

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. |
| JENNISSEN, 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

Thursday, December 2, 2004

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Pension Benefits

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Pension benefits for thousands of Manitoba health care workers are being cut because the government has refused to support the front-line health care workers in their desire to maintain their existing Healthcare Employees' Pension Plan (HEPP).

The government is doubling the early retirement penalty to 6 percent a year from 3 percent.

There will be no cost-of-living benefits for retirees in the foreseeable future, which means that inflation will erode retirees' pension cheques over time.

The government's refusal to support the existing pension plan will have a negative impact on hundreds of front line health care workers.

The government is demonstrating a lack of respect for front-line health care workers by its decision to allow administrative costs in the regional health authorities to skyrocket by millions of dollars.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider redirecting administrative cost savings to front-line health care workers.

To request the provincial government to treat front-line health care workers with the respect they deserve, and to consider supporting the health care

employees' pension plan by not cutting pension benefits.

Signed by Maria Richardson, Dayna Ploog, Beverley Allard and others.

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

The honourable Member for Morris.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on—

I had recognized the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), but I heard the honourable member say he was up on privilege. So I will hear his privilege and then I will go back to the honourable Member for Morris.

The honourable Member for Inkster, on the matter of privilege.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I truly do believe it is a matter which this Chamber needs to be made aware of. I think it is a very important matter. It happened earlier today in the legislative committee, in Room 255 or is it 254. I believe this is the first opportunity, obviously, that I have had to raise the issue with this House in the sense that the committee adjourned at twelve o'clock, and we have now adjourned the Chamber, or I should not say adjourned, we are now reconvened inside the Chamber. So it is the first opportunity to raise the issue.

In terms of the prima facie case, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that it is critically important that this Legislative Assembly recognize the importance of four what are supposed to be truly independent offices, the office of Elections Manitoba, the provincial auditor's office, the Ombudsman's office and the Child Advocacy office. Those offices report to this Legislative Chamber through you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it is important, it is absolutely imperative that when things require change, as we see within the

advocacy office, there is going to be a need to fill a position and that means there is going to be a need to have some sort of a search, if you like, committee.

We have heard on numerous occasions from the Premier (Mr. Doer), whether it is in Throne Speech or just comments to members of the media, of the importance of all parties working together in order to accomplish certain things; whether it was on smoking, we have the Healthy Child task force, we have had the Liberal Party be present in terms of making a presentation in Ottawa in an all-party type of format.

* (13:35)

Well, Mr. Speaker, what happened earlier today was that I had raised the issue in committee as to we believe that the Child Advocacy position should have a representative from all parties inside this Chamber. In particular the concern was that the Child Advocacy office reports to this Chamber and, as such, all of us should have some ability to be able to participate in the process. I talked about myself and the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party. I spent some time in explaining my position in detail, and I very much appreciate the fact that the official opposition did recognize that we do have the right to be able to be a participant in this. What surprised me was the fact that the government of the day, for whatever reasons, did not feel that it would be appropriate to have either myself or the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party involved in this process.

Mr. Speaker, I initially had approached it by suggesting that all members have to be afforded the opportunity to participate in some capacity. When I said "some capacity," ultimately, if we could not be a voting member, an observer, it is something which we would have entertained. But fundamentally, I do believe that we should be able to be a full participant in this because like Elections Manitoba, the Auditor's office and the Ombudsman's office, these are truly independent offices of this Legislature.

What I witnessed this morning was the government of the day intentionally trying to prevent myself and the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party from being able to be full participants. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there were three motions that were moved. The first motion was moved by the member from River East, in recognizing that we need to depoliticize the Child Advocacy office to the degree to

which representatives from all three parties should participate. Even though I could not vote, I thought it was a motion that was worthwhile in terms of voting for, and I indicated that.

The government of the day quickly voted it down. Then they brought forward their own motion, and that motion excluded the Liberal Party inside this Chamber. I think there is a contradiction in terms of you cannot say it is okay for the Liberals to participate in this and do this cherry-picking, when in reality, Mr. Speaker, this is a critical office. We all care deeply about the children of our province. No political party owns the issue of wanting to help our children, and that is why we have a child advocacy group or office that reports to this Chamber as opposed to directly to the government of the day. We all have shared responsibility. We all need to be able to feel that we are a part of ensuring that the hiring of this individual is, in fact, in the best interests of our children. The party politics should be set aside for this.

In committee, right after voting down the member from River East's motion, they then moved the motion saying that the Liberals do not have a role. Fortunately, there was an amendment that was moved to the government's amendment that would again have allowed us to have representation on that committee. What I see is that there are at least two parties inside this Chamber that are prepared to take a more apolitical approach in doing what is right in terms of the Child Advocacy office. What I do not understand is why the government of the day does not recognize that issue. The merits stand on their own.

If I did not raise this issue as a matter of privilege, I suspect that the likelihood of the government being successful at keeping Liberal participation on that committee will likely be successful because they have a majority. I believe that is not in the best interests of Manitobans. I genuinely believe that you have offices that are supposed to be independent of the government of the day, and the New Democratic Party needs to respect that. Those offices being: the child advocacy office, the Ombudsman's office, Elections Manitoba and the provincial auditor's office.

* (13:40)

So I ask, Mr. Speaker, that this matter be addressed before the committee determines to meet

next. I understand that I will be provided the opportunity when it does meet next to continue on the discussion that I was having prior to its adjournment today. My concern is that I think that people need to be made aware that the Child Advocacy office is not there to be politically manipulated, and we are not going to stand aside and let this government put at danger the risk of that very important office.

Having said that, I would move

THAT this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs and be reported back to this House.

I would move, seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing any other members to speak, I would remind the House that contributions at this time by honourable members are to be limited strictly to relevant comments as to whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I know the independent members of this House—because that is what they are, Mr. Speaker, they are not a political party in this House under the rules—are certainly eager to get up on matters of privilege that relate to procedural issues.

Mr. Speaker, I think, quite frankly, it is an unfortunate abuse of the rules and the practice and the role of matters of privilege that he got up today. There is a standing committee that began meeting today. It is before a committee of the House. There is a matter that is being debated in committee. It is going to come back in the next few days to deal with this issue.

On the matter as to whether it is a prima facie case, the member is somehow asserting that now the two independent members have a right to sit on hiring committees. There is no such right, but now, Mr. Speaker, I will say this. The government came to the committee and proposed, just for explanation, came and proposed a three-person hiring subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs as a way to deal with the matter and based on the distribution of seats in the House, which has been practised in the past.

Then the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) said into the microphone that he would like to participate, but he is not asking for a vote. He is not asking for a decision-making role. So what we responded with was an offer that we could discuss with them, an offer to participate in discussion on the hiring at the committee level. That was put on the record. It is in the Hansard. So we made an offer to them to participate, because he said he did not want a vote but he wanted to participate. So, we said, fine, they can take part in the discussions. We will have some further dialogue about how that can happen in what will have to be an in-camera meeting of the committee when the report from the hiring group comes back.

Then he changed his mind, Mr. Speaker, and he had support from members opposite. He changed his mind this morning, and then he says now he wants a vote. Well, he started the meeting by saying he did not want a vote. Now he wants a vote.

Mr. Speaker, then he gets up on a matter of privilege. Well, the matter is before the committee—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A matter of privilege is a very, very serious matter and all honourable members rightfully expect me to make a ruling, and I need to hear every word that is spoken to the matter of privilege.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of privilege in our view, but just on the equities of the thing, we are prepared to consider that. The committee rose at noon. He has now asked for a role, and the opposition, the official opposition, the political party in this House, supports that. We are open to that suggestion. We are open to considering that. We will look at the issue, the composition of that hiring committee, but these are matters that are ongoing before a committee. That is properly where they should be, and we are open to having some role. That is what members feel should happen. Fine. But that was not his position when he went into committee, and we responded to his initial position. We will respond to a second position as well.

* (13:45)

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, if there is any abuse, the abuse is by the

governing party, who acted very much like dictators this morning at committee. My understanding was that we lived in a democratic country with a democratic process. I clearly heard the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), in his opening comments, indicate that the process for the selection of the Child Advocate and the Ombudsman would be very much like the process and the other all-party committees, like the Healthy Living Task Force that is taking place right now and was announced by the Premier (Mr. Doer), and in fact, the Premier, at that time, included all three political parties in that all-party task force.

Well, then, we see a government indicating that one of those parties, that the Premier calls all-parties in this Legislature, was excluded from the process of the selection of a new Child Advocate. We, on this side of the House do not agree with the direction that the government is taking. We have now a process that the government is indicating has to be dealt with immediately because there is some pressure to get the Child Advocate and the Ombudsman in place. If it was an urgent process today, why was it not urgent, or why was the committee not called two months ago? We did not have to wait for the opening of the Legislature. In typical fashion, by lazy socialists, who have not been in session since—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am just reminding the House that a matter of privilege is very serious, and I need to hear all the words that are spoken pertaining to the privilege.

Mrs. Mitchelson: This Legislature has not sat since the middle of June, Mr. Speaker. This Legislature has the ability to call committees even if the Legislature is not sitting. This committee could have been called a month ago, two months ago, if it was such a pressing issue, but they waited until the eleventh hour and then called the committee and indicate that we have to move ahead with this today because it is so urgent and if we do not do it today, we are not going to have an Ombudsman or a Child Advocate in place.

Mr. Speaker, again, this just shows the heavy hand of this government that wants to dictate to the Legislature on their agenda rather than trying to serve the people of Manitoba in the most appropriate process. That would have been to have this issue dealt with months ago. There is absolutely no reason

why all parties in this Legislature should not be afforded the respect to sit on the selection committee for these independent positions, just as they have been selected to sit on all-party committees that this government has put in place.

I would like to hear the Premier's (Mr. Doer) rationale or reasoning for excluding the Liberals in this process while including them with open arms in every other all-party process that has been undertaken under his watch in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think I have probably heard sufficient argument. If the honourable member is rising because he feels that there is some point that has not been brought up, I will recognize the honourable member.

* (13:50)

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I do bring new information to the discussion. I was willing to yield to the Premier if he was going to stand up and answer the question from the member from River East, and I note that he did not.

But, on new information, I do rise to support the matter of privilege that was brought forward by the Member for Inkster (Lamoureux). I know that this is a sensitive issue for the members opposite, and it should be. It is a serious matter, as you say, Mr. Speaker, and we know that there are two cases that need to be set out to ensure that a prima facie case of privilege has been met and that a breach of privilege has happened. Certainly, on the first case, I do not think, there will be any dispute, that the Member for Inkster raised this issue at the first possible moment. I think, on the second issue about a matter of privilege, whether or not his ability as a member in House has been somehow impeded to do his job, I think that was the case.

This is a very unique situation, Mr. Speaker, that needs to be drawn to your attention because we are talking about independent officers of the Legislature. This is not like any other process, though clearly the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) did extend the offer to have it as an all-party committee.

This is a unique situation where these officers, in particular the Child Advocate's office and in particular the Ombudsman, will be acting on behalf of all members of this Legislature. They are not appointed

to serve the government, and they are not appointed to serve the opposition and they are not appointed to serve the members of the Liberal Party. They are elected, or appointed, hired, Mr. Speaker, to act for all members of the Legislature. I think that is a very critical point that was missed this morning by members of the government on the committee. This is unique for that particular reason because of the independence of the role, the important role.

We have seen in this Legislature over the last month and beyond the critical role that independent officers like the Auditor General play in terms of shedding light on scandals like the NDP Hydra House scandal. Clearly, now as we are going ahead and hiring officers like the Child Advocate, and we know that there has been a bit of a scathing report that has come out of the Child Advocate's office, it is important that all members who these people will serve have input and equal input.

I would say in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that today we all wear orange ribbons because we are here to support the democratic right and democracy in the Ukraine, and this is in itself a small affront to democracy. I certainly think that, on this day of all days, the Premier should stand up and say today we will defend democracy and today we will do the right thing.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I rise with some reluctance because if my independent members would only get out there and elect more of their members to the Chamber where they can be recognized as a party, then we would not have this debate. Having said that, let us just say that the motion that was brought forward to include the independent members, i.e., the Liberal members in this House, was to show some, I guess, goodwill in allowing all members of this Legislature to have representation on the hiring of an independent officer.

Yes, it is a departure from what we traditionally do, because I believe that when the independent officers were hired in the former administration, or in the previous time, there was indeed a presence of the Liberal Party on that committee as well. So it was only to reflect that this is an independent office, and that there is a reason for all parties and all members of this Legislature to be represented.

I do not think it takes away from the committee's authority or the subcommittee's hiring ability. It only

means that we add to the complement to allow for the assurance that an independent officer, who is going to be hired, is truly a hiring and is a reflection of the Assembly getting together and making sure that we have the best person in place to undertake those important duties that we have under the auspices of the Ombudsman and the Child Advocate.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that this whole process got derailed a bit because of the outstanding issues that the Child Advocate has identified that again were under the tutorship, under the stewardship of the former Minister of Family Services, now the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale). Once again, we see how this whole issue has been mishandled by the government. So, there are some important issues that have to be put to rest, but they are now in the realm of the responsibility of the government.

But, having said that, Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that if we really want to get on with the true democratic process of appointing independent officers, there is really nothing wrong with having a member from the independent members of this Legislature sit on that committee to do that hiring and to ensure that we have the best possible person in place for that responsibility.

* (13:55)

Mr. Speaker: A matter of privilege is a serious concern, so I am going to take this matter under advisement to consult the authorities, and I will return to the House with a ruling.

Now we will revert back to petitions.

PETITIONS

Highway 200

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

Signed by D. Teichroew, Louisa Gagnon, Ursula Bremaud and others.

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, and 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 Maureen Stevinson, Marlena Lanoria, Elaine Ford and others.

Pension Benefits

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Pension benefits for thousands of Manitoba health care workers are being cut because the government has refused to support the front-line health care workers in their desire to maintain their existing Healthcare Employees' Pension Plan (HEPP).

The government is doubling the early retirement penalty to 6 percent a year from 3 percent.

There will be no cost-of-living benefits for retirees in the foreseeable future, which means that inflation will erode retirees' pension cheques over time.

The government's refusal to support the existing pension plan will have a negative impact on hundreds of front-line health care workers.

The government is demonstrating a lack of respect for front-line health care workers by its decision to allow administrative costs in the regional health authorities to skyrocket by millions of dollars.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider redirecting administrative cost savings to front-line health care workers.

