress that you're making, check where the load—or where the problems are coming from. And, then, when you invest or make contributions to those water quality things, you want to be able to quantify that and be able to justify that to the people that are contributing, and they're looking for a return on the investment and that being water quality. So it's—the part 3 is about getting and providing results. And that's just smart business.

Part 4 is The Water Rights Act, where it streamlined the process for low-impact drainage and water retention which—that has been a real sore spot. I know in—from some of the constituents I've heard, some of the municipalities that I've heard, it's been a lot of red tape. It's been a real hurdle to get real minor works done. So we're hoping that that simplifies that.

And, of course, projects that are bigger in scope. You know, you're not going to need—you're going to have those offsets to be able to—it's not a stop sign on the project, but it's a caution, and we're looking—will be looking for offsets. So this is the way I am interpreting this.

So, really, this whole bill is a very positive step in the right direction towards water management and strategies to manage water effectively amongst stakeholders, and I really thank the minister for bringing it forward.

Thank you.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I'm very happy to get up to speak to Bill 7 this afternoon and to put a few additional comments on the record.

I want to begin by first thanking my friend from Wolseley for the work that he's done in relation to the issues raised and addressed in Bill 7. You know, he does a tremendous amount of work on environmental issues as our environment critic, of course, and he is highly knowledgeable with enormous expertise, and I noted in the question and answer period that happened earlier in which the minister and my friend from Wolseley were going back and forth that the minister was open to looking at some amendments that he had suggested, open to

looking at them—no commitment there, but open to looking at them. And that's to her credit.

And—but I want to encourage her, at all times, to take advantage of his expertise and his thoughtfulness on these kinds of issues. He has a great deal to offer, and I wanted to make sure that in my opening remarks on the bill, I probably acknowledged the work that he's done on behalf of our party, of course, and on behalf of this Legislature in general and, I might say, on behalf of all Manitobans. And so I wanted to thank him for the work that he does and the good sense that he brings to these issues.

And I do that in addition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I want to acknowledge that much of the work that appears in this bill is based on—quite clearly on work that he did in the development of a similar bill in the last session. And—which itself which was an extension of a surface water management act that we had on the agenda in the—prior to the last election. As it was, and I know my friend from Concordia will remember how many excellent bills we had at that point ready to go, and at the end of the day, the opposition, now government, was only interested in debating a few, and that's how things roll out. But the truth of the matter, I suppose, is that we've been sitting on surface water management acts, legislation, for more than a few years now. And so I can say that while we're very happy to have seen this legislation be tabled by the responsible minister.

We also are wondering why it's taken her so long when it could have been done much sooner, especially since this bill really reflects largely what was in not only the previous bill from the last session but, in fact, in the legislation that we had tabled, as I say, before the last election.

Now it's often said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and so we'll take that—we'll take both the imitation, because we want to see good legislation; that's for sure. And we don't often get flattered from the other side, so we'll take a little bit of that.

But no Manitoban's going to be under any illusions that the government came up with this all on their own, because, quite frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I think you know this: It doesn't really stand in line with all the other pieces of legislation that has been tabled by the government. Certainly, doesn't fit with the austerity agenda that's been the

government's main preoccupation since it came to power 18 long, long, long, long months ago.

And so that's why, in question period today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were asking the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), but, of course, it's the government's—up to the government who gets up to answer. I'm delighted that the Minister for Sustainable Development did get up. But one of the reasons we asked the question in the House today was to make it clear that while you can put stuff in legislation and you can appear to be on the right side of most of the issues, at the end of the day, if you're not prepared to provide the proper investments, none of the good stuff that is in the legislation will come to pass.

There'll be very few incentives, in the case that I was speaking of during question period, for farmers and producers to get on board unless they feel like there is substantial financial supports and the resources in place for them—those farmers and for those producers to make the very kind of transitions in terms of land management and as it relates to surface water management for them to take the actions that we desperately—desperately—need them to take in order to address a variety of environmental issues.

So I wanted to start just by, of course, acknowledging my friend from Wolseley and the extraordinary work that he does on our behalf and on behalf of the House and his constituents in Wolseley and on behalf of all Manitobans.

