Second Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 22, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 241–The Grandparents' Day Act

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, moved by myself, seconded by the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), that Bill 241, The Grandparents' Day Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Braun: Mr. Speaker, The Grandparents' Day Act be read today: As October Seniors' and Elders' Month approaches, we are pleased to introduce this bill that is intended to formally acknowledge the priceless and essential contributions grandparents make in supporting and caring for their families and communities by designating a special Grandparents' Day in the province of Manitoba on the first Sunday after Labour Day.

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

PETITIONS

Pharmacare Deductibles

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The NDP government has increased Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent each year for the past seven years, with the curious exception of the 2007 election year.

As a result of the cumulative 34 percent hike in Pharmacare deductibles by the NDP government, some Manitobans are forced to choose between milk and medicine.

Seniors, fixed and low-income-earning Manitobans are the most negatively affected by these increases.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba to consider reversing his decision to increase Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent in budget 2008.

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider reducing health-care bureaucracy, as previously promised, and to consider directing those savings into sustaining Pharmacare and improving patient care.

This is by Val Lockery, Sandra Ammeter, Shirley Weidman and many others.

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

Long-Term Care Facility–Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Lois Friesen, Harold Schlegel, Janet Wiebe and many, many others.

Hard Surfacing Unpaved Portion– Provincial Road 340

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition.

All Manitobans deserve access to well--maintained rural highways as this is critical to both motorist safety and to commerce.

Provincial Highway 340 is a well-utilized road.

Heavy vehicles from potato and livestock operations, agricultural-related businesses, Hutterite colonies and the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon use this road.

Vehicles from Canadian Forces Base Shilo also travel this busy road.

Commuter traffic from Wawanesa, Stockton, Nesbitt and surrounding farms to Shilo and Brandon is common on this road.

Provincial Highway 340 is an alternate route for many motorists travelling to Brandon coming off Provincial Highway 2 east and to Winnipeg via the Trans-Canada Highway No. 1. An upgrade to this road would ease the traffic congestion on Provincial Highway 10.

Access to the Criddle-Vane Homestead Provincial Park would be greatly enhanced if this road were improved.

The hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of Highway 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo toward Wawanesa would address the last few neglected kilometres of this road and increase the safety of motorists who travel on it.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of Provincial Highway 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa.

This petition signed by Bruce Gullett, Amy Coveney, Gordon Judson and many, many others.

Crocus Investment Fund–Public Inquiry

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

The 2007 provincial election did not clear the NDP government of any negligence with regard to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

The government needs to uncover the whole truth as to what ultimately led to over 33,000 Crocus shareholders to lose tens of millions of dollars.

The provincial auditor's report, the Manitoba Securities Commission's investigation, the RCMP investigation and the involvement of revenue Canada and our courts, collectively, will not answer the questions that must be answered in regard to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his NDP government to co-operate in uncovering the truth in why the government did not act on what it knew and to consider calling a public inquiry on the Crocus Fund fiasco.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by Eileen Collins, Irene Collins and J. Cesmystruk and many other fine Manitobans.

Education Funding

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Historically the Province of Manitoba has received funding for education by the assessment of property that generates taxes. This unfair tax is only applied to selected property owners in certain areas and confines.

Property-based school tax is becoming an ever-increasing burden without acknowledging the owner's income or owner's ability to pay.

The provincial sales tax was instituted for the purpose of funding education. However, monies generated by this tax are being placed in general revenue.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) consider removing education funding by school tax or education levies from all property in Manitoba.

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth consider finding a more equitable method of funding education such as general revenue following the constitutional funding of education by the Province of Manitoba.

This petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by Ken Kiselbach, Linda Kiselbach, Gord Lysen and many, many other Manitobans.

***** (13:40)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

National Forest Week

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

This white spruce seedling is provided in celebration of National Forest Week, September 21 to 27, 2008, by Manitoba Conservation and the Manitoba Forestry Association. The white spruce is, of course, Manitoba's provincial tree and these seedlings are grown locally at the Pineland Forest Nursery in Hadashville.

In the past year Manitoba has announced the Trees for Tomorrow initiative which will see five million seedlings planted over the next five years to meet our Beyond Kyoto climate change and carbon sequestering goals.

I thank the Manitoba Forest Association for the white spruce seedlings and for its continued efforts to promote the sustainable and wise use of our forests. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I thank the minister for his statement. I have to say that after eight years of coming into the House and receiving these trees, which is a wonderful thing, I think, for our community, I was a little taken aback, I have to say today, when I came in and found the tree in a plastic bag when, of course, we've so often been debating plastic bags. However, I did actually turn the bag over and noticed that it is made of biodegradable materials, so we're happy that members opposite are also looking at other ways of helping our environment, Mr. Speaker.

But I do, however, shudder to think of how many millions of more trees will be cut down as a result of this government's decision to put a bipole line down the west side of our province. I hope that this is one decision they've made on one side. I hope that they change their decision for the betterment of our province on the other. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I join other members of the Assembly in recognizing National Forest Week, recognizing the importance of trees to our economy, to our environment and, of course, in particular, today, to climate change and making sure that we've got a sustainable Manitoba and a sustainable planet.

This is a very important area for all of us and one that we need to be paying a lot of attention to.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bill 31
Government Intent

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): For an NDP government that has a track record of waste and mismanagement, of abusing taxpayer funds that grows by the day, Mr. Speaker, from Hydro raids to a collapsed venture capital fund, to scandals within the Housing Department, it's more important than ever for Manitobans to have access to clear information about how public funds are being spent.

I want to ask the Premier, who claims when he's campaigning to be on the side of regular people but when it's after the election, in government, he takes the side of powerful interests against regular citizens, why is it that he is using Bill 31 to deny access to government information that regular citizens are crying out for?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, certainly the member opposite talks about hydro rates, so I'm pleased that we have the lowest hydro rates in North America.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about other projects initiated in previous governments and we won't digress to discuss that.

Certainly there is greater accountability for the question raised by the member opposite in terms of Bill 31. We wanted to make it clear with the amendments on Bill 31 that Child and Family Services agencies under the jurisdiction of the Province and Aboriginal agencies would be fully accountable under FIPPA.

Mr. McFadyen: Last week the Premier attempted to blame both the Iraq war and the current global financial crisis on the official opposition, and I'm

pleased that he's backed away from attempting to advance those positions today.

The question today was about the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars on behalf of Manitobans. The fact is this government has a record of increasing spending at levels unlike any government that has ever governed this province. They have a record of spending without regard for accountability and results, some of the worst health-care results in the country. Even with the second-highest spending, they propose to overspend by $640 million plus on the hydro line.

Manitobans are looking for more information about how their money is spent, not less. Will they listen to the concerns brought forward by the Provincial Council of Women and other organizations that have concerns about Bill 31? Will they withdraw that bill, go through a proper process of public consultation and bring something back that is on the side of regular Manitobans, not on the side of a government that's trying to hoard information?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I would point out that, when we came into office, the MMA used to call the situation in Manitoba with the relationship dealing with doctors and the former Conservative government the dark days of medical care. I am pleased today more light is again being shone on the great profession of doctors here in Manitoba with the MMA agreement. That agreement has not only been disclosed but it's also been made fully public, and it's been settled in partnership with doctors as opposed to some of the threats of strikes and lockouts that we saw in the past.

In fact, one of the other changes we made–and the member opposite talks about health-care spending–in terms of accountability is to agree with the MMA to go to arbitration if we can't arrive at a settlement at the bargaining table. We weren't putting patients in between the reasonable settlement with the government and the doctors with patients, and so, yes, we are accountable for the decision we made today. We are accountable for the announcement made by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald).

We're accountable now for wait lists. Those wait lists were never published. In fact, the member opposite was the chief of staff and he denied the release of wait lists. He denied the release of information in the hallways. He denied the information on pharmaceutical programs. We had none of that, Mr. Speaker.

Now, are we perfect? No, we continue to work away at making as much relevant information public as we can. We divulge information in government Estimates, in FIPPAs and, indirectly, in other requests that the public or the media request from the government. We think that requiring the First Nations to be accountable for child welfare agencies is appropriate and that's why it's delineated as so in the act.