To request the provincial government to treat front-line health care workers with the respect they deserve, and to consider supporting the health care employees' pension plan by not cutting pension benefits.

Signed by Karen Faurschou, Michele Tully, J. Wormie and others.

* (14:00)

Physician Shortage – Westman Region

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): 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, 2004.

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: Kathy Penner, Melinda Moore, Karen Isham and others.

Minimum Sitting Days for Legislative Assembly

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba Legislature sat for only 37 days in 2003 and 2004 is not much better.

Manitobans expect their government to be accountable, and the number of sitting days has a direct impact on the issue of public accountability.

Manitobans expect their elected officials to be provided the opportunity to be able to hold the government accountable.

The Legislative Assembly provides the best forum for all MLAs to debate and ask questions of the government, and it is critical that all MLAs be provided the time needed in order for them to cover constituent and party duties.

Establishing a minimum number of sitting days could prevent the government of the day from limiting the rights of opposition members from being able to ask questions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider recognizing the need to sit for a minimum of 80 days in any given calendar year.

Signed by William Yumang, Edwin Porcioncula and Norman Castaneda.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Midwestern Legislative Conference

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, today the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and I, on behalf of the government of Manitoba, had the honour to sign a proclamation that will formally recognize Manitoba's affiliate membership in the Midwestern Legislative Conference.

Mr. Speaker, the MLC is a regional association of state legislatures representing the 11 Midwestern U.S. states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The purpose of the conference is to foster regional intergovernment cooperation in the Midwest. All 1550 Midwestern state lawmakers, as well as the provincial legislatures from Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan, are eligible to participate in the MLC activities.

In attendance at today's signing ceremony were Iowa's House Majority Whip Libby Jacobs, chair of the MLC; Speaker of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Myron Kowalsky, co-chair of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee and Nebraska Senator Pam Redfield, vice-chair of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee.

There are many good reasons for Manitoba to join the MLC. The obvious reason was the fact that Canada and the U.S. are each other's largest trading partners and closest neighbours. Keeping the doors of communication open will help us understand each other's position on important issues and to work for solutions. Manitoba's membership in the MLC will provide an important opportunity for the kind of two-way dialogue between our legislators and those of the Midwestern United States.

Legislators on both sides of the border and both sides of the House will have the opportunity to discuss matters that affect them all and to understand better their respective positions. Clearly, the Canada-U.S. relationship is huge. The 5000 miles of border that Canada and the U.S. share supports the world's largest trading relationship with over \$1

billion in two-way trade per day and over 200 million people crossing it each year.

This trading relationship translates into millions of jobs that provide a livelihood for millions of American and Canadian families. Our relationship with the Midwestern states is especially important. In 2003, the two-way trade between Canada and the Midwestern states was \$220 billion. In Manitoba alone, our two-way trade with the Midwestern states was \$8.3 billion in 2003, which does represent 55 percent of our trade with the United States.

Discussions between legislatures through the Midwestern Legislative Conference can only enhance this vital relationship, and I am very pleased that Manitoba's MLAs will have the ongoing opportunity to participate in this dialogue. I know, Mr. Speaker, we have many of them with us here today.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I also would like to comment on today's proclamation signing.

I was pleased to witness the signing of the proclamation officially recognizing Manitoba as an affiliate member of the Midwestern Legislative Conference. The proclamation was signed by our Speaker, Iowa State Representative Libby Jacobs, and our Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk), on behalf of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Smith).

I would like to welcome Senator Pam Redfield of Nebraska, State Representative Libby Jacobs, who is also the chair of the MLC, and the Speaker of the House in Saskatchewan, Mr. Myron Kowalsky.

The Midwestern Legislative Conference is comprised of 11 Midwestern states and 3 Canadian provinces. The purpose of the conference is to discuss regional intergovernmental issues and cooperation in the Midwest. One of the benefits is to be able to send one of our members to the Bohee Legislative Leaders' Conference, and our member from Springfield attended that this past summer.

We recognize the significance of a relationship with the United States, as we are each other's biggest

trading partners and our economics are closely linked. As Senator Pam Redfield from Nebraska said during her speech today, "We have much in common, and we are really the same people from the same origins, and if the boundaries of our countries had been drawn longitudinally rather than latitudinally, we might have found ourselves in different situations."

I had the opportunity to attend the Midwestern Legislative Conference in Des Moines, Iowa, last July, along with my colleagues the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), the Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub), the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg), and led by the Speaker of the House and our Clerk of the Assembly.

I can tell you that we discussed the issue of the border closure as a result of BSE, as well as issues related to energy, health and education, just to name a few. I know that we all found it very informative and interesting. It was a pleasure to meet many state representatives and senators from the Midwestern states, as well as many MLAs from Saskatchewan who attended. Next year, the Midwestern Legislative Conference will be held in Regina from July 30 to August 3, and I would encourage all MLAs to attend. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:10)

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: No? I will ask once again. Does the honourable member have leave?

An Honourable Member: No leave.

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I am hearing a no. I heard a no, so leave has not been granted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 9—The Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation Act

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Smith), that Bill 9, The Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Robinson: This bill replaces and modernizes The Centennial Centre Corporation Act, as we currently know it, which regulates the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation. We believe that this act will enable the corporation to take advantage of best business practices enjoyed by similar facilities in the Crown corporation sector. We also believe that this new act will allow the corporation the opportunity to develop new revenue services and become more responsive to the changing marketplace.

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

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 Representative Libby Jacobs from Iowa. She is the chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference and Majority Whip in the Iowa House of Representatives.

We have Speaker Myron Kowalsky from Saskatchewan. The Speaker is co-chair of the MLC's Midwest-Canada Relations Committee.

We also have Senator Pam Redfield from Nebraska. Senator Redfield is vice-chair of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee.

We also have Mike McCabe, who is the director of the Midwestern Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments.

We also have Ilene Grossman, who is assistant director for the Midwestern Legislative Conference

of the Council of State Governments and staff to the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee.

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

Also I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today 35 third-year students of Politics and the Mass Media from the University of Winnipeg. These students are under the direction of Mr. Donald Benham.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Physician Resources Pediatrician Shortage (Brandon)

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, Westman moms and children are suffering under the Doer government. When asked what the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) was going to do to the pediatric crisis in Brandon, that minister said, quote, "Brandon has to take the lead in putting their best foot forward to recruit physicians."

A letter that I received from a concerned mom in the Westman region, Jennifer Lamb, said, and I quote, "It is tiring to read on and on how it is Brandon's problem to retain these doctors. Is this the NDP trying to sweep Westman under the rug on the basis there are shortages all across the country?"

In an unprecedented move, Mr. Speaker, letters from three chiefs of departments, and I want to use this to reference a full-page letter to the Doer government saying, "Docs rip province." Their concern was basically, they stated in that article that the Minister of Health should realize that band-aid, short-term, election, year-to-year solutions do not work.

Mr. Speaker, rather than lay blame and play politics before elections and tell Westman what they want to hear, it is time for this Premier to accept responsibility. It is time for him to make sure and implement a program that deals with this pediatric crisis that we see in Westman.

When can moms and children that are in the gallery today from Westman expect a scheme, something that shows those moms that there is some hope for them for pediatric doctors in their region? When is he going to live up to what his promises are?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind our guests in the public gallery there is to be no participation, and that also includes applauding.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, certainly we know when it comes to Band-Aid solutions that you reap what you sow.

Regrettably, today in Manitoba, because of the reduction in the medical school from 85 to 70, we have less doctors graduating in our first four years in office. When you go from 85 to 70 doctors in your medical school, you basically deny Brandon, Parkland, Thompson, NOR-MAN, Churchill, Interlake, Winnipeg with less graduating doctors in this province. Unlike members opposite, we did not hack and slash the medical school, having a devastating impact on all Manitobans.

Our first year in office—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are very early into Question Period. All members that wish to raise a question or answer a question, I am sure will have their opportunity, but we can only entertain one question and one answer at a time. I ask the cooperation of all honourable members.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, in our first year, reversed that absolutely terrible policy. We immediately initiated an increase in enrolment from 70 to 85 medical students in Manitoba. The class in 2000 went up from 70 to 85. We will be subsequently graduating more doctors, more Manitoba students, more students from all over rural Manitoba from that medical school. We have now increased it from 85 to 87. We are on track to go to a hundred.

There is no question there were Band-Aid solutions in Manitoba in health care. Members opposite could not run a first aid kit.

**Regional Health Authority
Administrative Costs**

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have two empty loges. If members wish to have a conversation, please use the loges. It is time for questions and answers, and I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers in case there is a breach of a rule. I am sure you would all expect me to make a ruling, but how can I make a ruling if I cannot even hear the comments of the member that has the floor. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We just heard the Premier say that you reap what you sow. Well, is it not interesting that, under 1999, the administrative costs of the Brandon Regional Health Authority, at that time, were \$1 million. What they have reaped and what they have sowed now are those admin costs in the Brandon Regional Health Authority have gone to \$2.5 million. That is what they are reaping and sowing.

Mr. Speaker, what is equally as troubling is that the administrative costs for all of rural Manitoba, all the RHAs have gone from \$13 million under this Premier's watch, up to \$24.5 million. That is what they are reaping, and that is what they are sowing. We would love, by the way, to share with this Chamber and to share with the media, and all those people watching what the costs of the administration in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority have grown to, but they are hiding them. They do not even want to tell Manitobans what they are.

* (14:20)

Mr. Speaker, administrative costs have consistently gone up under the Doer government. They have gone up from one RHA to another. How does this Premier possibly explain his continuous lack of accountability, his continuous lack of any responsibility to properly manage health care dollars and the concerns of moms and children that we have in

the gallery representing other moms from the Westman region who are being shipped from Brandon to Winnipeg, highway medicine ambulances, because of his inability to manage health care. Why is he doing it?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): The number of people that had been disappointed, Mr. Speaker, from the decisions made by the previous government to not build and redevelop the Brandon General Hospital, thousands of people were shipped to Winnipeg for MRIs. They will no longer be shipped to Winnipeg because we placed the first MRI outside of the Perimeter Highway.

While the member opposite has been fighting a one-trick pony for the Maples profit clinic, we have been shipping surgeries to the Boundary Trails Hospital, to the Steinbach Hospital, a CAT scan in Thompson, The Pas, Selkirk, Steinbach, Portage la Prairie. We are putting diagnostic equipment outside of Winnipeg so less patients will have to come into Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, they decimated rural health care services, they decimated the medical school, and we are on track to rebuild that system, and yes—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: The would-have, could-have, should-have party is making a lot of noise now, but when they cut the medical school, they were quiet as church mice, Mr. Speaker. They did nothing for the people in terms of the long-term consequences.

Mr. Speaker, there is a shortage of pediatric surgeons. There is a shortage of family doctors.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: There is a shortage. I would say to members opposite that you cannot just snap your finger and solve the problem when the medical school—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind the House that when the Speaker is standing, all

members should be seated and the Speaker should be heard in silence. I would like to remind all honourable members that we are trying to get as many questions and answers in, and when there are disruptions going on, the clock is still ticking. It is just going to shorten the number of questions.

Mr. Doer: There is a shortage in Brandon. We have had the minister meet with the administration. He is going to meet later on with the families. I have pledged myself to meet with the families. We are working on long-term solutions through the medical school, as I have said. We are looking for long-term solutions with bursaries for those students. We are looking at long-term solutions with recruitment incentives and tuition forgiveness for people that do work in rural and northern Manitoba. We have established the office of rural doctor recruitment and northern doctor recruitment.

Members opposite were going to pay doctors 1 percent in 2003 and zero percent the other year. Mr. Speaker, you would not be able to recruit or retain any medical staff with the kinds of salaries members opposite had proposed during the election campaign.

There is a shortage, Mr. Speaker. There is a shortage. The number of days that are not covered, I believe, are five right now. It is over the Christmas-time. The minister is working very, very vigorously to take the 24 days that were not covered. He has reduced it down to five. We still have not got there, and we are dedicated to moving resources in to make sure that people do not have to come from Brandon to Winnipeg. As I understand it, in the last 13 days there has not been any.

Rural Hospitals Closures

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the arrogance in the answer, frankly, is cold comfort to those moms, those children who are suffering under this Doer government's inability to deal with a chronic crisis that is happening in Brandon. We see that health administration costs are going through the roof. We see patients under this Doer government being shipped from Brandon to Winnipeg in highway medicine. We see that there is a chronic shortage of specialists, that this Premier has the inability to not only answer questions about it in the House, but has the inability to do anything to give some hope and

comfort to those moms and children who are here in the gallery today.

Mr. Speaker, I am also very concerned that I asked this Premier for his commitment, that he said to Manitobans that he would commit not to close or convert a single rural hospital. I wrote him a letter and asked him if he would still stand up to that commitment. His response left me very concerned that he is not going to live up to his commitment.

So I ask, Mr. Speaker, in front of the moms, the children, everybody in the House: Will this Premier give us a straight answer? Will he live up to his commitment, and say today in this House that he will not close or convert one single rural hospital? Yes or no?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, again this is cold comfort for members opposite. We had to open the emergency ward of the Gladstone Hospital, so members opposite will look at what we are doing, and thankfully, too. The public knows what the Tories did in office. The public knows what they did not do with the Brandon General Hospital. The public knows how many family doctors have been lost. The public knows the 1500 nurses that were let go when they were in office. The public will not be fooled by the would-have, could-have, should-have members opposite because they did not do it, and the public knew that and that is why they were thrown out in 1999.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out we are dedicated to dealing with the shortage in Brandon, but I also want to point out a new spinal surgery program was started in Brandon with the new hospital we built in 2004. A new laser surgery in the urology program has been expanded. We are doing more minimally invasive surgeries now to bowels, appendix and colons in Brandon with the new hospital. The number of surgical beds in Brandon will go up from 43 to 56 in the spring of 2005, an increase of 30 percent. The MRI machine that has opened in Brandon means less people are coming to Winnipeg from Brandon. The people in Brandon know that. The people in Westman know it, and they know their record.

Rural Hospitals Closures

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Timely access to health care is a priority for all Manitobans. The

Minister of Health has indicated primary health reform is a big issue. The minister has requested the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority forward a document outlining future plans for the region. Will the minister assure the residents of rural Manitoba that no hospitals will be closed?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, in terms of primary health care reform, I was absolutely delighted yesterday to announce the construction and opening shortly of five brand-new primary health care centres in various centres in Manitoba. Let me tell the member opposite that primary health care is the most important reform area that we can work on in our overall health system.