Also appreciate—to appreciate the government for tabling this piece of legislation and for—really, for imitating, in large measure, what had been done by the official opposition and by the government—previous NDP government earlier. And, to make sure that there's a proper understanding and a proper context for where this kind of legislation emerged from, we wouldn't—it's not about credit so much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as it is about the sort of the depth of the context that needs to be always be understood and acknowledged.

And, certainly, we'll be out talking with Manitobans about this legislation. We'll be noting the elements of it that really have been on the table for quite some time, and that—while we're pleased that the government has decided to imitate what we have previously tabled in this House and, nevertheless, because it is a form of imitation, we have to ask why it didn't happen right off the bat, immediately following the last election, why it's taken 18 months

to get to this point when the material was already there and available at the fingertips of whatever minister happened to be in control of the department. I think there's been two so far in less than 18 months, and so you never know who's going to be in charge of the file.

And so we would've liked to see a faster, more accelerated schedule for the timing of this legislation to be tabled, and we're not opposed, I don't think, to trying to find ways to make things happen reasonably quickly, if that's the desire of all members of the House.

* (16:10)

As it was put by my friend from Wolseley earlier, there's very few occasions on which we have a common cause in the House and in the Chamber. And that's as it should be, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Government governs; opposition opposes in the simplest way of thinking about it. And so it's not so unusual that we should disagree. And what is actually unusual is that we should find common cause and common areas of understanding, and so we want to make sure that there is quick and immediate action on a bill such as this.

It's been, as I said, been around for quite a few years now. We certainly would have preferred if the government had moved faster, but, that said, we're quite pleased to be able to have this legislation be tabled and to stand and debate it today.

It's probably worth saying that the surface water management act that was tabled by us in the House some time ago to continue to work towards the goal of keeping our lakes and rivers and waterways safe and healthy for generations to come was met with quite significant appreciation from stakeholders across Manitoba. I have here a quote from Scott Stephens of Ducks Unlimited Canada from December 7th, 2015, which he called at the time, this is a land-quote-landmark announcement, is the beginning of the government of Manitoba's insightful leadership toward a healthier environment in our province.

And so I raise that because I want to reiterate not only has this legislation been around for quite some time, but the significant amount of work that was done earlier in terms of consultation, in terms of research, in terms of dialogue and in terms of communication with critical stakeholders here in Manitoba and with Manitobans themselves, and there was—and I recall being at the committee when this—

when the original surface water management act was tabled in the House, that we had any number of stakeholders come and said, yes, thank God, finally we're moving forward on this issue.

As I said, this quote was from December 7th, 2015. We're now heading toward 2018; the government was elected in April 2016. This is something that could have and, I might say, should have been brought forward by the government at the first possible opportunity, and so we don't want to have too much more delay, too much more time go past. Time is of the essence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to surface water issues, with water in general. Many have said, and I'm inclined to agree, that the key issue of 21st century will be water.

And so we're pleased that this bill was tabled, notwithstanding that we do have some concerns about it, and one of those was raised by my friend from Wolseley earlier, both in the question-and-answer period with the minister as well in his own remarks, his own very good remarks, on Bill 7 that he just gave to the House a few moments ago. But one of the key issues that we're having some problems trying to understand is why the bill—the first public reporting of nutrient monitoring in our waterways by over three years. If the bill passes as proposed in the—and should there be no amendments, and I think there probably will be, and I heard the minister say that she was open to amendments. And that's good, because we're going to make some significant process if she is, in fact, on board and has an open mind to trying to do the best for Manitoba and for Manitoba's environment.

But, if the things follow just in the way that they're going right now, the first report won't be due until December 31st, 2020, and that strikes me as being a long, long time from now, and almost coincidental—turn to others for their help in this regard, but it seems to me the next election is April 2020—[interjection]—October 20—October 6, 2020. I thank my friend from Minto for always having that information at his fingertips. So, when you think about it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, critical information will wait until after the next election to be reported—December 2020.

It doesn't make sense to us. It certainly doesn't make sense to me. One would expect the government would want to be more open and transparent about these kinds of issues. After all, as we said a few times, there's much to like about the bill. After all,

much of it was created by us. But it makes no sense to us to wait so long to follow through on reporting.