Mr. McFadyen: It's sad that he has to go back a decade, to misrepresent events of a decade ago in order to try to attempt to defend his very poor record in government. It was only several weeks ago that physicians in Virden were talking about the fact that this is the worst environment in the country to work in that they've created under this government as a result of their mismanagement of health care.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, speaking of transparency, that only one member of this Legislature has ever stood up in this House and gestured that there were zero patients in the hallways on a day when there were many, many Manitobans lying in hospital hallways. He brought that false information into the House on that day about health care. We know that almost 1,500 doctors have left the province under his watch, and he wants to take credit for what's going on in health care.

Manitobans know the story, Mr. Speaker. They know that health care isn't where it needs to be, but, more importantly, they know that he doesn't come into this House with direct responses to questions. So I want to ask him to respond to the question which is: Will he pull Bill 31, which is a backward step for openness and transparency? Will he come forward after consulting with groups such as the Provincial Council of Women, Mother of Red Nations and others who've expressed concerns? Will he go back after consulting and come back with a bill that provides transparency, rather than obfuscations when it comes to government information?

***** (13:50)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we have a situation now where the Ombudsman, the person in the position, is allowed to adjudicate and then rule–or adjudicate prior to a decision of the court for purposes of FIPPA. I recall asking for information, for example, on VLT revenues for various municipalities, and it was denied to us and we later had to go to court to get the information. There were other examples where the Auditor General had to go in with information that was denied on the loss agreement

dealing with the former hockey team that was not divulged, the $45 million that was not divulged.

This creates a privacy adjudicator. Now, this is the way the Ombudsman in the Ombudsman's report has recommended we go. We consulted with the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman's report clearly says that we can have both adjudication and compliance with the act prior to going to court, which hasn't been changed, with the proposed amendment and the way in which it's been proposed in this Legislature.

We now have somebody that can rule on a complaint on FIPPA. That is an expansion of the existing FIPPA provision, an expansion on the expansion of more information being made available to the public that's been part of this government's culture and operation since we were elected, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 31
Aboriginal Access to Information

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Brian Bowman, who is an expert in privacy law, was never consulted in the drafting of this bill and still holds firm that there should be a privacy commissioner as in nine other jurisdictions in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we've met with Aboriginal community members concerned about access to information regarding flow of money within their communities. It's critical if they are to hold their own governments to account; the VLT revenues, for example, that were discussed on CJOB this morning. There must be accurate and useful information compiled, but they also must have access to this kind of information.

Why is the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Robinson) putting roadblocks in the way of Aboriginal people and getting access to information?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Gaming Control Act): Mr. Speaker, by amendments that we put into the gaming commission act, all VLT site holders have to provide public audited statements every year by July 31 with respect to the 31 sites that are in operation. That compliance was never in effect. We put it in effect.

Now, Mr. Speaker, last year, in 2007, all of the statements came in. This year there are some statements that are still being reviewed and still– *[interjection]* Well, the Manitoba Gaming Control Commission is still working with individual communities with respect to those statements. Those will be made public, as all others were, once that review is done.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism hasn't shared the briefing notes with the other minister but, if he'd like, I have a copy.

Mr. Speaker, monies that flow to Aboriginal people can be spent according to their priorities, but by cutting off access to information, the community cannot get information and therefore cannot hold their own governments to account for their spending decisions. This isn't fair to Aboriginal people.

Mr. Speaker, it is difficult now for Aboriginal people to get information. The minister should be advocating for transparency and accountability, not against it. Why is he, instead, using Bill 31 to ensure Aboriginal people will not get information?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the member is factually inaccurate. First Nation site holders are required to maintain records and publish an annual report of their activities. They must submit an annual financial report to the MGCC within 120 days of fiscal year-end. First Nation VLT site holders are due by July 31. Last year, 2007, all reports were provided.

The members opposite FIPPA'd a number of reports. They couldn't get a number of reports because the Gaming Control Commission is working with communities on those reports.

Before that legislation came into place, there was no accountability in the previous government, Mr. Speaker. VLT hotel site holders aren't required to provide those reports. First Nation VLT site holders must provide those reports, and they're made public and they are provided to the community.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, Aboriginal people do not have the same access as other people to Crown corporations and the information that flows between Crown corporations and their local governments.

Mr. Speaker, Aboriginal people have the right to know what monies are being spent and how they are being spent according to their community priorities. They can't find this out unless they can have access to the information. The clauses in Bill 31 go the opposite way and deny access to information by Aboriginal people.

Mr. Speaker, why is this minister trying to keep Aboriginal people in the dark by refusing them

access to information when it is really their right to know? Why is this minister enshrining it in legislation in Bill 31? He needs to pull that bill.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, a First Nation community is required to provide an annual report of its VLT revenues and to post it in the community. On occasions when there is a discrepancy or when there is a problem, a complaint can and will be made to MGCC. MGCC will work with the community to provide that report.

Until that's done, in some instances–there are 31 communities, Mr. Speaker–the accounting statements and the auditing statements don't match up. There's a review, and then when that is reconciled, if there's a problem, it will be reported. If it's not a problem, it'll be provided via FIPPA, as it always has been because the member's got 32 FIPPAs on this, I believe, all the annual reports for all the communities in 2007.

What they're saying is not accurate.

Youth Crime
Recidivism Rate

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, Winnipeggers and Manitobans, they're concerned and they're frustrated about youth crime in our province.

I'd like to table for the House information that I received Friday regarding the re-offence rate for youth in Manitoba. According to the statistics, youth who were released from community custody are re-offending at a rate of over 90 percent. Youth who were released from a prison sentence had a 100 percent re-offence rate.

Can the Minister of Justice indicate whether he believes that this re-offence rate is appropriate?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): The member got the information provided by our office to the member with respect to recidivism rates, Mr. Speaker, and under FIPPA, a lot of this information wasn't available when we were in opposition. We've extended it to schools; we've extended it to hospitals; we've extended it across the board. This particular information–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: We have our prisons, Mr. Speaker, at maximum capacity as a result of the highest incarceration rate in the country. I guess the member's complaining that we're putting too many people in jail. Is that the member's complaint?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm complaining because everybody who leaves prison is charged with another offence within two years. Nothing that this minister is doing is helping. He talks about Lighthouse programs. He talks about the Turnabout program. He likes to talk about an anti-gang program, but his own statistics that are provided from his department show that between April and June of 2006, young people who were released from custody, every one of them committed another crime or were charged with another crime within two years. Every young person released from prison had committed another crime.

How can he explain that? Every young person, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, it wasn't that long ago when the member stood up and was complaining that there were too many car thefts in Manitoba.

One of the reasons that those people are in prison and one of the reasons that the rate of auto theft is down 50 percent, Mr. Speaker, is because we're putting those children back in prison, and if members would support us in our revision to the Young Offenders Act, we could get them in there on the first offence and keep them off the street. I can't believe it. That member complained about too many people on the streets stealing cars and now we've put them in jail.

By the way, the federal government doesn't keep statistics unless you're in there for more than two years. At least we track all individuals in the system.

Mr. Goertzen: You know, the Premier (Mr. Doer) used to have fireside chats with Manitobans to say everything's okay when it comes to crime. The former Minister of Justice used to have a news release a day and rehash announcements. This Minister of Justice, he just gets angry in the House when he can't explain what's happening in the justice system.

Mr. Speaker, between April and June of 2006, every young person who was released from prison had re-offended within two years. This is a justice system that isn't working. Every young person. You could do absolutely nothing and have the same results, and that's what this government is doing–nothing.

Why doesn't he just admit it, that every program they put in place is a failure?

***** (14:00)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, under the federal legislation, under the federal Young Offenders Act, you can't keep people in jail in most cases longer than two years. So, when the member supports our change to Ottawa to make sentences longer, we'll be happy. And I'd like to table in the Legislature a mailing by one Steven Fletcher about how working closely with provincial leaders to identify reforms in the federal Young Offenders Act has helped.

Mr. Speaker, the member can't complain about high auto theft rates and then complain when we– *[interjection]* You know, he won't even stop *[inaudible]* The member can't complain about high auto theft rates and then when we reduce it by 50 percent complain about taking–

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Health-Care Services
Physician Retention

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the NDP have done a very poor job of keeping doctors in Manitoba. In fact, since this NDP government came in nine years ago, 1,471 doctors have left Manitoba. That seems to be about a 60 percent turnover in doctors in this province.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain why doctors don't want to stay in Manitoba and work under this government.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I notice that the member opposite neglected to mention the number of doctors that have come to Manitoba. I can inform the member, in case she's not aware, that for every year during the 1990s the College of Physicians and Surgeons recorded a net loss of doctors with 1996 being a record-breaking year of minus 75.