For example, it is well-known that advance practice nurses can provide between 60 percent and 80 percent of the care adequately, safely and very effectively, that a general practitioner can provide. So primary care reform on the national level in every province in Canada and in this province is very high on our agenda and very important to the future sustainability of our health care system and to dealing with the shortage of physicians.

Physician Resources Pediatrician Shortage (Brandon)

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Manitobans do care about their health system. In fact in the gallery today are concerned parents from Brandon and western Manitoba. They have made the trip to Winnipeg to talk directly with the minister regarding the lack of pediatric services in the Westman region.

Will the minister assure these parents he is addressing this important issue, or should they put their best foot forward and find their own solutions?

* (14:30)

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I would just repeat what our Premier (Mr. Doer) has said, and that is we have a part-time coverage from Saskatoon and two from Winnipeg. We have successfully covered 20 of the 25 days that were going to be vacant between now and the new year. We will do everything we possibly can working with Brandon, with the WRHA and with other medical centres that have pediatricians to make sure there is coverage over that period of time.

I would just remind those that are present in the House today, though, that during the previous Conservative government's time in office, there was an 18-month period where there was not pediatric coverage in Brandon. We are working very hard with Brandon RHA, with our own regional health care association of Manitoba, to ensure there are doctors for all of the areas where we have shortages.

Recruitment/Retention Strategy

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, three doctors representing the heads of three departments at the Brandon Regional Health Centre have indicated that the minister should think outside the box to study other models of recruitment and retention and develop imaginative new solutions. We must put an end to highway medicine.

Will the minister confirm that he has a long-term strategy to deal with the chronic shortage of doctors in western Manitoba?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I think it has been clearly acknowledged by every Health Minister, every Premier and every Prime Minister in this country. There is a structural shortage of doctors because when the previous Conservative government was in power in this province, and other governments in other provinces, medical college enrolments were cut anywhere from 20 percent to 30 percent. Seven years later, you reaped what you sowed, and that is why we are in this situation.

Mr. Speaker, we do have a very successful program in Manitoba. Under the previous Conservative government, down 116 doctors. During our party's time in office, up 139 doctors, 52 of them serving in rural Manitoba. Fifty-two of those new doctors are in rural Manitoba. We still have a problem. There is lots to do, but we are in a lot better shape today.

Rural Hospitals Closures

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, all we see from this government is the legacy of broken promises. Remember the 1999 election, \$15 million in six months will solve all of Manitoba's health care problems.

Mr. Speaker, in a desperate move last election, the Premier (Mr. Doer) came through the communities of Erickson, Minnedosa, Rivers and said, "Your hospitals will not close. Read my lips. I will not reduce any services in these communities." What is happening today? We see no hospital in Erickson, Rosssburn, Birtle, Rivers.

Mr. Speaker, when will this Minister of Health take his job seriously and ensure that moms do not have to put their children on the highways to get services for their families?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there is more, and the more is that there are 139 more doctors today than there were when we formed office. We have moved our medical college up from 70 to 87. We are going to move it to a hundred.

We have put in a very aggressive program of recruiting and certifying immigrant medical doctors so that we can make use of the skills of those immigrants who have come to our province from other communities around the world and can make those skills available to us, Mr. Speaker.

There is no question there is a structural shortage across our country. We are doing everything we can to deal with that, and it cannot be done overnight. All Manitobans remember is in 2003, the Conservatives were prepared to try and fool Manitobans into thinking you could deal with a 1% increase in the health care system. No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, today the community of Russell, where 7000 people are being served by medical doctors, is down to one doctor. We are down to one doctor.

Two thirds of the graduates, our medical graduates, are leaving this province, Mr. Speaker. Why? Because of this government. It is time to address the issue. We have hospitals closing. People are without services. When is this minister going to deliver the services?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member is seated very close to me here, and I have a very difficult time hearing. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members. We have the viewing public through the television, we have our guests in the gallery who have come down to hear question and

answer period, and I think we at least owe them the chance to hear what is being asked and the answers that are being delivered. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member opposite forgets that the third-largest hospital in Manitoba was closed, the Misericordia hospital in Winnipeg, and it was closed by the former Conservative government, some 300 beds. Perhaps the member forgets that during his government's time in office, 1583 nurses left this province, left the registry. Perhaps he forgets that 116 doctors left our province during the time that they were in power. Perhaps he forgets that the closure of pediatric services coverage in Brandon was for 18 months, not a matter of days. Perhaps he forgets that they tried to privatize home care and were rejected by Manitobans overwhelmingly. Perhaps he forgets that they cut the enrolment in the medical college from 85 down to 70. Perhaps he forgets that only 210 nurses graduated in the last year of their government and that 700 are graduating this year. Perhaps he forgets.

Mr. Derkach: What a sick and conceited gesture by the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, there is one thing I do remember, and the thing I remember is the promise that the First Minister (Mr. Doer) made when he was in Rivers, when he was in Souris, when he was in Minnedosa, when he was in Erickson, when he said, "It is not the CEO of the ARHA who is in charge. I am in charge, I am the Premier. There will not be any closures of hospitals or services."

I am asking the minister to live up to the word of his Premier, and ensure that people from the west side of this province, moms and children, do not have to put their children on highways to get services for their families.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, during the previous government's time in office, they promised to build the Brandon hospital's renewal project six or seven times. It is open. It is providing excellent coverage for a huge number of new processes that were not in place when they were in power. Perhaps they have forgotten there was no MRI. There were no new CT capacities. Perhaps they have forgotten the new CTs that were put in a variety of places in northern and southern Manitoba, so that people did not have to get on the bus or did not have to drive their cars to be

able to get radiological services, cancer services. We are working to put more surgeries and more capacity all over rural Manitoba, and we will continue to build on that record.

Children's Advocate Recommendations Government Response

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, hollow words from a minister who left behind such a shambles in the Department of Family Services that, two years later, it is still in disarray. The Child Advocate, and I quote from her report, "Of most concern was the strained labour-management relationship that had created hostility, suspicion and fear." That is what he has left behind.

I would like to ask the Minister of Family Services if she can explain why more than two years after the horrible incident in Pauingassi that she and her department have still not responded to the recommendations made by the Child Advocate, and if she could explain to this House why the families who were involved in that incident, and more importantly the children involved in that incident, have still not received the counselling services that the Child Advocate recommended over a year ago?

* (14:40)

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I am sure we can all agree it was a very upsetting event to learn about. The department learned about it on September 24, 2002, and on October 2, responded to Southeast Child and Family Services with several actions. The Child Protection branch's investigation agreed that it was unacceptable to have children in the cells and advised the agency to immediately stop using the cells for retaining children.

The executive director requested the RCMP to investigate this incident because the jail cells used belonged to the RCMP. The RCMP agreed, and the use of cells ended. The executive director made recommendations to Southeast Child and Family Services regarding the continuing stability—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Loewen: It is unfortunate that this minister does not listen to the questions and simply stands up and reads from briefing notes that have been provided to

her. It was a very specific question about one of the 11 recommendations that were made to this minister in her department in October of 2003, 11 recommendations, I might add, that the department and the minister have not responded to as of today, over a year later.

I would ask this minister when she is going to put the needs of families, and more particularly, the needs of children, ahead of her own unsubstantive statements. When is she going to get down to the business of responding to the recommendations that were made with the Child Advocate's department?

Ms. Melnick: The progress that has been made, which began in October of 2002, a year before the Advocate investigated, and I am not saying anything negative about the Advocate, she does a very fine job, but the results to date are two of the three staff involved are no longer with the agency. The cells are not being used. The workers at Southeast Child and Family have received training on dealing with solvent abuse issues; specifically, CFS has instituted a process on how to deal with children under the influence of solvents. We have also been working with Southeast CFS to institute an internal process for conducting file audits to ensure compliance around the use of—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Loewen: I fail to understand why this minister continually stands up and makes excuses and goes into damage control for the former minister. The fact of the matter is the Child Advocate indicates—*[interjection]*

This is a serious issue, Sir. The Child Advocate indicates in a report, and I quote, "Another area of concern that we have noted over the last few years is that agencies and departments can ignore any recommendation made by the Child Advocate." That is what we would have here.

I would ask the minister to explain to this House, explain to the Child Advocate, explain to the families and children of Manitoba why, over a year after receiving the recommendations from the Child Advocate, her department, and she specifically, have failed to respond. When is she going to put the needs of children and their families first?

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, dramatics aside, recognizing that we are dealing with a very serious

problem, the department began, within two weeks of learning, to work with Southeast Child and Family. The Advocate also states that her relationship with our department is going very well. I meet with her on a regular basis, as do members of my staff. In fact, a meeting is set for next week for staff to meet with the Advocate to review her report in its entirety.

Bail Conditions Review

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): The NDP during the '99 and 2003 elections promised safer communities. The Member for St. Johns, who has been the Justice Minister for the last six years, under his watch we see time and time again, Mr. Speaker, criminals being released on bail into our communities, only to commit more crimes.

Take for example, Eugene Dumas. In 2001, he was arrested for breaking another person's jaw. He was released on bail and failed to appear in court. He was arrested again and given a probation order. He is now wanted on three warrants for assault causing bodily harm, uttering threats and breach of probation. He has disappeared, and the police have a warrant for his arrest.

I ask the Justice Minister has he made this community safer by allowing Dumas to be in the community continuing to terrorize Manitobans.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada tells us that Manitoba is the toughest province in which to get bail in this country. But I remind members opposite that when we came into office, Manitoba had suffered the highest violent crime rate of all of the provinces through most of the 1990s. Today our violent crime rate is 27 percent below the highest province.

Mr. Hawranik: Well, I ask the Justice Minister to take responsibility for this issue. He has been the Justice Minister for the last six years. I ask the minister whether he has fulfilled his promises to make our communities safer when Cory Lee Fairchuk was charged with assaulting a woman in April this year. He was released and then failed to appear in court. In June, he was again arrested for assaulting this woman and for breaching conditions, and then released on bail again. He again failed to appear in court and is still at large in the community.

The only way to find him is to follow his trail of victims.

I ask this Minister of Justice, and I ask him because he admits that he was assaulted and bullied at age 14, in this Legislature. Is the community safer because Cory Lee Fairchuk is at large in the community and free to commit more criminal offences? Is the community safer?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify for the record that when I was 14, I was not bullied in this Legislature. That has been more recent, quite frankly.

It is important for members opposite to know that our prosecutors act on the basis of the law, the evidence and prosecution policy. We have strengthened prosecution policies.

It is difficult, in comparison to other provinces, to get bail in this province. Indeed, 58 percent of our jail population is persons on remand custody. I might also add that we have supported our prosecutors. We have increased resources to our prosecutors by 68 percent since coming into office.

Mr. Hawranik: While in opposition, the Justice Minister put forward in a discussion paper advocating that criminals who break bail conditions should be ineligible for further release.

Again, while in opposition, the Justice Minister stated that bail should be eliminated for people charged with violent offences who have previously breached bail conditions. Tough talk when the minister was in opposition but now that he is Minister of Justice, these words ring hollow. Using the Justice Minister's own criteria, both Fairchuk and Dumas should not have been released into the community, committing more and more assaults. Why has the minister not backed up his words with action? This minister is all talk and no action. I ask the Justice Minister what has changed now that the minister is no longer in opposition.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, we do not need lessons from members opposite who presided over a government and a crime statistic that was unfortunate, very unfortunate. We suffered the highest violent crime rate of all the provinces through almost all the nineties. We are now 27% below the province with the highest rate. I might also add that Manitoba,

and you can have different views on this one, but the fact is we have the second-highest incarceration rate of all the provinces.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in addition to that we have gone to the federal government and we have said that they have got to change the bail rules in this country. We called on them to tighten it up, to make sure that those who are denied bail are rightly denied bail and create a presumption against bail for those who have breached their conditions. Thank you.

* (14:50)

Education System Capital Projects

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, this week we learned that Seven Oaks School Division will be getting a brand new school even though they did not ask for one. At the same time, communities that have requested much-needed new schools are not getting them. I would like to table documents from Louis Riel, Pembina Trails, River East school divisions which show that there is a real need for new schools in these high growth areas.

My question is for the Minister of Education. Why has the minister approved construction of a new West Kildonan Collegiate when not even requested by the division, while several requests from Louis Riel, Pembina Trails, River East have gone unattended?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the West Kildonan decision was based on an area of growth. Now yesterday in the House during a speech, on the Throne speech, the member from Portage talked about, let me quote from Hansard.

The member from Portage mentioned, "Let us look at the figures referring to out-migration exceeds in-migration." In 1999, the actual population in Manitoba was 1.14 million. Last year, it was 1.16 million, an increase of only 20 000 people. I do not know about you, but my math would suggest that 20 000 people is growth.

Certainly, West Kildonan demonstrated growth. The reason we opted to build a brand new school was because we took a look at the request to

renovate, and the cost of renovation did not make sense. It made more economic sense to build brand new over investing in an older structure.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the school division did not even request a brand new school in that area. The decision to build a new West Kildonan Collegiate was clearly a political decision. Perhaps this is because former NDP campaign manager and current Seven Oaks School Division Superintendent Brian O'Leary and NDP contributor Ben Zaidman, the current chair of the Public Schools Finance Board, made that decision.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Seven Oaks School Division Capital Priorities List for the House right now. It should be noted that a new school, West Kildonan Collegiate, is not even on the division's capital priority list.

Mr. Speaker, how much do the parents in Louis Riel School Division, Pembina Trails School Division, River East School Division have to contribute to the NDP before they get to see their schools?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, I really must take exception to the suggestion that this is a partisan decision. We have committed to build these schools in such NDP bastions as Winkler, and we recently opened one up in nearby Steinbach, in Mitchell.

We govern for all Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, and our record is very clear on capital. We have invested \$288 million. We have had eight new schools, eleven replacement schools, 35 major capital projects, over 600 projects renovating, or 707 schools. If that is partisan, I believe every opportunity I have had to visit schools throughout the province, I have been to 112 schools in my tenure, every opportunity I have had to visit schools, regardless of the political stripe, I have been amazed to see how much we have been doing in the last five years. I know what it is on paper, but I see it first-hand when I visit schools in every constituency in this province.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Neelin Spartans Volleyball Teams

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the Manitoba

Legislature today to honour the Neelin Spartans varsity boys' and varsity girls' volleyball teams, who this past weekend won the Manitoba High Schools—

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind the House that a point of order takes precedence over the matter. The only thing that a point of order will not stop is when a vote is being conducted.

