



Fourth Session - Thirty-Sixth 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
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.
Vacant	Charleswood	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, November 28, 1997

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Winnipeg Education Centre

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Jerry Jerrett, Erika Wiebe, John Rodgers and others, requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) to consider immediately reinstating the inner city education program to the University of Manitoba.

Introduction of New Member

Madam Speaker: I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly has received from the Chief Electoral Officer, a certificate showing the election of David Fauschou, Esquire, as member for the constituency of Portage La Prairie. I hereby table the return to the Writ of Election.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present to you David Fauschou, member of the constituency of Portage La Prairie, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take a seat.

Madam Speaker: On behalf of all honourable members, I wish to welcome you to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba and to wish you well in your parliamentary career.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a statement for the House.

I must inform the House that James A. Ernst, the honourable member for Charleswood, has resigned his

seat in the House effective October 28, 1997. I am, therefore, tabling his resignation and my letter to the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council advising of the vacancy that is created in the membership of the House.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Winnipeg Education Centre

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Sophia Holt, Rita Thorne and R. Keith Garvie requesting the Legislative Assembly urge the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) to consider immediately reinstating the inner city education program to the University of Manitoba.

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): I beg to present the petition of Rick Boyd, Jo-Anne Valkovic, Joanne Johnson and others requesting the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Education to consider immediately reinstating the inner city education program for the University of Manitoba.

* (1005)

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have the six young persons who have been appointed to the Manitoba Legislative Internship Program for this year. In accordance with established practice, three interns have been assigned to the government caucus and three to the official opposition caucus. Their term of employment is 12 months. During that time they will perform a variety of research and other tasks for private members.

These interns have commenced their assignments at the beginning of September, and I am pleased to introduce them. Working with the government caucus are Ms. Trisha Chestnut of the University of Manitoba, Ms. Maureen Cousins of the University of Manitoba and Mr. Ken Cohart of the University of Manitoba.

Working with the caucus of the official opposition are Ms. Iris Griffin of the University of Manitoba, Mr. Peter Ogrodnick of the University of Manitoba and Mr. Robert Sawatzky of Dalhousie University.

Copies of their biographies will be distributed to members shortly. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of all honourable members, to welcome you and to hope you will have a very successful and interesting year. Welcome.

Also seated in the public gallery we have with us today thirty-eight Grade 9 students from Churchill High under the direction of Mr. Ed Lenzmann. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford). On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this morning.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Premier's Comments Apology Request

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, my question is to the First Minister. We have been travelling through the Red River Valley and listening to many people that have been victims of the flood over the last number of months. [interjection] Well, not all of us were in London at the various events. Some of us were in Morris and listening to people from the Red River Valley.

Memories cannot be replaced with the flood. Possessions perhaps can be, but a lot of people just want to rebuild their lives with dignity. Throughout all of the communities we went to, when we were listening to farmers or people in other communities such as Ste. Agathe and others, we consistently heard the anger and disappointment concerning the Premier's comments about people living in a flood plain must take responsibility for the impact of that flood.

On behalf of Shaun Crew, who raised this question from Ste. Agathe, and the many hundreds of other Manitobans that were flood victims unfortunately last April and May, I would like to ask the Premier to apologize to those people and retract his comment, as recommended by the people of Ste. Agathe just a couple of weeks ago.

* (1010)

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Opposition does a disservice by attempting to make politics over the issue of people attempting to help their fellow human beings in response to what was an unprecedented disaster, the second-worst flood in recorded history, the worst civil disaster this century in this province.

In response to that, people have done unprecedented things, people in our government during the period of time of the flood event. No resource was spared to assure that we did everything possible to protect every life in the Red River Valley. No resource was spared to do everything possible to protect property, to protect individuals and their properties. We did everything that we could to ensure that in the face of this unprecedented disaster we did what we could to protect as much as possible from harm all of the people and including their property. In response to this unprecedented damage, we have continued to upgrade the program to ensure that what was reasonable to be done was being done.

At the beginning, Madam Speaker, the program under the NDP called for a maximum payment to people for disaster relief funds of \$30,000. We increased that to \$100,000. The program under the NDP said you could only have one claim per property; we said you could have multiple claims, one for your house, one for your farm, one if you had a business as well on it. You could have up to three, so therefore the limit was raised to \$300,000 from \$30,000.

We said that the program that the NDP had designed and had built called for a 20 percent deductible. We said that if you engage in a commitment to floodproof and that 20 percent deductible—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Beauséjour is very clear that answers to questions should be brief and relate to the matter raised. The Leader of the

Opposition asked very clearly whether the Premier is going to apologize for his comments blaming many of the victims for living on a flood plain. Will you please ask the Premier to answer the question? Is he going to apologize for that comment or not?

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson did not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, we continue to enhance and upgrade the program to meet the needs of the people of the valley and those needs as they continue to evolve. When people said that the 20 percent deductible was unfair, we said that if they would commit to floodproofing so that in future they would be protected from the flooding, that that 20 percent would be waived. When opposition and the people of the valley said that the program was not generous enough the way it had been designed under the NDP, the way it had been developed under the NDP, that it paid for depreciated values, we enhanced the program so that it provided for new furnaces, new appliances, provided for floor covering, provided for all sorts of things.

That is what we did. We continued to enhance the program in response to the needs of the people.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, what we have is unprecedented smugness from this Premier and callousness in terms of this comment. People who voted for you, people who supported you are absolutely angry at you for blaming them for living in three generations on a flood plain.

You are no Duff Roblin, sir. You are no Duff Roblin in terms of the leadership you have taken, because we all live on a flood plain. We all work as one community. We all work in a co-operative way.

Will this Premier now take the necessary leadership as head of this province and apologize for his unprecedented comments to those flood victims so they can know that the Premier will admit that he was wrong to blame them for living on a flood plain?

*(1015)

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, at no time did I blame anyone for living on a flood plain. I live on a flood plain; the Leader of the Opposition lives on a flood plain. We chose to live behind protective works, protective works that have had hundreds of millions of dollars of public investment. There are protective works in place in eight communities south of Winnipeg in the Red River Valley. People have chosen to live there. My comments have been in response to the assertions by various people that it was unreasonable or unfair to have any deductible whatsoever in the program.

The fact of the matter is that it was seen to be reasonable by the New Democrats. In fact, Harry Harapiak, the brother of the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), brought in the deductible. He argued that it was not anybody's fault. It is a matter of assigning who pays for the damage. People who live on flood plains, including myself, including the Leader of the Opposition, cannot get flood insurance.

So the question becomes then: who pays for all of the consequences of an unprecedented disaster? The answer, of course, has been in the past that there has to be some sharing, a small portion.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the taxpayers of Manitoba, the government of Manitoba are paying the vast majority of the costs of the damage. That does not mean they are to blame for the disaster. They are not to blame for the disaster; the taxpayers, the government is not to blame for the disaster, nor are the people who live there to blame for the disaster. That is what I have always said. It is only members opposite who have misrepresented my comments.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, is the Premier now saying that all the farmers in the Red River Valley have to move to Tuxedo to be protected like the Premier, that all the people in Ste. Agathe must move to Lindenwoods to get protected behind the protective measures that we have collectively built? Is that what the Premier is saying, and will he not now admit that that is a crazy thing for him to be saying—Perimeteritis, Tuxedo-vision kind of view of the province of Manitoba? Why does he not just apologize, as recommended by Shaun Crew, apologize for his comments on people that have lived in three

generations in Ste. Agathe, people that must take responsibility for consciously building on a flood plain when they have lived there for three generations? Why does the Premier not apologize for that statement?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, of course, in his usual way, tries to twist and misrepresent what I have said. I just said that people have eight ring-diked communities in southern Manitoba. He saw them when he went up to fly over that area with me, places like St. Jean Baptiste, places like Emerson, places like Morris, and so on throughout the valley, Rosenort, and so on. In addition to that, there are thousands of homes that were built with flood protection, many of them built eight and 10 feet above the level of the land, many of them built with dikes around them to protect them from all of those things.

Everybody made choices along the way and investments along the way, as did governments, and that is the kind of determination that people have made over generations, including those who have lived there for three generations. Nobody is suggesting that they ought to move. Nobody is suggesting that they do not have a right to make those choices. What we are discussing is whether or not there should be a deductible in the program, and even there every single one of those people can be eligible to have the deductible waived if they provide for floodproofing in the future and commit to floodproofing in the future.

So we have provided every opportunity for them to avoid those costs. We think that is a reasonable thing to do, and we certainly are not blaming anybody for choices that they make, nor are we blaming anybody for the flood, because the flood is not the responsibility of any human being, Madam Speaker.

* (1020)

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, with a new question to the Premier. All taxpayers in Manitoba, through the federal-provincial sharing agreement, paid for the building of the Brunkild dike. In terms of its construction, it was built within four days to protect a number of people. The people in the Ste. Agathe area feel that that measure and other measures may have impacted on the flooding in their communities. They also feel that you, the Premier—not the NDP, but the

people of Ste. Agathe have called on you as the Premier to retract and apologize for your heartless comments about they had decided to consciously reside in an area that they knew was prone to flooding.

Now I would ask on behalf of the people of Ste. Agathe for you just to stand up and simply apologize, take some leadership in terms of the values of our community of co-operation and apologize for your heartless comments about their responsibility for living in Ste. Agathe.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I have already responded to that question in full. I have described how many of us sitting in this Chamber have made conscious decisions as to where we reside, and many thousands throughout the Red River Valley have made conscious decisions about the level at which houses were constructed or the dikes that were constructed around them, all of those things that are part of it. What the argument and debate is about is as to whether or not it is reasonable to have a 20 percent deductibility that was brought in by the Honourable Harry Harapiak, the brother of the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), and at that time he made the argument about people having a joint responsibility for the costs of this when there is no ability to have insurance coverage.

