

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, November 25, 2004

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege. I wish to do that, not because it is something that I want to see as a habit in this House, but something, unfortunately, that I see occurring is the atmosphere in this House and the ability to function in this House is rapidly becoming poisoned by a situation that has been unfolding around information for Hydra House.

Yesterday, I rose on the same issue about information being provided and not being provided in this House but only being provided under certain specific circumstances. Then, subsequent to that last night, Mr. Speaker, in the dark of the night, after six o'clock, the information that we were asking to be laid in this House for the information of the members was distributed to only the members of a specific committee and, I understand as well, to members of the media.

Certainly the media and the public should have information. That is not the point, Mr. Speaker. What we have is a deliberate attempt to circumvent the process in this House where members have a right and a privilege that is granted upon being elected to this House, to expect that the information that is being requested in this House will not be circumvented and provided to others by other means in order to avoid that member or any one of the members of this Chamber receiving that information in a timely manner. To have this information slid under the door in the dark of the night, it reflects on the standard—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will remind all honourable members that a privilege is a very serious matter, and I need to hear every word that is spoken. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, I take some umbrage in the comments from the government. I would

suggest that members on this side leave this building far later than most of them, even in opposition.

Mr. Speaker, the point that I want to make, and I want to make it very briefly so that we can get on with the Question Period, and that is this circumvents what I believe is appropriate privilege for members of this Chamber. It has been seriously breached. Our ability to do our jobs has been compromised, and I would ask that, seconded by the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), this matter be referred to the Committee on Legislative Affairs.

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 to strictly relevant comments as whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

* (13:35)

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, first on the matter of privilege. Aside from the time issue which is not, I do not think, in question, whether it is a prima facie matter, it is our position that clearly it is not at all. It is a dispute and not even a matter of order.

I just want to make my remarks very brief. I just want to quote from Hansard which is now available to members. Thanks to that operation. Page 73 from yesterday, the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) said, and I quote, "When the date is set for the next Public Accounts meeting, I will undertake to get that information to the members of Public Accounts as I agreed to in the last meeting." Then, she reiterated on the same column, page 73, "When a date is set for the next Public Accounts meeting, I will provide the information to all members of Public Accounts."

So it was in this House late yesterday when we set the time and date for the meeting. We had a brief discussion with the Chair on that, and the minister did exactly as she committed in the House, she did that.

I will just add this, Mr. Speaker, that the members are asking that the reports be tabled in the

House, and if that is the only issue, we can solve that. I know the minister would be more than happy to table that information in the House now.
[interjection]

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, I can only entertain one privilege at a time.

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, as you know, a privilege is a very 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.

* * *

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a new matter of privilege. This is a somewhat strange and unprecedented situation. Although the matter did not happen within the House, it results as comments made from the Premier (Mr. Doer) yesterday, who said in the House, and the day before, that he was ready to allow for the Public Accounts Committee meeting to proceed, and he was encouraging that it would even proceed the night before last. Finally, his House Leader did announce that a Public Accounts meeting would be held this evening. That was announced at five o'clock yesterday afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I just received a letter from the Acting Clerk of Executive Council. Now, to put a little bit of background to this, yesterday when the announcement was made that there would be a Public Accounts meeting, the Chair of Public Accounts, who is the member from Southwood, wrote a letter to the—

Some Honourable Members: Southdale.

Mr. Derkach: I am sorry Southdale, twice now.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter, so I want to get back to the content of the issue here. The letter was written from the Chair of Public Accounts indicating to the House Leader that, as a result of calling a Public Accounts meeting, he was going to be recommending to the committee that certain individuals who have connection to the Hydra

House issue would be invited to answer questions, and that in order for those people to prepare themselves and be present at the Public Accounts meeting, because the Public Accounts meeting was only called at five o'clock last night, that the Chair would be writing to them advising them that he would be recommending, as is his role, to the committee that he would be asking for the people to appear as witnesses before Public Accounts.

Mr. Speaker, we heard nothing from the government until about 15 minutes ago when a letter was delivered to my office addressed to Mr. Jack Reimer, MLA, indicating, from the Acting Clerk of Executive Council, that the individuals who were invited have been advised that they are not required to attend the committee meeting. This is the Acting Clerk who answers directly to the Premier (Mr. Doer). The Premier, through this letter, has muzzled the civil service from coming forward to answer questions on a very serious matter.

Mr. Speaker, this government is making a mockery of the Public Accounts process and is not permitting the public to get to the bottom of the problems that are associated with the scandal of Hydra House. The Premier has implicated himself in this whole affair now and is muzzling members of the civil service from coming forward.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to table the copy of this letter, and I move, seconded by the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), that this matter be referred to the Committee on Legislative Affairs and that it be reported back to this Chamber.

*(13:40)

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): Mr. Speaker, first of all, after information was provided as members have sought, they get up and they rise on a matter of privilege and complain. Now they are getting up and, sure enough, as predicted, they want to have this, as I said yesterday, a bun fight on rules rather than deal with the public

interest and have the ministers come before the Public Accounts Committee tonight. That was the arrangement that we attempted.

Mr. Speaker, for the Chair of Public Accounts, a committee that is subservient to this House, to have the audacity to advise civil servants and private citizens that they are to appear before a standing committee with no rules to support it, really, I think, is so unfortunate, some kind of a star Chamber attempt that I think is not in the interests of dealing with this matter. The live issue, of course, is to what extent the Public Accounts Committee rules should be changed, because we just in this House, a couple of years ago, all three parties agreed on changes to strengthen the Public Accounts Committee. As a result of this particular issue, the opposition now has flip-flopped, and they say, "No, we should do something differently."

When we change the rules, Mr. Speaker, it is important that all members realize that we cannot do this as part of a stunt. We cannot do this on the back of an envelope. Changes to the rules will be here for a long time. They will be here to serve us as members and serve the public if we are on this side of the House or that side of the House. They have to be done in a studied way. There are very serious questions that have to be addressed before there is any agreement to start calling private citizens or civil servants before a committee of this Legislature.

Are they entitled to counsel, Mr. Speaker? Who pays for their counsel? What kind of notice do they get? There are also serious and fundamental questions about what is the role of Public Accounts Committee. Is it to do some grandstanding stunt or is it to make sure that there is good fiscal management in the public sector?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, I remind all honourable members that a matter of privilege is very, very serious, and I need to be able to hear the individuals that have the floor.

Mr. Mackintosh: So, Mr. Speaker, these are all issues that I think are really worthy of careful consideration. We are prepared to do that, have a Rules Committee next week, and deal with the issue of Public Accounts reform. In the meantime, for a Chair to send out that kind of correspondence is, I think, unfortunate.

In any event, the Acting Clerk of the Executive Council, I might add the former Legislative Counsel for the Province of Manitoba, writes and I state, "I have reviewed your letter and the provisions of the Rules, Orders and Forms of Proceeding of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to which you refer, and have concluded, with advice from the Office of the Law Officer of the Legislative Assembly, that you do not," that is the Chair, "you do not have the authority as chair to issue the invitations. Accordingly, I have advised the individuals who received your invitation that they are not required to attend the committee meeting."

Mr. Speaker, the question now is why this bun fight on rules. Why this stunt?

An Honourable Member: Two former ministers.

*(13:45)

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that the former ministers, including the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), not be shielded any longer, that these ministers come before the committee tonight. We can have the questions and answers while the Assembly deals in the appropriate forum, that is through the Rules Committee and then the House, on the issues of reform of the Public Accounts procedures.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am going to once again ask for the co-operation of all honourable members. The honourable member rose on a matter of privilege because that member deems it to be very serious, enough to raise it as a matter of privilege. I think it is incumbent on all honourable members to hear the person that has the floor. I ask once again for the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Mackintosh: Just to conclude my remarks. We are, as we said yesterday, prepared to facilitate the questions and answers of the two former ministers, and indeed if the current minister is wanted, she will be available. It is unprecedented that, first of all, Public Accounts Committee would be called specifically to deal with one report before it, also unprecedented that we would ensure that the matter of Hydra House is prioritized there. It is also unprecedented that former ministers or even the responsible minister of the day come before Public Accounts because it was very clear he decided in this

Legislature in April of '03 that it is the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), as representing Cabinet, who should be accountable for the Public Accounts of Manitoba. It was a firm decision expressed by members opposite and indeed unanimously.

So we are doing some unprecedented things, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that there is a light on this issue of public interest. I would urge that, really as a matter to move this along, we should have this meeting take place tonight, not with the bun fight of rules but with questions and answers of the former ministers.

In conclusion, I fail to understand how this is a matter of privilege or it is a matter of order. This is a matter in the committee, and hopefully it will be resolved in the public interest so that questions and answers could actually flow and not be impeded by the raising of these procedural points that rightly should be dealt with in the Rules Committee and by the House itself.

Mr. Speaker: I think I have probably heard sufficient argument. If the honourable member is rising on new information, I will recognize the honourable member.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I just want to share in some of the frustration that has been expressed from the opposition. I think it is done in a very timely fashion. The need for senior civil servants is, in fact, an appropriate thing for a Public Accounts Committee to have the ability to be able to call. The rules do not forbid the Chair from being able to call the senior civil servants. It is, in fact, an appropriate thing that is done in other jurisdictions, to try to appease the Government House Leader. It just emphasizes the importance of us trying to better deal with some of these rules that do need to be changed so that the democratic principles of this Chamber, maybe, could be a little bit better enhanced.

With those few comments, that is all I have to say.

* (13:50)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the history of this Chamber and the rules that are here today, agreed upon by the parties, one of the fundamental principles of the rules is

ministerial accountability. That is one of the primary principles of this Chamber and has been for generations. The government has agreed to have the former minister responsible during the period of time of the audit. There are two ministers that were responsible for Hydra House during the period of time of the provincial auditor.

If the public of Manitoba would like to hear the answers from ministers responsible, let them go in the order of their tenure before the Public Accounts Committee. That would be the former minister at '97 to '99, October 5, and the minister who took over. That is the proper thing to do under our rules. That is ministerial accountability. We support the principle of ministerial accountability. Let us get on with it.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I, too, believe that there is ministerial accountability and there is Premier accountability, Mr. Speaker. We have a Premier who was aware and was made aware in the year 2000 of allegations around inappropriate expenditures at Hydra House. The Premier was fully aware of the allegations that were made in the year 2000, and yet the Premier has not indicated that he is prepared to go before Public Accounts to indicate what he knew when, what action he took and what possibly convinced him that he was satisfied with the extraordinary financial review that was done around the issues of Hydra House.

So, Mr. Speaker, I agree. I am quite prepared to be at Public Accounts. I believe—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, I think all Manitobans would want the minister that was responsible at the time that government found out that there was inappropriate expenditures should—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The minister that was responsible for Hydra House at the time the allegations came forward has indicated very clearly publicly that he did not believe that there was any way the former minister would have known about the allegations. So he is on record. The present Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) is on record indicating that.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Doer) knew the allegations came forward in the year 2000, under his watch. I hope that the Premier will stand up in the House today and indicate that he will be there at Public Accounts and will be prepared to testify and indicate what he knew when and what he did about it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is turning into a debate and not about advice to the Chair pertaining to whether it is a prima facie case. *[interjection]*

Well, if you think we are into a debate, I have heard enough to make my ruling and that will end it.

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

* (13:55)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Highway 200

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Highway 200 is paved from Winnipeg to the Canada-U. S. border except for approximately a 10-kilometre section between highways 205 and 305 which remain 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 Irene Boulet, Art Boulet and Carol Shaw and others.

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

Pension Benefits

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): 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 Health Care Employees' Pension Plan.

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 Theodozjh Aporcki, Lori Kosh and Mary Bortkiewicz.

Provincial Road 304

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

Provincial Road 304 is the main connector road between Provincial Trunk Highway 11 and Provincial Trunk Highway 59 for residents in Pine Falls, Powerview, St. George, Great Falls, Manigotagan and Bissett who wish to travel in a southwesterly direction to Selkirk and to Winnipeg.

Provincial Road 304 from Provincial Trunk Highway 11 is in a southwesterly direction, is travelled by approximately 1000 vehicles daily, and shortens the travel time to Winnipeg by at least 30 minutes.

The 14 kilometres of Provincial Road 304 to the south of Provincial Trunk Highway 11 is in very poor condition, has no shoulders, and winds among granite outcroppings and through swamps, creating very dangerous and very treacherous conditions for the travelling public.

At least six people have died needlessly in the last eight years on the 14-kilometre stretch of Provincial Road 304 south of Powerview.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider

rebuilding and reconstructing the 14 kilometres of Provincial Road 304 to the south of Provincial Trunk Highway 11 at the earliest opportunity.

Signed by Margaret Bonekamp, Dan Gelinas and Ted Pichor.

Highway 227

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

It is unacceptable for the residents of Manitoba to travel the unsafe gravel roads of Highway 227 in the constituencies of Lakeside and Portage la Prairie.

Inclement weather can make Highway 227 treacherous to all drivers.

Allowing better access to Highway 227 would ease the flow of traffic on the Trans-Canada Highway.

Residences along Highway 227 are not accessible to emergency services due to the nature of the current condition of the roadway.

The condition of these gravel roads can cause serious damage to all vehicles which is unacceptable.

Residents of Manitoba deserve a better rural highway infrastructure.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux), to consider having Highway 227 paved from the junction of highways 248 and 227 all the way to Highway 16, the Yellowhead route.

To request the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) to consider supporting said initiatives to ensure the safety of all Manitobans and all Canadians who travel along Manitoba highways.

Submitted on behalf of Murray McRae, Ashley McRae, Whitney McRae and many, many others.

* (14:00)

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 Dennis Dempsey, Warren Thompson and Frank Liebszeit.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister responsible for Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the 2003-2004 Annual Report for the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 200—The Personal Information Protection Act

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I move, seconded by the member from Steinbach, that Bill 200, The

Personal Information Protection Act; Loi sur la protection des renseignements personnels, now be read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for Morris, seconded by the honourable Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 200, The Personal Information Protection Act, be now read a first time.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to introduce a made-in-Manitoba approach to private sector, especially employees in the workplace in their privacy protection that is substantially similar to the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents called PIPEDA that balances individuals' right to privacy and the reasonable needs of organizations to collect, use, retain and disclose personal information.

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

Bill 2—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Protection Penalties)

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a bill to amend The Child and Family Services Act, to increase penalties with respect to child protection offences.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind all honourable members they must move the motion before they are recognized to speak to it.

Ms. Melnick: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), the introduction of the amendment to The Child and Family Services Act (Child Protection Offences).

Okay. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), that leave be given to introduce a bill, Bill 2, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Protection Penalties), be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Melnick: I am pleased to introduce a bill to amend The Child and Family Services Act, to

increase penalties with respect to child protection offences. The need to increase penalties was recommended as part of the Manitoba strategy to address the issue of children and youth exploited in the sex trade.

The objective of the bill is to deter persons from acts that cause children to be in need of protection, including child abuse. The definition of abuse in The Child and Family Services Act includes sexual exploitation of a child with or without the child's consent.

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 Sir David Steel and Her Ladyship. Sir David served as the first speaker of the Scottish Parliament and is a member of the United Kingdom House of Lords.

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

In the public gallery we have, from the Maples Collegiate Institute 23 Grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Dawn Wilson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub).

Also in the public gallery we have from Rivers Collegiate 43 Grade 10 students under the direction of Mrs. Lesley McFadden. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Maples Surgical Centre Pediatric Dental Surgery

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, today in the gallery we are joined by Dawn Sandison, Dawn's mother, and

more importantly, baby Ariel, their three-year-old daughter.

Mr. Speaker, baby Ariel has been on the wait list for some nine months to have pediatric dental surgery. During that time, the pain for baby Ariel clearly has worsened. On September 24, the Maples Surgical Centre sent to this Doer government a proposal that would allow for children suffering in pain like baby Ariel to get timely access to care.

My question to this Premier is this: Is he prepared to provide innovation to health care to deal with the Maples Surgical Centre so that children like baby Ariel, who is here in the gallery, and other Manitoban children who are suffering can get timely access to care?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about children's dental health. We were very surprised when a previous Conservative government cancelled the dental health program that served northern Manitoba in particular, with dental assistance in our schools.

Our concern for dental health is why we put 700 dental surgeries back in Thompson, why we are starting dental surgery in Beausejour. The first surgeries have occurred, and the Leader of the Opposition might want to ponder why he opposed moving dental surgeries to Beausejour and equipping that suite and providing a doctor to do dental surgery in Beausejour, a hospital in one of his own member's ridings that is now providing dental surgery there.

