

Fourth Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 7, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Crocus Investment Fund

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 government was made aware of serious problems involving the Crocus Fund back in 2001.

Manitoba's provincial auditor stated "We believe the department was aware of red flags at Crocus and failed to follow up on those in a timely way."

As a direct result of the government not acting on what it knew, over 33,000 Crocus investors have lost tens of millions of dollars.

The relationship between some union leaders, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP seems to be the primary reason as for why the government ignored the red flags.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider the need to seek clarification on why the government did not act on fixing the Crocus Fund back in 2001.

To urge the Premier and his government to cooperate in making public what really did happen.

Signed by Atish Maniar, Patricia Meyler, Veerbala Maniar and many, many others.

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

Highway 10

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

A number of head-on collisions, as well as fatal accidents, have occurred on Highway 10.

Manitobans have expressed increasing concern about the safety of Highway 10, particularly near the two schools in Forrest where there are no road crossing safety devices to ensure student safety.

Manitobans have indicated that the deplorable road condition and road width is a factor in driver and vehicle safety.

It is anticipated that there will be an increased flow of traffic on this highway in the near future.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) to consider providing sufficient resources to enhance driver and vehicle safety on Highway 10.

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services to consider upgrading Highway 10.

This petition is signed by Susan Peters, Linda Young, Craig MacDonald and many, many others.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Fiscal Record

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious from yesterday's NDP budget that complacency reigns in Manitoba. This Premier is comfortable sitting still in last place as the rest of the provinces in Canada pass Manitoba by. This Premier is satisfied with Manitoba being the only have-not province in western Canada. This Premier is satisfied with hardworking Manitoba families being the highest taxed west of Québec. This Premier is satisfied that Manitoba's health care system under his watch is dead last in Canada. Manitobans are not and should not be satisfied with last place. Why is this, Premier?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I believe the Fraser Institute, that outstanding NDP organization, just rated Manitoba as fourth, Mr. Speaker, and that is before—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Fourth in investment climate, and third in government efficiency, which means we have more work to do, obviously, but we are on the correct track.

I would point out that the budget yesterday might be unusual for members opposite because it does something that they never did in the past. It actually keeps promises. I know members—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers.

* (13:35)

Mr. Doer: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know members opposite, when the tired group was in government, had a situation where they promised to eliminate the payroll tax in four years and they promised to fund education at 80 percent. Well, what a surprise. They did not tell us which four years, 2020, 2021. They broke that promise, and rather than increasing funding to 80 percent to education, they actually increased taxes by 80 percent for education.

Mr. Speaker, the promises we made in May of '03 on tax reductions, every one of them has either been met or exceeded in the budget that was produced yesterday. We have lowered middle income tax rates with this budget to 13 percent from 16.6 percent when we came into office. That was a promise made and a promise kept.

When we came into office, the small business tax was 8 percent with a threshold of \$200,000. It is now targeted and going down to 3 percent with a threshold of \$400,000, not only meeting our promise but exceeding it. We promised in the 2002 budget and again in the 2004 election to reduce the ESL and eliminate the ESL on residential properties by the year 2007. We are doing it in the year 2006, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, despite the business communities of Manitoba who understand why we have to be competitive in this province, they understand it because they live it everyday, unlike this Premier who turns a blind ear, we saw once again in this budget yesterday that there was no long-term economic strategy for the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we continually are a have-not province under the leadership of this NDP Premier. It is interesting and I know that members opposite are not interested in this, but Manitobans understand that in times of unprecedented revenues in the province of Manitoba, under this Premier's watch the debt has gone up to over \$20 million.

In times of unprecedented revenues, Mr. Speaker, this NDP Premier has raided the rainy day fund not just once, but twice in the last two weeks to the tune of \$171 million. This Premier is not accountable for where the money is going and where he is spending it.

I would ask this Premier: When will he stop settling for last place? Manitobans deserve better. When will this Premier deliver?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, there was a report out yesterday that clearly indicates Manitoba's continued progress. When we came into office the corporate tax rate in Manitoba was the highest in Canada. We promised in the 2003 election campaign to have a plan. That plan has been implemented budget after budget. In fact, part of what we have done is advance the reductions in those taxes. We advanced last year the Speech from the Throne, something that was missed by the members opposite, the corporate tax reduction to January 1 of this year instead of July.

It is now going to 14 percent, January 1, 2007. It is targeted to go to 13 percent in 2008. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that on Friday before this outstanding budget, the Bank of Nova Scotia said on some of our newscasts the fact that if you compare Manitoba to Ontario, Manitoba has its fiscal house in order. It has energy sources which are important as opposed to other provinces who are wrestling with deficits and energies. We are going by provinces budget by budget.