I can also report, Mr. Speaker, that since 1999, we have had a net increase of doctors with the year before last being a record of a net gain of 54. Thank you.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health likes to brag about doctors coming to Manitoba. However, despite her spin she does a much worse job of doctor recruitment than seven other provinces. According to the most recent CIHI report, B.C., Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, P.E.I., Nova Scotia and Québec all attract more doctors than Manitoba does.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us why Manitoba is almost the worst in Canada for attracting doctors.

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, I'm also provided with the opportunity with that question to alert the House that the negotiations with the Manitoba Medical Association have concluded today with an unprecedented 93 percent of doctors in Manitoba ratifying this stellar agreement.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that through this agreement we have been able to resolve issues that have been unresolved for over 30 years. We've been able to change the culture in Manitoba from what was described by a former president as being the dark days of the '90s to a culture of co-operation and collegiality. We know that this master agreement is going to improve our retention rates by putting us on parity with Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health has created a revolving door of doctors coming and going from this province.

The numbers from CIHI trump this minister's spin. Alberta attracted 70 percent more doctors; New Brunswick, 12 percent; Newfoundland, 10 percent; P.E.I., 8 percent; Nova Scotia, 5.5 percent; B.C., 5 percent; Québec, 5 percent and Manitoba attracted only 2 percent, almost dead last again in Canada.

I'd like to ask this minister to tell us why Manitoba has such a hard time attracting doctors to work here.

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, it's curious strange having these words, these inaccuracies put on the record by the member opposite who I believe was legislative assistant to the Minster of Health when decisions were made in Manitoba, get this, to cut the spaces in medical school, to cut them from 85 down to 70.

So in addition to having a net increase of doctors–not my numbers, Mr. Speaker, but the numbers of the College of Physicians and Surgeons– we've been able to reverse that heinous decision, restore to 85 seats, go up to a hundred seats, and this year we saw the largest first-year medical school class with 110 students at the University of Manitoba.

Garden Valley School Division
Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, September 15, I again asked the Minister of Education to adequately fund education at Garden Valley School Division. The data for this school has been there for many, many years. The minister has seen and has had access to the data.

The minister is either not paying attention, or did the Premier (Mr. Doer) overrule him when he recommended not to spend infrastructure dollars in southern Manitoba? Which of the two is it, not paying attention or being overruled by the Premier?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Well, thank you very much for the question and, certainly, as I was driving down the new highway construction on my way to Winkler to visit the Winkler area, and as I drove by the new hospital that we built in that area, as well, when I went to visit after I'd opened up a new school at Emerado–*[interjection]* When we built it, I said. After opening up the new school at Emerado, after agreeing to build additional schools in the area, and unprecedented Public Schools Finance Board funding, I met with the Garden Valley School Division and we're very much aware of the situation and we're working with the Garden Valley School Division to find creative solutions to the very good problem of unprecedented growth in the area.

Certainly, in the 1990s, that wasn't an issue. People were leaving the province. Right now, people are coming to the province, and we will work with them to manage that growth, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, just to set the record straight, it was our government that built Boundary Trails, not this one.

Garden Valley School Division is in a crisis. We have an increase of 5 percent to 8 percent in student enrolment on an annual basis for the last eight years. The minister knows and has known that space is a real problem.

In Alberta, they announced today that 18 new schools will be built and opened by September 2010; that's in two years. Will the minister commit today that Garden Valley School Division will have access to a new high school by September 2010? They can do it in Alberta. Why can't we?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite was listening to the radio this morning, as I was before I was interviewed about the issue, the member opposite would have heard that Garden Valley now has made a high school their No. 1 priority. It had not been the No. 1 priority, because the No. 1 priority had been a junior high school, or a middle-years high school, as the top priority. We've committed to do that, and they are currently planning to build a middle-years school.

They haven't selected a site yet for the high school. Upon the selection of a site and working with the community, that process will be undertaken, Mr. Speaker. We know there's need there. We've been there. We've seen the situation and we know that there's need to address that capital infrastructure request.

Quite frankly, members opposite know that we do build a lot of schools in–

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dyck: It would be nice if the minister was factual in his information. The *Winnipeg Free Press*, CJOB, Statistics Canada recognize that Winkler is one of the fastest-growing communities in Manitoba.

In the light of the crisis they are facing, will the minister attend the public meeting in Winkler at 7 p.m. tonight to tell the community what his plans are to address the problem? I hear the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) is going to Virden. I'd like the Minister of Education to come to Winkler tonight.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been to Winkler last June, actually, and toured the facility. I met with the Garden Valley School Division just last week and will continue to meet and work with our partners to achieve the outcome and the desired result, and that is to address the infrastructure needs in the community.

Since 1999, there's been $18 million in schools' capital in the Garden Valley School Division. That included the new Emerado School which we built in such a way that we could add to it. Certainly, after opening the school two years ago, we recognize the need and we committed to add four more classrooms.

And, again, the No. 1 priority for Garden Valley School Division had been a middle-years school. They're planning that school and they're meeting tonight to discuss site location, among other issues, for the high school, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Flooding
Assistance for Farmers

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Many parts of the province are still in a flood crisis. We need leadership from this government. The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) and the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province lack the leadership on this particular issue.

When will they put rural Manitoba first and put a plan in place for this crisis that we're dealing with?

***** (14:10)

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Well, very, very clearly, Mr. Speaker, this government has shown leadership in this area. Our ministers have been out there to visit with farmers, to visit with municipalities. We worked with them to address the needs. On August 24, our Minister of Agriculture actually introduced an AgriRecovery initiative worth $10 million that farmers in the backyard of the Member for Lakeside can access.

I would encourage members opposite, instead of being doom and gloomers all the time, to actually work with the producers to help fill out the application forms to make this happen. Let's make this happen rather than complain about it.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, we need leadership from this government. We need action today and what we have is a crisis whether they want to realize it or not. The Premier was up in Eriksdale, had coffee, turned around and left. Left no promises, left no advice. Shame on him.

Mr. Speaker, we wrote the Minister of Agriculture in July and told her to get ready for this crisis. We saw nothing. We need leadership. We need it today. Producers sell off their herds. We need some action in this government.

Mr. Struthers: Well, based on the information that the Premier (Mr. Doer) and ministers have gained from the farmers in the area, we have taken action. We've taken action starting back in August in terms of the AgriRecovery initiative which actually does provide money for his own constituents to access so they can weather the amount of rain that we've had in these parts of our province.

This is an issue that we take seriously. We put concrete actual plans in place to help the farmers. I would suggest that the members across get on board and help their own farmers take advantage of these programs.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, most families each and every day *[inaudible]* and advocating for their benefit. The meetings in Eriksdale, Eddystone, were packed. They wanted answers then. That's been some two and a half, three weeks ago we've seen no action from this government. We asked the Ag minister to take action. We asked the Ag Committee to be called. No action.

When will this government show real leadership, get off their duffs and call real action today?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, we put in place in excess of $12 million to help these farmers. Through AgriRecovery, we've done that. We've done some very practical steps in terms of creating tools by which farmers can access hay in other parts of the province, and then we assist them in getting that hay to the cattle that need to have that hay.

We know there are farmers working very hard, who are working hard and aren't getting the number of bales of hay that they need to get through the winter. We know that. I know the member opposite knows that, but what he won't admit is that we're actually putting in place programs that help his constituents.

Ambulance Fees
Federal Invoice

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, last week, when I was talking about the need for the Premier to stand up for Manitobans, the Premier asked me if I would go with him when he takes the federal government to court to recover the dollars that Manitoba is owed for ambulance fees. Yes, I'm ready to go with the Premier to court to take the federal government to court to recover those dollars.

So I ask the Premier: Has the Premier prepared his case? How much is Manitoba owed? When are we ready to go to court? Are you ready to go to court or are you bluffing?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): As we're doing our due diligence on this court case, I want to say that I made a mistake. I said that one of the decisions was made by the former Liberal government on air ambulance, and one of the other decisions, or two decisions, were made by the present Conservative government. I've actually found out that the second decision to unilaterally withdraw from transportation for northern residents, including in the city of Winnipeg,

was actually made by the Liberal government. So I want to thank him for his assistance as we prepare our legal arguments to sue the former government, if we do decide to do it, but, Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness we have provided the funds to the City of Winnipeg, $7 million.