My friend from Wolseley made it quite clear that the data sets would certainly be in place, so, if either analysis has to happen after the fact, well, that's okay. Maybe it's best to get those data sets out in advance so that Manitobans can have a look at them, and we can see what progress we're making, what else needs to be done, what else needs to happen.

And so, when we think about the fact that the report won't be due until December 31st, 2020, the report might not actually be made public until the spring of 2021. We now are starting to get far afield down the road from keeping tabs on, keeping track of and fully understanding the nature of what the data is suggesting, and, in addition to that, it puts off, until after the election, something that really ought to be before the people of Manitoba prior to the election in fairness to them.

After all, this is a government that walks around using and, quite cavalierly, using the phrase most improved province. Nobody actually knows what that means. Nobody has dared ever to define it in this House. So, actually, it would be helpful if you want to try to have indicators of improvement, because we have many indicators of things that haven't improved and, certainly, we'll be talking to the people of Manitoba about that over time.

It seems to me if this is one indicator of showing improvement, you might want to do this sooner rather than later, not defer, not delay, not wait and not really play politics with a critical issue, not only in the here and now but for future generations to come.

I think it's also worth pointing out that when it comes to things environmental, the government has been nothing short as a colossal disappointment. And now, I might add, that's not a surprise. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we didn't really have high expectations for the government when it came to environmental issues. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself was one of the first and most vociferous climate change deniers that ever existed. He's had some kind of change on the road to Damascus, and we're glad about that—but let's make no mistake—that it's taken the Tory caucus a long, long time to come to terms with the reality of climate change and the potential implications for the immediate generation following us and generations to come.

And so, while we have some—have given some props to the minister and to the government for tabling this particular piece of legislation, it's also fair to say that when it comes to issues of environment, the government has been nothing short of a colossal failure and a colossal disappointment. And most of that, I have to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, goes to the heart of one of the things that the government campaigned on in the last election, and that was how they were going to be this really open, really transparent government where everything would be crystal clear. There would be no doubts, no secrets, no information hidden away. They'd just be, you know, full kimono, to the people of Manitoba when it came to being open and accountable and transparent.

And, of course, nothing like that has happened at all. In fact, instead of transparent, the government's been more translucent. It's hard to actually see through them rather than understanding what's going on there.

We know that, for example, when it comes to openness and transparency, we have these KPMG reports that have been circulating now for quite some time. It took the Minister of Finance a long, long time to table that particular report on the financial side of things even though we asked, repeatedly and relentlessly, time and again, because we said the people of Manitoba paid for this report. You said, government, that you were going to be open and transparent, so where is it? And somehow it sat on the side of the minister's desk for a long, long time.

* (16:20)

At the same time, KPMG was also retained to do a health-care report, and I know my friend from Minto, as our Health critic, and I know my friend from Concordia, who acted in a role of Health critic earlier, both have been waited—waiting for that report, and it looks like they're going to continue to wait for quite some time.

And so it was hardly surprising to see an editorial in the Winnipeg Free Press this morning making it abundantly clear that, when it comes to openness and transparency, the government has been—receives a failing grade in every possible way. And the editorial concluded by saying that this does nothing to improve Manitoba, to improve quality of life, quality of our environment, quality of the world in which we live in.

And so we would invite the government maybe to stop pretending that they are open and transparent and start acting in that regard. And one of the things they could do is table the health report immediately and also to stay away from the kinds of legislative games that they've been playing in the House when it comes to critical issues facing the people of Manitoba.

And I can think of no better example than that, than Bill 24, loosely, crazily, oddly, weirdly called the red tape reduction bill, and yet included—I don't know how much environmental deregulation you can fit into one omnibus bill, but I guess a credit to the tall thinkers in the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) office who found a way to cram a whole bunch of environmental deregulation into one bill that did nothing to improve the quality of our environmental circumstances here in Manitoba and actually served to detract the quality of our environmental circumstances here in Manitoba. And that was, I would suggest to you, a reflection, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the kind of government we get rather than the kind of government that was promised to us in the last election.

