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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 19, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

**Bill 203—The Liquor Control Amendment Act
(Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Prevention)**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that Bill 203, The Liquor Control Amendment Act (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Prevention), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, this is one of those bills which, if the government chose to take a proactive stance in fighting fetal alcohol syndrome, it would recognize the value of passing Bill 203. In essence, it's a bill that would ensure there are labels put on alcohol beverages. It would ensure that there's signage that's put in different establishments that sell alcohol, alcoholic beverages.

Mr. Speaker, it's all about education. It's a very serious disorder that's out there. There are things that we can be doing to better educate, and hopefully, I believe through this bill, prevent FASD from occurring in the lives of many, many children in the future.

I don't want to speak at length on this bill. I would rather see it passed to committee, Mr. Speaker. So I hope and trust that the government will show action in allowing this bill, at the very least, to go to committee.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I believe this is the second time that this bill has been on the Order Paper. It seems familiar from a previous session. So I believe this is the second time I've spoken on this bill. It's an interesting idea, and certainly FAS is a serious concern in our society. The result has been that there are many, many government programs directed at people who are affected by FAS or FAE.

In fact, in my constituency, at Shaughnessy Park School, there are FAS classrooms, and our son, Nathan, is a teacher in one of those classrooms, in a grade 4, 5, 6 class. He wanted to specialize in special education and he was fortunate to get a one-year contract. About a month ago, he got a permanent contract with the Winnipeg School Division. He doesn't know yet whether the teacher will be returning to his class and whether he'll be moved to another school, but he will continue in special education. Everyone seems to agree that it's very challenging to be a teacher in an FAS class and I think Nathan would agree as well. On a personal note, he'll be my campaign manager in the upcoming election.

I think my son would be very interested in this bill, and I will take it home and show it to him. I'll tell him what the government position is, which is that it's very expensive and difficult to label individual bottles in one province. It would make more sense if the federal government would mandate this, but, in fact, the federal government has chosen not to do that, even though I believe there was a motion that was approved by the House of Commons to do such a thing. But the health committee of the federal House of Commons, the Standing Committee on Health, recommended that they not proceed with Bill C-206 to require warning labels on alcohol packages.

The recommendation was based on three points: (1) the plan by Health Canada to develop a national comprehensive strategy to address the issue of FASD; (2) the cost of implementation and maintaining a labelling system; and (3) witness testimony in support of established targeted programs.

So, first of all, we think that it's something that the federal government should be doing. Secondly, the federal government, at least the Standing Committee on Health, has recommended to the government that they not do that. I presume the government of the day could still do that. They aren't dictated to by committees. They could still make that a federal initiative.

We are investing money in programming in Manitoba from the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission. We make a \$250,000 annual

commitment to the With Child–Without Alcohol awareness campaign which was launched in 2002. This program was developed with the assistance of Healthy Child Manitoba, the FAS interagency group, Health Canada, the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, the Coalition on Alcohol and Pregnancy, the Fetal Alcohol Family Association of Manitoba, New Directions agency and the Manitoba College of Physicians and Surgeons.

The program includes information kits, a Web site, pamphlets distributed through MLCC Liquor Marts, messages on MLCC Liquor Mart bags, messages on MLCC retail store cash register receipts and posters in MLCC Liquor Marts and health organizations. Signs warning about the dangers of alcohol use during pregnancy have been provided to all licensed establishments, liquor stores and vendors, and specialty wine stores since 1999. FASD awareness training is provided to servers as part of the It's Good Business responsible beverage service program.

In our budget, budget 2007, we made a major investment of \$7.5 million to step up Manitoba's integrated programming related to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. By way of prevention education, Healthy Child Manitoba services a program called STOP FAS, a successful mentoring program that works with women who are pregnant. This program was expanded to include Thompson and The Pas. I believe the first staff for this program were hired by NorWest health clinic which is in Burrows constituency, and I was there to make the announcement a number of years ago. It's a very good program which uses peer mentors to work with pregnant women who have drinking problems. It's also been very successful, I understand.

An FASD education pamphlet is included in rotation in mail-outs out of the Manitoba Healthy Baby prenatal benefit. There is an FASD toll-free line which is run jointly with Health Canada. There is partial support to west region CFS Reclaiming Our Voices program with women who drank during pregnancy.

The clinical practice guidelines for physicians was developed in partnership with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. We have developed and distributed *What Doctors Need to Know About FAS*, a CD for every family doctor, obstetrician and gynaecologist, and all graduating medical students in Manitoba. There is a resource called *What Corrections Needs to Know About FASD*, and

certainly this is a growing problem because children with FASD become teenagers, they become adults, and they end up in our youth corrections system and in our adult corrections system. We need to educate our staff because these individuals need to be dealt with in a different way, and I think there needs to be training and rehabilitation that happens differently for these individuals.

* (10:10)

There's also information called *What Educators Need to Know About FASD* and *What Early Educators Need to Know About FASD*, which are being revised by Healthy Child with the community stakeholders. We published *The SMART Guide: Motivational Approaches Within the Stages for Changes for Pregnant Women Who Use Alcohol* along with the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. Unique to Canada, we have a universal screen for alcohol use during pregnancy which was implemented in January 2003 to measure the success of prevention efforts and assist in new targets. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth includes FASD education materials as part of the new K to 12 health curriculum.

Our Healthy Child department supports two specialized classrooms for students with FASD at David Livingstone School, and I'm glad that I added Shaughnessy Park School because it's not on my speaking notes here. I would point out though that I believe that David Livingstone School was the first one in Canada to have a special classroom for FASD children, and so educators from all over Canada have come to David Livingstone School. Recently I was talking to the principal, and I told the principal that my son was teaching an FAS class, and the principal actually knew my son because he had been to meetings with her at David Livingstone School.

We provide funding to the Fetal Alcohol Family Association of Manitoba which provides support and services to families and promotes public education. We have provided partial funding to the FASD graphics project, a partnership between Red River College and interagency FASD to create tools for use by youth when communicating their disability to others.

We have specialized behavioural treatment intervention to individuals identified as having FASD at Headingley Correctional Centre. We have specialized training for staff in youth correctional facilities. The Youth Justice Project provides diagnostic-appropriate sentencing recommendations

and community follow-up supports for youth coming before the courts suspected of having FASD.

Our resource for teachers called Tapping Hidden Strengths: Working with Alcohol-Affected Students has been developed, as well as inservicing for divisions on how to implement strategies outlined in this document. Funding is provided to support school requirements, including class aids for students with special needs, and these students really do require intensive supervision. For example, in my son's class there are only eight students and there are two teaching assistants, so there are, in effect, three teachers for eight students.

Funding has dramatically increased to community living supports and initiatives. There are two diagnostic clinics, the clinic for alcohol and drug-exposed children in Winnipeg and the fetal alcohol support team in Thompson, providing multi-disciplinary diagnostic and follow-up services to children and families.

The FASD outreach team through Family Services and Housing provides support to birth and adoptive families raising children with FASD diagnoses.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that I think in the long term what we need to do is to make drinking during pregnancy as unacceptable as smoking is in the broader society and that, I think, should be a worthy goal for all of us.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I do welcome the opportunity to put a few words on the record today in respect to Bill 203, The Liquor Control Amendment Act (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Prevention), and I do want to commend the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) for bringing this bill forward.

I think it's a very important bill, and I concur with the Member for Burrows in some of his statements about future goals, to see that prevention of drinking during pregnancy would be the norm in our society because, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that prevention is the key here rather than treatment. That is the goal, of course, recognizing that we do have a lot of people currently within our society that are afflicted by FASD, and treatment is essential, but ultimately the goal is prevention.

I do want to say that the government has brought forward some initiatives in terms of FASD in prevention, but I think we need more strategies directed towards prevention rather than treatment, Mr. Speaker. This bill, I think it's a very simple,

straightforward prevention strategy to put warning labels on alcoholic beverages at point of sale and in locations where alcoholic beverages are sold. I think that this is a very good step in recognizing and trying to educate people as to the problems that can occur once alcohol is consumed while a woman is pregnant, like cigarette packages. Cigarette packages are already labelled with warning signs, and there are some significant photographs on cigarette packages which I think serve as a deterrent for people to smoke. Certainly there's been a lot of recognition over the years that smoking is not good for your health. I know at one time, even, smoking was permitted in this Chamber and I think there are still ashtrays, or what used to be ashtrays, on the desks here. So we've come a long way in terms of educating our society as to what is good and what is not good.

I think that with FASD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, we see a lot of significant problems in society because of this disease, and we need to look towards how we can prevent this from happening in the future. So starting now, over many years, like we did with smoking, we would hope that we would see that.

There is a similar bill in Ontario which was enacted in 2004. It's called Sandy's Law. It requires signage to be posted in licensed establishments that warns of the danger of drinking while pregnant.