* (13:40)

Mr. Murray: Since 1999, this Premier has refused to be accountable for his overspending and his mismanagement of his government. You know, under this Premier, Manitoba has gone from spend more, get less to spend more, get last. The last, Mr. Speaker, have-not province in western Canada. Last place in taxation, last place with respect to our health care in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are demanding better. They deserve it. When will this Premier deliver?

Mr. Doer: Even prior to those tax reductions that we made yesterday, the Fraser Institute evaluated Manitoba just behind Ontario, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that this budget on terms of corporate taxes, small business taxes and corporate taxes allows us to go beyond Ontario.

Since we have been in office we have more nurses in this province. We have more doctors in this province. We have more police officers in this province. We have more prosecutors in this province. We have more primary health care units in this province. We have more Telehealth in this province. We have more investment in highways. We have more MRIs. We have more CAT scans and we have less taxes.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am going to once again remind members that I cannot even hear the questions and the answers. I need to be able to hear them in case there is a breach of the rule. I am going to once more ask for co-operation.

Has the honourable First Minister concluded your comments?

Budget Overspending

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Premier forgot to mention that we also have more debt in Manitoba. It is the responsibility of government to live within its means. Clearly the NDP government cannot do this. In spite of \$478 million of new revenue, the second-highest increase in Manitoba history, this NDP government plans to spend \$77 million more than it has taken in.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why can he not find a way to limit his spending within the second-highest increase in revenues in history? How much revenue is enough?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): The member opposite, first of all, should get his facts right. The absolute debt in Manitoba over the last three years has gone down \$327 million. The member seems to be concerned about expenditure in the province. If he would draw his attention to page B34 in the budget papers, which actually deals in fact as opposed to rhetoric and propaganda from the member opposite, he will see that expenditure as a percentage of the GDP has actually declined this year over last year and is steady over the last several

years. The member is just wrong in the facts as he always is.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is wrong in his facts and I point to B32 of his own budget papers. Our debt has increased by \$618 million from last year. Take a look.

Just two weeks ago, the Finance Minister withdrew \$86 million from the rainy day fund. In order to balance the budget, this Finance Minister again had to dip into the rainy day fund, this time to the tune of \$85 million, a total of \$171 million in just two weeks.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why does he have to dip into the savings of this province when we have the second-highest increase in revenue in history?

* (13:45)

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, perhaps they could cast their minds back to their last three budgets. Their draws from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund were \$185 million, \$186 million and \$100 million and their draws were far higher in absolute terms. Their draws were far higher as a proportion of the budget, and as the member knows, we had a prepayment on our health money a couple of years ago from the federal government. We have a planned drawdown to reduce wait list times. Members opposite have said they wanted more spending to reduce wait list times. We are putting the money where they have asked us to put it.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, not only did the Finance Minister dip into the Province's savings, but in this year's budget he increased the total debt of the Province of Manitoba by \$618 million. The NDP government is increasing the total debt of Manitoba, and everyday Manitobans pay \$3.5 million a day in interest. In case the Finance Minister doubts that figure, let him look at the highlights of the 2004-2005 Public Accounts, page 11.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why does he refuse to get his financial house in order?

Mr. Selinger: The financial house of Manitoba is in better order than it has ever been which is why we have had two credit rating upgrades. The member opposite persists in putting this information on the record even when the Auditor General himself has corrected him.

The average debt in Manitoba has gone down about \$327 million in the last three years. The debt-to-GDP ratio has gone down steadily from '99-2000

when it was 31.4 percent to 24.5 percent. The bond rating agencies recognize that, the banks recognize that and everybody else recognizes that, but the member opposite has his own unique and arcane way of making calculations.

Livestock Industry Slaughter Capacity

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, this budget is nothing short of absolute failure for our Manitoba farm families toward a lack of commitment to increase slaughter capacity, the open-seed green program or the continued neglect to address agriculture shortfall. This government has proved once again that it does not care about Manitoba farmers and has left them out in the cold.

When will the Minister of Agriculture make a meaningful commitment to slaughter capacity, a commitment that was sorely lacking in the budget, and not just another re-announcement?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): First of all, Mr. Speaker, our government has been committed to and is committed to working with producers and the industry to increase slaughter capacity in this province.

Our money has been on the table and will continue to be on the table. What I find passing strange, Mr. Speaker, is the critic for Finance just said that we are spending too much money and the critic for Agriculture is saying spend more money. Which way do they want it?