We know for sure that there was significant efforts to weaken restrictions on hog production in this province and—in Bill 24. My friend and I from Flin Flon learned a lot about anaerobic digesters during those committee hearings, and thank God, I might add, for the—for second reading committee hearings, because they actually do a great deal to educate members about bills that are being tabled and to provide us with sound reasons why or why we shouldn't go forward.

And it's true that there were some proponents who came to those hearings to support one small element of the bill, and it's understood that it was in their own personal self-interest that they would want to see some of these things happen. And when we would say to them in the—during the hearings, okay, well, that's one small part. What do you think about the rest of the bill that threatens environmental sustainability, that puts into question very significant public health questions in relation to drinking-water quality? What did they think about the provision in the bill, buried deep in a bill on red tape regulation, a bill that provided oversight on potential P3s in our province? And of course the government did away with that oversight legislation, that legislation that sought to make things more transparent and more open and more apparent to the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And when we would put those questions to members from the public who came to speak on one small section of it, they would say, well, we really don't know about that. The bill's all thrown together.

An Honourable Member: Gosh, I don't think that was the plan.

Mr. Allum: Yes, it's a mishmash of things, and so we're—we support this one little thing. We're really not too sure about this other thing that you're asking about, and we don't really support those things either, but, you know, it's in our self-interest, I suppose, to support one aspect of it.

But that was an example, in our view, of a government that played games with the legislative process, that wrapped important, critical environmental questions up into one bill, all with the purpose—and I think my friend from Flin Flon just suggested that to me, all with the 'impure' purpose of either confusing Manitobas—Manitobans or misleading them or misdirecting them in some fashion. And we don't think that that's helpful to debate, either in this House or in the coffee shops of Manitoba—certainly, shouldn't happen at committee hearings.

And so, while the government wants to take credit for this particular piece of legislation, and I said a few—more than a few times during the last 25 minutes, we're glad to see it. You can understand why we would be more than a little suspicious and more than a little skeptical about the government's overall commitment to either this bill or to other critical environmental questions that will almost certainly define life in the 21st century for all of us, no matter where we live across the globe.

We certainly think that there are other things that need to be addressed in the bill, and my friend from Wolseley outlined just a few of those, either in relation to his remarks that he put on the record in debate or in the questions that he asked during the Q & A section of the—of this afternoon's debate, and I don't think that he was disappointed by the answers that came from the Sustainable Development Minister. We want to believe that she will do something which has rarely happened with this new government, and that is to convince the Premier to take positive, productive actions on behalf of all Manitobans rather than simply finding ways to punish Manitobans for voting NDP through one, two, three and four elections, or what they would call

17 years, because it seems to me, really, when you think about it, that's the kind of government that we get. That's the kind of government we get every day in question period—that because they have no answers and no plan and no apparent interest in governing on behalf of the people of Manitoba, they spend the vast majority of their time talking about us. It's an obsession that I would suggest is rather unhealthy. It certainly doesn't do any good for the people of Manitoba.

We can take it. It's no big deal to us; that's for sure. But, at some point—at some point—we would invite the government to put away much of the hyper-partisanship that has characterized this House for the past 18 months and start governing on behalf of the people of Manitoba in a productive, positive fashion that builds on the achievements of a four-time defending champion, as we were in government, and tries to build on those achievements rather than trying to tear them down bit by bit by bit, over and over again, to the point where it's quite literally threatening to turn the clock back on Manitoba, turn the clock back on Winnipeg and take us back into the 21st century. I think they're the only government in the history of governing that has as their major talking point back, not forward. And we would invite them to stay away from that kind of stuff. *[interjection]*

I know my friend from St. James doesn't feel good when those kinds of politics are practised, and I'm sure that's true of many, many others of the backbench for the government, who really want to see their government involved in doing productive, positive things that help people, that help the land, that help the environment, to make a stronger, more sustainable—to ensure that we live in a fair, more inclusive, more just society. That's what animates us every single day in this House.