I'd also like to take a moment to talk about the effects of FASD on Manitobans. As just one example, in 2005, four young clients of a social services agency here in Winnipeg were the victims of a homicide. All suffered from fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. These incidents all point to the need for strong supports in FASD in the community.

Clearly, there's a lot of work that needs to be done, but I think that this bill does serve as a good starting point. I don't think that there's anything in this bill that anybody could vote against. Here we are just simply trying to have strategies, one more strategy, to encourage women who are pregnant and educate women who are pregnant that there are significant effects if you drink while you are pregnant. So putting labels on alcoholic beverages and signage in places where alcohol is consumed, I certainly think that there's nothing that could be seen to be bad about this. I think it's a very, very good strategy. It's part of a strategy. It's not the whole strategy, Mr. Speaker, but it is a part of it, and I don't see anything negative about that.

I'd just like to talk a few moments about the severity of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and how it affects so many people in Manitoba. It is the leading cause of developmental disability among children and the very, very, very sad part about this statistic is that it is 100 percent preventable, Mr. Speaker. Children born with FASD are often smaller at birth and remain that way for the rest of their lives. They can have a number of developmental difficulties with thinking, seeing, hearing and speaking. I'm told by a mother of a fetal alcohol-afflicted young person that they do not understand consequences and when they are punished, they do not really understand the consequences are relative to their actions. They don't put those two together so, therefore, it does not help to teach them that they shouldn't do that in the future. We have seen this a lot in the media lately about a lot of young people involved in crime, car theft and the like, that many of these young people are afflicted by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and may not quite understand the consequences of their actions.

*(10:20)

We know that FASD has wide-ranging effects, significant implications for health care, for education, justice and family service social services systems. We know that FASD among Aboriginal people is 25 times greater than the rest of the world's average. That is significant for us here in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, as we have a significant Aboriginal population and we need to address these strategies for them.

Just improving the awareness of FASD among Aboriginal people, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important. There are a number of strategies already in place and I welcome those ones, and I commend the government for having put these in place. But this particular bill I don't see a problem with, and I don't see that there's any reason to vote against it. I think that we should unanimously support it. It's a very significant issue in the justice system, the health care system, the social services system.

I want to again just say that I encourage the government to look very seriously at this bill and to pass it to committee and pass the bill. Therefore, I just would like to allow more people to speak on this bill and commend the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) once again for bringing it forward. Thank you.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I'm excited to stand up here and talk about the Manitoba FASD strategy. We

have worked tirelessly with community stakeholders, professionals, foster parents, youth, and designed a strategy that is respected around the country.

The investments that we have made since 1999 have made a difference. They've made a difference as far as public education, prevention, detection, treatment and ongoing family support. We really believe that it is necessary to have a spectrum of services.

Since 2000, through Healthy Child Manitoba alone, we have invested \$8.5 million in evidence-based FASD programs and initiatives. Some of them include STOP FAS, the Fetal Alcohol Family Association, the Coalition on Alcohol and Pregnancy, the FAS pregnancy alcohol screen, and FAS in the classroom. This is a spectrum of initiatives that have provided support to people diagnosed with FASD as well as their families.

It's also provided Manitobans with the information to hopefully prevent FASD. As we know, it's 100 percent preventable. It's important to get that message out, and we've been getting that message out through our service providers throughout Manitoba, through the home visitors that go and meet with parents, through the Healthy Child Manitoba, and the investments that we've made around parenting.

In the FASD strategy, in the Healthy Child's budget for FASD programs, \$1.4 million. This alone represents a 1,400 percent increase since 1999. Prior to that there was only a \$10,000 investment for FASD prevention. I must note that this only represents Healthy Child Manitoba. There are lots of other departments that also invest in FASD strategy such as Education, Citizenship and Youth, Justice and Housing and Family Services. We're able to provide the services that are necessary.

On April 13, I had the honour, along with the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), to make an announcement, and this announcement was received with accolades from all over the province. The announcement was for \$7.5 million for the FASD strategy. What this included was Spectrum Connections. It will be a new mobile team to help youth transitioning out of the foster care system and young adults in support or independent living; \$600,000 in new funding for FASD specialists so Child and Family Services authorities can support agencies to provide services to families, increased diagnostic services for adolescents, funds to enhance public education, a training strategy to

improve existing service delivery systems for individuals with FASD and expansion of the very successful STOP FASD program to three rural and northern communities, more support for women with addictions, more training support for school divisions, as well as increased research guide for the development of new programs and policies.

I think it's very important to mention that \$2.1 million of the strategy has been allocated from the Changes for Children budget, and it must be said that these new initiatives have been implemented with consultation with all of our stakeholders.

Following the announcement, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs sent out a media advisory which endorsed the provincial FASD prevention strategy, and we're very grateful for their partnership in this.

With the supports that we receive, we will continue to make a difference in preventing the incidence of FASD, but as well as providing the necessary supports to all Manitobans with the affliction of FASD. Yes, as the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) stated, they do have challenges, but they also are people with phenomenal strengths and dreams and have a quality of life that needs to be celebrated.

There was a delegation from Manitoba that had the opportunity to go to Victoria, B.C., and participate in an international FASD conference. It was an amazing, life-changing experience which I had the opportunity to participate in. The closing ceremonies included FASD-diagnosed youth and adults who participated. They were the MCs. They were the performers. They developed the flags. They were the ushers. They made this happen, and throughout the whole event, you never saw people with FASD. What you saw were strong, capable, confident, able-bodied individuals that wanted to make a difference and wanted to hear their voices heard.

It was a celebration, a celebration of their past, of their future and the successes that they've experienced. It was very powerful for all of us from Manitoba as we shared and celebrated with their accomplishments.

Healthy Child Manitoba has continued to make investments for the betterment of early childhood development. There's been a total of over \$153 million invested since 2000. This is incredible. This is money that is used for prevention, for

development, and is making a difference for all Manitoba children.

I think it's very important that we support the FASD strategy that we've developed and continue to work on evaluating its successes and ensuring that we are using best practices. At the conference in Victoria, we were approached by many people who talked and spoke about Manitoba being leaders with FASD. It was incredible to hear the support that we received. But we were always very cautious to say: Yes, we have made some accomplishments, but we have more work to do. And we are committed to working with our partners in the prevention of FASD, making sure that the services and the supports that are necessary to ensure that they can, people diagnosed with FASD can have a positive quality of life and continue to contribute to Manitoba as they have in the past. I think it is essential that we continue those conversations.

I think that I can put on the record some specific programs which we've developed in Manitoba.

We have the FASD information phone line. It's a toll-free information line that provides parents and individuals with FASD, and those supporting them, with information on FASD, community strategies for working with specific challenges and resources. It's a free service, but also provides factual information on alcohol use during pregnancy.

The Fetal Alcohol Family Association provides a range of education, advocacy, and support services to families facing the behavioural and social, emotional challenges of raising children. There are special needs funding that happens through Education, Citizenship and Youth to ensure that the children can have the necessary support for them within the schools.

Through Healthy Child Manitoba, we're also proud to support FASD classrooms at David Livingstone School, where we see the success that happens, amazing accomplishments for these youth.

There's also the Families First, which is a community-based home-visiting program to support families with children up to six years old, where the visitors come into the home, provide the necessary support and encouragement to make sure that they can be successful.

Through Children's Special Services, supports are provided as far as case managing, individual services to strengthen the families and support the child and youth. Through Justice, there is the

Youth Justice Project which has seen remarkable outcomes for youth. Once they have the diagnosis, the workers work very hard in managing the case and developing wraparound services and supports for them so they can be successful in the community and at home and continue to thrive and contribute to our society.

I want to thank you very much for allowing me to put these few comments about our FASD provincial strategy and I look forward to more opportunities as we go forward. Thank you.

* (10:30)

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I do want to commend the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) for bringing forward this particular piece of legislation, Bill 203, The Liquor Control Amendment Act, otherwise known as the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder prevention bill. First of all, I just want to read into the record the explanatory note that comes along with this so that everyone's fairly clear on what the principle is, the undertaking behind this particular piece of legislation. This bill prohibits anyone from selling or serving any beverage with more than 0.5 percent alcohol content without a warning about birth defects caused by consuming alcohol during pregnancy. Furthermore, two forms of warning are required: warning labels on bottles, cans and other sealed containers of alcoholic beverages unless they are sold by the case or carton, and warning signs posted in places where alcoholic beverages are sold or served.