* (13:50)

Budget Agriculture Programs

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): That shows the unaccountability of this government, Mr. Speaker.

Members on this side of the House were not fooled in an attempt by this NDP government to hide behind old commitments to agriculture in their budget. Neither were Manitoba farmers. KAP officials realized this as well, stating, and I quote, the main part of the budget dealing with agriculture was simply a re-announcement of previous commitments.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture commit to a sustainable program to help Manitoba families, or are they content to simply let farmers fall further behind?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I can tell this House and people in this House that this government is committed to farmers. We have reduced their taxes, education farm taxes, which they asked for. They asked for improvement to drainage and we have increased the budget to drainage.

Yes, we announced ahead of time some of the programs that we were putting in place such as crop insurance and CAIS so that farmers would have some signals. Do you know what the members opposite did for farmers? They sold Manitoba Telephone System, so all rural farm bills go up. That is the support that members opposite give to rural Manitobans.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what the farmers are talking about, re-announcements and re-issues and do not stick to the topic about farm families. They have faced increased hardship due to circumstances out of their control such as BSE, flooding, low commodity prices. Despite this, the NDP government has not offered any concrete solutions in their budget to these problems and farmers are struggling to survive.

Mr. Speaker, rural communities were listening to the budget and their concerns were not addressed. Will the Minister of Agriculture now offer any concrete workable solutions to ensure viability of Manitoba agriculture?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, we have offered solutions to the issues that producers have raised to us. Producers have raised the issue of drainage and they have asked for improved drainage. We have doubled that budget.

Producers have asked for changes to crop insurance so that they could have better protection, Mr. Speaker. We have put in place—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou), I ask for your co-operation. I have asked for order in the House twice already. I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers and I am asking all members for their co-operation.

Ms. Wowchuk: We have listened on drainage. We have listened on crop insurance. Mr. Speaker, we are looking at opportunities for value added and the incentive that we put out on biodiesel will certainly help in that.

Budget Health Care Spending

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, the Premier of the Province (Mr. Doer) likes to talk about promises. Well, let me remind him of a promise that he made some seven years ago to Manitobans to end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. Promises made, promises broken on that side.

This Minister of Health should be ashamed that, in times of unprecedented revenues, Manitoba's health care system is ranked dead last. This minister continues to spend billions of dollars on health care with no accountability for where the money is going and little results to show for it, Mr. Speaker.

When will this Minister of Health accept responsibility for his failure to provide Manitobans with the health care they deserve?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, some things do not change. One of the things that has not changed in this province is the attitude of members opposite. When they were in office they drove nurses out of Manitoba, more than 1000 of them. They drove 117 doctors out of Manitoba. Today the critic for Health gets up and insults the health care professionals of Manitoba again when she knows—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sale: —from the Conference Board of Canada itself that our system ranks third in performance in Canada, not dead last, but third. She knows that her own favourite institute, the Fraser Institute, ranks us as second best in Canada; *Maclean's*, as third best in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Why in the world would she stand up and continue to insult the nurses, doctors and health care professionals in this province? They are the ones who drive them out. We are the ones who train them and hire them.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health likes to insult Manitobans. The Conference Board of Canada ranked Manitoba dead last when it comes to health care. What part of that do you not understand?

A 2005 national survey of health care providers, managers and the public revealed that 50 percent of Canadians have falling confidence in the health care system. The percentage of those surveyed who expressed falling confidence in the health care

system was highest in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are not and should not be satisfied with last place. Manitobans are demanding better. When will this minister deliver?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, just today the Canadian Institute for Health Information noted that Manitoba had the lowest times for access to cancer radiation therapy for all forms of cancer, the best in Canada.

Dr. Menkis, the head of our cardiac care program, noted last week that we met all of the benchmarks and exceeded the benchmarks for cardiac care. If the member opposite would like to read the wait list data on our Web site, which members opposite never put out, no wait list data from that side of the House, she would know that the waits for diagnostic care in Manitoba are approximately half of what they were one year ago. The wait list for pediatric dentistry is down 60 percent in terms of numbers and three-quarters in terms of the time waiting. We have the third-best system, Mr. Speaker. It will be the best system in Canada.

* (13:55)

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, hopefully we can get to a point where they do not have to put it on a Web site, because there will be no wait lists in Manitoba. Shame on this minister.

Accountability and sustainability are absolute foreign concepts when it comes to this Minister of Health. Throwing more money at a system with no accountability or transparency will not reduce wait lists and is not in the best interests of Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

When will this Minister of Health wake up and realize that his spend more, get last mismanagement of our health care system is forcing Manitobans to continue waiting in pain?

