

Third Session - Thirty-Eighth 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-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 7, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Highway 200

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Highway 200 is paved from Winnipeg to the Canada-U.S. border except for approximately a 10-kilometre section between highways 205 and 305 which remains unpaved.

School buses, farm equipment, emergency vehicles and local traffic must travel on Highway 200 which is dangerous, if not completely impassable, during wet spring weather and other times of heavy rainfall.

Due to unsafe conditions, many drivers look to alternate routes around this section when possible and time permits. The condition of the gravel road can cause serious damage to all vehicles.

Insufficient traffic counts are not truly reflective of the traffic volumes because users tend to find another route to avoid this section. Traffic counts done after spring seeding, during wet weather or during school recess are not indicative of traffic flows.

Maintenance costs for unpaved highways are high and ongoing. It would be cost-effective to pave this section.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider paving Highway 200 between highways 205 and 305

to ensure a smooth, safe and uninterrupted use of Highway 200.

This is signed by Lucille Preteau, Charles Courcelles, Arthur Desmarais and others.

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

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) provides intervention, rehabilitation, prevention, education and public information services on addictions for the citizens of Manitoba.

Manitoba's provincial budget 2004 cut funding to the AFM by \$150,000 and required the organization to absorb a \$450,000 wage settlement.

In order to operate within its budget, the AFM was forced to close 14 treatment beds in its primary care unit and eliminate 10 nursing positions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health to ensure that his attempts to balance his department's finances are not at the expense of the health and well-being of vulnerable Manitobans suffering from addiction.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider monitoring the waiting lists for addiction treatment and to consider ensuring that timely treatment for Manitobans with addictions is not compromised by the provincial government's decision to cut the AFM's annual budget.

Signed by Jamie Irving, Vivian Bérubé, Jenni Diamond and others.

* (13:35)

Physician Shortage—Westman Area

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Westman region serving Brandon and the surrounding area will be without an on-call pediatrician for 20 days between November 10 and December 31, last fall. It is still ongoing.

As a result of the severe shortage of pediatricians to serve the Westman area, Brandon and area women with high-risk pregnancies as well as critically ill children are being forced, at even greater risk, to travel to Winnipeg for urgent medical attention.

The chiefs of the departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Family Practice and Anesthesia at the Brandon Regional Health Centre have publicly voiced their concern regarding the potentially disastrous consequences of the shortage.

Brandon physicians were shocked and angered by the lack of communication and foresight on the part of the government related to retention of a local pediatrician.

The Minister of Health has stated that Brandon has to put its best foot forward and recruit its own doctors.

Doctors have warned that if the current situation is prolonged, it may result in further loss of services or the departure of other specialists who find the situation unmanageable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to consider taking charge and ensuring that he will improve long-term planning efforts to develop a lasting solution to the chronic problem of pediatrician and other specialist shortages in Brandon.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to treat this as the crisis that it is and consider consulting

with front-line workers, particularly doctors, to find solutions.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health and the Premier of Manitoba to consider ending highway medicine now.

Signed by Michelle Sawyer, Judy Mytopher and Rita Eslinger.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs
First Report**

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the First Report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its First Report.

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings:

Your committee met on Wednesday, December 22, 2004, at 1:30 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters Under Consideration:

Annual Report on the administration of The Elections Act and The Elections Finances Act for the year ending December 31, 2001

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2002, including the conduct of the Lac du Bonnet by-election dated March 12, 2002

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2003, including the conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election dated June 3, 2003

Committee Membership:

Substitutions received prior to commencement of the December 22, 2004 meeting:

Hon. Mr. Doer for Hon. Mr. Mackintosh

Hon. Mr. Ashton for Hon. Mr. Bjornson

Mr. Murray for Mrs. Mitchelson

Mr. Loewen for Mrs. Taillieu

Mr. Cummings for Mr. Goertzen

Hon. Mr. Chomiak for Mr. Santos

Substitutions made, by leave, during committee proceedings:

Hon. Mr. Mackintosh for Mr. Schellenberg

Officials Speaking on Record:

Mr. Richard D. Balasko, Chief Electoral Officer

Reports Considered and Adopted:

Your committee has considered and adopted the following reports as presented:

Annual Report on the administration of The Elections Act and The Elections Finances Act for the year ending December 31, 2001

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2002, including the conduct of the Lac du Bonnet by-election dated March 12, 2002

Reports Considered but not Adopted:

Your committee has considered the following reports but did not adopt them:

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2003, including the conduct of the 38 Provincial General Election dated June 3, 2003

Ms. Korzeniowski: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**RCMP Tragedy**

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

I rise today to speak briefly about the Canadian tragedy that occurred last Thursday in Alberta, the horrific shooting of four Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers in the line of duty.

There are many reasons why this tragedy has sparked an outpouring of emotion among Canadians. They were young men at the beginning of their careers, full of hope and promise. Constable Brock Myrol, 29 years old, was posted just last month to the job that was his childhood dream. Constable Peter Schiemann, only 25 years old, was the son of a Lutheran pastor who will now bury the child he baptized. Constable Anthony Gordon was the father of a two-year-old boy, and he and his wife were expecting their second child this summer. Constable Leo Johnston, 32, was a newlywed of only three months.

* (13:40)

In Manitoba, these events bring to mind the tragic death of Constable Dennis Strongquill in 2001, and the shooting of Constable Mike Templeton the following year. Searches like the one executed in Alberta last week are performed by police across Canada every day. The incidents remind us again of the dangers faced by police, and it is why we must have stronger sanctions in the Criminal Code for individuals who assault or kill police officers.

On behalf of Manitobans and this House, I extend our deepest condolences to the families and friends of constables Gordon, Schiemann, Johnston and Myrol. I would encourage Manitobans to sign the book of condolences located at the RCMP "D" Division Headquarters on Portage Avenue.

Mr. Speaker, after the other leaders have made their statements, I would propose that members observe a moment of silence in memory of these four young officers.

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the members of our caucus to put our thoughts and prayers forward to the families, members and loved ones of Constable Schiemann, Constable Johnston, Constable Gordon and Constable Myrol who so tragically had their lives taken in what was a senseless act.

Mr. Speaker, as the Premier said, the RCMP have the reputation throughout not only Canada but

around the world as being the ultimate in peacekeepers, and we respect that role. That red serge, when we see it, not only makes us proud as Canadians, but it resembles everything that we believe in what is right about the RCMP.

Mr. Speaker, we, too, recall these deaths and the tragic loss of Officer Dennis Strongquill and Officer Mike Templeton, who also had their lives taken in the line of duty. We, on this side of the House, want to pass on our deepest condolences to the family members, the loved ones and all the other members of the RCMP and other police officers who work so hard to make our lives better. Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday the sad and tragic deaths of four RCMP officers certainly hit a chord with all of us. On behalf of the Liberal Party, I join others in this Legislature in extending our condolences to the family and friends of the RCMP officers who died in the line of duty, constables Schiemann, Gordon, Johnston and Myrol.

We all need to support the RCMP, and we know the risks that they take. We know that there are still many unanswered questions. I have been asked, for example, how could a person with such a track record be in possession of such firearms. I am sure that over the ensuing time we will find some of these answers.

We are sad, of course, and recognize the deaths of constables Strongquill and Templeton in Manitoba. I think it is also important to note that it has already been a sad year for violent deaths in Manitoba. I would recall, in particular, a horrific shooting death earlier this year of a 15-year-old boy while under the supervision of Child and Family Services. I would take this opportunity to extend our sympathy and condolences to the family and friends of others who have died recently from such violent deaths. So I join the others in looking forward to a moment of silence in recognizing and remembering these tragic events.

Mr. Speaker: Would you please rise for a moment of silence?

A moment of silence was observed.

* (13:45)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Manitoba's Canadian Women's Curling champions. With us today are Jennifer Jones, Cathy Overton-Clapham, Trisha Eck and also their coach, Larry Jones. Also with him is Joan Halowski who is the president of the Manitoba Curling Association.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Budget Tax Increases

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to certainly add my congratulations to those in the gallery today. I think it was resonating throughout all of Canada when everybody saw that shot, and I know that it will be etched in everybody's minds. It was spectacular, and we are proud Manitobans today, and we will be proud when they win the world championship.

Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the Doer government is going to bring in their budget. What we have seen with this socialist approach is the classic tax and spend. While this Premier tried to mislead Manitobans, the Auditor General set Manitobans and this government straight. Specifically, this government has run deficits for the past three budgets. In 2001-2002, they ran a \$10-million deficit. In 2002-2003, that deficit ballooned to \$184 million, and last year, the granddaddy of them all. Although the Premier tried to say there was a surplus, the Auditor General caught him and explained to Manitobans that no, there was a \$604-million deficit.

Mr. Speaker, in the last budget this Premier stood in this House and said, "I was not elected to raise taxes." Then he introduced user fees and taxes to some \$90 million. This Premier has punished seniors, he has punished middle-income Manitobans, and he has punished our ag producers. I will ask this Premier today will he stand in the House and declare that there will not be one increase in taxes in

tomorrow's budget or one increase in user fees in tomorrow's budget. Will he declare that today?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor also stated that, consistent with our promises to the people of Manitoba, we have balanced the budget under balanced budget legislation, under every budget we presented. The Auditor has asked this Chamber in the past to proceed with the summary financial statements as part of the primary way of reporting which is, of course, a requirement to amend the balanced budget legislation that was brought in by the former government. The former government, when they were presented this recommendation, said no. When we have been presented this recommendation, we have said yes.

Mr. Speaker, there are elements of that reporting system that the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Eric Stefanson, said was not appropriate for the public sector, and he was an accountant. He mentioned, of course, the fact that you could have situations such as droughts one year, as we had last year, an act of God, a drought. We can have a very positive situation for Hydro that the subsequent year when there is a considerable amount—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know members are a little eager, but we will have decorum in the House.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and you could have situations where the water levels are high, in some cases with a lot of agricultural producers, too high, where Hydro produces a revenue.

Mr. Speaker, I think members opposite will see those are quite evident, the difference between a drought, which the Auditor said was the primary reason for the summary financial budget situation. I would repeat, the Auditor stated that the election promise we made of following the balanced budget legislation, the Auditor stated in his report that the balanced budget legislation test was met by us. A promise made and a promise kept.

* (13:50)

Budget Health Care Services

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on a promise made and a

promise kept, it was this First Minister that told Manitobans that he would end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. So much for a promise made and promise kept. Despite this First Minister's promises that he was going to solve all of Manitoba's concerns on health care and despite putting \$1.3 billion more into health care, the fact of life, and we heard this at our regional meeting on health in Brandon, is that there are serious concerns that this Premier has misled Manitobans with respect to health care.

Tomorrow's budget is an opportunity for this Premier to put his idealistic sociology, socialist approach to health care, to put it aside and understand that if he really wants to ensure that there is more timely access to care for patients, that there is more opportunity so that we do not see in orthopedics waiting lists grow longer under this Premier, that they grow less. Will he today commit to ensure that there are some dollars in the budget tomorrow to ensure that the private sector has an ability to deliver more care to Manitobans? It should not be about socialist ideology, it should be about timely access to care. Will he make that commitment today?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that a Leader of the Opposition is asking some reheated old questions of the past, when we have an agricultural crisis today because the border was closed again last week by a Montana court. I cannot believe the Conservative Leader of the Opposition does not stand up on the lead question and raise the issue of farmers and their situation in this province.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have just started Question Period and Question Period lasts for 40 minutes. All members who are eager will have the opportunity to ask questions and the members, the ministers on this side, will have the opportunity to answer those questions. So let us just be a little patient and let us have some decorum in the Chamber.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, to continue on an issue of priority for Manitobans, which of course is the agricultural sector. The Premier of Alberta, the Premier of Manitoba and the Premier of Saskatchewan just had a conference call with the Prime Minister. We just completed it a few moments ago. The Prime Minister conveyed to the Premiers on the line along with the federal agricultural minister

the fact that the President has reassured him, again, that he would veto any bill from the Congress or Senate. He also explained to us, and I want to explain to this House, that he does not expect a vote of the Congress in a similar way to that of the Senate. That is the information that the Prime Minister passed on to us. We had a number of proposals to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Agriculture. We think that the fact that the Senate debate last week included false information in the U.S. Senate dealing with the safety of Canadian beef, the fact of the matter is—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed a lot of leeway for questions and I have allowed a lot of leeway for answers, and I know that we have leaders' latitude, but I think we are pushing the envelope a little bit. The question was on health care and I have allowed a lot of latitude, but I would just like to bring a little bit of relevancy to the questions and to the answers.

* (13:55)

Mr. Doer: I was carrying on with the preamble that contained the whole budget, Mr. Speaker.

We, of course, will ensure that the budget includes measures for health care. It will include measures for education and training. It will include measures for cleaner water. It will include measures for more police officers. It will include investing in Manitoba in terms of providing the needed infrastructure. It will also include tax reductions for farmers and investment for slaughter capacity to deal with the closure of the border.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely surprised that this First Minister does not believe that health care is important to Manitobans. We on this side do. If he has not the ability to answer with health care, we understand that because it has been six years and every waiting list, every promise he has made in health care, he has failed.

Mr. Speaker, a budget is a very important document, a very serious document and this government is going to bring it tomorrow to this Legislature. The Doer government has an opportunity to say to Manitobans that they will take their tax dollars seriously, that they will ensure that they will eliminate the education tax from residential property and farmland, that they will put money back into the rainy day fund, that they will ensure that

there is a cash advance for our hard-fought beef producers in Manitoba, that they will ensure that they will have a plan to immediately ensure that there is slaughter capacity in the province, that they will ensure that there are more police on the streets.

Mr. Speaker, the money is there. It is there in unprecedented numbers. The question is, is the political will there for this Premier to do the right thing?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, when we came into office the cancer treatment waiting list was six to eight weeks. It is now one week. When we came into office the cardiac waiting list was unacceptably too long. It has been reduced by 60 percent. When we came into office there was no plan for dealing with the gamma knife surgery for neurosurgery patients. This is now in place, and we are attracting neurosurgeons from across Canada. The life and death procedures in Manitoba have been improved. The quality of life procedures still require more effort, more priority. We are continuing on by hiring more orthopedic surgeons, by making more announcements on more procedures and we will carry on with the deliberate plan that we put in place.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that members opposite last spring asked two questions as a lead question on BSE. They asked thirteen on the floodway labour agreement. They are big talkers, but when it comes to supporting the people that need support they kept the taxes high. We have lowered the taxes on education for farmers by 50 percent. They are talkers. We are doers.

Livestock Industry Slaughter Capacity

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Livestock producers in Manitoba were supposed to be celebrating the American border opening today, but a judicial injunction and an American Senate vote against that border opening will be closed indefinitely. Increasing provincial slaughter capacity must be the top priority for the livestock industry of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, since the NDP government has announced today they are adopting part of our major five-point BSE Recovery Program, will the minister now commit major dollars as our plan did to ensure slaughter capacity for our finished livestock animals?

* (14:00)

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, it certainly was a disappointment to learn that the border which we had anticipated would be open today did not happen. Since that has not happened we have taken additional steps to what we have in the past, but it is very interesting to hear the members opposite talk about slaughter capacity when their critic has been recognized in the past for saying that investing in processing was not a good idea. They have now changed their mind when they are saying investing in processing is a good idea.

We made a commitment, Mr. Speaker, when the border closed to Manitoba, to Canadian producers, that we would work with producers and processors to increase slaughter capacity. We are working with them. Today we made a further announcement, a further commitment of \$3 million. We have also committed to work with processors who have to work—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: We will see how much money has flowed from that side of the House in the last two years. None of that money has flowed to the processing side of that.

Mr. Speaker, in September of 2003, the Minister of Agriculture told the House, and I quote, "We have to continue to work to increase our slaughter capacity so that if this situation ever happened again we are in a better position than we are at this time and have the necessary slaughter capacity." That comment was made 576 days ago and slaughter capacity in the province has not increased at all. The whole industry is in crisis.

Can the minister tell this House if her NDP government has a plan built into tomorrow's budget to deal with cull cows becoming another problem for the cattle industry?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the member opposite quoted what I had said because I am still committed to increasing slaughter capacity in this province. I think it is the most important step that we can take given the challenge that we have with the continued closure of the border. That is why I said today that we have additional money that we

are going to put forward. We are going to work with those processors who are provincially inspected to help them get to a federally inspected standard so that they can export out of this province. Those are the kinds of things that we have to do.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we have not had the support of the opposition at all times. The opposition has said we do not need processing capacity, there is enough capacity in this province. So let them remember what they said. In this crisis situation what we need is a united front. We need to have members on all sides of the House standing and saying how important it is that we work first of all to get the border open, but also to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

BSE Recovery Program Cash Advance

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, obviously they have not been listening on that side of the House. Six months ago we, as the Official Opposition, presented a five-point BSE recovery program using previously announced but unused government dollars that would have provided a cash advance, increased federally inspected facilities and expanded slaughter capacity.

Mr. Speaker, now that the Minister of Agriculture and her NDP government have accepted and adopted one of our recovery plans, will she now commit to the other aspects such as infrastructure investments and the cash advance program?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the member has been listening to, but if he would have listened to some of the things that we have announced, we talked about the need for a cash flow. We put in place a loan program. We have now, through Manitoba's negotiation, been able to get a cash advance on CAIS money for producers. I would encourage him to talk to his farmers and tell them to apply for that CAIS program. We have also talked to the federal government about putting a program in place similar to what the grain producers have in order that there can be a cash advance.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing things. They are just not quite sure what they want. They continue to

change their mind and will not recognize that there are good programs in place.

Livestock Industry Slaughter Capacity

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): The minister speaks long and loud about what they have been doing for producers, yet there are very few producers that have benefited at all from the CAIS program. There are very few producers that have benefited from the many programs that she has announced. When we look at the actual amounts of money delivered compared to the \$180 million that they advertised it is no small wonder that our farmers, our cattle producers, are going broke.

When will the minister, who speaks very highly of the livestock producers, and we all agree we have the greatest producers in the world right here. It has been 576 days since the BSE crisis began. In Manitoba, the producers have seen no increase, absolutely zero increase in the slaughter capacity. As a matter of fact, some of the small slaughter facilities have closed down since this crisis started.

When will the minister and her government commit to help the slaughter industry, to commit to infrastructure development such as lagoons and water treatment—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, again I would have to tell the member that he is inaccurate in his statements. He says no money has flowed to producers. I can tell you through the various programs that have been put in place since BSE struck this country, we have flowed \$116 million in funds to producers. I would not say that that is a very small amount.