Mr. Speaker, the content and the concept of this particular piece of legislation is fairly straightforward. It's a fairly simple undertaking. It's, I guess, quite similar to the legislation that we see around cigarettes and cigarette packaging that has been brought forward over the last number of years. Clearly, we have seen that particular advertising and promotion be very effective in dealing with the ramifications associated with tobacco-smoking or tobacco use. I certainly recognize the Minister for Healthy Living and her comments towards the government strategy on FASD. Certainly, they are spending a lot of money on this particular issue. There seems to be a scattering of money going out across the province. We view this as another tool that can be used in that fight against FASD. We would certainly encourage the government of the day to take a strong, hard look at this particular legislation because we do feel it could be an important tool in dealing with this very, very significant social issue.

In reference to the minister's comments, again we know there's a lot of money going to different areas around the province. Our issue—of course, we know the government can spend money in different areas—we're all about getting value for the dollars that we're investing in different programs. What we want to do, Mr. Speaker, is make sure that those dollars are being spent in an appropriate and an effective manner so that the end of the day, we're getting results on this particular disorder. So, I think this is what it's all about. This particular bill again, as I say, is just another tool to get to where we want to go in the prevention of this particular disease. I think the key point in this particular disorder is that it is preventable. If this particular legislation will stop one or two, or 10, or hopefully hundreds of females from drinking alcohol during pregnancy, we think that will certainly be a very good undertaking.

So, I know the government is certainly spending money in terms of the—a little bit on the prevention side, some in the treatment. Of course we do have a big issue in terms of numbers of FASD across Manitoba. We know our First Nations communities are certainly impacted on a very high percentage basis compared to the rest of the population. So we know those are very significant undertakings and we appreciate where the minister is going in that direction. We're just saying, let's look at all the tools that may be available to us to prevent this very, very significant social disease, I will call it, Mr. Speaker.

I think when we talk about awareness, nothing would hit home to me, in my mind, more clearly than if a pregnant woman was to pick up a bottle when she's going to have a drink and on that bottle there was a warning label. That, to me, would be the most public-awareness position that anyone could have and that is kind of the last case, the last point, where you could actually make an impact on that particular individual. I think, as I said, this bill is very straightforward and would be very easy to implement. It really wouldn't cost the government any money to implement, and I think it can be a very positive result for us in our fight against FASD.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that we do have to do as much as we can because a good percentage of the population is not aware of the very detrimental side effects to drinking while pregnant and, again, this is another tool to stop that or make that awareness known.

We know, of course, what smoking can do in terms of the development of the fetus, and we know

now, through some of the research we've done, the serious side effects that come along with alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, they're very significant. We talk about the first thing we see when a child is born, they're quite often smaller at birth and quite often remain that way through the rest of their lives. So, of course, when we have smaller babies, there are certain restrictions that they will have and, quite possibly, for the rest of their lives. Usually, these particular infants have trouble thinking straight. Their sight and their hearing and their speaking abilities are also detrimentally impacted. So it can be very significant. These children may also look different than regular children too. Also, probably one of the fundamental problems that children with FASD incur is the trouble learning the way other children do. So this will have considerable side effects for them down the road.

The next thing we've learned recently too is the social issues inherent with FASD children. Mr. Speaker, we're really talking about behavioural difficulties associated with FASD. We know this can go on all through childhood and when they get into their adolescent years, those sorts of things continue on. I just make reference to the situation we have in Manitoba with our auto theft situation. In fact, some people will say quite a significant amount of auto theft is a result of kids and adolescents that have been impacted by FASD. So certainly anything we can do to curtail the incidence, the rate of FASD, will have an impact on us, to society.

Mr. Speaker, just to go on and talk in terms of the effects of that disease, you know we're talking about reduced IQ, hyperactivity, reduced attention span, comprehension difficulties, learning disorders. I talked about behavioural problems and, of course, the speech and vision impairment. What that does as well, when you bring these kids into a classroom, that disruption in the classroom has negative effects on the rest of the classroom and the rest of the children in that classroom and their particular ability to develop.

So, Mr. Speaker, obviously we know this is a very important issue in Manitoba. FASD has a very significant implication to all of us in society. All we're asking is the government of the day take a long, hard look at this tool in the prevention of FASD.

I do thank you for the time to put a few words on the record. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to be able to stand up and put a few of my thoughts on the record in regard to the bill that has been proposed, the private member's Bill 203, by the member of the Legislative Assembly for Inkster, The Liquor Control Amendment Act (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Prevention).

This bill is looking to prohibit the sale and service of beverage alcohol with more than 0.5 percent alcohol content without a warning label about birth defects caused by consuming alcohol during pregnancy.

Mr. Speaker, the member has to keep in mind that the labelling is the responsibility of the federal government under the Food and Drugs Act, and, if federally mandated, manufacturers could add a warning label as part of their existing bottling and labelling system.

*(10:40)

In April 2005, this issue was considered by the Standing Committee on Health, and as a result of their considerations, recommendations were made to the House of Commons that they not proceed with Bill C-206 that would require warning labels on alcohol packages. These recommendations were based on three points, one being that a plan by Health Canada to develop a national strategy to address the issue of FASD was under consideration; the cost of implementation and maintaining a label system was going to be quite prohibitive; and that witnessed testimony was there in support of the established targeted programs that were already in existence.

For the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission to implement a labelling program without the participation of other provinces would be very difficult, Mr. Speaker. The Manitoba Liquor Control Commission believes that the high cost of implementing warning labels on beverage alcohol bottles is better directed toward education programs such as the With Child-Without Alcohol program.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that research that was conducted in 2001 to 2003 by the University of Montréal concluded that no studies have shown that labelling alcoholic beverages reduces alcohol-related risky behaviours. Warning labels are an information tool and, in that sense, they need to be a part of a bigger spectrum, a comprehensive strategy that could much better inform people.

Warning labels and posters are one way, Mr. Speaker, that we have right now about educating the public about the effects of alcohol use during pregnancy. We need a broad comprehensive approach based on practices that have proven to be effective in reducing alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Recent research into effectiveness of warning labels indicates that they have the most impact on the amount of alcohol consumed by women who drink less than one drink a day, and that they have no impact on women who drink more than one drink a day.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Today FASD is acknowledged as the most common preventable cause of developmental abilities in Canada, derived from prenatal exposure to alcohol. There are approximately 200 children that are diagnosed with FASD each year in Manitoba. Drawing on the addictions research and community expert advice, Manitoba has worked diligently to foster approaches to FASD which work with public awareness and that effectively we reach the people and the women who are at risk.

The Manitoba Liquor Control Commission has worked hard at making women aware of some of the issues that are out there. They make a \$250,000 annual commitment to their program With Child-Without Alcohol which is an awareness campaign launched in 2002. This program was developed with the assistance of Healthy Child Manitoba, the FASD interagency group, Health Canada, the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, the Coalition on Alcohol and Pregnancy, the Fetal Alcohol Family Association of Manitoba, New Directions Agency, and the Manitoba College of Physicians and Surgeons.

As I said, Madam Acting Speaker, the program includes information that tries to target those who are most at risk, including information kits, a Web site, pamphlets that are distributed through the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission Liquor Marts, messages, as I think many of us have seen on the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission Liquor Marts bags, messages on the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission retail store cash register receipts, and posters in the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission Liquor Marts and health organizations. These signs are there to warn about the dangers of alcohol use during pregnancy, and they've been provided to all

licensed establishments, liquor stores and vendors, and specialty wine stores since 1999.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder awareness training is provided to servers as part of It's Good Business responsible beverage service programs.

Madam Acting Speaker, I'm really pleased to be able to speak to the budget 2007 recommendations and the budget that has just recently passed and to the news release and the information that was put out on our government on April 13, 2007, by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) and the Family Services and Housing Minister.

I think this is a great step forward to support those who are affected with the disorder to be able to reach their full potential in the community. We will be providing \$7.5 million to co-ordinate services, diagnostic and interventions, including money to Spectrum Connections for a new \$450,000 mobile team to help youth who are transitioning out of foster care system and young adults in supported and independent living to access opportunities like housing, education and training, recreation, crisis service, family connections and mentoring.

As I mentioned, Madam Acting Speaker, this is really important to be able to reach out to those people in their own communities, and a mobile team is really important to be able to go out and reach people in an outreach manner rather than expecting people to come to you.

We are also providing \$600,000 in new funding for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder specialists so that the Child and Family Services authorities can support agencies to provide services to families impacted by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

We are also going to be increasing diagnostic services for adolescents. We're going to be funding enhanced public education initiatives, and we have a training strategy to improve existing service delivery systems for individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Expanding a successful STOP FAS program to three rural and northern communities. We will be providing more support for women with addictions and more training supports for school divisions to implement best practice approaches to educating students with FASD. We will also be providing money to increased research to guide the development of new programs and policies.

The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder strategy incorporates community recommendations and builds on the Changes for Children strategy launched

in October 2006. As part of that strategy, Madam Acting Speaker, \$2.1 million is being allocated for FASD through Changes for Children.