Mr. Sale: We have exceeded the target for increased hip and knee surgery. We have exceeded the targets that we set. We exceeded the targets for dental surgery to the point where the wait list is under three months. We have cut the wait list for diagnostic tests from an average time of 12 or 14 weeks to a maximum time of 12 or 14 weeks. In other words, about half of what it was a couple of years back.

We exceed the benchmarks for radiation therapy access, Mr. Speaker, we are better than the national benchmarks, best in Canada, 160 new ambulances on the road. New hospital in Brandon which was promised how many times? Six times by the

members opposite and never delivered. Fourteen hundred more nurses today working in the system than there were when they were in government. They drove a thousand out of Manitoba. We are spending more and we are getting much more.

Workers Compensation Board Auditor General's Report

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report on the Workers Compensation Board clearly indicates this NDP government acted inappropriately in dealing with the serious allegations brought forward by the CEO, Pat Jacobsen. However, this government even yesterday still claims it did the right thing. This government uses lack of guidelines as an excuse.

Why does this Doer government insist on using guidelines to make decisions? Where has the common sense gone?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General in his report has made a recommendation that we should put guidelines in place and we have—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Allan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General said in his report, it is on page 5 of the report, the relationship between the government and the arm's-length agency, the WCB that has a tripartite board of directors, is complex. When the former Minister of Labour received the letter in regard to the personnel issues, she acted reasonably and she acted within the law. He has recommended guidelines and we will accept that recommendation.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are looking for a government that will be accountable to all Manitobans. Anyone who has read the eight pages of allegations brought forward by Ms. Jacobsen would realize the issues were not a personnel matter. The inactions of this government clearly smack of a cover-up.

Why does this Doer government require guidelines when it is dealing with moral and ethical issues?

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to read the eight-page letter that was written by Pat Jacobsen. I am sure the members opposite have had that opportunity as well, and many, many times they have tried to link that letter to Crocus. I think if they

read that letter they will determine that absolutely nowhere in that eight-page letter, not once is Crocus mentioned, or is the word "Crocus" in that letter.

* (14:00)

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister to stay tuned. In that letter there is a reference to investments and we will get to the details of that.

Mr. Speaker, this government has clearly shown a lack of responsibility to public employees and a lack of accountability to Manitobans. This Doer government is so arrogant that they even disagree with the Auditor General.

The first step to recovery is to admit you have a problem. Will this minister now admit the Doer government handled this file inappropriately when these allegations were brought forward?

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased that the member opposite talked about the WCB's investment performance. Let us talk about that investment performance. In 2004, the WCB had the second-best investment performance of any jurisdiction in Canada. It also had the second-best investment performance from 2000 to 2004. It has a \$70.5-million reserve. In 2004, it had an 11.8 investment performance. It also has the second-lowest average assessment rate of any jurisdiction in Canada. It is part of our Manitoba advantage for employers doing business in this province.

Civil Service MGEU Telephone Survey

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for the Civil Service. Can the minister confirm that a home telephone survey of Manitoba government employees was done this past week on behalf of MGEU which asked, among other questions, who these government employees would be voting for in the next provincial election?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister responsible for the Civil Service): Mr. Speaker, I have to just say right off the hop, whatever the MGEU does I am not responsible for. They have to answer their own questions on their own surveys.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, this is also the minister who is intending to bring forward whistle-blower legislation, I understand. So a further question to that minister, and I would ask that he would endeavour to find the answer. Can the minister indicate, will he find out for us who the polling company was that

asked Manitoba government employees who they intended to vote for in the next provincial election?

Mr. Selinger: If the member wants to know something about an activity of a body like the Manitoba Government Employees Union he should check himself. We do not have anything to do with their activities and we do not answer questions on their behalf. They can answer their own questions about what they are doing.

Budget Overspending

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): In 2002, the NDP government was \$16 million over budget. In 2004, they overspent \$164 million and last year they overspent by \$275 million. The NDP now plan to recklessly rack up an increase of \$555,781,900 this year in spending. Actual spending will actually be much more and worse, the NDP plan to raid \$69 million from the Province's rainy day fund even before their post-budget spending starts.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Will he tell us now how much over budget he expects to be this year and how much more than \$69 million he plans to raid from the rainy day fund this year?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that we have a plan to retire the general purpose debt in this province where we contribute \$110 million a year, up from the \$75 million when the members opposite were in government. They also know that we have the first plan in 40 years to retire the pension liability, a liability that had grown from \$1.9 billion to over \$3 billion. We have a plan to retire that over 35 years down to zero instead of letting it swell up to \$8.8 billion.