The new protocol, we think, with the national government is a way to adjudicate these disputes when unilateral decisions were made by the former government. I do apologize. The second decision on withdrawing air ambulance support for First Nations people was actually–and land transportation, ambulance costs to the City of Winnipeg, was made by the former Liberal government.

Federal Liberal Green Plan
Government Support

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Well, whichever government made that mistake, I'm ready to support Manitoba's interest.

Talking about speaking and standing up for ordinary Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about an ordinary Manitoba family with two parents, two children, earning, say, $40,000 a year. Under Stéphane Dion and the Liberal green shift, this family would have an additional $1,500 a year to spend.

I ask the Premier: Why was he campaigning at the NACC meetings against a program which would put $1,500 a year in ordinary Manitobans' pockets? Will the Premier stand up for ordinary Manitobans and support the Liberal green shift and putting $1,500 a year in the pockets of ordinary Manitobans?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, if you're a senior citizen that is not making any claims on income tax because of very low income and because of all the credits in the federal and provincial tax system and you have the, quote, green tax that's levied on your heating fuel in northern Manitoba, on some of your other utilities that you use and have to use, you will not get the $1,500 the member opposite is talking about. It will be a green tax on many people.

Now, we believe, Mr. Speaker, in the cap and trade system in Manitoba. We support the Ontario and Québec governments joining in on that proposal. When we were asked whether we supported the idea of the carbon tax that was introduced in British Columbia, we said no at the time.

Mr. Speaker, I am surprised the member opposite would not know the impact on a northern Manitoban. I mean, I can't believe that this would be advocated in northern Manitoba by the member opposite. Certainly we have worked in the past with federal governments and federal ministers on ideas on climate change. We were the first province in Canada to come out with a climate change plan.

We think there are ways of going, such as energy efficiency, such as cap and trade and many other measures. For example, we've introduced a tax on coal, but we want to make the conversion of coal to other renewable energy sources before that takes place. But the member opposite can campaign on the carbon tax as much as he wants to. We're opposed to it, and we'll say so from every place in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

School Enrolment
Guardianship Fees

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, for the last few years, on behalf of the Liberal Party, I've been advocating for Grandparents' Day and getting a proclamation and doing something in regard to Grandparents' Day. The NDP have taken yet another idea that the Liberal Party has been advocating.

I want to make another suggestion, and the suggestion is why don't we do something real for grandparents that goes over and above the recognition of Grandparents' Day and allow and give the assurance across the province of Manitoba that if, in fact, a grandparent is taking custody of a grandchild, that that grandparent will not have to pay any additional fee for providing quality education to their grandchildren.

That's another good Liberal idea. Will the Minister of Education acknowledge that and agree that that's what this government will do?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, certainly, as I've told the member, my office is continuing to work with the grandparents on this custody issue as it relates to jurisdiction that falls under The Public Schools Act.

The individual in question that the member has raised in the House–and in not a very timely fashion, I might say–this particular individual is talking about nursery school which I have no jurisdiction over, but we want to ensure that next year, if the grandparents have custody of that individual, that there is no issue

with that child being involved in the public school when the time comes and the child being enrolled.

Provincial Nominee Program
Government Initiative

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, we know that Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program is the leader in the country.

Can the Minister of Labour and Immigration explain what this government is doing to further strengthen the province's labour force and to improve the Provincial Nominee Program?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, last week I was privileged to make an announcement in regard to a very innovative and dynamic change to Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program.

We will be removing the occupational requirements list from the Provincial Nominee application kit and also from the Web site, because we believe it was a barrier to those individuals that were applying to the program from abroad. They will be assessed through our priority streams, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, this kind of a change is going to help us to meet our skilled-labour shortage here in Manitoba, and we look forward to these changes because that's how we will meet our labour market requirements here in Manitoba and continue to have the best program in Canada.

***** (14:20)

Emergency Room (Virden)
Closure

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, a month ago following a public meeting I organized on the lack of doctors in Virden and subsequently Melita and their emergency room closures to which over 600 concerned southwest Manitoba citizens attended, I wrote the minister to invite her to Virden to meet with all the stakeholders involved in the doctor shortage in the southwest region. I'll table a copy of that letter in the House today.

Tonight she is attending such a private meeting. Can she enlighten this House and southwest Manitoba citizens of progress in this doctor-shortage crisis, or will they still have to wait for a wish of February before doctors are available?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the House and the member opposite that we have had two meetings with the people of Virden. That is specifically in the minister's office. We are going to Virden to speak with doctors, nurses and members of the community that are very interested in improving this situation.

I can also clarify the record, Mr. Speaker, that the February date that's been cited is concerning the training program for international medical graduates, but, of course, the work to reopen that ER is going on daily, working on doctors having shared call, working on bringing a nurse practitioner to the community and working on bringing Telehealth to the community.

So we're very active on this file. We know we need more doctors in rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're bringing more to Manitoba and not driving them away.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, a question might be who is the minister meeting with tonight? But with 1,471 doctors leaving Manitoba under her watch, she might as well go fishing. She's got a bait-and-release approach to doctor recruitment.

Will she end this train-but-do-not-retain process and, Mr. Speaker, will she commit to a later public meeting to let concerned citizens know how soon they can expect their emergency rooms in Virden and Melita to reopen?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, we know the people of Virden want to have their ER reopened. We're working very hard to do that. We know that there has been a net increase every year of doctors, not a net loss like when they had their watch. It's a little disingenuous to suggest that a doctor left Virden to go to another community in rural Manitoba, for which I would think the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) would be very pleased.

But we need to continue to bring up the entire complement of doctors in rural Manitoba. The MMA agreement is going to work to do that. Increasing the spaces in medical school is going to do that, not cutting them, and having aggressive recruitment and retention packages and good relationships with our doctors are going to do that, not being at war with them like the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

West Winnipeg Community Access Centre

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that plans for the new West Winnipeg Community Access Centre are now underway. The new access centre will be the fourth to be developed in Winnipeg. Just like the other centres, this one will integrate community-based health care and social services in one location, providing the community with a wide array of services all under one roof.

The centre will include a primary care clinic, and provide community mental health counselling, public health care, supported living services, child day-care services, community outreach, vocational services and employment income assistance.

This partnership project between Manitoba Health, Manitoba Family Services and Housing and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has already brought improved access to primary health care and community services to the residents of Winnipeg with the other access centres in the city. Now we will be better able to service those in the West End of Winnipeg.

Currently, public information sessions are being held in west Winnipeg, so that the residents can provide their input on the needs of the community.

Mr. Speaker, health care and health-care access is a local, national and international challenge. Our government is making progress in meeting this challenging task. Through the implementation of these access centres, we can better provide constituents with the every day needs that they require. We believe that having all of these services in one location results in better co-ordination, delivery and ultimately better care for our residents. I'm looking forward to what the new centre will do for the community. It is truly an exciting time to be a part of the Kirkfield Park constituency. Thank you.

Neepawa 125th Anniversary

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to rise and congratulate the town of Neepawa on its 125th anniversary. This historic community is located in an area that was known for its stable climate, good soils and abundant harvests as settlers and fur traders settled in the region. In fact, the name Neepawa means land of plenty in the Cree language.

Today Neepawa is considered one of the most beautiful towns in the province and has been awarded Manitoba's Most Beautiful Town Award more often than any other community. Flowers and trees line the streets and the town also has the honour of being named the Lily Capital of the World.

Five days of events mark Neepawa's momentous milestone. They were kicked off with an opening ceremony and cake cutting. Resident Winnie Cheetham, who is an 88-year-old former teacher and has lived in Neepawa for 78 years, cut the cake. The 125th and the homecoming weekend were scheduled to coincide with many other significant dates, including the 50th anniversary of the Neepawa and Area Collegiate Institute and the 12th anniversary of the Lily Festival. Events included the lily show, a square dance, buskers, clowns, quilt show and live music. Celebrated yodeler, Tillie Harpelle; fiddler, Caleb Whiteside and singer-songwriter, Jeff Thomas, were featured, among others, as musical guests.