* (16:30)

We're not just interested in making sure that we get kudos from the business community, making sure that the guys smoking stogies at the Manitoba Club are fully happy and taken care of. What we are always about is to ensure that whatever piece of legislation is tabled, that whatever we're debating here, that the interests of Manitobans is put front and centre, and that those who can't speak for themselves have a voice on this side of the House, in this caucus, who want to fight for every single Manitoban because for us everybody counts, everybody matters,

nobody gets left behind, and we're going to continue to work in that regard going forward.

So, as my time comes to an end, Madam Speaker—welcome back to the chair—I simply want to say that there are elements of this bill that we support because, well, we created them. And so, well, you could hardly expect us to oppose something that's been in our wheelhouse for quite some time. We're glad to pull the government kicking and screaming into the 21st century at every possible opportunity, and we're going to continue to do that to the very best of our ability.

This legislation would seem to be an example, as that they don't want to be productive and positive, maybe there's a few elements in the House on that side of the House who really do want to do the right thing. We see a government that is so often focused on doing the wrong thing. I want to compliment the Minister of Sustainable Development (Ms. Squires) for at least trying to do the right thing. She says she has an open mind toward potential amendments. I hope she does, she takes advantage of doing the right thing on behalf of the people of Manitoba not only for today but for generations to come.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Water. It seems we always have too much of it or not enough of it, both of which can be issues, especially for the agricultural community. I'm pleased that my colleague the Minister of Sustainable Development has introduced Bill 7, which aims to strengthen watershed management across the province and create some clear guidelines for producers when they undertake drainage projects.

It's a perfect time to introduce this bill as it reinforces our government's commitment to water as one of the four pillars in our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan. The water pillar brings together challenges of both water quality and water quantity. It recognizes the important relationship between land use and water quality and recognizes that management must happen locally and regionally on a watershed basis. It addresses the two issues that have faced Manitobans over the years: floods and droughts.

Wetlands and well-managed watersheds are critical to preserving habitat and wildlife. They can also act as natural drainage features in a time of climate change and flooding. Finding integrated solutions to water management that work are key

moving forward in this province. Agriculture is a mainstay of the Manitoba landscape. I think we can all agree on that. So addressing land and water use together will help everyone concerned with harnessing natural opportunities for managing irrigation, prospering through climate change, sequestering carbon on agricultural land and increasing yields.

I am pleased that our government has decided to extend the deadline for consultations on this very important made-in-Manitoba plan. Manitobans will now have until December 22nd to continue to weigh in on what we believe is a very comprehensive plan to tackle climate change in a way that makes sense for our province. The idea of consulting Manitobans on key issues such as budget priorities and cannabis is something our government is very proud of. We know Manitobans have views, and we want to hear them. To date, over 2,000 citizens have made submissions online, and we expect that number to increase considerably over the next couple of weeks. Besides giving their views on our plan, we want to know what they would like to see in terms of how our government will recycle carbon revenue.

Bill 7 will make a number of key changes to The Conservation Districts Act, The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act, The Water Protection Act, and The Water Rights Act. Provisions in this legislation will add new requirements that will ensure that drainage projects undertaken do not result in loss of certain classes of wetlands; modernize drainage inspection and enforcement tools and increase penalties for illegal drainage; allow for the establishment of nutrient targets to help measure water quality across jurisdictions; change the name of conservation districts to watershed districts; expand the mandate of Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation to include wetlands protection, mitigation and restoration; support transboundary water management for improved water quality and reduce impacts of flooding and drought; modify drainage licence processes to focus on high-impact projects; modernizing the Conservation Districts program to strengthen watershed management planning and implementation, including the ability to enter into agreements with our indigenous communities.

Madam Speaker, proof that climate change is happening is all around us when we think about it. In fact, one event that happened in my constituency of Riding Mountain in 2014 drove the point home for me. Rainstorms are quite normal summertime events, but never used to cause widespread flooding.

Hydrology experts say that these floods can be blamed in part on farmers draining wetlands. That was very evident in July 2014 when extensive overland flooding occurred in my constituency, raising the Qu'Appelle and Assiniboine rivers, threatening the community of St-Lazare.

Historically, when we think of a flood in Manitoba, we think of snowmelt causing flooding in April and/or May. But to having flooding in June and July is something not expected in this province. So proper drainage and encouraging farmers to maintain their wetlands is key, moving forward, to reducing these events. As we all know, we can't control the amount of rain from Mother Nature.