We are paying out the claims to 4,800 people, willingly we are paying them out, and we are providing for an ability to waive the deductible if they provide for long-term protection, participate in the long-term floodproofing that will then ensure that in future neither they nor anybody else who lives on that property would be subject to this kind of damage and this kind of trauma. These people went through unprecedented trauma. That is why we have upgraded the program numerous times throughout the months, well above any level of coverage that was ever provided under the New Democrats when they were in government. We are doing so because we believe it is the right thing to do, and we will continue to do the right thing to ensure that we provide whatever coverage, whatever support is reasonable for these people, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Doer: Why can this Premier not just admit he was wrong to have made his statements last spring and repeat them again this week if he does care about the

trauma of flood victims, as he alleges he does? I have heard from hundreds of flood victims that have been traumatized by the flood. They have lost their memories, they have lost their possessions, and the way they have had to access many of the government programs, they feel they have lost their dignity. But more than anything, they are angry and hurt by the comments made by the Premier that they chose to live on a flood plain and must take the responsibility. Why can the Premier today not take the proper leadership, admit he was wrong to make that heartless comment to those people, and just apologize to them?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I cannot remove the trauma, I cannot remove the effects of the flood, much as I would like to. Many of us spent seven days a week, long hours throughout the period of time, because we were dedicated to and committed to doing everything possible to ensure that no life was lost, that we minimized damage to people, to property and every other thing that could be done to ensure that the trauma was as much relieved as it possibly could be.

We have set up unprecedented resources, counselling, supports, opened offices throughout the valley to ensure that people had access to whatever supports government had in place to provide. We have worked with the federal government. We have enriched programs well beyond anything that was ever there, and we will continue to stand beside the people of the valley to ensure that anything reasonable is done to support them in these circumstances.

* (1025)

Mr. Doer: The Premier is correct. He could not remove the water, but he can remove his words. He can remove his words. That is what we are asking him to do today. I have listened to people all across this province, including people that have been protected in the city of Winnipeg, and they are absolutely offended, as people that were protected, that you would then blame those victims in southern Manitoba for the trauma they have gone through and for locating on that flood plain, generation after generation of farmers that have been located on the flood plain who cannot move to Tuxedo, generation and generation of people in Ste. Agathe who have raised their families in those communities and many other communities across the flooded areas.

All I ask the Premier to do is to remove his comments by doing the proper thing and showing leadership today and apologize to those people for his callous and heartless comments of last spring which he repeated, regrettably, again this week.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I have not at any time blamed any people for the circumstances of the flood. I have not at any time blamed people for the circumstances of the flood. The member continues to misrepresent what I am saying and continues to do it for his own political purposes. I am not interested in that debate.

Flooding Compensation Agricultural Losses

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, farming plays a very important part in the economy of Manitoba, but farmers cannot move their land within the dikes that are protected from flooding. We raised the issue of farm income and farm losses in May. We visited people in the southern part of the province in October, and we met people who were very frustrated by the red tape they were facing and lack of information on coverage that was provided them. Now we have the hearings, and we see that the farmers are still facing frustration.

When is this Premier (Mr. Filmon) going to stop being so heartless and when is he going to address the concerns of those farmers who were not able to move their land and have suffered because of the water that was forced onto their land because of decisions made by the Premier?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): I presume that the member, without being specific, is referring to the land immediately south of the Z-dike as one of the issues that has been raised recently, because within the Red River Valley as a whole, there are crop insurance opportunities. In fact, Manitoba Department of Agriculture would indicate that all of the valley was seeded except for about 2,500 acres, although we all realize that it was a delayed spring.

But addressing the farmers immediately south of the Z-dike, in fact the Department of Natural Resources has

written to the federal government referencing this area as a concern that we have about the specific impacts that occurred on about six sections of land. They have not presently been accepted within the parameters of the federal-provincial and the federal program, where they pay 90 percent of the cost. They still consider them ineligible, but we are advocating on their behalf for further compensation as a result of the action that was taken there.

I will address the control structure perhaps in a subsequent question.

Ms. Wowchuk: In my questions I refer to the people outside the Brunkild dike but also people throughout the Red River Valley in the Morris area who have said that they have had all kinds of red tape and unfairness in the way that they are being compensated. Information is not being given to them and they are having a hard time surviving this winter. When are we going to see some compassion and some heart from this government to see that people are able to feed their families this winter since they have lost their livelihoods in many cases?

* (1030)

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, there are numerous issues across the entire agricultural portion of the Red River Valley, not the least of which is the recovery of the drainage system that needs to occur after you have had enormous sedimentation as a result of a flood that is the highest in about 160 years of known history of the valleys. There have only been two floods that exceeded this magnitude, and they were prior to the valley being populated. The fact is, if there are specific issues about some of the—

An Honourable Member: Aboriginal people were here 6,000 years.

Mr. Cummings: Well, if the Leader of the Opposition would like to discuss the damages that occurred to the aboriginal properties during those years, I suppose we could.

Madam Speaker, the issue of the six sections immediately south of the Brunkild dike, the issue there is that, in closing the Brunkild dike, there was never

anticipated a volume of water as far west as occurred during this flood, and there were no control structures on the drainage crossings that went through the Brunkild dike. Those culverts, if we had released them when the water was at its peak or even as it was beginning to go down, engineers assured us that they would roll up like tissue paper and we would have flooded the La Salle valley. There was simply a very significant issue there in releasing that water slowly, and we are advocating on behalf of those farmers to see if there is a willingness for them to become part of further compensation.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Speaker, there were a lot of comments there, but the minister is not really listening to what I am asking. I am asking him to consider the fact that there are people that are losing their livelihoods, people like Linda Manson, who is saying she is considering packing up and moving out because she will not be able to make a living off that land for 10 years. Instead of talking about what the federal government is going to do, when is this government going to talk to these people specifically instead of trying to pass it off onto the federal government? There is responsibility from this province to deal with these people.

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, the member for Swan River Valley only picked up on one phrase. We are fully prepared to work with anyone in the valley who has special circumstances that may not fit within the broad range of these programs. I am certainly not hiding behind the skirts of the federal government; I simply said for them to be reimbursed at a different level, it has to come under the 90-10 program. The 90-10 program is a jointly administered program, and they may receive some relief through that program.

As to the other specific within the valley, the Department of Agriculture, the department of emergency response have all combined, along with Rural Development and Natural Resources, to put available in the valley all of our resources. There have been offices and phone lines established throughout the valley. If there are specific concerns that have not been brought to my attention or to one of the individual ministers that are somehow exceptions or outside of the normal programs that have been offered—and the exceptional programs in some cases have been

offered—then please bring these to our attention and we will deal with them forthwith.

Manitoba Telecom Services Rate Increase

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, one year ago today we saw a day that will be remembered for many years to come in this Legislature as this government broke centuries of parliamentary traditions and every rule in our rules to ram through the sale of MTS, a sale that was never once raised in the election, something they had no mandate to do.

I want to ask the Premier: now that we have a year to see that many of the predictions that we made have come true about rate increases, about the fact that MTS is not even a Manitoba-owned company anymore, will this Premier now admit that the only people that have benefited from the sale of MTS have been his stockbroker friends and that the rest of Manitobans, one year later, are now paying the price for that government's decision?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): No, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Ashton: I want to ask, Madam Speaker, if the Premier will deal with the consequences of his decision and his government's decision to sell off MTS.

Will he join the more than 50 band councils and municipal councils that have spoken out against the MTS rate increase that will bring in a 12.75 percent rate of return, a hundred-million-dollar profit, four times what it made as a publicly owned company? Will he at least speak up, take responsibility for the consequences of those rate increases and join the municipal councils in saying no to this ripoff to the ratepayers?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, we—

An Honourable Member: Tell the truth this time.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Filmon: What I will say in response to the member for Thompson is that exactly what we have said is happening right across Canada, that a rate rebalancing is underway in every telephone—

[interjection] Madam Speaker, in every utility in Canada we see that long distance charges are going down and we see that local charges are going up, that this was part of proposals that have been in place for a considerable length of time. The member may know that in Saskatchewan it has been announced just very recently, as we said it would be, that the rates will go up over a two-year period of four and a quarter in the big cities of Regina and Saskatoon, five and a quarter per month in the medium-sized cities and over six and a quarter in the rural areas per month—per month, major increases. Those are exactly the same things that are happening in Saskatchewan, as are happening in every other province of Canada.

As the member may know, particularly in his own community of Thompson, overall bills are less today than they were before because of the impact of the reduced long distance charges, and so average bills, Madam Speaker, continue to be less because long distance rates are going down and all the ratepayers benefit by that.

Mr. Ashton: Madam Speaker, a few months ago I talked about the Premier should have a sequel to the movie, honey, I blew up the phone bills. Actually, now: I have rebalanced the phone bill.

I want to ask the Premier if he will tell Manitobans that in Saskatchewan they have had no rate increase since 1993, and now the increase they are seeking under public ownership in Saskatchewan is one-third of what it will be under the privately owned MTS. Why will he not speak out against those rate increases, Madam Speaker?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, the member continues to bring misinformation to the House.

Mr. Ashton: On a new question, Madam Speaker, since the—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I understand the member for Thompson is prepared to allow me to ask a question.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Inkster.

Flooding Compensation Appeal Process

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for EMO. Many thousands of Manitobans were affected quite dramatically as a result of the flood. In fact, there was an appeal mechanism that was put into place for those citizens that felt that the assessments that were given were not in fact accurate or good. The government had chosen to charge a \$25 appeal fee.

My question is to the minister responsible. Can he indicate to this House how many people, victims in fact, applied through the appeal and if he can give us an update as to what the current number is still outstanding?

* (1040)

Hon. Frank Pitura (Minister of Government Services): I just wish to inform the member that, in reference to the \$25 appeal fee, that has been waived, and there will be no fees for anybody wishing to have an appeal before the disaster appeals claims board. As well, anybody that had a house that was unsalvageable, in terms of assessing the market value of that house for determining a settlement, if there could not be agreement on that settlement, then that appeal went to the Land Value Appraisal Commission.

As of today, there is one appeal that has been registered for the 1997 flood. We have some outstanding appeals from the 1996 flood that should be heard, but that is the update as of today.

Mr. Lamoureux: Can the minister indicate in terms of when is the last day for victims to be able to launch any sort of an appeal, or can that be done at any time?

Mr. Pitura: That can be done at any time because the claims continue to stay open until such time as there is agreement between the claimant and the Emergency Management Organization as to the finalization of the claim.

Mould/Mildew

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Can the minister indicate what the government is prepared to do for those individual homeowners where, because in a hurry and trying to get their lives back together, there has been an exceptional amount of mould and mildew? In fact, in many houses where there was construction completed, they are having to tear down some of the walls as a result of that. Is the government prepared to take any sort of action in support of these individuals?