Mr. Speaker, I would like again to congratulate Neepawa on their 125th anniversary. Thank you.

Seniors' Housing Issues

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, on September 4 and 5, I had the pleasure of meeting with some local groups to discuss regarding seniors in our province. My first visit was to Dawson Trails Apartments, an active-living 55-plus complex in Windsor Park. It was a chance to meet with local seniors who call the modern and beautifully furnished complex located on the scenic walking and biking trail their home.

During our first visit we discussed some local issues of safety and building maintenance, very important to them. We also discussed about transportation from the complex to local shopping malls and recreational facilities. Being a senior myself, I understand the importance of most issues to residents and I look forward to continue to work with them to ensure their needs are met.

I was very impressed with the apartment's layout and surroundings, and I would like to thank Shirley, Gordon and Donna, Werner and Ingie, Mike, Jannine and Perry, Joyce, Lawrence and Ida, and Inez for their warm welcome.

The next morning I had the privilege of holding a meeting with seniors from the Transcona Community Network at the Transcona Access Centre. We discussed affordable senior housing and the need for more housing in Transcona and

Radisson. Several complexes have already been built in that area, allowing residents to continue living in communities in which they have spent most of their lives. Our discussion also touched on the models of sliding-scale rent affordability.

My visit with the seniors of the Transcona Community Network was a great opportunity to meet with the Manitobans at community level and to confirm our government's commitment to the issue of seniors and housing. I would like to thank the Community Network committee for their work in organizing the event, including Donna Jacobs and Amanda Younka of the WRHA, Diane Truderung of the Transcona BIZ, Gwen Howe from the City of Winnipeg and Transcona resident, Doug Buckingham.

Mr. Speaker, in many ways seniors are the jewels of our society, and I respect them and I would like to continue working with them. Thank you very much.

Red River Exhibition Day for Special Needs Children

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): On June 18, 2008, children 10 years of age and under who are participants within the Children's Special Services Program were invited to an exclusive special free day at the Red River Ex. Personal invitations were sent to the children including guest passes for the children's parents and their preschool siblings. There were a total of 800 individuals who participated in this event. All participants received unlimited free rides at the Kids World portion of the exhibition, opportunities to play with the animals at Weston's Petting Zoo, free hotdogs, drinks, chips, many donuts, cotton candy and a plush toy.

In receiving some feedback from families, they expressed how grateful they were to have had the opportunity to attend this special free day. This day allowed the children to experience a fun-filled day of rides and goodies without having to face some of the barriers that may have prevented them from attending the exhibition during regular hours. Specifically, the children were able to take the time they need to get on and off the rides and did not have to face the noise and distractions from large crowds of people.

***** (14:30)

The St. James-Assiniboia and Assiniboine South Health and Social Services Department commend the Red River Exhibition Association for their continuous efforts in supporting the citizens of Manitoba. Their initiation in creating a day for special needs children, along with their donation of time and resources, models Manitoba's energy initiative. The Red River Exhibition's effort in collaborating a multitude of suppliers, volunteers and carnival employees truly demonstrates their ongoing dedication to the community.

I would like to congratulate all of those that made this happen. Particularly, I would like to recognize Pat Gamvrelis, the case manager for Children's Special Services and Ron May, the executive director, Family Services and Housing, St. James-Assiniboia and Assiniboine South, and to also compliment the Red River Exhibition Association for doing something that is so special for these children. Their commitment, obviously, on all their parts, has made the lives of these children something very special for this period of time and I commend all of them for their efforts in this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Financial Assistance for Interlake Flooding Victims

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, from a farming perspective, the summer of 2008 has once again been a consummate disaster for the people of the Interlake and the provincial government has acknowledged this. Municipal declarations of disaster have enabled individuals to file claims for property damages through Disaster Financial Assistance and the R.M.s themselves are free to apply for repairs to infrastructure.

Farmers have several program options available since the signing of the Growing Forward agreement with the federal government in July of this year. Close attention should be paid to the Business Risk Management suite of programs which include AgriInsurance, AgriInvest, AgriStability and especially AgriRecovery, the disaster assistance component.

The recently announced Manitoba Forage Assistance program is a prime example of a specific program which can be flowed through this mechanism. AgriRecovery assistance programming was triggered on August 22 when the provincial deputy minister of MAFRI was directed by the government to contact his federal counterpart to inform him that an agricultural disaster had occurred. This was all that was necessary and no further public declarations of disaster by the provincial government

are required despite repeated opposition party claims to the contrary.

It is most unfortunate and shameful that, in this current crisis situation, members of the Conservative Party cannot put blatant political opportunism aside to encourage farmers to work within the framework which was recently established between the federal and provincial governments across the country after much negotiation.

Growing Forward programming must be given time to work, as Minister Ritz, in Ottawa, has indicated he will not support ad hoc funding. What with high input costs, poor weather and rising protectionism to the south, farmers do not need Tory disinformation campaigns to add further to their woes in this time of trial. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, on a grievance?

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): On a grievance, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon with a heavy heart. I watched this morning as the pneumatic drills went to work and the dropped arm swung around in demolition of the Burnside, former Manitoba Pool elevator. A very valuable asset to Portage la Prairie and costing millions and millions of dollars to construct and being just a little over 20 years old, was in excellent, excellent shape and could have continued for many more years serving producers.

It was a corporate decision made by the new entity known as Viterra that came to be with the merger of the former AgriCore United and Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. The asset known as Burnside came to the ownership of Viterra**,** which is the operating arm of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, for consideration and the corporate decision was to, first off, take a full analysis of the viability of that point and took months to do so. Actually, it came to the conclusion that the elevator did, indeed, serve a purpose and was of value to local producers. So, in the middle of July, a tender notice went out of the pending sale of that asset and all producers or corporate entities were encouraged to put forward proposals. However, just a scant few days after the tenders were released for the sale of this particular asset, and might I mention there were other assets around the province also put out for tender, but it was a corporate decision to withdraw the offer for tender of the Burnside elevator. So the corporation withdrew the offer for proposals and instead decided to demolish the Burnside elevator and, indeed, eight other points of delivery throughout Manitoba.

What I would like to share with the Chamber is not only the disappointment that this particular asset is now being demolished, but it is a recognition that this government's inaction to safeguard some of the very valuable infrastructure that we have here in the province.

I know earlier this year we had the opportunity to debate a resolution that was brought forward by the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), that cited the rail-line abandonment and rail-line salvage operations that are ongoing in the province of Manitoba. With the removal of very valuable infrastructure, such as these rail lines, more and more traffic, heavy weight traffic, might I add, is added to our roadways, which our Province is responsible for not only maintaining, but upgrading.

So, with the activity of today, not only have we lost what I believe is a very valuable asset, a very viable asset in Portage la Prairie, but, subsequently, to the demolition of the Burnside elevator, the spur line, which is also owned by Viterra, is slated for salvage operations. Once again, we all know that the track that is salvaged will never ever be replaced because of the significant cost and, also, too, the changing dynamics of rail traffic here in our nation.

It is an era lost that I would like to share with honourable members, where, as a co-operative member–and I know most members opposite will appreciate being a member of a co-operative movement–we had Manitoba Pool Elevators with the motto "Service at Cost." I was very proud to be a co-operative member and, in fact, played an active part in, actually, the decision to construct the Burnside elevator. Further to that, actually sold the land to which the Burnside elevator is located.

It also is something of note that the change in attitude and activity of larger companies now that have gone from a co-operative structure to a large corporate structure, the activities of that corporation focus more and more on shareholder return. And because of that, I will say that corporations, I believe, personally, are losing focus on what is really important, and that is the service that they offer and the persons that receive that service, and that is we, the farmers of western Canada.

At the recent annual general meeting of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, it was noted by the president and chief executive officer, Mr. Mayo Schmidt, that they were very, very proud of the level of margins within their operations. I will say that I took particular note, and I will quote from his address: Viterra generates high returns for shareholders. For instance, margins in the grain business can range between $24 and $26 per tonne. In the feed business, we experience margins in excess of $40 and, in the food processing business, we enjoy margins of $75 per tonne, or more.

***** (14:40)

Again, this particular quotation–end of quotation–cites the focus on shareholder return rather than trying to maximize the producer returns as was the focus when the operations were of a co-operative structure.

As a producer, if I could only achieve $24 to $26 per metric tonne on a net margin with relatively little risk, I would, indeed, like to see that reported on my farming operation's bottom line.