The member knows that our spending, as a portion of the GDP, has remained constant and is actually slightly down this year over last year. The member knows that this government has balanced the books every year under the so-called balanced budget legislation. The member also knows that under the full summary budget we predict a surplus of \$148 million.

Manitoba Hydro Revenues

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question is about the minister's so-called budget. There is good reason to be very sceptical of NDP budgeting. The

record shows that in the last four years the NDP has not had a budget target that it did not miss.

Despite NDP meddling, Manitoba Hydro this year is predicting a record profit of \$375 million. Now, since this government came to power, there have been a number of NDP raids on Manitoba Hydro, with the result that Manitoba Hydro's debt has risen from \$5.7 billion to \$6.7 billion. With Manitoba Hydro planning to build new dams it will need reserve funds to start construction. It does not need more debt.

Will the Premier guarantee this Legislature that he will not raid Manitoba Hydro profits anymore? Yes or no?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, to show that in the budget there is some close to \$800 million in revenue generated from export sales in the third quarter report of Manitoba Hydro.

I would point out for the record that it was the Liberal Party of Manitoba that called this project lemonstone. It was the Tory Party of Manitoba that mothballed the development of Limestone. We are doing better than any other jurisdiction in the world because we are builders. They are drifters.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I requested that the Premier acknowledge the need for a public inquiry regarding the Crocus Fund. We have Manitoba Securities, we have the provincial auditor, we have the RCMP and we have our courts. They are all looking into the Crocus Fund. Over 33,000 Manitobans have lost in excess of \$60 million. I think Manitobans deserve an answer from the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to appeal to the Premier to answer the question and not have one of his government lackeys answer. I want to hear from the Premier himself, if the Premier is prepared to tell us, why is this Premier not prepared to call for a public inquiry? Will the Premier have the courage to tell Manitobans why he will not allow for a public inquiry?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I trust that the member opposite, after he listed all the different recourses that we have done, we have taken all legal matters and we have taken it to the RCMP.

All the cases with the Manitoba Securities Commission have continued to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, on a point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: Just on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The government has done nothing. These are all things that have been done outside—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Points of orders are to be used to point out to the Speaker a breach of a rule or a departure of Manitoba practices and not to be used for debate. The honourable member does not have a point of order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would challenge your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: Does the member have support? All those who support, please stand. Okay, the member has support. You may be seated.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of sustaining the ruling of the Chair, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to sustaining the ruling of the Chair, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, as a result of the Premier (Mr. Doer) not wanting to call an inquiry, I think we have the yeas and nays.

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

The question before the House is shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 30, Nays 20.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been sustained.

* * *

* (15:10)

Mr. Speaker: We will now revert to Question Period.

The honourable Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines has the floor. You have 33 seconds remaining.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I find it sad that the member opposite continues to show disrespect, inappropriate in the House. I have referred this matter as I explained. All the legal matters were referred to the appropriate authority as soon as we received the Auditor General's report.

The Securities Commission is reviewing past filings and making sure that there are no irregularities or inappropriate behaviour as far as past filings or misbehaviour. As far as the implementation team, the implementation team has taken the actions and suggested legislation and changes that will refer to all the Auditor General's issues, and the tax issues have been referred to the Canada tax agency.

**Cardiac Care
Government Initiatives**

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Speaker, together with many of my colleagues, as well as some

colleagues on the other side of the House, I was able to participate in the annual Heart and Stroke Foundation hockey game. Once again, of course, we did vanquish the media. Now February was Heart Month in Manitoba and certainly a time for all of us to reflect upon this disease.

I wonder if the Minister of Health could inform the House in regard to some of the recent progress in cardiac care in the province of Manitoba.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): First, Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope that my honourable colleague's comments to the media do not detract from the covering of this very important story.

I was delighted today to join with Dr. Alan Menkis, the head of our cardiac care program, Dr. Tam, the head of cardiology, Michel Tétreault the head of St. Boniface Hospital and Dr. Brian Postl, the head of WRHA, to announce a \$30-million completion of our cardiac care program, the final piece of the puzzle that Dr. Arvind Koshal from Edmonton put in place when he made his report to my predecessor, the honourable Minister for Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak). We will provide for new catheterization labs for a 36 bed in-patient ward and a new cardiac ICU. Cardiac care in Manitoba has never been—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. We have continually seen calls from a wide range of public in this province for inquiries into the Crocus Fund. We have seen the moving of funds from the Workers Compensation Board, from the Teachers' Retirement Allowance into Crocus-supported investments through what we consider a conflicted, overlapping, investment committee. It has also come to light that we have seen two senior managers who saw fit to be worried about this and bring the concerns to the public summarily being fired by the hands of this government.