We will bring the list down. We are very concerned about this. We will bring that list down over this next period of time.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I find the arrogance of this new minister unbelievable. In the gallery we have a young, three-year-old girl who is suffering. Of the 20 teeth, she has 10 cavities. She fell and she needs one of her teeth extracted, and, day after day, hour after hour, her pain continues. Her mother said she cannot brush her teeth. She cannot brush her teeth, and she is having trouble eating her food.

Mr. Speaker, all we hear continually from this Doer government is blame, blame, blame. There is a solution. If they would open up their eyes, there is a solution to help these children in Manitoba.

Will they not agree to provide innovation to health care? Do the right thing. Deal with the Maples Surgical Centre in a publicly funded fashion and allow young children like baby Ariel to get timely access to care and ease the pain that she is in.

* (14:10)

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, in close consultation with the WRHA, we are working to expand surgery for children's dental problems. We are very concerned. I have three children. I have four grandchildren. I do not relish the thought of any child being in pain for any reason whether it is dental surgery or any other surgical need. We are working to expand the capacity of our system to have more doctors able to do dental surgery; to have the anesthetists that are required when a child requires anesthetic, which is a much more complex procedure, because anesthesia with young children is a fairly high-risk issue, and we have to be sure we have the quality available to ensure this surgery is done properly. That is why we have expanded dental surgery in Thompson, in Beausejour, in other parts of the province, and we will be expanding it shortly in Winnipeg as well.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely appalled at this minister's inability to deal with a very serious issue. When Ms. Dawn Sandison called your office, she was told by somebody in the minister's office, "Are you sure you trust this private clinic?" trying to scare a mother away from helping her child. That is what came out of this minister's office. I say shame on them. The Premier (Mr. Doer) loves to stand up and say, a baby is a baby is a baby. Ariel is a baby. She is a Manitoba baby that is suffering. This minister is denying her care. Why is he doing it?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, no member of this House, whether it is on this side of the House or the other side of the House, relishes a situation in which children need dental surgery. We have to ask ourselves two questions. What could we do so that there are no more Ariels coming to us, to prevent the need in the first place; which is why we need to work in the North, in the south, in the inner city and in all communities to help people have the healthiest teeth possible when they are born, with good prenatal care, with adequate vitamin D, with the ability, post-natally, to understand that we should never put a baby to bed with a bottle in her mouth or his mouth? I am sure that is not what happened to Ariel. We

need to work on prevention. We need to expand surgery. That is what we are doing.

Hydra House Financial Review

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a document entitled, *Financial Issues Summary* for Hydra House. It is a document I received last night, which indicated to me this was a document given to the Minister of Family Services and Housing, which were the initial allegations.

We asked for documentation on September 8 that had been provided to the Auditor. I will quote from Hansard. This is from the Auditor, "There was other information provided to us by the department with respect to the financial allegations that we have incorporated into our file and into our audit work. However, of course, I cannot provide that to the committee." He also went on to say, "I would suggest they ask the government for it." We asked the government for it on September 8. We asked the government for it in this House. It was finally received last night, slipped under our doors at about 6:30 last night.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Family Services and Housing if the document she gave to the committee members last night, represents all of the information the auditor was speaking to on September 8, and if it does, why did the government not include the document I have just tabled that were the initial allegations?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I did what I said I would do. I provided to the members of the Public Accounts Committee the package of information that had been received, to the minister of the time, surrounding the allegations of Hydra House. The timing was in response to the announcement in the House at approximately 5 p.m., yesterday, when it was announced the Public Accounts Committee would be meeting at 6:30 p.m. this evening. I then instructed staff to deliver the information as quickly as possible to all members of the Public Accounts Committee, and that is, in fact, what was done.

Mr. Loewen: It is kind of astounding that the minister did not deliver this document entitled *Financial Issues Summary* for Hydra House which

was given to government on November 14, 2000. Why would she not have given that to the Auditor?

But the real question is after receiving this document, we have heard from the then-minister, now the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), and I quote from Hansard, "We have made all of the normal and some quite extraordinary checks into the issue. We are satisfied that what we are seeing is quality service, adequate accountability." This is a detailed document. It lists dates, it lists cheque numbers, and what did the minister do? The minister sent over some of his staff to ask the question, "Is this true?" They said no, and he walked away.

I am asking the minister to explain today. Does he expect this side of the House, does he expect anybody to believe that his extraordinary checks into this issue involved sending staff over to the accused, asking them questions, and when they were told it was not true, walking away from the issue? Is that what he expects us to believe?

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Speaker, I was asked to present the information that I had taken under advisement by Public Accounts. This is the information that I presented. This is the information that was presented to the minister of the day.

Perhaps if the department had still had the capacity to monitor the financial dealings of these agencies, which was cancelled in 1994, we would have been able to have a more thorough representation. Unfortunately, that capacity was cancelled.

We are rebuilding that capacity with the Agency Accountability Unit. It will be a unit of five, which will be one more than the unit that was destroyed in 1994. We have hired two of the unit members and are currently interviewing for three more. We are moving forward; we are rebuilding the capacity. We are rebuilding the relationships that we have with our agencies ensuring they know what is expected and what we will be providing.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would, at this time, like to ask honourable members, when posing questions pertaining to this matter to be careful how they are posed, because I have taken this matter under advisement and we cannot ask questions directly related to the privilege that was raised earlier. So I

would just ask members to be careful in how they are wording and posing their questions.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate that advice.

This is a detailed document. It indicates cheque numbers, dates of those cheques. It indicates where the mortgages are held. It indicates who owns the vehicles, who they are registered to. This is a document that this government is telling us they did not even share with the Auditor.

It does not take anybody with a great deal of education to check the facts that are presented in this document. All it requires is anybody at a low level could go and find out who owns the car, who owns the houses, who the cheques were made out to, when they were made out. Yet, this government, this minister, the Minister of Health expects this House to believe his statement that he made an extraordinary attempt to determine. In fact all he did was go and ask the question, "Are these all right?" When told no, he walked away from the issue.

So, Mr. Speaker, the question is this: Why did the minister ignore this information? Will the Minister of Health stand up and tell us that he carried on some other type of extraordinary investigation or, in fact, are they trying to hide this under the pillow?

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Speaker, I have presented the information that was presented to the minister of the day. The analysis was done by the department around the capability that existed in the department at that time. It was not the capability that should have been there because it was destroyed by the former minister, the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). Perhaps, at some point, she can explain why that capacity was destroyed.

We are rebuilding the capacity. We are doing what we need to do around service purchase agreements, and we are doing what we need to do to rebuild the capacity in the department to greatly reduce the chances of a situation like this ever developing again.

Hydra House Financial Review

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, the tragedy of the financial trail around Hydra House is

that these are the most vulnerable people in our society. The minister received, in 2000, a set of information that had 30 points and questions on it. The questions that appear to have been asked to try and verify whether there was any truth to this or not were five simple questions. It was alleged, and I give this as an example, it was alleged that there was property in Florida. The answer? No. Is that extraordinary interviewing?

I ask the minister this: Is she going to defend that as being an appropriate intervention in what is a most shameful abuse of public funds?

* (14:20)

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the department did not go far enough because they lacked the capacity to do the sort of monitoring that should have been done and that we are rebuilding under the Agency Accountability Unit. That capacity, again, was removed from the department in 1994. We know these behaviours began in 1995. The department did not go far enough. We are going the distance we need to go to rebuild that capacity to greatly reduce the chance of this situation ever developing again.

Hydra House Public Inquiry Request

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, we have been patiently and, sometimes, impatiently asking this government for information as to how they dealt with this issue when it was brought to their attention. What possible reason, what possible motive could they have for not acting aggressively on this information when it came to them? Even the Premier (Mr. Doer) is quoted as saying, "We have no problem with all the documents being released." And then he threw in the other little rider, "Well, obviously we missed the financial accountability piece." All the more reason that a public inquiry into the issues surrounding how this was managed is very important.

If this minister is going to indicate that the problem is with the capacity she has within the department, then why is it that the department, when they were asked to review this, asked simple questions such as, "Was there money put in personal residence?" The answer appears simply that an

appropriate answer was provided. Those are not extraordinary reviews.

Will the minister, will this government now help the public get to the bottom of the question on behalf of the most vulnerable people in this province?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we received the Auditor General's report on July 6. We accepted the Auditor's report. We acknowledged that the type of in-depth investigation was not completed because the capacity in the department was not there.

On July 6, I announced the five-point plan, one of which was the Agency Accountability Unit, which we are using to restore the capacity so that we cannot only monitor what is happening with agencies, but also, if difficulties arise, that we can catch them quickly and steer organizations on the right track so that it does not spin out of control as we saw reflected in the report mostly during the time of the previous administration.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, this issue, brought to the government's attention early in their mandate, normally would have triggered a radical response by the now-government in terms of pointing where they want to deal with an issue of financial accountability. They spent months assembling information when they first came into office trying to create a deficit. Then they get this kind of a report and they simply have made every attempt to brush it under the rug. The minister's comments about lack of capacity speaks to the very reason why we need to have the ability to have those who are working in the department come to either a public inquiry or a committee to explain their actions. Will the minister now agree?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I believe I was the member yesterday who talked about the need to set a date for the Public Accounts Committee. I am pleased that the date has been set for 6:30 this evening, and I, too, look forward to hearing from former ministers.

Hydra House Premier's Awareness

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, last night we received financial detail that

was provided to the Minister of Family Services on December 14 of the year 2000, that had very serious concerns raised with the Minister of Family Services.

My question is to the Premier (Mr. Doer). When did the Premier learn of these allegations that were received by his Minister of Family Services?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recognize that, although the previous minister claims that she knows nothing, there must have been flags during her time too. We know that the financial statements of Hydra House from '97-98 and '98-99 were overdue. The '97-98 statements were received 11 months late. The '98-99 statements were still outstanding when we took office. So it is quite—
[interjection]

Some Honourable Members: Oh. Oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Melnick: So perhaps this will help to jog the memory of the former minister.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, what I do recall very clearly is the date that allegations were made—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to ask the co-operation of all honourable members. I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, what I do recall is the date the very serious allegations were made and brought forward to the Minister of Family Services in the year 2000 and shared with the Premier.

I would like to table a letter from the Premier's correspondence secretary dated March 8, 2001, indicating that the Premier had received two letters; one on February 21, 2001, and one on March 7, 2001, with serious allegations around misappropriation of funds at Hydra House. His correspondence secretary indicated that the Premier would be reviewing them. They would be brought to his attention, and he would be responding.

I wonder if the Premier's memory has now been jogged, and maybe he could stand in his place and

indicate clearly when he knew about the allegations of financial mismanagement at Hydra House.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Speaker, there were flags raised during the time of the opposition being in power. I do not believe anything was done at all when concerns were raised to our administration. We looked into them. We did a report with the capacity that remained in the department after the destruction of the Agency Relations branch.

Realizing these were concerns, we referred the matter to the Auditor General. We fully complied with any information requests during the time of the audit. We received the audit on July 6. I came forward with a five-point plan at that time. We are moving forward. We are rebuilding the capacity. Today there are more service purchase agreements signed with agencies in the community services area than ever before in the history of Manitoba. We are rebuilding their accountability.

* (14:30)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to jog the Premier's memory one more time and table a letter that the Premier wrote to the people that made the allegations about financial mismanagement on May 4, 2001. The Premier says, "With regard to the investigations of allegations against Hydra House I can advise you that you will be provided with an update once the review is complete. I advise you to contact Mr. Ben Van Haute," who probably prepared this letter for the Premier's signature. So that meant that the Premier was in contact and his office and the Premier were dealing and working with the Department of Family Services.

Can I ask the Premier today to stand in this House, or maybe come to committee tonight, and share with members of the committee and members of the public when he received from his Minister of Family Services the detailed allegations, with the cheque stubs and the invoices that were presented to his Minister of Family Services? When did he receive them and what did he do? Was he satisfied with the review that was done?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have said this over and over again. When we received the

full and complete investigative reports conducted by the provincial Auditor General in July of 2004 that basically stated that the original investigation of the department was deficient, we went back and looked at what were the reasons, or what were the factors to all of us, through two different governments, not recognizing and not dealing with what went wrong at Hydra House.

We went back and found the Auditor's Report in 1990 that said building in the capacity to monitor the department and the external agencies was critical. We went back and found out, and I found out, maybe I should have picked it up as Opposition Leader, that that function was decimated and eliminated by the previous minister.

We found out that the Cadillacs were bought in 1995, Mr. Speaker. We found out from the Auditor's Report that those Cadillacs were sold back to the individuals in the summer of 1999. We were not elected then.

Mr. Speaker, there is nobody in this Chamber that would want to concur with the actions that happened at Hydra House. What are we doing about it? We are bringing back the accounting office in the Department of Family Services. We have gone from 55 service agreements to 155 service agreements. We have announced that we are severing our relationship with the Hydra House private owners, and we are going to do so in a humane way for the vulnerable people that are in those residences.

Hydra House Financial Review

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, I have just gotten off the phone with the Auditor General who has indicated to me that, although he has a document similar to this, it was not provided to him by the government. This is a detailed document that was provided to the government on November 14, 2000. I would ask the minister to explain when she finally, finally, turned the information over to the Auditor in 2002, why on earth would she not give the Auditor General a copy of the very detailed allegations that led to this discovery of this whole situation which they received in 2000?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, Mr. Speaker, let us correct the time line. They are asking me a question for 2002. I was not the minister at that time.

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, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The minister has just acknowledged that she cannot respond because she was not the minister then, yet the then-minister is in the House and he refuses to get to his feet to answer these questions. Perhaps now that his colleague has acknowledged that she cannot answer the question, he can rise in his place and answer the question since he was responsible.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Unfortunately, the member interrupted the answer. I think it is only fair since they want answers that they allow them to flow, and indeed answers as well from the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson).

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, questions are put to the government. It is entirely up to the government what minister they wish to answer the question.

On the point of order raised, the questions are put to the government, and it is entirely up to the government if they wish to answer the questions or not.

* * *

Ms. Melnick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To complete what I was going to say, I know that the members opposite have seen the letter from us to the Auditor which said we would fully comply, and indeed, the department did fully comply with information requests that came from the AG.

Mr. Loewen: The question really at the bottom of all of this is who knew what, when, and why is the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) trying to cover it up?

Mr. Speaker, these are detailed allegations that came forward November 14, 2000. It does not take

capacity and a department to go back and look at cheque no. 1237 dated April 18. It does not take capacity to go back and look at cheque no. 1299 dated April 23. It does not take capacity to go and search for who owned the vehicle. It does not take capacity to go and check that the employee who was on the payroll of Hydra House actually worked at MTS, as is alleged here.

I would ask the Minister of Health to stand up today and explain to us and the people of Manitoba what extraordinary lengths you believe that you actually went to in order to prove these allegations wrong. What did you do, sir?

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear here. We were dealing with a department that did not have the capacity that the member opposite does not seem to feel was that important in a department.

The question is why was that capacity cut. We know the result. We know in 1995, two Cadillacs were bought for approximately \$40,000 each, then sold back for about \$8,000 each. We know that those problems occurred right off the hop, but the question is why the capacity was cut. The question is not what people were expected to do when they did not have the capacity to do the job. We are rebuilding that capacity, and we are working with the signing of SPAs with agencies.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, on my third supplementary, this is not an issue of capacity. That is unfortunate that the Minister of Health did not do what the Auditor had suggested in 1999, and put in the service purchase agreements. If he had done that, if he had taken that action, we would not be here discussing this issue today.

The real issue, Mr. Speaker, is what is this government trying to hide. Who are they so cosy with that they are trying to cover this up? My 20-year-old son could go into Hydra House and ask questions based on these allegations and come up with a better answer than this minister got out of his extraordinary investigation. This is a sham. I would ask the minister to stand up today and explain to this House what steps he took, and why he did not follow through on this issue.

Ms. Melnick: We agree that the signing of purchase agreements is indeed very important.

I would like to table for the House today a chart that shows the signing of purchase agreements from 1997 to 2004. In 1997, although it had been recommended strongly to move forward on service purchase agreements, there was maybe, I think the chart shows 40, I am not trying to be facetious, shows about 40. If we look at from 1999 on, we are moving upwards to 60, and we continue to move upward to today where again we have 155 out of a possible 179 signed.

We are aiming for 100 percent, and we will continue to move forward in the signing of purchase agreements.

* (14:40)

Aiyawin Corporation Financial Review

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier, a very serious question to the Premier of the province.