Hon. Frank Pitura (Minister of Government Services): Yes, we are. Mould is certainly an issue that we are addressing, and we are monitoring it very closely. We have had the opportunity to speak with our friends in Quebec, in the Saguenay region, as to the practices that they employed with regard to mould. As well, we have been having discussions with our neighbours to the south of us in Grand Forks.

As these issues arise, we have the Department of Environment as well as other officials in government that are prepared to investigate each issue as it arises with regard to mould, and ultimately a decision will be made with respect to whether the mould is a health risk or not.

Manitoba Telecom Services Rate of Return

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, on May 2 and May 8, this Premier said that Manitoba ratepayers would get the full benefit of the tax deferral from the pension plan contributions to MTS.

Will the Premier now explain to this House why his government has not intervened before the CRTC to resist MTS's attempt to take a large portion of that benefit for their rate return of 12.75 percent, an obscene rate of return that they are asking for their shareholders, in contradistinction to what this Premier said would be the rights of a return to the ratepayers of Manitoba? Why will he not intervene before the CRTC to secure our rights?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): That matter is currently before the CRTC, and the CRTC will be

making their judgment based on the proposals and the interventions that are before them.

Mr. Sale: Why will this Premier not see that his word is kept on behalf of Manitobans? Why will he not be before the CRTC as other provinces have been when their privately owned telephone companies have been making obscene requests on a rate of return? Why will he not keep his word that all of the benefit of the tax ruling will come to the ratepayers of Manitoba and not to the shareholders of MTS? Why will he not keep his word?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I repeat that that matter is before the CRTC, that they are an independent commission and that they will consider all facts when they make their decision.

Flooding Water Levels—Ste. Agathe

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, the people of Ste. Agathe have been very clear both before and during the commission hearings that they did not know what was coming their way. They also did not know about a massive construction effort that was taking place out of town; they did not know about the **breadth of the Red Sea that was forming outside of their community; and they did not know of the intentional blocking of drainage culverts and the intentional cutting of country roads.**

Why did this Premier not have the decency to warn these Manitobans before he threw a wall of water at them last spring?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, now there is a very, very far stretch with respect to placing facts on the record.

Every day during the flood event we had all of the officials available to discuss all of the issues with respect to the flood on a daily basis in news conferences here in the building. They were in touch daily on a telephone conference at which they shared all information with the leaders of the local communities in all of the municipalities.

The road cuts that were talked about as being a brand new revelation are talked about here in an article that

was in the Winnipeg Free Press on the 2nd of May, and at that time Larry Whitney, who is known to members opposite, who is known to the media, talked about those particular road cuts. The officials who were there said by observation exactly what was happening and where these different measures were taking place. They talked about the flow directions. They talked about the locations. I pointed out those specific road cuts to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) when we were flying over it at that particular time.

I would say to the member for Dauphin that he should get some factual information when he comes here. I would recommend that he read this article that was in the Free Press the day after the Ste. Agathe community flooded, and one of the last people it says who was in town, Jean Champagne, Ste. Agathe postmaster and one of the last people to leave town when the water poured in early Tuesday morning, also put the sole blame on the wind: "Nobody's to blame; everybody did their job," Champagne said. That is the kind of information that was available every day. There are quotes by Larry Whitney about the road cuts, about every one of those things, Madam Speaker, so he should not attempt to come here and say that these measures were taken without anybody knowing.

* (1050)

Mr. Struthers: Is this Premier now still saying that it is totally the fault of the people living in Ste. Agathe that they got their houses flooded, that he has no responsibility in this?

Mr. Filmon: Now that is the kind of statement that does a disservice to all people in public life, Madam Speaker. That deliberate misrepresentation and distortion of that kind of comment is absolutely inexcusable.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the Premier, in our first Question Period, back again as is so unusual for him, is using unparliamentary language. He made reference to the member for Dauphin deliberately misrepresenting something and that is not only unparliamentary, but the Premier should immediately withdraw that.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader):

It is a good day, Madam Speaker, for us to reflect on the use of language in the Legislature. Certain language gets used from time to time which can provoke other language which then becomes the subject of a point of order. I have said a few times that if each time something unparliamentary was uttered by honourable members opposite, I as government House leader would be on my feet all day. I think honourable members need to look—[interjection] Right.

This is the same honourable member, the honourable member for Dauphin who shouts from his seat “tell the truth,” which Your Honour has had to deal with words like that on numerous occasions as a result of questions of privilege and points of order. The point is if you are inclined—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Thompson, indeed, the honourable First Minister did use unparliamentary language. The words “deliberately mislead” are definitely on our list of unparliamentary language, and I would ask that the honourable First Minister withdraw those words.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I will withdraw that.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable First Minister.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Manitoba Telephone System—Privatization

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, this being the first members' statement of this session and being on the anniversary of the sale of the Manitoba Telephone System, a day that we will never forget as we stood in the back of this Chamber and did not vote on what we consider an absolutely illegitimate process in this House, I would like to use the rest of my members' statement as a moment of silence to express our concerns in our caucus about the death of democracy last year, November 28.

1997 Canada Summer Games

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Madam Speaker, this past summer the city of Brandon and surrounding area did the province of Manitoba proud by hosting the 1997 Canada Summer Games. Many of us had the opportunity to see first-hand the excitement and quality of the sporting events, and after two weeks of tremendous effort by the hundreds of athletes and thousands of volunteers, the province of Manitoba is left with a strong sporting legacy.

Pelican Lake at Ninette was host to the sailing competition from August 10 to 15 and the enthusiastic crowds that gathered to watch the sailing were left with much more than memories. Thanks to the co-operation between community, local and provincial governments, Pelican Lake has been left with a world-class facility. The new facilities are a far cry from the modest beginnings of the Pelican Lake yacht clubhouse. Now the community has a quarter-mile sand beach, a 400-foot breakwater, a 24-foot docking facility, a cement launch pad for boats, and a revitalized modern clubhouse.

I had the opportunity to speak to a number of tourists and residents during the week-long event and the consensus was clear. Pelican Lake and area are destined to be a site for many more boating events. These events bring with them tourists, tourist dollars and, further, positive word of mouth of the province of Manitoba and particularly the Pelican Lake area.

My congratulations go to all community members who made the dream of a successful event a reality. Thank you to the many unsung heroes who worked behind the scenes since last fall preparing Pelican Lake for this prestigious event. We appreciate the efforts.

Flood of the Century

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a member's statement.

This spring Manitobans were faced with a major challenge in the flood of the century. Many Manitobans did a wonderful job of coming together and co-operating and working hard to protect their neighbours and to protect their homes and to protect

their lives and their memories and everything that they have held dear for centuries in Manitoba. They were faced with a tremendous natural disaster. This natural disaster, Madam Speaker, was compounded by the heartless, uncompassionate performance of this government, heartless, uncompassionate statements by the Premier (Mr. Filmon), who today I was disappointed in when he refused to apologize or withdraw those statements at all.

The people in the Red River Valley need our help. They do not need to be singled out and blamed for their own predicaments. This government must, through some type of decency, find the decency within themselves to treat these people in a humane way. The only time this government ever did anything for the people of the Red River who are affected by these floods was when we on this side of the House pushed and pushed and pushed to get this government to do something for these people in the Red River. That is the only time this government even paid any attention to the people who are victims of this flood. The Manitoba government should be ashamed of the way it has approached these people in the Red River, and the Manitoba government needs to get its head screwed on right so that it can deal with these people in a fair, equitable way, instead of being smug and arrogant about the problems faced by fellow Manitobans. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Telecom Services

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, a year ago in this House we had the shameful spectacle of the opposition silenced while the rules were broken and a Crown corporation was wrested away from Manitobans against their will and against the promises of a Premier (Mr. Filmon) who is a stranger to the truth on many issues in regard to the Manitoba Telephone System. The Premier indicated that Manitobans would get the full benefit of the tax ruling that he trumpeted as a way of keeping rates down. He will not now acknowledge that before the CRTC, the Manitoba Telephone System is claiming a very major portion of that tax benefit as a return to their shareholders in order to justify a 12.75 percent rate of return that they are requesting. He made those statements on May 2 and May 8. He made those statements on October 31, 1996. On May 2 and May 8, he said that privatization would have no impact on rates.

Madam Speaker, even if Saskatchewan's telephone company receives the increases that it has applied for and have not been approved by the Saskatchewan government, even if that happened, our phone rates would still be 33 percent higher in the city of Winnipeg and in rural Manitoba than under Saskatchewan telephone corporation. Those rates are well established in all of the documents that have been tabled.

This same telephone company that is supposed to serve rural and remote ratepayers has applied for a new rate group E, a rate group that would see northern and remote and rural, southern Manitoba, rural rates jacked by as much as three times their current level. That request is before the CRTC, and this Premier and this government would not appear as other governments have appeared in opposition to the kinds of rate increases that have been requested. This government should hang its head in shame for misleading Manitobans in regard to rate increases, misleading them in regard to the advanced tax ruling, misleading them in regard to the affordability of rural and remote phones.

Flooding—Volunteerism

Mr. Ben Sveinson (La Verendrye): Madam Speaker, I would like to comment briefly on the success of Manitobans as they unselfishly worked to save their neighbours, their friends and complete strangers that share a love for this province. We all worked together to help alleviate the hardships of the people of Manitoba during the flood of 1997.

I saw first-hand the levels of water that we had to fight that arose through an act of nature. Let us count our blessings that we do not have the extent of damage to our province as Grand Forks did in losing their entire downtown to flood and fire. Although we knew the flood was coming our direction, we still felt their sorrow and unselfishly helped them in physical, emotional and fiscal ways.

We are very fortunate that there were no lives lost directly to the flood in Manitoba. Through the efforts of all levels of government, the military, families, businesses, church groups and many more quickly established organizations. We were able to protect our No. 1 concern, which was the lives of our Manitoba families. We look at the flooding in Germany this

summer. They were not as fortunate as Manitobans as they lost many lives. Because everyone pulled together to work around the clock, we were able to successfully protect the lives of people in the flood area, which was our paramount concern.

* (1100)

Let us hope that we never have to endure such a natural disaster again. However, let us also take heart in the knowledge that Manitobans can come together in a time of crisis. Thank you.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Red River Flood

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I would take this opportunity to move, seconded by the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) that, under Rule 31.(1), the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the aftermath of the 1997 flood and the plight of Manitobans recovering from the flood in the Red River Valley.