Shareholders in Crocus Fund have been looking for answers. They have lost over \$60 million. They have been demanding answers. Taxpayers will end up being on the hook for costs. If this Premier has nothing to hide, call an inquiry.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that the Gomery inquiry findings dealing with boards of directors and CEOs of corporations very clearly recommend, and I do not know whether it has been accepted by the new Prime Minister, that governments' politicians should not interfere with the board of directors in the hiring and firing—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very important in terms of the hiring and firing of CEOs. It is consistent with the law of the Workers Compensation Board, which makes it very clear that the quote: "Hiring and firing of a CEO is the responsibility of the board of directors." That is a law that was in place before we were elected. It was a law that I assume was in place during the hiring of former CEOs, and it was the law clearly that was in place, appropriately so.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, on my second question, I believe that this Premier knew that there was information available that he could have avoided the conflicted, overlapping investment committees. He also knew that when they made those decisions they were going into co-investments with Crocus that were already in trouble. The Crocus shareholders are so incensed that they have no way of being able to find out who caused these losses. People lost their retirement funds. They need to know why this Premier stood by and let it happen. If he has nothing to hide and he says there is nothing wrong then let us have an inquiry.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, it is well documented that the investments made that the member opposite raises with Crocus and Workers Compensation were made in 1996 and 1998. The members opposite—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: The members opposite might know that—

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

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Ste. Rose, on a point of order.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, it is more in embarrassment than anger that I raise this

point of order. I am embarrassed that we have a government that will not answer to the shareholders who lost their money, retirement funds, who are going to have their retirement put at risk, that the return that they will receive will not be appropriate. I am embarrassed that this government would turn a blind eye to the ratepayers at Workers Compensation Board who cannot expect that they will get the best benefit from the money that they are investing.

Mr. Speaker, we are embarrassed that this government would not want to get to the bottom of this web of deceit and potentially fraud that is being foisted on the people of this province.

The Premier (Mr. Doer) will not get up and answer the question, Mr. Speaker. That is a point of order that I think the people of this province need to know, that the lead minister, the leader of this government will not be accountable for the type of misappropriation of funds that has gone on under his direction.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Clearly, Mr. Speaker, there is no point of order. It is just an abuse of the rules of the House and not a good use of the time of the House.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) might by his current colleagues at least allow him to get up and respond to the budget so we can have some debate on the budget in this House which is of critical importance to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, if the member has comments, as he has made, that he wants to pursue, surely he can look at grievances if he has one left.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose, he does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect, I challenge your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been challenged.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of sustaining the ruling of the Chair, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to sustaining the ruling of the Chair, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Derkach: Yeas and Nays, Mr. Speaker.

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

* (16:10)

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question before the House is shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 30, Nays 21.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been sustained.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

2006 Manitoba Winter Games

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I am pleased to draw attention to the 2006 Power Smart Manitoba Winter Games, Manitoba's largest ongoing multisport event. The Manitoba Games help develop over 10,000 of Manitoba's top athletes, coaches,

officials and volunteers. The games are being held March 6 to 12, 2006, in the host communities in the constituency of Lac du Bonnet, including Beausejour, Tyndall, Garson, Pinawa and in the Rural Municipality of Springfield in Springfield constituency. The location of the Manitoba Winter Games, largely within the Lac du Bonnet constituency, is an acknowledgement that our communities are capable of ensuring that this event is a success. Hundreds of volunteers have come together to host one of Manitoba's most prestigious sporting events.

The Beausejour, Brokenhead, Tyndall and Garson areas are no stranger to successfully hosting large events. Just this past weekend, the Beausejour area hosted another successful Canadian Power Toboggan Championship race, the largest and longest-running snowmobile race in Canada. This race was the 44th consecutive CPTC race in Beausejour. There is no other community the size of Beausejour that can boast of successfully hosting a national sporting event 44 years in a row.

The secret to our success is our volunteers. We have some of the best volunteers in Manitoba located in the constituency. They come out time and time again and tirelessly dedicate themselves to serve our community. Hundreds of volunteers have committed to making the 2006 Manitoba Winter Games a success. I thank the volunteers for their community spirit and their commitment to the Games.