We know that four years ago serious allegations of inappropriate spending at Hydra House came to the member from Fort Rouge who was then the Minister of Family Services. The minister at that time said that he had done a thorough, extensive, extraordinary investigation. He said there was nothing untoward.

The Auditor General investigated and he found over a million dollars of taxpayers' money had been misspent. Yesterday, the Auditor General raised serious allegations that came to this minister, that same minister from Family Services some three years ago, that there was inappropriate spending at another publicly funded corporation, Aiyawin Corporation. Today the Auditor General is investigating this financially publicly funded corporation.

We know that the Premier was aware of Hydra House misspending. My question is to this Premier, Mr. Speaker: When was the Premier made aware of the Aiyawin allegations, and what did he do about it?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have gone back over the Auditor General's report and it completely contradicts the member's statement in this House two days ago. If this member is going to use information in this House that is inaccurate, I think he owes me an apology.

Auditor General Budget Increase

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, if anybody owes an apology to the people of Manitoba, it is this Premier for completely misleading Manitobans time and time again. Shame on him.

Mr. Speaker, the Doer government's record on accountability is shameless. It is unbelievable that the Auditor General has recently stated, that just over a week ago he said, quote, "Potentially serious complaints are going unchecked because his office does not have the resources to tackle them."

I would ask the Premier today will he do the right thing. They talk about capacity, Mr. Speaker. Will this Premier do the right thing and ensure in the upcoming budget that he tables that he respects the Auditor General, that he will provide the three additional people the Auditor General requires to ensure that the continual misspending that we see under the Doer government goes checked by the Auditor General?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Certainly we will look at all requests from every source. Today we were at the AMM convention. They were very happy that we had reduced the taxation on farmland. They were very, very happy about that. They were very happy at their efforts to put in money for a BSE crisis in terms of slaughter capacity.

The provincial auditor's budget has gone up 22 percent compared to 15 percent overall in government, but we take his request seriously, Mr. Speaker, and we have every year. That is why his expenditure levels have gone up, as I say, at about 22 percent according to the briefing I received from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger).

But every year we look at trying to balance some of the issues of child poverty that were raised yesterday, trying to balance some of the issues of the agricultural crisis, trying to balance some of the requests to reinstate the funding that was cut from drainage ditches, trying to deal with some of the highways that are being mentioned in petitions, trying to deal with the pediatric dental surgeries that are legitimate issues. Every day we have to look at how do we balance off the various legitimate requests, including the Auditor General's request,

with the other legitimate requests that we have all over the provincial government. We have done it before. We will do it again, Mr. Speaker.

Aiyawin Corporation Financial Review

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): It appears we may have a second Hydra House situation. I first heard of the problems at Aiyawin Corporation on November 2. I arranged for a detailed briefing from Mr. Don Dorion on November 3. It was immediately apparent that Mr. Dorion was credible and was raising very serious issues about financial accountability at Aiyawin Corporation. In my view this needed urgent attention of the Auditor General and I put a call into his office later that day. I asked the Minister of Family Services and Housing, who was made aware of this situation at Aiyawin by Mr. Dorion in his letter of October 7, why she or her department did not ask the Auditor General to investigate until after they learned of CBC's I-Team investigating and going to do a story?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, certainly the issues raised by Mr. Dorion are very important. I will let the House know that we had already commenced an organizational review of Aiyawin before that time.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind all honourable members that the clock is ticking. We are trying to get as many questions and answers in as we can.

Ms. Melnick: The operational review was completed by the department. We did send a letter to the Auditor General requesting his assistance in further review. We have also informed Aiyawin that they have one week which will be ending November 30. We provided them with a copy of the organizational review. We have provided them with a letter requesting their response within one week to agree to our concerns. They then have two weeks to come back with a plan. They have also been informed that if they do not come back with an appropriate plan, the funding will be cut.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely extraordinary that a department which has a budget

of hundreds of millions of dollars does not have the capacity to be financially accountable.

Mr. Dorion's letter refers to an audit done by the department before January 2004, but apparently it was not a very good audit. Something smells rotten when this NDP government is having difficulty properly managing public funds. For this to be occurring with Hydra House and with Aiyawin is very distressing. The government has been irresponsible with taxpayers' money. I ask the Premier (Mr. Doer) why his government is so lacking in fiscal responsibility and accountability to the taxpayers of Manitoba.

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Speaker, we worked with the Auditor General around the concerns of Hydra House. We are acting in a way to rebuild the capacity that was decimated in 1994. We were doing an organizational review before the concerns were raised by Mr. Dorion. We have completed that review. We have taken action to ensure that this organization either becomes responsible in the management of their board or we will be taking action on the funding. We are accountable, we are responsible, and we are taking the appropriate actions.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AMM Convention

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, today the Association of Manitoba Municipalities will conclude its sixth annual convention. The theme for this year's convention is motivate, inspire and lead, three abilities shared by all successful municipal officials. In their work with local councils, community groups and other levels of government, municipal officials give tirelessly to further the goals and serve the needs of their communities.

On many occasions, municipal officials work closely with the provincial government in order to achieve the objectives of rural Manitoba. In Manitoba's Speech from the Throne, the Province announced that it will be rebating 33 percent of the education portion of the 2004 property tax on farmland, and in addition, this will be cut to 50 percent in 2005. This decision was the product of

several months of discussions with rural municipalities.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker, the close relationship between the Province and municipal governments has also resulted in initiatives to strengthen rural Manitoba's infrastructure and economy. In an effort to make Manitoba more self-sufficient and deal with the BSE crisis, the Province is providing funding to increase our slaughter capacity. To adapt to changing conditions, there will be further investments in research and diversification of food products. Also, to allow more farmers to settle in rural areas, the Immigrant Investor Program will also be expanded.

Progress is also being made in the energy sector. Several new northern training programs for hydro-electric projects have been created, and in St. Leon plans are underway to establish Manitoba's first wind farm. This enterprise, which creates significant economic opportunities for rural areas, will generate \$10 million in earnings for local landowners.

In the future, rural municipalities will be receiving even more support. A new Manitoba law, the first of its kind in Canada, has been introduced to guarantee any new share of federal fuel gas taxes will be invested directly in roads, highways, and municipal infrastructure.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all municipal officials for their dedicated service to their communities and their willingness to work with the provincial government to move Manitoba forward. Thank you.

Hindu Society of Manitoba

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to put a few words on the record about a fabulous evening I spent with the Hindu Society of Manitoba attending the Diwali at the Convention Centre. It was a wonderful evening full of celebration, wonderful food, friendship and, certainly, I know that the Hindu Society of Manitoba has really made a tremendous impact on the province of Manitoba.

Clearly, from the young level of dancers who were there to some of the teenage and even adult dancers, there is a tremendous pride in the Hindu

Society that was shown to all of us who attended, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, there was a tremendous crowd filling the Convention Centre that night.

I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to take part in this Festival of Lightness which really talks about hope and opportunity for all people in Manitoba and I think that the Hindu Society has been a leader in terms of offering hope in society in this great province.

I would like to pay particular tribute to Bhadrash Bhat, who is the editor of the magazine that was so well put together, *The Hindu Darshan*. and I would also like to say that I was delighted and proud to be there when all members of their society spoke so glowingly about the Hindu Centre that is going to be opening, hopefully, early next year in the summer. I can tell you that it will be a proud moment, not only for the Hindu Society, but for all of Manitobans, and I will be proud to stand with them at the opening. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

South Winnipeg Family Information Centre

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, the South Winnipeg Family Information Centre marks the milestone of its 30th anniversary. It brings me great honour as the MLA for Fort Garry to share with you some information about this special organization.

The South Winnipeg Family Information Centre is a community-based resource centre that aims at enhancing the quality of family life. The organization was established in 1974 by forward-thinking Fort Garry residents and professionals eager to make sure that families have adequate programs and services to help them have happy and healthy lives.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the centre and its volunteers share the same mandate. The centre offers many workshops and evening sessions for parents, children and families on important topics such as parenting, babysitting, anger management and family communication. Important support groups are also operated by the centre. Issues covered by the support groups include the effects of divorce, how to cope with children suffering from bipolar, eating, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders.

One of the most important services provided by the centre is the Clothes Closet program. This

referral program offers quality clothing for hundreds of women leaving abusive relationships.

Mr. Speaker, it is the volunteers who have made the centre successful in reaching out to families in Fort Garry. It has received numerous awards and recognition through the years highlighting the role of its volunteers. Two such awards include the Order of the Gate for service in the community, in 1981, and the Mayor's Volunteer Service Award, in 1984.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the many volunteers, past and present, of the South Winnipeg Family Information Centre for working hard to improve the lives of our families in Fort Garry and in Winnipeg. The dedication of these volunteers is an inspiration to all of us. Thank you.

New Flyer Industries

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Pollution is a pressing social issue that cannot be ignored. Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate in Manitoba to have a pioneer company such as New Flyer Industries responsible for producing environmentally friendly hybrid vehicles. The active use of hybrid vehicle buses in public transportation can reduce greenhouse gases and emissions and are currently in use in 21 North American communities. This company demonstrates that environmentally friendly companies can prosper and is a rising member of the Winnipeg business community.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my congratulations to New Flyer Industries for recently winning the Blue Sky Award from WestStart-Calstart, a not-for-profit transportation industry consortium. This award recognizes New Flyer Industries for outstanding efforts and groundbreaking technological developments. We would like to ask the other MLAs to join us in congratulating New Flyer Industries. Thank you.

Maison McDougall House

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): I had the pleasure of officially opening the Maison McDougall House this past Canada Day at Place Saint-Norbert Interpretive Centre. This opening is an important step towards preserving our heritage in Manitoba and for promoting St. Norbert's rich history and culture. From July 1 to August 31, the home had approximately 450 visitors. Exhibits on the history of

St. Norbert were on display in the house this summer and Heritage St. Norbert, which operates the building, hopes to open again in June of next year.

Maison McDougall was originally built as a log house in 1899 in Lorette and was home to the McDougall family. After Daniel McDougall died of smallpox, his wife, Virginia McDougall, was left to raise their five children. She converted the main floor of this two-storey house to a small store where she sold her fresh baked bread and pies to early settlers in the area. She helped epitomize the pioneer spirit of Manitoba at the turn of the century.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank L'Union nationale métisse St. Joseph du Manitoba for offering Heritage St. Norbert the Maison McDougall House. I would especially like to thank the executive members of Heritage St. Norbert, including Madame Jeanne Perreault, Bill Loewen, Jim Cameron, Eric Annandale, Robert Roehle, Evelyn Dowbiggin, Jane Fudge, Les Stecheson, Carmen Joyal, Margaret Benôit, and Janice Lukes, for undertaking the renovation and maintenance of the house.

Mr. Speaker, the St. Norbert Interpretive Centre and Maison McDougall House play a role in the education of our young people by providing an important look into our past. I wish Heritage St. Norbert which operates the Interpretive Centre continued success. Their ongoing dedication and commitment to history and culture in St. Norbert benefits us all. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE

(Third Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed amendment of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), who has 29 minutes remaining.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Despite the words of wisdom from my friend across the way, the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), I did not cover all of the ground yesterday with the 48 seconds I had to work with, the 48 seconds that she left me to work with yesterday. I think what I will

do, Mr. Speaker, is just pick up from where I left off. There are so many good things in this Throne Speech to talk about, so I do not even know if the 29 minutes remaining are enough to cover it.

* (15:00)

The first thing I want to do, Mr. Speaker, is kind of undo all that negativism, all those nasty things my friend from Tuxedo talked about yesterday. There are so many positive, very positive issues to deal with coming out of this Throne Speech. Yesterday I just got started talking about how much I look forward to coming back to this House. On behalf of the people of the constituency of Dauphin-Roblin, on behalf of all people because I think all of us represent the 1.2 million Manitobans that live in our great province, whether they are from the North or from rural parts of the province or from the city of Winnipeg or from the city of Brandon, we represent all of the people of this province. I am very proud to be able to do that here in the Legislature, participate in the debates that we have in this great building on behalf of all of our constituents.

I want to begin, as well, Mr. Speaker, before I get into the real heart of the Throne Speech, by welcoming the two new members that have joined us since the last time I had a chance to rise and speak in this House. I am going to start with my friend the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan). The Member for Minto I have known for a while. I know that he is hardworking. I know that he takes issues seriously. Time after time after time the Member for Minto has proven that he can pass the tests that are necessary to be a good MLA. I have already seen the Member for Minto in action, and I know that he will represent not only his neighbours in Minto admirably but the people of Manitoba. I welcome the Member for Minto here today.

I also want to welcome the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen). I know that this member will also serve us well. He was put to the test one day. I do not think he was even a member for two weeks when he arrived at the opening of the brand-new provincial park in his constituency called the Criddle/Vane Homestead Park. The new Member for Turtle Mountain joined us there, was introduced, and then sat back in a lawn chair. It was a nice, warm day, one of the few nice, warm days we had this past summer. He had his sunglasses on and a shirt and a pair of shorts, and he had even kicked off his

sandals. He was relaxing, and I thought I would take that opportunity to invite him to come up and help me cut the ribbon on the brand-new park.

That new member knows an opportunity when he sees one. He grabbed his sandals, flipped off his sunglasses and sprinted to the front to help me cut that ribbon. So I know that that member knows an opportunity when he sees one, and he will be a very good addition to this House as well.

I also want to take a minute to recognize the two previous members in those two constituencies, MaryAnn Mihychuk and Merv Tweed, both members of the class of 1995, which spawned so many good members in this House. On behalf of the class of 1995, on behalf of the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) and the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) and the Minister for Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) and the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), I want to say that it was a privilege to work in this House with both of those members. I appreciate the hard work of both of the members that I have referred to. Merv Tweed shared a rural constituency with me, and I always knew that Mr. Tweed was attuned to the needs and the desires of his constituents, many of whom shared the desires and hopes of my own constituents.

I also want to say that MaryAnn Mihychuk was somebody who worked hard in this Legislature, spoke forcefully and sometimes bluntly in favour of her projects, in favour of her constituents, somebody who, I think, served her constituents well, indeed.

I wish both of those former members of this House all the best as they look to another chapter in their careers.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I think this Speech from the Throne was packed with good news. I think it would be quite a sad day should the opposition, both parties in opposition, it would be quite a sad day for them to miss out on this opportunity to join with our government in moving forward on such a positive, uplifting, beneficial Speech from the Throne, that will govern the deliberations in preparation for a budget, that will govern the deliberations in preparing of bills, that will govern the focus of this House for the next period of time. It would be a shame, a crying shame, if members of the opposition blew such a good opportunity to work in a co-operative way with this progressive government to

put forward on behalf of the people of Manitoba a very positive and a very beneficial focus.

Rural Manitobans can see in this speech a move toward the realization of a number of economic development opportunities. Rural Manitobans, I think, can also see a real commitment on behalf of this government to meet the challenges that rural Manitoba has faced over the last period of time. We know, and it has been well documented, and we have had debates in this House dealing with the challenges that many of my constituents and other people's constituents face in terms of the BSE crisis; the result of one cow causing the raising of a wall between us and our southern neighbours, between us and the market that those cows were destined for.

The results of that one action, that one incident, is hard to measure in some of the small communities in Manitoba, especially some of those small communities such as Rorketon or Eddystone or Cayer, Meadow Portage, places that depend on cattle, places where the land is not readily suited for anything but cattle, places in our province where they do not have the ability to diversify into grains and oilseeds, or other activities. It is hard to measure the kind of hurt on farm families that one incident has inflicted.

But I want to say here, Mr. Speaker, I want to say it loudly and I want to say it clearly, that our Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has taken this seriously and has moved forward to help people who are hurting in these circumstances. She does so with the clear support of a government who understands that there are people hurting in our rural communities, farm families who are struggling. Not only is this government providing relief in terms of direct help, direct assistance with farmers, with producers involved in the cattle industry, but we are moving to correct a situation that has been allowed to develop in terms of the slaughter capacity in Manitoba. From '89 through the nineties there was a tremendous drop in the number of cows that are slaughtered in Manitoba. This government is working co-operatively with producers, trying its best to work co-operatively with the federal government to move forward with slaughter capacity.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

My question all along through this is where has the opposition been. Where have they been? Just the

other day in this House, it was just staggering to see the response of the Agriculture critic when he was told bluntly, point blank, in this House, of the action that this Minister of Agriculture of ours is taking. As if she had never said it, he got up and declared that we were doing nothing.

An Honourable Member: He does not listen.