We have also ensured that there is money flowing in advance through the CAIS program, Mr. Speaker. We have had money in our budget last year and before that to ensure that there was money to help people who want to increase their slaughter capacity. We have done a feasibility study to help producers, and we announced additional money today to help producers or processors move from provincial to federally inspected plants. I would encourage the members opposite to be supportive

rather than constantly criticizing, and let us have a united front to put to the federal government.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, the minister stands before this House and lauds the commitment that she has made in the program that she has announced. Can the minister today tell us how many federally inspected plants have opened in this province of Manitoba since she and her government had to encounter the BSE crisis in this province?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, when the BSE situation hit this province, we fully recognized that their slaughter capacity was lacking. The members opposite would recognize that we lost that slaughter capacity during their administration. They did absolutely nothing to slow down the loss of slaughter capacity in this province. We put in place programs, and we have worked with processors to move along in order that we can increase slaughter capacity. We announced additional programs today. We want the federal government to be on board with their Loan Loss Reserve Program. We want the federal government to come forward with the other programs, but we do have to continue to work with our processors and our producers to ensure that we do increase slaughter capacity in this province.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question I asked is absolutely none. There have been no new plants opened in this province. What the minister has done is met with the Rancher's Choice Beef Co-operative and kept them on a string and just kept them talking and talking. They are still talking. There is still no plant being built.

Can the minister tell this House whether she will commit today to put in place the five-point BSE recovery plan that the Tories announced in this province six months ago? Will she commit to that today? Will she meet with those processors that are interested in building a major plant in this province and make that commitment to those processors?

Ms. Wowchuk: That is really interesting. A few minutes ago the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) was calling us a bunch of socialists, and now the members opposite want us to be the socialists and build a plant. That is really interesting.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind all honourable members that when the Speaker is standing the Speaker should be heard in silence and all members should be seated. Also I would like to remind all honourable members that we have guests in our galleries and we have the viewing public, and when I am sitting here and I see guests in the galleries having to lean forward to hear the member who has the floor, I think we have a problem. I would ask all honourable members for their co-operation. We need to maintain decorum in the House. I ask all honourable members.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind the member opposite of a comment that he made and a quote in the paper that says last week the Conservative critic said that investing in processing was not a good idea. But when the Province announced additional funding for Rancher's Choice this month, he fired off a release saying it was a year and a half too late.

Well, you cannot have it both ways. You cannot on one hand say government should not be involved, and on the other hand say why are you not doing more. We have listened to the producers. We have listened to the processors. We announced additional programs, and we will continue to work with those who are interested in increasing slaughter capacity in this province.

Police Services Resources

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, this weekend three people were murdered in the city of Winnipeg. Four individuals have now been murdered in this province since the beginning of the year. A new gang, the Banditos, were welcomed into the province by this Minister of Justice last month. Grow ops are being busted virtually every day. Our officers are putting it on the line every day for the security and the safety of Manitobans, and this Minister of Justice is not giving them the resources they need.

Last year he promised 20 new officers. It is a drop in the bucket. It will not do enough when we have gang problems, when we have grow-op problems, where there are murders happening on the streets of Winnipeg. I want to ask this Minister of Justice why will he not provide real resources to our police officers.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that members in this House, as members on this side do, support the efforts and particularly when it comes to the operations of Winnipeg Police Service. Indeed, the member was right on one point. They are busting marijuana grow operations every day.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, only this Minister of Justice would be proud that we have that many grow ops in the province that one is busted every day. In Canada, there is one officer for every 47 offences that occur in our country. In Manitoba, there is one officer for every 68 offences that occur in the country. That is seventh worst in our country.

The Minister of Justice's spokesperson, when confronted with these facts said, "Well, we did not think we were the seventh worst in the country, we thought that we were the sixth worst in the country." Well, seventh worst, sixth worst, we do not care on this side. We do not think it is good enough, Manitobans do not think it is good enough, and our police officers who are putting it on the line every day do not think it is good enough. I want to ask the Minister of Justice when is he going to ensure that we have enough officers to bring it up to the national average.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I remind members of this House that Manitoba has the second highest number of police officers per capita. I do not think we need lessons from members opposite on the number of police officers. When there were record crime rates under their watch, what did they do? They cut the provincial policing line. This side of the House has increased support for provincial policing each and every year we have been in office. I believe that since we have been in office we have increased support for policing in Manitoba by almost \$12 million. That is an unmatched record of support for our police officers on the front line.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Justice knows full well that the workload of officers is driven by the number of offences, not on a per capita basis. He hides behind the numbers because he knows that his government has not done enough. There are two new gangs in the province since his administration came into the province. The Hells Angels have moved in and now the Banditos have joined us. There are a record number of grow ops.

There were a record number of murders in this province last year under the administration of the NDP.

I want to ask this Minister of Justice will he ensure that in tomorrow's budget there will be the kinds of resources to ensure that we have on a Canadian average basis, that we are up to par, that we have as many officers per offence as they do in the rest of the country.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I find it strange that the opposition would be taking this position because I looked at the budget that they had put forward in the last election in terms of what should be spent in the area of justice. They flatlined all the spending in justice for the last two years. We would have been suffering from massive cuts to policing, to probation services, to courts, to Corrections. That is the vision that they had in the last election.

Mr. Speaker, I will remind members opposite that we have committed to 40 more officers over the next two years. We funded additional dollars to the Integrated Organized Crime Task Force. The government has been putting forward a vigorous, proactive and innovative plan to deal with crime in this province, and I expect that they will support a budget that moves funding forward even more. I expect if there is that kind of support in the budget, they will vote for it.

Crocus Fund Evaluations

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, in 2002, after a number of warning flags were raised with the NDP government regarding a possibility of the overstatement of valuations within the Crocus Fund, I would like to ask the Minister of Industry today if he would advise the unit holders of the Crocus Fund what steps were taken by the NDP government in 2002 to satisfy them that the Crocus Fund valuations were in fact accurate.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member asked this question because I think it is important that all people, all Manitobans, know that right now there are a lot of professionals doing their job. What they are doing is they are investigating to make sure that people follow the appropriate actions as far as regulatory

review. The Auditor General is looking at the management and all investment practices and the whole processes there. We have the Manitoba Securities Commission which is conducting an ongoing evaluation. What we are trying to do is make sure that the professionals have a chance to do their job appropriately to make sure that all people behaved and acted appropriately. Thank you.

Crocus Fund Government Investigation

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, I remind the minister that the professionals are involved because his department did absolutely nothing. As a matter of fact, after repeated, repeated assurances from this NDP government that the valuations published by the fund were accurate, Manitobans continued to invest their retirement funds in Crocus. In 2001, the NDP Minister of Industry brought legislation to this House that gave the minister broad powers to demand any and all information from the fund at any time.

Can the Minister of Industry indicate if this NDP government has used any of these powers prior to the halt and the trading of shares of Crocus in December of this past year?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to note that it was under this government that we actually extended the Auditor's role where the Auditor was allowed to go into third-party areas where government had invested money or whether there was interest from the government. So under this government, not under members opposite, in 2001, we expanded the Auditor's role. Not only that, but it is important to note that when the Auditor made sure that under those rules he had authority to go and both myself and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) quickly responded to say yes, because we wanted open and honest disclosure. We went and made sure that not only did he have the right and ability to do that, but we made sure that we facilitated that as much as possible.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the unit holders in Crocus would appreciate it if this minister would actually get his facts right for once. I would remind him that it was he who said in December that he did not think the Auditor General needed to be brought in at all. In fact, the Auditor General forced him into this position.

Mr. Speaker, when the government introduced in 2001 these amendments, the then-NDP Minister of Industry stated, and I quote from Hansard, "It is important that the government monitor the operations of labour-sponsored funds to ensure they are adhering to the legislation." She went on to say, and again I quote from Hansard, "These important amendments provide audit and inspection powers as well as powers to facilitate obtaining information."

Can this Minister of Industry explain to the 33 000 investors in the fund why his department has not utilized the powers that were given to them by the legislation passed in 2001?

*(14:20)

Mr. Rondeau: I understand right now the Auditor is doing his job. We extended the Auditor's roles and responsibilities to make sure he had the ability to go in and investigate. Under the Conservative's watch there was no ability to do that. We extended it so that people could have a good, unbiased opinion of what was going on in the fund.

It is important to note that we also have a Manitoba Securities Commission that is investigating this. I believe it is necessary to let the professionals do their job. In fact, under the government that set up the Crocus and ENSIS funds, they said we should not have political interference. They said we should have a fund that is run and managed by experts. Government set up the parameters. Government set up the rules. Our job is to focus and make sure people follow the rules and that is what we did.

Crocus Fund Government-appointed Directors

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor went in because this government refused to do anything for three years. That is why the Auditor went in. It has become obvious that this NDP government has either been asleep at the switch or was in collusion with the management of the Crocus fund. This NDP government appoints a director to the board who has fiduciary responsibility to the shareholders to report and bring attention to any material changes at the fund as soon as they are known.

Will the Minister of Industry identify any issues that were raised with his department by either John

Clarkson or Ron Waugh, both of whom are senior staff and have been with the government and are government-appointed directors since 2001?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): I am glad that question has been brought up because of the understanding of fiduciary responsibility. Once a board member has been appointed, it is important to note, they are fiduciary. Their responsibility is to the shareholder. It would be not only inappropriate, but it would possibly be illegal for those people to report back to me what happens on the board. They are responsible to the unit holders and what is important is that opinion was not given just by us. That opinion has been given by the nation's experts in fiduciary responsibility. The job of the board member is to report to the unit holders. It would be inappropriate and possibly illegal for them to report to me. I can assure the member opposite they did not report to me what happened in the board because that would be wrong.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, John Clarkson and Ron Waugh were appointed to protect the government's investment in Crocus. The people of Manitoba had someone at the table that was supposed to protect our investment and that of the people of Manitoba. The minister should understand the structure and how this was all set up.

Is the Minister of Industry telling 33 000 Manitobans that their retirement funds are going to be slashed because this NDP government was either too lazy or did not care enough to monitor the fund either through the powers given in 2001 or simply questioning their NDP government-appointed directors and making sure that our investment, the people of Manitoba's investment, was secure and not plummeting like we have seen lately?

Mr. Rondeau: I would like to quote a simple quote that was given by the Minister of Finance when the fund was set up in 1992 or 1993. Then-Finance Minister, Clayton Manness, who I assume the people opposite know, said, "Rather than entrust the political interference that can sometimes swirl around decisions made, let us have some trust in the community leaders, business leaders, to make the right decisions. People are skilled."

He further went on, and I will paraphrase. He said that we should not have political interference.

We should have independent board members who have a fiduciary rate to the shareholders. We did not appoint political appointments. We appointed long-term civil servants that know and are experts in the economy. We believe we should not have political interference in the investment or management decisions of the fund.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, nobody was asking for political interference. What people were asking is that the government was supposed to protect a significant amount of public money that was in the Crocus fund. That was what the government was appointing representatives for.

Will the minister tell the 33 000 investors in the Crocus Fund what efforts his NDP government made on their behalf to ensure that Crocus was adhering to the provisions of the legislation, or is this minister going to continue his routine of see no evil, hear no evil, know nothing about it? In the meantime, 33 000 Manitobans lose a lot of their retirement fund. Shame on this government. Shame on this minister.

Mr. Rondeau: I would like to inform the member opposite that the legislation and the rights and obligations of the minister is to ensure that the extra 15 percent, the federal government and the provincial government, 15% credit extra, to ensure the following: 1) investments are made in Manitoba; 2) money is invested in Manitoba.

We have the right under sections 11.5 and 15 to investigate if they have made the fiduciary responsibility. In other words, invested in Manitoba. We have done that. What we have now done is we have the Auditor making an investigation, we have the Manitoba Securities Commission making an investigation to make sure that they have followed the rules. Our job in government is to set the rules. The regulators make sure that the rules are followed, and our job is to not allow political interference in investments.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Scott Tournament of Hearts Winners

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I am pleased to rise today to congratulate Jennifer Jones and Team Manitoba for

their stunning win at the Canadian Women's Curling Championship in St. John's, Newfoundland on Sunday, February 27.

Mr. Speaker, the winning of the Scott Tournament of Hearts was a testament to a strong team effort. The championship game came down to the last rock, a difficult hit-and-roll take-out shot. Jones stressed the importance of teamwork, saying, "We called the shot, the girls left it for me, swept it great, called it great and I made it." This shot is already being called by many sports analysts as one of the greatest shots in the history of Canadian curling. The team's final shot led to an 8-6 victory over Team Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I am especially proud of the Jones team since Jennifer's home club is the St. Vital Curling Club, an important landmark in my constituency.

This championship win represents Manitoba's first Canadian Women's Curling Championship victory since 1995. The Jones' team will now represent Canada at the Women's World Curling Championships in Paisley, Scotland, from March 19 to 27. The win also provides the Jones team with a berth in Canada's Olympic trials for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games which will be held in Turin, Italy.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Jennifer Jones, Cathy Gauthier, Jill Officer, Cathy Overton-Clapham, Trisha Eck and coach Larry Jones for winning this year's Scott Tournament of Hearts. I also want to wish them the best of luck at the Women's World Curling Championship in Paisley this month. I know they will make all Manitobans proud.

Eva McKay

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to honour the memory of Eva McKay.

Eva was a well-respected elder and healer from Sioux Valley First Nation who passed away four days short of her 85th birthday. She was a devoted advocate and will be missed dearly by her family, friends and community.

Eva was one of the first council members for Sioux Valley and served with distinction as a member for four terms. In 1964, she was among the founders of the Brandon Friendship Centre and

helped establish the Manitoba Indian Women's Association in 1969. Eva's hard work and support of local community development aided with the opening of a school in 1979 and the Dakota Lodge in 1983.

Eva served on numerous committees and panels over the years, sharing her wisdom and skills. Of note, she served on the National Parole Board in 1996, the Advisory Elders Panel for Brandon University for over 30 years, the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, the Self-Government Advisory Committee for Sioux Valley, and she was an elder adviser at the beginning of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry.

Eva was well known for her dedication to young people and worked closely with the Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services agency welcoming many foster children into her home. Her community involvement was recognized when Eva received a Woman of Distinction Award in 1988 from the Brandon YWCA, and later the Governor General of Canada's 125th Commemorative Award for Public Service in 1993.

* (14:30)

Last spring I had the pleasure of attending the Keeping the Fires Burning Recognition Ceremony in which Eva's efforts were acknowledged. I sat with Eva's family who were representing her interests that evening. I learned a great deal about Eva's accomplishments. Her daughters shared with fondness how Moses McKay, Eva's late husband, would drive Eva to many of her meetings and wait with respect and patience for many hours.

Mr. Speaker, Eva's accomplishments were many, some of which are only now coming to light to her family. It is truly astonishing how she could have possibly given so much of her time to causes and still have been such an attentive, loving wife and mother.

Mr. Speaker, Eva McKay was an amazing woman. I offer my sincere condolences to Eva's 12 children, 50 grandchildren, extended family, friends and all the individuals whose lives were touched by this extraordinary woman. Thank you.

Speaker's Office Outreach Program

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to applaud

and bring attention to the outstanding work being done through the Manitoba Legislative Assembly Speaker's office outreach program. Since 2000, when he first introduced the program to Manitoba, the Speaker has visited over 75 schools and community groups in order to educate young Manitobans about the legislative process and the parliamentary system of government.

Recently, I had the privilege of witnessing the Speaker's office outreach program in action when the Speaker and staff from the Clerk's office visited Linwood School. They use such creative and effective methods of teaching that they make learning fun. The students at Linwood participated in a mock parliament while our clerk, Monique Grenier, walked them through the stages of passing legislation.

The visit to Linwood School was a huge success. Not only did the students have lots of fun, but they also gained valuable knowledge that will benefit them for years to come. It was exciting to see the tremendous enthusiasm of the students.

I would like to thank the Grades 3, 4 and 5 students at Linwood School for making my time with them so enjoyable. I would also like to thank the Linwood School principal, Dianne Snider, as well as teachers Leanne Mager, Gina Petty, Paula Andres and Mark Zubrun for taking such a strong interest in the education of their students. I am encouraged by the prospect that in the years to come these students will remember the enjoyable time they had and because of it will be more likely to engage in the political process.

In recent months, much has been said about fostering greater interest in the political process among young Canadians. I commend the Speaker's office outreach program for going a long way to address this issue. I would like to take this opportunity to call on all members of the Assembly to join me in recognizing you, Mr. Speaker, and the staff of the Clerk's office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly for introducing and fostering this extraordinary program in Manitoba. Thank you.

Werner Boeve

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I stand up to honour the memory of Werner Boeve born 1939 and who passed away March 11, 2000.

Mr. Boeve was married to Parvaneh Boeve and they had children. On March 11, 2000, at about one o'clock in the morning, Mr. Boeve indicated to his wife, Parvaneh, that he was not feeling well. She noticed that he was not looking very well by the discolouration in his face and called for an ambulance. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the first to arrive was a detachment from the police department after which the fire department showed up. Mrs. Boeve went on to state that no ambulance arrived for approximately 26 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, this has become a grave concern, not just for Mrs. Boeve but for the citizens of East St. Paul. The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency response time whereas the City of Winnipeg uses the benchmark of 4 minutes. Ambulance coverage for East and West St. Paul is provided from Selkirk which is almost 25 kilometres away. Combined, East and West St. Paul have over 12 000 residents.

Thus, we request of the provincial government, in view of the fact that tomorrow is going to be the provincial budget day, that the provincial government consider providing East St. Paul and West St. Paul with local ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul. We also request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technology such as GPS in conjunction with a medical transportation co-ordination centre, which will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time, and request the provincial government to consider ensuring that appropriate funding is provided.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Boeve went on to say that if an ambulance would have arrived at the right time, her husband Werner would have lived following his heart attack. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I Love To Read Month

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, this past February was I Love to Read Month. It is celebrated across North America as an event to promote childhood literacy. Teaching our children to read and write while they are young is essential to ensure that they will live successful and healthy lives.

During February, I read to classrooms from Oakenwald, St. Maurice, Ralph Maybank, Arthur A. Leach, St. John's Ravenscourt and École Crane. I also read to children from St. Maurice Day Care, Lyons Gate Day Care, Universal Day Care and Fort Garry Child Care Centre. Altogether, I had the privilege of reading stories to hundreds of students from the Fort Garry area.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important to stress to our children that reading can be an interactive and fun activity. Rusty Palud, one of our volunteers, accompanied me to each classroom and organized a craft for children based around the story, "The Paper Bag Princess." These crafts challenged each child to use his or her imagination and were a big hit with all the students. Rusty, a Francophone, also helped promote bilingualism in our schools by reading some stories in French.