Motion presented.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for Inkster, I would remind all honourable members that under our rule, subrule 31.(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from each of the other parties in the House are allowed not more than five minutes to explain the urgency of debating this matter immediately.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I do want to stress the urgency of this particular motion in the sense that we are going to be sitting for approximately two weeks. That time is going to deal with the throne, and no doubt a number of members will take issue with the flood in their throne speech remarks.

What it is that I am suggesting and arguing and hoping to articulate in a few minutes is the importance of this issue in being addressed today by, in particular, some key members of the Chamber, the minister responsible for EMO, for example, to have concerns

raised from the critic of the official opposition to other individuals that want to be able to raise issues because, in fact, we are only going to be sitting for the next two weeks, and we are at a time in which there is a great deal of stress out there.

We saw the urgency when we had the Leader of the official opposition (Mr. Doer) not only take one but two questions today. We saw the urgency with the last member from the government side that gave the political statement about the flood in talking about the flood. It is on the top of the minds of many Manitobans today because we are at a time of the year in which most would have anticipated that the ramifications of the flood and the tragedies caused from the flood would be at least in most part addressed. They are not because there have been a number of things that have not occurred, and we have talked and raised some of those issues today when I talked about the mould and mildew to the whole question of trying to get assurances from the Premier (Mr. Filmon) on comments that he has made.

I believe that before Christmas what we want to be able to do is to assure the victims of the flood in the best way that we can, assure them that government is doing what it can. That is why in the wording of this particular motion it was not an attempt to take a cheap shot at the government or in terms of criticizing the government. What we are looking for is a very sincere debate from the government and from all members of this Chamber as to what some of the problems are today and how we can collectively—as we attempted to do when the flood came to Manitoba, where we all worked together. We saw parties of all stripes working together. Well, Madam Speaker, I would suggest to you that having this sort of a debate is, in fact, in order today, given the impact that the flood has had and the consequences that thousands of Manitobans are still suffering today as a result.

By allowing a two-hour debate, Madam Speaker, what we will then allow for is more debate on the throne speech, on the many other aspects which the government is wanting to do, because the throne speech is, in fact, the only other debate that we are really going to be having before we adjourn, so it would seem to me to be an appropriate time to have this particular debate. I appeal to both the government House leader and the

official opposition House leader to agree with me and the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) as to the need to have this debate today. I believe all members of the Chamber are, in fact, in favour of trying to do what they can in contributing to a positive discussion as to what should be happening.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the attention of the House.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, the rule respecting this particular legislative procedure is predicated on a couple of matters. One of those matters is that it needs to be shown that there is no other appropriate opportunity for a debate of the kind envisioned by the honourable member for Inkster and then the whole question of urgency. I certainly would not be arguing any question about relevancy because the throne speech itself delivered yesterday by the Lieutenant Governor dealt at length with issues related to the flood of the century, so there is no argument in that respect.

Madam Speaker, it is rare, indeed, during a Throne Speech Debate that the issue of relevancy comes up. In fact, I do not know of a time when anyone has ever argued that someone was being irrelevant or any Speaker has ever ruled that relevancy was an issue. In any event, as I said, the flood of the century is referred to at length in the throne speech itself.

The honourable member knows also that Question Period is available to members of the opposition, as we saw today, and there is ample opportunity in Question Period and in the Throne Speech Debate as it unfolds to deal with the issues that are of concern to the honourable member for Inkster and, indeed, of concern to all of us.

So I take no issue whatever, Madam Speaker, with what it is the honourable member is trying to achieve, and I suggest that that end can be achieved through the rules that we have respecting the Speech from the Throne and Question Period and the procedures that we have available to us in this House.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) for bringing this matter before the

House. I want to indicate that we are fully in support of this particular matter of urgent public importance, and I want to note for the record that we actually called on the government to recall the Legislature earlier than was actually the case. This was basically the preagreed return date, because we felt there was nothing more important, nothing more vital than dealing with the many outstanding concerns that are still being expressed and are being shown most clearly to the current round of public hearings, the commissions holding them in the flood-affected communities. We felt that we, as Manitoba legislators, should be doing what we did during the flood, and that is putting top priority on dealing with those concerns.

* (1110)

I want to stress that even today in Question Period we saw how important it is to have this kind of debate when we saw the Premier (Mr. Filmon) six times refuse to withdraw comments that have caused a great deal of concern and, I dare say, anguish with many flood victims.

All of us in this House, I know, know people affected by the flood. My brother and sister-in-law were evacuated. They were fortunate not to face damage. But you know, Madam Speaker, I want to give you their example as to why we need to debate this and why we need to get the Premier to withdraw those comments. They moved into an area. They actually moved in just before the flood, so I know currently what the sense was of people moving in the area. They did all their homework. They checked what had been done, because this was an area of the city that was affected by the 1950 flood. They checked the work that had been done in that area. They were told that the current situation following the floodway would protect that area and, yet, they still found, through the unusual circumstances this year, that they had to be evacuated and that their property was at risk. That is the story of many Manitobans. That is the story of many people who, yes, have chosen to live in an area in many cases for decades or even recently.

You know, many of them took every reasonable precaution. Many people in rural areas have taken their own initiative. I heard stories from people I have talked to, and I attended the rally held by flood victims who

talked about how they built to the 1950 level. They built to the 100-year level, to the 200-year, 300-year level, and it still was not good enough, out of their own pockets. That is why we need the Premier, I believe, as part of the healing process, because recognizing the fact that many flood victims still are concerned about their situation, part of the healing process should be for the Premier (Mr. Filmon) to withdraw those comments, because he said that people that choose to live on a flood plain should accept some responsibility. He does not understand—[interjection]

An Honourable Member: That is not what he said.

Mr. Ashton: The Conservative member across the ways says, that is not what he said. It is in the newspapers. He repeated it again today. He is trying to put a spin on it as he always does—but that choose to live in a flood plain.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, this whole city is on a flood plain. Most of southern Manitoba is on a flood plain. I actually do not live on a flood plain; I live in Thompson. But, you know, you could say the same thing, that I choose to live in an area that is affected by forest fires. Let us face it, in this province, between floods and forest fires, there are not too many areas that are immune to those kinds of natural disasters. That is why we need this debate. We need to educate the Premier (Mr. Filmon). We need it now. We cannot go into the normal routine as if nothing happened by having the Throne Speech Debate. We need the Premier to understand the hurt that his comments have caused.

I want to say, just to finish off, I will tell you somebody that reflected this. I was travelling back to Thompson. There was somebody from Newfoundland who read the Premier's comments, and I want to be a little bit more diplomatic than what he said. He turned to me, did not know who I was, obviously, and he pointed to the Premier's statements. He says, I cannot stand this guy; I do not believe what he said. I said, how insensitive. He said, I am from Newfoundland. I believe that the government should not be blaming the victims but should be dealing with them in an open and honest and fair way. That is what Manitobans did. That is what Manitobans want from their government and they want from their Premier.

So, Madam Speaker, if we need an emergency debate to get the Premier to finally, despite six chances earlier in Question Period, put the record straight and deal with the hurt and the anguish of flood victims who feel that he does not care and that he is out of touch, let us do it. Let us have the emergency debate. Manitobans want it.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I thank all honourable members for their advice on whether the motion proposed by the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) should be debated today. The notice required under Rule 31.(1) was indeed provided. According to Rule 31 and Beauchesne Citations 389 and 390, there are two tests for a matter of urgent public importance to proceed. One is that the subject matter is so pressing that the ordinary opportunities for debate will not allow it to be brought out early enough; and two, it has been shown that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention.

Precedent from past rulings of Manitoba Speakers indicates that the scope of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, which is scheduled to begin today, is broad enough to allow for the discussion of most subjects. I would say that the issue raised by the honourable member for Inkster certainly can be discussed during the Throne Speech Debate.

With respect to the second test for a matter of urgent public importance to proceed, that is, will the public interest suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention? Although this is unquestionably a very serious matter, I do not believe the public interest will be harmed if the business of the House is not set aside to debate the motion of the member for Inkster today. Therefore, I must rule that the matter does not meet the criteria set by our rules and practices.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE (First Day of Debate)

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou), that an humble address be presented to his Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

We, Her Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, in session assembled, humbly thank Your Honour for the gracious speech which Your Honour has been pleased to address us at the opening of the present session.

Motion presented.

Mr. Dyck: Madam Speaker, for the next 40 minutes, we Manitobans have a chance to look beyond the veneer of political prejudice and open our minds and hearts to see what is really being created for the good of all Manitobans. It is with a sense of pride and accomplishment that I rise in the House this morning and move my government's throne speech for the Fourth Session of the Thirty-sixth Legislature of the Province of Manitoba.

Before I begin to discuss the accomplishments that my government has achieved for the benefit of all Manitobans, I would like to take a moment and acknowledge the co-operative effort among all levels of government, the Canadian Armed Forces and the people of Manitoba during the flood of the century. I participated in an aerial survey of the infamous red sea, and I can say without a doubt that, despite the devastation, the flood allowed other Canadians and indeed the world a glimpse at the true mettle of Manitobans. Our spirit, our strength and our commitment to help one another were an inspiration.

Welcome back, all members of the House. I hope that everyone had the opportunity to return to their constituencies during the legislative break and to speak to their people that sent them here in the first place. Only through contact such as this can all of us ensure that we are truly representing Manitobans, building the kind of Manitoba that Manitobans want and deserve.

A special welcome goes to our newest member of this House, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou), who sits in the Legislature for the first time. I am confident that he will make a valuable addition to this government and Legislature. He has big shoes to fill, no pun intended, and although the former member for Portage la Prairie has left this Legislature, his seemingly endless energy, his ideas and his quick wit will long be remembered by our caucus and indeed all members. He was a friend and a colleague whom I

have nothing but the highest respect for, and I wish him all the best.

Welcome also to our six Pages. Your assistance during the long days and evenings is most appreciated. I hope that the knowledge and experience you gain are rewarding and give you a greater understanding of the political process that shapes our lives and our province.

Throughout this debate, Madam Speaker, we begin the process of considering the overall statement of my government's intentions as made in the throne speech. The people of the Pembina constituency have placed their trust in me to represent their interests and create a prosperous province for both them and their children.

As a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, I know that we have done Manitobans proud. I am a member of a party that stands for something, a conservative philosophy that is fair and decent and compassionate and full of hope for the future of Manitoba. We proclaim our principles with pride and conviction, because I know that when acted upon our philosophy will make our province a better place for all Manitobans.