Madam Acting Speaker, I really think that we are moving forward in working with this disorder, and I'm very proud to be able to speak of our successes. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Acting Speaker, I rise to speak to this bill. The tragedy of the last eight years has been that we have such a high incidence of FASD in Manitoba and that there has been so little done and that the NDP continues not to support bills like this which can make some positive steps forward.

The problem is that there's no evidence that anything that they have done has actually decreased the incidence of FASD in Manitoba. In part, this is because they still don't have a registry or a province-wide scientific study showing the incidence of FASD in Manitoba. They're working from guesstimates and estimates without having any scientific basis for knowing what the real incidence for FASD is in Manitoba.

Eight years and a complete and abysmal failure in this regard by the NDP government. This in spite of the fact that FASD is a huge cost to Manitoba taxpayers. The estimate is that, with the number of children who have been born with FASD in this province since the NDP came to power, the cost to taxpayers has mounted up to \$1.7 billion and is continuing at \$380,000 a day because of their inaction. It's a terrible, abysmal performance, a terrible record. It is shameful that the NDP will not act to support this bill.

It is shameful that this NDP government, as the MLA for Burrows has said, feels that they are handcuffed by Ottawa, unable to act. Well, I tell this NDP party, it is time to stand up for Manitoba first. It's time to cast off those Ottawa handcuffs. It's time to stand up for the people of Manitoba and get on with the job that needs to be done for the people here. We need not only to change the ways things are done, we need to change the government. Time to vote Liberal and get a Liberal government to change the ways things are done.

* (10:50)

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): This is perhaps not the first time I've seen a tirade from this member opposite. It seems to me, Madam Acting Speaker, that this individual is a little out of character here

today, and I'm quite concerned for his physical health that he has displayed here.

Madam Acting Speaker, I understand what the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) says when he says don't confuse passion for a tirade in this Chamber, but I listened very carefully to what the Member for River Heights was saying. I think you can get the same message across without engaging in the type of debate that he just displayed here in this House, and I would have expected a little different from a leader of an opposition party and a leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): Order, please.

Mr. Reid: Well, it's interesting, Madam Acting Speaker, that the member opposite was a member of the Privy Council. I believe we still call him the honourable member when he stands up for a vote count in this House. He had a chance as a member of the federal government that was responsible for the Food and Drugs Act of Canada to bring in changes to the regulations and laws of Canada that would've allowed for a labelling of all of the products across Canada, and I have to ask the question that comes to my mind, well, if you were a member of that Privy Council in Canada, as a part of the federal government, why didn't you implement that policy that would allow for this labelling of all alcoholic products across Canada to make it uniform across our entire country?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Reid: So now the Member for Inkster is saying that he's abdicating all of the responsibility that his federal colleagues had in Ottawa and that they shouldn't be responsible for their actions. No accountability is what he is saying when his colleagues were in government in Ottawa. That is difficult to understand, the position of the Member for Inkster on that fact.

But, Madam Acting Speaker, one of the advantages of being in this House for some time is I have the opportunity in past, and I remember my days in the opposition benches although I prefer to remain on this side of the House obviously. I have to think back to the days when one Judy Wasylycia-Leis, the current MP in the federal Parliament, was a

member of our caucus benches in this Legislative Chamber, and I remember Ms. Wasylycia-Leis looking to make some changes to the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): Order. I would caution all members that this time is being used for debate. I would ask that we have a little more decorum during this period. I caution all members to please give the person speaking your attention. Thank you.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I'll continue my remarks. I know that the member opposite has some problems with this, and he had a few moments to add his comments to the public record here, and we respect he's taken that opportunity here, but I would just hope that there would be some additional decorum as a result of the comments that he might have added here, and that we would give others the same opportunity to add their comments as well.

Madam Acting Speaker, going back to the comments that were made by Ms. Wasylycia-Leis when she was in the House here and we attempted to make some changes to the liquor sales systems that we have in this province, we were successful. I know the occasional time that my family would go into the liquor stores of this province, and we would buy the bottle of wine for family functions and events. There are—

An Honourable Member: Private wine stores?

Mr. Reid: No, I don't attend private wine stores in this province. I believe in the public system in this province.

Well, I know the Member responsible for Headingley, the only issue—Morris. Well, Headingley—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): Order. I once again remind members in this Chamber, there's very little time left. The time is intended for debate. Could we please have the attention to the Member for Transcona who is now speaking.

Mr. Reid: Well, I'm not certain why the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) is indicating that certain members of the House are—and she used unparliamentary language, but I won't go into that part of it. I'll leave that for another time, but it seems to be unbecoming of the member opposite to engage in that type of debate.

I know that she has raised issues in this Chamber. It seems to be the only issue she has in her community, is the location of the liquor store that she has in the community and continues to have petitions why people have to drive an extra X number of kilometres to obtain a bottle of wine or a bottle of liquor. I'm not sure why she has that as the only issue for her community, but she's chosen that as well.

I have to say, as a result of our issues—*[interjection]* Yeah, let's engage in a discussion about pigs maybe. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about how your leader has now flip-flopped on the position that he had originally. Yes, let's talk about the three positions, perhaps, that your leader has had on these different topics. And that's not the only topic where he's flip-flopped. I have to look at the comments that were made to this—*[interjection]* Now the Member for Morris wants to have relevance. She raised the topic. Now she wants to go away from that discussion.

So let's switch back to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, Madam Acting Speaker, the topic at hand here today. I do know that as a result of our efforts here in the province of Manitoba we do have bags that are now labelled, warning young women that are expecting that they should not consume alcohol products. I know there are posters within the various liquor stores of our province and the fact that we're trying very diligently to prevent individuals who may be expecting to not consume alcohol products at any time during the course of the pregnancy. It's something that's very important to allow for the full healthy development of the fetus into a child. I think we are taking efforts through our Manitoba Liquor Control Commission to make sure that that does occur.

Now, that's not to say that we haven't had and recognize as a government that we have other efforts and work that we need to do, because that was part of the announcement. The Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) and our Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), during the announcement that we had on April 13 of this year—we've announced that we have some \$7.5-million additional dollars into prevention, diagnostics, and intervention dealing with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So our government recognizes that we have work to do, and that's why we made the allocation through our budgetary process here in the

province of Manitoba. We now know that we have taken the opportunity to invest in a range of programs aimed at improving the FASD prevention, detection and the support programs that are in place.

I watched very closely, because I did attend the presentation that was in the Rotunda here in the Legislative Building, and I listened to the presenters, the individuals that are working in the field, so to speak, with respect to working with the young individuals and the mothers that may be impacted as a result of alcohol and alcohol consumption during pregnancy. I listened to the young man that was on TV during the interviews that were conducted by the media.

I listened to the comments that were made by that young man, how he wants to have an opportunity in life and that he sees that by having an investment into these programs, it will help him to obtain the education that he wants and to give him that bright future as we all want for that young man and so many others want in our province, that these programs will allow for that individual to develop into a healthy, normal adult and to be a productive and contributing member of our society. That's what he wanted from his life and I think that these programs go a long way through our announcements that we have made to allowing those opportunities to occur for people like that young man that was interviewed.

I do know that we have made the announcements with respect to the program and that we have provided some involvement in two different agencies—

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

* (11:00)

RESOLUTION

Res. 4—Rural Job Loss/Centralization of Jobs

Mr. Speaker: The time now is 11 a.m. and we will now move to resolutions. We'll move on to Resolution No. 4, Rural Job Loss/Centralization of Jobs.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), to present the private member's resolution, Rural Job Loss/Centralization of Jobs.

WHEREAS many of Manitoba's rural communities are facing great economic hardships;

WHEREAS many agriculture producers are being forced to find income sources off of the farm to supplement their operations; and

WHEREAS developing and maintaining economic development and employment is one of the primary difficulties facing rural communities; and

WHEREAS the current government has shown an inclination to support the centralization of rural jobs and the removal of these jobs from rural settings; and

WHEREAS the centralization of rural jobs away from rural communities increases hardships and pulls much needed economic supports out of rural communities; and

WHEREAS the practice of centralization has negatively impacted a large number of rural families who are unsure of how they can continue to support themselves as employment options are removed from their communities; and

WHEREAS often families are forced to leave their home communities and families behind in order to seek employment opportunities in urban centres as jobs in their communities are removed or relocated; and

WHEREAS it is essential to ensure the continued sustainability of rural economies for good of all Manitobans.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to strongly consider reversing its policy of centralization of rural government jobs, such as the Crown land jobs threatened in communities of Minnedosa and Neepawa; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider keeping current government employment opportunities in communities where they currently provide much needed economic investment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider providing greater support for the protection of rural employment in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for Minnedosa, seconded by the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain,

WHEREAS—[interjection]

Dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, a December 2006 report by the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry titled *Understanding Free Fall: The Challenge of the Rural Poor* addressed some of the important issues facing rural communities. Rural communities have been facing challenges of depopulation, increasing poverty, and loss of economic opportunities since the end of the Second World War.