I Love to Read Month signifies the greater need to promote literacy to all children worldwide. I encourage my fellow colleagues to continue supporting literacy initiatives that are occurring here in Manitoba and across the globe.

In conclusion, I want to thank the teachers and principals that allowed me to read to their students. I found the experience to be enriching and extremely worthwhile. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on a grievance?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes.

Mr. Speaker: On a grievance, the honourable Member for Inkster.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I did not anticipate having a grievance today, but after having some time just to reflect in terms of the importance of this Legislature, I thought it was indeed most appropriate for me to grieve.

I truly believe that I have consistently articulated in the past to my constituents that I believe a vast majority of Manitobans expect accountability inside this legislative Chamber. It is very difficult to be able to clearly show how open this government is to being held accountable when we see things like we saw

today during Question Period, and I think we all have to share in some of the responsibilities for this.

I have been introducing petitions, and those petitions will in fact continue on one, if not a couple of very important issues to me and, I believe, to my constituents, if not to all Manitobans. In 2003, this House had 35 sitting days. In 2004, we had 55 sitting days. That puts a relatively few number of days in which we have the opportunity during Question Period to be able to ask questions of the government so that we are best able to have that face-to-face dialogue in holding the government accountable.

What we have found, Mr. Speaker, is that in Manitoba—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind all honourable members a grievance is a very serious matter, and if members wish to have a conversation, please do it in a loge or take your conversation out in the hallway. I need to be able to hear every word that is spoken.

* (14:40)

Mr. Lamoureux: In Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, we have some rules that have been very effective and have done wonders in terms of ensuring that there is a sense of accountability, but there are other rules that we need to seriously look at and how we can change the rules that are going to ensure that there is better accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged to hear about the Rules Committee and the idea of going over rules, but one of the fundamental issues in parliamentary democracy, whether it is at the provincial or federal level, is indeed Question Period. If you go back through the history in Manitoba, all the way back into the eighties, when, as an example, the Manitoba Liberal Party has had several opportunities to have questions being asked during Question Period and whether it was Sharon Carstairs as the only MLA inside here, June Westbury as the only MLA, whether it was myself or Gary Kowalski and Neil Gaudry, we have always been afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

The concern is now because of this, 35 days one year, 55 days the next year, there is more pressure in terms of the Question Period. We are starting to see

more questions being lost in terms of this Legislature. I think that what we need to do is we have to encourage and allow for appropriate questions and answers to be able to proceed ahead during Question Period. I could stand up and suggest, Mr. Speaker, that one of the rules that we should change is the length of Question Period. There are jurisdictions that have 60 minutes for Question Period, 60-minute Question Periods.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that if 40 minutes is not doing the job that it should be doing in terms of allowing for questions to be asked inside this Chamber, we then have to look at increasing it to 60 minutes. If we are not prepared to increase it to 60 minutes, then maybe we have to sit down and say maybe it is 40-second answers, 40-second questions. Maybe we need to look at limitations in terms of the Leader and the Premier. You, me and other members of this Chamber have sat down and we have tried to talk about the importance of Question Period ensuring that there is as much decorum inside the Chamber, and that individuals are being provided the opportunity to ask questions.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we need to reflect on the past which has clearly indicated whether the Liberal Party has had party status or it has had a single member inside the Chamber, or it has had three members inside this Chamber. Every year, all the way going to the early eighties, you will see that this Chamber has respected the importance of that voice being heard. When we proceed ahead, I truly believe that that is one of the issues that has to be dealt with. That is the most important rule from our perspective.

It is very difficult for us to deal with other rules if we are not being allowed to hold the government accountable. The opposition, and all members of this Chamber have been in opposition, know that it is not just you walk into Question Period and you pose your question. There is a great deal of effort and energies and resources that are put into the lead-up of posing questions. There is a certain need to feel comfortable in knowing that you are going to be afforded the opportunity to be able to ask that question. Manitobans have the rights to ensure that their representatives at the political parties are, in fact, being represented.

Far too often I hear a comment, "Well, you have two members. If you want more questions, get more members elected." Mr. Speaker, compare in some

jurisdictions that two members have a heck of a lot more weight than what we have here in the province. Who was it that determined that it is four as opposed to two as opposed to one? It is somewhat of an arrogant argument to say that you do not have the required numbers, so therefore you do not have the same sort of rights.

We should be looking in terms of what has happened in the province of Manitoba in Question Period prior to the last two sessions, Mr. Speaker. You and I and other members have seen the record. You know, I can remember Sharon Carstairs as the sole member asking two questions in the Question Period. I cannot recall ever when she missed a Question Period. So I truly believe that members need to reflect on what it is that they believe that this Chamber is here for.

We have been consistently arguing that this Chamber needs to be sitting more. There needs to be more accountability. I had what I believe was a very important question that I would have liked to ask. It is important. Well, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) in his opening remarks made reference to the deficit. You know if I read, and to me this is a critically important issue in the province of Manitoba, the apolitical and independent office of the provincial auditor, and I will quote directly from his annual report which states, this is the March 31, 2004, annual report, the government's media communications continue to emphasize operating fund financial statements. This portrays an incomplete and "misleading by omission" picture of the province's financial position and operating results to the citizens of Manitoba. For example, it is unlikely that Manitobans are aware that the government incurred the second-largest deficit of \$604 million.

It is a critically important issue. This is the apolitical office who is saying the public are not even made aware. This is a government that has gone out of its way to mislead the public on this issue. We should be afforded the opportunity to hold this government accountable, and in fact if you read between the lines of the provincial auditor, that is even being implied that the opposition members maybe for whatever reasons are not being as effective as they could be.

Is there a coincidence? When the NDP were in opposition they hammered day in and day out of the

importance of Question Periods and the Estimates and so forth in terms of accountability, but in government they have changed their opinion on it. We truly believe that there is accountability that needs to be had inside this Chamber. We are concerned when we hear about the need to change rules. We support the need to change rules. As time changes there is a need to change rules. But there are some fundamental principles that have to be adhered to, and a good example is that you ensure that members, no matter what political status that they might have inside this Chamber, their voice is, in fact, allowed to be exercised during the day in and day out process of Question Periods, of bills and so forth. That is nothing new. As I had indicated with Sharon Carstairs, I could talk about Paul Edwards, I could talk about myself back between, I guess it would have been 1995 and 1999, we did not have party status, yet we had a question every day.

I rise today as a grievance to indicate and try to gain a sympathetic ear from members of both caucuses as to why it is that from this point forward I believe that we need to revisit the way in which questions are being asked in Question Period and to immediately have dialogue among the three parties, or the three groupings, inside this Chamber in consultation with you, Mr. Speaker. As of today I see an impasse, but I am an optimist in believing that whether it is the Government House Leader (Mr. Mackintosh) or it is the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach), that we are going to be able to overcome this impasse. If not, the only recourse that we have is to appeal to you directly and ask, once again, that we look and revisit the issue of Question Period. We do not have to go that far back to find, I believe, that there is something seriously wrong inside this Chamber. I know when we sat in the Rules Committee, the Government House Leader in the formal part of the committee listed off some concerns that he had. I know that the Opposition House Leader listed off some concerns that he had. If you check Hansard you will see that I, too, listed off some concerns that I had and you will find that Question Period is right up there at the top.

* (14:50)

What we are asking and suggesting to members of this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, is that we do what we can to resolve what is a bit of an issue, at least for some members of this Chamber, in terms of ensuring that we are properly afforded the

opportunity as a political factor inside the province of Manitoba, to be able to hold government accountable. For those days that we sit, we should be able to ask a question. There are tens of thousands of Manitobans that have supported the Manitoba Liberal Party throughout the years. This Chamber in the past has respected that. It has afforded other members, other leaders, other individual members even when we did not have leaders elected. They were always afforded the opportunity to ask a question a day. I am appealing to you and your office and to the government and the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach) to make this issue of the utmost importance. I am hopeful and optimistic, Mr. Speaker, that hopefully within the next 22 hours we will have a more permanent resolution to this matter. With those few words, I thank you for the opportunity to express my grievance.

Mr. Speaker: Is the honourable member rising on a grievance?

An Honourable Member: No, I am rising on a matter of urgent public importance.

Mr. Speaker: I am asking all honourable members: Is there any other grievance?

I am still on grievances. Is there any other grievance? I see none.

Then we will move on the business.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): I rise in my place this afternoon to ask this Legislature, and I seek leave of this House, to set aside the regular business of this Chamber to deal with a matter that is of significant, urgent public importance. Mr. Speaker, I know there are two conditions that have to be met in order to satisfy this matter to be elevated to the matter of an urgent public matter. I would indicate that we have—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before addressing a motion, the honourable member would have to move the motion first.

Mr. Derkach: Yes. Therefore, I move, seconded by the member from Lakeside,

THAT the ordinary business of this House be set aside under Rule 36(1) to deal with a matter of urgent public importance;

THAT being the issue of the hardship being faced by the agricultural industry, rural communities and farm families as a result of the ongoing BSE crisis and the continued closure of the U.S. border to Canadian live cattle and the lack of attention given to the crisis by this NDP government and the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk);

FURTHERMORE, as a result of this NDP government not taking more timely action to ensure adequate processing facilities are in place in this province, farmers and the entire livestock industry find themselves in a state of crisis.

Mr. Speaker: I regret to inform the honourable member that the motion he has moved before the House is not the same as the motion I received this morning, so I would now have to ask leave for the honourable member's motion that was tabled, the original one, to be moved in the House. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

I will ask the honourable member to move the original. I will share my copy with him.

Mr. Derkach: I move, seconded by the member from Lakeside,

THAT, in accordance with Rule 36(1), I hereby file advance notice with you that today I intend to raise a matter of public importance on the following topic: the hardship being faced by the agricultural industry, rural communities and farm families as a result of the ongoing BSE crisis, and the continuing closure of the U.S. border to Canadian live cattle.

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable Member for Russell, I believe I should remind all members that, under Rule 36(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other party in the House are allowed not more than five minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately. Stated in *Beauchesne's* Citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion, and remarks that members should focus exclusively on is whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the

House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Derkach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to begin by addressing the urgency of this matter as a condition for a matter of urgent public importance. It was only days ago that we learned that the border to the United States for live cattle has been closed once again to the farmers and to the entire nation, if you like, and its impact on this country and on this province specifically is more than I think we should be expected to bear as individual producers, who are, I think, doing their job in producing the best livestock in the world. But we have had no other opportunity to debate this matter in this Legislature up until this moment.

I think it is incumbent upon us to not only show our support to the agricultural industry and to the livestock industry in this province by debating this matter here and today, but I think it is a signal that all of us in this Chamber representing Manitobans throughout the width and breadth of this province have a concern about the impact this particular initiative is going to have on all of us. It is in this Chamber that matters of this kind need to be debated to underline how important these issues are to Manitobans and to ensure that together we move in a direction that will allow for the borders to open or for some other remedial action to be taken to allow our producers to exist. I daresay that, if we do not have this opportunity to be able to debate this matter, to be able to look for solutions, many of our livestock producers and the cattle industry may disappear from the landscape.

We heard today that, in fact, the R-CALF group is looking at putting a motion forward that would ask for an injunction on boxed beef as well as live cattle. If that happens, our livestock industry will grind to a halt. It is for this reason that I think, as legislators, we need to set aside some time today. We have a budget coming tomorrow, but today we have the time to set some of our precious time aside to debate and to ensure that we explore every possible avenue of trying to rectify this situation.

The federal government, through the Prime Minister, has to have direct access to the President of the United States. I think it is incumbent that this debate be raised to the highest level in this nation, and that means that we have to signal to the Prime Minister that there is a responsibility on his part to

talk directly with the President of the United States. At the same time, I think it is important for us to have the opportunity to underscore the importance of this issue with our Premier (Mr. Doer) and with our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) to ensure that they are going to pay attention to this not just today, but tomorrow as they bring forward the budget. We have heard all kinds of signals that, in fact, this could be a good-news budget, and I applaud that because this province needs it.

* (15:00)

But, Mr. Speaker, if it is that, then we have to do whatever it is we can to ensure that livestock producers in this province, and the livestock industry, will survive this very, very serious crisis, because if we lose this industry, we are not going to lose it for a day or a month, we are going to lose it for a long time.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, that is the urgency of the matter. In terms of speaking to how quickly this could be raised, this is our first opportunity. Collectively, this is the first time that we have been able to gather since the decision was made to close the border again, and I think it is important that we deal with this very important matter today, this afternoon. I would daresay that if there are members on either side of the House that need more time than this House sits today, I would say, let us extend the hours. Let us make sure we have the right amount of debate on this matter and that we take a strong message to our producers, to our American friends and, indeed, to the government of the day, as well as to the federal government. So it is for those reasons that I raise the issue.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): We are certainly pleased that the motion originally read by the member was not the correct one, Mr. Speaker, because we would have vigorous concern about what was said out there, but as the matter of urgent public importance properly filed with the Speaker's office is worthy of consideration.

I will say this I think that in even just two days' time, when we are entering on the budget debate, it would be difficult to deal with a MUPI at that time, given rulings of this House, but the budget debate is two days away. We on this side of the House recognize that this is an urgent matter of public importance. This whole closure has been extremely

difficult on the whole community of Manitoba, but of course it has fallen most difficultly on the producers. But it was the news, the good news and the anticipation of the border opening and then the subsequent change of circumstances that has elevated this matter once again to an urgent matter and, I think, has really, indeed, been painful for those who had expectations of getting on with livestock production in the usual course here in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I think that members on this side of the House feel very strongly that this is a matter that should be discussed today. We would like to have had, in preference, an all-party resolution presented and debated so that we can unite our voice here as 56 or 57 MLAs speaking together, speaking to south of the border, speaking to the federal government. It appears that we have not yet achieved that all-party resolution. At a minimum, at least through discussion on a matter of urgent public importance, we think that we can turn our mind to an issue that in every way is critical to the well-being of this province, its economy and those of the lives of its producers.

In conclusion, we support this being debated. Mr. Speaker, if you would take my comments as an indication of the will of the members on this side of the House to see the matter debated, even if, in other circumstances, it may be somewhat irregular, we support this as a matter of urgent public importance.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Under our rules, to recognize to speak to the MUPI is usually the House leaders of a recognized political party.

I see the honourable Member for River Heights is up, so I would have to ask leave of the House if they will allow the honourable member to address this. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise on behalf of the members of the Liberal Party to indicate that we, too, would like to see debate of this urgent matter. We believe, as it would appear, that the other two parties believe that this is indeed an urgent issue that we face in Manitoba, indeed in Canada with a situation where there was an expectation that the border would be opened, but the border was not opened because of a court ruling last week in the United States. We believe that it is urgent to debate this, not only because of the court

ruling and the continued closure of the border but because today we had an announcement from the government that they were going to change their approach to supporting slaughter capacity and that their announcement demonstrates the failure of their policy to add to slaughter capacity during the last two years.

In 22 months, there has been very little progress in adding slaughter capacity and in converting provincially inspected plants to federally inspected plants and therefore it is very important to bring this forward right now to make sure that the public is aware that the provincial government's policy with regard to slaughter capacity has failed for 22 months. Yes, we are pleased that they are ready to change, but such a change clearly should have happened a long time ago, and 22 months after the beginning of this problem is clearly a long time afterwards.

There is another reason why this is an urgent matter. It is clear from the court ruling in the United States that one of the significant issues from the court was that we were not proceeding in Manitoba or in Canada to have full testing of animals over 30 months, let alone other animals. The court judgment was based, in part, on the fact that at this point we still do not know what the incidence is of BSE.

I have argued since very soon after May of 2003 that we should have moved in this province to begin such testing, and had we done so we could have, I suspect, made the court think twice about imposing this ban on the export of cattle from Manitoba and from Canada.

I think the federal government is clearly to blame in this respect as well as the current provincial government for not taking the adequate steps in this regard. Mr. Speaker, it highlights the importance of having this debate today. It is clearly an urgent matter, and we agree strongly with both the Conservative Party and the NDP party that this should be debated today.

Mr. Speaker: Order. From what I have heard, the House has agreed that the debate should proceed. Each member wishing to speak may do so for up to 10 minutes. I rule the motion in order.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: Shall the debate proceed?

All those in favour, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed, say nay.

In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

The House has agreed that the debate should proceed. Each member wishing to speak may do so for up to 10 minutes. Pursuant to Rule 36(4), the total debate on this matter may not exceed two hours.

* * *

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, before I get into the issue of the BSE crisis, I want to just signal to the House that, although we only have two hours to debate this matter, I know with leave of the House that we can go beyond the two hours. There are a lot of members in this Chamber who have a concern about the seriousness of this matter, and I would propose at this time that if in fact there are more members who wish to speak after two hours this House do consider extending the time for this debate. Having said that, I want to go directly into the issues as I see them with respect to the BSE crisis.

* (15:10)

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, agriculture producers in this province have undergone another blow. Just as we were anticipating that prices could then move upwards and cattle could start moving across the border and then freeing up some additional slaughter capacity for cull cows in this nation, the door was slammed shut on us again.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know how much more agricultural producers can withstand. We have looked at grain prices, as a matter of fact, and grain prices in this province and in this country are down at their lowest in decades. Just by way of example, I pulled out some sale tickets from grain that was marketed by my father in 1954 and the wheat prices then were higher than they are today.

Now, Mr. Speaker, can you believe that our agriculture industry is facing this kind of crisis, depressed prices, when we have all-time highs in fuel prices. We have fertilizer prices that are moving up and farmers are looking at the prospect of putting in another crop.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have an issue on our hands and I do not envy the government for the kind of issue that they have to deal with here because it is not easy. I am going to be the first one to stand and say that this is not an easy matter to deal with because there are other pressures of the treasury as well, but I think we have come to a point in history where we either are going to support our ag industry in an appropriate fashion or we might lose it. I do not want to see our ag industry lost.

Mr. Speaker, I have a young family who would love to get involved in the ag industry, but they are afraid. Every farmer I speak to who is my age, or perhaps a little younger or a little older, who is looking at perhaps turning over his operation to his family cannot do it because we are facing a time of uncertainty, a time of depression, and it is, I hate to use that word, but it is a time of depression, if you like, in our agricultural industry.

I want to come back to the BSE issue, Mr. Speaker, because, you know, we can debate the importance of the BSE issue for a long time. Our party put forward a five-point plan. Was it political? Was it to get the government offside? What we tried to do was look at the needs of agriculture. We looked at what resources the government had and we said, to the best of our ability we think that we can do, collectively, this for our agriculture producers.