* (1120)

My government has outlined our hope for Manitoba's future. We must make our case with reason and respect, not the rhetoric often espoused by members opposite. We must inspire others to follow. In short, we must lead. Our leadership must be based on principles and core convictions from which we will not waver.

All members on this side of the House believe in a fiscally sound government. Manitoba families must balance their budgets and pay their bills and the province must do so as well. Living within our means means better living for the families of Manitoba. Governments past failed to understand this most basic concept and, even today, they rally against the idea of balanced budgets. Because of their inability to grasp this idea, my government had to budget \$520 million in our most recent budget just to service the debt. If interest costs were a government department, it would be the fourth largest after Health, Education, and Family Services, consuming nearly 10 percent of our

total budget. What a waste of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

My government believes that governments should do a few things and do them well and have the courage to meet the challenge of change. A government that tries to be all things to all people is destined to fail, leaving cynicism and anger in its wake. Government cannot solve all our problems. My government knows that the real solutions to society's problems are found in our communities, our neighbourhoods and in ourselves. My government knows results matter, that government must prioritize and perform. The biggest single thing a government does is provide for the health of our communities. We understand that if something is not working we ought to fix it. That is why we do not fear competition and change, unlike members opposite.

Madam Speaker, I would like to address the economy. Conservatives know that government does not create prosperity. Producers and entrepreneurs do. The role of the government is to create an environment that attracts capital, an environment where people are willing to take risks to create jobs.

Within the constituency of Pembina we are blessed with a number of great entrepreneurs, individuals and business leaders who recognize and appreciate our government's efforts in ensuring that their tax dollars are spent wisely. In fact, no other province in Canada can say that they have not increased major taxes for an unprecedented tenth straight budget and that they have tabled three successive balanced budgets.

The business community in Pembina has responded to this healthy economic environment with enthusiasm and unprecedented growth. In fact, a recent survey of 4,000 small- and medium-sized-business owners in western Canada done by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business stated, and I quote, the Morden-Winkler area has a very good probusiness reputation, end of quote. The poll measured the performance of local governments in five areas: level and distribution of property taxes; value for money of local spending; control of public sector wage levels; fairness of by-laws and regulations and overall awareness of small-business issues. The Pembina valley received the highest rating of any rural community anywhere in western Canada—high praise, indeed.

The economy runs wild is how the Conference Board of Canada sums up Manitoba's stellar economic outlook for 1997 in a recently released report. The Conference Board of Canada said, and I quote, the brightest story coming out of Manitoba these days is job creation. By the end of 1998, the local economy will have produced 23,000 new jobs since 1996, lowering the unemployment rate to 5.9 percent.

Manitoba's employment growth in 1997 is expected to lead the nation at 2.7 percent, and the unemployment rate is expected to average 6.8 percent, the third best performing among the provinces and well below the national average. The organization predicts Manitoba's real gross domestic product will grow by 3 percent in 1997, the third best performance of the provinces.

People from all over the globe are hearing about the great things that are happening in our province. During this summer a magazine in the United Kingdom called *Canada News* printed an excellent two-page article about Manitoba. The headline said it best: Prairie province in the fast lane. While outside accolades are appreciated and act as an incentive to non-Manitoban businesses and individuals to locate here, the truest test of our government's policies is the success of our local businesses.

Triple-E is in full production with more than 300 mostly full-time employees working at full capacity. Triple-E is one of Winkler's largest businesses and the one which more than any other has given our community national and industrial exposure during the last three decades. Since its founding in 1965, Triple-E has gone from producing 50 units to 1,100 units in 1996. Besides its recreation division, Triple-E Canada also consists of Lode-King Industries, a major manufacturer of highway trailers employing more than 200 people. Lode-King continues to be an industry leader in the manufacturing of highway trailers and is in the midst of a major capital expansion that will add 53,000 square feet plus new production equipment.

Wiebe Funeral Homes in Winkler has completed a 2,000-square-foot expansion, effectively doubling the size of the existing building. They also recently completed an expansion of their facilities in Morden.

Leisure Travel Vans Limited has announced a major expansion plan that will see a good portion of its production moved to the former Tupperware plant in Morden. The 19-year-old company expects to triple their current production level after renovations are completed to its 75,000-square-foot facility in 1998. With the expansion, Leisure Travel Vans will require an additional 200 employees.

Meridian Industries have recently opened a 20,000-square-foot expansion in Winkler's industrial park. Meridian's steel hopper bottom bins have revolutionized the way farmers store and handle their grain. This company currently employs 90 people, with 25 of them in Winkler.

Acrylon Plastics, a Winkler manufacturing firm, is a firm on the move. Last year they were involved with the largest Grow Bonds issue in Manitoba history. On September 26, 1997, Acrylon Plastics held the grand opening of their \$2.4-million, 20,000-square-foot expansion which effectively doubles the size of the Winkler plant. Employment currently rests at 45, and as production increases, plant manager Ron Funk said they would be requiring up to 25 more employees. Acrylon owner, John Borland, gave praise to the local workforce that he described as terrific, committed staff. He went on to say that—and I quote—the work ethic is unique in this area, and the community is the backbone of that ethic—end of quote.

The economy of Pembina is expanding at such a rate that membership in the Winkler and District Chamber of Commerce is at an all-time high this year. As of August, membership stood at 226, up from 218 last year. More businesses are recognizing the advantages of being associated with the Chamber, and I am pleased to see that they too are having a successful year.

Not all economic development in the Pembina constituency is without some aspect of fun and good times. Morden tentatively boasts a brand new claim to fame as the town of the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. The Morden Recreation Centre will become a home to the province's first baseball hall of fame after Morden's bid was selected over a bid from Neepawa by a 7 to 6 secret ballot vote. I hope that the honourable member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) holds no animosity that his community was not chosen

for this prestigious award. The community of Morden anticipates the grand opening in June of 1998.

Five Flags Speedway between Winkler and Morden opened in late September. Over 300 spectators showed up on September 20 for the speedway's grand opening and enjoyed some intense go-kart racing. I had the opportunity during the grand opening to go head to head with my cousin Councillor Ted Dyck. Unfortunately, despite my best efforts, my cousin took the checkered flag, but a rematch is in the works for next summer. I blame this on a false start.

Our government recognizes its role in promoting local economic development. Morden's new \$5.4-million water treatment plant will help the community continue with growth initiatives, provide clean water, solve pressure problems and keep water bills among the lowest in the province. Construction is slated to begin in early 1998. The new plant will provide for approximately 75 percent of Morden's total water needs, with the remaining 25 percent being provided by the Pembina Valley Water Co-operative's expanded regional system.

With economic growth comes a need to provide adequate housing. Housing starts in Morden are going strong. As of September 30, 1997, Morden had issued 85 permits, 32 more than during the same period last year, and the value for the construction is \$4.4 million. The number of residential construction permits is up from 40 to 60 this year, while total value remains at \$2.8 million. Of those permits, one was for a multiple-family residential unit, one for a duplex, 17 for single homes and 32 for other residential works.

* (1130)

In Winkler, building permits are up from 113 last year to 127 as of September 30, 1997. Value for this construction is approximately \$12 million. Residential permits are at 76 this year with a value of \$3.5 million. This includes two multiple-family units, one duplex and 28 single homes. Winkler has seen its industrial building activity rise with the number of permits doubling from seven to 16 with the value of the construction rising from \$464,000 to over \$3.3 million. Permits for commercial activity are up from 21 to 26 at a value of \$835,000.

In the R.M. of Stanley, building permits are up from 50 to 76, and their value of the construction doubled to \$4.1 million. Residential permits are up from 33 to 50, including five for single homes. The value of residential permits is also up from \$1.4 million to \$2 million. Commercial permits are up from three to nine with a rise in its value from \$13,000 to \$443,000. Agricultural-related construction has increased with 14 permits compared with 11 last year.

The communities in Pembina constituency have also recognized that with growing senior population comes a growing opportunity. In late September, I attended a sod-turning for Winkler's newest condominium project aimed at the retirement market, Oakview Terrace. The project is geared towards providing our senior citizens with the kind of accessibility designed to meet their needs. Therefore, it will be "soft-handicapped" with wide hallways and doorways for easy wheelchair access plus lowered lights switches and control panels. Oakview Terrace is a two-phase project. Phase one will see the first 18 units built on the south corner of the site. Phase two will provide another 18 units in the north wing by the spring of 1998.

This, of course, is not the only senior housing project in Winkler. I attended the opening of a \$10-million Crocus Village 55 Plus Condominium project in September. As well, the community of Manitou has just built a 12-unit 55 Plus condominium unit.

For the first nine months of 1997, total seasonally adjusted employment in Manitoba has averaged 537,800 persons, a growth rate of 2.9 percent, the highest of any province and much stronger than Canada's 1.7 percent. All of this job growth has been in the private sector, with Manitoba having the strongest private sector growth among the provinces.

Morden has also seen the expansion of local businesses including Decor cabinets, Buhler Industries and Huron Windows, Eldons Furniture, among others. These projects are just some small samples of the healthy economies in our communities. Money has been invested and quality jobs have been and continue to be created. There are many other economic initiatives both current and forthcoming in the constituency of Pembina. We are proud of the role we

are playing to ensure that Manitoba's economy remains a leader among the provinces.

Our government continues to respond to the needs of small business owners. During Small Business Week, our government announced changes to the Business Start Program, including: Unencumbered business assets will be considered equity if they are purchased within six months before applying for a loan guarantee provided they form an integral part of the business and meet other eligibility criteria; the eligibility period to qualify for the program has been extended from three months to six months after a start of operations; multiple partners or shareholders are allowed to apply if all owners sign joint promissory notes, and co-operatives are now eligible for the program.

We have all heard that small businesses are the engine of our economy. If this is true, then the engine in the Pembina Valley is running at full throttle. In fact, the engine is running at such a rate that representatives have been meeting to deal with a problem most communities in the country would give their eye teeth to have, a labour shortage to meet the requirements of a growing local economy. The Pembina Valley's unemployment rate is approximately 2.4 percent which, according to the economists, is full employment.

Next, Madam Speaker, I would like to deal with agriculture. Agriculture has been the mainstay of Manitoba's economy. Our province, including the constituency of Pembina, was built in large part by the farming community. Although the number of Manitobans involved in farming has been increasing for a number of years, their economic impact remains. In fact, agriculture represents approximately \$3 billion to our economy, and it is responsible for over 600,000 jobs.