I also would like to take note of this government's inaction again to recognize that, when early in office, this government passed legislation providing for successor rights as respective to rail lines here in the province of Manitoba. This government imposed upon all persons or corporations acquiring rail lines from large rail companies here in Canada that they include the responsibility for maintaining the employment of a union nature, as was attached to the trackage which they are acquiring.

I would like to take note of the activity of small rail-line operations, abandonment of track or acquisition of track by small operations in the province of Manitoba. After this legislation was enacted, there has not been one kilometre of rail line acquired from large unionized companies to small non-unionized operators, not one kilometre of line.

That is so telling as to why we now look at the miles upon miles of railway track here in the province of Manitoba that are being salvaged. This line is not going to the blast furnaces. The track that is being picked up here in the province of Manitoba is being shipped intact to other countries around the world where they are laying down more and more railway track because it is the most cost-effective, efficient movement of high-weight-and-volume merchandise from one point to another.

Yet, here in Canada, we have not realized that fact and continue to allow further rail-line abandonment and disappearance of a former–

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Acting Government House Leader): We'll start with debate of second reading on 47, then go to 48 and 46.

Mr. Speaker: Orders of the day. We'll deal with Bills 47, 48 and 46.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 47–The CentrePort Canada Act

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on second reading, Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

What is the will of the House? Is the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. It's been denied. Is there any speaker?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 47 today. I was perhaps hoping that the minister would rise to his own bill and put it on second reading. I would assume that he may take the opportunity to do that as we move forward with The CentrePort Canada Act, Bill 47. Mr. Speaker, I know he's engrossed heavily in discussions on issues, so I will certainly want to make comments in regard to Bill 47 today in the House because CentrePort, the inland port development in the province of Manitoba, is such an important issue that we very, very much need to look at this type of legislation to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, there are many many parts to the bill, but it is fairly straightforward in regard to the type of future development that is important in this province. There is also an inland port resolution from our side of the House in regard to this type of legislation that may get to the floor as we move forward this week. I wanted to just check in regard to the minister's availability to discuss some of those issues, and he'll have his opportunity there as well.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly believe strongly in inland port development in the province of Manitoba. Let me put that on the record and be very clear about that. The bill establishes a CentrePort Canada Inc. as the title and the name of the bill that the government has brought forward, Bill 47. They gave inclination to this type of legislation coming forward last June before the House rose in regard to Bill 46 that was tabled at that time, tax increment funding financing, that has and will be developed further in discussions in the House as well, as a means of funding some of this type of legislation.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So we assumed that a bill of CentrePort Canada act type of legislation to support an inland port in Manitoba was coming forward from the government. Most pleased to see it come forward as well.

We're happy that the government has taken action in establishing this inland port for Manitoba, and I want to give great support and contribution though for their efforts from all of the private-sector persons that were involved in this and including the federal government, Madam Deputy Speaker, the federal Conservative government that has gone to great lengths to focus on a Canada position in regard to trade.

We are seeing how important trade can be and how, with an international agreement that was not successful at the go-around of discussions in Brussels earlier on this summer for trade, particularly in the areas of agriculture, but in all areas, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are a number of products that can be processed in this region of Canada and exported out of this region. We are also centrally located in North America for the distribution of those goods within 36 hours by truck to virtually any point in North America. I think that's a tremendous opportunity for a city that was founded on transportation.

Of course, for the record, the city of Winnipeg was to have been some three million people by the turn of the century, and as has been spoken before, probably would have attained that as it was the crossroads of transportation and delivery of goods across North America in the late 1800s, early 1900s. With the development, however, of the Panama Canal, there were many who felt that a lot of those goods were diverted in another means around Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker, and prohibited the men from having to go from sort of the eastern seaboard or even the St. Lawrence River Basin to Vancouver or to the West Coast in that manner.

***** (14:50)

But, today, Madam Deputy Speaker, with the trade developments that we have in this province and the opportunity to grow Manitoba, this is, and I would say, as I have before, probably Manitoba's one great opportunity to become a have province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, very, very clearly, Manitoba is a have-not province under this government, and we have an opportunity to right that wrong and move forward with the development of not just hundreds or thousands of jobs, but tens of thousands of jobs.

I just would like to, I would reference such a fine individual like the CEO of the Winnipeg Airports Authority, Mr. Barry Rempel, who estimated, in regard to Manitoba, that an inland port would create something like 740 or 750 jobs immediately, could end up with 2,600 in the long-term jobs to the economy and an expected annual output in economic activity greater than $391 million, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was a quote from the *Winnipeg Free Press* back on March 20th.

I would just say that I would certainly concur with Mr. Rempel on these remarks, and to show that the whole progress of this and the importance of it is moving forward, I would show that the co-operation of the federal government in regard to this project has taken the lead in showing the importance on it in that there were funds put into it prior to the '07 election. There were announcements, provincially that is, in regard to the twinning of Inkster Boulevard to the west Perimeter, which would be a plus in regard to the activities around the Winnipeg international airport–the James Richardson International Airport–which is, of course, where CentrePort Canada is potentially to be located.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is also pointed out that there was a fund put in place to expand the Trans-Canada Highway in regard to the area around No. 1 and the Yellowhead corner to put an overpass there so the traffic does not have to slow, such as the underpass on Kenaston highway, to continue with the facilitation of smooth movement of vehicle traffic, particularly the semis that would be hauling goods in and out of Winnipeg if and when CentrePort becomes successful.

There are a number of other areas. Of course, there were funds put in before that election to

enhance the Churchill activities, with the $20 million each from the Province, federal government, as well as the Hudson's Bay rail, and $8 million more for the enhancement of the Port of Churchill to establish the northern end of the mid-continent route, Madam Deputy Speaker, that would be so important to the export of goods out of our North American region and into it as well. These have been very keen developments in regard to the successful completion of a trade zone that would take place out of Winnipeg.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to say how important it is that we take nothing for granted by this bill. I want to say that the bill, while it has been brought to this House–and I have said that I and my caucus members will be voting in favour of this bill later on. We'd like to see this bill move forward as quickly as we can because it does allow for a board of directors to be established in regard to the CentrePort activities that then allows it to begin developing a business plan that can be used to facilitate long-term development.

It also would be used to encourage investment in an inland port region that would actually bring the private enterprise and the private jobs to it. Most pleased to see that the government and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce announced an $80-million program on Friday–50 from the Province and 30 from the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. If I said 50, I'm sorry. It was $80,000; 50 from the Province and 30 from the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I believe that kind of encouragement will help bring business to Manitoba, but it's very much needed because of some other lack of incentives for business to attach itself to Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I hope to get into those in either this reading or in third reading of this bill.

But the bill does allow for, as well, apart from long-term development and operations of the inland port, it also encourages investment. But it also, and just as importantly, promotes the inland port by marketing the inland port domestically and internationally and by participating in organizations formed to develop and promote the inland port, transportation gateway and trade corridors with links to the inland port area. Of course, some of the funds that I've just talked about would be used in that vein, I'm sure, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The board is set up without a share capital. It's not under The Corporations Act, although it is set up and given the powers of an individual, with a corporate structure similar to The Corporations Act in Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There is a concern, I know, that it's the intent of the Premier's Economic Advisory Council who make the members up that are basically appointed as first directors in section 10(1), and it's their intent to take the names of the 11 others that would be forming a board which is made of anywhere from nine to 15 members.

I know that it was their intent to just bring those nominees forward and make them as part of that board, but there was a concern that myself and certainly the member representing Rosser, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), represented the concern of why Rosser, as a municipal jurisdiction with a good deal of its land mass in the Canada CentrePort jurisdiction that's described under the bill in the schedule at the back of the bill–defined as the Inland Port Area–that they weren't given an initial seat at that board to help make those decisions on whom the larger board would be.

I am most pleased to see that, with the member from Rosser's insistence, discussions that we brought up with the minister in the briefing we had on this bill and others, the minister has brought forward an amendment or has indicated that he will bring forward an amendment, which we will support, in regard to allowing Rosser to be a part of that appointment of first directors. A group, Madam Deputy Speaker. So I commend the member from Rosser for his efforts in making that possible and for the minister in bringing forward the amendment.