Now maybe we did not have the broad panoramic view of what should happen in agriculture, but I can tell you from our experience on this side of the House, from being farmers, from being involved in the industry, from being close to the industry, we thought we were responding to what the agriculture industry out there needed.

Now we received opposition from the government, that we were short-sighted, that we did not know what we were talking about, but let us lay all of that aside, Mr. Speaker. Today I am happy that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) put forward a plan today to help the abattoirs in our province at least expand their operations, raise their level to a federally inspected level and be able then to move ahead with processing animals in Manitoba. That is a positive step forward, something we should have done a year ago, but something that maybe this is the second best time to do it and let us move on with it.

I say to the government you have to understand that out there people are desperately looking for

solutions. They do not care about our political blindfolds, if you like. They want to see solutions.

Mr. Speaker, we have Rancher's Choice out there. I can tell you that operation cannot get off the ground with the limited amount of money that is available to it. It is time for us, collectively, to support government and say go out there and put major dollars on the floor. If you have to put the \$40 million on the floor to get a processing industry in this province here immediately, do it.

Mr. Speaker, there is another operation that was looking at Neepawa as a site. They do not need money. They have their money raised. What they need is a commitment from us as legislators to backstop, should there be a turnaround and should all of a sudden they find themselves in a pickle because the border has opened and because somebody is manipulating prices, they want us as legislators to be able to backstop that.

Secondly, they want infrastructure and that is our responsibility. That is government's responsibility. That is local government's, federal government's and provincial government's responsibility to make sure that we have the infrastructure in place for the industry to get on with it. I say this is an opportunity. I look at this as an opportunity for the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), the Premier (Mr. Doer) and all of us as legislators, and we will support, if, in fact, the minister goes out there, the Premier goes out there, and says we will put the dollars on the table to make sure that this happens. We will look after the solutions that perhaps have to come as a result of the amount of money we have invested later. I think all Manitobans would see this as a good move.

What does it do for our province, Mr. Speaker? It does several things. Number one, it creates the capacity to process animals that are today sitting in feedlots and have nowhere to go. Number two, it allows us to look for export markets, markets that we will compete with the United States rather than being dependent on the United States to market our product for us. This is an issue that both the provincial and the federal government have to get their act together on. The marketing is not just a federal responsibility, not just a provincial responsibility, it is both. It is the two levels of government plus the industry coming together and getting out there and marketing our product.

I go to Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and I look at the marketing programs they have got there. These are initiated by the cattle industry and by government. It says eat Manitoba beef, eat Alberta beef. When you go to a restaurant, they serve you Alberta beef. When you go to Manitoba restaurants, we just serve beef, and we serve Canadian beef. I think it is time that we had to put a label on it. Let us brand our beef. Let us say that it is Manitoba beef. Let us be proud of it. Let us get our chefs' association on board. Let us get our restaurant association on board. Every time we go to the restaurant, let us make sure it is Manitoba beef.

Mr. Speaker, that takes an effort, that takes an effort from industry, that takes an effort from agriculture, that takes an effort from all of us as legislators. We put forward a five-point plan. Now perhaps the government does not want to buy every single point on that five-point plan, and I am not saying that it is gospel, that it should be treated as that, what I am saying is let us open our minds. Let us look at what is good in that five-point plan. Let us take what is good and let us put it to work. The minister did that today. She did that today by announcing that she is going to move ahead with improving our abattoirs, and I commend her for it because that is the right thing to do.

The next right thing to do, Mr. Speaker, is putting some cash in the hands of our producers. Now I know that there has been resistance to this because the government does not see this as a good way of doing it, but, I say it is time to lay aside some of those fears. It is time to put some money into these hands of these producers through a cash advance program. That means that if I have got an animal on my farm that is going to be marketed three months down the road because the border is not open, I can get some cash to feed that animal, than I can get some cash to at least buy some groceries for my family, or pay for some expenses on my farm because that animal is there. The first call when I go to market that animal, the first call is for that cash advance, just as it is in grain.

In other words, if you give me \$500 on an animal in my feedlot, the first \$500 when that animal sells goes to pay the cash advance. There is nothing wrong with that, Mr. Speaker. Is the government putting up the money for the capital? No, all it is doing is putting up the interest for that cash advance program because that money is coming back. It is no different than the grain cash advance program. So let

us not be resistant to that. Let us open our minds. Let us do the right thing for the producers out there. Let us get these families to a point where there is less stress.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say one other thing. On Friday, I called Bunge Foods who market Canola. The manager there told me, "Len," he said, "I have had more calls this morning on the BSE issue than I have had about Canola." He says it is to the point where I am almost recommending that some of these producers seek help from the stress line. That is how critical it is out there. He was talking not just about producers in Manitoba. He was talking about producers in Saskatchewan as well, because they are facing the very same thing.

So I say to this Premier and I say to this Minister of Agriculture, please do the right thing. Please make sure that we take off our political blindfolds and that we do what is right today for the farmers, the families, the communities and the industry in this province because that is our responsibility as legislators. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:20)

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable First Minister, when the honourable Member for Russell was speaking, he had indicated a desire for the Speaker to ask the willingness of the House that if this debate goes on more than two hours that leave be granted.

Order. I have to ask the House that if all members that wish to speak have not concluded their comments, is it the will of the House to exceed the two-hour limit that we are limited by our rules?

Is there will of the House for leave? Is leave granted?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable First Minister (Mr. Doer), on a point of order.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): You are asking us to make a decision about how much time we should

allocate before we get to that point. We are certainly willing to have all members speak, but I think it would be prudent for us to have leave granted at the two-hour mark and at the three-hour mark in a systematic way as we sometimes do in committees, as we sometimes do in this House, as opposed to sort of a blank-cheque leave before we get there.

I would strongly suggest that you canvass the House at the two-hour mark. I guarantee our House will grant leave at that point, and then we can do it in a way that is predictable because this is the most important priority we have. But some of what people are going to do is actually talk to people about the BSE crisis as the day progresses. I would suggest that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Just for clarification of the House, when any member asks the Speaker to put a request that departs us from the rules, it is my job to put that request and to inform the House that under our rules, the member had asked to extend the debate if there are members wishing to debate it and if it exceeds two hours. But under our rules, the debate on a MUPI cannot continue past the adjournment hour. If you look at the clock when we started and when we adjourn, there is very little time in between. If the members wish to go beyond the two hours, but under our rules it cannot continue past the adjournment hour so the leave I heard the member asking for was just to continue past the two hours. Under our rules it states that at adjournment hour the MUPI is finished.

The honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), on the same point of order?

Mr. Derkach: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think the Premier (Mr. Doer) does probably have a good point, and if we have to amend it so that it becomes a more practical, more workable approach, then the House would be ready to do that.

I know the minister will probably be wanting to meet with members in the livestock industry today so if we can continue the debate, and when we have reached the two-hour mark, then certainly I would be in my chair and prepared to ask for leave at that time, Mr. Speaker, so if we can continue. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. There seems to be agreement that I do not put the request for leave at this time. What I am hearing and I need the advice of the House is: Prior to two hours expiring, you are asking

me to put the proposal forward for leave if there is a request. The onus will be on you to ask me to put forward asking for leave prior to two hours being up. It is entirely up to you, the members, to put that forward. Also keep in mind that if you are asking for leave to extend the speaking time, under our rules, it still states that the MUPI expires at adjournment time unless you ask leave for that.

* * *

Mr. Doer: Thank you for your ruling, and thank you to the member from Russell on his resolution before the Chamber today. I think it is a very timely and helpful resolution. I thought his comments were generally very constructive on this debate, and I actually do believe that the desire for all our producers across all the constituencies of Manitoba is to have, I think the terminology used by members opposite was, "Take our political blinders off and try to do what is best." Now we obviously think that is a good idea, and I know we are trying to balance off what is best in the short term and in the long term with the producers.

I was pleased that the Prime Minister did call today with the other western Canadian premiers and did relay to us his conversation with the President. I think he feels that the President will back Canada's view to open the border. He feels the minister of agriculture in the United States will help back the position of the Canadian producers, and he also feels we will be consulted on legal action that is going to be necessary.

We also agreed that we cannot let some of these statements being made in the United States including sometimes, by the way, the courts in the United States that generally give credence to the argument that the Canadian food supply is unsafe. We cannot allow this kind of statement to exist without being challenged. Unchallenged statements become, sometimes, the unfortunate conventional wisdom. Last year Senator Daschle stated that the Canadian beef was unsafe. Senator Daschle might be eating a hamburger out of the United States that had BSE, because BSE was in the food supply with the one cow that was detected in Washington state. BSE was not in, and never has been to date, in the food supply in Canada, and whether it is a judge in Montana or a senator in Washington, we have got to say it loud and clear, that the Senate was wrong, those senators who said, as Senator Daschle said last year, that our

beef was unsafe, are absolutely wrong. Every situation has been detected, has been inspected and has been rejected from the food supply. That is a fundamental difference from the one case in Washington, and that is why Mike Johanns and other senior American officials know that science is very much on our side.

Where the weakness was, I thought, was in the SRMs that two years ago stated that we had to have a policy common to Europe, Japan and Korea on the SRMs. It was Canada that was saying that the policy on SRMs was going to leave us behind and it was Canada and this minister and other ministers that argued we could not have the European protocol which was identified in a scientific report by the experts, we could not have a two-tier SRM policy that would be bad for the United States in terms of Japan and Korea and would be bad for Canada in terms of the European markets. I am glad that, again, it took right until July 2004 to get that changed and we think that that is positive.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to our press release. We are talking about five-point plans and other plans. I recall we actually waited an extra week to incorporate slaughter and marketing in the press release we issued in August of 2003. When we got involved in the initial slaughter capacity, or slaughter subsidy, we recognized very early that that was not working, and we actually amended it to include marketing, slaughter and a subsidy program not based on slaughter but based on feed. We further amended it another additional time to deal with the fact that there was a drought going on in 2003. We actually had slaughter and slaughter capacity early on. The problem always has been that everybody agrees with slaughter capacity, but not everybody signs up for it.

The border then opened in August for boxed beef. All of a sudden the slaughter desire slowed down out there. Then the rumour the border was going to open in December of 2003, and then we had the case in Washington, and we went right through 2004 with an unacceptable situation, but at the end of 2004 we had the Ag Minister, again, say the border is going to open for cattle under 30 months. This is frustrating because the capital and some of the equity commitments that we announced last year, for Rancher's Choice for example, that remains. The announcement made by the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) builds upon the commitments we

have for Rancher's Choice, but we need also with any slaughter capacity, and that includes the Neepawa plant which I am somewhat familiar with, they are worried about the government being there if they need us. We are worried about cows being there if we need them. We cannot—

An Honourable Member: We will have the cows there.

Mr. Doer: We can and we will, but we want to get the enrolment level at a sufficient level to ensure that the investment is solid. Having said that, I agree with many of the statements made by the member from Russell, and I also agree that many of the federal-provincial programs are not agile enough for the producers.

One of the areas that we thought we had to deal with was the whole issue of cash, not only for beef producers, but for wheat producers and oil seed producers. Members opposite will know what the tax regime was when they were in office. They know what it was. They were responsible for the levels of taxation on farmland, and we have taken the first two steps through a rebate program, which is cash in the hand, which we announced last November in the Speech from the Throne. We did not wait for the budget to announce it at the 33 percent and we did not wait for the budget to announce that this budget would be a rebate program of 50 percent of the farm education tax in Manitoba. We did that because we knew people were hurting. We knew people were hurting; we acted.

* (15:30)

This Minister of Agriculture acted in a positive way for the benefit of producers. I think the members are right, that we need to have a proper program for our producers in Manitoba. I think we have to have a long-term strategy on the herd size in Canada. I think we need to have a long-term strategy. Some of the interesting parts about the Neepawa plant, as I understand it, they will have less products in the cattle.

I think there is a vulnerability for the U.S. feed business, by the way. I think there is a vulnerability down Highway 83, if you will, of the safety of their beef and some of the products that are utilized in the production and the feed lots. God knows we want to continue to work with one market with the United

States, but, if we cannot, I believe our ability to turn our Canadian production around and the safe food and safe beef like Neepawa will provide us greater agility to compete into Japan and Korea.

If we cannot get a market open, there are lots of consumers in the world that have views on materials, and I certainly do not want to undermine the feed lot industry here in Manitoba, but, having said that, we have to deal with the fact the border is closed for live cattle under 30 months, and the only progress we have made is for cattle with the box beef cattle.

We believe that many of the measures that the minister has put in place have been helpful, but nobody on this side of the House is going to say that any one measure has bridged the income loss that cattle producers have felt since the first cow in Alberta was inspected and rejected in May of 2003. All of us know that these measures that have been put in place try to get us to more slaughter, and we are still committed to that. They try to get us to more long-term management of the herd working with other provinces. We would like to have a made-in-Canada and made-in-Manitoba safety marketing strategy. We have met with the chefs, the hotel industry, the hospitality industry, the health care industry. We have met with people to talk about Manitoba beef. It is not always that easy what looks to be easy.

Even in Alberta you can get beef from New Zealand sometimes, and you just cannot understand it. Even big chains—[interjection] I understand that, but I am just saying that it is not that simple.

We have put in the loan advance, and when members opposite said the second year was too high, we dealt with it. We dealt with the Drought Assistance Program. We have lowered the issue of the taxes for the first time ever, and I am pleased to speak on this resolution and I want to thank the member from Russell for putting it forward today. It is very, very timely. Thank you very, very much.

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker. I want to applaud the member from Russell for bringing forward the matter of public importance, the issue about the fact that today was to be a day where there was to be some celebration in Manitoba, and across Canada for that matter, that the border would be open to cattle under 30 months. We know today that we are standing on

this MUPI, this matter of public importance, because that is not the case. And so the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) has very eloquently argued why we should be debating this issue, and I applaud him for that initiative, as well as the member from Lakeside who has seconded the motion.

I think the reason we bring this issue forward is that it was May 20 of 2003 where our cattle producers in Manitoba woke up as they normally did every day to go out to do the kinds of things that our producers in Manitoba do, and that is to produce the best beef in the world, to supply beef to those countries, to our provinces, to North America to ensure that they had the ability to taste and be a part of what is the best beef in the world. That suddenly was closed to them through no fault of their own, through no doing of their own. So, Mr. Speaker, they wondered, "What next?" What was going to happen over the fact that this border was closed and the fact that they would have their businesses interrupted? So they, quite rightly so, look to their provincial leaders, their provincial premiers, they look to the federal government, quite rightly so as they should, and basically said, "Where do we go from here? What are the options that we can do?"

I think it is important during this debate that we as legislators, because as we know, governments come and governments go, but one thing is very clear, and that is that the previous government was very, very clear to promote the opportunities of rural Manitoba to diversify, to do different things, to ensure that there was diversification throughout the province of Manitoba. In fact, the Member for Russell was a driver behind that because he was the Minister for Rural Development looking at other opportunities. So what did our producers in rural Manitoba, the entrepreneurs do? They listened and they followed through. They decided that they were going to go out and diversify and do different things. And so I want to make that point, because I think it is important that we as legislators in this House realize that if we ask the rural entrepreneurs to go out and do something different, and they do, and they run into a situation, as we see, that is none of their own doing. It is something that has just been foisted upon them. Then I believe it is important for all of us in this House to stand and say, "You did what we asked, and now what we must do as legislators is we must be there to support you in your time of need." In fact, I would say that we have used the word "crisis" and perhaps we use it as almost a throwaway term, but it

is not a throwaway term. It is, in fact, a very serious crisis.

I would say to the current government, the Doer government, that we saw barbecues taking place here in Winnipeg, taking place in Brandon, great support from the communities to come out and buy our Manitoba beef, to show that we are standing four-square with our producers. That is what we did. Now, the second anniversary happened in Brandon just in the summer past, and again there was tremendous support from all elected officials to be out, to be there to help serve, to help promote that industry. But underlying that second annual barbecue in Brandon was the very reason that I believe that we are here debating this issue, and that is that our producers are suffering, and there is nothing being done in real terms to solve the issues that our producers are expecting from the government of the day.

I know that we, six months ago as a party, said, "We have got to come up with a plan. We have got to come up with something that we can bring forward to the Legislature." And we did. It is not perfect, we admit that, but we came forward with a five-point plan that addressed what we were hearing from producers, and that is that we need to increase slaughter capacity immediately. We need a short-term solution and a long-term solution, and so our five-point plan. I think the important part of our five-point plan is that we did not ask the current government to spend any more money than they themselves had committed to this issue, to this crisis. They talked about \$180 million, and they themselves indicated that they had put around \$100 million or so into the program, so it left some \$80 million. That was the basis on which we brought forward our five-point program. We ask that there be money put into building a slaughter facility.

Now, I understand that members opposite might say, "Did I hear the Leader of the Opposition correctly? Did he say that government should go out and build something?" Well, I come back to my initial point. The answer is, yes, I said that. The question is why. Because we believe, on this side of the House, that there is a crisis in the province of Manitoba with our producers. I always believe, and I have not been in public life for as long as some of the members in government have, but surely there has to be a sense that if there is a crisis in our society, in our province, is it not the role of

government to help families in times of crisis? That surely must be the underpinning reason that we are sitting debating this issue. I know that in the flood of '97, the government was there because there was a crisis in the province of Manitoba. I know also that when there was extra flooding the former government was there to help the families because there was an issue of a crisis.

* (15:40)

Here we are, Mr. Speaker, close to two years with this border just being slammed shut on producers, again through no fault of their own, and we do not see the current government helping those producers. Yes, they have talked about programs. Yes, they have had announcements, but why is it, as recently as Friday, when we went to the Winnipeg Auction Mart, that we were listening to producers who were saying, well, yeah, we have got a program all right, and there are forms to fill out for these programs, but when we fill out the forms and if we make one slight error, we get rejected.

Mr. Speaker, there is no sense of saying wait a minute. Again, is this not a crisis? If it is, then we should be there to support our producers in every way we possibly can. So, if there is a little misunderstanding, we will ensure that we are there to get this thing through, on time, so that you can get the kind of assistance that you need, but we do not hear that from the current government. I think that is why all our producers in Manitoba are very frustrated, because they hear announcement after announcement but there is nothing to really meaningfully help the producers. That is why in our five-point plan we were very clear and we said, and I say again today, six months ago we tried to say to the current government, "Look, this is about making Manitoba a better place. This is about understanding that we have got a serious crisis in the province of Manitoba."