Agriculture is an ever-changing business. New equipment, new soil management practices, new seed types and added diversification are among the things farmers must contend with on an annual basis. Our government recognizes the need for an increased focus on agricultural research and development. Our last budget increased funding of research and development by \$3.4 million over the last year's level. This increased funding is spent in several areas including:

Canada-Manitoba Agreement on Agricultural Sustainability provides funding assistance through local organizations which provide technical support to producers to promote soil conservation practices; Agri-Food Research and Development Initiative provides funding for an agricultural development and research initiative aimed at enhancing diversification and value-added opportunities in our agri-food sector; grants to the University of Manitoba and the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute which provides funding in support of agriculture.

Our farmers have shown that they are capable of meeting the challenges of global competition. However, like farmers everywhere, their success depends on the co-operation of nature. Assisting farmers to obtain adequate crop insurance protection has always been a priority of our government. Accordingly, we have introduced enhancements in the coverage provided by the Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation, the Unseeded Land Insurance Program and the Net Income Stabilization Account. The farming community has told our government that research is key to achieving and maintaining a competitive edge in farming. By diversifying and investing in new technologies, Manitoba farmers are laying the basis for new industries and revitalized communities in rural Manitoba.

Health care: In health care, our province is second to none. During our last 10 budgets, almost every additional dollar in Manitoba, or 88 percent, went to our spending priorities of health, education and social services. My government spends 34 percent of the \$1.826 billion of its budget on Manitobans' health care needs. This is approximately one-half billion dollars more than when we took office in 1988. The ultimate goal of health support services is to improve the health and independence of all Manitobans, both urban and rural. I firmly believe that Manitobans want access to a quality public health care system, one that is delivered with an emphasis on public service, one that is accountable to them as both consumers and taxpayers.

Our government's success in health care is quite an accomplishment given the challenge we faced dealing with \$24-million cuts in transfer payments. Even the new federal Liberal Health minister has acknowledged the significance and negative impact that these cuts

have had on all of the provinces' ability to deliver the care demanded by Canadians. We have seen some substantive changes in our health care system. For example, we have allowed local community leaders to have a greater say in setting their health priorities through the introduction of regional health authorities. As part of these changes, we have been treating Manitoba's health care facilities and services as a single entity serving all Manitobans rather than a series of institutions and clinics operating in isolation.

It is important to remember that hospitals are not the only place to deliver high quality care. Home care is a cornerstone in our evolving system. Therefore, our government has more than tripled its budget for home care from \$33 million in 1988 to \$103 million today. We have also opened almost 1,000 new personal care beds throughout Manitoba.

Our government has allotted \$76,500 for bone density testing, which would see our waiting list of 1,200 clients cleared by the end of this year. At the Grace Hospital we have increased the number of hip and knee replacement surgeries by 180 cases; 2,500 more Manitobans were able to have cataract surgery than in 1987. Approximately 20,000 women have participated in the breast screening program at the Misericordia Hospital since its inception in 1995.

Our government is an active partner in the construction of a new \$42-million centre for the Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation. The centre reaffirms our government's commitment to addressing the needs of those people afflicted with this terrifying disease.

Mental health services for our youth will be improved with the construction of the new \$3.2-million Child and Adolescent Treatment Centre in Brandon. Inpatient treatment, day treatment, community service and educational support will be the core components of the new facility. It will ensure youth and their families from five health regions have access to quality mental health services that are crucial during the often turbulent adolescent days.

* (1140)

In the constituency of Pembina, the Eden Mental Health Centre has been awarded another three-year accreditation award from the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation. The centre has maintained its ongoing accreditation since 1983. In its report, the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation congratulated leadership and the staff for their compassionate approach to care, the dedication of staff, their skills, knowledge, and commitment to patient care as well as a pleasant environment.

The centre held a ceremonial sod-turning ceremony for a \$900,000 expansion, \$750,000 of which came from Manitoba Health. The expansion is a two-phased project, with extensive safety and service upgrading happening throughout the facility. This facility has been serving the community for 30 years. The major emphasis in the renovations of Eden Mental Health Centre is patient safety. Fire safety has been enhanced with a comprehensive sprinkler system.

While Manitobans unfortunately pay more than \$500 million a year just on interest on the debt due to the tax-and-spend policies of the previous government, our government has turned the tables so that we are looking in a new direction, one that sees us contributing more money for vital services like health care and less to servicing the debt.

Manitoba's commitment to health care is leading the nation. Our government spends approximately 10 percent more on Manitobans' health care than the Canadian average. We also spend a greater percentage of our balanced budget on health care than any other province.

The key feature of health enhancement in the Pembina area is the Boundary Trails Health Centre. The announcement in the last provincial budget that the Boundary Trails Health Centre will proceed was positive news for my constituency and indeed to all the communities it will serve. New construction plans for this facility are the result of several factors, including the need to ensure that there will be full utilization of all health beds in our area.

As well, there have been improvements in technology, a new emphasis on wellness, and a general decline in the number of days an individual is required

to be in the hospital, which results in a reduction in the number of beds needed per facility.

The intention of the Boundary Trails Health Centre will be to try to do more procedures locally. This will eliminate unnecessary trips to Winnipeg and reduce any undue stress on patients and their families that may impact their recovery and general health.

My government intends to have a facility constructed that will meet as many of the needs as possible of the people in the community as well as those served by the facility. Also, it is our intention to design the facility so that, as the communities continue to expand, the facility can easily be expanded.

Manitoba Health is currently working with the proponents of this facility, and we have received assurance from the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) that this project is of utmost priority to him and to his department.

Boundary Trails Health Centre will have an emergency department designed to accommodate 15,000 visits per year. It will also have three state-of-the-art operating rooms and 96 beds. Currently we are estimating that the \$26-million facility will open in June of 2001.

To ensure that the communities have a stake in the project and that the project does not go beyond the community's actual needs, our government has introduced a community contribution policy. Whereas some provincial governments require up to 50 percent input by local jurisdiction, our government has **determined** a level of 20 percent local input.

Education. Government shares with parents a responsibility to ensure that all young people make the most of the opportunities our education system provides. Because knowledge and skills lead to employment and higher incomes, we must strive to prepare our students with the skills necessary to make it in the global economy.

While we have increased spending on education by approximately 40 percent, the measure of our success lies in the success of our children, and according to a recent Statistics Canada comprehensive literacy survey,

Manitoba youth have posted the highest literacy score in the country, outperforming other provinces by a clear margin. It found Manitobans between the ages of 16 and 25 have the equivalent of a full year more schooling than the national average.

This is a result of the many excellent educators in our province who have made a commitment to our children. However, we should not become complacent. We must always be looking ahead, seeing what we can do better.

Last budget, our government introduced the Learning Tax Credit which will put \$17.35 million back into the pockets of students to help offset tuition costs. We have announced the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, a million-dollar fund to encourage universities, community colleges and the public to enhance scholarships and bursaries for Manitoba's accomplished students. Red River Community College will introduce eight new programs thanks to new provincial funding.

We have given parents a strengthened role in their children's education through advisory councils. Also, we support Schools of Choice which enables parents to select a public school of their choice that best meets the educational needs of their child. The program that allows for the distribution and upgrading of used computers received \$200,000 in funding support from our government. This program delivered over 1,200 computers to Manitoba schools and libraries in 1996-97 as well as almost 400 printers and several hundred peripherals and accessory items. Provincial funding is in the amount of \$279,000 for distance education, and technology pilot projects will benefit students and help prepare them for a future in a world of rapidly advancing technologies.

Funding for community-based literacy programs including the Garden Valley School Division and Pembina Valley Language/ Education for Adults received an additional \$100,000 for 1997-98. Earlier this year, the Pembina Valley Language/Education for Adults received the Lieutenant Governor's medal for literacy in Manitoba.

Our government continues to work on the partnership and linkages between education and business to ensure our children develop relevant marketable skills to help

them succeed in meeting business and industry needs and find employment right here in Manitoba. Among other things, our government has promoted initiatives such as the Business Mentorship Program, the Business Advisory Group on Education, the Economic Innovation and Technology Council and Hire-a-Student Week.

In the constituency of Pembina, Morden students will have the option of attending the Boundary Trails Christian Academy in 1998. Classes such as science, math, history and English will be taught, but with a Christian emphasis. Plans are to provide schooling from K to 12.

Grade 3 students in Morden scored better than the average on the standard math test written last spring. Wayne Kroetsch, the supervisor of student support services for Western School Division was pleased with the 65.7 percent average and felt the new math curriculum has moved the program in the right direction.

Trainex Industries in Winkler is a centre where people having difficulty in the workplace can receive job skills training and education upgrading. Other classes at Trainex teach and reinforce good job skills such as punctuality, job performance, relating to managers and other workers. Earlier this year, Trainex experienced a devastating fire in their woodworking plant. However, they experienced little down-time as local businesses generously made space available for them to continue production. Trainex held a celebration in October of 1997 to mark a 3,500 square foot expansion as well as renovations costing just over \$500,000.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, since 1988, our goal is a simple one, to make Manitoba the best place anywhere in which to live, work, invest and raise a family. Have we succeeded? The answer is a resounding yes. Job growth exclusively in the private sector continues unabated thanks to prudent fiscal responsibility. Major tax rates have been frozen for over 10 years. Personal income tax rates are now lower than in 1987. We have reduced the small business income tax rate. We have the second lowest sales tax rate in Canada. More than 90 percent of businesses are now exempt from the payroll tax, and targeted tax

incentives have created jobs and industries such as manufacturing, mining and the film industry.

Health care remains our No. 1 funding priority with 34 percent of our budget allocated to it. Waiting lists have been reduced in a number of areas, and we have adopted a more co-ordinated approach system to the health care system to eliminate duplication, increase efficiencies and share information and resources.

In education, testing for standards offers parents, government and educators an opportunity to review students' strengths and weaknesses. We have placed emphasis on four basic foundation skills, including communication, problem solving, human relations and technology. We spend approximately \$115 million more on education than when we took office.

* (1150)

Our government believes in the worth of the individual and the strength of the family. Strong families make strong communities. Strong families nurture and love. In our families we learn the values essential to make us good citizens of the world. The constituency of Pembina is a testament to this. All public policies should work together to strengthen families and keep them together.