To the athletes and coaches, I wish you the very best. To the fans, enjoy the Games and the hospitality of our communities. Personally, Mr. Speaker, I will be at the Games and I hope to see you there. Thank you.

Black History Month

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, this past February marked the 25th anniversary of the Black History Month celebration committee and Black History Month activities in Winnipeg. Today I want to recognize the continued importance of this month-long celebration of the achievements and contributions of black people in Canada and around the world.

At the ceremony I was privileged to present to Dr. June James, patron of Black History Month, a plaque from the Minister responsible for Multiculturalism (Ms. Allan) honouring the committee's 25th anniversary.

Every February, Canadians have an opportunity to pause and reflect on past historical injustices as well as a chance to ensure that the achievements of black Canadians are properly recognized. Originally created as Negro History Week by an African-American scholar named Carter G. Woodson in the 1920s in response to ignorance and misrepresentation of the history of people of colour, the celebration has since grown by leaps and bounds. In the 1970s, the commemoration was extended to an entire month to attest to the continuing need to educate the public about black history in North America.

*(16:20)

In Manitoba, Black History Month first began in 1981 through the efforts of local community activists and volunteers who saw the need for a celebration that would highlight the undertakings of black Manitobans and black Canadians in general. With over a half a million Canadians identifying themselves as black, an awareness of the origins and accomplishments of this significant community is essential.

Mr. Speaker, I call on all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing this important milestone. For 25 years now, Manitobans have worked towards mutual understanding by recognizing the achievements of all its citizens. I also call upon all members to join me in congratulating and thanking the many volunteers and activists who have helped make Black History Month a reality. In particular, I would like to recognize the efforts of Wade Kojo Williams Sr., who for 25 years has been on the Black History Month Celebration Committee and has worked tirelessly to promote their many successful events.

Safeway Select Curling Championship

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to a very successful event that was held in the Steinbach community just this past month. The 2006 Safeway Select was held, and it was a tremendous success for the fans, for the sponsors and all the volunteers that were involved. Never before have I seen a community come together to rally behind athletes from across the province to ensure that they felt at home in that community and the host community, that they truly felt that, in fact, it was their community. I heard from all the curlers who were involved and all the volunteers that it was one of the best curling events,

one of the best Safeway Selects because of the hospitality that was put forward.

I want to pay special tribute to Doug Lintott and Wayne Pauls, who served as the co-chairs of the event and really saw the vision and had the foresight sometime ago to work to bring this event to the Steinbach community for the benefit of all the residents of the region. Volunteers from across southeastern Manitoba came together to work to make this thing happen. As we know it cannot happen without volunteers and sponsors, both in the area and across Manitoba. Of course, the event was about the curlers, and particular gratitude goes to Jeff Stoughton and Reid Carruthers, who put on a wonderful final in the community and surely gave the fans their money's worth throughout the entire tournament.

I want to wish Jeff Stoughton well as he goes forward and represents Manitoba in the Canadian national Brier in the week ahead, and thank all of the people of Steinbach for the great work they did in putting on the 2006 Safeway Select.

I Love to Read Month

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, this past February was I Love to Read Month, an internationally recognized month-long celebration of the benefits of literacy and the inherent pleasure of reading. With participation by all levels of the community in the I Love to Read festivities, we underline the important place that reading and literacy have in the public and private lives of citizens of democracy.

I was privileged to be invited to participate in a number of I Love to Read Month activities in my constituency of Fort Garry. At Ralph Maybank School, General Byng School, St. John's Ravenscourt School and Oakenwald School, as well as Fort Garry Child Care Centre, I was honoured to be a part of a collective literary event where I exchanged stories with students and teachers. Having met with 600 students this past month, I feel it is important to inform the House of the depth, passion and commitment displayed by students of all ages to learning and reading.

This passionate commitment is heartening, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank each and every volunteer, parent, teacher, and administrator who helped make I Love to Read Month the same success it has always been. From the promotion of literacy

and the early encouragement of interest in reading to the simple enjoyment of a good book, the benefits of the activities put on during the month are lasting and significant.

Through the continued support of public libraries and programs in schools across the province, this government hopes to encourage the important work that is being done in conjunction with I Love to Read Month. Through these and other celebrations, the lifelong excitement and discovery that is reading can be ignited. It is up to all of us, Mr. Speaker, to continue to stoke that fire. Thank you.

Auditor General—Departmental Budget

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, we in the Liberal Party are calling upon this government to immediately increase the funding of Manitoba's provincial auditor's office by \$821,000. We are calling the government to do that because this is an amount, an additional amount, that would put us at par with the Saskatchewan provincial auditor's office, and we have a larger administration and obviously a much higher need for our provincial auditor to be able to do the type of work that it needs to do in order to ensure that Manitobans' interests are, in fact, being protected.