Mr. Struthers: If he is not willing to listen, he should at least read the Hansard because it is all there. It is in black and white. It is there for not only him to read, but for all of our constituents to read, and maybe they will.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that the other section of this Throne Speech that I was very impressed with was the continued commitment that this government has in terms of the environment. Given my position as the Minister of Conservation, you might think that I am being a little bit biased with that.

An Honourable Member: No.

An Honourable Member: Not at all, Stan.

Mr. Struthers: But you know what?

An Honourable Member: All his family are environmentalists.

*(15:10)

Mr. Struthers: Not only individuals in this government have been true environmentalists, but the government as a whole has taken some very positive steps forward in terms of our commitment to protecting our land, protecting our water, protecting our air, protecting all of the resources, whether they be forests, wildlife, fish. It is something we take seriously, and I know that members opposite, way deep down, deep down in their bellies, they take it seriously too, but they cannot bring themselves to voting against a Throne Speech that is as supportive to our conservation efforts, that is as supportive of our environment, as this Throne Speech is here that we are debating today.

This Throne Speech continued on the very progressive, very mature approach, I think, that this government has adopted, not just over the course of recent months, but from 1999, when the people of

Manitoba so wisely installed our Premier and this government on this side of the House. I welcome the support from the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) in protecting our boreal forest, in making those hard decisions on the east side of Lake Manitoba, the boreal forest, including those bears that the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) is so concerned about. This will provide us an opportunity to sort out the people who protect the environment from those who pretend to protect the environment.

I am going to watch to see when it comes time to vote on this Throne Speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am going to watch to see who actually does stand and protect the environment as opposed to those who pretend about it, and ask question after question in the Question Period. Put your money where your mouth is and I will give you credit. You will get that chance.

This Throne Speech builds on decisions that this government has made, announcements such as the protection of the Bell and Steeprock canyons in the Porcupine mountains. Mr. Deputy Speaker, and anybody here listening today, if you ever get a chance to go up into the Porcupine mountains and view the Bell and the Steeprock canyons, I highly suggest that you do so. You cannot possibly stand on the edge of the Bell Canyon and come into this House, I know the member from Charleswood is from that area, and I know that when she gets her opportunity to vote in favour of protecting the Bell Canyon, she will do that. You cannot stand on the side of that beautiful escarpment on top of the Porcupine mountains, look over that gorge, especially in the fall when the trees are turning and there is a number of different bright colours mixed in with the evergreen, you cannot stand there, view that beauty and then walk into this House and vote against such a good Throne Speech as this one. There is no way that can happen, not even the most hardened of our friends across the way could manage to do that. So I am very confident they will see the value of this Throne Speech.

Members opposite will remember too the announcement that we made to protect Little George Island. Little George Island is a little island in the middle of Lake Winnipeg. It is just a small island, and if you look on a map, you might not think it matters too much, but it does. It matters to about three species of birds that nest on that island. The greater scaup has its southernmost nesting grounds

on this island, and if this government had not moved to protect that, then there could be questions from our friends from across the way, just as there were about bears and other animals within our environment.

I was also very pleased that this government moved to extend the boundaries of Rivers Park. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has really taken seriously its commitment to protected areas. This government has taken seriously its role in expanding, creating new parks. I think members can remember very, very vividly, not too long ago when this government opened up the Pembina Valley Park, Trappist Monastery Park, South Atikaki Park and, of course, with the help of our new Member from Turtle Mountain, we opened up the Criddle/Vane Homestead Park.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another very important announcement was made not too long ago when we extended the protection of the territorial area of the Poplar River First Nation. That was one of the first steps toward developing an approach to designate as a UNESCO World Heritage Site a large piece of land on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. That Poplar River extension was a key step in that process. The chief and council and their land manager at Poplar River are people who understand land-use planning. I have met with them and their community, and I was absolutely impressed with the level of knowledge and the foresight and the planning that group wants to move ahead on.

We also worked very co-operatively with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Not a lot of people may understand the importance of protecting the Western Prairie Fringed-orchid. If you ever want to see the Western Prairie Fringed-orchid, I would head down to the R.M. of Stuartburn north of Vita, and I would go along that trail as my family and I did this summer. I would look for those orchids. You do not have to look too hard because they are all over the place. They are part of the tall grass prairie. This may be the rarest species in our province, and between this government and the Nature Conservancy, we took great strides to protect that species. That is important work, I believe.

I want to just take a couple of minutes before I close by talking just a little bit about the World Heritage Site proposal we announced in this Speech from the Throne. I have to admit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was my favourite part of the Speech from the Throne. Out of so many good things, this was my

favourite. Because this rolls up into one announcement so many good things this government stands for, I know the members opposite want to vote with us.

Our decision to move ahead springs from the recommendations of the East Side Planning Initiative, a historic move by this government to include First Nations living on the east side of Lake Winnipeg for the first time in their history. Generation after generation of being ignored, of being left out of the loop, of not being included in decisions that affect their livelihoods right in their backyards. We have taken on that challenge. I think it is really great because we work together with another province, our neighbouring province of Ontario. The only thing that separates our Atikaki Park from the Caribou River Park is a boundary. The only thing that separates the First Nation Accord lands from the First Nation of Poplar River, right through eastern Manitoba and into northwestern Ontario, into the community of Pikangikum is a boundary.

* (15:20)

We will work steadfastly to make sure we have the best possible chance of having those First Nation accords along with our provincial parks declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and you know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because it is the right thing to do. Because, for once, we have an opportunity as legislators to come together, all of us, work co-operatively with the First Nations involved. We are co-operating with the federal government and the government of Ontario to move forward on a very progressive idea. To do the right thing in terms of eco-tourism, but most of all to once and for all finally include the people of the east side in decision making involving their own lifestyle, involving their way of life, recognizing, respecting the treaties we signed so many years ago and finally doing the right thing.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I hope I have convinced at least some of my friends from across the way to step forward, do the right thing and vote in favour of a positive Speech from the Throne, vote in favour of a very progressive step forward, and vote in favour of the hopes and the dreams of the people of the province of Manitoba. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I got a little bit of more convincing. I am sure that after I listen to one

or two more of you on that side, I will have a little clearer insight on where you are actually trying to go, because your speech was definitely a lot of smoke and mirrors. Having said that, I do want to welcome the new members from Minto and from Turtle Mountain. Welcome to the Legislature. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have the last year. It will get better. I know some of the other colleagues will probably agree with me that it is a learning process and we will get there.

Also to the pages, and in particular Heather Morgan—I would like to mention Heather. She is from Argyle. She is a very dedicated student, and we are very proud and honoured to have her as part of this House.

I would also like to congratulate the new appointments to the ministers. It is an important task. I know, as critic for Industry, Trade and Mines, that side of the House has had a hard time trying to find somebody to take that portfolio on. We have had three, but I hope that Mr. Rondeau will be able to concentrate and fulfil his duties and try and get there.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Eichler: I will correct myself, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for that. I will not make that mistake one more time. The Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), I stand corrected.

Having said that, we will move on. I hope everybody had a good holiday over the five months we were out. I know I certainly did not get one, but I am sure that side of the House did. I lost five pounds running around trying to chase BSE. We had a lot fewer barbeques to go to this year. Not because of celebration—*[interjection]* Well, actually, we could probably get on a scale and do that, but we will not go there today. But definitely after, we will get together and talk about that.

The speech that was delivered on Monday does bring concerns. We will get into those as I get started here. I was not really impressed with the government when it talked about the BSE program. Today is day 556. What did the plan really have? As a new member of this Legislature, I find it somewhat appalling that we cannot seem to get together. We do have a lot to offer. I know, last night, listening to the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province, he said, "I like good, constructive suggestions." I hope he can read

Hansard, go back, and I am sure the members here will carry these messages to him because they are good suggestions. I hope he takes them very seriously.

When we are talking about our five-point program, I know yesterday the premier made mention that we did not even bring it up at our convention. We did not have to because we have a five-point plan. I would like to put it on record so that maybe, just maybe, they might pick up on one or two of them.

Point 1, \$40 million to increase slaughter capacity to meet, at minimum, the additional 500 head-per-day shortfall that currently exists in the province of Manitoba.

Two, \$2 million to create a fully funded feasibility study and a business plan fund. Number three, \$10 million to provide forgivable loans to existing or small, new plants to allow them to move forward with the necessary upgrades to meet federal inspection standards, thereby allowing Manitoba beef to be exported to other provinces.

Twenty million to provide an immediate cash advance to those producers, and the last is provide a commitment of provincial dollars to support producers as outlined in the Canadian Cattleman's proposal which requires both federal and provincial funding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think two of these programs are very simple. We have a packer in Carman called BJ Packers. They have asked and met with the Premier on several different occasions, and they have yet to get funding to expand their program whereby they can export outside the province of Manitoba. We have so much to offer right here in the province. People from Ontario come here, eat our hamburgers, yet we cannot ship them to Ontario. People that are here from the province of Manitoba eat our beef. What is wrong with open trade barriers within the province of Manitoba?

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), I am sure if you just listen to me for a minute or two you will get that conflictive idea, that you will be able to understand where I am going with this. It is so simple that where we get interprovincial trade first, that is the simplest to do. Move it forward. That

is not a hard thing. All we have to do is get together with the other provinces, and I understand you do meet on a regular basis. So pick up the phone, make the call, make the judgment, and a lot of these operations will be able to get rid of some of this beef within the two neighbouring provinces.

Right now our cows are being shipped from Manitoba to Québec, and I do agree wholeheartedly with Rancher's Choice. I will hope that the barriers and the conditions that the Province has put on will not stop this project from going ahead. We would hope that it does not stop it because we need this facility within the province of Manitoba. I know I bought my shares, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have done everything I can. I have met with these producers on a regular basis, and I know so has the minister. I give her credit for that, but we do not want to make the barriers so tough that it will not succeed.

The idea of removing the property tax of 33 percent, as the Minister of Agriculture knows, and I am sure a lot of the members in this House, is not enough. Thirty-three percent, when you look at the cattle producers within the province of Manitoba, these cattle are on marginal land. If you look at a section of land that is taxed for cattle, he may or she may get a credit of maybe \$300. In the year 2005 they may get a credit of \$400. Not enough.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Tories, this side of the House, have made a proposition to the government on several occasions. It is so simple. We eliminate the tax off all farmland and residential properties. This does two things. Now I will get to the first thing first. It gives the farmers and the people within rural Manitoba dollars available to spend in that local community. Very simple. When you have extra dollars to spend, it spurs on the economy. It helps those people in need. It helps those businesses in need, so therefore it is a no-brainer. Very simple.

Let me talk about the tax off residential property. Again, very simple. I hope that you write this down and you are making notes, because what happens, whenever you have extra dollars to spend, very seldom do we keep those dollars. We put them back into the businesses, back in the local communities, we spur on the economy. Follow the example of Alberta. It is not a hard thing. The Premier (Mr. Doer) made mention yesterday that the water of Manitoba is the oil of Alberta. I could not agree with him more, but let us not let that go by. We have the

money. Why take it and not use it? We had half a billion dollars more in transfer payments. Utilize that money the way it should be. Spur on the economy. Do not bury it in the Treasury Board somewhere, or not pay off this or pay off that. Do it to the people that need it. This is what is important.

The day before yesterday, at CJOB our Premier of Manitoba was talking about how to spur on the economy within the city of Winnipeg, and he did apologize to me, but I just want to put it on the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that he says that he wants to see that development is going on inside the city. Here is what he says, and I quote: "We believe the choice is either made in Winnipeg or developing some place like Teulon, not that it is not a beautiful place, but I do not want to insult people in Teulon, but the real question of building the economy in Winnipeg as some of the capital regions have built themselves up in the last two decades."

* (15:30)

Having said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we somewhat, in rural Manitoba, wonder whether we have this Perimeteritis again. Do we have Perimeteritis? I do not know. I hope not, because these are constructive suggestions to help people in rural Manitoba, and that is what this is all about. We do want rural Manitoba to prosper. Wind farms? Sure, that is a start, but we are talking about every community, not one community, not a certain area. We are talking about people within all of rural Manitoba.

The Throne Speech goes on to talk about the extra funding for police within the province of Manitoba. We are going to fund that through the casinos here in the city of Winnipeg. The profits are down by some \$14 million. Using this formula, how are we ever going to figure out how to give them some money. I am going to be watching to see that they do.

We in the town of Teulon lost our police department, Selkirk, Steinbach, just to name a few. We are so underpoliced that we are going to be like B.C. before very long. When the alarm goes off because there is a robbery in downtown Vancouver, the police do not even respond. The police do not have the resources. We already have a bad enough name as a have-not province. That is why we got our transfer payments. Do not tax the poor on the casinos

to try and raise money for such an important issue. If the profits are down again, what funding is going to be going to those police officers within the city, within rural Manitoba?

The break-ins within rural Manitoba have skyrocketed to unprecedented levels, and we all know that sitting in this House. I am not sure the police are the answer. I am not real sure of that. I think it is a start, but before we go too much further I think we need to look at the court system. The police are frustrated, they are upset, and I can understand why. Our sentences are not strong enough, they are not long enough, and I think we have to get tough on crime. That is what we got to do. There is no sense of arresting people and charging them.

We had a grow bust operation just north of Teulon a year ago, and I hope that you take heed to this. What had happened, he got arrested, very proud of the fact that he finally got busted. He wanted to join his buddies at Stony Mountain. You know what they did? This was the longest bust, the biggest bust within the province of Manitoba at that time. There have been bigger since. He got sent to Lac du Bonnet and was put in a cabin. His wife came to see him on weekends. He said, "What a hardship. I could not even get away from my wife very long enough to have a little free time. What a holiday." Oh man, we want more grow ops within the province. No wonder they are popping up all over the city. It is a joke, and I have seen members opposite laughing along with me. It is embarrassing to have this as our justice system.

Police? I do not know if it is going to happen. We need to look at our criminal organizations. We need to get tough on crime. We need to make sure that this is just there for, not just the protection of the people, but for the protection of the upcoming crimes to prevent those police officers from just spinning their feet. There are 100 more gang members within the province of Manitoba and 20 officers within the city are certainly not going to be able to curtail that as well.

With respect to health, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the diabetic program that was done in 1998 by the former government, I have no problem with the Throne Speech talking about wanting to have another look at this program. But to restudy it, that is a total waste of time and money. What they can do instead

of trying to reinvent the wheel when the wheel is not broken is why not make the necessary changes to that. Sure, government is in power to do that, but we do not need to study the diabetic program once again. There is no need to.

What this government is good at is stonewalling on delivering the products and services to the citizens of this province. That is the way the government is doing, they are great at stonewalling. They are great at putting things off. It is time to step up to the plate, not study, but to take action.

This government is closing hospitals in rural Manitoba. They are talking about making more hospitals accessible within rural Manitoba for surgeries such as hip replacement, knee and eye surgery. Having been the recipient of a hip operation, I know the pain and the suffering that goes into a hip operation, and the long waits are something that I would not want to put on anybody.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that the government, and I would give them credit if they followed through on this program, make sure that they utilize those services within rural Manitoba. We are very fortunate within our RHA district to have a number of doctors that are staying. We do that for two reasons; No. 1, we treat them like decent human beings. We pick them up at the airport if they are an immigrant. They come in, we make them part of our community.

The second thing we do is we help them to keep their operational skills. Those skills they do not want to lose. Whether they stay in the province of Manitoba, move on to the United States or move into another province, one thing that is important to them is those operating skills. We want to make sure those skills are not lost within the time frame they are unable to use them. Maybe some of those doctors will be able to utilize those services as well within those surgery areas.

I would be remiss if I did not talk about Lake Winnipeg. I am glad that the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) is here to listen to me this afternoon.

An Honourable Member: He is here in spirit.

Mr. Eichler: Well, spirit is great and body is even better.

The Lake Manitoba water report was adopted, I understand, back in June. The concerns that I have, and they have been brought to the minister's attention, I want to put them on record in Hansard here today. I would like to commend the minister for setting forward a water stewardship board. However, we want to make sure there is representation from the fishery people. We want to make sure there is representation from the trappers. We want to make sure there is representation from the cottage-goers. We have on the east side of Lake Manitoba a number of fishermen who feel their voice has not been heard. We will be forwarding a list of those names to the minister for his consideration to sit on this water stewardship board.

These people have had motions from every municipality along the east side, the southern side and parts of the west side on the lake levels. We do realize the recommendations have been brought forward from 810.5 to 813 for the water level is important. The people feel 810.5 is way too low. The cottagers who are there also feel it is too low. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 813 is definitely too high, but the motion is very clear. We try and maintain the level at 811.5.