Our main responsibility, indeed our most fundamental obligation, is to set the tone for change, whether that change involves reforming welfare, education or health. Strong legislation helps, but all the laws in the world cannot make people love one another. We must recognize that each of us is responsible for our behaviour. We are responsible for loving our children that we bring into this world. We are responsible for loving our neighbour as ourselves. We must promote good values in our homes and in the public arena.

Even though we have delivered on promises and are making the difference by building strong, self-reliant communities, even though we have delivered on promises and are making the difference to the growth prospects of our economy, even though we have delivered on promises and are making the difference in the health and education, we will never be complacent.

We strive under the leadership of our Premier (Mr. Filmon) to push ourselves and our province.

Success is never given; it is achieved. But, as Manitoba achieves success, we continue to move the mark ahead. We are determined to offer Manitobans more than a record of the past accomplishments but a vision for the future. New ideas and new perspectives ensure that we emphasize the progressive in Progressive Conservative. I know that the path our government travels will ensure that not only we but our children will have the opportunity to live, work, invest and raise our families in the best province in Canada, a province of compassion, opportunity and strength.

My government has indeed made Manitoba strong. We have delivered on our promises, and we are making a difference. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. David Faurichou (Portage la Prairie): Madam Speaker, Premier Filmon, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. It is indeed a privilege, and I am most honoured to be amongst you this afternoon.

I would like to begin by first looking to the gallery and upon my mother and father. It is with their wisdom and their nurturing that I am here today and also to my mother- and father-in-law who privileged me with my wife Lori's hand in marriage, and which we have gathered our strength to raise our children, Aaron, Jenna and Katelyn. It is with their loving and their support that I am with you here this afternoon and, most assuredly, the residents of Portage la Prairie. They put the trust in me to represent their concerns here in the Manitoba Legislature. Their actions on September 30 have given me the opportunity to give back to Manitoba and to Portage la Prairie that which they have given me.

My decision to move into the world of politics was an easy one. For years within the constituency of Portage la Prairie, I have been involved in the community, and it has always been my belief that one should not only be involved but also give back to that community more than ever one is expected to receive. Portage la Prairie has given so much to me, and I am most honoured to represent them here in this House today.

In fact, if I might mention a little bit of background, I indeed have the opportunity to farm for a living. The area to which we farm now involves a farm which was originally broken from prairie grass by our first MLA, Mr. Kenneth McKenzie, who came to this House in 1874 representing Portage la Prairie. Mr. Kenneth McKenzie was very much a proud member of the community which we know, just west of Portage la Prairie, as Burnside. Burnside has less than 100 members, Madam Speaker, but yet those 100 residents have yielded four MLAs over the course of the last 100 years.

As we begin the Fourth Session of the Thirty-sixth Manitoba Legislature, I am very honoured to be part of this Legislature. Together with the residents of Manitoba, I intend to work with this Chamber to raise those concerns of Portage la Prairie and to enhance the quality of life for not only the residents of Portage la Prairie, but the residents of all Manitoba.

Thanks to the efforts of local residents and businesses in partnerships throughout Manitoba and Portage la Prairie, we have built one of the finest provinces in which to live and raise a family. The constituency of Portage la Prairie is a home to more than 18,000 residents, of which almost 13,000 live within the confines of the boundaries of the city of Portage la Prairie, making that the third-largest—

An Honourable Member: What is that?

Mr. Faurshou: Perhaps the fourth largest city.

An Honourable Member: We talked about this last night.

Mr. Faurshou: The honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), I and he will debate this point at a later date.

The constituency is home to countless tourist attractions such as the Strawberry Festival, the Heritage Days, the Fort la Reine Museum and Pioneer Village, the Portage Industrial Exhibition, and the Island Park Arboretum.

There are numerous sports attractions including the annual McCain curling superspiel, the beautiful Island

Park, which is, as I might mention, the home to Waterski Manitoba and provides many events throughout the summer. As well, when our Crescent Lake freezes over it provides the venue for winter car ice racing. Horse racing and an 18-hole golf course are also part of the Island Park.

I speak of Island Park, Madam Speaker. It is because it is worth mentioning that the Manitoba government has recently provided Island Park with over \$12,000 in the last year and \$46,000 over the last three years to enhance this most important tourist attraction and athletic environment for the residents of not only Portage la Prairie, but those visiting Portage.

Madam Speaker, in 1998 the city of Portage la Prairie will be one of six hosting centres for the World Junior Hockey Tournament, and in 1999, Island Park and Crescent Lake will be home to the Pan American Games waterski events.

Other highlights of the Portage constituency include McMillan Industrial Park, which is the home of the National Food Technology Centre and most advanced potato production facility in not only all of Canada, but in the world, the McCain food french fry processing plant. This plant, if I might mention, most recently produced 1.4 million pounds of potatoes in a 24-hour period, unheralded in any processing facility in the world.

Portage also is home to one Delta Marsh. This staging area is world renowned as well for its interpretative trails with that of offering game sport. Just north of Delta Marsh, you will also find Delta Beach, a great tourist attraction providing visitors the best swimming, sunbathing and camping facilities for the whole family. Over 100 community volunteers are in existence in Portage la Prairie, as well as 17 schools, 10 daycares, the Portage District General Hospital. As well we have proud ownership of two personal care homes, the Lion's Prairie Manor and the Douglas Campbell Lodge. Much more are available to those residents of Portage la Prairie as well. I am sure that all members here today will agree that the Portage la Prairie constituency is truly a location that is a fine one in which to raise a family, work, invest and do business.

Madam Speaker, the Portage constituency has come a long way over the last decade, but as has been said before success is a journey, not a destination. We must continue to work together to develop new and innovative ways of doing things. We must continue to adapt to needed changes and to ensure that government policies, programs and initiatives are working in the best interest of all Manitobans. We must work together to create even more jobs in our communities, to build healthier and safer neighbourhoods for our families and to ensure that our young people have a safe environment in which to prosper. We must do this one thing for the future of Manitoba and indeed our country because our country depends on our young people because they are, indeed, our future.

* (1200)

The throne speech highlighted our government's vision for the future as one of a shared and growing economic prosperity, a vision of providing and protecting essential services such as health care, education and family support for all Manitobans. By continuing to work towards our goal, we will be providing an environment ultimately for our children to provide them with the skills, the tools, the resources that they will need to succeed in today's fiercely economic global economy. Just look at our government, what it has been able to accomplish in partnership with Manitobans. Earlier this year, the Conference Board of Canada once again highlighted our province as one of the top performers in economic growth and job creation. In fact, the board expects Manitoba to lead this nation in job creation into the new millennium.

In September, the TD Bank stated that the anticipated growth of Manitoba would be 4.1 percent. This report is indeed providing a bright story for Manitoba. By the end of 1998, our provincial economy is expected to have produced 23,000 new jobs lowering our unemployment rate for the entire province to 5.9 percent. Outstanding, Madam Speaker.

Since 1990, Manitoba's exports have more than doubled, reaching \$6.7 billion last year. Exports to the United States have increased to over 140 percent of that achieved five years ago. For the first time in the history of our province, in 1996 our exports to the rest of the

world will exceed our exports to the rest of Canada. We are well positioned to continue this progress into the next century.

In addition, our mining, forestry and tourism industries now approach the billion-dollar value in Manitoba. In fact, we now have one of the most attractive mining industries in the entire country, not to mention the fact that there are now thousands of jobs coming out of the science, medical research and product development areas. In the telecommunications industry, more than 7,000 jobs have been created in the last seven years.

Madam Speaker, the good news is indeed abundant around the province but even more so in Portage la Prairie. That McCain facility which I previously mentioned is significantly enhancing our ability to produce potatoes here in Manitoba. Our province now has exceeded the production of New Brunswick and is fast approaching the No. 1 province in our nation, that being Prince Edward Island.

I am so extremely pleased that the government of this province has included in the throne speech that The Cooperatives Act will continue to be involved in making this province one in which we can prosper in value-added. The Cooperatives Act will be modified to eliminate the restrictions of capital, thus allowing the development of a new generation of co-operatives.

During the by-election, Madam Speaker, I called upon the province to make changes that would allow farmer-owned businesses, and since my election I have had the opportunity to discuss this with my colleagues who have certainly been very receptive to the idea, as has been highlighted in the throne speech. I am very pleased to see this commitment to the legislative changes that will make producers have a greater access to producing and marketing their own product. In fact, during the recent election in Portage la Prairie, I assured voters of my goals as MLA, and that was to encourage and enhance potato research, ultimately providing more potatoes in the Portage la Prairie region, and for the province of Manitoba in which to prosper.

As a lifelong farmer, I understand the need for change in industry and the importance of research. With rapid changes and advances in agriculture today,

we need to find new and innovative ways in which we can work with value-added products. I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes the importance of this, and I am committed to working with all Manitobans to help add value to their products and to diversify their operations. In fact, companies in our province now ship out value-added products to over 100 countries around the world.

The throne speech pointed out that Manitoba's efforts in agriculture and agri-food diversification, including crop diversification, will continue to expand. It went on to further say that the support of sustainable agriculture and diversification and continued expansion of our livestock industry with new regulations setting higher standards for the management of livestock waste will be enacted. Our government has demonstrated its commitment to helping further strengthen agriculture and agribusinesses through other added incentives; the Manitoba Food Product Campaign is working to highlight our trade profile of value-added Manitoba products. It has also provided a \$3.4-million fund for Agri-Food Research and Development Initiative. Manitoba Agriculture has also partnered with Manitoba Pork Advantage, an initiative that will give further momentum to already an expanding hog and pork industry here in Manitoba. Also mentioned in the throne speech was an enhanced crop insurance, which will see producers in 1998 be able to purchase insurance that will provide them 100 percent coverage of expected market price.

Continuing with the good news in Portage la Prairie, I turn to Manitoba government's recent commitment of nearly \$500,000 to a number of projects in the R.M. and the City of Portage la Prairie, including a paving of a portion of Meighan Avenue, constructing access roads in and out of Koko Platz a suburb south of Portage la Prairie and \$270,000 worth of road repairs and upgrades in the rural roads of Portage la Prairie.

The Manitoba government's Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship has provided the Portage Community Centre Inc. with \$400,000 to assist with the development of the William Glesby Centre in downtown Portage.

An Honourable Member: You have only been an MLA for a month and you have all of this already.

Mr. Faurshou: I had a lot of help.

An Honourable Member: Turned the focus on you.