Of course, the bill also states that there's an ineligibility for appointment to this–cannot be an elected official, officer or employee of a municipality that is referred to in the Capital Region Partnership; can't be a member of the Manitoba Legislature, the Senate or House of Commons, employee of the Manitoba government or Canada; or any person under the age of 18 or is an undischarged bankrupt, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that one certainly goes without any further explanation.

I know that the intent is to form a board within 90 days of the passing of this legislation, and it's our intent to encourage that process to move forward and get in place very quickly, Madam Deputy Speaker, because with the directors appointed for three years and you can serve three successive terms but no more, it gives them a lot of continuity in regard to

nine years for members to be on that board and other areas.

But there are reasons why we feel that we need to encourage the government to move forward with this type of legislation which they could have brought in last June, Madam Deputy Speaker. We would have very much had this bill–probably the board–in place by now. I don't know if that was too quick for the government and their actions in moving forward on this, but certainly the bill has not been tabled until this fall, so we didn't have an opportunity to look at it.

That's why we were bringing forward an inland port resolution ourselves. I look forward to the minister being able to provide us with support on that, as we are supporting Bill 47 as well, and perhaps we can move forward with getting this activity done much quicker than might otherwise have been.

***** (15:00)

I think one of the areas of concern that we had in regard to the urgency of this, Madam Deputy Speaker, was to make sure that other jurisdictions didn't beat us to the punch. There's no doubt that other jurisdictions are looking at this as their windfall or their abilities to move from not being a have province, but to being more of a have province, because Saskatchewan and Alberta are already have provinces, as we've pointed out. I'm sure the whole public of Canada knows that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, when you are looking at the issue of whether it was prairie port which has come up from the Saskatchewan government, the tri-city arrangement of Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon and other areas of Saskatchewan in developing an inland port venue for their area, or whether it was Western Economic Diversification, putting $1.5 million into the Edmonton region with the Edmonton regional airport to look at an inland port in that jurisdiction, we were concerned as an opposition that this bill was not moving forward fast enough in coming into the House to make sure that we were leaders in this field.

Now, I understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the geographic reasons that we have for making Winnipeg the case and Manitoba the case for a CentrePort Bill 47 is exactly why we support it. It is the confluence of both railroads coming through the city of Winnipeg as well as Burlington Northern from the south.

It's got No. 1 and No. 16, the Yellowhead route that I've spoken about, the Perimeter Highway that needs to be upgraded if this process will continue, but it is there. It's established. It needs to have extensions of perhaps access to that CentrePort land region around some of Headingley that's been discussed by some of the members here as well, to have greater access to that region as well, and not the least of which is the seaport of Churchill to have activity of some of the venues that we have in the north as well to bring goods and services in from other areas of the world as was exampled by the distribution of fertilizer through that port to farmers in Saskatchewan this year, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that's just the beginning of some of the things that we could see there.

I think that the whole package comes together extremely well by the fact that we have wonderful overnight one-day service from China to Winnipeg to be able to be in our airport by our airlines. It allows for the movement of goods in and out in a much quicker manner than it does some other cities or certainly cheaper because they don't have to refuel anywhere to get into Winnipeg and unload those goods, reload and go back. It can cut as much as a day off of a three-day trip into any other city in central North America to get these goods distributed.

Then, of course, there's the confluence of the two rail lines that I spoke of, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific coming from the west coast with loads and loads of container products that would move into the prairie region and, as I said, the prairie region is centralized here in Manitoba for processing. It is also a centre that could be developed for the assembly of many, many goods that would come in from offshore to be assembled and put together in this area, and that's the part of making the thousands and thousands of jobs.

Two important things that have to happen in that though, Madam Deputy Speaker, are that the–and the bill outlines the fact that this would be a single entity, single jurisdiction body, the CentrePort Canada port. That is very important to the success and the future development of this industry as well.

The part from being a single entity though, the CentrePort venture needs to be able to move forward in a manner that would provide Manitoba and the area involved, the 20,000 acres that has been used in this bill, although that's not hard and fast according to the bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, either. It can be moved up or down from that according to the wills

and needs of CentrePort at future dates, but one of the most important issues is that we need to have a free trade zone in this whole region in order to make it happen.

Of course, we're very concerned that we have a Premier in Manitoba who's not in favour of free trade, who has spoken out publicly against free trade in the past, although he does speak highly and his government has brought forward this particular bill to make sure that CentrePort happens. I don't know how he's going to explain that one to the unions, Madam Deputy Speaker, but, you know, there's a plus in this for everyone in that the more jobs we have the more members the unions may have in the long run as well.

So, while there is a great deal of private enterprise involved in this whole process, tremendous opportunities in the trucking industry that we have in Manitoba–and I see that the Manitoba Trucking Association is one of the representatives on the board, along with the Winnipeg Airports Authority, the Manitoba Business Council, the Chambers of Commerce of Manitoba and Winnipeg; the tourism industry is represented through Destination Winnipeg; the Rural Municipality of Rosser, the City of Winnipeg, the Government of Canada and the government of Manitoba are the persons that would be appointed to the initial board with room for further expansion of four more persons, according to their expertise and needs, to make sure that there is a circle of persons with various expertise to make sure that this project is successful. There would be one nominee per director organization, but there would be an unlimited amount of committees being able to be established by this board, as well, to bring experts from other jurisdictions, perhaps international trade and other areas, the railroads and others, to be part of any future developments so that they actually can have input into making sure that this is a most successful port.

I want to emphasize as well that this is not about tackling and competing so much with the Edmontons and the prairie port that I talked about earlier. This is, by design, a bill called The CentrePort Canada Act. It is an act that will complement other jurisdictions of Canada, including the Asia-Pacific route that is so important to our trade, including the mid-continent route to the south, including Mexico, all the way to Churchill, that I talked about, and including the eastern seaboard trade corridor that's involved with the Maritimes and eastern Canada, as well. Because, of course, Manitoba is still centred in the distribution area of Manitoba, that would allow us to move products as I said, by truck, with 36 hours anywhere in North America.

There are a number of very important issues around this in working with other jurisdictions. There can be establishment–as much as the oil industry has helped build the economy of Alberta, and moving forward more in that in Saskatchewan, and certainly it's helped the small corner of southwest Manitoba, where we have most of the oil in this province, I want to say that, as much as that has helped, there has been a spinoff of the benefits in Alberta in the oil industry back across the prairies and, indeed, to all of Canada in regard to the distribution of the equalization payments and transfer payments that we have across the country.

I only say that CentrePort Canada should be looked at as an opportunity for those other areas to work together with this region. To enhance the opportunities that the others will continue to go forward with in their jurisdictions and make it an opportunity that we can develop a tremendous amount of investment.

To look at the role of the private sector in this–to look at the area of impact in the community–this is an opportunity to continue with our housing. To continue the development of bringing foreign workers into Canada and raising–completely having the opportunity to provide much more training and retraining processes–universities, colleges and in our schools for the type of work that could be done here.

I just want to say that 62 percent of Manitoba's gross domestic product is due to trade. I would say that two-thirds of that is centred right here in Winnipeg. Those are the numbers that Canada West has revealed. I also know that the Winnipeg international airport is the fourth busiest international airport in Canada and one of the 17th busiest in North America. I think that speaks quite highly to the fact that the–probably a lot of people aren't aware of the increases in transportation and traffic that's come into this airport in the last five years due to trade agreements that have been established and of course, we're looking at one with Europe right now, the opportunity of the French prime minister coming into–French president rather–coming into Québec on the 17th of October to talk about an opportunity there. We've had a free trade agreement with North America, within North America, for over a decade. It's an opportunity to proliferate the benefits of that

kind of a trade with all of Manitoba and, particularly, as I said earlier, to make us a have province.

***** (15:10)

I only want to close by saying that I referenced earlier a couple of things why people would come and businesses wouldn't come to Manitoba. On the personal side, first of all, we still have the highest personal taxes west of Québec, and that's a deterrent. We have to get a government in Manitoba that will address that. Certainly, it was our intent, as the Progressive Conservatives, to do that in the last election.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that the members of the government know that they still have a very detrimental payroll tax in place in Manitoba. We're the only province in the west that has such a detrimental tax. So there are these types of unfriendly arrangements that we have in our tax structure in this province that will make it difficult for people who want to expand their businesses to come to Manitoba or to build a new business, and of course, never mind the fact that we've got a Bill 17 that is an attack on businesses anyway.