Let us not talk about any parties or any politics. Let us talk about how we as legislators can work together to ensure that our industry is supported, Mr. Speaker. So we would have been delighted if the current government would have said, "Well, you know, we might have some issues with your five-point plan." We have acknowledged that it is not perfect, but our concern was to ensure immediate slaughter capacity and to ensure that there was a plan for the future for our producers in Manitoba, so that

issues like the seventh of March, when we know that the border is supposed to open, but in fact we know that the Americans are a litigious society. They are always going to court over some issue. That is nothing that we can help.

What we can help is that we can ensure that we have something in place for our producers, so that if the border does not open next week or the week after, and we hope it does, we really hope it does, that has got to be the ultimate answer for all of us, but in the meantime, what do producers do day-in, day-out? They hope and they pray and their frustration is boiling over because it is not enough to hope and pray anymore. They have done that, they have done that, they have done that and nothing has changed.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand before this House, saying that this issue is as a crisis. If we believe it is a crisis, then we will move mountain and earth, we will ensure that any regulations to proceed to ensure that we have proper slaughter capacity here in the province of Manitoba, that we get it done properly, that we do not dither any longer, that we take action on behalf of our producers in Manitoba. We say it in the Legislature, that they are the best producers in Canada. Let us stand and ensure that we not only talk about it, but that we show some action. I ask the Doer government that we start today to do exactly that.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise today to talk about this important issue, and the member from Russell brought this urgent matter of public importance forward, we were looking at how we could bring an all-party resolution forward, where we could all support a resolution. The Conservatives were there to support us, because what we really wanted was to put in place a resolution that would spell out what our concerns were and what direction we thought that we could be taking as a provincial government, what direction we could send to the federal government, and send a united voice from the Manitoba Legislature that we were all in support of standing strongly behind our producers on this important issue.

Unfortunately, we did not get support from all sides of the House, from all members, so that meant

that we are now talking about a matter of urgent public importance, but let us proceed with this issue as it is. I have to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when the news came on Wednesday that the border was not going to open, it was a huge disappointment for—

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Derkach: I apologize to the Minister of Agriculture. I do not want to put her on the spot, but I rise on a point of order because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, she said that she did not get support for the resolution. It was our understanding on this side of the House that we were prepared to go into the debate on that resolution, and, certainly, we would support the resolution as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Differences of opinion are not points of order.

* * *

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased that we have this resolution but—

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

Point of Order

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it is very important to clarify this issue from all parts of the House. The minister is talking about a resolution which has not even been presented to the House. We have not had an opportunity to say yes or no, quite frankly. It was a last minute resolution which we were told about, and quite frankly, when we are done with the MUPI, if there is time, then we will wait for the minister's resolution, but right now, we are debating the MUPI. I think we should proceed on the MUPI.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is no point of order. Let us proceed with the debate.

* * *

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a disagreement on whether we had a resolution. I know that there are members of the House that commented and I thought we had some

agreement, but since we cannot come forward with an all-party position on a motion, we are here debating the MUPI and I believe that that is very important.

I wanted to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it was a great disappointment for me when I heard that the border was not opening because there had been a tremendous amount of hope built up by our producers. Prices had started to come up based on sales. There were people that were filling out all their forms. In fact, that is where a lot of emphasis was being placed on. How are we going to make sure that we can get all the right paperwork so that we can get back to some normal trade again.

Unfortunately, that did not happen. It just makes you wonder how one judge in one state can make a ruling that will change the whole policy of the U.S. government. We have the assurance of the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President has indicated to the Prime Minister that they are going to move forward on this. This outlines very clearly the challenges that we have and why it is very important that we move forward with the repositioning strategy that we talked about. A strategy that will increase our slaughter capacity, and a strategy that will help us develop new markets as well as other programs to help farmers as they keep their farm animals on the farm for a longer period of time.

The members opposite talk about their five-point plan that they brought forward six months ago. Well, I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we brought forward a plan. We recognized well over a year ago that slaughter capacity was an issue, and we put in place programs that would help to increase slaughter capacity in this province. We have to continue to work in that vein. We have to continue to work to move from provincial slaughter capacity to federal slaughter capacity because there is beef being imported into this country, into other provinces that we cannot sell from Manitoba because we only have one federally inspected plant. We have to continue to work in that vein to ensure that we move Manitoba beef into many other markets.

*(15:50)

Others have talked about the need to market Manitoba beef, and certainly there have been programs in that vein where we have worked with the restaurant industry to get more Manitoba product

into Manitoba restaurants. The first program was for beef. The last program that we just announced is for all ruminants. We are trying to encourage more Manitobans to ask for a Manitoba product in the restaurant and enjoy some of the other products that we have in this province, not only beef.

With regard to programming, as we have been developing these programs, we have been working very closely with the producers. When producers have identified areas where there was a need for assistance, we have put those programs in place. The drought assistance that we had, the Cull Cow Program, the BSE Recovery Loan, the loans that we have through the Agriculture Credit Corporation are all very important programs. As a province, we have done many things. In particular, you talk about cash advance. Manitoba was the one that designed the program to get a cash advance through your CAIS program. Yes, people talk about the difficulty of that program, and we recognize that.

I want to tell members of the House that I was at a federal-provincial ministers' meeting just this last week, and the CAIS program was a topic of huge discussion. One of the issues is the deposit. Manitoba has always felt that the deposit was a burdensome program and we, the provinces and federal government, would be able to agree that we are going to further delay the deposit on the CAIS program. That means those people who thought they were going to have to have their deposit in by March 31, that payment will be delayed until March 31 of 2006, so for this year people are not going to have to put their deposit in.

We are going to have to find another way for producers to participate in the program rather than have them put money into a bank account and sit there when they could be using that money. That is the plan that the provinces and the federal government are working on. The details will be announced by March 31 of this year. But producers can know that the issue of putting money on deposit is one that we are addressing. That takes a whole burden off producers until we decide what the new program will look like.

As the Premier (Mr. Doer) said, the issue of the reducing taxes of our farmers is a significant move because it produces, again, a tremendous burden on

farmers who are pressed for cash not to have to put that additional money in.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the areas that I am concerned about is the other ruminants. The federal minister was here in Manitoba, I believe, on September 10. He talked about the loan loss provision, which would help people with slaughter capacity. He talked about money for other ruminants. Their money has not materialized for the loan loss provision for people who are looking to increase their slaughter capacity. They have not been able to flow any money.

We raise that issue because if we can get a better loan loss provision, that will be very helpful for us to increase slaughter capacity. They have not put in their money for the other ruminants. I want to remind everybody in this House that we continue to talk about the beef industry, but there is another whole group of people, our bison, our sheep, our goat and elk people, who are caught up in this and are not getting the support they need.

With respect to cash advance, we have talked about a cash advance program similar to the grain program. My understanding is the federal government has designed a cash advance program similar to the wheat program that we have, but it will not come into effect this year. It will not come into effect until next year. We have some work to do to get the federal government to recognize we are flowing money in the provinces. The federal government has announced some programs for other ruminants. The federal government has announced now a cash advance. We have to work through those. They also have to be prepared to invest in slaughter capacity as the provinces are. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that it is important—*[interjection]*

The member opposite just asked about the CAIS deposits. In fact, I just spoke about that in the House where the CAIS deposits will be delayed until another option is developed.

What we need from this Legislature is a strong, united front saying that we support the industry. We want that border opened, and it should be made based on science. I have to say I am very disappointed in the comments made by the judge to say that our beef is not safe, because we know, based on science, our beef is safe.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. I hope, as everyone in this House does I am sure, that the border is opened soon, and that we will see slaughter capacity increased in this province, and new opportunities for our producers. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Deputy Speaker, today was the day we were supposed to be in celebration in opening the border to our cattle being shipped south to the United States, our biggest trading ally. It is, indeed, that we are standing here in sadness instead.

Instead of moving our cattle forward and taking them south to be processed, we are left in the lurch with respect to what we are going to do with our cattle now. We did, some six months ago, bring a five-point plan forward whereby we asked the provincial government to use dollars that were allocated out of the \$180 million that they had proposed. Unfortunately, until now, that program was not addressed.

The lack of leadership has got us in somewhat of a pickle. I was talking to the Secretary of Agriculture's office on Monday, Mr. Mike Johanns, and I did write Mr. Johanns a letter and asked them to consider opening the border on behalf of all Canadians and the United States, to work together in solving this issue. His office phoned back and said that he was excited and was looking forward to working on some of the other issues as they came forward. I do believe that the Secretary of Agriculture does have good intents of the United States. Unfortunately, those comments did not come true.

So now we are left, and I go back to some of the comments the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) talked about, and that is with our U. S. partners. I remember very clearly on Thursday night when I was watching the news, one of the members, the senator from Idaho said, "Listen up, Canada. We want your attention that your beef is not safe in Manitoba. We want to make that loud and clear." I say to the member from Idaho that he should listen up. Our beef is safe. We have not got the beef into our food system, and we have not allowed any beef to move into any food chain other than that of what was safe and useful to our Canadian people.

The R-CALF group is claiming that they have some 12 000 members of which 44 states are

represented. I question whether or not they have 12 000 members who are actually farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also question whether or not they have 44 states. What I do know for sure is that that R-CALF group is a very powerful group, and when they can get the same judge to make the same decision twice, I think that that was going to be very hard to be overturned. We are looking at a minimum of probably six months before this will be heard. The President has come out and said that he will veto anything that is going to happen in the House, but that will not deal with the issue at hand, and that is the court injunction.

We need to move forward. I am glad to see that the Minister of Agriculture on her side over there has agreed that research is going to go into helping move the slaughter capacity forward in this province. However, \$3 million is not going to cut it in the slaughter capacity. We had asked for \$40 million to help those cattle over 30 months. We also asked that they be tested for BSE. We also asked that they increase the slaughter capacity to a minimum of 500 head per day. We also asked that the government on that side of the House forward \$10 million and provide forgivable loans to existing small new plants to allow them to move forward with the necessary upgrades to meet federal inspection standards.

* (16:00)

Whenever we can go into a restaurant, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and have a hamburger that is processed right here in Manitoba, I find it somewhat surprising when meeting with the Minister of Agriculture this morning that the other provinces will not support the idea of an interprovincial meat program. In fact, I find it very disturbing that we can go to Ontario and have that same hamburger, they can come here, and yet we cannot find a common ground of which we will be able to make that happen.

The government has also said that they are helping out with the BSE recovery loans, and the amount that is quoted in the press release was \$67.9 million. That has just put our producers further in debt. I hope tomorrow in our budget that we will be able to address this issue and the government on that side of the House will. They are due and payable by this fall and not counting the interest but the debt that is going to be incurred by these farmers is going to put them into deeper hardship, and rural Manitoba as we know it today will not exist in the same format.

The issue of the government not moving forward with our five-point program also leads us to believe that we do not know where we are going in the next six months. We need to take leadership. We need to take it now. There are several proposals out there in regard to slaughter facilities. There is one I know of that I was at in Neepawa. It was the Prairie Natural Beef initiative. I think that the minister and that government on that side of the House, I realize, again, with my colleague from Russell, that there is hardship in the financial budget, and we need to address it, but having said that, the minister needs to be open to all proposals. They need to do what they can to assist the processing plants within the province that they are able to move them forward as quickly as possible. Had they listened to us, we would have had a processing plant up and running in the province today.

When they talk about the BSE Recovery Program that they outlined, there are some sectors that they have not addressed. The emu and the ostrich is not in the plan. These people also are hurting and they have not covered them off. They cannot ship. There is one producer in Neepawa—

An Honourable Member: Minnedosa.

Mr. Eichler: —Minnedosa, rather, that has 10 head of ostrich that they are not allowed to ship because of the problem that they have within the BSE program.

The other thing that the minister just alluded to, as regards to the CAIS program, that the deposit will not be required to be paid until 2006. Well, that comes as great news but it does not cover it off. CAIS is not working. We know that is not working, and I believe the minister knows it is not working. What is going to happen is that that will be set up as a payable for our farmers, an issue that they cannot deal with at this point in time. Granted, that will give us one year to find alternative solutions, but that does not fix the plan. The CAIS deposit is not working. The bison are not listed as a commodity, and therefore they are having trouble accessing the program.

The other thing that has happened in the last couple of weeks, I was talking with a farm-debt review board and there are nine bison farmers that are under review at this point in time on whether or not they are going to be going under or staying alive. We have a member in my constituency who has 350

head of cattle, 4000 acres of farmland that has been hit hard not only by the BSE program that they could not access because of the paperwork and the hardship, and the CAIS program did not flow the dollars that they needed in order to sustain their farm which has been a family farm for two generations and lose in the third.

Before we get ready to close up here, I also would ask that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) and people on that side of the House address the cash-advance program that the minister alluded to in the federal program. The idea of that is great; that is what we have been asking for, however, we ask that the province take the leadership role and make sure that the money does not flow to those provinces who have processing plants, those that have the capability of killing the livestock, where we in the province of Manitoba are left high and dry once again.

Again, we ask that the government show due diligence and make sure that the farmers in this province of Manitoba are protected in the years to come. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on the record. Normally, I begin my remarks by saying it is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak on an issue, but today it is not a pleasure. Other members have made the point. We were all waiting today for the border to finally open for our cattle, and once again, we find ourselves stymied by political ambitions in the United States. We find that our border is going to remain closed for another six months possibly, or even longer, so it is certainly not a pleasure to rise on this issue today.

I represent the Interlake, which is probably one of the regions in the province that has the most cattle production. I guess the first point I would like to make is to take some umbrage with members opposite when they allude to our lack of action when this crisis hit us. I remember most distinctly in the spring of '03, in fact it was in the midst of an election campaign that this crisis hit us, things were very bad in my region. Not only was the border closed to our exports, but we were in the midst of one of the worst droughts in recent memory.

I know the pastures in my region, especially up in the northwest of the Interlake, the Ashern,

Moosehorn, Eriksdale areas, by the middle of June, the pastures were finished. That was not only to do with the drought, but the fact that we also had a grasshopper infestation at the same point in time. Here my producers were with no market for their cattle. There were no pastures left. They were already feeding their winter hay supply to their cattle, and when they looked to the financial institutions for more assistance to carry them further, the answer was no. Quite frankly, you cannot blame the banks. Why would they throw more money into a situation when there was no conceivable solution? It was at that point the provincial government stepped to the fore, and I was witness to that first-hand in my constituency.

There is a lot of talk on the other side of the House about cash advances and all that, but I know the \$100 million this government put in place for low-interest loans was absolutely critical to these producers in the northwest Interlake, who had no source of funding whatsoever. To have \$100 million put on the table for their use, I think I can safely say a lot of those producers are still in business today thanks to that particular program. You have to take that \$100 million, low-interest loan program in conjunction with another program that was absolutely critical to the survival of the producers in the drought area, and I refer to the drought assistance program.

I remember the day when the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk) came up to the Interlake, and this was probably her third or fourth trip into the region. She was there every time I called. Every time my producers called, she was there. We took her out and we walked her out into one of these pastures. When she could see the grasshoppers bouncing over her head, she knew there was a problem. It was probably within a week to 10 days that this provincial government flowed that drought assistance program, which facilitated the movement of feed into the Interlake area. I think the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) would agree with me that program was absolutely fundamental. A lot of his producers benefited well from it, and it was a very important, very timely program.

The thing about the northwest Interlake is that it is marginal land; there is very little annual crop production. The fact is there was no source of straw for the cattle, and that is how bad it was. We were so

desperate that we were feeding straw, and we did feed straw to the cattle with supplements. It worked, but it is certainly not the best mix. It was so bad in that region that there was no straw. Because there was no annual crop production, a lot of my producers were looking at hauling straw in from distances over a hundred miles away, some of them 150 miles away. Some of them were looking at transportation bills in excess of \$40,000 to \$50,000 thousand dollars just to move straw in to feed their animals. That program, in conjunction with the low-interest loan program, was absolutely fundamental in the survival of probably 90 percent of the ranchers in that area that are still in business today thanks to, in large part, those two particular programs.

* (16:10)

I know that members opposite are making a lot of noise about putting a plant in place here and certainly that is something that we have been working on from the very beginning here. The Rancher's Choice group, coincidentally, which originated in the Interlake region, and I take my hat off to David Reykdal and Blair Olafson and Garth Lussier for initiating this whole process, it takes a lot of courage and they have stuck with it over the last year or so. That plant is very close to becoming a reality in the very near future.

But to listen to members opposite talking about putting in place big plants to handle all the fat cattle in this province, I would like to see what their numbers are on that because we know what that would require. You are dealing with economy of scale. If you are going to kill fat cattle, you are going to have to kill at the same level that they are in Alberta. You have to have incredible capacity for it and you are talking several hundred million dollars to compete at that scale. So that is the bottom line to a plant like that.

It is unfortunate that the Conservatives let the slaughter industry go to pot in this province. I think the statistics are very, very clear that 90 percent of the slaughter capacity was lost in the time that Gary Filmon was Premier of this province. So it is somewhat ironic to listen to them today putting forward what they were referring to as socialist mentality earlier on in Question Period. How quickly they convert over, and to advocate for what sounds to me like Soviet-style state enterprises to address this issue is somewhat ironic, I think.

We are going to take a very managed approach toward this. We are behind the Rancher's Choice 100 percent. The minister announced today, as a matter of a fact, another \$4 million to put toward feasibility studies so that we can take some of our smaller plants, we can start focusing on specific markets, we can start custom killing and even custom growing to meet those markets, which is, essentially, what is going to have to take place in this province if there is going to be a beef industry into the future.

I would like to call on the President of the United States, who says he is going to veto the latest initiative in the Congress, which is all fine and dandy, but I would like him to maybe put a little thought into opening the border up. If he has the power to invade countries, topple borders and all that, I think he should be able to exercise some influence over one judge off in some district court off in one of the states in the US. So step up to the plate, Mr. Bush. Talk is cheap, but we are waiting in this province for the border to open.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Just to rise and put a few words on the record about the dilemma that the beef industry in this province is facing as we speak. I think we were all sort of dismayed when the announcement that the R-CALF organization had been successful in its court challenge to the industry and, indeed, to Canada. I think the huge economic impact that that is going to have, and some of the political ramifications are very significant. I think we should as legislators here pay a lot of attention to what has not only already been said, but what in fact will be said in the future.

I think that when we look at the kinds of programs that have been put in place in Canada to deal with issues such as BSE, one has to wonder, really, what the intent has been. I look at the CAIS program. I know the Minister of Agriculture today made reference to the CAIS program and the deposit that is required by farmers to activate the program on each individual farm.