I heard the honourable member say he was rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Our rules indicate time limits in terms of Question Period. I realize this is really the second Question Period in which I did not get the opportunity to ask a question. But what I wanted to do, because I made a commitment to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) to get him a Big Mac if he proclaimed the Criminal Property Forfeiture Act, and I believe he has done so. I wanted to be able to provide that Big Mac for the Minister of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind all honourable members a point of order is to point out to the Speaker a breach of a rule or a departure from Manitoba practices. Points of order should be used when they are raised.

The honourable member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Brandon East, continue with your member's statement.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the Manitoba Legislature today to honour the Neelin Spartans varsity boys' and varsity girls' volleyball teams.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on a point of order, and I know that today's Question Period went on inordinately long, and the member from Inkster did not get a question. But, if I am not mistaken, we are not allowed to bring props and demonstrations into the Legislature, and I would just like your advice on that.

Mr. Speaker: The rules are very clear: We are not allowed to—well, for one thing, I am not sure what is in the container, but if—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A point of order is a very serious matter. On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, it is very clear. If that is a food product, it is not allowed into this Chamber. We all know that, and if it is not, it is an exhibit, and the exhibits are not allowed in this Chamber.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I know, on numerous occasions, documents and such are tabled. This is just a request to hand something. I can recall Judy—

An Honourable Member: The Speaker ruled.

Mr. Lamoureux: Be patient. Judy Wasylycia-Leis, who is a New Democrat, did the same thing. There are other MLAs who have done things of similar nature. If the government feels so offended, I am prepared to withdraw the gesture.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamoureux: Calm down. It is not different from what your own New Democrats did.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not want this to turn into a debate.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Yes, to add a new point to the point of order, Mr. Speaker, not only is the member abusing the rules, and he knows so, but to ask our pages to be part of that breach of the rules is, I think, really, really inappropriate. It puts our pages in a position I have never witnessed before in this House. I think it is an absolute disgrace. He should apologize.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order that was initially raised, I am going to be making a ruling here. I have heard enough to make a ruling. Order.

First of all, food products are not allowed in here. Secondly, exhibits are not to be used, and thirdly, when I see a can of a product on the members' tables, I ask them to put it in the glass, because we will not allow the cameras to be used for advertising of any product in this Chamber. I ask the honourable member to please, that container, put it in his desk or in the garbage can, but off the desk. That has been always our Manitoba practices, and I will not allow that from any member.

* (15:00)

I heard a comment about using the pages. When members are sending items to other members or to the table, they have to use the pages. That I cannot—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

So the instruction was to ask the member for the page to deliver to the member, but I saw—order. Listen. Order. That is why we have the table. Order.

I have just been informed, checking our records, Speaker Rocan, in the past, has ruled if the item is a prohibited item, either exhibit or the other items that I described, the pages were not allowed to deliver those products from one member to another, and I will follow the precedent that had been set by the previous Speaker.

I have noticed the honourable member has put the item away, and I have ruled pertaining to that, that the point of order he raised it on was not a point of order, and also the point of order that was raised by the honourable Official Opposition, I have dealt with it, and this should end the matter.

Point of Order

Mr. Lamoureux: Just on a new point of order, and I will not belabour it, it is just that the Premier (Mr. Doer) also knows, if he is so familiar with the rules,

that you are not supposed to be imputing motives, and for the Premier to make the assertion that I was manipulating the pages of this Chamber, I do believe is most inappropriate.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier should withdraw his comments, as I will, without any hesitation, withdraw any way in which I might have offended this House. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Inkster, that is why I was pleased that I was able to explain to the House the processes, because it is very obvious to me that members have different interpretations. Some members probably were not even elected at that time when Speaker Rocan made that ruling and set a precedent for us speakers to follow, so I will have to rule that the Member for Inkster does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Carman, on a new point of order?

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): On a new point of order.

Mr. Speaker: On a new point of order.

Mr. Rocan: Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to rise today on a particular point of order that I am raising at this particular time. You, Sir, have ruled quite justly so on the exhibits in the House, but I believe what I have heard in this House this afternoon is a statement made by a particular member of this Legislature which I believe to be a bribe toward a minister of the Crown. I believe, Sir, if you peruse Hansard, you will find that the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) has offered a particular gift token to a particular minister of Executive Council to extract a favour.

Traditionally, the way we stand in this House, we will present to you a particular breach of the rule which, I believe, to be rule 100. Rule 100 very clearly states, "Since 1867, the House has had a rule specifically forbidding the offer of money, or any other advantage, to a Member. The present rule is Standing Order 23(1). Section 119 of the *Criminal Code*, . . . similarly forbids such action."

Mr. Speaker, because I do not have a copy of Hansard at this time, I do not expect to have any. Sir, I would ask you to take specific notice to Rule 100 in *Beauchesne's* on this particular incident that I am raising right now on a point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: This, Mr. Speaker, to the same point of order. It is a very serious allegation that has been put forward and if, in fact, the will of any court in this province were to suggest that I attempted to bribe, I would entertain that.

I think that what you have to keep in mind, and you might need this, Mr. Speaker, in terms of ultimately making your ruling if you are going to make a ruling, just so that members are very much aware. There was an interview that occurred a number of months back, you cannot quote me, at least six, seven, eight months ago or so, and it was in regard to the bill that the government of the day had passed known as The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act.

At the time, I sat on the committee and questioned whether or not the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) would, in fact, proclaim that bill. There is sometimes a need for having a sense of humour as a political figure, and a number of months later I indicated to a *Winnipeg Sun* reporter that if, in fact, it was proclaimed, I would be more than happy to buy the Minister of Justice a Big Mac. I suspect that it will not be proclaimed within 12 months.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it became very close to the 12 months. I think that it was a very innocent gesture and if the House feels that it is more than an innocent gesture, I would ask for the Government House Leader (Mr. Mackintosh) and others to comment at this time if they feel that it was an inappropriate thing to do.

Mr. Derkach: I regret that we are using up time when we should be debating the essence of the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, to deal with a matter of this kind. But on the other hand, I guess we must acknowledge that all this was, and I think the member from Inkster has indicated, this was just a stunt that he was trying to pull to attract some media attention.

If you want to do that, I say do it outside of the Chamber, Mr. Speaker. I do not think that is the proper use of the time of members in this Chamber.

Secondly, when we ask for gestures of that nature, and I know they are sort of humourous in a sense but, more importantly, it is a gesture to try and attract some media attention. I think that can be done in the hallway.

I would hope that you would take this under advisement. I think the member from Carman indeed has a point of order in that this could have been perceived as a bribe, and that should not be allowed in this Chamber either.

So I would ask that you take that under advisement and report back to this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan), I am going to take it under advisement in order to peruse Hansard, and I will come back with a ruling.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: I would like to ask the kindness of the House, as the honourable Member for Brandon East has been interrupted, if we would allow him to restart and give him the full two minutes. *[Agreed]*

Neelin Spartans Volleyball Teams

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): It gives me great pleasure to rise in the Manitoba Legislature today to honour the Neelin Spartans varsity boys' and varsity girls' volleyball teams, who this past weekend won the Manitoba High Schools AAA Provincial Volleyball Championships.

I take some personal pride in this achievement, Mr. Speaker, for not only is Neelin High School one of the finest educational institutions in Brandon East, but it is also my alma mater. I along with all the citizens of Brandon, am very proud of the Neelin Spartans volleyball teams, whose members' names I will now read into the permanent historical record of the Manitoba Legislature.

The members of the Neelin varsity girls are Jessi-Beth McCannell, Allyson Menzies, Kirsten Lawson, Stephanie Lacey-Avon, Natalie Majcher, Rina Lall, Kaylee Steffan, Kady Bootsman, Sarah Lopes and Tiersa Kejick. They were coached by Jill Martine and helped by the manager Le-Ann Featherstone.

* (15:10)

The members of the Neelin varsity boys are Adam Philpott, Kelly McGuinness, Jason Hargreaves, Jordan Nostedt, Graeme Matheson, John Nostedt, Brett Mallette, Darcy Hammond, John McLeod, Cory Taylor, Emery Knight and Brendon Chudley. They were coached by Don Thomson and Grant Wilson.

Congratulations to the Neelin High School varsity boys' and varsity girls' volleyball teams. As provincial champions, you have done your school and city proud.

Ukraine Election

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): On a more serious note this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I want to just pay a little bit of attention to the orange ribbons that all of us in the Chamber are wearing today as a symbol of our support to the people in Ukraine who are fighting for democracy and for freedom.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen a glimmer of hope in recent days that there may indeed be a new election in Ukraine, and perhaps the principle of democracy and of fair elections and fairness and freedom can return to that country.

So, today, I just want to assure all Manitobans of Ukrainian heritage that we stand with them. We stand with the people in Ukraine to support them in their striving for freedom, for democracy and for fairness in the electoral process. It is indeed our hope that in the few short days to come that indeed we may see that sense of freedom, that sense of democracy, the sense of fairness return to the country of Ukraine, which has struggled for so long to try to retain, to try to sustain those very important principles that we enjoy here in the western part of the world.

LifeWorks Golden Plate Gala

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, on November 25, I had the pleasure of attending LifeWorks' 5th Annual Golden Plate Gala. I was joined at the dinner by my colleagues, the honourable member from Assiniboia and the member from Rossmere. It was the fifth year in a row that I attended the gala, and as usual, the meal and the entertainment were fantastic.

The gala raised crucial funds for LifeWorks. This not-for-profit organization helps adults with

mental disabilities find work and participate in the community. Currently, they support over 130 individuals and work with over 200 businesses. At the gala, several of these businesses were acknowledged for their outstanding support of LifeWorks' activities. I was particularly pleased to see that a St. James business, Gerard's Bakery and Deli, was recognized. They were named the Employer of the Year. Supported by LifeWorks, Gerard's Bakery and Deli has created positions for two individuals, both of whom work full time and earn a competitive wage.

Mr. Speaker, the owners of Gerard's Bakery, Loraine Handley and Gerard Hagggett, are very deserving of this award. Their business gives all people an opportunity not just to work, but to grow and take on new challenges, all in an environment of kindness and respect. The significance of this cannot be overstated. By helping disabled individuals lead dignified and productive lives, Loraine and Gerard make a tremendous contribution to the betterment of our society.

I would like to thank LifeWorks, which is also in my constituency and Gerard's Deli for their efforts to improve the lives of individuals facing mental disabilities and for their dedication to improving our community.

I would also like to thank the members of the Manitoba Culinary Team, who created the meal for the Golden Plate Gala, the Larry Roy Trio, who entertained the crowd with their music, and the many businesses who donated supplies for the meal and the silent auction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deep River Science Academy

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Whiteshell campus of the Deep River Science Academy, located in Pinawa, provides hands-on research opportunities to Canadian high school students.

The concept of the academy is based on a network of partnerships involving parties who share the mandate to encourage youth to become the scientists and engineers of tomorrow. The campus does this by working with research partners who provide studies for the students to work on for six weeks in the summer. The students not only gain valuable experience, but in doing so can make decisions about furthering their education following

high-school graduation. Students work with skilled scientists and a tutor, a university student that is a research assistant to the scientist and mentor to the two students who join the research team. The Deep River Science Academy is a non-profit national organization with two campus locations. The Deep River Ontario campus commenced operation in 1987, and the Whiteshell campus opened in 1993 and serves as the campus for western Canada. This award-winning program has an impressive network of partners including numerous scientific research organizations and government departments, industry and foundations that support their cause.

I commend the volunteer board of directors for their commitment and enthusiasm for the academy: Vince Lopata, president and chairperson; Mike Luke, vice-chairperson; Dr. Stu Iverson, treasurer; Dr. Michael Attas, secretary; Connie Hamon, board member; Jane Sargent, board member; Scott Smith, board member; Brian Wilcox, board member. I congratulate the staff, principal, Walter Kukurudz, and the business manager, Arlene Davidson, for ensuring a quality scientific program and developing interest in scientific research.

The academy is currently in its eleventh year and has won many science awards, the latest being the 2004 Michael Smith Awards for Science Promotion which was received last week. Congratulations to the Pinawa Deep River Science Academy. I am proud that the Deep River Science Academy is in Lac du Bonnet constituency.

Windsor Park

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, I rise here to speak with great pleasure to proclaim the Windsor Park community as a model community. Windsor Park is a very friendly and vibrant place to live in Winnipeg. The special charter of Windsor Park can be largely attributed to the numerous dedicated, sweet-minded individuals who live there. Parents, teachers and community club executives are always working tirelessly to organize and to stage events which bring their community together. It is a community like an extra-large family.

This year the efforts of the staff at Winakwa Community Centre have been particularly very impressive. Cindy Fox, Ben Lee and their associates devoted many hours to planning upgrades to Winakwa Community Centre and were instrumental

in an effort to obtain a Community Places grant which will fund their project. I wish to congratulate them on their fine work and I hope their endeavours are a huge success.

Winakwa Community Centre has also done an outstanding job of bringing people from Windsor Park neighbourhoods together during the holiday season. Last weekend they held their tremendously popular Lunch with Santa where many children played, sang and danced with Santa. On New Year's Eve they are planning to hold a big gala. These events go a long way to foster a sense of community and improve the lives of everyone involved.

Mr. Speaker, not only is Windsor Park a great place for young families to live, it also has a lot to offer for seniors. The energetic members of Prendergast Centre provide a place where seniors can be sociable and feel treated with dignity at the same time. They provide the room for many day cares, once again a great service to the community. Windsor Park epitomizes Manitoba's renowned reputation as a leader in volunteerism. I have been very impressed by the commitment displayed by numerous members of Windsor Park volunteers who strive to enhance the quality of life in their community. I would like to thank everyone in Windsor Park who has helped to make such a wonderful place to live and I send them best wishes for the holiday season.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Resume debate.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE

(Eighth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg) and the debate is open.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to stand in this House and speak to our Throne Speech that was introduced just a short time ago, but just before I do that, I would like to welcome everybody back to the session. Certainly we have eight new pages that I hope enjoy their tenure here with us in this House. I would also like to

welcome our two new members. Our member from Minto, it is a great pleasure for us to have that member in this House. He brings great respect of his community, and we are proud to have him on our side. I know, as well, the opposition has a great new member across the way from Turtle Mountain, and I do welcome those two into the House.