Rural communities in Manitoba are on the verge of decline that will be almost impossible to reverse. Residents are already being treated as second-class citizens in terms of access to services and opportunities to improve their quality of life.

Agriculture is the fundamental driver in rural Manitoba. However, farmers have faced tremendous hardships in the past few years. Adverse weather conditions, the BSE crises, along with the soaring operating and capital costs associated, have created a situation where profiting from operating a farm is very difficult. Economic hardship in rural communities has an impact on family and social conditions. This is not just an economic issue; this is a social one, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The provincial government's 1990s decentralization program was an excellent initiative for rural Manitoba. Rural communities benefit from having a population and economy stabilized. A variety of government services became more transparent, more efficient, more accessible, user friendly and accountable to the clients they served. The decline of rural areas in Manitoba is a very real problem that requires action on the part of government. Government must support rural communities; not ignore them, or worse, take away what is already there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government has continually centralized important jobs and removed them from the communities that so desperately need them. I can say four communities, specifically in my constituency,

have seen possible removal of government jobs and have seen a decline in the number of positions in those communities as they become vacant, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Not only does this remove valuable employment opportunities, it also creates uncertainty and tension among people who must decide between keeping their jobs or staying close to families and friends.

The choice to move the women from the Minnedosa offices at Crown Lands was not an option of moving. Those women were connected to agriculture-based employment, businesses within the community with their spouses, and that was not even an option given. So I find it extremely offensive that this minister across the way, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) would indicate that she's backfilling, and I use her quote, backfilling positions within the community when that is a slap in the face to the women in the community of Minnedosa.

The NDP continue to send mixed messages to the town of Minnedosa, the town of Neepawa, the town of Rivers, the town of Wawanessa, the town of Souris and the municipalities surrounding. For those individuals working in the offices have had to fight, have had to fight to keep their jobs, have had to fight to make the government aware that they are people in these positions and not just a staff here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

For example, Rivers, the Department of Education at one time had a good half-dozen jobs in that office, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they're down to two. For the last year and a bit, they have been trying to get answers from this government to see whether their community will lose the two remaining jobs in that community. The mayor and the Chamber of Commerce, the local community development corporation, have all been very vocal in trying to get the attention of this minister.

You know, on April 4, 2006, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) was actually in Rivers at a school event and actually he refused to meet with the staff in that office. He refused to meet with his two staff in that office to share with them, you know, his belief that their jobs were of value. Actually, when the community themselves asked for a meeting with the minister, he refused to meet with them. The minister refused to meet with them so actually, the Chamber of Commerce and the CDC stood in front of the minister when he was leaving the school and demanded answers and demanded he listen to what

they believed was an important issue in the community and should hear the facts. So when he has indicated in correspondence since that point saying he's met with them and appreciated the opportunity, he didn't. He was forced to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and unfortunately, that's how this government presently operates.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Point of order being raised. What is your point of order?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): The time that the Member for Minnedosa is referring to, there was a very tight schedule that I had committed to that day. Yes, I did meet briefly with the individuals that had met with me at the school event, and we have since been in correspondence with the individuals who raised those concerns, and we will continue to work with those individuals, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The member is inaccurate in her statements, once again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A dispute over the facts is not a point of order.

* * *

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Actually, his recollection of the issue and the meeting is definitely inaccurate.

An Honourable Member: You were there for the meeting?

Mrs. Rowat: Yes, I was, actually, I was there. I was there. The minister was forced to speak to the chamber and to the CDC, but again, great consultation, discussion, and great openness by this government.

Wawanesa has a position within the Department of Education that was being also considered moved out of the community, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Again, we had to bring this to the minister's attention. The mayor had to fight for that position to remain in the community. Again, after much pressure, the government did agree to leave that position. But again, there's a cycle here that any time that there's a position that becomes vacant, if the community doesn't take action, that position will be removed and taken back to Winnipeg or moved to another community and used as a political pawn.

*(11:10)

Despite repeated assurances, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Souris will not lose any of the positions, the centralization clawback issue hangs

heavy on the community and the workers in Souris. So those are my communities and the issues. Despite repeated assurances that these people's lives would not be thrown into upheaval by job losses when 19 Crown land positions from Minnedosa, Neepawa were being moved. The people were left to deal with it on their own, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The staff at the agriculture Crown Lands office wrote a letter to the editor in the July 26, 2006, edition of the Tribune, Minnedosa newspaper, stating this announcement, and these are from the staff of the Crown Lands office, these are their words: this announcement has been a huge disappointment for us who are dedicated to customer service and providing information and services to the public and government departments that are open, fair and transparent. Our voices continue to be loud in supporting government staff located in rural areas and our message to the minister and politicians will be clear on election day. I think that speaks volumes and should be listened to by the members opposite.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Minnedosa, Souris, Rivers, Wawanesa, these are all communities that had to fight for their community jobs. I think that says something. When they write to the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), their correspondence were just shuffled on to the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Lemieux); no response to them individually saying anything, not showing any concern or compassion for the issue at hand. Actually, one of the staff people at Crown lands had sent an e-mail to the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Premier deleted the e-mail without even looking at it. It was deleted without being looked at.

Virtually all of these positions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in rural Manitoba are held by women in my communities. So I think that this says something about the issue of gender inequality. Virtually all of the positions have a spouse that works in agriculture. If the husbands are the main income earners, they will not be able to relocate. The employees may be forced to make a decision to leave their families behind and the pressures of such decisions are not fair or reasonable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other positions in the town of Minnedosa, for example. There are Crown land jobs that started at 17; we'll be down to, who knows, four? Highway department: there were 20 jobs in that community, we're now down to four, three. RCMP officers, they were up at 11, now they're down to four. I guess there's a history here and I think the communities that I represent are

wondering why does the NDP government insist on trying to remove and take away what is theirs? Why are they playing games with the people in my communities? The provincial government needs to make protecting rural employment a higher priority on its agenda and begin to seriously address the challenges of rural communities and the issues that they face. The government needs to rethink its policy of centralizing rural government jobs and leave them in the communities where they currently provide economic opportunities.

This is much more than a game of numbers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are people in these positions. This is not a game of backfill, this is an issue about the communities and the importance of those jobs. These are jobs that are very important to the people within the communities, and I take offence.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was indeed interesting to listen to the member opposite speak on what is a very important issue. She talked about the decline of population that has gone back to the time of the Second World War, and indeed the population of rural Manitoba has changed. All across the country, as you have industrialization, mechanization, people move and they move toward the jobs.

But I'm also amazed that the member opposite is talking about her concern for women who have lost their jobs. I wonder where she was, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when 1,500 nurses were fired in this province, the majority of them women, and women across the province. I'll tell the member opposite, my colleague and I met with Parkland Regional Health Authority just this last week and they told us that they were still feeling the impact of those nurses being fired and leaving this province because they couldn't get work. Now they are having a hard time filling nursing positions. I wonder where she was to defend the 242 teachers who were removed after there was a minus one and cutbacks under their budget. Two hundred and forty-two teachers, the majority who were women. I'm surprised that she didn't defend women so vigorously at that time and speak out for them as she is now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these women that she is talking about have played an important role. She also understands that there was a reorganization of Crown lands, that the special operating agency was created, and there was a need to move jobs to one centre. There was a commitment to the people of that area

that there would be jobs that would fill those positions.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the positions that we are filling are in the soil surveys crew. Do you know why these positions have to be filled? Because, under the previous administration, the Conservatives did not put any value on soil survey crews and, in fact, they laid them off. Our government recognizes the importance of soil survey crews with regard to managing soil and water, and we are filling positions. We've put five positions into Shoal Lake. I was in Minnedosa where I announced eight positions for soil survey crews, and these are very good jobs. I'm disappointed in the member opposite that she wouldn't recognize how important soil survey crews are and the value that they bring to the community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also speak of our record. The members opposite would imply that we are not doing anything with jobs in rural Manitoba. The members opposite will not recognize that we have reorganized the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives in a way that keeps jobs in this province, in rural Manitoba. This is not how jobs or rural agriculture is done in other provinces. In other provinces—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wonder if you would ask the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) to come to order. I gave her respect when she was making her comments. I wonder if you would call her to order so I can make my comments as well.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have reorganized the Department of Agriculture and Food. We have kept all of the people there—

Point of Order

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Point of order being raised.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask you again if you would call the Member for Minnedosa to order. I have respected her when she is speaking. I expect the same, rather than her chanting away while I am trying to make my comments. I don't believe she wants to hear them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Noise comes from both sides of the aisle, so I will say nothing until it becomes intolerable.