Those of you that have taken a look at the CAIS program would know that a substantive amount of money on every given farm has to be deposited in a bank account by the farmer, and if the farmer does not have the money to deposit it in the account, they have to go to the bank and open a loan account and borrow the money to put in a bank account that just sits there until there is a drop in their income, in their

revenue on their farms through other methods than the BSE, because BSE has clearly demonstrated that that will not trigger the CAIS money because the inventories held, the large inventories being forced on them by not being able to market their cows have value, and therefore their incomes are deemed higher than they were the previous year because of larger inventories. Whether you market the inventories or not, or are able to market the inventories, is totally immaterial to the CAIS program.

Therefore, many have argued, as the cattle producers have, the grain producers, the pulse stores have argued, because markets do not exist is no reasons for those programs not to be triggered. You can have all kinds of inventory hanging around your farm; if you cannot sell it, you will not have any money to buy fuel and fertilizer to put in next year's crop.

That is the kind of situation that farmers in this province are facing right now. The beef producers, sheep producers, elk producers, or grain or cash crop producers or other commodity will not have the money to put a crop in the ground, and they will have to go to the bank to borrow operating money, plus they are going to have to borrow money to put into a bank account that will just sit there until a CAIS triggers, in fact, arrives.

That is why we are asking this minister to lobby in Ottawa. That is why we thought the other day when the provincial ministers were meeting in Ottawa with their federal counterpart, that they would actually try and convince the federal government as had been indicated by the Liberal Party's annual meeting, that the CAIS deposit account should be, in fact, deleted. I believe that the minister had indicated some willingness to do that. However, it appears now that our provincial minister is hesitant, that she is saying now that she might look at reducing or setting aside the deposit for a while, but eventually that deposit will have to be met.

I think the other issue that I think is relative to this whole matter is when we look at what sort of an industry we face in this province without any capacity to really affect the herd at all if we would be relegated to a point as we are now that we have to process our own cattle in this province. We have to have killing capacity today to process them here because Alberta has enough cattle to satisfy its market. So do Ontario and Québec. We in

Manitoba do not have any killing capacity for the live cattle we have today. If the border does not open, they will have to be kept again for another year, and they will have another set of babies. That will double our herd again.

So this government, in my view, has no choice but to make a very significant investment and commitment. As the Conservative caucus had indicated to the Province of Manitoba, its five-point plan, and I believe this government would do well and say, "Hey, this plan can actually be made to work." We have no problem with this government taking ownership of the five-point plan that we put in place. Put \$40 million in place. Walk up to a major processor anywhere in North America, or maybe even in Europe or Ottawa and say, "Come on down. We would like to deal with you to set up a major plant in this province that will kill the 30 and under cattle that we will produce every year in this province, a million and a half young stock every year that could go into this killing plant." I believe that would be a very significant incentive to ensure that farmers would, in fact, have a place to market their cows as there are farmers now that have said, "We will invest in a processing plant ourselves to get rid of the old cows and the old bulls to make bologna or to make hamburger, or any of those kinds of ground meats that a lot of people use for barbecuing and those kinds of things."

*(16:20)

So I say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if this government were truly, truly committed to resolving the dilemma that the beef industry, and the ruminant industry, really, in its entirety, finds itself in today, they would take steps that were enunciated so clearly six months ago by the Conservative caucus and say: "Here is a plan. We are committed to it. We will make that investment, and we will ensure that we will never be that dependent on the U.S. border opening again."

You know, having come back from the state of Kansas, which is the second-largest beef producer in the United States, we were told, it is very clear that those people are also concerned about the dilemma we face. They are concerned that one of these days there will be, one way or another, a case found in the United States, and they will find themselves in the same position we are, and we might in fact then, as Canada, lock our doors to United States beef. We might then go to the Japanese and the Taiwanese and

the Koreans and the Asiatic countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia and all those countries and say, "Look, have we got beef for you." That is where we should be. We should be able to go to those people, to those countries and say, "We do not need to ship you live cattle. We could process and employ our own people. We can build a processing plant here; we can manufacture the beef to the cuts that you want; and we will ship you the finished product." We will employ large amounts of people in this province that now do not have employment.

Where is this government? Where is this government's commitment to employment? Where is this government's commitment to its primary sector? Where is this government's commitment to safe food production? Where is this government's commitment to ensuring that our economy will be such that we will, in fact, be able to afford our health care? Where is this government when it looks at where to raise the money to educate our young people? Because these farmers that are out there are now paying the largest portion of their land taxes towards education. Where are they going to get their money to pay their tax bills to educate their children? That is what this government should be addressing. It has such broad ramifications. It has such economic impact to each and every one of us, whether you live in the city of Winnipeg, whether you live in Brandon, whether you live in Portage la Prairie, or, indeed, Halbstadt, Manitoba.

We are all dependent on those farmers to make a solid living, to contribute to the economy that all the services we provide as a government can be dealt with fairly and economically, and that this government could, in fact, at some point in time, could balance its budgets instead of having \$600-million overruns that this government has had. If the economy were such to support the services that are needed, then and only then would we be satisfied. I believe it is imperative that this government make the commitment and investment to ensure that our ruminant industry will be processed in this province and we will no longer be dependent on the U.S. President and his government indicating when and if or where we can market our beef.

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): It is certainly a pleasure to speak for this resolution on the BSE crisis. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am also of an agricultural background and I represent an area in The Maples where there are no cattle farmers, but I

sympathize with a lot of those farmers that are suffering as a result of the BSE crisis.

Let me tell the previous speaker where the government stands on this. The government to date has put in place the most extensive BSE strategy across Canada, which has provided support to producers for the fresh market prices, assistance to producers for feed costs, compensation to producers moving feed and calves in the hands of producers to maintain their operations.

Producers have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that calves in hand is the most important tool in dealing with the BSE crisis. Our comprehensive BSE strategy has put over \$116 million in assistance directly into the hands of Manitoba producers. Beyond our efforts to support our cattle industry in the present, we have also taken an active role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the cattle industry in Manitoba with the creation of a task force whose main goal was to explore how best to sustain our beef and ruminant industries in a post-BSE era.

We understand the province's lack of slaughter capacity limited our producers' ability to manage this crisis. As a result we have been active in rebuilding the slaughter industry in Manitoba, and we have been partnering with local producers interested in ensuring a strong local slaughter industry. We have been active in pursuing home-grown solutions to Manitoba's slaughter deficiency. The Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk) has been a leader in lobbying for federal participation in the resolution of this crisis as well as a steady voice of reason on the world stage calling for science-based decision making.

Rebuilding consumer confidence in foreign markets is essential to the resolution of this crisis. Increased protection with regard to our beef is important, which is why new regulations with regard to the removal of special risk material are so important. Our food supply system is one of the best in the world which is evident in how the BSE cow was inspected, detected and rejected. This animal identified was found promptly, kept out of the food system, and trace backs and trace forwards were undertaken rapidly and efficiently. Our extensive animal tracking system to determine where the animals came from and what other animals may have also been exposed to the disease was so effective that it drew international attention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the programs that were in place for the BSE programs were: We have put in \$7.8 million for the Canada-Manitoba BSE Recovery Program. We put in \$6.2 million for the Manitoba Feeder Assistance Program. We put in \$9.4 million for the Manitoba Slaughter Deficiency Program, \$4 million for the Manitoba Drought Assistance Program, \$4.8 million for the Manitoba Cull Animal Program, \$67.9 million went to Manitoba BSE Recovery loans, \$1.9 million went to the Feeder Financing initiative, \$5.6 million went to Stocker Loan initiative, \$250,000 went to the dead stock program, \$8.4 million went to Canada-Manitoba BSE Recovery Program. The total of the BSE funding comes up to \$116 million.

On the opposition side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, cruel media have criticized the opposition and, more specifically, the member from Emerson for their stance on the BSE issue and Rancher's Choice. They said, and I quote, "The provincial opposition party has been equally unhelpful using the ups and downs of Rancher's Choice only as an excuse to issue press releases to criticize the government when it should have been taking a non-partisan position to encouraging producers' commitment to make the plant viable for lenders."

* (16:30)

The member last year said investing in processing was not such a good idea. But when the Province announced additional funding for Rancher's Choice this month, he fired off a release saying it was a year and a half too late. That is the view from the opposition. I have spelled out our government's support for the BSE crisis. I think our government has contributed, and managed the BSE crisis until today. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: I rise to speak to the matter of urgent public importance which we are addressing today. In doing so, I want to make it very clear to members of this House that, in my view, our provincial NDP government has failed miserably when it has come to addressing the BSE crisis.

First of all, on the issue of slaughter capacity, we in the Liberal Party agree with all the members that there should be increased slaughter capacity in Manitoba. The problem is that for almost two years now, twenty-two months, the NDP government has said that they are doing something but there has been

very little actually done in increasing slaughter capacity in Manitoba.

One of the significant policies that the NDP government put in place to enhance slaughter capacity, to enhance the number of plants that were federally inspected, has been a major failure. It is the major failure of that policy which caused the government to rethink it and announce a new approach earlier today.

Twenty-two months of failure in addressing the issue of slaughter capacity has caused the NDP to start all over again in their approach to how you increase slaughter capacity in Manitoba. I think it is apparent to anybody who looks at this objectively that there has been a long period of poor public policy by the NDP government, of failure to deliver on their commitment to increase the slaughter capacity in this province.

Second, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we in the Liberal Party have argued that we should have moved in Manitoba very quickly after May 20, by at the latest the late summer of 2003, to have mandatory testing of all animals over 30 months slaughtered in Manitoba. The reason for that was not only safety but marketability. Indeed, the ability to market Manitoba fully tested cattle would have significantly increased our capacity to market Manitoba beef, not only in Manitoba but elsewhere. If that had been done, combined with an effective program for having federal inspection, then we would have been able to move our industry significantly forward.

We had here a major testing facility at the Canadian Science Centre for Human/Animal Health for BSE. We were the closest jurisdiction to that centre, and we had, here in Manitoba, lower slaughter capacity than a lot of other provinces. As we all know, to our great regret, lower slaughter capacity would have made it a lot easier for us to be the first province to do mandatory testing of all cattle over 30 months slaughtered in Manitoba. The low prices that we have seen for animals over 30 months reflect a perceived risk. We could have changed that perceived risk; we could have changed the prices for producers; we could have changed the ability to market Manitoba beef. What has this government done? They have waited more than a year and a half to bring in a program to better market Manitoba beef. Not good enough. Another example of poor provincial public policy.

I speak today as one Manitoban who has made an effort to support our Manitoba farmers, who has purchased meat directly from farmers, and indeed Naomi and I have in our freezer right now directly purchased Manitoba beef from Manitoba farmers, directly purchased Manitoba bison, and directly purchased Manitoba lamb. All of us should be supporting our farmers, and I hope that all of us are.

Now, I think it is pretty important that we look very carefully at this recent judge's ruling in the United States. There has been a view, I think mistaken, having a look at this ruling, that all we have to do is to say, "Our beef is safe; our beef is safe," and we are going to open the border. But what is apparent if you read this judge's ruling carefully, that if we were to pay attention, there are, I think, some things that we can do that would make sense, that would address the concerns, and that would enable the border to open a lot faster.

Let me go through the sum of the concerns which were raised by the judge in the United States: Number one deals with the impact of opening the U.S. border to live cattle, and it says that the USDA in their ruling says the risk is very low but did not provide evidence of risk, did not provide a clear understanding of what they would accept as an appropriate low level or incidence. Clearly, this is in part the USDA's fault, but clearly, on our hand, we could provide better evidence of what the incidence of BSE infection in our herd actually is.

As is said in point number two that, indeed, and let me read, because I think it is worse, point No. 2: "The USDA characterized the incidence of BSE in the Canadian herd as minimal, low, or very low. However, the evidence is that Canada has not conducted sufficient testing of BSE to accurately assess the rate of BSE infection in Canada. To date, Canada has tested approximately 40 000 head of cattle in the past decade, and almost exclusively cattle with outward signs of possible BSE. In the past year and a half, four cases of BSE have been identified in cattle born and raised in Canada. In contrast, the United States has tested over 200 000 native cattle born in the U.S. believed to be at risk for BSE, and has not found a single case."

Now the problem here is in the Canadian statistics. What is the incidence of BSE in the Canadian herd? Well, there are four cases which were identified, one, of course, which went down to

the United States. Four, let us hope it is four, out of the whole Canadian cattle herd, but the problem is that we do not know that with the kind of testing we have done, and if it is four out of 40 000, well, that is one out of 10 000. That would be one hundred out of a million cattle, and we have several million cattle: five or six million cattle in the base herd. So we need to do more testing, as I feel we should do mandatory testing starting with those over 30 months of age.

* (16:40)

The reliance, the third point on the Canadian feed ban—you know, there is a concern about bovine blood which may be capable of transmitting BSE and is still being used in feed for Canadian cattle and U.S. cattle. We should get rid of bovine blood from feed to all Canadian cattle so we do not have that problem. The specific risk materials, which is point No. 4. Let us applaud what was done in Canada in getting rid of the specific risk materials.

But the plaintiff argues that there is now some evidence this is not good enough. We need to examine that, re-examine that in the light of what has happened and have a careful look at that evidence.

There are some things that it would do well to pay attention to in this ruling and in duress, directly and ensure Canadians and those who may have cattle going to their countries from ours. Those are things that we should be doing. This government is not doing them.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Deputy Speaker, quite frankly, my worry today is that a year from now, we will be going through this debate all over again. It seems to me that we had this debate last fall and we had the debate last spring. Real-life conditions for people out there in our constituencies have continued to worsen. I cannot, and none of us can, even begin to explain the depth of the disappointment that people felt last week when we learned that the United States was not going to open that border.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I do not think, and I am not much of an orator. I am not much of a great communicator. I certainly cannot come up with the words to describe that. I am sure there are better speakers in this House who can make a better attempt at that, and when somebody

steps forward and can encapsulate the feelings of despair that resulted from that decision last week, I will applaud that member.

Since the last time we spoke of this issue in this House, the conditions have become more serious for people that live not just in rural Canada, but in Canada period. We in Manitoba, understanding how important agriculture is to our way of life and to our economy, to our GDP, understanding how important that industry is to the way we live in this province, I would suggest that as much as any other province in our Confederation, we are feeling the pinch of this decision.

In my constituency, I have spoken with a producer who has a bison ranch who explains to me that through no fault of her own—it was not even a bison that tested positive, but because of the events that have unfolded and because of the border being closed—her bison ranch is in very serious trouble. This is a producer who knows what she is doing. This is a producer, this is a farmer, a rancher who has been in agriculture all of her life. She understands what it takes to run a ranch. She is in real trouble.

I represent a community called Rorketon, a district in the northeast part of my constituency way up there north of Ste. Rose. Rorketon is in particularly tough straits when it comes to this question. Rorketon is situated on land that is perfect for cattle, perfect for ranching, perfect for cow-calf operators, not much else, Mr. Speaker. They try to grow wheat, barley, oilseeds. Some of them have experienced some success at that, but clearly this is a part of our beautiful province that is absolutely dependent on the ability to raise cattle. They do not have a lot of options.

This Legislature has to come through for those producers. This Legislature owes it to those people and to people in other parts of our province who find themselves in the same predicament as my constituents in Rorketon. We, as 57 legislators, owe it to them to come through, to make decisions in this body that will benefit those producers.

Mr. Speaker, I represent and I share a part of the province, the Parkland, with a number of representatives in this Legislature, and we watch as small communities in the Parkland area depopulate. We watch as small communities, and we can name them in our area and other areas of the province as

well, we can look at little communities who have virtually shut out the lights, rolled up the sidewalks and called it quits. That has been happening for a period of decades. Since World War II, our country has become more and more urban. My worry is that many little communities, which otherwise may have had a hope of survival, of continuing on, because of this crisis, will be put in a position where they will accelerate the rate at which they depopulate and the rate at which we do lose these little communities.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, so many in this House understand that they are great little communities to live in, great little districts with a lot of things on the go, with a lot of people working hard raising their families, producing the food that we all take for granted in Canada and producing food for our export market. We owe it to them to make good decisions. I want to suggest here, as I have suggested in the past, that one of those good decisions that we could make is that all of us, all 57, all of us representing the people of Manitoba, come together on this issue, set aside our ideological arguments, set aside our natural kind of partisan feelings that we usually have on issues, put those things to the side and make the decisions and stand together to benefit the people who are most affected by this very serious problem.

My ultimate worry, Mr. Speaker, is that this body does not show the kind of leadership or, in fact, interest in this issue to really take it as seriously as the problem warrants. I think that farmers and ranchers and producers in this province will forgive members opposite for only coming up with two questions last fall. I think they will forgive the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) for only coming up with two questions in the lead position on this issue last fall. I think they will forgive him of that. They were more interested in unionization, 15 questions, than they were about the plight of my ranchers in my constituency.

I think the farmers of this province will forgive the Conservatives across the way for not even so much as talking about this at their convention last fall. I think they will forgive you for not putting forward their issues. I think they will forgive you for that.

I think that they will forgive the Liberal Leader in Manitoba who has over and over again made excuses for the lack of federal leadership in this. In

the House today, Mr. Speaker, I could not believe, and I think they will forgive the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for making excuses, not only for the federal Liberals but for blaming the victim in this case by pointing to the wrong-headed decision of that judge in Billings, Montana.

We have to decide where our priorities are, and my priorities are not with the American producer. They are not with some American judge. They are with the people in this province who every day go out and raise cattle and raise grain and raise oilseeds. Those are the people we have to be here on behalf of.

* (16:50)

I think they will forgive members opposite for those mistakes, but they will never forgive members opposite if they play politics with this issue instead of coming together as 57 legislators and moving ahead on this issue like they expect us to do. They will not forgive you for doing the right thing.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I want to speak to this matter of urgent public importance today for all the farm families that have suffered for almost two years now. The member from Dauphin speaks of the despair he felt when he heard the news the border was not going to open. I felt despair for every single farm family in this province who has been waiting, waiting for almost two years and this government has not done anything.

I feel despair for the small communities, the small businesses that have folded because, as we know, when farmers suffer in this province, our communities suffer, our businesses suffer. I feel despair for rural Manitoba.

The member opposite talks about forgiveness. I do not think that those farm families will forgive the NDP for two years of sitting and doing nothing to help these people in crisis. They do not understand how these people have suffered. It was June 23, 2003, I stood in this House on a matter of urgent public importance on this crisis, because we had just received news that the border had closed. At that time, I said that this is a crisis that will weave itself through the very fabric of our society and, indeed, we have seen that that has happened.