* (15:20)

This Throne Speech is truly about the building blocks that we have done ever since 1999, Mr. Speaker, year after year after year. I believe that we are seeing the tangibles now come into effect, where you saw in the nineties, those dark, dark days of the nineties, a regression in Manitoba where you saw education slowly slipping down that drain. You saw the lack of investment in capital projects, in our educational system and, sadly, we saw a deterioration in one of the most critical elements that Manitoba has said over and over and over again is the key element in our province, and that is our health care.

Mr. Speaker, our health care system is very precious to Manitobans. Again, in the Throne Speech, it is reiterated where we will continue to build our health care system. We will go from the lack of investment in health care, where as early as the last election we saw the members opposite talking about investing 1 percent in an increase into our health care system. Let us truly look at that. Let us think about that. With that type of philosophy and that type of attitude, we would see the things that we saw in the dark days of the nineties.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

We would see promises to build hospitals in Brandon just before elections, shelved right after the election, and nothing being done, Mr. Acting Speaker. The people in Brandon, the people in the Westman community, and certainly in the southwest part of Manitoba, know over and over and over and over again of the broken promises from members opposite. Yet, they have the audacity to stand in here and say nothing has been done.

Mr. Acting Speaker, redevelopment of the Brandon Regional Health Centre and what we have for facilities, technology and services out in that region are well recognized by the people in Westman

and certainly well recognized by people in Brandon and my constituency of Brandon-West. The MRI, for the first time in Brandon outside the city of Winnipeg, is such a benefit for people in Brandon and area, and certainly that is well recognized.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the simple facts in the nineties of the loss of doctors in the province of Manitoba is well documented: 116 lost doctors in the province of Manitoba through the nineties. Doctors are professionals who have a high-quality, high-standard education that takes seven and eight years to complete. Let us look at the facts. When you take doctors in our universities and the opposition members reducing the seating in that, it does not take people long to connect the dots. When they reduced by 15 the number of seats that we had in Manitoba, people from Manitoba, some of the best minds and young rural doctors that we had potential to have in those seats eliminated. It was very evident right after '99 when we came into power, as a start of a building block, to bring that number up, bring that number back up to 85, now today at 87 and heading for 100.

It is a systemic problem that you have to think more than a year down the road on, and unfortunately, members opposite talked about cost cuts, and I believe the *Brandon Sun's* quote was "one-trick ponies on taxation reduction."

Mr. Acting Speaker, you have to look at those systemic problems. You have to look at graduating nurses and professionals out of our facilities, out of our educational facilities and having those people come into the system that we have and building the morale, having the positive courses in line for those people, and we have done that. We have done it with nursing; we have done it with doctors. We are going to increase that again back up to 100 seats here, 200 seats here in Manitoba in a short period of time.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I must mention, as I have a short period of time here, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. We had just completed the conference and had a lot of input, a number of meetings myself and many of the ministers, many of the MLAs in the Legislature here had the opportunity to meet with 198 or 200 rural municipality folks we have in the AMM, and listen to key elements that they see as positives.

I am proud to say that one of the key concerns that they had over some, really tragedies, that we

have seen in rural Manitoba in the last while with the BSE, and some of the conditions that our producers have had to put up with here in the last few years in looking for some assistance, certainly, on the educational side of their taxation. We had promised prior to the election that, in fact, we would reduce ESL on property on farmland by 5 percent per year over a period of time and reduce that to 20 percent.

Mr. Acting Speaker, listening to AMM, listening to the past-president, Mr. Stuart Briese, that said over and over again this is a key issue for us in all of rural Manitoba, it is something that we think is critical. There are great steps that have been made on ESL. Certainly, with the \$100-million overhaul reduction we will see that ESL is on target, but there is ESL on the farm property. Is there something we can do? We heard that over and over again.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I am proud to say that, in fact, 33 percent in the Throne Speech was announced that we would reduce this year. In fact, we have it in 2004 and assist the producers or farmers out there. That was well received. That is some \$13 million in reductions. We are proud of that as a government.

Again, to expand on that, another 17 percent is going into our budget into next year for a reduction in six months, the largest reduction on farm taxation property on the school taxation, on the ESL, in Manitoba's history. Mr. Acting Speaker, when we do that, that \$20 million back into the hands immediately of those folks is certainly well received.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I am proud of that. I am proud that our government had the ability to do that. We had that as a key priority in our Throne Speech. As well, I can tell you when you look at the growth in Manitoba, and members opposite want to toss around numbers that truly do not reflect numbers that are real out there in our community.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the economy is expected to grow in Manitoba by some 2.7 percent in 2004, certainly notwithstanding a difficult year, but ahead of what we are seeing in many parts of the rest of Canada. Manitoba's inflation rate is 1.5 percent, among the lowest in Canada, and, in fact, lower than the Canadian average of 1.7 percent.

The unemployment rate in Manitoba is 5.4 percent, the second lowest in Canada. In the first months of 2004, average weekly earnings have

increased 4.9 percent compared to 1.7 percent for the rest of Canada.

Now, Mr. Acting Speaker, we know that there are areas in Manitoba that are having difficulties. We know that our producers are having difficulties, hit with the BSE and some of the weather conditions that we have had, the early frost and some of the crop losses that we have seen. We have addressed that by putting tangible dollars in a big way back into those communities. I can tell you when you look at the housing, starts are up 11.1 compared to 9.6 for the rest of Canada.

Manitobans in every community all across Manitoba realize growth when they see it. When they are walking down the street, they see new vital growth on every street corner. You do not have to sit around the kitchen tables of Manitobans and try to convince them that things are gloom and doom like the members opposite have done over the last period of time. Things are getting better in Manitoba than they have been since the early 1980s. There are more people coming to Manitoba now than we have seen since the early eighties.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the immigration policies that we are following here in the province of Manitoba recognize right across Canada as being very, very well established and set up. I congratulate our members on this side of the House. That, again, was in the Throne Speech and certainly that is something we are going to continue to build on. It is something that is critically important for all Manitobans.

When you are on the soccer field as a parent, and you are sitting there and you are listening to people generally, people do have issues always. We all hear that as MLAs. We hear constantly some of the things that are concerns for people in our constituencies and we all listen to that. But the general feel, Mr. Acting Speaker, and the feel in this Throne Speech is the building blocks are working. It is now moving Manitoba in a direction that is positive. As our Premier (Mr. Doer) likes to say, "The should-have, could-have, would-have party" on the other side, the only thing they can say is, "That is not fast enough."

Mr. Acting Speaker, let us think about that. They did not do it, and we are doing it. We are moving ahead, and we are building. Those key building blocks are starting to gain momentum, and they are

starting to gain strength. Manitobans are recognizing in health, they are recognizing in education, they are recognizing it in their immigration policies, they are recognizing in many, many areas.

I can tell you Manitoba, as the Throne Speech has mentioned, certainly is committed to negotiating with our bilateral agreement on the federal fuel tax. I can tell you the minister—and as I met as a minister in Toronto just a short time ago, November 12, I believe it was, with more colleagues that I have from across Canada, had an excellent conversation with Mr. Goodale.

* (15:30)

I can tell you when we can work on a level like that, and we can get people working together in all the different provinces, we can take that to the federal government and we can say, "You know what? We have identified these priorities in Manitoba, leading that, in Manitoba, helping in that process to look at getting those fuel taxes back." Manitoba and our fuel tax and the building blocks that we had, \$600 million into capital. When we talk about economic development, Mr. Acting Speaker, we talk about our road systems in every part of the province of Manitoba, some 19 000 kilometres of road system throughout our province. The reduction in spending, terrible in the nineties and not addressing issues in rural Manitoba, was recognized.

Mr. Acting Speaker, we have increased that budget over 10 percent, year after year after year, up to \$120 million in capital expenditures in the province to make those connections. We made those connections with the University of the North, the connections with the road systems in the North. Many of the members on the other side have got up and spoken about their rural communities, and of course, very important for the members on the other side, I know. The members on the other side are from Winnipeg, many of them, and certainly this will go for Winnipeg, but not much have I heard. I am talking about the big piece of Manitoba, and that is rural Manitoba and the expenditures that we are putting into rural Manitoba. The connection now with the University of the North, a building block in every society, or it should be, in connecting people who are in remote and rural northern communities, is well received.

Again, in the Throne Speech, I know many, many of us in this House have issues they would like

to raise, they have things they would like to say on the Throne Speech, and I am sure members opposite will not be voting against those types of initiatives. I am sure, Mr. Acting Speaker, that there will be a number of members on the opposite side who will say this Throne Speech, these things committed, the member from Emerson and others I know will be saying What a great reduction to farmers in our communities in getting that money back on their educational taxes. What a great step forward. What a great step forward on your health care. What a great step forward in many ways, building those building blocks. I know that in caucus people talk about support or not supporting, and I can tell you—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Order, please, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I just want to assure the minister, when he is rising and speaking, that we will support the 33% reduction in tax; however, I want to also make note that they increased the education tax to rural Manitoba by 161 percent before they called the reduction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): There is no point of order. It is a dispute of the facts.

* * *

Mr. Smith: Mr. Acting Speaker, this government is clear and decisive in the actions that we take. Manitobans know that, as we move ahead, you are not going to see those double-digit increases on the education side, some 126 percent over a period of time, in the Interlake, I believe, and up in the Gimli area. It is not a shell game, shuffling things around, as the members opposite had done many times on farm tax reductions and putting ESL certainly on some of the buildings on the farms, but a true reduction back to our producers, back to the farm gate, back to rural communities.

I can tell you we are proud of the building blocks, we are proud of year after year, doing in bite-size pieces, in a way that is affordable. It is a way that we can do it year after year sustainably, and it is a way that we can show each and every part of Manitoba that it is critical to us to make sure all Manitobans are represented equally. We continue to do that in the economic development plans that we

have had, and you are seeing them build year after year, more people coming to Manitoba, more young people staying in Manitoba, 13 000 new students into our post-secondary education system here in the province.

Mr. Acting Speaker, key education. Now, members opposite might not connect the dots, but in every civilized society, a key building block in developing your plans in economic development is well-educated communities and work forces. As we get into the technological age, in the age that we are in, and the biotechnology, which again is expanding in Manitoba, I am proud to say, those are critical, and it is being done, and it is being done by this government.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I know that many of the members would like to put comments on the record and, I can tell you, if we only had a couple of hours each, I could continue to put things on the record. But, in all fairness, I know members like the member from Fort Whyte and others would very much consider voting for this; however, in their caucus, they may have directed him in a different direction. I cannot see him voting against the positives we are seeing in the city of Winnipeg. I cannot see him voting against this on the reductions in taxation, the building blocks for education and the building blocks for health care.

I am proud to say that this government, year after year in a surefooted way, has moved Manitoba ahead. It is recognized on the soccer field. It is recognized by people out there at their kitchen tables. We are growing in Manitoba. We are continuing to grow. We are dealing with growth. I am proud to say that dealing with growth is the reverse of what we had in the nineties. Thank you very much.

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Acting Speaker, would you please canvass the House to see if there is agreement for the time frame for the filing of private members' resolutions and for the House leaders' selection of prioritized private members' resolutions to be waived and conducted at a time to be worked out between the House leaders?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Is there agreement for the time frame for the filing of private

members' resolutions and for the House leaders' selection of prioritized private members' resolutions to be waived and conducted at a time to be worked out between the two House leaders? Is there agreement?

An Honourable Member: Can we read that again please?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Is there agreement for the—excuse me, I will repeat the statement. Is there agreement for the time frame for the filing of private members' resolutions and for the House leaders' selection of prioritized private members' resolutions to be waived and conducted at a time to be worked out between the two House leaders? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): We will continue our debate.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Thank you very much, Mr. Acting Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak on this debate. It gives me great pleasure to also speak after the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith), who, I do not believe, in listening to his comments, stood in his place and apologized to the moms and the children in the Brandon area for the dismal service they are receiving under this government's watch.

A government that has been in place for five years now, over five years, in the province and a government that committed back in 1999 to getting rid of hallway medicine, ending hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. I am somewhat dismayed that the Member for Brandon West did not stand up for the people that he represents and the people in his region of the province and apologize to them for what is happening today. We had moms and children that travelled all the way from Brandon to come in today to send a message, a strong message to this government, that they will no longer tolerate the kind of second-class treatment they have been receiving under this government's watch.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I have to say that I was somewhat disappointed, and I am sure that the people in Brandon and the Brandon area will be very disappointed too that the member from Brandon West could not stand up in his place in the House today, and apologize and commit to them that he

would talk to his Premier (Mr. Doer) and talk to his Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) and try to get some positive solutions. Instead he neglected to even mention the dismal services that are available to children in his city and his region.

But, Mr. Acting Speaker, I, first of all before I get into other comments, would like to welcome the pages to the Legislature. I know that they have already experienced some unusual activity. There is never a dull moment in this Legislature, and I am sure that they are all up for the challenge, and they will have a growing, learning experience over the next year.

* (15:40)

I also want to welcome all of the new interns that have joined both the New Democratic and the Progressive Conservative caucuses. I know the ones in our caucus are working extremely hard. They are committed, very intelligent, energetic young people. I hope that they, too, on both sides, will get the kind of experience that they anticipated they would when they applied for the program, and wish them all well.

Mr. Acting Speaker, we hear comments from every speaker on the government side of the House on what we might be voting against when we vote against this Throne Speech. Members of the government side of the House had an opportunity to vote with us just yesterday, and I would just like to read into the record today and make a few comments on what this government voted against. They voted against an amendment that I think really would have held this government's feet to the fire. They have made commitments and they have made promises over the years that they have not lived up to. I think it is incumbent upon Manitobans to know that we are not going to vote to support them when they have not lived up to the promises that they have made over the last five years.

One of the biggest issues for me, Mr. Acting Speaker, is the issue that we have the dubious distinction today of being the only have-not province in western Canada. You tell me whether that is something we should support and something we should vote for. Absolutely not. It is not something that I want left as a legacy to my children, and I would hope members on the government side would not want to leave that kind of legacy to the next generation.