For the record, it is also important to note that, before man got involved, before man started tinkering with the water which we usually do when we mess up conservation at its best, because Mother Nature did the best job when it was looking after its own. Those levels were very close to 811.5. We would certainly recommend the minister take into consideration these recommendations when he is making his water stewardship board and creating a voice that will be heard for all Manitobans. In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would like to make sure people on this side of the House do recommend certain changes. We made those yesterday when our leader spoke in his amendments.

Today is the 365th day of my opportunity to speak to this House. Last year, so I am glad to be able to bring these few suggestions to the government. I look forward to the rest of the presentations here this afternoon.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise for my first major speech in this Legislature, and I am proud to speak in this debate in support of the Speech from the Throne. I

am honoured to be the representative for the riding of Minto in Winnipeg.

First, I would like to congratulate the new pages, the new legislative interns. It is nice to know I am not the only rookie in here. And there is another rookie I would like to congratulate and that is the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen). The member and I will always be known as the class of '04, and I certainly wish him the best for a successful career. I have enjoyed my chance to get to know him and I am very pleased we have both been appointed to the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force. We will be working together with other members of the task force, including the Minister for Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald) to improve the health of young Manitobans.

* (15:40)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge the important people in my decision to pursue this seat in the Legislature. I will start with my wonderful family, my wife Tamsin, who came to this country and this city with her family when she was 10, and my two lovely daughters, Rhiannon, who is six, and Catriona, who is four. My father, David, graduated from Daniel McIntyre High School in Minto and worked for 35 years with Air Canada as a union machinist. My mother, Beverley, grew up in Fort Rouge and worked at Great-West Life. My parents' first apartment upon being married was on Sherbrook Street in Minto, and they later moved and they have continued to live in the area so ably represented by the MLA for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski). My brother Ken and his wife, Lilah, live on Home Street just north of Sargent Avenue.

An Honourable Member: –lived on Home Street.

Mr. Swan: It is a good street, I could tell the MLA from Carman. My in-laws live on Sherburn Street, just north of Ellice Avenue.

I do wish to thank the partners, the associates and the staff in my former law firm, Thompson Dorfman Sweatman. I had the privilege for 14 years to work with a fine group of lawyers who have a long tradition of public service and a history of political action for parties of all stripes. The lawyers I worked for have acted as counsel to individuals both rich and poor, to businesses both big and small,

and successive governments in this province. I am proud to carry 14 years of experience as a lawyer into this Legislature. From my practice in the area of family law, I thought I had seen just about everything, but I expect I will get to see a surprise once in a while in this House.

I do want to thank the members of this Legislature. I have been made to feel welcome by both sides of this House.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I do have the highest regard for my colleagues in this House for the work we do here, for your office, Mr. Speaker, and for the symbols and the trappings of our democratic government which we cherish.

I want to thank particularly the members of my caucus. Some of you I have known for a great many years. There are others who I have come to know only during or since my campaign in June. I want to acknowledge the assistance they have given to me and continue to give to me and the guidance and fellowship. I am certainly proud to be associated with this government.

I want to thank staff within this building, both political and non-political, who have provided direction to me. Sometimes they have literally provided direction as I have tried to search for the right room in this edifice.

But most of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the people of Minto who have honoured me by electing me to the Legislature to serve as part of this government. It is a true honour to represent a fascinating area of the city of Winnipeg.

Minto riding does not, as some would think from time to time, include the village of Minto on Highway 10. In fact, it is the west end of Winnipeg, and it is named for the imposing Minto Armouries that you can see along St. Matthews Avenue. It is a riding which is incredibly diverse. The eastern boundary is Balmoral Street in the downtown part of the city, and it stretches all the way west to St. James Street.

It is a thriving community which has been enriched by waves of successive newcomers. In the latest years we have been enriched by new Canadians from the Philippines, Portugal, Vietnam,

Poland, the Ukraine, most recently African countries, including Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan. These new Manitobans have joined previous immigrants as well as the original Manitobans, our Aboriginal and Métis people who also make up a vital part of the Minto riding.

Mr. Speaker, it is an area not without its challenges, but it is truly a community on the rise. It is a place where people take pride in their homes, in their schools and their places of worship, and in their community places.

Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech yesterday from my fellow rookie, the MLA from Turtle Mountain, but I have to confess that unlike him, my riding does not have any mountains, does not have any lakes, does not have a desert. In fact, there is not a lot of open space, and even Westview Park, which some may call garbage hill, is located outside of my riding.

There are some blessings, of course, including the fact that I will never have to embarrass myself on a golf course in my riding. But we do have, which some of the members could not wait to say, thank you, is that we do indeed have a football stadium, and we have a football stadium that is going to host the 2006 Grey Cup. Again, although I have been advised that this House can be partisan from time to time, I am sure that all members can join me in agreeing that it is our wish that the game will include our Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

The riding of Minto does have a waterway, and it is a waterway which is being turned around. Omand's Creek, which you can see near Polo Park, is being restored and, indeed, now there are reports of wildlife, of fish in the lower reaches. There are areas around the creek which have been restored with species of prairie grassland. I was pleased to organize a clean-up this fall, Mr. Speaker, and we will be back in the spring to make sure that Omand's Creek and its banks are a true jewel for my area of the city.

Through the Building Communities Initiative, which was a partnership entered into between the government of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg, we are continuing to develop a linear park which I believe will be a signature development for the West End. I am also proud, Mr. Speaker, to represent a riding which I believe, which I know, has the

greatest collection of restaurants in the province of Manitoba.

Again, I know this is a partisan House. I know that there will be a lot of things said, but at this point, in the spirit of good will, I would like to invite my friends on the other side of the House to come to Minto any time they want, and I will take them for lunch at any of the wonderful restaurants along Ellice Avenue or Sargent Avenue. You can find anything, Mr. Speaker, from hot and sour soup to moussaka to roti to borsch. It is not just great restaurants; it is great schools too.

I am proud that in my riding is my father's alma mater, Daniel McIntyre High School, which is a school of excellence with some 900 students. Daniel Mac has a wonderful student leadership program and a performing arts program which is expanding by leaps and bounds. I recently had the privilege of attending a Remembrance Day service at Daniel Mac, and I was impressed with the meaningful service prepared and carried out entirely by the students.

Just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the *Winnipeg Free Press* carried a great story about English as a Second Language class at General Wolfe School in Minto which decided to go beyond simply collecting money for UNICEF on Halloween. They decided to learn more about what this organization does, and by learning about the organization and human rights I am proud that students in Minto are truly becoming world citizens. In one class alone at General Wolfe School there are students who came recently from eight different countries. Other schools such as Sargent Park, Clifton, Isaac Brock and John M. King have innovative programs and award-winning staff and the future, our future, will be in good hands as the students in Minto grow up and take their place in our society.

It is a riding as well which features a vibrant business community. I am pleased to work with the West End BIZ who have board members from a broad number of businesses across the area. Through the West End BIZ, if you travel through Minto, you can see street improvements. You can see a series of murals in the area which are a symbol of renewal in this riding. Recently, the West End BIZ announced a long-term plan to develop a Portuguese village along Sargent Avenue which would draw people to the area for all the right reasons.

Indeed, business is good. We have found this in the election campaign when it was difficult to find any commercial rental space at all along Ellice or Sargent. Even Elections Manitoba had to find an empty building, renovate and put in washrooms because there was no other space in Minto. I say this for the information of my friends on the other side of the House because I do not believe they had an office in that election.

I do not think I am exaggerating, Mr. Speaker, if I say that no other member in this House has knocked on as many doors and met as many constituents in the last six months as I have. I do not want to slight my friend the member from Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), but we cannot accept that the houses on Sherbrook Street are a little bit closer together than the houses down Highway 5. From knocking on around 5000 doors in the campaign and my work in the riding since, meeting with people from all walks of life, I can say with pride that the vision and the plan contained in the Speech from the Throne addresses the hopes and addresses the wishes of the people of Minto.

* (15:50)

What are they telling me? Well, they are telling me they are proud to live in a province with the goal of most parents to see that their children have the chance to attend post-secondary education is attainable. The Speech from the Throne highlighted the reduction and the tuition freeze over the past four years and the resulting increase in enrolment. Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we believe that every child, whether they go to Ravenscourt or they go to Daniel Mac, whether they go to St. Mary's Academy or they go to Tech Voc, they have the right to fulfil their potential and they have the chance to go into study, whether it is Red River College, Assiniboine College, University of Manitoba or Winnipeg or Brandon, they have the chance to go on to post-secondary institutions, because we grow as a province if all of our citizens have a chance to participate, and when I say growth, we are growing as a province. I am proud to represent a riding which has benefited so much and is continuing to benefit from the Provincial Nominee Program, which has been so successful in attracting new Manitobans.

This program is now attracting 7500 new Manitobans per year, a level of immigration three times higher than in 1999, and we are now striving

for 10 000 new Manitobans a year. Many of these new Canadians settle in or have relatives in my riding, and I can tell you there are few things that I can do as an MLA to give me as much pleasure as helping my constituents, hardworking people, with roots in the Philippines, in Vietnam, in Portugal and a host of other countries, but to help them apply that their families and their friends with skills, experience and desire can come to our wonderful province.

I heard the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray), I read the comments of the Leader of the Liberal Party (Mr. Gerrard), who like to type Manitoba as a "have-not" province. Well, if they would come to Minto and speak to the new Canadians, people who have come here, they would know that this is a "have" province, and the benefits of this program, of course, are not just in Minto. They are across the province, Steinbach, Winkler, the Interlake, many other areas and all parts of our city are being enriched by our newest arrivals.

I had a chance recently to attend Citizenship Court, and I watched as 60 people from 19 different countries became full citizens of our country. Mr. Speaker, we can all be proud that these people have chosen to make Manitoba their home.

I am proud that my children live in a place where they can experience the food, the dance, the language, and the culture of so many different lands. It was while enjoying the hospitality of so many pavilions at Folklorama that, perhaps, watching their father do the apron dance at the Philippine pavilion, my children decided that they really thought daddy's new job was a very good one.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the turnaround in Manitoba's economy since 1999 has had a real and it has a profound effect on the people of Minto, and I found that and maybe some of my friends on this side of the House found that as well during the election, it was hard to find people at home because people are not at home during the day. They are out working in a province which has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada.

Five years ago, the people of the inner city, which is my riding from Arlington Street in to Balmoral, were in despair. The values of their homes were plummeting, lenders would not lend, and insurers would not insure. But what has happened? The balanced policies of this government have

allowed a rebirth as housing prices have risen and people believe, once again, in their community and as I travel around my riding, I see people fixing up their homes. I see people buying the homes that they used to rent. I see people turning once-proud homes that had been subdivided back into single-family homes for themselves and their families. I also see landlords, including private landlords, including non-profit landlords, who are prepared to invest in improving our rental properties and improve the housing stock. In my previous work on the Residential Tenancies Commission, I was certainly pleased to work not only with tenants, but with many landlords who have an interest in improving and rehabilitating our housing stock for the benefit of all.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Minto tell me that our Manitoba Hydro is a key to our future and the people of Minto truly understand the idea of thinking globally and acting locally. Earlier this month, I am pleased to say, I hosted a meeting at which representatives from Manitoba Hydro presented details of the Power Smart program which includes low-interest loans for people who want to fix up their homes and make them more energy efficient. Ninety people came out to the meeting, and from the nature of their questions there are going to be many, many more people in my riding making the effort to improve their homes. Every dollar they save, every watt of power they save, is going to be another watt of power that we are going to be able to sell to our friends in the United States or, hopefully, as we go forward, to our friends in Ontario for the benefit of all Manitobans.

People of Minto are proud of this government's work to improve housing. Just last week the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) unveiled the new plan for infill housing at a house on Sherburn Street in Minto. I am pleased to see beautiful new homes appearing throughout the riding as part of a continuing effort to improve housing by this government. The affordable housing initiative in which this government is a partner has to date invested over \$2 million in the Minto riding alone.

We know in Minto there are challenges, particularly in the east end of the riding. It is true that there are a small number of people who engage in anti-social activities, but on this side of the House we do not write those neighbourhoods off. The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act is a powerful tool to assist residents to deal with houses in their

neighbourhoods which are a problem, and it is working. Over 80 homes have been closed down so that the majority, the good residents of the area, can go forward to build their communities. The Safety Aid program assists low-income seniors by performing safety audits and installing safety equipment, so that our seniors can truly feel safe and remain in our communities. This is a program which we heard is being expanded in other areas of the province.

We know on this side of the House that criminal activity cannot simply be treated as a law-and-order issue alone, and that is why this government addresses the issue of crime across departments and across disciplines, and we are working to address the root causes of crime and provide alternatives. That is why I am proud to hear in the Speech from the Throne that the Lighthouses program, which provides constructive options for youth in the evening and on the weekends, is being expanded across Manitoba. We know on this side of the House that our children are worth our investment, and we are addressing the prevention of crime in the first place, because we know on this side that justice is only one part of social justice.

As I said, we do not write neighbourhoods off, and perhaps when my friends join me for lunch we can go for a walk down Furby Street, Langside, Spence, Young Streets, and my friends on the other side of the House will be surprised at what they will see, because they will see a number of homes that are immaculate, homes which have had new siding, new stone, new work done. You will see people with immaculate lawns in the summer, with flowers hanging off the vine. Why is that? Because people have pride and they have hope because of this government.

Much of Minto is what I think most of us would call working class. On this side of the House, that is not an insult. I had hoped, Mr. Speaker, given this is my first speech, that I could keep my contribution to the debate on a fairly positive level, but I was greatly disappointed by the comments of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) in his attack, and I think that is the only word that can be used, his attack on the rights of Manitobans including my constituents in Minto, to choose to better their lives and be represented by a union, and unfortunately the example that the Leader of the Official Opposition gave involved a situation in my riding. It has been said, I am not sure who came up with the quote, but

it is better to be silent and thought a fool than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt, and that may very well be the case here, because I am afraid that the Leader of the Official Opposition did not check his facts.

Mr. Speaker, the member chose to give Gamble Electric as his best example of his problem with this government's vision of the future, and what happened in that case was that, upon a certification campaign, an employer simply closed its doors without even sitting down to speak to the union, without even learning what was being asked, and what happened? The members on the other side of the House will only listen to the fact that 11 workers lost their jobs, but unfortunately we did not hear the whole story. Of those 11 workers, 8 of them decided to go and get their union cards, and how long did it take those workers to find jobs? One day they were out working in unionized positions, earning three dollars an hour more than they had been with their previous employer, with benefits for themselves and their families and with a pension plan which they have been denied at their previous employer. There were two others who decided to form their own business, to which they are entitled to do, and which we are very pleased to hear. Another employee, who decided he did not want to be part of a union, went to work elsewhere.

* (16:00)

Mr. Speaker, there stands the difference between our side of the House and their side of the House. Who is their compass? Who do they listen to? They listen to one disaffected business owner who, in fact, is running a business into the ground, and who do we listen to? We listened to 11 families who now experience a higher standard of living because of fair and balanced labour laws in this province. We now have 11 families with more money to invest in our economy, buying clothes, buying cars, buying Blue Bomber tickets from our stadium, or maybe even Moose tickets at our brand-new, state-of-the-art hockey arena.

This really, really spells out the difference for me, Mr. Speaker, of those of us on this side and those of us on those. Your compass can be the petulance of one person or your compass can be 11 families representing the best that we have to offer in this province.

I hope that my friends will learn and be prepared to support this Throne Speech.

I have got many constituents who are First Nations and Métis. We now have a political climate which is allowing our Aboriginal people to claim their rightful place at the table. They are able to participate in our economy. They are able, they are willing, and they are empowered to take pride in their language, their culture and their heritage.

I spoke earlier about Hydro. We know that our Hydro development, our public Hydro development, is going to provide great benefits for First Nations people in the North and also in Winnipeg. With respect to First Nations culture, I have had the opportunity as one of the perks of being a member of this House, to meet friends at NCI, which is the Manitoba Aboriginal radio station, including Cory "The Coyote" Whitford. I could do the coyote call, Mr. Speaker, but it might be unparliamentary. Recently the NCI hosted an event, NCI Jam, which showcased top Aboriginal talent from across Manitoba.

Every day I learn more from my Aboriginal constituents and certainly I have got more work to do. But the people of Minto tell me that our government is on the right track.

Minto is a riding where people believe, where they know that governments play a role in improving their lives. They can count on this government to provide stable and increasing funding for their schools. They count on this government to invest in public places, for example, the Sargent Park recreation complex where I do my laps in the winter, which has already seen improvements and will continue to see exciting new development through the federal-provincial infrastructure agreement.