It was urgent then. It is definitely more urgent now. This government did not recognize the severity

of the problem in the beginning and I do not know that they do, because we remember last spring, when the Minister of Agriculture said, "Farmers should get off the farm and get a real job." Now what does that say to farm families who are suffering, who cannot even pay tuition for their kids to go to university? They cannot afford to put their kids in dance lessons, in soccer lessons, they cannot afford to put gasoline in their vehicles. I think that was an insult to our farm families, and showed a total lack of understanding and caring and the depth of the crisis and how it was affecting people in rural Manitoba.

In a time of crisis, that is when we see real leadership, but we saw no vision and no leadership from this government. There was a lot of dithering and wringing of hands, false hopes raised that the border would open soon, statements that we will be waiting and seeing what the federal governments do. Of course, it is always blame the federal government, it is not our problem.

A government leader, or a minister who is a leader, would have, early on, seen this situation as an opportunity. Yes, there was an opportunity. Manitoba at one time was the largest kill province in Canada and one of the largest in North America. The Doer government had the opportunity to put a processing plant in place over six months ago. There was opportunity. A leader would have taken the opportunity, would have seen an opportunity in a bad situation. And, yes, the government will say, "But there was risk associated." There is always risk associated. What if we put money into a slaughter operation and the borders open, what will happen?

Well, farmers know what risk means. They do it every year. Business people know what risk means. They risk when they want to start to do something, but once you make a commitment to do something the risk deteriorates. It depletes itself because you have made a commitment to go forward and make something happen. The only way something happens is when you commit to making it happen and then go forward. If you do not commit to making something happen it will not happen because you have not made the commitment.

The government would not risk spending money on our farmers. It is not their support base. The opportunity is there, the marketing opportunities, ways of marketing within our province, within our country and internationally. They are still there. I

think we have maybe taken some first steps in that regard to opening up slaughter capacity. I do want to say that is a positive step and look forward to that actually happening. I think it is better to do something late than not do something at all.

Last year, we took the initiative to introduce a five-point plan. I am happy to see that the government has actually decided to consider the first point and increase the slaughter capacity in the province of Manitoba. That is a good start, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the government in that respect. But, also, we do need to recognize there is still money that is needed in farm families in the way of cash advances. We need some cash advances to be in the hands of the people that need it, and they need it now. They needed it quite a long time ago.

There needs to be forgivable loans to existing and small plants, new plants to allow them to move forward with the necessary upgrades to meet federal inspection standards and allow Manitoba beef to be exported to other provinces. We missed an opportunity to put ourselves as Manitobans front and center with a slaughter capacity, be a leader in western Canada. We had the opportunity. The government did not seize that opportunity as it was presented to them, but the opportunity is still there to increase the slaughter capacity.

We know now that the border is not opening anytime soon. We do not have any idea when it will open. What we need to do is take the bull by the horns so to speak and create industry and economy in our province. I certainly hope that in tomorrow's budget there is money allocated for this and money for farm families who have waited a long time, who are suffering and who are in need. I would ask that the government look very carefully at what is happening in rural Manitoba and assist the people there as necessary. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I am pleased to rise on this matter of public importance today. One thing, Mr. Speaker, as a history major, I am constantly reminded by members opposite why they as a government did not want history to be a compulsory subject for Manitoba schools, because history holds us accountable.

Members opposite have a very different view of the history in this province. Members opposite have

talked about the slaughter capacity in this province. It was under their watch, Mr. Speaker, that we lost the slaughter capacity. Members opposite talk about the tax burden on farmers and talk about the tax burden on rural Manitoba, but it was under their watch that we saw a 68% increase in property taxes. Members opposite have a very interesting view on history.

Our government is committed to rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to our farming communities. Only the members opposite would say that our relief efforts of \$116.25 million are nothing. Only members opposite would say that \$96 million in tax relief provided through our education initiatives is nothing. I have a hard time fathoming this when you take tax relief into account, when you take into account what we have done for our farmers, for members opposite to suggest that this is, indeed, nothing or a lack of action.

* (17:00)

They talk about a five-point plan, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have an eleven-point plan under the leadership of our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk). That eleven-point plan includes co-operative efforts with the federal government: the Canada-Manitoba BSE Recovery Program, \$7.8 million in that program; the Manitoba Feeder Assistance Program, in Manitoba only, \$6.2 million; the Manitoba Slaughter Deficiency Program, \$9.4 million; the Drought Assistance Program, \$4 million; the provincial portion of the Manitoba Cull Animal Program, \$4.8 million. The list goes on and on with these 11 initiatives. Those 11 initiatives are \$116.25 million, and members opposite say that is nothing.

We have had a number of initiatives in providing meaningful tax relief for rural Manitoba, \$96 million throughout the province in education taxes, but members opposite say that is nothing. The truth is, we have been very responsive to Manitoba's agricultural situation. We are planning for the future to compete with the American markets by bringing forward this Rancher's Choice initiative. Again, slaughter capacity is something that was lost under their watch. We are committed to a new slaughter facility and that will happen.

Beyond our efforts to support the cattle industry in the present, we have taken an active role in long-

term sustainability of the industry with the creation of a task force. The main goal is to explore how best to sustain the beef and ruminant industries in a post-BSE era.

We understand that the lack of slaughter capacity has limited our producers' ability to manage this crisis, and we have been active in rebuilding the slaughter industry in Manitoba. In partnering with local producers interested in ensuring a strong local slaughter industry, we have been active in pursuing home-grown solutions to Manitoba's slaughter capacity.

Our minister has been a leader, Mr. Speaker. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives has been lobbying for federal participation in the resolution of the crisis and has been a voice of reason on the world stage calling for science-based decision-making.

Rebuilding consumer confidence in foreign markets is essential to the resolution of the crisis, Mr. Speaker. Increased protection with regard to our beef is important and new regulations with regard to the removal of special risk materials are also important.

Our food safety system is one of the best in the world. It is evident in how the cow was inspected, detected and rejected. Each animal identified was found promptly, kept out of the food system and trace-backs and trace-forwards were undertaken very rapidly and very efficiently. Our tracking system, to determine where the animal came from and whether other animals may have been exposed, was so effective that it actually drew international attention.

I am 100 percent confident in the safety of our food. I am very proud to be on this side of the House where we have been doing a lot to support our farmers, to support our rural economy. It does not surprise me that members opposite have a very different view of the history with respect to the industry, with respect to the slaughter facilities and the capacity, and suggest that \$116.25 million is nothing, to suggest that we are not providing tax relief with \$96 million in tax relief, to suggest that that is nothing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is committed to rural economy. This is a government that has taken very positive steps to ensuring our rural economy. This is a government that is very

concerned about this crisis and will continue to work with the producers for solutions, for made-in-Manitoba solutions. I thank you for the time I have had to speak on this issue.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on a matter of urgent public importance.

I have never seen a government that has abandoned a sector of their society to a greater degree than this government has abandoned the farm community. This is a rural family issue, not only an agriculture issue. Since the discovery of the BSE 656 days ago, farm families and rural communities have suffered significantly. Hartney's mayor, Bruce Evans, said in an interview: "This government is ignoring this area. The best they have told us is to pray for the border to open. This has left the community suffering. I do not think I have ever seen people as depressed as this."

The members opposite spoke about history. I think they had better be starting to think about the future because if they do not, rural economy is definitely going to be continuing to go in a downward spiral, and they will be history as a member here had indicated. The reeve of Glenwood Municipality also indicated in a letter to me, and I know they have also copied this to the other side of the House. They have indicated this is a real crisis, and producers will not be able to hang on if they do not receive help.

We cannot stand by and watch an industry be systematically destroyed because of a failure to act. I pose the question. Where is this minister's sense of responsibility to Manitobans, and where is their leadership? The BSE crisis has been hurting our farmers, their families and their communities for almost two years now, and it is time the NDP provides adequate financial support and an action plan to increase local slaughter capacity. My understanding is we have had at least two or three groups aggressively working to make this happen. Where is the government on this issue? Where is the government on this plan? Where is the environmental licensing? Where is the financial government support to move these projects forward? For 656 days, the NDP government has failed our livestock producers by not implementing a BSE strategy. It is time this government showed some signs of leadership, some sign that producers are being listened to.

Six months ago, we introduced a five-point BSE recovery plan. Something that the producers are wanting. Something this government failed to create. It has called for increased slaughter capacity and cash advances for producers. This plan was developed in consultation with the producers, with community leaders. It is credible, and it is accountable to the producer because it was created by them.

I was concerned today when I saw the Minister of Agriculture laugh at the BSE recovery plan suggestion during Question Period. Does she not realize that she is laughing at the vision and the work of her voters, her producers? This is shameful. Floodway jobs, as was recommended by the Agriculture Minister, are laughable. That is what is laughable. Where are your priorities? Where is your commitment to our producers and their families? We hope tomorrow's budget will present a detailed plan. I encourage the NDP to use their hours if they feel they have run out of time to prepare and to be accountable.

This NDP government has been in office for six years, and year after year their budgets ignore the needs of rural Manitobans. Just because the NDP government's core support is not located in rural Manitoba does not give them a good reason to ignore a serious crisis. You as government must represent all Manitobans. This NDP government and this Minister of Agriculture have left our producers wondering where their futures lie, and they are demanding this government take action, real action.

Many producers I have met with have indicated that they are now left with no options but to liquidate their assets. Most of these producers are young farmers. Our future's agricultural sector. Do you not care that these young farmers' dreams are being shattered? In the two years that I have been the MLA for Minnedosa, I have seen grown men cry. Over the past six months, I have been to many funerals.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Under our rules, MUPs are two hours. The honourable Government House Leader.

An Honourable Member: Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: I mean, the honourable Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Derkach: Well, it could have been House Leader.

An Honourable Member: It should have.

Mr. Derkach: Way to cut me down.

Mr. Speaker: For the record.

Mr. Derkach: I am wondering if there is a will in the House to allow debate on this resolution to continue for a little time until the members who have been identified have spoken.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

* (17:10)

Mr. Mackintosh: I would also ask if you would seek leave of the House so that following the conclusion of the MUPI debate, just confirm there is all-party support to introduce a resolution on support for the cattle industry, before we rise today.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, first of all, is there leave for the MUPI to continue until the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) concludes her comments? Is there leave for that? *[Agreed]*

Okay, is there leave for the MUPI to continue until the members that were identified conclude their comments? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Also, is there leave for once we conclude the MUPI, to not see the clock, to debate the resolution that will be coming forward. Is there leave for that? *[Agreed]*

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Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Minnedosa, to conclude her comments.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over the past six months, I have been to too many funerals that have been directly related to the crisis; families left without their mothers, wives, husbands. What do you say to a 14-year-old girl who no longer has a mother because her mother could not cope with the issues facing their families? I ask you, "What do you say?" It is time for this government to announce and actually implement an aggressive strategy to help our cattle producers, to help our farm families.

I will close with a few thoughts that were put to paper by a constituent of mine whose family is looking for help, looking for answers from this NDP government. Katie Kruk of Souris writes, "How this BSE affects me. After this mad cow incident came about the world, we were no longer able to sell our cows. Since we can't sell our cows we cannot get paid, and if we don't get paid, we're not going to survive. By Christmastime, I may have to sacrifice some things like curling and piano because we'll have to pay for groceries. And it might even come to moving far away from the family farm which has been with us for generations. This mad cow scare isn't only affecting us now, but in years to come. Down the road, when it's time for me to go to university, there will be no money in our savings. We will have to raise sheep and sell them when we need money. Now we have to sell them for one fifth of the price because we need to save for the bales of our cattle. The amount of work my parents put into these cows is almost like a volunteer job. They don't get paid half as much as they should. Think how it feels to be feeding the world but not being able to feed your family. If you knew the hard work and suffering it takes to be a farmer, you'd have a little more respect for us. How many people do you know of that work seven days a week, morning till night? So please, if you're listening, I just want you to understand this doesn't only affect adults, but the kids, too. If the government doesn't want to give us the help we need, we won't have a home to go back to, just a lot of bad memories." Thank you.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order, I would just like for Hansard to put a correction on the response that I made to the First Minister. It was brought to my attention that I should have indicated that Constable Mike Templeton was shot and not what I had indicated to the Premier's statement. I appreciate the House for that understanding, and I thank the Premier for the correction. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, he does not have a point of order, but I thank him for the correction.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now we will resume debate.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Certainly, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that is important to Manitoba, to each and every one of our communities here in this House. Obviously when the border was closed back a couple of years ago in 2003, it was pretty evident, the amount of trade that we do with the United States, certainly on our beef and the beef production that we have here in Manitoba, and the effects of the lack of slaughter capacity that we have let go over the last 20 years in this province.

Certainly, through the 1990s, the terrible loss of slaughter capacity in Manitoba went to a lot of the larger slaughter capacity centres, both in the United States and in Alberta and elsewhere, where many of the producers had identified that early on. Early in the 1990s, I remember hearing from them saying that all the eggs in one basket is probably not the way to go. We should be putting more emphasis on assisting this industry and increasing our slaughter capacity here in the province of Manitoba.

It hit home when, in 2003, we saw the loss of our cattle going across the line because of one animal that was detected, inspected and rejected in a process that is excellent here in Canada, into the United States.

It did not just affect people on our side of the border. Obviously, we have seen the impact on producers on the American side of the border, where, in fact their slaughter capacity is beginning to dwindle. They are having difficulty in some of their plants, certainly just south of the border, on getting enough cattle into their plants to make them viable, and they are running into problems very, very much on that side of the border.

We are having certain groups in the United States, R-CALF and others, that have successfully used the litigation system, the court system to the benefit of their producers. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, in Manitoba it was reflected immediately after that border closed with an Agricultural Minister who quickly went to producers for advice. We dealt with producers on where we could assist and what we could do to assist the industry through it.

I think many people in this House thought it would be a short period of time, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, that has turned from a short period of time to a year and a half, where many of the producers are having extreme difficulties. In identifying that, there are many, many areas, over \$115 million to assistance right directly to the producers. On many other sides, the government identified in rural Manitoba and rural communities the difficulties that producers were having. With things like the educational tax, a commitment a while back in saying that we would reduce that somewhat, we reduced it 50 percent. It is direct results to producers and people in rural economies that are having difficulty.

Mr. Speaker, we know, and certainly the rest of the world knows, that the system we have here in Manitoba, based on science, is one of the best in the entire world. Many of the other countries in the world have identified that our system in fact does exactly what it sets out to do. The cattle, many of them from Alberta, that were detected, inspected and rejected shows a system that is truly working. It should be identified by our American counterparts and certainly by the American public generally that our system in fact is working better than their system is. It has been identified many, many times over that our system is the envy of the world. It is a system that is based on science. Obviously, the discontinuance of the product that was into the food chain has been done here in Canada. We are dealing with some of the older animals, and, obviously, those are identified. They are traced, one of the best tracing systems in the world with product, and the rest of the world knows that.

What we are dealing with is a short-term group that is affecting the American market, they are affecting our Canadian producers, and they are affecting jobs on both sides of the border in a negative way. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the political will by this side of the House, by this minister, led by our Agricultural Minister, has been working very diligently with, it has been mentioned here many times, Rancher's Choice and many others to expand the slaughter capacity in the province of Manitoba, and what we can do for expanding our markets and gaining new markets other than the United States. It has been very successful. It is obvious when you look from 2002 to 2004, during this trying time the slaughter capacity has increased in the province of Manitoba steadily. We have more slaughter being done here in the province of Manitoba. We have identified the markets and the internal markets.

Mr. Speaker, one of the anomalies that we have seen here in Manitoba that you did not see elsewhere in the world, and you certainly did not see it in the U.K., is the support from our Agricultural Minister, this side of the House, and I know in many cases members on the other side of the House, to actually have our markets increase in Manitoba with our product, and the public opinion identifying just how safe our beef is in our industry. Many times in other places where these occurrences have happened you have seen a decrease in consumption, you have seen a decrease in local consumption, and you have certainly seen a decrease in the capacity for slaughter. Those have all had the opposite effect here in Manitoba because of the initiatives that we have had out.

* (17:20)

Mr. Speaker, we immediately, through our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), having that steady voice on the international stage and the Canadian stage, obviously have had the federal government held to task on getting into this with us. We have certainly stepped up to the plate with Rancher's Choice and many of the others, and I have been somewhat dismayed by comments of members on the opposite side that have used people like Rancher's Choice and good, hard-working producers and people that are really trying to come up with a solution in this industry to use this as a political sounding board every time they have run into a bit of a problem through the banking institutions and others and jump on this as if it is a negative. It is not a negative.

It is moving to the point where the large-scale capacities, through Rancher's Choice and others, through solutions on this side of the House, and through our loan programs, certainly are recognized by the industry. I know the member from Russell is saying to me right now, I recognize that. I believe I heard him say that you are doing everything you can with the producers. You have met with them many, many times, with Rancher's Choice. Certainly, our Minister of Agriculture has been out into many of the communities with those folks looking for solutions.

I believe I hear the member from Russell again saying, "You know what? If we had not reduced the slaughter capacity, maybe we would not be in the problem we are facing today." I might have misunderstood, Mr. Speaker, what he was saying, but

certainly that did happen. We are dealing with an issue today that is recognized by our producers. It is recognized by the consumers in a confidence level that our producers are the best producers of beef in the world. The assistance has helped them through a very difficult time.

When you start talking in terms of \$100 million, members opposite might want to sneeze at it and say, "Well you know what, really that is nothing." That is something that is not assisting. It is not helping, but \$115 million in assistance in areas that have been directed by a joint committee with our minister, with our government, with local authorities that are out there directed to target areas where it is really needed is certainly not something to sneeze at. It is, in fact, something that I believe hit the ground running, one of the best in the western provinces here and recognized by other provinces as having excellent assistance programs with our producers.

Mr. Speaker, the recovery loan program certainly has been well received, the Feeder Assistance Program, the Slaughter Deficiency Program and many of the others. We will work toward a solution with our producers, listening to our producers, not to the rhetoric from the members opposite that did nothing about the slaughter capacity from the late eighties right through the nineties. Suddenly, when the border was closed, they began to look for assistance.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the transition over the last two years has gone to helping the producers through a tough time. Again, today, we have seen the lobby group from R-CALF successfully, through litigation, hold the border closed again. We will come up with the slaughter capacity results here in Manitoba. We have increased it substantially. Our Minister of Agriculture will have those numbers for you in the next period of time.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): On May 20, 2003, one cow in Alberta was discovered to have BSE and for 656 days counting today we have seen our farmers, our cattle producers, living quite literally hell on earth. Mr. Speaker, today was supposed to be a day of great joy and celebration and it has not been. What a sad day for those individuals who looked out the kitchen window today and were faced with the realization that they have to feed cattle. They have to keep all the work up not knowing if there will ever be any return or if this is basically a road to financial ruin.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there is that acronym or that saying that goes, and when you thought the news could not get any worse. There is also a little bit of sabre rattling going on in the United States that there might even be a challenge to boxed beef which, if that challenge were to be upheld, would be disastrous beyond belief to those men and women who toil on farms where there was not really a lot of hope, where, as of today, it looked like things were going to look up and are not. Denying boxed beef the entry into the United States is beyond anything that any of us could have comprehended even a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, I think basically what we can say without any equivocation is the old system is failing us. In fact, I would say what we are going to see is this has become the small producer killer of Manitoba, in fact, for Canada.