But you know, that seems to be the socialist way in Manitoba. We have a Premier that stands up, wears his Tory blue suit and pretends to be a friend of the private sector and a friend of business. We know that his policies and his only economic strategy is to go tin cup in hand to Ottawa to beg for more money, because he does not have the capacity to deal with the issues of growing our province.

Mr. Acting Speaker, there has been \$500 million more in revenue in the province of Manitoba, \$1.5 billion more since his government took office. Yet we have to go begging day after day after day to the federal government saying, "You are not giving us enough. We are the poor cousins in Manitoba. We come with a hand out. We are not looking at how we can provide a hand-up to individuals. We just want more, just give us more and we will fix it all."

Well, Mr. Acting Speaker, we have seen what this government has fixed with \$1.5 billion of new revenue. They spent every last penny and when they have run out, what have they done? They go to our Crown corporations like Manitoba Hydro and raid them. They say, "Hand over more money. Give us several millions more because we cannot manage with the \$1.5 billion more that we have got. We need more."

When they do not get enough, when they have not been able to take enough or raid Manitoba Hydro enough, they go to the ratepayers of Manitoba and the taxpayers, and they ask for more user fees. All we have seen is significant increase year after year after year in backdoor taxation through increased user fees. Mr. Acting Speaker, I know Manitobans are getting a little fed up. They are prouder than what the New Democratic government gives them credit for, and they believe that their government should try to live within their means and not keep gouging and asking the taxpayers to dig deeper into their pockets to support the spending habits that are out of control by this government.

I know that the people in River East would not want me to support this Throne Speech when all of the promises that this government has made have not been fulfilled.

Mr. Acting Speaker, we made a commitment in the last election campaign to remove all education tax from property and from farmland. I have to admit, and we do not always want to be absolutely

100% critical, but I have to admit that this government has taken a small step. I want you to know that the devastation that our rural communities are facing deserves and warrants 100% reduction of their property tax.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So, if anything, all I can say is that I am voting against them not going far enough to deal with the issues of the devastation that happened in our rural communities as a result of BSE and the weather conditions. I cannot support the little-too-late policies that this government has implemented.

We heard today of another devastation in rural Manitoba, and that is the closure of rural hospitals and the lack of services available for women, families and children in the Brandon area. This is not a laughing matter, and I think the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) and the Premier (Mr. Doer) when they are meeting today should apologize profusely to those families and make a commitment to them, although we have heard commitments before and we have never heard them followed through on. That is the one thing.

It is fine to make promises. It is great to make promises, but quite frankly, when you do not follow through on those promises and people wait and wait for solutions, and the government thinks that they have lots of solutions. Instead of looking forward and planning in any significant way, they keep going back to the past. Well, there comes a point in time when you have been in government, and they have been in government for five years, that they have to at some point take some responsibility for some of the things that are happening in the province of Manitoba. This is a government that wants to blame everyone else but themselves for the problems that exist in our health care system, for the problems that exist everywhere in our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the issues that I think just shows how dismal the track record of this government is, is looking at the administrative costs in the regional health authority. We do not have all the numbers in, and for some reason or other the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has decided in their wisdom, I guess, because of government's insistence, not to share the information on what their administrative costs are. What are they hiding? The administrative costs in the Winnipeg Regional

Health Authority have doubled in the time that this government has been in power, but what are we seeing generally on the front lines in our health care system? We are seeing directives that say we cannot afford to call in a nurse if a nurse calls in sick. You tell me whether the dollars that have gone to administration, to building the bloated bureaucracy that this administration has created, if those dollars could not be better spent hiring a few more nurses on the front line.

* (15:50)

I do not understand the rationale. We have a government that always talks about being the champion of the poor and the underprivileged. Well, what about being the champion for the front lines in our health care system, for the front lines that are worked and overworked and having to work overtime because there is not enough front-line staff? Yet, this government would rather spend millions of dollars building a bureaucracy and paying senior officials in that bureaucracy three hundred, four hundred, one-half a million dollars in salaries rather than allowing more nurses, more nurse's aides, more technicians to deal with the hands-on care that Manitobans need when they are sick and vulnerable. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it very disconcerting. Manitobans are having difficulty understanding where the priorities of this government are.

When it comes to the raid on our Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro, I find that unprecedented policy by this government, unprecedented. Again, I go back to the facts that this government has seen unprecedented growth in revenue, \$1.5 billion more, but it does not seem to be enough to satisfy their spending appetite. We have seen, as a direct result of that raid of Manitoba Hydro, money that Manitoba Hydro had to go out to borrow in order to pay the government. We have seen Hydro rate increases of 10 percent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do know, again, when we look at what the impact has had on Brandon, for instance, when a company in Brandon indicates that their hydro bill will increase so significantly that it will have an impact on their ability to continue to operate—we have heard those kinds of concerns.

We know that many that are on fixed incomes live in apartment blocks that are electrically heated. There is going to be a significant impact on seniors

that are on fixed incomes who will see their rents go up proportionately according to the increase in hydro rates. We will make sure that we let them know why that is happening. We will make sure that they understand clearly that it was because of the unprecedented raid that this government forced on Manitoba Hydro to borrow money to hand it over to the government to put in their provincial coffers that ultimately led to the increase in the hydro rates that they are seeing today. Manitobans will not tolerate, or continue to tolerate, that kind of mismanagement of their hard-earned dollars

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just move on to what we saw at committee this morning when we saw this government try to ram through, under its own will, a process to hire the Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate. We saw just earlier this week the report of the Children's Advocate that is extremely critical of this government and the activities that they have undertaken. I want to take a moment to publicly thank the Children's Advocate for the good job that she has done, although members on the government side today when she was hired were extremely critical. I believe that she has done an excellent job of raising issues and concerns around the chaos that we see today in that child welfare system, chaos that this government has talked about fixing.

You know, they have brought in legislation, and there is devolution now of Child and Family Services, and we have yet to see what the end result of that will be. I think we will be watching very carefully, as Manitobans will be watching very carefully, to make sure that children do not fall through the cracks, and we do not see higher instances reported of child abuse and child neglect.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we saw also that the Winnipeg Child and Family Services agency is now a part of the Department of Family Services. We saw an article in the paper, we see comment in the Child Advocate's report that, in fact, three of the shelters that were set up were in such deplorable conditions that the Child Advocate indicated that those three shelters should be shut down. Well, we find out that a year later when a child that is living in one of those facilities calls the Children's Advocate that indeed, when the minister in the department had indicated that that shelter had been shut down, the Advocate found out, in fact, that it was not shut down, that

children were living in even worse conditions a year later than they had been the year before.

Well, what was the response from this minister? Well, I did not know and my senior officials did not know. Well, who is in charge? Child and Family Services agency of Winnipeg is no longer an independent agency. They are the direct employees of the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick). They are her responsibility. They are her employees.

Why on earth would she not know that that shelter had not been shut down? Well, in the typical crisis management mode, it has been shut down. A year too late, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and who knows how long that shelter would have stayed open if one of those vulnerable children had not called the Children's Advocate. I believe the Children's Advocate has done an exemplary job of pointing out issues, but we know that the whole system today is in chaos. We know that it is management by crisis in this department, and every time an issue comes forward we have a minister that stands up and reads from briefing notes trying to indicate that all is well and good in the Department of Family Services, and that things are under control and they are being managed. Well, we know different and the Children's Advocate knows different.

The Children's Advocate has indicated in her report, and I just want to read from it into the record that I think it is important to know where some of her concerns lie as she is leaving that office and we will be hiring a new Children's Advocate: "Another area of concern that we have noted over the last few years is that agencies and departments can ignore any recommendation made by the Children's Advocate because the OCA has no ability to enforce recommendations or even require a response from those cited."

For example, while the Minister of Family Services and Housing announced an action plan within days of receiving a shelter review, she announced an action plan but, in fact, did not follow through on it because one of the shelters remained open that the Advocate indicated should close. The Advocate goes on to say that she has had no response to recommendations that they made on the Pauingassi Review.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have asked questions and we have received no answers, no

rationale, no reasoning, why those recommendations were not followed through on. The Child Advocate has also indicated that it would be far more beneficial if she was provided, or the office was provided, with the opportunity to publicly report on important issues because it was too important to leave some of those issues until an annual report and just report in that manner.

* (16:00)

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know how the office of the Auditor General works. The Auditor General can go in and do reviews and can make reports to the Legislature as we have seen with the Hydra House report and others. I think that is very beneficial to accountability and transparency within government.

When we first came into government, the Children's Advocate reported to the Minister of Family Services. We made changes to legislation. We made that office an independent office of the Legislature and had that office report directly to the Legislature and be accountable to all members of the Legislature. That was a step forward, a step in the right direction. What we are seeing today is that we need to go steps further and take further measures to make sure that the Advocate in his or her role, whoever that may be into the future, has the ability to do those independent investigations when they are warranted and should have the ability to make a report directly to the Legislature, not wait until the annual report comes out.

I think that is a commendable recommendation. I think that as we go through the process of hiring a Children's Advocate, we should look at those changes in order to ensure that the Advocate has the tools to do the job within the office and has the ability to report so that Manitobans know and understand where the issues are in our Child and Family Services system and how to get timely answers and actions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also believe that the Department of Family Services within government should be required to respond back to the Child Advocate's office in a timely manner on what course of action they are going to take. There should be some onus on the department to put in place an action plan and to make that public, and be held accountable for it. We will be pressing those issues

as we move forward to put a new Child Advocate into that office. I do want to say again that I believe that she has done an admirable job of raising issues, bringing issues forward surrounding vulnerable children, and we would hope that the resources that her office or the office need will be provided and that there will be a little more accountability on the government department as a result.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also would like to comment just very briefly because I have been a part of Public Accounts Committee's meetings over the last number of weeks. One of the other reasons we would not vote for this Throne Speech is because it did not include some new rules around the operations of the Public Accounts Committee. Recommendations that were endorsed wholeheartedly by members of the government today when they were in opposition, but conveniently now have decided that it is not important to have that committee be open and accountable and transparent. We disagree with the government, and we will be pushing and pressing through the Rules Committee to get the kind of changes made that will hold government accountable for the financial decisions that they make.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those words, I want to indicate that, as I have spoken to people in the fine constituency of River East, they tell me that they are not happy with the present government. They would like to see their education property taxes reduced. We do not see that in this Throne Speech. They are telling me that the wait lists are too long for diagnostic tests, and for needed surgeries. They are telling me that, despite the promises that the NDP made in 1999 and again in the year 2003, they are not seeing any improvement in our health care system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be voting with my constituents that I have had the opportunity to talk to, and I will be voting against this Throne Speech. I know that the government will try to spin it in a way and they will continually remind us that we voted against the new initiatives in their Throne Speech.

What we voted against was the inaction and the things that were not in this Throne Speech that were promised to Manitobans and have not been delivered on and were not even talked about in this year's Throne Speech.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): It is a privilege to rise today in the Manitoba Legislature as

the Member for Brandon East, and an honour to represent the people of Brandon East in this Legislature to put a few words on the record for the 2004-2005 Throne Speech.

At the beginning of the sixth year of our mandate, there is more energy in this government caucus than there was five years ago. That is a very, very encouraging sign for myself and for my colleagues in this caucus, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This government is just beginning to find its stride in terms of coming to grips with the great many challenges that were bequeathed to this province by members opposite after their 11-year rule of this province.

In western Manitoba, we are seeing the largest growth in the history of the region. In the last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had major announcements on the Westman Lab, the redevelopment of the Westman Lab in Brandon, major announcements on the renewal of the Keystone Centre and agricultural complex, major announcements on the development of Convergys and the service centre that Convergys provides in downtown Brandon, major announcements on the development of the Corral Centre, "power centre," our box-store complex at 18th Street North, the Canad Inns development at the Keystone Centre, highways reconstruction that has gone hand in hand with the development of those commercial enterprises. We have seen the continuation of a major housing initiative that has, so far, produced over 500 units in Brandon, and we will see many, many more units created in the future.

In particular, I should touch upon the work done by Mr. Glen Crook and the Canadian Mental Health Association in Brandon, who have really stepped up to the plate to provide homeless units in our community as well as low-income units for those who are at most disadvantage in Brandon. The work of the CMHA in the Wheat City has really been exemplary. It is something that I certainly look to for inspiration in my own work here.

This last year has seen the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry move to Shilo with thousands of new, western Manitobans coming with the PPCLI relocation.

This last year, we have seen the continuation of the Neighbourhoods Alive! initiative in Brandon, an initiative that I am, again, particularly proud of,

because Neighbourhoods Alive! brought to Brandon for the first time in the history of the city a neighbourhood renewal initiative for the core urban areas of Brandon. Formerly, those sorts of programs were only available in the city of Winnipeg.

Our government initiated an urban renewal program in the city of Brandon and in the city of Thompson, recognizing that there are urban challenges, not only in Winnipeg, but in the other urban communities of our province. I expect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we move forward, we will see an expansion in that very, very successful neighbourhood renewal program that, again, was brought in by our government in '99-2000.

We have seen a continuation of support from McKenzie Seeds in Brandon in renewal of the commercial-industrial infrastructure and renewal of the commercial-industrial presence of such firms in the Wheat City.

* (16:10)

On the post-secondary education front, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very, very proud and privileged to be in the august company of my colleague, the MLA for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), the current Minister of Education and Youth, and my colleague from La Verendrye, the former Minister of Education and Training. We are all very privileged and proud to have served as ministers of Education in a government that is rapidly becoming recognized. It has become recognized as a leader in providing educational excellence and policies for providing educational excellence in this province.

In Brandon, that has meant renewal in the public school infrastructure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in elementary schools and in high schools, in middle schools, at Brandon University with the creation of the health studies complex a couple of years ago, in the current Throne Speech indicating our commitment to the development of Assiniboine Community College as a hub for post-secondary education in the Westman region.

We have a very dynamic and exciting process under way at the former Brandon Mental Health Centre campus site in the North Hill. That is perhaps the greatest opportunity to transform the face of Brandon and transform the face of western Manitoba in terms of creating high-income, high-skilled

opportunities for young people to both get training and remain in the province in years to come after graduation.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the work that we have done as a government since 1999 and the work that we will continue to do with this Throne Speech, makes me, as I said, very proud to be a member of this caucus. There is more energy in this government than there was three, four years ago and that energy is only increasing. There is more enthusiasm for our policies and platforms, more collegiality and teamwork expressed on a daily basis, than is expressed on an annual basis from the members opposite.