In my constituency of Riding Mountain, we also deal with water coming into the Assiniboine River basin from water drainage projects in Saskatchewan. It's been like the wild, wild west in eastern Saskatchewan, with heavy equipment busy digging drainage ditches that eventually funnel the water into the Assiniboine River watershed and into either Lake of the Prairies or downstream into the Assiniboine River.

Since being elected, our government has started dialogue with our counterparts in Saskatchewan aimed at getting the government there to realize the impact that drainage projects they are allowing to happen are having on Manitoba, and working with them towards transboundary solutions.

The Assiniboine River Basin Initiative, consisting of stakeholders from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Dakota, was officially formed in the fall of 2014 to seek co-ordinated solutions to water management across the entire river–river basin area. A major concern brought forward was landowners draining land with reckless disregard for other property owners. This group meets regularly and works with governments and municipalities to seek a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to engage all players in finding solutions rather than finger pointing. Bill 7 will give this group more tools and funding to find these solutions.

Madam Speaker, today I also want to speak about the Alternative Land Use Services program, or ALUS, that was established in co-operation with the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District. This pilot project ran from 2006 to 2009 in the former Blanshard municipality in the Oak River area of my constituency of Riding Mountain. In 2014, the ALUS program was relaunched to include the

original Blanshard pilot project, plus an expanded area covering approximately 4,000 square kilometres or 1 million acres, including the town of Minnedosa.

Typical projects undertaken by landowners who receive support and annual payments under the ALUS program include permanent cover on marginal croplands to hold water on the land, as well as building riparian fencing to help keep livestock out of waterways, often with the installation of off-site watering systems in order to meet the watering needs of livestock while protecting water quality within the watershed.

Conservation district Colleen Cuvelier has always been a huge proponent of ALUS. In her words: Things have changed. We've had wet conditions for 10 years in Manitoba, and areas that used to be cropped annually are now too wet to be cropped. So now what do we do? Rather than let those areas become a weed patch, we can seed it down with perennial seed, alfalfa and grasses or a mixture that suits the landowner's goals. This area will then produce forage that can be cut for livestock feed or can be left for birds and waterfowl to use as nesting cover or for habitat for deer and other wildlife. It's a great solution.

*(16:40)

Well, our government thinks so, as well. This legislation sets out a foundation to implement GROWing Outcomes in Watersheds, or GROW, which is programming for ecological goods and services that is based on the ALUS model. GROW will incentivize agriculture producers and other landowners to participate through best management practices in the areas of grassland and wetland restoration, water retention projects and management of riparian areas. Farmers want to be good stewards of their land and giving them a financial incentive to this makes perfect sense.

Dan Mazier, the president of Keystone Agricultural Producers who spoke earlier today at the Farmer Appreciation Day in the Golden Boy room, thinks so as well. He said that KAP shares the goal of enhancing ecological goods and services on the agricultural landscape. He continued on by saying that farmers are uniquely positioned to do this. And with the help of GROW programming we can provide flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, nutrient capture and habitat protection.

The KAP president also said he is pleased that this bill would include provisions for revised

drainage regulations that will reduce red tape for minor maintenance projects, but increase focus on larger initiatives, a good balance to protect both upstream and downstream landowners.

I am certainly encouraged today to hear the comments of members opposite, that they are agreeable to send this bill to committee as soon as possible. This is certainly good news not only for all the farmers in Manitoba, but indeed for all Manitobans to ensure good water quality and quantity moving forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act, to put a few words on the record.

First of all, we in the Liberal Party are supportive of this legislation. It's been needed for a long time. I've called for efforts to improve water storage and water management for many, many years. For example, pointing out the benefits of following in the example of the South Tobacco Creek where the Deerwood water management group has very effectively put up 27 small dams, most of those many years ago at this point, and the result of those 27 small dams is much less flooding of farmland in the area, it is reduced phosphorus in the water downstream and many benefits for farmers who work very closely with the South Tobacco Creek group who was organizing this.