They can count on this government, through the Building Communities Initiative cost-shared with the City of Winnipeg, to improve schoolyards, playgrounds, sports fields and community clubs. They can count on this government for Neighbourhoods Alive! to support local initiatives to improve our community.

They can count on our government to provide stable and increasing funding for themselves and also for many people in Minto for their employment. They can count on our government to provide assistance for low-income parents with additional benefits. They can count on our government to provide a balanced approach to the question of the

minimum wage in Manitoba, and they can count on our government to provide, as a last resort, stable employment and income assistance, although I should add, the numbers of people on assistance across the province and in Minto continue to drop as they find employment and fully participate in our economy.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne provides a vision for the people of Minto, a vision of managing growth which we know will continue under this government's leadership. People in my riding do not expect a free lunch. Only my friends across the House are going to get that in Minto. People in Minto expect to work and they will work hard. People in my riding, they want to be treated with dignity and respect. They want to be represented, and they know that they are represented by a government that is managing growth for the benefit of all of us in this province and not just the privileged few.

It is my honour on behalf of the people of Minto to proudly support this Speech from the Throne. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk for a few minutes about the recent Speech from the Throne by the government. I want, first of all, to extend my congratulations to the new members and to the new pages, and want to hope that the members across the way are awake and not asleep, alive and not dead. I comment to begin with that the Speech from the Throne, which we were tortured with, offered nothing very substantial to the people of Manitoba.

It offered no action plan to move us out of have-not status into a have position, offers no plan to ease the pain of hundreds of Manitobans suffering on long, health care waiting lists, or to improve the cost, affordability, and quality of our health care system. It offers no clear actions to clean up the lakes and rivers. It offers no vision to make major changes which are badly needed to the financing of education in Manitoba. It is perhaps hardly surprising, for if we think back five years ago to when the Premier's first Throne Speech was delivered, and we look carefully at it, we can make some comparisons.

In the 1999 Throne Speech the NDP said they were going to rescue health care, everybody had quick access to health care when they needed, and

they were going to address the shortage of physicians and other health care professionals. Today in Winnipeg it is harder to find a family doctor. There are more shortages than ever, and in Ashern, for 11 of the next 18 days, there will be no doctor available in town or in an emergency room. Even in the darkest days of the Tory government before, it was never so bad.

In the 1999 Throne Speech, the NDP said they were going to clean up Manitoba's lakes. Five years later Lake Winnipeg has more algal blooms than ever and the pollution problems, the toxic waste problems on beautiful Kissinging Lake are worse than ever without any action whatsoever.

In the 1999 Throne Speech, the NDP said they were going to make Manitoba safe. Five years later there are more murders in Winnipeg than ever. We are still the murder capital of Canada. Some progress.

In the 1999 Throne Speech, the NDP said they were going to make Manitoba's workplaces safer. Five years later we have the least safe workplaces in all of Canada, and our workplaces are twice as unsafe as Ontario and Alberta when one looks at the standard measure of time loss days as a result of injury and workplace injury.

In the 1999 Throne Speech, the NDP said they were going to implement the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry and five years later, on Monday, Aboriginal leaders from all over the province were out in front of the Legislature calling the government to task because very little progress had really been achieved.

In the '99 Throne Speech, the NDP said the high rate of child and family poverty in Manitoba was unacceptable. They said this was a priority. They were going to do something about child poverty. This week, on Wednesday, we had a report; Manitoba is the second worst in all of Canada. We still have one of the highest rates of child poverty in the whole nation.

*(16:10)

In the '99 Throne Speech, the NDP said they were going to increase citizens' input into regional health care authority decisions. Five years later we still do not have elected Regional Health Authority boards. I get calls very frequently about problems in

one Regional Health Authority or another, because there is not adequate citizen input into decision making.

Mr. Speaker, this comes to credibility. The NDP have failed so badly to implement what they committed to five years ago that their credibility is just not very great. They had some five years ago. Much of that has been dissipated by the unkept promises over the intervening period.

We use five years as a measure, and the 1999 Throne Speech as a measure, because in five years there is plenty of opportunity to get the job done. Five years is a long time. It is far too long to be able to blame the previous government anymore for their own failures. It is time that this government was really held accountable for those failures, for its failure to deliver on the fundamental promises that they made back in 1999.

Going into this Throne Speech, there was an opportunity for change. There was an opportunity to address some of the major issues of the day, but we did not see it. There was an opportunity to address the need for a better accountability and transparency in government. Yet now we have a government which, the last two years, has sat for fewer days in this Legislative Chamber than in any years in the previous 10 or so.

Here we have a government which talks about accountability and yet refuses to proceed with the needed reforms to the Public Accounts committee to give us better accountability. A government which talks about accountability and yet manages problems like Hydra House, Aiyawin Corporation, where spending is getting out of hand, poorly managed, being wasted, going to conditions and circumstances for which it was never intended, as we have heard from the provincial auditor and we have heard from many others. Again, the lack of accountability is a lack of credibility.

There was an opportunity to provide a vision for the improvement of the delivery and the cost, quality, and accountability of health care in Manitoba. I have already talked about how, in terms of access to physicians in many areas of this province, it is worse than it was five years ago.

But there is more.

There was an opportunity after the accord of September, an accord which provided a 10-year plan for funding from the federal government for the Province of Manitoba and the other provinces. There should have been a plan to put into action how they were going to manage the quality and costs of health care in the years ahead, now that the funding issues have been answered. But, no, what we were treated to was a major plank which dealt with diabetes and it dealt with a prevention strategy for diabetes. Now this is all well and good, Mr. Speaker. We badly need not only strategy but action to prevent diabetes. Nobody doubts this. It has been needed for a long time, particularly the last 5 years.

It is interesting that I have got up frequently in this Chamber to ask the government about their strategy for diabetes: what they were doing for diabetes, what they were measuring, what kind of results they were producing. The Minister of Health, not the present one, the previous one, got up time and time again. He said we have the best strategy for diabetes in the county.

Well, that is what happened in the last five years. Now we have a Throne Speech which says that was not any good. That was not any good. We did not really have a strategy. We did not know what we were doing. Here, we are coming. We now have a plan, prevention for diabetes. They pulled it out of a hat, and it is no more credible than the words of the previous Minister of Health who said for five years, "We have the best strategy for diabetes." Now that we have a new Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), he realizes that there was not an adequate implementation or strategy or action or anything at all because, in fact, the incidence of diabetes appears to have increased significantly over the last five years. It has gotten worse instead of better, just like a lot of other things under the management of this government.

We have a situation in Winnipeg where surgical suites may be closed for a lack of anesthetists; in Brandon, a shortage of pediatricians. There may be some days this fall and winter when women may not be able to deliver babies in Brandon, but will have to travel over snowy highways to Winnipeg. The situation with respect to the availability of rural physicians in other areas is quite serious. In The Pas, there used to be 18 doctors. When I was there in September, they were concerned they might be down to 2 by the end of the year. While it is a little better

looking at the moment, maybe 4 or 5, but it is still far from what it should be in The Pas.

In Ashern, there are normally at least four doctors, but now they have none; temporary coverage from two doctors who have retired, who are filling in a little bit. Ashern for 11 days in the next 18 will be without medical services, will be without physicians. Just imagine somebody coming from Dauphin River, arriving at the emergency room in Ashern, and they are very sick, maybe a heart attack, and they are feeling like they desperately need medical care. Well, the notice in Ashern says, "Please go on to another emergency room." Where is that other emergency room? The notice does not tell us; maybe in Dauphin or Hodgson or Winnipeg. You have to go maybe an hour, maybe two hours, to find an emergency room after you have already travelled an hour and a half. It is not good enough. Some standard of care for a government that promised five years ago to rescue health care. This is deplorable. It is unacceptable.

What about the people of Rivers? They wanted to improve health care in their area. They wanted to make sure they had good facilities so that they could retain and attract doctors and be able to serve their community well. They knew that their hospital needed renovating and upgrading, so they talked to the Premier (Mr. Doer), and the Premier said during the last election to the people in Rivers, "All you have to do is collect 10 percent of the dollars, and we will provide the rest and build your hospital." So the people of Rivers, at the time of the BSE crisis, at the time of a lot of trouble in rural Manitoba, scraped together \$460,000 to provide the 10 percent. They scraped it together and they came to this government and said, "We have done our part; now it is your turn to fulfil your commitment so we can have good hospital and health services." The Minister of Health said, "We are not so sure that we are going to do it. We are not so sure."

* (16:20)

It was a solid commitment. What happened to that simple and solid commitment? Well, it has kind of evaporated. It has become spongy and soft and flexible, and we are not so sure it is there any more. That is the nature of this government. This Premier could be the opener for David Copperfield. He has got his disappearing act down to a tee. That is what has happened to this government. It is too bad, and it is a sad part.

The new MLA from Minto (Mr. Swan) was talking about concern about this being a have-not province. Yes, we are concerned about being a have-not province, but the member from Minto must know it was not me who labelled it a have-not province. It was not the Tories who labelled this as a have-not province. It was the Premier (Mr. Doer) who labelled it as a have-not province. The Premier has repeatedly said, "We are a have-not province. We are desperate. We beg for more resources. We are such a desperate have-not province that we need help."

Every week or so he goes down to Ottawa and says, "Give us help because we are in such terrible have-not straits here." The member from Minto must know it is the Premier who is sending that message not just to Manitobans, he is sending that message all the way across the country. It is not a very good message to be sending because the message we want to send is that we are a have province so people will come here, so people will invest here. That is what we want. We want a plan to be a have province but this Premier keeps on saying, "We are a have-not province. We need to beg for more resources because we are in such desperate have-not straits."

We need to change that. We need to have a plan. We need to make the money that we get for example from equalization transfers accountable. We need at least to indicate where and how we are spending that money and how it is going to make a difference, how it is going to move us from being a have-not to a have province and how it is going to meet our constitutional responsibilities as recipients of equalization transfers, our constitutional responsibilities to provide reasonably equivalent services and reasonably equivalent levels of taxation. In that case the government has fallen short both in terms of reasonably equivalent services in areas for example like sleep disorder testing. It is hard to say we have reasonably equivalent sleep disorder testing services when Thunder Bay has more testing services than the whole province of Manitoba. It is hard to say we have reasonably equivalent levels of taxation when we have so many areas where our levels of taxation are so much higher.

When will the Premier meet these constitutional responsibilities? The NDP have talked a lot but again and again they have failed to deliver. There are examples after examples of their failures and I could go on and on. That is really the sad part about it. I do want to cover a few particular items as well. We had

children in here from a school in Arborg today. The situation in their school is that some parts of the school are very cold. It is almost freezing, and other parts are so hot you could go around in shorts. *[interjection]* Somebody forgot to look into the heating system or the insulation or something because there is a problem. This was Arborg. These were the students in Arborg. They actually invited the Member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) to lunch, but, as I understand it, he had to go to the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. That is all right.

Once again, we see the promise is not met, the problems persist. When it comes to BSE, the government could have been on the ball. We could have had significant increases in slaughter capacity already but we do not. We could have had mandatory testing of all animals over 30 months to guarantee the quality of our Manitoba beef, the best in the world, and to be able to market it well all over the place, but we do not. This government could have done so much but it has done so little.

In terms of lakes, that promise of lakes. Well, we all know Lake Winnipeg with many more algal blooms than five years ago. The fisheries on Lake Winnipegosis are as bad or worse as five years ago. They have not been able to implement a good action plan. Conditions on Lake Manitoba where people have raised concerns are similar to what they were five years ago.

Kississing Lake, which I visited in September, here is a lake, a wonderful fishing, tourist lake in northern Manitoba, some 25 miles by 25 miles, beautiful scenery, wonderful fishing conditions and, is it being looked after? No, there is a really sad and sorry story here. There was a mine there and a huge tailing pond. When that tailing pond could have been contained with cofferdams so that there was no leaking, but no, no, the NDP have done nothing.

What has happened is that day by day and week by week and month by month and year by year, the toxic wastes have been flowing out on to the Kississing Lake. It is so bad the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) knows that for five miles not even an invertebrate can live. How can you have fish when they have no invertebrates to eat? For miles beyond that there are problems with the lake and yet, the NDP government has done nothing. There are concerns about the water supply for the people in

Kississing Lake and yet the NDP has not resolved those concerns either. One after another, these concerns have not been met, and it is too bad. We would wish for better. We had hoped for better but clearly, the NDP have not delivered.

It is sad and it is in this vein that I now move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux),

THAT the amendment moved by the Member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Murray) be amended by adding, thereto, the following words:

That this House further regrets:

- (1) the government's failure to provide Manitobans with accessible health care leading to concern among patients and health care providers;
- (2) the government is not accountable to, or transparent to, the people of Manitoba;
- (3) the government has no plan to address child poverty in Manitoba, the second highest in Canada;
- (4) the government has failed to adequately address education taxes on residential property and farmland;
- (5) the government has failed to implement an effective strategy to address the growing problem of crime;
- (6) the government has no economic plan to move Manitoba out of the ranks of the "have-not" provinces;
- (7) the government has failed to take action to clean up lakes like Kississing Lake;
- (8) the government has failed to take action with respect to the long waiting times for testing for sleep disorders.

AND HAS THEREBY lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House.

* (16:30)

Mr. Speaker: Order. To deal with the subamendment, I would ask the honourable mover of this amendment, the bottom line, "AND HAS THEREBY lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House," is already in the amendment that was moved prior. So, if the honourable member agrees, we could delete it from the subamendment. Then that would make the amendment in order. You agree? *[interjection]* Okay. We will remove that line and I will read the motion.

It has been moved by the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), seconded by the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux),

THAT the amendment moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray), be amended by adding thereto the following words:

That this House further regrets:

- (1) the government's failure to provide Manitobans with accessible health care leading to concern among patients and health care providers;
- (2) the government is not accountable or transparent to the people of Manitoba;
- (3) the government has no plan to address child poverty in Manitoba, the second highest in Canada;
- (4) the government has failed to adequately address education taxes on residential property and farmland;
- (5) the government has failed to implement an effective strategy to address the growing problem of crime;
- (6) the government has no economic plan to move Manitoba out of the ranks of the have-not provinces;
- (7) the government has failed to take action to clean up lakes like Kississing Lake;
- (8) the government has failed to take action with respect to the long waiting times for testing for sleep disorders.

As I had informed the House that this subamendment is in order, are there any members who wish to debate it?

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I rise today to speak in my support of the Speech from the Throne on November 22, 2004, at the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. While this Throne Speech has addressed many important issues facing Manitoba today, it also has been very futuristic and is the map for moving ahead on several economic and social fronts.

Let me begin with my own assessment of the government's vision and its plan to build Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I believe, at the time when Canadians are looking for our own policies to be developed in Canada by Canadians for Canadians, our Premier (Mr. Doer) in reality has set a new way, a unique way to govern with fiscal responsibility and, at the same time, create sustainable growth based on universality, equal opportunities with value of social justice, humanity and dignity for all citizens.

To me, it is an experience which I really enjoy. I really see Manitoba moving ahead with the best possible road map on economic development and a great future. I know that we are on the right path.

We know that some provinces in Canada are fortunate, like Ontario and Alberta where the wealth is created due to the geographic advantages and abundance of resources. The irony is that their governments get all the credit for doing a great job when the flow of revenue comes from the least amount of effort and creative work by the governments. We, on the other hand, Mr. Speaker, have a strategy which we will be addressing in my follow-up sentences.

It is not rocket science to know that with abundance of natural resources and natural wealth like oil and gas, Alberta has done well, but let us look at Manitoba and our great geography and history. Manitoba, being a small province, basically has depended on the farm and agricultural economy for a long period. Some of the developments have occurred in the past toward building of some economic base, but it has not been that great during the early sixties and seventies. A new vision was needed to make a change in Manitoba's economic future.

It was at that time that the NDP's visionary leader, the Right Honourable Edward Schreyer, who had the vision to build Manitoba Hydro and the Public Insurance Corporation in Manitoba. Both utilities are sources of good revenue for the public who are getting the services at the best rates in this country.

Development of Manitoba Hydro is an example of leadership which looks ahead and takes bold steps to build, compared to those who call these public assets socialist investments.

I am proud, Mr. Speaker, to say that history is repeating itself under the leadership of our Premier, Premier Garry Doer, who has a great vision to build the future of Manitoba, and I am proud to say that we have our colleagues on this side of the House who are literally, brilliantly looking at building the future of Manitoba together.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you some of this growth of strategies that have been addressed in the Throne Speech.

Manitoba is the first in growth in earnings, with weekly earnings growing more than twice the national rate and providing an average increase of \$1,560 annually.