I want to wind up with just a couple of brief points, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we, on this side of the House, represent the face of Manitoba. We represent the full diversity of this province. We represent north, south, east, west, rural, urban, all ethnic groups, all genders. We are, on this side of the House, the face of Manitoba.

In concluding my brief remarks today, I want to pay tribute to a very dear friend and inspiration to me who passed away earlier this year. My colleague, the Member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan), made reference to the passing of her mother, Hazel Allan earlier today. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Hazel Allan was a great friend of mine. She was a strong-willed, resolute, committed, democratic socialist. She was a CCFer, a New Democrat, a confidant and friend of M.J. Coldwell.

She, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1999 and 2003 in the Turtle Mountain elections, was somebody that I went to, to seek advice and direction on campaigning and canvassing in that constituency. Right to the end, Hazel Allan was committed to full participation for all citizens in the province of Manitoba, and not just elites, not just those who have the economic wherewithal and the social wherewithal to succeed, but wanted and dedicated her life to ensuring that all Manitobans could succeed.

I think I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to Hazel today as I conclude my remarks on the Throne Speech.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I am pleased to rise this afternoon to place some remarks on the record with respect to the Throne Speech. I would like to begin, first of all, by welcoming the new

pages into the Assembly, and may I wish them a very good time while they are doing their diligent work in this Chamber. I know, from time to time, it is not only going to be a learning experience, but it is going to be, let us just put it to this, "just an experience."

I would like to also thank the members of the table because the Clerk and her staff do a magnificent job in this Chamber. I know at times it is not easy, but it is a very critical function of the proceedings in this Legislature, and I think both sides of the House have enjoyed a good relationship with the table and, in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would say that the Clerk and her staff have been very open in advising us so as to enhance the quality of the debate, the quality of proceedings in the Chamber.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to say to the Speaker of this House that we, indeed, appreciate his participation and the decorum that is kept in this House. Although it is difficult from time to time, I have to acknowledge that our Speaker does a very magnificent job in ensuring that there is some equity and some fairness in his presiding over the matters that are conducted, and the matters that are debated in this Chamber.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say something about my constituents, too, because the last year has not been an easy one for constituents in the western side of the province. The Premier (Mr. Doer) himself has acknowledged that we lived through a drought in 2003, and then we went into a monsoon kind of situation this year, and that was coupled with a very deadly frost on August 19. That day, I guess, should be known as a black day of the month of August in this whole year. It devastated the hope, the aspirations, the dreams of many rural families on the west side of this province.

You know, when I am insulated from it here in the Chamber, I do not feel the pain until I go back to my constituency and to the people who live on the west side of the province. I do not isolate this to one particular area, but if this were to happen anywhere else in the province, if this were to happen in southern Manitoba, or if this were to happen very close to the city, I would daresay that municipalities would be declaring the regions a disaster area. But because of the pride of those people in the west side of the province, I daresay we have endured many hardships because of Mother Nature. Today, those

people try to remain resilient, try to remain hopeful and try to remain optimistic about what the future can bring for us.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the Premier in his Chamber, today, I just want to remind him that whatever it is can be done to assist those people in these rural communities in this time of difficulty, must be done. We have to lay aside our partisan approach to things when in time of disaster like this, and we have to make sure that our best foot is placed forward. I invite the Premier to my area. I know that he does travel the province.

I go back to 1997 and 1995. We had two disasters: One was the flood on the west side of the province in 1995, and then we had the flood of the century in 1997. Everyone rushed to familiarize themselves with the depth of devastation of those events, and we travelled the breadth of this province to make sure that we touched the people who were affected.

This is no different. When I look at the impact that this has on my constituents, on people on the west side of the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at a row of grain bins, and there is not a kernel in those bins because of what happened, one cannot help but understand that this is a disaster of the magnitude that we had in the south in 1997 to those families. In those days, government rushed, with the support of opposition, to help in any way that we could.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell the Premier that in this case the disaster was not just the frost, but, coupled with the BSE issue, and you put on top of that the impact of the demise of the equine industry, and then the impact of the BSE issue on other livestock, this kind of situation has crippled the ability of many families to continue to sustain themselves.

* (16:20)

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

What a paradox it is when we talk about the agricultural people feeding the world but, yet, in parts of our province, many of these same families cannot afford to feed their children and themselves. If we talk about the poverty line, if you were to look at the incomes of these families, they are the poor, they are the ones who are living below the poverty

line, if you like. Yes, we can say that they have got all of these assets, but that is what earns them their living. So I say, on behalf of these people, that we are crying out for help in a way that we are not asking for handouts. I think what the people in the west side who have been devastated by these events are asking for is a hand up, or a bridge to allow them to continue on into the future.

Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech, although it talked about seven points, seven points that are addressed in terms of the economy of our province missed one huge area. I asked the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) what happened to the money that was in place in rural development when that whole department was transferred over to her area. We see nothing happening in the whole area of rural development. There has not been a single Grow Bond, not a single Grow Bond and, if there is, I will eat my words. There has not been a single Grow Bond that I know of been let in the last two years. If there is, we want to know about it, because usually the government is very quick to put out the news releases, and I have not seen one on any Grow Bonds.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the REDI program that was such a program that we were so dependent upon to do things like business plans, to do things like financial plans, to do things like marketing plans for fledgling industries, and for the value-added industries, I am yet to see anything productive.

Mr. Speaker, you know the Premier (Mr. Doer) talks about the importance of the nutraceutical industry. I point him to the Pizzey operation in Angusville, Manitoba. Angusville has 74 people living in it, but here is an industry that employs 52 people. A state of the art industry that has access to markets world around. This industry still has to put up with a highway that was built in the 1930s. They cannot get product into their facility. Why? Because of the restrictions of our roads and the condition of the gravel highways to link them to Highway 16. You know what I was told? They should not have located there. They should not have located there. Where should they have located? In the city? This is part of rural development and, yet, people on that side of the House have said to me, it is too bad that they located there employing 52 people. The minister wants me to identify the source. I do not think she does, because I could.

This is the kind of attitude that we have on this part of the government. A government that rushes to help people when they are in distress in the city. I refer to Motor Coach Industries and, yes, the help should have been there, and it was there on a timely basis, and that is the way to do it, but what about the other sectors? What about the agricultural sector?

Mr. Speaker, if we want a slaughter industry in this province, a livestock slaughter industry, \$11 million is not going to do it. If you want a slaughter industry, step up to the plate, get the industry built, and then you will see that it will be sustained. We have taken a lot of criticism from members of the government about initiatives that we undertook in the past. Well, I am proud of initiatives like Pizzey Milling in Angusville, Manitoba. I am proud of the strawboard plant that still operates today. I am proud of CanAmera Foods.

Mr. Speaker, this government is blinded by their own philosophical ideology, because if you ever allowed a private entrepreneur to access of government money to give them a hand-up to develop an industry for vastly the rural part of this province, that would be disastrous. How could you do that? So they have been toying; they have been playing; they have been teasing. Whether it is Rancher's Choice, or whether it is any other industry because, if this government were serious, there are abattoirs in the province that want to expand. There are abattoirs in the province that need that helping hand to give them a hand up to start, and they will pay you back dividends—

An Honourable Member: Money is there for them.

Mr. Derkach: —and, yes, money is there for them. You show me, Madam Minister, where you have allowed a single penny to an abattoir to get established in this province. You cannot find one. It is nothing but words, empty rhetoric, whether it comes from the Premier (Mr. Doer), the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), or any of the other ministers, Mr. Speaker.

An Honourable Member: Motor down.

Mr. Derkach: I am not going to motor down. This is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Smith), who should be standing up for the people who are out there trying to contribute to the economy of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I do not begrudge any of the money that this government has put into enterprises right here in this city. Why does this government abandon that economic engine in rural Manitoba that was doing so well? What do we see? We see a clawing back of the decentralized positions that were out in Manitoba. We are talking now. We are letting the words slip out, but we are not acting on it yet. The rural agricultural offices are going to be reconfigured. You know what is going to happen? We know what is going to happen. There will be fewer people out in rural Manitoba. It is all done because there is no representation here to represent rural Manitoba. We have that lonely voice from Swan River who has no clout in that Cabinet. *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker, I do not think the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) is in Cabinet because the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) said: "Oh, look at the Member for Interlake, he is from rural Manitoba." But he is not in Cabinet. What clout does he have?

Some Honourable Members: Brandon? Dauphin? Interlake?

Mr. Derkach: Dauphin? No, no, I am talking about rural.

Mr. Speaker, the proof is in the pudding. I have lots of time. I still have half an hour. I can wait for the debate to take on a more civil form, and I will.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: I know the Premier wants to get up and put his comments on the record, too, and so he should. But I am not going to cut my remarks short in the midst of heckling when I have important things to say in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, let me say this. When I look at the seven-point plan that was put forward in the Throne Speech, the NDP have taken a page out of our book, but they could not accept it as the complete solution to the problem. They had to alter it. They could not bring themselves to say, "We are going to take the education tax off farmland completely." We see the devastation out there folks. We will have \$500 million more in our Treasury over the next two

years. We are going to take that tax off right now. The Premier has the money. You know something? He says he is going to take 33 percent off farmland education tax. Thank you very much, and I will applaud you for that too.

But it is not going nearly far enough, and you are not going to get me to support a meagre measure. Do the right thing. Take the education tax off farmland and off residential property. "Where are you going to get the money?" they are going to say. You have got the money. Gerald Flood showed you where the money is, and if you cannot find it—I mean, the Premier has trouble finding money. He does not have any problems spending it; he just has trouble finding it.

Mr. Speaker, I will go back to 1999. Half a million dollars would solve all the health care problems, or \$15 million will solve all the health care problems. He said, "I cannot find it, that billion dollars that the Conservatives were talking about in 1999." No, he could not. He found two billion. That is the kind of rhetoric that we continue to hear out in Manitoba. I say be truthful with the people for once. Go out and do the right thing. Help the people that are in need.

* (16:30)

Mr. Speaker, there are farmers out there right now who, because there is no processing facility—and we have been dithering around with this for more than two years—we are 18 months since the BSE issue took place. *[interjection]*

I will not take that from the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), because it was their colleague, the then Bill Uruski, who killed the cattle-processing industry in this province, by supporting what? By supporting Alberta, because he put a subsidy on a cow-calf operation and all our feeder cattle went to Alberta. The grain went in behind the cattle, and our kids follow the grain. That is the kind of policy this government had, and that is the kind of policy that they are trying to institute today. They do not understand agriculture. They do not know where to put the money. They are going to waste it instead.

Mr. Speaker, when I take a look at the condition of highways in southern rural Manitoba, I am embarrassed as a Legislative Assembly member, because this government has absolutely ignored all

of the highways. When you look at Highway 83, that is supposed to bring tourism up to Manitoba, that is a truck route for products outside of this province. When you look at Highway 16 and talk to the truck industry, they will tell you the worst stretch of highway in all of Highway 16 is on the west side of our province. Because Highway 16 is our second transportation corridor west, we tried to make an attempt to make sure that the highway was wide enough, paved shoulder to shoulder, so that if there was slow-moving traffic, traffic could get by without danger, without accident.

What do we see now? The highway has been narrowed, Mr. Speaker. I asked the minister of highways personally to look into making sure that the highway between Binscarth and Russell was paved shoulder to shoulder. It was supposed to be paved four years ago. You know what he did? He narrowed that highway down. We have the shoulders all built, ready for paving, but, of course, this is not up in northern Manitoba, so therefore you do not need a wide highway.

There is a heavy truck that goes by the Binscarth café every ten seconds. We have a highway there that the trucks cannot get off to let faster moving traffic by. It is a dangerous highway, and it will not be long before we have tragedy on that highway, because this government refuses to invest where it should be investing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about that 33 percent that is going to be reduced off the special levy for education taxes.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Derkach: Yes, we should applaud, but, Mr. Speaker, it is something we should all be crying about, because there is no mechanism put in place. There is no plan. You know what is going to happen? They are going to turn around, and they are going to blame school boards for raising taxes. They are going to turn around and say, "Look at what a great job we have done." Meanwhile, taxes continue to increase, 162 percent in rural Manitoba since they took government. Now you tell me why. Is it because you are investing what you should be in education? No.

Another question is that when you talk about education and the importance of it, we have

classrooms today in some parts of our province that are so full that we have students sitting in hallways, students sitting in stairwells, because there is no room in the classroom. What does this Premier (Mr. Doer) do and his Cabinet? They announce a school that has not even been asked for. Why? It is a gift to Brian O'Leary. Well, we know what Brian O'Leary did.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is, you look at the chair of the Public Schools Finance Board. Where does he come from? He comes from the same division that he has announced the school for. Now you talk about stinky political patronage, this is the ultimate. This is the ultimate.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about health care, because health care is, indeed, an important issue to all of us. The Premier came through my constituency two days, one day before the election of 2003. It was a desperate move to try to win Minnedosa, and he was still hoping that he could win Russell. He was still hoping he could win Russell. I do not know, kind of a pipe dream, I guess.

An Honourable Member: How did it work out?

Mr. Derkach: Well, it did not work out very well for the Premier (Mr. Doer).

What is important about this is the promise that was made to the people in Erickson, to the people of Minnedosa, to the people of Rivers. When the Premier was asked directly, "Mr. Premier, are you going to close down our services in these hospitals?" and then they approached him and then they said, "Mr. Premier, but the CEO of the regional health authority said these hospitals will close." He said, "The Premier of the province is me, and I will assure you today that not a hospital will close and that not a service will be reduced in your hospitals." He said that to the people of those communities, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, your word is supposed to be your bond. The Premier's word has to be his bond, and if you break faith with those people that you have made those commitments to, then what are you? It is not an "if", because the Erickson Hospital still does not have a doctor and still does not run emergency. The Rossburn Hospital is now being closed. The Birtle Hospital is being reduced, and it is going to be faded out. It is going to be closed. Why? Because these

people do not understand what quality of life is outside of their own little jurisdictions. They do not understand that there are families, there are little children, there are elderly living in those communities. You need those services.

Mr. Speaker, I heard today that it is a crime in the city of Winnipeg or anywhere not to have an ambulance within 10 minutes of an accident. Come to my area, folks. You are lucky to get an ambulance in 45 minutes; you are lucky to get an ambulance in an hour. Now, I remember the days when I could get an ambulance out to my place in 10 minutes. Today, 45 minutes.