Indeed, the type of water storage varied. In one instance, for example, water was—or land was flooded early in the year and then later on drained so that it could develop into good pasture for cattle. So there's a whole variety of approaches that were taken, but the net result was increased water storage, decreased flooding and better situation for farmers and better situation for the water quality downstream where there was less phosphorus because more was in essence used and taken up in the waters that were created.

Sadly, in the—10 or 15 years ago, almost 20 years ago, when I was talking about this, the NDP were not very supportive of this initiative. Indeed, it was so much so that one of the people who was very involved, Bryan Osborne, who did a lot of work in the area, was so frustrated that he left to go to Alberta because he was so discouraged by the lack of the progress and support.

I've also followed the work that has happened with the pilot ALUS program in the Blanshard

municipality. I visited with people there when the pilot program was going on. It was clear that it was very effective. People were changing the way that they managed the land and the water. There were areas where there were wetlands which were being reserved—preserved, and there was riparian habitat that was being enhanced. It was clearly a very positive project. Now, it went for three years—I believe it was 2006 to 2009—and, sadly, the NDP did not continue this project, and the result was that when it was stopped there was almost immediately a large amount of drainage which occurred. It was almost as if people were making up for those three years when they had stopped the drainage and taken much more care of the water and preserved the watershed.

It was a telling comment on the need to ensure that if an ALUS program is implemented that it needs to be continued and made a permanent program. You can't do it for a few years and then stop, or you will lose the effectiveness, and get—be right back to where you started. The implementation of such an ALUS program can be not only long term but needs to be fairly widespread.

There have been other examples. In the RM of Dufferin, the council there got together and organized a modified—not quite so large, but nevertheless with some success—ALUS type of program in their municipality. There is—optimistically, I would say, using the models of South Tobacco Creek and the ALUS-type programs that one could have the foundation for improving the situation in Manitoba for expanding the amount of water stored or benefiting, as the South Tobacco Creek program has done, the waterways and the farmland and farmers. It could also potentially be important in resolving some important water management issues, the area around Whitewater Lake for example.

I think in this context, though, in terms of water storage, that we need to be aware that there are other things than just creating wetlands, which can be involved, in essence, in holding water on the land. There is a really good example not far from Russel, where a farmer had completely cleared a section of trees, and it was absolutely amazing what then happened, that the water came off so much faster than it had historically, that all of a sudden, you know, the area where water drained, there were huge erosions, flooding of roads, just an incredible change in a very short period of time as a result of clearing that section of trees. And we mustn't forget that trees

can have a tremendously important role in holding water on the land, in essentially storing water on the land. Trees suck up a tremendous amount of water and create a landscape which is much better at keeping water on the land. So we need to be cognizant that when we're managing water, it is not just about how we manage the water itself but other aspects of how we manage the landscape which can be critically important and make a big difference.

In 2014, when there was a lot of flooding in southern—southwestern Manitoba, one of the things that made that worse was that it was a year where there was a lot of acres which were not seeded, and so when this flooding and heavy rains occurred in June—I think it was late June—what happened was that there wasn't the crop there, the vegetation to take up the water, and the water came off the land much more quickly. Areas which had seen water-level rises a couple of days after a heavy rainstorm, all of a sudden were seeing large rises within a few hours. And so, once again, not only the amount of water, the saturation of the soils with water and the cover of the land with plants, crops or trees, can be tremendously important in affecting the amount and the speed with which water runs off the land.

* (16:50)

There are some potential significant benefits not just in terms of water management and pollution of water and a decrease in flooding of farmland, but, interestingly enough, improved water management could have a very significant benefit in reducing the amount of greenhouse gases produced by agriculture, and specifically, nitrous oxide.

Nitrous oxide is produced primarily when nitrogen has been applied to the land, and the land gets wet, and the water and the conditions catalyze nitrogen to be converted to nitrous oxide, and instead of being able to help nourish and fertilize the plants and be used by the plants, the nitrogen then goes up in the air as nitrous oxide.

This is a significant contributor to greenhouse gases in Manitoba. Fifteen per cent of the greenhouse gas produced in Manitoba is nitrous oxide produced in agriculture, and it's primarily because of the use of fertilizer which in—containing nitrogen, which then the nitrogen gets converted to nitrous oxide.