* * *

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very proud of the record of our government, and I'll speak particularly of Ag, Food and Rural Initiatives where we have indeed recognized the importance of economic development in rural Manitoba and have put economic development specialists with each GO Team.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when there are opportunities to decentralize people to rural communities, we do so. We have moved approximately 30 jobs from Winnipeg to rural communities: 15 in Brandon, 15 in Portage la Prairie, 5 positions in the food safety initiative in Morris, unless the member doesn't consider those to be rural communities anymore. But we have taken every step.

The Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) and the minister responsible for infrastructure yesterday announced that there will be 13 new inspectors, and I can assure the member that the majority of those inspectors will be going into rural Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would say to the member I'm surprised that she wouldn't say anything about the jobs that we are increasing in Minnedosa through the Husky expansion. But, of course, she wouldn't speak about that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd expect the member would say something about the value-added that's taking place in Brandon. My colleague the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith) and I had the opportunity to go to the beginning of Shape Foods where there will be over 30 jobs created in value-added.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the whole issue of alternate energy is an economic driver in rural Manitoba: wind energy in St. Leon that I'm sure many of the members opposite have gone to St. Leon with the MLA for Carman to look at the great opportunities that have been created in that area; people looking at alternate energies like biodiesels, biofuels. All of these are economic drivers. All of these need the supports that our government is prepared to give them, supports like putting in economic development officers to work with them, to work through their

business plan, the variety of programs that we have put in place and incentives to support economic development.

* (11:20)

But, of course, the member wouldn't recognize or want to recognize or pay tribute to rural people who have been those drivers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will point out a couple of them: Mr. Paul Bobbee in the Interlake, who is starting a biodiesel facility; Mr. Nesbitt, who is one of the people involved with Shape Foods, who was very excited when we were there because they have found a market for another product and adding value to an agriculture product.

The member opposite would have the public think that there is no economic growth in rural Manitoba. She's wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's biodiesel development, construction underway at four different sites, and we have in place alternate energy programs to assist these people. There are the new environmental enhancement loans to help with these.

We also care about the agriculture producers who are the base of this economy, and that's why we have taken steps like reducing education tax on farmland. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we promised to reduce the education tax by 20 percent. In this budget, we are up to 65 percent, and members opposite don't care about farmers. They voted against that budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the important tools that farmers look for and have counted on over the years is the Canadian Wheat Board to ensure that we have high-quality wheat and maintain our record around the world. Members opposite would not support us in our lobby of the federal government to maintain the Wheat Board or to give the producers a say. They supported the phony vote put out by the federal government rather than speaking out for producers and giving the kind of vote that producers wanted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've expanded safety net programs. We've expanded programs to help with the intergenerational transfer of land because some of our farm population is aging. We have to move to the next generation. We've put various programs in place to help the next generation. Members opposite vote against them. They talk one talk, but they do not walk the walk when it comes to supporting rural Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people who were in those jobs have found other employment, or the majority of them have found other employment, have been seconded to other departments. I believe one has gone to the federal government. We will continue to work, and we will continue to work to enhance services in rural Manitoba.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite cannot say she defends women when she stands behind the cutbacks of 1,500 nurses and 242 teachers, most of them who were women, and now she's talking as if she's defending the women. She's not.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): I'm sure the members of the government would be disappointed if I didn't have some observations on this resolution, and after listening to the presentation from my colleague and the rebuttal from the Minister of Agriculture, I know now why the popularity of this government in rural Manitoba is in the toilet because the fact is, it seems that almost every disparaging adjective that you could think of that is acceptable in this House, in terms of the political acumen and the leadership provided relative to the particular issue that my colleague is raising, and it affects my community as well, and that is the reorganization and the clawing back of the decentralization initiative.

I could go on at great length about what this does to some of the individuals, but let's talk about the principle that's involved here. There was a principle that was at play when decentralization occurred. We looked at other jurisdictions, and they were moving services closer to some of their rural centres. They were putting significant service centres in some of their smaller centres, and if ever there was a province like the province of Manitoba where you have a large centre—as Winnipeg goes, the province goes. We all know that. It is the main driving force in the industrial and services section of this province.

But if we don't do the right things to make sure that Portage and Brandon and Neepawa, Minnedosa, Thompson, Dauphin, the Pembina Triangle, all of the significant communities there, if they are not given an equal opportunity, then the government is not doing part of its role which is to make sure that all of its citizenry and, frankly, all of the regions that make up this province have an opportunity to participate in what has unfortunately developed into a situation where the large percentage of well-paying jobs are either directly, indirectly connected to services that are managed and controlled by government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this action where the government decided that they want to reorganize Crown lands, they stood up on many occasions, and they argued that this was a result of the Auditor's report. Well, I was the minister responsible during the report that the Auditor made on the land issue. It had nothing to do with the offices in Neepawa or Minnedosa. That was a stalking horse that this government thought they could hang on somebody the blame, to accomplish a goal that they had already pre-determined. Those offices are not the ones who made the mistake. The mistake was made right by people closer to the situation, not out of those offices. But this government tried to blame those offices for the report of the Auditor General which was very critical of how the process was handled on the Hecla Island resettlement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what is so disgusting about how this government has operated. Be honest with the people. You wanted to put jobs in Portage, and you were going to do it no matter what, and you tried to make this into a legitimate transaction. I wrote down a couple of thoughts about what that means to those of us out in rural Manitoba. It is a brutal decision. It is not backed up by facts. It's not backed up by better organization. It's foolish, it's irresponsible, and the definition of foolishness is that it lacks in common sense. I don't hear any chirping from the government, so that must mean they're listening, and they know darn well that this was the kind of thing that is going to hurt them for years to come in rural Manitoba.

Well, now they started to wake up when I finally reminded them that it's good that they're listening.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it isn't just what's happening in Neepawa, Portage, Minnedosa. It is a hallmark of this government.

Reorganize. Reorganize Natural Resources, reorganize Environment, reorganize the department of water and water quality. You have reorganized government into a mess. That's what you've done. Good people, good technicians, good administrators, good civil servants out there can't get their work done because they're constantly being changed in who they report. They're being changed in their mandate and it's not for the better.

We can always improve how we provide services. No one would deny that. No good manager would think that he could come in and put his feet on his desk and not have to examine the organization for

which he is responsible. No government would sit there and say, well, I guess the previous guys were all right; we won't make any changes. That's not what I'm trying to say. What I'm trying to say is that you have used this method of operation in many departments in government, and particularly the ones I'm responsible with, and I would add Agriculture to this list. Agriculture was decentralized, reorganized, and then this government decided they were going to reorganize it into GO centres, and they'd move a few more people around.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in some cases there were some communities that benefited and a few that didn't, and it seemed not to be based on decisions that followed any kind of a plan. It seemed like the Cabinet of the day sat down and said, well, you know what? There's a map. We'll put a few over here. We'll put a few over there. We'll put some down there.

This is being done in the midst of an influx of dollars that are not being distributed across government in what we would consider a planned way. So these departments, at the same time, in the midst of reorganization and restructuring, they're also being forced to reorganize because of ongoing stringent controls on their budget which I would argue restricts them from fulfilling their mandate.

* (11:30)

The office in Neepawa, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were short a third of their staff, and that government over there has the stupidity, frankly, to stand up and blame the staff in that office because they're a year behind with their work. You take eight people out of a 20-person office and don't fill the jobs, and then blame the people. That's how this government operates. All the time that's how they operate. Find a scapegoat, blame and reorganize, then see how smart we are. That is something that is destroying the credibility of the civil service in rural Manitoba, and they are responsible. They are responsible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find myself shouting and being aggravated over this situation because this is so much against the concept of being able to provide service in a decentralized way within a reasonable context of community sizes across the province. None of us should ever pit one community against another. We do it very often, I suppose, accidentally, but we should never do it in government. We should not be pitting one community against another. And when you have an unplanned and disorganized

change in how you distribute jobs responsibly across this province, that's what you do; you pit one community against the other.

On behalf of the civil servants out there who were mistreated by this government, who were blamed for mistakes that they didn't make, I can only say that this is a disgusting turn of events that will not be forgotten in the communities that it affects, and I hope that when the opportunity for them to go to the polls comes, it's sooner than later. Thank you.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise in response to the remarks of the members of the opposition.

My first point would be how convenient it is for them. When they sit on the opposition benches, they speak out of one side of their mouths; when they're in government, they speak out of the other side of their mouths. It's easy in opposition to say, oh, let's hire more people, let's build the civil service, and so forth. But the reality is that should they ever return to power, you're going to see a very vast reduction in the size of government in their zeal to privatize things across the board. So they're not fooling anybody in the defence of the number of jobs in the civil service.

The Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) was using words like "disgusting" and so forth. Well, I have to respond to that as well. I look, in particular, at what's at issue today, which is the creation of the Crown Lands and Property Agency to address the whole control over Crown lands. I just have to look back to before 1999 to see how the Conservative government handled Crown lands, and that's what was disgusting. The way they catered to their friends. The way they sold off Crown lands in ignorance of all policies and control mechanisms, catering to their friends, good supporters of the Conservative Party. If they wanted Crown land, all they had to do was apply and it came to them. These decisions went right to the Cabinet room. If you were a good friend of Harry Enns, and you wanted five quarters of Crown land or 10 quarters or 20, 25 quarters of Crown land—and there are examples of that—all he had to do was talk to the former Minister of Agriculture and he would take it right to the Cabinet room, bang, rubber-stamped, all the Crown land you want.

Well, that's not right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is—[interjection] It's bloody well true, and I know damn well it is because it happened in my very constituency. In my very constituency I know that

one block of Crown land, in particular, seven quarters of Crown land were sold to an individual who hadn't farmed for six, seven years, and within a very short period of time it ended up in the hands of a very rich and very strong Conservative.

So it was a case of classic corruption and crookedness and intervention right at the Cabinet table to facilitate that. So this whole movement toward consolidating Crown lands into a special operating agency, putting guidelines into place to ensure—

Point of Order

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

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask that the member repeat those comments outside of this Chamber.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: I wait for your ruling on the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then I'll continue my remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Thank you, Sir. The whole of the R.M. of Fisher is well aware of what took place there. You're not fooling anybody, and it's on the record now. So I've made my statement in that regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]*

Exactly. The special operating agency will put rules of order in place, will put people in positions of responsibility where they're not dictated to by their political masters. This agency will put the administration of Crown lands back on an even keel in correction of what the previous government did.

Now, I started by commenting on how the Conservatives, while they're in opposition want big government, want all kinds of jobs created in rural Manitoba, government jobs, and the Member for Ste. Rose had the audacity to criticize the creation of the Department of Water Stewardship I believe. I was listening to his remarks very carefully, and that was one of the things, I think, that disgusted him. So, you know, because we're trying to get some rhyme or reason over the management of water in rural Manitoba, which is of fundamental importance to all of the people.

But I'll take us back to the Filmon years once again in terms of job creation and supporting civil service positions and all that. What did the former

premier do in regard to the Water Resources Branch? What did he do? He cut their budget to about a third of what it was, and he fired probably 70 percent of the staff of the Water Resources Branch and left it in a state of total chaos. Total chaos.

When we came to office in 1999, you had done such a terrible job of managing the water resources of this province that a judge, a provincial judge, threw The Water Rights Act out the window. The Hildebrandt case threw The Water Rights Act out the window. He said the provincial government has been so negligent in the management of water in terms of licensing and so forth that you had no jurisdiction. And he threw your jurisdiction out the window. That's one of the first things—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order please. The member should address himself to the Chair. Then there should be no direct confrontation. The remarks should be directed to the Chair.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I take your advice and will respect your words. But these are relevant points that have to be made. The fact that while you're in opposition it's easy to preach, oh, government jobs and all that, but the fact is that if they were to come back into office, this whole privatization agenda that they have would be facilitated, and I'm making these points, how they gutted the Water Resources Branch as a prime example. You can look to the sale of Crown corporations as an example of the past and the future. What they did with the Manitoba Telephone System they will do with the Hydro utility. It's all privatization. It's all big business. It's all money in their pockets.

And that's why they're over on the opposition benches, and that's why they're going to remain there for some time to come yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they still haven't learned their lesson.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So, you know we're proud of our record in rural Manitoba. We have, and I will say, I will say, in terms of maintaining jobs, Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, the jobs that governments should maintain in rural Manitoba are the farm businesses that we have in place. Those are the real jobs.

* (11:40)

We want to see farmers remain on the land. These guys opposite, what they want, they want to cater to the large corporations. They want to gut the

Canadian Wheat Board which will terminate most of the smaller grain producers. They will all go bankrupt and they'll all go to work for some of the big farmers that are going to buy up the land. We all know that. That's what happened in the hog industry. When you ended the marketing board. All of the small hog producers were gone. Now we're raising 10,000, 15,000 hogs per farm. That's what happened in the hog industry, that what's going to happen in the grain industry if these Conservatives and their masters in Ottawa succeed in gutting the Canadian Wheat Board.

That's what's going to happen with the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation now. What have we learned just the other day? Here's another supply-managed industry. We've got 16,000 fishermen in Manitoba making a good living of it. They own their own boats, their own equipment, they're their own masters. Now that's the next thing on the Tory agenda. The next thing on the Conservative, the neo-Conservative ultra right-wing government in Ottawa, which these guys follow along behind like little lambs, that's what they're going to do. They want to kill the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. What next?

All methods of supply management are on the chopping block. They swear that they're not going to do it over in Québec where milk and eggs and chicken and all that, because that's where they want the votes. They would never touch the supply-managed industries in eastern Canada. Hogwash. We all know that's exactly what they'll do, and they couldn't even contain themselves until the Wheat Board issue was resolved. I mean the barley aspect of it. They couldn't even contain themselves. They had to throw out the FFMC on top of it, right? So we know how Conservatives operate. They cater to themselves and to the rich, and the smaller producers who are existing on the land today are the canon fodder that will fall when these guys, if they ever—

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

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it's certainly going to be a pleasure to put some factual comments on the record this morning in regard to agriculture and rural economic development in Manitoba. I certainly appreciate the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) bringing forward this very important resolution. I think it's very important that the government of the day understand the decisions they are making impact

rural Manitoba to a great degree. In fact, they directly impact quite a number of civil servants who have been living and carrying on business in rural Manitoba. Quite frankly, those civil servants have been doing a good job in terms of helping out rural Manitobans in terms of economic development, rural issues, farm issues and those sorts of things. To take some of those people out of the rural economy really does impact the economy of rural Manitoba.

So, clearly, what we're trying to do with this resolution is bring the issue forward to the government of the day and let them have a sober, second thought on some of these decisions they are making. As we know, in the Minnedosa situation, quite a number of civil servants were taken out of that community. It appears now that, due to some of the public pressure out there with the provincial election pending, the government of the day through the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has decided to do some backfilling with some soil positions out in that neck of the woods, Mr. Speaker.

So, clearly, as we know, this government does on a daily basis, it's all about political positions, some political views, some election wooings, those sorts of things. That's what the government's good at, in terms of announcements. We're not sure if we're ever going to see those positions out in Minnedosa, but at least in this period of time before an election, it looks good that the government of the day is making an announcement that there could be some positions show up there.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just Minnedosa that's being affected in rural Manitoba; it's other communities. When I reflect on my constituency of Turtle Mountain, we've seen—and I guess primarily through the changes in agriculture and the Agriculture Department—the rearranging or restructuring of the GO offices, the GO centres throughout rural Manitoba. Quite frankly, we've seen some of those very important positions, such as the old ag rep positions, removed from those communities. Quite frankly, those ag reps and some of those other positions dealt directly with producers at an economic level. They assisted producers in making concrete economic decisions that could benefit their operation.

I've been listening to what the Member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) said. He wants to keep farm jobs. Quite frankly we want to keep farm jobs too. There's more to it than keeping farm jobs, Mr. Speaker, there's enhancements there. If we as

government can come to the front and we can help producers, help business develop and foster, that, I think, is the role of the government. I'm not sure that the member from Interlake or this particular government understand that, Mr. Speaker, that there are very serious implications with removing some of the knowledge-based people and staff, incentives that are there for rural Manitoba. Once you take those and factor those out of the rural economic perspective things change and they may not change for the good.

In terms of Turtle Mountain, I want to make a point. The ag rep position in Carberry was removed some time ago and has not been replaced. There is another example of another change the government has made and never replaced an individual. So that whole area is without the services of some specialized people in the agriculture side of things.

The same thing happened in Killarney. We have positions over there, primarily at the staff and the service level of people. There's positions that have been vacated. Those positions have not been refilled, Mr. Speaker. The other side too is on the Natural Resources or Conservation side. Positions there—staff have moved on. Positions have not been filled either through the Natural Resources position or the staffing position there. So, quite frankly, there's a gap there in terms of those positions in rural Manitoba.

I just do want to make one comment as well in terms of this government's handling of the rural economic situation. A classic example, Mr. Speaker, is the situation we have on No. 2 highway, just outside of Wawanesa, where a highway bridge, an infrastructure bridge has basically fallen apart. So instead of making some kind of a short-term solution here where we could detour traffic just around there without impacting the economy of the area to a great deal, the government has decided to put signs up 80 miles away, 80 miles away so that traffic is diverted at 13 highway in Elm Creek, 80 miles from that particular bridge where it's out.