I want to express a personal experience I had not more than two weeks ago. I came upon an accident where an elderly gentleman was trapped in a vehicle, and the vehicle was on its roof. I phoned 911 immediately. The accident, 10 miles outside of the town of Russell. Do you know how long it took the ambulance to get there? An hour and 17 minutes. Now, Mr. Speaker, I tell you, that was unacceptable under our administration. You would never, ever allow for that to happen, but today that is okay. That is not a standard that we have to improve. That is not a standard that we have to take care of. Well you can talk about as many ambulances as you want, you could put another hundred ambulances on the road, but if you have not got the people to run them, you are not going to get to the accident.

If you have got a bureaucracy sitting behind offices, all you are doing is increasing the administrative costs. Can you imagine? In Assiniboine health region, the administration costs today are as high as they were with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority some six years ago: \$5 million. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think this is shameful.

When this Premier (Mr. Doer) and this government expects us to endorse this Throne Speech, they have another thing coming because, yep, not enough policemen on the streets. I do not care if you put another 40 on there. If there is crime happening, if we are the homicide capital of this country, you have not got enough people out there. Address it. Thirty-three percent on education tax? No way. A hundred percent is what we want. So do not expect us to support this meagre measure of a Throne Speech that was put before the people in very flowery language.

I know I am taking time from the Premier's wishes to comment on the Throne Speech, and I have

cut mine short. Mine has been 12 minutes long. I will cut it short because I understand that we have a vote at five o'clock, and I do want to be respectful to the comments the Premier needs to make on the record. So, having said that, I have simply put a few short comments in terms of what I want to express about the Throne Speech. Let me just tell this government, once and for all, that it is time that we addressed the real issues; stop hiding from them; help those people that are in need; get the economy of rural Manitoba moving. I know the economy of Winnipeg is moving, but we do need the economy of rural Manitoba to make this a healthy, balanced province, and it is your job a government to do that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me this time.

* (16:40)

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. My normal practice is opposition, government, opposition, government. If the honourable member is rising on a point of order—

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Yes.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Fort Whyte, on a point of order.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the indulgence of the House. I will be short. I was scheduled to speak on the Throne Speech this week. Unfortunately, I have been afflicted by a little bit of a throat ailment here, and was not able to give my usual eloquent and poignant speech, but I do want to thank my colleagues on this side of the House for putting the information on the record. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, it is not a point of order.

* * *

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I always recall the hour we allowed the former Premier—nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, it is important to get up and start right from where the comments made by the honourable member who preceded me—a lot of swagger from the member from Ste. Rose and the member from Russell and other members of the former Cabinet. In fact, the front row is full of swagger, people who walk into the coffee shops and talk about what they

would do and what they should do, but they did not do it when they were in government.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the farmers in Manitoba had been short-changed by members opposite. They took one tax and replaced it with another tax in the early 1990s, and then they took the portioning on farmland and raised it. The farmland taxation, after 11 years in office, went up. It went up, under members opposite, so they can swagger into the coffee shops of Manitoba, and they can talk about what we should do, but we know the numbers. The 33% decrease in this Speech of the Throne, is the largest decrease in the history of the province, and the decrease on April 1, 2005 is an additional amount of money.

You had your chance. Your history is in writing. Your babble in the House does not come close to the reality of your record, and your record is to raise taxes on every farmer in Manitoba. Every one of you should be ashamed of voting against this Speech from the Throne. Every one of you.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we got that message loud and clear. We got that message loud and clear when we went to as many of the conventions, including even yesterday, in the cafeteria, farmer appreciation day. I did not even get a question from the opposition. Farmer appreciation day, they told us that they did appreciate our move, because—
[interjection]

No. You are going to interrupt because you cannot stand it. You cannot take it. You cannot take 15 minutes.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I know that a dispute over the facts is not a point of order, but it seems like there is a nasty habit being developed over on the government side of the benches. As long as the government wants to heckle themselves and heckle me when I get up, at the time, we will go, and I am not going to apologize for that, but let the Premier be truthful.

Yesterday, in this Chamber, the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) stood on a private member's

statement, because the government did not have the gumption to stand up and make a ministerial statement, and he acknowledged and thanked the producers yesterday for being here. It is not that we needed to ask a question. The issue is, we acknowledged the contribution of these people to the economy, and we did it as a member statement, and this government could not even stand to respond to it or to make a ministerial statement, and they have the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). Let the Premier be truthful when he speaks in this House.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, I would like to remind all honourable members that when members are speaking, in the Chair's view, all information that is brought forward is factual.

The honourable member does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, there is an old saying, "you just cannot handle the truth." The bottom line is the tax cut was the largest. You raised taxes. You can swagger everywhere you want. They raised taxes. We are lowering taxes. It is very, very simple.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned yesterday we had lots of comments from people that did appreciate the reality of what we have done in this Speech from the Throne. I can tell you I judge a lot of what is going on in this Chamber by what people say outside of this Chamber. When I was going to various schools the week of the Speech from the Throne, a parent who happened to also be a police officer asked me why the opposition is opposed to more police officers. Why is the opposition opposed to more police officers?

They saw the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) on TV after we lowered farmland taxation by 50 percent, and after we announced more police officers in Manitoba, in Winnipeg, in rural Manitoba, they asked the simple question, "What are you opposed to?" Why should they be opposed to that? How come they are playing politics with a good idea? That is what members opposite are left with, comments that do not make any sense at all.

They are going to vote against the tax cut for farmers. They are going to vote against more police officers for Manitoba. We are going to hold them

accountable for their record. They are developing a voting record, Mr. Speaker. After I said on the radio that members opposite voted against the new arena in downtown Winnipeg, they were running around the Chamber. They were running around the building. Thank goodness, Hansard is there, and Hansard was there with the Finance critic from the Conservative Party calling it a rinky-dink project, that it would embarrass Winnipeg and embarrass Manitoba. The only embarrassment is he could not get the puck in the net, and this side of the House did it. We did it. You know what? Your vote is in Hansard. It is there for all of history. The rinky-dink voting party is on the opposite side. It is on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of votes and records and documents, I want to mention the honourable member from Inkster, because I think we should bring a private members' bill into this Chamber very shortly. The member opposite, after the Liberal Party after the last election, said, "Oh, we do not want to meet in the summer." So we agreed to an agreement. After they argued about what seat they would sit in in the middle of a BSE crisis, they agreed to a deal. We had better bring a law into Manitoba, a private members' bill that disallows disappearing ink, because his signature is on the document. Now he is running around with petitions complaining about the deal he made with his own signature. They are in trouble because that kind of duplicity over time will not work. You cannot sign a document and then oppose it. You know what? The public is too smart.

I will not be able to cover all the positive stuff in our vision, Mr. Speaker, but I will not be able to begin to cover the positive activity. The endangered species, the building crane, is back in Manitoba. The building crane is in northern Manitoba with new hydro-electric development is. It is in rural Manitoba with the new windmill, \$189 million wind farm, in rural Manitoba, in St. Leon, Manitoba. It is downtown Winnipeg. The building crane is back in Manitoba. We are back in business. We are growing this province. We are growing.

*(16:50)

Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the fact that we are not only regrowing our economy with our seven-point economic plan, but we are doing it in a sustainable way: new legislation on water, new renewable energy projects. We are setting aside part

of arboreal forest. We are setting aside part of arboreal forest, not only for ourselves, but for our children and for our grandchildren and for our great-grandchildren. That is the vision that is on this side of the Chamber, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our seven-point economic plan is working. It is working because the economy is growing. Yes, we have to deal with the pain in the agricultural economy, and that is why we made the largest tax reduction in the history of Manitoba. But, under the Tories, under the former government, education taxes went up 68 percent, and property values were absolutely frozen for 10 years. We have reversed it. Property values are up, and education taxes are down. It is very clear.

An Honourable Member: Murder rates are up. Hells Angels are up.

Mr. Doer: Well, the honourable member, Mr. Speaker—[*interjection*] We look forward to the next extreme question his caucus will allow him to give because it is a real window on the true ideology, the extreme, lean ideology of members opposite. We look forward to him getting a question one of these days.

Mr. Speaker, there are more full-time jobs in Manitoba. There is more economic activity. There are more housing starts. There is more private-sector investment. There is more public-sector investment. There is more population. There are more people enrolled in post-secondary education. There are more people making more money in the economy.

In fact, the members opposite talk about people and their taxpayers and their money. Mr. Speaker, the average earnings in Manitoba last year, the last current set of statistics, went up close to \$1,500 per person. That is twice the national average. It never happened under the former government, and when you talk about the results of economic planning and activity and policy, you have to look at the number of people that are working. We have created more jobs in our five years in office than we ever had under the total eleven years of Conservative government.

We are not perfect, but in five years we more than doubled per year the number of jobs created in this economy. That is why we are continuing to grow as a province, and that is why we are going to

continue to grow as a political party and movement in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned our education platform. A little bit of optimism, we are investing some \$50 million. There is \$200 million now for the private sector. We have the new renovations going on at the University of Winnipeg. We have the third stage completed at Red River College. We are going to build new expansions in the Assiniboine College, looking at all different options. We, on this side of the House, are proud of the fact that the University of the North will be built under this government.

Mr. Speaker, northern Manitoba for members opposite is north Tuxedo. Northern Manitoba for this side of the House is the people living in the North. That is why we are an inclusive party doing inclusive things for the people.

We, of course, have continued to make sure that capital is invested in this province. I mentioned seven funds that are now in place. Biotech, we have had the largest increase in biotech of any province recently. Our population increase has doubled. More young people are staying here, and we have an affordable government. As we can move ahead, as we can move ahead, we are reducing income taxes, the largest decreases in the last number of years. We have the first corporate tax cut since the Second World War. We have small business taxes. When we came in, they were 8 percent. They are down to 5 percent. They are going to go down as we move along.

When members opposite were in government, they promised to eliminate the payroll tax in three years, and they promised to fund education at 80 percent. Those were their two promises. They did not eliminate the payroll tax, and the taxes in education went from 70% operating investment from the former government—with the two taxes it was below 50 percent when we came into office. We are going to eliminate one of those taxes, and we are going to exceed our promises, unlike members opposite that broke their word.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to make sure this economy is fair, an Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce, an Aboriginal education strategy, Aboriginal people with the new Hydro development, improved mining sector, improved ecotourism including Aboriginal tourism. We are going to

continue to evolve all our economy. We are going to continue to have regular increases in the minimum wage because we believe in it. We are going to continue to stand up for fairness for working people.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite fly by the seat of their proverbial pants. When they see a Labour Board decision, without even reading the decision, the member opposite goes for a headline. That is fine, but we will remind working people that the Leader of the Opposition said that he would not have any overtime for any salaried employees in Manitoba. He went on to say that if a salaried employee in Manitoba did not like it, they can quit their job. If he thinks that is the way Manitoba should be run, let him take that out to the people because we will take that door to door in the next campaign and remind people what he stands for.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of material, but, of course, members opposite cannot handle the truth. *[interjection]* Well, the member opposite babbles on. He had a chance. He voted against the new arena, and then he showed up at the cocktail party when it was opened up. "Oh, hi, I'm Stu Murray and I'm great." I am sorry, "I'm Leader of the Opposition and I'm great." Oh, yes, vote against it, then show up. At least the Leader of the Liberal Party did not vote—well, he had two positions too, but at least he did not vote against it and show up.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Doer: You can yell all you want. You can yell all you want, but you voted against the arena and we are not going to let anybody forget it. We are not going to let anybody forget it.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to bring in new workplace safety and health provisions to prevent injuries. We have outlined a long-term health care plan for Manitobans that includes more doctors, not less doctors. It includes more nurses, not less nurses. The former legislative assistant to the Minister of Health to bring up the issue of pension liability is scandalous. It is absolutely scandalous. She was the person in the spring of 1999 that allowed pension benefits to exceed pension payments. It is shameful what they did. We will correct it like we have been correcting so many other scandals that have been left to us after we formed office.

Mr. Speaker, this Speech from the Throne provides for early childhood development. It provides for support for families. It provides for improvements for income assistance, particularly in rural Manitoba. It provides for housing, not only in the city of Winnipeg, like the Perimeteritis we saw with members opposite, but it provides for housing inside Winnipeg, inside rural Manitoba and inside northern Manitoba.

Speaking about rural Manitoba, look at the rates in Saskatchewan for telephones and look at the brokers' party and what they did with the sale of telephones, the Tuxedo party. We know what they stand for.

Mr. Speaker, this economic plan is making a difference. We are dealing with more housing, more people, more challenges for more—*[interjection]* You will get a question some day, just relax. I know you are upset about what the Tragically Hip said about the vision of the new arena, and I think you are sort of—no, you are not. You are not really that hip, actually, after all.

* (17:00)

Mr. Speaker, we have a party across the way that is a would-have, could-have, should-have group. I would have, I would have, should have, I should have done this, I should have done that. The minister responsible for pink Cadillacs was the one that took Christmas out of the Christmas tree. We put it back in. That is the party we are. We are a can-do party. We are a can-do party, and we are getting things done for all Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., pursuant to Rule 45(5), I am interrupting proceedings in order to put the question on the motion of the honourable Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg), that is the motion—*[interjection]*

Order. We are conducting a motion. I ask the cooperation of all honourable members, please.

That is the motion for an address and reply to the Speech from the Throne. Do members wish to have the motion read? Dispense? Dispense.

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay

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

I declare—

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I think I heard that the Nays were a little louder than the Yeas. Did I hear that the Nays have it?

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, in that case I guess we should have a count-out vote.

Mr. Speaker: A recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

The question before the House is the motion of the honourable Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg), that in the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Do members wish to have the motion read?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

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

We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at this Third Session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislature of Manitoba.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Aglugub, Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Brick, Caldwell, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Reid, Robinson, Rondeau, Sale, Santos, Schellenberg, Selinger, Smith, Struthers, Swan, Wowchuk.

Nays

Cullen, Cummings, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Eichler, Faurschou, Gerrard, Goertzen, Hawranik, Lamoureux, Loewen, Maguire, Mitchelson, Murray, Reimer, Schuler, Stefanson, Taillieu.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 34, Nays 19.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, 5:30?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 5:30? *[Agreed]*

The hour being 5:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 2, 2004

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