Mr. Faurshou: Indeed. The William Glesby Centre will indeed be a showcase in downtown Portage la Prairie. It will have portable seats that will be removable for trade shows and other small- and medium-size conventions, a definite attraction and improvement in my constituency. Central Plains Inc. as well received over \$20,000 to assist in Portage regional development. By working together with this development corporation, I am looking forward to many great things in our constituency. Madam Speaker, it is through the Manitoba government's commitment to spending smarter and increased efficiencies by choosing its priorities carefully, that successes of which I speak have been able to come through to fruition.

Also, supporting the development of a new long-term infrastructure program was mentioned in the throne speech; full implementation of an agreement of internal trade, as well providing for a national highways program; the implementation of a three-year strategy as well to promote a mid-continental trade corridor that extends all the way to Laredo, Texas, continuing on to Mexico; a continuation of the public sector reform and renewal designed to provide all Manitobans with a more efficient and effective government.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to support a government that is now in its third consecutive year of budgetary surplus and will in the next fiscal year add a fourth consecutive surplus budget. The province's debt continues to be paid off and Manitobans continue to reap the benefits. Our government has now frozen or reduced all major tax rates for the tenth straight budget year. It makes me feel extremely proud.

During those 10 budgets almost every additional program dollar in Manitoba went toward our priority spending. Those already mentioned are health care, education, and social services. Our government's balanced budget legislation, the strongest in Canada, continues to be our best guarantee for more jobs, healthier communities, safer communities, and an improved educational system of which our children, our future, will benefit.

* (1210)

One lesson that I have learned is that there is no substitute for paying attention. I am proud to be part of a government that is not only recognizing that point but is one that is listening. This government knows that Manitobans have ideas for ways that this government can still continue to improve their delivery of services, and they will continue to consult and work in partnership with all Manitobans to make our communities even stronger.

Right now our government is holding budgetary consultations with Manitobans to get their input on how taxpayers' dollars should be managed to the best of their needs. Our government listens to Manitoba and appreciates their input. This is so critical for wise spending.

Health communities is a key part of our government's overall commitment to creating a positive environment for our children. Being partly responsible to taxpayer, we must recognize their needs. By working together to decide how best to spend our dollars we are ensuring that Manitobans have the best health care which is available, not only for us, but for our children's sake. Currently the Manitoba government's commitment to health care is leading this nation. Manitoba is the only province with a balanced budget that commits more than 34 percent of its total budgetary expenditures towards health care. I am proud of this commitment, and I support the direction of the government.

Just look what can be accomplished. The Manitoba government recognizes the vital importance of facilities like the Lions Prairie Manor and the Douglas Campbell Lodge, which, I might say, is named after a very respected former member of this House. Douglas Campbell Lodge is now caring for over 500 people.

The Manitoba government has now tripled its home care budget from \$33 million of expenditure in 1988 to \$103 million today. That is indeed a tripling of the home care budget. In fact, in our area, which is served by the Central Regional Health Authority, the constituency of Portage la Prairie has increased its budgetary expenditure in home care from \$2.5 million in 1988 to more than \$7.5 million this year.

We are a government that is committed to quality, accessible health care. A commitment is further highlighted in the throne speech initiatives: additional resources to reducing many waiting lists; upgrading neonatal intensive services; enhanced adolescent addiction prevention treatment centre in Brandon; focusing capital projects on areas of highest priority such as cancer care; more effective approaches to mental health care and community-based initiatives; new approaches to communicable disease control.

Addressing the special needs of all Manitobans including disadvantaged individuals and at-risk youth is definitely a priority. As we indicated in the throne speech, we must continue working in partnership with community organizations, municipal and federal governments, private and public sector agencies and business to ensure that we are meeting the needs and the challenges that arise.

Energy, persistence, and the will to succeed are key ingredients. Among the many contributors to a healthy, safer Manitoba and ultimately for our children in this province, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to learn from the throne speech that the Secretariat will continue to develop and implement programs to meet the challenges facing our youth, addressing key issues such as nutrition, adolescent pregnancy, fetal alcohol syndrome, youth gangs and generally at-risk youth.

Continuing to build partnership with other governments and the private sector is key to this government's vision to a stronger Manitoba.

Partnerships such as the federal government's initiative to develop the national child care benefit—a move that will prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty and result in fewer families having to rely on income assistance. As our province works together with Ottawa, we are acknowledging that our children are our future, and an investment in a good start in life will ensure that our children will become healthier, productive adults. They are indeed our society's economic lifeline.

Manitoba's ChildrenFirst strategy further highlights our government's commitment to supporting children, youth and their family, and it is part of Manitoba's

effort to ensure an effective delivery of this national child care benefit.

Madam Speaker, an important part of creating a positive future for our children is the one that we give them the opportunity in which to learn. Our government's plan is to prepare our children for the future by providing them with a foundation for excellence leading into the 21st Century and the opportunities there await.

The province has already implemented a world-class standards and province-wide testing; more parental involvement through such measures as parent advisory councils to provide the opportunity that we as parents have to put input into our child's learning; an increased emphasis on language arts, mathematics and the sciences; a new emphasis on making schools safer so that not only students but teachers alike will have a safe environment in which to learn and teach; as well, \$1 million of new funding for scholarships and bursaries for students at universities and colleges.

Madam Speaker, our government has increased funding to public education by \$115 million since taking office in 1988. For the 1997-98 school year, we are spending \$746.5 million in public education. We have implemented the Manitoba Learning Tax Credit to assist post-secondary students with their tuition fees. We have enacted legislation establishing a Council on Post-Secondary Education to ensure greater co-operative learning throughout our province's universities and colleges. We have put \$913,000 to community-based adult literacy programs, including a most recent grant to the Literacy Foundation in Portage la Prairie.

Education is my priority. Education is this government's priority. Madam Speaker, we are committed to working together with all Manitobans to ensure that we are preserving, protecting and enhancing our education, that it indeed continues to meet the needs of our children.

In fact, our commitment to parental and community involvement is again highlighted this weekend with the fourth Parents' Forum. This forum will be held on Saturday at the John Taylor Collegiate and will again give parents another opportunity to share their views

and suggestions to our government on how it may enhance the environment of our students. It will give again parents the opportunities to give their ideas towards the education system, the curriculum testing and other needs of our educational system.

As I said earlier today, Madam Speaker, there is no substitute for paying attention, and our government, I believe, is listening.

I was pleased to learn of other significant initiatives of this government in post-secondary education: working with the federal government to address student funding and student debt; working with universities to enhance their excellent record of research and maintaining the benefit that research provides; building a stronger connection between students and community colleges, university and prospective employers, which indeed will help. Helping youth focus on value-added training in education and a new labour-market Internet sits well with students throughout our province.

I share the belief with our government that criminals must indeed be held accountable and pay the consequences. The rights of victims are of paramount importance to me, Madam Speaker. The justice system must continue to be fair and accountable to the people of Portage la Prairie and to all Manitobans. Manitoban families and their communities must have a role to play in the justice system. In Portage la Prairie, the Manitoba government has continued to provide for victim services with a recently announced \$86,000 grant to provide support for a two-year period with storefront operations of public community crime support. Recently, as well, I might note, is that the RCMP have received more than a 60 percent increase since this government took power in 1988, and currently three more officers are providing services to the residents of my constituency.

Just recently, the city of Portage la Prairie had an opportunity to host the Manitoba crime prevention conference and ultimately provided awards to some Manitobans. I might make mention to this Chamber that one of those award recipients was our very own mayor, Mayor Glenn Carlson. Included also in the awards was recognition for the Women's Television Network, which you may be aware of, involving

inmates of the Portage Correctional facility and their 1-800 referral service which is indeed helping bring those inmates back into society.

Madam Speaker, these are the kinds of local efforts that are happening all across the province by Manitobans who recognize the importance of their involvement in helping our government create and implement initiatives and programs that are building safer communities for our children.

The effort, of course, is one of partnership, and just as Manitobans are working to help keep our communities safe, I am pleased to learn of additional measures announced yesterday in the throne speech that our government will be taking to protect and make safer our environment and to prevent crime, including a community policing initiative that I have already mentioned right in Portage la Prairie, increased resources across this province and in other communities from which we in Portage la Prairie are already benefiting. They will be making new funding available to implement recommendations of the report on domestic violence and the justice system here in Manitoba; as well, to develop an urban aboriginal diversion program and support enhancements to the Winnipeg Police Services curfew registry as well as to support the Salvation Army's youth initiative.

I am confident that through the government's planned direction as set out in the throne speech yesterday that we are moving upward and forward. We are winning the battle, Madam Speaker, and Manitobans are the beneficiaries. We are all individuals, but together as a

government in partnership with all Manitobans we can be a united team, and we can do something together. I am confident that we will be successful.

Madam Speaker, I am very proud to support the government's throne speech and all the initiatives found therein. I look forward to the upcoming session and to the new challenges that lie ahead. Together I am confident that we will indeed keep Manitoba strong.

As I stated at the outset of my address this morning, it is both an honour and a privilege to be present in this Chamber here today. I recognize that fewer than one-tenth of 1 percent of all Manitobans have this privilege. We are all here present representing our constituencies, and although our views may differ from time to time, I am sure we share the same goal in making Manitoba the best place to live, to work, invest and to raise our family. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Shall we call it 12:30, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 12:30? [agreed]

The hour being 12:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Monday next.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, November 28, 1997

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Presenting Petitions

Winnipeg Education Centre	
Martindale	13
Friesen	13
Mihychuk	13

Introduction of New Member

Dacquay	13
Filmon	13

Speaker's Statement

Dacquay	13
---------	----

Oral Questions

Premier's Comments

Doer; Filmon	14
--------------	----

Flooding Compensation

Wowchuk; Cummings	17
Lamoureux; Pitura	20

Manitoba Telecom Services

Ashton; Filmon	19
Sale; Filmon	20

Flooding

Struthers; Filmon	21
-------------------	----

Members' Statements

Manitoba Telephone System—Privatization

Ashton	22
--------	----

1997 Canada Summer Games

Tweed	22
-------	----

Flood of the Century

Struthers	22
-----------	----

Manitoba Telecom Services

Sale	23
------	----

Flooding—Volunteerism

Sveinson	23
----------	----

Matter of Urgent Public Importance

Red River Flood

Lamoureux	24
-----------	----

McCrae	25
--------	----

Ashton	25
--------	----

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Throne Speech Debate

(First Day of Debate)

Dyck	26
------	----

Fauschou	34
----------	----