So, Mr. Speaker, I travel that road quite a bit and over the last two weeks there's been very little traffic down No. 2 highway. The point of the matter is, the infrastructure deficit is impacting the economy of rural Manitoba. This government refuses to do anything about it.

The same thing happens when they take positions out of rural Manitoba. That directly impacts the economy of rural Manitoba and, Mr. Speaker, it's time this government woke up and

understood the ramifications of the decisions they're making. You can understand the passion from the people from Minnedosa and the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) and the issues they bring forward as it is a very, very important situation out in rural Manitoba. Thank you very much for your time.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to speak to this resolution today, particularly after the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen) has spoken, because I understand he was at the opening of a new school in his constituency yesterday, another investment by the Province of Manitoba, by this government in rural education.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I must say I've attended many openings with many colleagues across the way. We continue to invest in rural education in Manitoba and in fact, their most recent announcement included three major projects in constituencies of members opposite. So we continue to invest in education in rural Manitoba because we believe in rural Manitoba. We know the growth that will take place in rural Manitoba.

I know members opposite profess to be the champions of rural Manitoba and they've put some rather interesting rhetoric on the record. But, you know, there's an interesting article that appears in the *UPWord*, the voice of construction industry in Manitoba. After all the doom and gloom that I've just heard and I might quote the article: If you were asked to name a Canadian municipality that's going through a building boom, Calgary, Edmonton, even Toronto might come to mind, but Steinbach, Manitoba? Unlikely. However, this rural southern town is seeing a remarkable development recently. Founded in 1874 by 18 Mennonite families, Steinbach now has a population of just over 9,000 and a solid base of industry and it's growing.

* (11:50)

Now, it goes on to say: This thriving little community is under a boom in major building projects in various sectors, Mr. Speaker, including manufacturing, education and retail. I think it was the middle of November that we had \$60 million in permits for the year, which for Steinbach is a record, says one Mr. Neufeld, president of Three Way Builders Ltd. of Steinbach.

Of course, this is because we've been investing in immigration, Mr. Speaker, and supporting immigration to come to the province of Manitoba,

and why are they coming to the province of Manitoba and going to areas like Morden, Winkler and Steinbach, where we have the fastest growing communities? Unprecedented gain in three decades, which coincidentally would go back to the years when one Premier Schreyer was at the helm of the province. We haven't seen growth like that since Premier Schreyer was in office.

So, for members opposite to suggest that rural Manitoba is in crisis, they might question the *UPWord* construction magazine. Well, what about one of their own members who said, "I see in this budget, with all the day cares in rural Manitoba that I've been able to get, the highway projects that I've been able to get, the funding that I've been able to get from the highways, the Francophone community, we in rural Manitoba, we see the French language services not only in Notre Dame, St. Claude, Notre Dame de Lourdes, but, indeed, in St. Boniface, St. Lazare, St. Jean. We see it, we see it."

That member did say and I quote from *Hansard*, ". . . but I can tell you right now, in all sincerity, and I thank each and every one of the ministers across the way and indeed this Premier (Mr. Doer) because my constituents have never been better served than they are today." This is a quote from a rural member opposite who, of course, is now an independent member.

To hear them talk about the impact on rural jobs and the rural economy—and I'll echo the comments made by the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) because the Minister of Agriculture pointed out the 1,500 cuts in nursing positions which was across the board throughout Manitoba. Nurses perhaps weren't very well paid during the Filmon years; perhaps that's why many of them left as well. But it is traditionally a very well-paying job in the rural economy, as are teaching positions, Mr. Speaker. I was a teacher in Gimli who, for five years, did not know if my job was secure because the members opposite kept announcing minus two, minus two, zero, zero and the one increase in funding. Members opposite kept cutting funding to education. How is that going to impact the rural economy when teachers are being cut from the positions within the school division? So nurses, doctors, teachers all being cut from the rural economy. For members opposite to say they're champions of rural Manitoba when these cuts went throughout the province is somewhat disingenuous for them to suggest so.

Now, if you look at what we have been doing for rural Manitoba, rural Manitobans know the impact on the economy of unprecedented highway funding, Mr. Speaker: \$400 million, \$400 million in highway construction. That's unprecedented, and that's going to be tremendous for the rural economy of Manitoba because of the impact of the construction itself and what that means for local businesses during that very busy construction season. What does it mean for rural Manitoba when members opposite stand up and profess to be the champions of rural Manitoba? Living in Gimli, the members opposite did not build the new school. The members opposite did not build the new hospital in Gimli. The members opposite did not build the new waste water treatment facility in Gimli. These are initiatives under this government.

Members opposite stand up and say, we're the champions of rural Manitoba; we stand up for rural Manitoba. Well, if that's standing up for rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker—well there's lots of things that I could say about that. But as a rural member I'm proud of the record of this government and I'm proud of our initiatives.

We have a commitment to water safety, Mr. Speaker, and the initiatives that have been launched by this government with respect to 40 more water resource officers who will be primarily located throughout rural Manitoba. The commitment of this government to increase the conservation districts, and we've gone from nine to 18. Not only that, we tripled the funding to the conservation districts. So where are those jobs going to be? Well, they're going to be in rural Manitoba. Jobs that make sense for rural Manitoba. Also having, through the Department of Agriculture, the soil testing that has been announced as well. That makes sense to rural Manitoba. So here we have a government who has shown repeatedly that they are the government, we are the government for rural Manitoba.

Our economic development in terms of building Hydro, our economic development in alternative energy, our economic development in the wind farms, biodiesel, all of these initiatives have a profound impact on rural economies, Mr. Speaker.

Now, farming: The members always talk about farming—increased the portioning in farming, while we reduced the taxes. But they profess to be champions of the farmers. Mr. Speaker, 2.5 million to help farmers start to adapt their operations to new water protection regulations, a commitment to provide a strong voice for the Canadian Wheat Board

because somebody in this province has to have a strong voice for the Canadian Wheat Board, not just the wheat producers who advocate for the Wheat Board, but this government has a strong voice for the Canadian Wheat Board.

The safety net for Manitoba farmers: Over the last three years, the farmers have benefited by more than 550 million in the Canadian agriculture income support payments.—[interjection] Well, Mr. Speaker, I hear the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) chirping away once again. If he doesn't like it in the sandbox, perhaps he should get out.

But, as a rural member, Mr. Speaker, I have heard so many times the members stand up and profess to be the champions for rural Manitoba. Well, it is such a disingenuous statement for them to stand up and say. Rural includes northern in the minds of our government where they had—what?—4 percent in the highways budget, if I'm not mistaken, for rural Manitoba. And the highways were so ignored in rural Manitoba under members opposite. We've increased funding to support the highway infrastructure in northern Manitoba. There's a reason why Eternal Youth, as the Golden Boy was first called, looks to the North because the symbolism of the Golden Boy looking North was this future of this province rides on the North and the resource-rich North that we do have.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite are talking about rural depopulation. Well, in 1996, there were 8,478 people living in Steinbach—today 11,066; in 1996, in Winkler, 7,943 people—today 9,106. My home town of Gimli has seen growth as well. In 1996, it was 1,657; today 1,891. That sounds like growth to me. Members opposite keep talking about it as a challenge and a crisis. We know that there are situations that we need to do a better job, and we're committed to do a better job in working with our partners in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be on this side of the House and be champions for all Manitobans, all Manitobans. That's the difference between members opposite and this government. We govern for all Manitobans.

You know, I didn't have a question yet on our school capital plan in the House, Mr. Speaker. Why was that? Oh, when members opposite were in government, 75 percent of the schools that they built were in Tory ridings, 75 percent. Since we've been in office, 50 percent of the schools that we built have been in Tory ridings, and the last announcement, the three major projects that we announced, are all in Tory ridings where we've seen significant growth. The significant growth throughout this province, that's a good problem to have. Did they have that problem? No, because more young people were leaving Manitoba in the 1990s. We have had a net out-migration during the Tories' years; we've had a net increase in population. Despite incredible competition from our neighbouring economies, we have still seen a net growth in this province. Manitobans know which party grows this province, and that is the party on this side of the House. That is the party on this side of the House that grows the entire province of Manitoba. Thank you.

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

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I regret that there's only a very short time left to say anything about this topic, Mr. Speaker, but let me say that I could speak on this topic for hours. I live in rural Manitoba, and I know what kind of a void there is in terms of the government presence in this part of the world. I think it was clearly pointed out by the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) who very clearly put on the record what this government has not done and how they've devastated the services that were being provided in rural Manitoba, services that were put there by a Conservative government in the 1990s when there was an effort made to deliberately decentralize positions from Winnipeg into rural Manitoba. And what has happened under this government, they have retrenched those positions back into Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Russell will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, we will recess and reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 19, 2007

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