Manitoba is third in growth in capital investment, expecting a 5.4% increase in 2004, well above the national average of 3.1 percent.

Population growth is at its highest level since the 1980s. Young Manitobans are staying here in increasing numbers, from a net loss of young people in 1999 to a net gain in 2004. In fact, I, my entire family, relatives moved in the late nineties from Manitoba because there was no opportunity here.

The biotech sector is the fastest growing in Canada, employment is up 35 percent in the past 18 months.

The annual immigration level has reached 7500 in 2004, and we are looking ahead to the target of 10 000 in years to come.

Manitoba's seven-point action plan for economic growth continues in collaboration with the Premier's Economic Advisory Council. This Province is working with industry to provide the largest

expansion of skills in training in the history and emphasis on cutting-edge industries such as biotechnology, research and development, and diversification of food products.

We know that the opposition would like to talk about health care again, not because they are in love with the people of Manitoba and they believe that their health care must be looked after. I think it is more political. The real intentions are they are trying to initiate an Americanization of Canadian medicine.

I am a strong believer that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray), who has already stated this publicly that he would like to have private health-care initiatives started in Manitoba, has an agenda that we will reject, because we do not want an Americanization of Canadian medicare. We will overwhelmingly reject it not only in Manitoba, but in the entire Canada. Their friends in Ottawa would definitely like to do that, but I am informed that this something that Canadians do not want.

Health care is a crisis which is a national crisis. It is not only national, it is a global crisis. This is an issue which is a very serious issue. This is not an issue that can be used as a political tool, exploited in the House to debate on individual cases and to make us feel that we are not doing our job. I think that health care has moved a lot on the futuristic point. I would say that when you look at the investments which are being done today in Manitoba, our future health care will speak for itself in years ahead.

* (16:40)

I would like to ask the members on the opposite side to show one example of one reason in Canada that there are surplus of doctors, that there are a surplus of health care workers, that there are no wait lines. It is a national problem. I think we are not doing terribly badly. We have done a lot of investment in rural Manitoba. We have done a lot of investment here which results will show in months and years to come. It is impossible to find instant solutions to growing demands on health care, but, Mr. Speaker, we are on the right track and moving ahead.

In particular I am also pleased to see several community health action centres being built throughout the city. In particular I am very happy to see and thankful to the government for having

approved the Health Care Action Centre in Radisson with a \$3.5 million investment which will benefit the residents of my constituency and that of Transcona. Five years ago, a plan to restore public health care in Manitoba was launched. We can see some of the things happening, which are increased training of doctors, nurses and health technicians, capital investment in hospitals and equipment, a health provincial agenda, service innovations to provide access to health care and timeliness of essential procedures. In each area, significant progress has been made. The number of nurses being educated throughout the province has doubled. This year a program will be introduced to educate Aboriginal midwives and nurses for practice in northern communities.

Much of the \$800 million invested in the new health capital since '99 has gone to upgrade rural and northern health facilities, and for the first time, to purchase and operate major diagnostic equipment outside our cities. This is, Mr. Speaker, a futuristic, socially responsible move. It will show results a few years from now unlike our other friends on that side who are desperate to install private health care in Manitoba, we reject it.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to talk about education. This particular faculty is very unique to me because my father was a vice-principal of a college and out of my older brothers they were all university professors and teachers. To me, education is the fundamental basic need to build a better society. I remember when I was growing up. There is a Hindu goddess called Sarasvati. She has a violin in her hand and a book. The violin displays the ideal of music and art and the book, of course, is the source of knowledge. I think, with that philosophy coming in, I am proud to see the government here on this side of the House has the vision to develop education right from the schools, fundamentally from kindergarten onwards, with the philosophy of building up the sports, arts and all these things that are very fundamental to the basic value of education in our society.

I remember last time there was some talk of taking the sports and other facilities, other actions away from the classroom, which was suggested by the opposite side which is very tragic for us to make education just a process of book knowledge, but we have really looked at a very unique strategy. Also, I see some excitement being built in the campuses of

the University of Manitoba, which I attended a few weeks back. I saw a tremendous amount of change happening. We see a new Red River College in the downtown area flourishing. We see the University of Brandon. We see the University of Winnipeg. We see some northern university centres being opened. A lot of exciting things are happening in the field of education. If I were on that side, I would have applauded. I would have enjoyed the growth of investment in education which has resulted in since '99 there are 13 000 more students enrolled in Manitoba colleges and universities, including 1300 more Aboriginal students.

What this reflects is the vision of the government. This reflects the vision of our policies and our priorities. On the sustainability of environment, water stewardship and green strategies, we have seen a new ministry has been started. We are trying to really go into the fundamental cause and trying to correct the quality of life by improving the quality of water in all communities. Since '99, this government has invested \$79 million to upgrade water and sewer services in 92 communities across the province. The sale of bulk water from Manitoba waterways has been banned. The Province has worked with partners on both sides of the U.S. border to fight water projects that could harm the reservoir system. I am proud to see our hardworking Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) bringing changes for the better quality of life to all communities.

Manitoba's Green Strategy is also something very, very unique. I think that we have seen that the growth has been managed well in the preservation of our environment promoting the health and well-being of citizens and enhances our unique Manitoba lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, I state this with great pride that one of the most respected Canadians in modern history, Tommy Douglas, stated: "Courage, my friends, it is not too late to build a better world." I am really honoured to be part of this government led by Premier Doer who has led this government for the past several years with a new vision to make Manitoba a leader in green economy and renewable energy. I feel proud to be part of this government which governs with a principle of balancing budgets, of investing in the future, of working with all citizens, of an open and honest government. We are indeed on the right path of building a better

Manitoba which will be part of the better world for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to rise today to respond to the Throne Speech. I feel it is an honour and a privilege to have this opportunity on behalf of the people of Charleswood. I am very grateful to my community of Charleswood for their confidence and faith shown in me by electing me to represent them here. I am very committed to them, to the people I represent.

I would like to welcome back to the House, Mr. Speaker, all honourable members, and a special welcome to my new colleague, the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), and also to the new Member for Minto (Mr. Swan). I would like to wish them both well and hope that they find their new role to be as exciting and rewarding as I have found mine.

I would like to also welcome the pages and the interns, and hope that they find it to be a rewarding experience for them as well, and to the table officers and Sergeant-at-Arms, a big welcome back to all of you.

To the Speaker, I would like to say I appreciate your patience and your fairness in doing your job, and I also wish you well during this session.

David Copperfield's coming to town must have influenced the Premier (Mr. Doer) because this Throne Speech that was delivered was more about illusion than about anything else. I have to say what a disappointment. At a time when Manitoba is crying out for strong leadership and a strong vision for this province, we got served crumbs. I said it last year and I will say it again: Where was the strategy to grow the economy, to make this province competitive, to create an environment that will attract new business, keep current business here, and create jobs.

It is such an embarrassment that Manitoba may soon be the only have-not province in western Canada, that even Saskatchewan is doing better than us and taking advantage of its opportunities to move their province forward. They have an economic plan and a vision that drives it. The Doer government's economic plan is gambling revenues and handouts

from Ottawa. The only way they have achieved balanced budgets here in this province is through significant raids on Manitoba Hydro and the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. By the way, that raid on Hydro, Mr. Speaker, contributed to a 10% increase in hydro rates in this province.

The Doer government does not want to get their hands dirty with the real hard work. They would rather look for the easy way out, the lazy way out. They would try to fight with the federal government to make them increase equalization payments.

* (16:50)

Mr. Speaker, 30 percent of Manitoba's revenue already comes from equalization transfers. That is up 21 percent since the late nineties. Yet still the Doer government is pushing for more, so they force Manitoba to face the dismal prospect of being the poor cousin among the four western provinces. Will our young people stay here if the situation is like that? Will dynamic businesses move here? Will businesses want to stay here? Will confidence drive opportunity from here, or will this lack of confidence in our province drive opportunity from here? Will Manitoba grow strong and proud? I do not think so.

Governments are supposed to create climates where the economy can thrive, where Manitoba can be competitive. Instead the Doer government has signalled that the Premier's timid, non-visionary status quo will continue to win out over modernization, progress, and prosperity. How pathetic is that? Why not do the right thing and commit to completely eliminating education taxes off of residential property and farm land by 2007? Why not help farm families struggling through BSE and weather related crises?

Why not help property owners in Winnipeg, who have already seen a 33% increase in education taxes on property since the Doer government came into office in 1999? This would be a great kick start for this province. It would ease the burden on hardworking Manitoba families, families who are also burdened with a health care system in crisis, families who are burdened with a justice system struggling to keep the people of this province safe, families who are worried about the murder rate in this province. Why not help them? Why not present more than one minute in the Throne Speech in talking about justice. What about families who are

burdened by having the highest personal income taxes west of New Brunswick? Why did the Throne Speech not deal with any of that, and for families who are burdened with amongst the highest property taxes in Canada?

Families in Manitoba do not ask for much but they deserve so much more than what this government offered up in this Throne Speech, because this government offered them nothing more than crumbs. Did the Premier recognize any of this in the Throne Speech? He did not even come close. Instead he tried to tell everybody that things were so good that his biggest problem now is managing what he called growth. Well, Stats Canada has something to say to this Premier, this illusionist, about this spin that he was putting out there about managing this so-called growth in this province.

So let us start with job growth. According to StatsCan, the number of net new jobs grew by only 0.3 percent last year, well below the national average of 2.2 percent. Manitoba ranked ninth out of ten provinces in job growth last year. The year before that, Manitoba's job growth was only 1.6 percent, again below the national average of 2.2 percent. In fact, Manitoba's job growth was well below the average growth for Canada every year since the NDP was elected in 1999. Well, that is not very reassuring news for the future of this province.

Well, what about this year? In the first six months of 2004 Manitoba's job growth was 0.7 percent. The national average was 1.8 percent. So what is all this boasting about, boasting about how much more Manitobans are earning today? Well, actually, we have one of the worse records in Canada on earnings and it is getting worse, not better; again, the illusion of spin from this Premier of this province. In 1999, Manitoba ranked seventh out of 10 provinces in average weekly earnings and we have since fallen to eighth place behind provinces such as Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. Despite all the Premier's hype about how well Manitoba is doing economically, Manitoba's economic growth has come in below the national average every year except one since 1999.

There has also been a lot of talk about how Manitoba's population is booming. Is an annual population increase of 0.4 percent a booming year? Most people would not agree, but it is the kind of spin you get from the NDP. We lost a net 3044

people to other provinces last year, up from 2733 the year before. Manitoba had the second worst interprovincial record in the country last year. How is this a province that is booming, that a Premier is so worried that he has to manage growth? Well, maybe he is trying to manage it to the lowest common denominator, because it certainly is not what he is purporting it to be. So where were the initiatives in the Throne Speech to spur real growth in this province? I imagine that is something that is probably very foreign language to the Doer government.

In this Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, we should have heard a signal that the Doer government would move away from an agenda that has caused serious economic harm to this province; serious economic pain. *The Winnipeg Sun* captured it accurately when they wrote, and I quote, "To say this Premier has been a disappointment for Manitoba since taking office in 1999 would be an understatement." I think this Throne Speech certainly points to that. Besides having the highest individual income taxes for middle income earners west of New Brunswick, we also have among the highest corporate taxes in Canada. We also have one of the most anti-business labour laws in the country that is keeping businesses from wanting to move to Manitoba. This government spends beyond its means, posting three straight years of deficits even after raiding Manitoba Hydro hundreds of millions of dollars and after almost depleting the rainy day fund. Manitoba's total debt is now at its highest level in history and it continues to grow, and I think we have an NDP government to thank for that. It is hardly fair to the children of this province who are going to be stuck paying off this debt, and as a mother of two of those children I find that very, very offensive. *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg) has just indicated that I am whining. Well, on behalf of all of the people in this province, the individuals who pay high taxes, the businesses that pay high taxes, everybody who is working hard, we cannot get doctors here because of the high taxes in this province, this member from Rossmere is actually sitting there on behalf of all the people in this government, and that probably is a reflection of his government and his Premier, thinking all these people who are talking about things like this are whiners. Well, shame on the member from Rossmere and shame on everybody in that government for having those low expectations for this province. You should be ashamed of yourself, all of you.

Mr. Speaker, a recent Winnipeg Chamber survey showed that three out of four businesses in Manitoba believe that the Doer government was doing a poor job of creating a positive economic climate for Manitoba. So are they whining, too? Is that what the member of Rossmere would have us believe, that the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce is whining when they say, when all these business people say, that three out of four think that the Premier is doing a poor job or that the economy here is so poor? Well, we are not whining. This is not good news for Manitobans and Manitobans should be worried. We should be worried, because Manitoba is being left in the dust by other more progressive provinces, and we are now being left in the dust by every western province in Canada, and we will be the last have-not province left. That is a pretty dismal record for this government. What Manitobans needed to hear in this Throne Speech was a vision from its Premier, but that vision was not there.

Mr. Speaker, it seems this government is more obsessed with minutiae at the expense of grander problems. That particularly applies to health care. While the Doer government is busy rearranging the furniture in areas like health, what seems to be neglected is the fact that the roof is near collapse. They have no grand scheme for health care, so said the former Minister of Health. There is no grand scheme to grow the provincial economy either. There is no plan to curtail government spending, to make things like health care more affordable. It is great to advertise for doctors, but does anyone really think doctors in Alberta, B.C., Ontario and Saskatchewan are going to rush to Manitoba once they compare their income and property tax bills, or what they will be paid here, or what they will take home here after working hard? That is the problem. The Premier just did not offer a grander vision on how we can rebuild the house. The Doer government squandered an opportunity in this Throne Speech to give Manitobans some faith and hope that the health care system was going to be improved. I would just like to tell the Doer government that for somebody who campaigned to fix health care, they are doing a lousy job.

* (17:00)

Mr. Speaker, I thought that there would be something more substantive offered up in the Throne Speech, considering that we hear of weekly crises in health care, but the speech was sorely lacking about how to address these very serious problems.

I have very, very grave concerns about the appointment of the Member from Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale) as the Minister of Health. His poor management of the Hydra House scandal does not give me any comfort at all that he is going to have the commitment to properly address the problems in health care.

Accountability and transparency, Mr. Speaker, are paramount and highly significant in the management of health care right now, so how can a minister who mismanaged the investigation of the Hydra House scandal, who mismanaged the whole issue of misappropriation of funds and basically went ahead and did such a cursory investigation into that, and basically walked away from it thinking that he had done enough. We find out later that he totally missed the seriousness of what was happening and walked away from what is really a scandal in this province. Now this man, who could not manage an investigation of a \$1-million misappropriation in Hydra House is now responsible for a \$3.2-billion budget in this province.

How can we have any faith in this particular man when he basically dropped the ball in a huge way on investigating a significant scandal in Manitoba? In fact, in 2002 what the member said at that time when he was the Minister of Family Services, and I quote, "We have made all of the normal and some quite extraordinary checks into the issue. We are satisfied that what we are seeing is quality service, adequate accountability and a dispute between a former employee and a boss." On August 8 he said, and I quote, "I do say that a thorough investigation was done and the complaints were not substantiated apart from very minor issues you would find typically in a congregated care setting that could be strengthened."

The Premier of the province takes somebody like that, who made such a big mess of dealing with Hydra House, and he has put him in charge of the health care system that is crumbling around us where we are seeing a crisis, week upon week. I really have to question the Premier's judgment in making that particular minister the Minister of Health.

Based on that, Mr. Speaker, with all of this money that is now going to be flowing into the province from this most recent health accord, I have called for, and I will again call for, a full accounting of where that government is going to be spending this \$75-million windfall this year and it is over \$100

million every year after that. What I fully believe should happen is that those federal dollars should be put into a trust account and that that money should be accounted for as it is taken from the trust account and used to bring down waiting lists.

Mr. Speaker, I have huge concerns that this money may not end up where it is supposed to be going. We have got a lot of union negotiations going on right now and I hope that this government does not intend to take that money to put forward into solving union negotiations. That money is meant to bring down waiting lists for people that are waiting for surgery. We have got 10 000 people right now waiting for CT scans and MRIs in Manitoba. We have got over 2000 people in Brandon on a surgical waiting list. We have got over 4000 people in this province waiting for cataract surgery. We have got 1200 kids with rotting teeth, in pain, who cannot get surgery because this government has got all this money. Now I am not even sure where all this money is going because it is sure not going to bring down waiting lists.

I would really like to see this government take that money, put it in a trust account so that we can trust it is being used for the reason that it was meant to be used for. I have huge concerns that that is not what is happening right now.