There are now good evidence that we can change the water management and the way that the nitrogen is applied and the form that it's applied and achieve significant reductions in nitrous oxide. And this is

not insignificant. If one achieved a one-third reduction in nitrous oxide from 15 per cent of greenhouse gases down to 10 per cent, that would be a reduction of 1 megaton. That 1 megaton is roughly equal to the amount of greenhouse gas produced by all the cars travelling on all the roads in Manitoba. It's roughly equivalent to the amount of greenhouse gas from burning fossil fuels to heat all the homes, residential homes, in Manitoba.

So there is the potential to make some changes which will have a big impact on greenhouse gas production. It is to be wondered at that the government did not even mention nitrous oxide in their climate change plan. Really astonishing that the government would neglect such an important greenhouse gas, and indeed the 15 per cent that it takes up or is given in the reports may actually underrepresent the amount of nitrous oxide. And the reason for that is that it's a very long-lasting gas in the atmosphere. And, when you take in time-account of the residence time in the atmosphere, nitrous oxide may be much larger contributor than we acknowledge right now. So we should be paying a lot more attention to it.

There are some areas of—which need attention in this legislation. I have already, in my questions, talked about the phosphorus in commercial automatic dishwasher detergents. We should be acting to see if that can be reduced. We need significant enforcement if we are going to achieve success, and it can't just be one farmer telling on another.

We need to have—for example, be using satellite maps, be monitoring the water bodies. I'm sure that if these are not already developed, it would be not unreasonable to develop the computer programs so that it can take a satellite map and tell you to what extent there has been changes in the water and where they have been located. And in automated systems like that, it can very quickly tell you whether there has been drainage which should not have occurred or to verify that the money that is been taken to give a no net loss of wetlands is actually achieving that no net loss of wetlands. We need to be able to monitor and to verify if we're going to be successful, and I think that farmers and others also need to know that this will be monitored effectively and that those who don't follow the normal procedures will, you know, have the force of the minister and the ability to act to fine individuals, if necessary, to come into play so that people will realize that this is a fair playing field, that you are not going to win just by drainage that is not done without appropriate procedures.

The no-net-loss-of-wetlands concept is something that I introduced in an amendment in about 2005, but it was rejected at the time by the NDP, but, finally, we are going to have no-net-loss-of-wetlands approach.

The devil, as they say, is in the details, and we will see if the minister can make it work. We hope so. It will be good for farmers; it will be good for all of us if we can achieve it.

There are some issues also which need some attention: the size of wetlands, temporary or permanent, which will be covered and which will not be able to be changed by regulation but which will need permit, is going to be important and important that it be managed well. It is important that there be the funding there to enhance water storage and to make—help farmers with changes to the landscape. There are clearly issues, as has already been brought up, in terms of drainage from Saskatchewan. We need to work with others. It was amazing, what has happened across the border in, for instance, Blackbird Creek, just south of the Lake of the Prairies. Used to be a small creek. With the drainage happening in Saskatchewan, it became a roaring torrent. That transformation is the sort of thing which is significant and tells you the impact of the drainage that has occurred.

I think that if we can follow through on this and we can make it work, we can achieve some really good things for Manitoba. I am optimistic. I think there is yet a lot of work to do before we can really have the success, but I hope that the minister will see if this legislation can be passed, if not this session, but shortly after we return in the spring, in March, so that it would be in effect as soon as possible and have an impact as soon as possible.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Merci.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): It gives me great honour to stand here for the next couple of minutes and put a few words on the record on this very important piece of legislation.

My understanding is this bill that the minister's introduced looks substantially similar to a bill that was previously introduced by people on this side of the House, which—it shouldn't matter which side of the House we're on. If someone has a good idea, we should go with it. And, if there's ways that we can make a good idea turn into a great idea, then we should be looking at that as well. And, certainly, I'm sure that I know my colleague from Wolseley has a

lot of ideas around this, which, I'm sure, would make this bill even more impressive than what the minister's made it already. So, while I commend the minister for introducing this piece of legislation, I truly hope that the government is willing to listen to ideas and suggestions—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 29 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, December 4, 2017

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