I want to cite the example of the Crocus Fund. The provincial auditor is one of several independent groups that are out there that have found so many faults with this government in the way in which they have dealt with the Crocus Fund and the management of it. Mr. Speaker, we have seen now a Premier who has stepped aside and has chosen to say nothing because he is fearful that he will get personally tarnished because of the mismanagement of that whole Crocus fiasco.

What Manitobans want to see is an independent public inquiry, even former Premier Ed Schreyer, both opposition parties, shareholders, taxpayers, independent media outlets, the list goes on. The only one in this province who does not want to see it is, in fact, this Premier (Mr. Doer). I understand why he does not want to see it. For the first time in many years you have the opposition working together to get the Premier to do what is right and call for that public inquiry. We challenge the Premier to do what is right here. Do not be forced into a situation. Life might not be as easy as one would think unless you are prepared to go ahead—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, in Question Period today we witnessed something that I felt was extremely disgusting: an abuse of the rules of this House in terms of asking questions. Questions are supposed to, by nature, be those that seek information from government. It is the opposition who seeks answers from the government. Although we have been trying to seek answers from the Premier with regard to the Crocus Fund, the Workers Compensation Board, he has cleverly deflected all of these to his so-called ministers who have abrogated their responsibility and have not come clean with Manitobans. Neither has the Premier come clean with Manitobans with regard to what went on in Crocus.

Now, the Premier has not come clean because he knows his lieutenant, Mr. Kostyra, was directly implicated and directly involved by visiting the offices of Workers Compensation Board, the Crocus Fund. On many occasions, Mr. Speaker, people witnessed his presence there in light of the fiasco that then followed with regard to Crocus.

Mr. Speaker, there are some legal issues here when we have members of the opposition denied the opportunity to continue with Question Period because a backbencher decides to stand up and ask the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) to outline activities. Now, he meets with his caucus every day. If that question had been legitimate, and if that question had sought information that was legitimate, I would not be rising on this point of order. But it is for that reason that I rise on this matter, because it is an abuse of the workings of this Chamber.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I did not hear of a single rule that was allegedly breached. I did not hear a point of order from the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, it has been the practice of all Houses to allow government backbenchers to ask questions. When we negotiated the rotation of questions, question No. 8 was agreed to for a government backbencher to ask questions. I am not going to start to judge if the question is a proper question or not because members have a right to ask a question, and it is up to the government to answer the question, or they could refuse to answer the question. That was negotiated. So under our House rules, the first six questions are the official opposition's. Number seven is for the independent members and number eight is for the government backbenchers and presuming there is more time, the rest of the Question Period goes to the official opposition. That was negotiated.

So the honourable member does not have a point of order. That will have to be my ruling.

* * *

* (16:30)

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect and in light of the fact that this government continues to stall on the issue of the inquiry, I challenge your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the ruling of the Chair—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The ruling of the Chair has been challenged.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in agreement to sustain the ruling of the Chair, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to sustaining the ruling of the Chair, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Derkach: Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

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

Order. The question before the House is shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 29, Nays 19.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been sustained, and the time being past 5 p.m., this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 7, 2006

CONTENTS

| ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS | | | |
|---|------|--|--------------|
| | | Manitoba Hydro Gerrard; Doer | 1107 |
| Petitions | | | |
| Crocus Investment Fund Lamoureux | 1101 | Crocus Investment Fund Lamoureux; Rondeau Cummings; Doer | 1107 1109 |
| Highway 10 Rowat | 1101 | Cardiac Care Swan; Sale | 1108 |
| Oral Questions | | | |
| Government Murray; Doer | 1101 | | |
| Budget Hawranik; Selinger | 1103 | | |
| Eichler; Wowchuk | 1104 | | |
| Stefanson; Sale | 1105 | | |
| Gerrard; Selinger | 1107 | | |
| Livestock Industry Eichler; Wowchuk | 1104 | | |
| Workers Compensation Board Cullen; Allan | 1106 | | |
| Civil Service Goertzen; Selinger | 1106 | | |
| | | Members' Statements | |
| | | 2006 Manitoba Winter Games Hawranik | 1110 |
| | | Black History Month Martindale | 1111 |
| | | Safeway Select Curling Championship Goertzen | 1111 |
| | | I Love to Read Month Irvin-Ross | 1112 |
| | | Auditor General-Departmental Budget Lamoureux | 1112 |