Mr. Speaker, the lack of anything new, and specifically, the lack of a plan in health care, the lack of solutions to the weekly crisis tells me that this Doer government is really struggling to keep its head above water. I reiterate, I think they are doing a lousy job of something they made a strong commitment to. They said they were going to fix health care. Well, they have not even come close to that. This is not the health care system that the NDP promised Manitoba. They promised to fix it in six months with \$15 million. Well, a billion dollars later and it is crumbling around us. They were going to hire all the staff that was needed and slash all the waiting lists. It has turned out that they are not the saviours of health care. They never were and they never will be.

Why, Mr. Speaker? Because health care needs good management and this government does not have a clue on how to do that, particularly when it comes to health care. You cannot just continue to throw money at it, hope that it is going to stick somewhere and solve some problems. It does not

work that way and, in fact, I believe in the end that is going to make it far worse. Worse, not just for the health care system and the patients in it, but for all of the other programs that are being drained of dollars to prop up this health care system, this failing health care system, because all their money is doing right now is propping up the status quo. We are already seeing a lot of problems in this province, whether it is in justice, in education, in family services, because all of the money is being taken from a lot of those other programs and poured into health care, and it is going to have a detrimental effect across the board.

This might be a good time to remember all the members who are sitting here heckling away that it was the Tories who introduced medicare into Manitoba. So for those members who think that the Tories do not have a legacy here in Manitoba, I just would like to remind the members that it was the Tories who brought medicare to Manitoba and that is not an NDP legacy. But it is the NDP who are putting it at risk. It is the NDP who are putting that great medicare legacy at risk. Their mismanagement, their slowness to respond to serious issues until they become a crisis and hit the front page of the papers, their lack of a plan, their lack of knowledge about sustainability, and their blind ideology will eventually force this system into serious, serious trouble. We see it in their lack of solutions in this Throne Speech.

Perhaps the real reason the Doer government has not revealed its health care strategy to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, is because it does not have one. I believe that what we are seeing in the management, or mismanagement, of health care in this province is a government flying by the seat of their pants, going from crisis to crisis, without a real vision of where they want to go, and without a plan they are all over the map.

If they had a plan, would there be doctor shortages in almost every community in Manitoba, including major centres such as Winnipeg, Brandon, The Pas? If the NDP had a plan, would there be over 2000 Brandon area residents on a waiting list for surgery, or 1200 children waiting for dental surgery? Would there be over 10 000 patients waiting for MRIs and CT scans today? Would rural communities be in fear and despair of their hospitals closing? If the NDP had a plan, would hospitals need to cut OR days because of a lack of anesthetists? Would there be an emerging orthopedic crisis? Would cardiac and

ER patients have died waiting for care? If the NDP had a plan, would administrative costs in RHAs have skyrocketed? Would we have a health care system that threatens to bankrupt the provincial budget? Would there be 4400 patients waiting for cataract surgery? Would beds for addicted patients have been cut? Would there be a crisis in Brandon where there is a surgical wait list of over 2000 and a shortage of half of the pediatricians, forcing high-risk pregnant moms and sick babies and children to be rushed to Winnipeg by ambulance to see a doctor? Would there be highway medicine if the NDP had a plan? Would mentally ill patients be falling through the cracks?

* (17:10)

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, and I wish I had the time to outline some of the serious gaps and problems in the system but, unfortunately, I do not have that much time. The sad fact is that the NDP rode to victory five years ago on a commitment to save our ailing health care system. Today, despite the fact that the Province has increased health spending by 50 percent since 1999, we are no further ahead. So why is it happening to a province that spends \$6,000 every minute on health care? Why are we not getting a bigger bang for our buck? Is it really fair that Manitobans are forced to wait for health care just because their government is unwilling to look for innovation in how it delivers that care to its citizens?

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Doer government to listen to the public and begin building the health care system that Manitobans want, a system that is going to allow people to get the care they need when they need it. It is time for the Doer government to take the politics out of health care and start making the right decisions for the right reasons, and get rid of the ideology that drives so much of their decisions. It is time to put patients first.

It is time for the Doer government to put a plan in place. As a former nurse who has been in the trenches, I firmly believe this is needed. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Doer government does not have a grand scheme for health care. Leaving health care to be managed from crisis to crisis, this is terribly, terribly unfortunate for Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, not one mention in the Throne Speech on Manitoba being the biggest spender in

health care in the country. Not one word on how to sustain that funding, on how to find deficiencies in health care. Not one word about innovative reform, about evaluation of regionalization, just more of the same, more of the status quo, more blindly pouring money into a system and not being able to say if this money is making a difference in patient outcomes.

All of the research that is out there right now is showing us that money alone will not fix the system. With over a billion dollars of new money in health care, you would think that we should be seeing monumental improvements. Instead, parts of the system are in absolute crisis. I want to right now commend the front line workers of health care because they are the ones, they are the glue that is holding the system together. It is the government that is making it more and more difficult for them to do their job every day. It is all of those professionals on the front lines that are the ones making the big difference in health care. Shame on this government for making their jobs so much harder. This government is just blindly pouring money into the health care system, and that is only perpetuating the system's inefficiency and the system's status quo.

Mr. Speaker, this government had an opportunity in this Throne Speech to put forward a dynamic vision for Manitoba for the people of this great province, and they failed so miserably to do that. They are in their sixth year of governing, and at about this time, you would think that they would have more successes and more good things happening in the province.

I think it is really demonstrated, even by their own members as they stand here giving their speeches, they do not even have enough in their speeches to acknowledge what they should be acknowledging, and that is good things are happening by their government. Instead, they spend the majority of their speech discrediting the opposition. They are into their sixth year, and by now, they should be only talking about what they perceive to be good things. I suppose if you do not have enough good things that your government is doing, you have to scramble and find something else to look at. Therefore, you end up attacking the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen that every year by the Doer government, and I am absolutely surprised that, into their sixth year, we are still hearing that from the

members that stand up in this House and talk about their response to the Throne Speech. I have never, ever heard that when we were in government. I do not ever recall that our members in government stood up and spent time criticizing the opposition. Well, that is absolutely silly, unless they feel so threatened by the opposition that that is the only thing they know what to talk about in a Throne Speech. That is really too bad they cannot find something better in their own achievements. I think it speaks to their own Throne Speech that they are grasping at finding good things to talk about.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that this Premier has not left a good mark in terms of this Throne Speech or any Throne Speech. He has spent a very timid five years as a Premier, and it looks like we are in for another timid year. We are not seeing the kind of bold, innovative moves that a province needs to make in order to become a have province. Instead, we continue to see a premier of this province really taking a very easy way out to try to find the resources either by robbing Crown corporations or the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, or going begging cap in hand to Ottawa all the time, and that really is a pathetic way for a Premier to be looking at building a province.

We will never become a have province as long as the Premier of Manitoba has that as the basis for how he sees his economic vision. Then you can throw all of the gambling revenues in that because that is the other part of the equation of how this Premier sees Manitoba having an economic vision.

Mr. Speaker, it still looks like a dangerous backward slide, and I think we are continuing to be in for some dark days, and we on this side of the House will continue to raise our voices to that. We cannot let that happen to Manitoba, and I pledge to continue to work my hardest to keep the NDP government accountable, to push them to reach higher than mediocrity because I think Manitobans deserve a lot better than that. Manitobans deserve a lot better than mediocrity. We should at least fight hard to try to become a have province, and join the rest of western Canada and other provinces in this country at trying to be the best that we can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, as I begin, I want to congratulate two new members of

this Assembly on their election and welcome them. They are the new Member for Minto (Mr. Swan) and the new Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen). I hope that they enjoy their years of public service here, and I am sure they will both make a valuable contribution to debates in this Chamber.

I have been elected for 14 years, but this may be the fifteenth Throne Speech in which I have participated. As a result, I am going to do something quite different which will sound like a sermon. I do so reluctantly because I do not want to encourage other members to start quoting Scripture because then we will just get into an endless competition which will only determine who has the best concordance for looking up supposedly relevant passages. Probably in a competition like that, the Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos) would beat me. Also, I do not believe that I have any special corner on the truth, so what I say is just my interpretation of Scripture.

You may wonder why I am using this approach to my Throne Speech debate, which I am happy to explain.

On November 14, I was the Scripture reader in my congregation, and as I sat listening to our minister, Juanita McKinnon Smith, expound on the passage I read, I realized that the passage read and preached upon, namely Isaiah, Chapter 65, verses 17 to 25, sums up some of my core beliefs and sums up who I am as a social democrat.

By way of background, let me explain two different kinds of prophecy in Scripture. You are probably the most familiar with the prophecy which has to do with foretelling the future. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures contain many examples of this kind of prophecy, but there is another kind of prophecy which I believe the passage from Isaiah is a part of, which has been described as forth telling the word of God to today's society. I am indebted to the late Professor R.B.Y. Scott and his book, *The Relevance of the Prophets*, for most of this idea.

I have also been reading a fascinating book called *Christian Perspectives on Politics* by J. Philip Wogaman. He says there is an epigram which describes, he being R.B.Y. Scott, which describes these prophets as "forthtellers rather than foretellers." They did not speak of our age but to our age. Because spiritual and moral issues are present in

every society and every age, their message is still relevant.

* (17:20)

Another way of paraphrasing the prophets and how we use their wisdom today is to say that they spoke the truth to power. They spoke on behalf of God usually to the priests and to kings. This tradition has continued today whereby Christians are encouraged, as someone has said, to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

Now let me examine briefly how this applies to someone in elected office. I believe it is possible to speak the truth to power even as an elected person to government, but I clearly understood Cabinet solidarity before I was elected and, in fact, I first understood Cabinet and caucus solidarity when I studied civics in Grade 10. My teacher at the time was Mr. Peter Hill, the best teacher I ever had, and who encouraged my passion for current events and politics, but I digress. I knew before I was elected that I could speak up and say whatever I want, including speaking in the truth to power behind closed doors in caucus meetings. I also knew that I also had to defend in public all the policies of my caucus in opposition and in government, and that if I did not, I would have to accept the consequences. I would hasten to add that it is much easier to defend one's policies when part of the official opposition than when in government. In opposition, as we used to say that one can be on the side of the angels, that one could pick and choose one's issues and even the critique of government policy. It is not so easy being on the government side. One has to defend everything because your government or, in this case, our government is responsible for every policy, every decision made and every dollar spent.

Surprisingly, I have not had to speak the truth to power very often in caucus, and I think the reason for that is that our policies have moved in very progressive directions. In fact, I am even surprised at the speed and progressiveness of our policies. I was Chair of a number of policy committees before the 1999 election, who wrote and recommended policy to our provincial party which we hoped to enact as government. I would say that in the areas of family services that I was responsible for, that our first Minister of Family Services and Housing, the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale), implemented

more and even went beyond the policies that we had recommended in our platform for government.

Let me read the passage which has inspired this speech, mainly Isaiah 65:17 to 25: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former things shall no more be remembered, nor shall they be called to mind.

"Rejoice and be filled with delight. Your boundless realms which I create: for I create Jerusalem to be a delight, and her people a joy.

"I will take delight in Jerusalem and rejoice in my people. Weeping and cries for help, shall never again be heard in her.

"There no child shall ever again die an infant. No old man fail to live out his life. Every boy shall live his hundred years before he dies. Whoever falls short of a hundred shall be despised.

"Men shall build houses and live to inhabit them; plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

"They shall not build for others to inhabit; nor plant for others to eat. My people shall live the long life of a tree, and my chosen shall enjoy the fruit of their labour.

"They shall not toil in vain or raise children for misfortune, for they are the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their issue after them.

"Before they call to me, I will answer, and while they are still speaking I will listen.

"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like cattle. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord."

This is one of many passages which inspired Tommy Douglas. I had the pleasure of hearing Tommy Douglas speak once, in 1979, and I was immediately struck by how often he quoted Scripture or referred to Jesus and the parables. I think that incorporating his Christian beliefs in such a public way was probably appropriate in Saskatchewan, especially between 1944 and 1961 when he was Premier and Saskatchewan was a predominantly Christian society. I think it is less acceptable today, in spite of what I am doing here in this speech, since we live in a multi-faith society. I acknowledge the

multi-faith society in which we live, and recently visited a mosque and explained why I have been fasting during Ramadan for the last four years.

Tommy Douglas wanted to establish the New Jerusalem on the Prairies. For example, in the Saskatchewan election of 1944, Tommy Douglas said, and I quote, "A new economic system is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. We are desirous of building a more just and secure economy, but we are conscious of the fact that when we have improved the economic lot of mankind, we have only begun the much greater task of building a new society. After all, a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesses. Life at its best consists of spiritual values such as regard for truth, a love of beauty and a seeking after righteousness." These words were spoken by Tommy Douglas in a radio broadcast called "Religion and the CCF" during the 1944 election. Many of us here are voting for Tommy Douglas as the greatest Canadian, and if you have not voted yet, I encourage you to vote early and often, or the maximum that is allowed which, I believe, is five times. As the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) indicates, he has already voted for Tommy Douglas.

We as New Democrats have historically taken inspiration from the religious roots of our party to talk about and work toward building in the words of this passage: "A new heaven and a new earth." Just what do we mean by this and how can it be applied to today's NDP and our policies in government?

Isaiah says that no child should die an infant. I take this as an imperative to be proactive as a government to reduce infant mortality rates and to give all children the best start in life we can possibly give them, beginning at gestation. Our government has done that. We were the first government in Canada to implement a prenatal benefit for pregnant women. It is available to all pregnant women in Manitoba with a net family income of less than \$32,000.

There are many early childhood development programs, so I will only give brief descriptions. The Healthy Baby program, in addition to the prenatal benefit, has a community-support program. There is the BabyFirst program which includes universal screening of all births with targeted assessments of at-risk families. There is the STOP FAS which is

delivered from four sites, including Nor' West Co-op Community Health centre in Burrows constituency.

Our government has been proactive in improving parenting and family supports. For example, we have restored the national child benefit supplement for all children from birth to 18 years. When the supplement was introduced in 1998 as an additional payment to low-income families with children, as part of the national child benefit program, Manitoba, under the Filmon Conservative government, and most other provinces, chose to deduct this new money from families on social assistance. In July 2000, Manitoba began restoring the benefit to families with children from birth to age six, and in two further phases, raised the age until all families with children were allowed to keep all of the supplement. A total of \$13 million is being delivered annually to parents.

The effect of this is quite startling, with the income of single parents increasing by 20 percent.

Our objectives were to prevent and reduce poverty, to promote labour-force attachment of parents and to reduce overlap and duplication. I believe we are meeting these objectives.

Another area of great expansion and improvement has been in child day care. Total provincial support is now approximately \$80 million, an increase in funding of 50 percent since we came to office. We have invested in 3500 new spaces and plan to continue this expansion.

Under the rubric of strengthening early childhood development, learning and care is the Early Childhood Development Initiative which assists school divisions and districts to provide services for preschoolers up to five years old. These services focus on helping young children get ready for school. Human and financial resources are available to improve children's readiness to learn, as well as to improve schools, partnerships with parents, communities and relevant support agencies.

In March 2001, we launched the Parent-Child Centred approach. This community development approach brings parents, community organizations, school divisions and health professionals together to support parenting, improve children's nutrition and literacy and build community capacity for helping

families within their communities. Each parent-child coalition plans what community activities are needed based on local needs.

I want to congratulate the Point Douglas Parent-Child Coalition for their exciting and innovative plan to give every child a book on their birthday. This was launched at Faraday School in the presence of coalition members. All the children of that school, the previous Minister of Healthy Living, the Attorney General of Manitoba, and myself were pleased to be in attendance. This worthwhile endeavour was made possible with the co-operation of Pemmican Publishers, who will be supplying many of the books.

I would like to emphasize the importance of all these initiatives regarding children. Governments tend to think very short term, four years. Our government is visionary. We are looking at the long term.

None of these programs are going to benefit people that can vote in the next election, or even the one after that. We are looking to the future. We are looking toward 25 years from now, but you have to start at gestation and birth and early-infant and preschool and school-age children and invest in them now, because it is an investment in their future.

We are putting the money up front. We are not going to get any benefits or see short-term results. We are looking for the long-term results and the benefits to all children in Manitoba. I point out that many of these programs are applicable in First Nations communities, not just off-reserve. Even though they are federal government jurisdiction, many of these programs are being delivered to First Nations communities, because we believe in giving a good start to all children, not just those off reserve. I think that is another innovative policy. We did not have to do that. We did that voluntarily, because we believe that all children deserve a good start in life.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 18 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Friday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 25, 2004

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