I know first-hand one couple, he being in his seventies, she being in her mid-sixties, thought they would go one more round, just a little bit more money for retirement. By the time they got out of their obligations, they are now in debt by \$140,000 and will either sell the farm or will have to continue to figure out how they are going to meet their payments so that they can stay on the farm that they worked so hard to have. This is disastrous.

My fear, as one member of this Legislature, is that in the long run the only thing that will be left will be corporate farms. It will have squeezed out all the family farms; it will have squeezed out all of the medium-sized farms. All that we will be left with is the mega farms, Mr. Speaker, because the small farmers, the men and women who toil on medium-sized farms, cannot survive this much longer. Nobody thought it was going to be 656 days, and here we are with not a lot of hope in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, in September 9, 2004, the Progressive Conservative caucus met in God's country, and for those who may not know where that is, of course, that is the constituency of Springfield close to the town of Oakbank. That is where we unveiled the five-point BSE recovery plan. I know the government has now looked at it. I would encourage government members: have another look at it, see if there is not something that maybe convinces them to go with that five-point plan. We must look at alternatives; we must look at some other way of dealing with their beef.

One does not want to single out individuals, but in this case Calvin Vaags, who farms just a little bit east of Dugald, has opened up the Carver's Knife. He has decided to, if I can use the term, take the bull by the horns, and he has opened up his own retail store. I recommend people go there, support our local people, support our local beef. It is called the Carver's Knife, and it is on Nairn Avenue.

We are going to have to support our local individuals, and that also means getting our slaughtering facilities up to a federal standard. You know, if that means that we have to help provide asphalt so they can asphalt their parking lots, if that is what is holding it back, then for goodness' sake let us do it. You know, getting our industry back on its feet does not make you a conservative, does not make you a socialist. What it makes is individuals, leaders in our community who realize that we cannot continue this way, that every time somebody has a hatred going on for us somewhere else, our farmers struggle and go bankrupt, lose their farms and in some cases lose their health.

Now is the time to act. I call on the government, I call on the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province: act on this. We have had the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) say, "Let us get together on this." Absolutely. I extend my hand across the aisle, and I say to the Minister of Agriculture, "Let us work together as 57 legislators." I again would be willing to pass the five-point BSE plan that was announced in Oakbank on September 9, 2004, a great program, but let us move this on, let us move this forward. Let us get production going in Manitoba, let us get production going in Canada, and let us move the beef and build our industry and come up with solutions made at home.

We cannot rely on international forces, on international politicians to look out for our best interest. It is up to us to decide what is in our provincial and what is in our national self-interest and then proceed with that because waiting for others to do it will never work. Let us get together. Let us work this out and move forward and get beef moving, not just across Canada but across the world, and solve this crisis. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a few words on record on this most important issue as well. I want to say

that the five-point plan that we put forward, that our caucus put forward last summer, was most impressive. It is a pleasure to see that the government has finally moved on a few of these issues, but it is most disheartening to think that this government has not seen the light and spent—I think, if I remember hearing one of the members on the government side of the House today saying that they have made \$116 million, that is all they have actually spent out of the 180 that they went to great lengths, in fact advertised at great lengths, to say that they had made available to farmers in Manitoba in the fall of '03, a year and a half ago.

* (17:30)

They have spent now, by their own admission, \$116 million, of which some \$70 million, close to, is loans to farmers that will have to be repaid starting this fall, and we will see what they do at that point under this crisis that is still occurring under their noses. It has been 656 days under the BSE crisis in this government, and to stand there and procrastinate any longer, that they are actually doing something in regard to this crisis in Manitoba, is blasphemy at best. This government should be extremely soundly beaten in the next election based on this alone, from a priority perspective in regard to how they have mistreated Manitobans.

I heard one of the members today expound and say, "We recognize the urgency of this matter." Well, Mr. Speaker, it is 656 days later. What an oxymoron. I have never heard of any such drivel out of any government in my life. This is false promises from the beginning if I have ever seen it, and this government needs to be chastized for the lack of caring that they have had and the lack of leadership that they have taken in regard to the construction of further slaughter facilities in this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, by their own math, they have got \$64 million to spend, still, that has not been spent by the money that they said they made available in Manitoba, some 18 months ago.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Sixty-four million dollars, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would build any slaughter plant in Manitoba to take care of all of the needs of the animals that we presently raise and need to slaughter in Manitoba, and this government has not moved a foot closer to

getting a spade in the ground to make sure that that happens. They have not even spent any of the funds that they have said that they would make available for slaughter facilities in Manitoba. They have not spent any of that money on the equipment that is needed to house that plant because all of the money that has been spent so far has been money raised by the farming community and none by this minister or her government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just also want to say that, in regard to a resolution that came forward at the national Liberal convention, if they expect to get any help from that source, there was a resolution that apparently did get passed at the national meeting in Ottawa. There was, in fact, the Liberal president out of Brandon-Souris today is giving credence to the fact that this resolution received unanimous support that was so important, and it was calling upon the federal government to put funds forward for further slaughter facilities in Canada, I think their resolution was that it should be within sixty kilometres of Brandon, but that coming from the Brandon-Souris group is certainly not unexpected.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today's press release in regard to the success of that resolution in Ottawa is calling on the government now to make money available for a feasibility study, not to make sure that there is plants actually being built as the resolution was put forward, but to go back and have more comprehensive feasibility studies looked at and made available.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to retract a little bit, because this resolution, apparently, was not important enough at the Brandon-Souris local meeting to get on the agenda to be moved out of that district into Ottawa from that particular meeting, and so they had Mr. Downing, who was the candidate in the last election for the Brandon-Souris Liberals, ending up having to take it to the people in Ottawa and bypass that local constituency, and now the local constituency is coming out and taking credit for actually making it a unanimously accepted resolution in Ottawa, which any government, any caring government, would do. They would look at this as a national problem and say that something needs to be done and we will make money available, but of course we have seen procrastination from both levels of government on this and it is high time that that issue was set aside and that there were funds made available. This Province can no longer wait on the

federal government to do those things. They need to put some of the \$64 million that they admit that they have not spent in Manitoba into the slaughter facilities and move this issue forward for the saving grace of the farm families out there today that are going under, going broke, as has been mentioned by a number of my colleagues today, and not, if you will, procrastinate any longer about making money available because that is all that farmers keep hearing about with this government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that if there are other things that they wanted to do, they could look at a floor price on culls as has been done in other areas of Canada and other jurisdictions. That would certainly have helped our industry here in Manitoba.

I want to close by saying that senators like Mr. Dorgan, and, of course, Tom Daschle who lost the last election in the United States, the senator from South Dakota, but, more importantly, Mr. Dorgan, who has been a Canadian-basher from the time he was first elected, I believe, in North Dakota, from anything that I have ever had to do with him over the number of years that I was a farm leader in western Canada. It is very much an opportunistic pattern that Mr. Dorgan has put forward. Last summer we heard him make the false statement that Canadian beef is not safe to eat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he and other U.S. congressmen who make those kinds of statements do not have any factual evidence to that. In fact, they know that in Canada our system of beef is more safe than theirs because we actually inspect, and none of the animals that have had BSE in Canada have ever been found to be in the food system, unlike the American system, because they do not inspect animals, not to the same extent. So I want to just put that on the record.

I want to say as well that Dr. Sam Holland, the head veterinarian in South Dakota, who a year ago last summer, when this came up in July of '03, indicated to some of us who were at a joint all-party meeting of four states in the state of South Dakota that, if you ate an animal that was severely infected by BSE, your odds of becoming ill from eating this beef as a human being would be like being struck by lightning three times on the deck of your own house in one morning. It is not going to happen.

So I will close with those few remarks and say that it is high time that the NDP in this province got

on with building some slaughter facilities and helping these distraught farmers.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): As the last speaker on this side of the House, I want to point out that there were a number of my colleagues who agreed to forgo their opportunity to speak so that we might get on with discussing the motion that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) intends to put forward and conclude that discussion before the day is over. I want it very clearly understood that these members gave up that privilege in order to facilitate discussion on a motion that we believe is also important.

In reference to the debate that we are having around the matter of urgent public importance, I have listened to a number of the government members speak. I have listened very carefully. I want to close by making my remarks very directly to the government. They are the government. I listened to a number of the members speak, including some Cabinet ministers, who said: "Well, we have a problem out there. We have depopulation. People cannot move their cattle. They have financial problems." "I fear" was the attitude they were taking; they fear that there is not enough will in this Legislature to solve the problem. In fact, one of the government members went so far as to say that he was afraid we would be back here in a year's time continuing to debate this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the very reason we have to be forceful in this debate, because, as we go forward, it is not enough to say that we must stand together to make a decision. We have been trying to put forward some suggestions and some ideas about what the government could, in fact, do. I am challenging the government to think about the fact that there is an opportunity that they can seize upon.

The Premier (Mr. Doer) and a couple of other members have shot back at us that have we suddenly adopted socialist principles, that we believe the government should be involving itself in investment. One of the roles of government in our society is to take responsibility for investing in infrastructure. The general revenues that come into government can be used and used appropriately to invest in infrastructure. I would tell the members of the government that the one thing that is going to slow down and be standing in the way of increased production capacity in this province is infrastructure.

We need infrastructure in Dauphin, and we are going to need infrastructure in Neepawa to meet the needs of two plants that are proposed.

* (17:40)

I would suggest if the government wants to put to rest a lot of the arguments that they have heard here today, if the government truly wants to come forward and put their stamp on changing this issue and the impacts of the lack of market now that we have a BSE problem with a subsequent border closing, that the government can seize the opportunity through an infrastructure program. It would not be discretionary against other communities; it would not be seen as favouritism. It would be seen as assisting industries and towns with infrastructure at the very time when it is the most needed. I will give the government credit and acknowledge the previous government that when the potato industry, when the pork industry was looking for expansion of waste water treatment in this province, the government was able to play a role.

When the government is being faced with a lack of capacity in our small plants because of a lack of qualification for inspection, government may have a role that they could act on to increase the capacity and to increase their ability to access markets by putting in position some money that would enable that existing capacity to be increased and to be more rapid in its response to the demands of the product that is being made available to them.

The Premier (Mr. Doer) made comment, and I was disappointed to hear this, that he was afraid we are going to be waiting on cows, that there might not be enough cows out there if a plant was built and the farmers had not committed to their cows being in the plant. I, frankly, was a little taken aback by the Premier at this stage of the game making that comment. That ranks right up there with the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) saying that she is still worried about who destroyed the kill capacity in this province, knowing full well that it was under a government of her stripe that allowed that capacity to leave this province, and she has the gall to put on record in this Legislature in this debate that she thought it was a different party. I find that very disturbing when the ability to fix the problem lies in the hands of this government, not just to the farm hands, not just in the Government of Canada, but in

the leadership that can come from the government across there.

Stand up and do what you say you can on behalf of the farmers of this province.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Point of Order

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

Mr. Maguire: Yes, Mr. Speaker, a point of order, just a point of clarification. I have often chastised politicians who stand up in House and make an incorrect statement, so I want to correct one that I just made. That is, it was not the Brandon-Souris Liberals that decided the resolution on BSE was not important enough to make it to their national convention. It was, of course, brought forward to the provincial body in Manitoba at that time. It was the Brandon-Souris people who brought it forward, but it was deemed unimportant enough by the Liberals in the province of Manitoba to make it into the top five resolutions that they were allowed to send to Ottawa, and therefore they had to go around the delegation from Manitoba to make sure that it did get on the floor of the national convention. I just wanted to correct that.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden, he does not have a point of order, but I thank him for the clarification.

Mr. Speaker: By previous agreement, the MUPI is now concluded.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, by leave, I move, seconded by the member from Lakeside, that

WHEREAS Manitoba's cattle and ruminant producers have been dealing with the effects of the prolonged border closure due to BSE since May 2003; and

WHEREAS the border was set to open to cattle under 30 months, starting on Monday, March 7; and

WHEREAS a United States district court judge has granted a temporary injunction to stop the U.S.

government from reopening the border to Canadian cattle which will extend the border closure for an unknown period of time; and

WHEREAS the United States Senate passed a resolution in opposition to the rule submitted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish minimal risk regions and resume trade of Canadian cattle under 30 months of age; and

WHEREAS the BSE crisis has necessitated considerable disaster assistance to cattle and other ruminant producers since the beginning of the BSE crisis; and

WHEREAS the ruminant industry has been working to find new markets for these animals as well as new opportunities for local processing in order to reposition their industry in the new post-BSE era.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Manitoba government support and work with Manitoba's cattle and ruminant producers throughout the extended border closure; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Manitoba government support and work with Manitoba's cattle and other ruminants industries to find new export markets for their animals as well as enhance their support to domestic efforts to build local slaughter capacity within the province; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba call upon the federal government to explore all options that would lead to resumption of trade in ruminant and ruminant products as quickly as possible; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that until trade resumes, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba encourage the federal government to continue with its Repositioning the Livestock Industry Strategy and move forward immediately on other supports for the industry.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food, seconded by the honourable Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler)—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense. The motion is in order.

Ms. Wowchuk: I am only going to speak for a few moments just to say how pleased I am that we have been able to come to an agreement in this House on a resolution that shows our united support for the industry and the need for us to move forward in support of our industry, but also to move forward and call on the federal government to take action and work toward re-establishing trade with the U.S., as well as to reposition the industry.

Although there are different views on each side of the House, and we each have our opportunity to put our thoughts on the record, or reflect on how issues played out in previous times, I think it is important that we get that information on the record.

I also think it is important that we recognize that a tremendous amount of work has gone on since the first case of BSE. We also have to recognize that there is a tremendous amount of hurt out there. I believe there are many people who do not recognize what the burden has been on farm families. I ask people to think about what it would be like to have your paycheque taken away. This is even more serious than having your paycheque taken away, because not only do you not have a paycheque, you also have to continue the expense of keeping that livestock herd alive.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to pay tribute to the many people who have been interested in increasing slaughter capacity in this province. I have heard people opposite put on the record that there has been no increase in slaughter capacity in this province. That, in fact, is not accurate. There has been a tremendous amount. If you look at how small our industry is and how much growth there is, I want to pay tribute to those people who have been increasing and putting on extra shifts.

There is much more work to do. We have to move to a slaughter capacity that is at a federal level so we can get into other markets, and we have to continue to work with the industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will just, with those few words, say that I am pleased that we will have a united front coming from this, the first day back in the Legislature, that we can say to the producers we all recognize how serious the challenge is that they are facing, and we are committed to working with them.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, yes, we on this side of the House recognize that the Manitoba government does need to work with the cattle producers and other ruminant industries in the export market, as well as their support for domestic efforts to build slaughter capacity within the province. Also, we on this side of the House want to remind the Province that we should provide a cash advance immediately to those farmers in distress and do that within the budget tomorrow.

* (17:50)

Also, we on this side of the House want to call upon the federal government to explore the options that would lead to the resumption of trade in ruminants and ruminant products as quickly as possible. We, also, on this side of the House want to reiterate the fact that because of this crisis that has been brought upon us, the government needs to move quickly and efficiently in order to get this done. We will look forward to that.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach).

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the honourable Member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this resolution, which has the support of the Liberal Party as well as the other parties. I am pleased to indicate that we are in strong support of measures that will improve things for those in the cattle industry and in the industries of other ruminants, which we must always remember whether it is bison or sheep or goats or others, that there are not just cattle producers that are affected.

I think that it is important to note that I have been very critical of the Province and some of the aspects of its approach to BSE. I talked about that earlier on, both that the actual impact of the measures to date on increasing slaughter capacity has not been what it should have been, that in my view we should have moved quickly to mandatory testing of animals over 30 months and that we should have moved much more quickly in terms of marketing and branding Manitoba beef.

I have also, to be frank, been openly critical of the federal government, both in the mandatory

testing industry on not removing bovine blood from cattle feed and insufficient approach to increasing slaughter capacity. I think the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) may quibble a little bit about how the resolution got to the floor of the federal Liberal convention, but the fact that it was there and it passed is important. I would make one correction. I think in correcting himself, he actually inadvertently made a mistake. He said that it was the provincial Liberal convention. In fact, we have our provincial Liberal convention still coming up. It was a federal party convention within the province.

An Honourable Member: That is in a telephone booth.

Mr. Gerrard: No, no. It is going to be a lot bigger than a telephone booth, I assure you.

An Honourable Member: Two telephone booths.

Mr. Gerrard: A lot more than that, my friend. We are growing.

What I do want to say is that I hope we can see a time when both the federal and provincial governments can work together to make sure there is an increase in the slaughter capacity in Manitoba. As Liberals, we know all too well that the NDP is very good at passing the buck, and we want to make sure that the NDP is standing up for our province and taking responsibility instead of just trying to pass the buck.

In looking at the resolution, we note and want to emphasize that the Manitoba government should support and work with Manitoba's cattle and ruminant producers. We note that the cattle producers were calling for much better testing than is going on at the moment.

Be it resolved that the Manitoba government support and work with Manitoba's cattle and other ruminant industries to find new export markets. In our view, finding those export markets depends in part on such testing and in demonstrating that we are taking this matter very seriously and proving what we do stamps high-quality Manitoba beef.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba call upon the federal government to explore all options to lead to a resumption of trade in ruminant and ruminant products as quickly as

possible. Very important. I think, quite frankly, as I pointed out earlier, that this should include the mandatory testing which we have mentioned.

Be it further resolved that until trade resumes the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba encourage the federal government to continue with its repositioning of the livestock industry strategy and move forward immediately on other supports for the industry. We certainly support this and hope that the federal government as well as the provincial government will make sure that the Manitoba beef and other ruminant producers have a future which is much more promising than it appears to be today. It will require provincial action and federal action, and let us just hope that everybody can work together. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question for the House is a resolution moved by the honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk), seconded by the honourable Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

Do the members wish to have the resolution read?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

I have been asked to record it as unanimous. Is that the will of the House? *[Agreed]* Unanimous.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The hour being past 5:30 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 7, 2005

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