But we have an opportunity in this province to make ourselves into a have province so that we are less, if not totally, unreliant on the opportunities from other parts of Canada, to get rid of the $1.8-billion transfer payments that we are attached to today, mainly coming from Ontario and Alberta, from across Canada. All provinces do get some equalization payments, but with Saskatchewan being a have province, we look forward to having CentrePort inland port opportunity.

The CentrePort Canada Act, Bill 47, to develop CentrePort in the city of Winnipeg in the region that it's described with the R.M. of Rosser, has an opportunity for Manitoba to become a have province. Madam Deputy Speaker, I only look forward to saying that later this afternoon we look forward to passing this bill on to committee, moving it forward as quickly as we can. I know that the minister may want to have an opportunity to put some words on the record today as well. We just want to make sure that Manitobans know that we support the opportunity to have a CentrePort and an inland port in Manitoba to make sure that in the future their children and our grandchildren will have opportunities to work here in Manitoba and that Manitoba has the opportunity to become much more self-reliant than it is today and have the opportunity of becoming a have province.

With those words, I look forward to other comments from my colleagues in this Legislature on this important bill. Thank you.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to put on record my support for Bill 47, the CentrePort enabling legislation. It's good to see this government is finally taking action on something that we have been proposing for many, many years. We would really like to see it move ahead. There have been concerns over the last long while that cities like Edmonton and Regina and Saskatoon were moving ahead on this project and here we were in Manitoba sitting back and not pushing on it. So it's good to see now that this legislation is finally coming forward.

We know that CentrePort Canada will establish– or will re-establish, I should say, Manitoba as a global transportation hub. This project is big. It's big not only for the city of Winnipeg; it's big for the whole province. The whole province will certainly go ahead from this project.

So there are several private-sector proponents who are driving this project. We certainly need to be–we are behind them and we'd like to see them be successful in this project. Winnipeg, as I said, has a natural geographic advantage, not only with its location in the centre of Canada, mid-continent, but also with our roads, our rail, our seaport to Churchill and our access to the U.S. This project has a potential, really, to put Manitoba back on the map. I hope this government realizes the potential of this and moves forward with it in a meaningful way because we will certainly push on them to do it.

I might add that, while this is CentrePort and it's based around the Winnipeg Airports Authority and the CentrePort plan, it seems strange to me that, at the same time, Air Canada plans to move flight attendants and other staff out of Winnipeg. That's sending the wrong message out here. If you're allowing one sector to leave the airport and the potential that it has, I feel very strongly that this government should really be behind the flight attendants. There's talk now about the pilots. What's going to happen with the Air Canada pilots?

It would be nice to see a strong signal coming out of this government, that they really are behind them. It's jobs for Manitoba, but it's also the signal about Manitoba: Are we there for business? Are we going to encourage business because, if you can't even keep them, how do you expect the whole CentrePort concept to grow?

We also have the payroll tax, our infamous payroll tax of Manitoba which is just a huge disincentive to business. I was in a conversation with some of the business people involved. They said the business tax is the No. 1 issue that comes up when they talk to businesses from around the world that would be potentially interested in coming in to CentrePort. So this government has a lot of work to do on this.

Alongside of the actual CentrePort, we know that we'll have to see an expansion to our road systems which will include bypasses around heavily-populated areas, interchanges such as is being worked on for a No. 1 and No. 16. I would be completely remiss if I didn't mention to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) that this also includes the roads that connect into Winnipeg, such as upgrading of some of our roads into making them possible for heavy truck traffic, such as Highway 305, which we've said is an integral part of moving products into Portage la Prairie. Ultimately, they would be moving into CentrePort as well.

As I said, there's been a major push by businesses. Certainly, the federal government through ministers Cannon and Toews have worked on this. We need to continue, and I'm sure that, once we have a majority Conservative government after the 14th, we will be able to push on that government even harder. They understand the potential of this.

I should mention too that the Emerson port must see further expansion too, because this is just another lock in step with CentrePort. Building CentrePort by itself is not going to create the potential that it really has unless we work through the entire system.

There are always bottlenecks. We've seen the bottlenecks that happen in the Port of Vancouver. There are lots of examples of how, when you look across the ocean into China, they have just massive expansion of their seaports and their ability to load containers. We've created this bottleneck now on the west coast.

This is where CentrePort could come in here; we could bring these in, but, also, with CentrePort–again, it's all part and parcel of it–we need to have the free trade zone so you can bring these products in; they can be dispersed without the taxation on them until they go to their respective jurisdiction. We don't want to be able to create more bureaucracy and more taxes, because that's what these companies are looking for–an easier way to move these in under a free trade zone within CentrePort and then be able to move them out to their respective markets. This is absolutely vital. I hope this government realizes the potential of this and works at these bottlenecks.

***** (15:20)

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I've mentioned, this project will have a huge impact on all of Manitoba. We do see Greyhound and Canada Post relocating to the airport. They are certainly ahead of their time in terms of what the potential of CentrePort has, and we encourage this. We also need, and you need to have community involvement. Certainly, the Rural Municipality of Rosser will be very much affected by this and will be part of this whole process. We would hope, at least, they would be part of the process of creating CentrePort, but you also need to include all communities around in terms of increased truck traffic, rail traffic and make sure that we don't create bottlenecks in there and that people understand what the ultimate goal is of this.

The Winnipeg international airport, being the fourth busiest international airport in Manitoba, and the jobs that are created by freight and in which freight is becoming a larger part of the Winnipeg Airports Authority right now, but the potential for the jobs in there is just mind boggling in terms of what we can do.

We all know about the trade with China. One only needs to go in a store these days to see all the products that are coming out of China, and this is going to continue. They have a fifth of the world's population, but the amount of exports they have created, an export economy, that we can only envy right now because we continue to ship them raw materials, and in return we're taking back finished products.

That is going to continue. We have to work hard to create more manufacturing here of products that we can, but we know that there are labour issues in terms of cost of labour there. They have a very cheap labour factor in China, but we also know they also have some quality issues. I don't think anybody in Manitoba here is too keen about taking milk products out of China right now. That is the type of product that we could–we have quality in our products here, and we need to be able to have our consumers here realize the quality of product.

But, nonetheless, we are going to continue to have these massive imports. Winnipeg is ideally

situated for this not only from China, but also from Russia and Eurasia through the Port of Churchill. It's always an interesting train ride to go to Churchill right now, and I know they're going to upgrade the line there. As that continues to evolve, we can see more trade coming both in and out of Churchill. That will help Manitoba a lot.

While we're all optimistic about CentrePort, we need to be cognizant of what it is, given this government's track record, and as opposition members, how can we try, at least, to negate some of the negative aspects of what this government has done. As I've mentioned, with the payroll tax, they really need to look at this seriously.

This payroll tax is going to become part and parcel of trying to sell CentrePort, and if you are not willing to at least address this, this is going to seriously impede the development here. We have crumbling infrastructure. I noticed today in question period that the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) thought he travelled on some pretty good highways out to Winkler when he was out there. I would certainly like to know which highways he was travelling on when he saw all that construction because the traffic counts on our highways, at least in my constituency, are incredibly high, and the infrastructure continues to fall apart. So we need to–again, this all links back to CentrePort. We need to have some solid, long-term plans that we can all count on and that we know are reasonable and rational and Manitoba can actually do.

This government has certainly been very eager to sit back and blame the feds whenever anything goes wrong, but this ball, this CentrePort ball right now is squarely in the hands of this government, which can be a scary thought given their past record, but, at the same time, they have the opportunity right now to run with this and make this truly–to help Manitoba become a have province, to lose our dependence on federal transfer payments.

We will do everything we can to promote this idea and to see that it can happen. We agree with the creation of CentrePort. It's an excellent project with tremendous potential and we hope that, not only all governments–all levels of government be involved, but also all levels partake in an open and meaningful way and not try to have their own agendas on here. There are a great many opportunities to be seized on this and we believe that, working together, these can be achieved. So, with those few comments, I would just like to add my support for Bill 47 and I certainly look forward to seeing CentrePort become a reality. Thank you.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Madam Deputy Speaker, I, too, want to put a few things on the record in regard to Bill 47, the CentrePort bill brought forward by the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux), and certainly, I do support the bill. I have a large part of my constituency of the R.M. of Rosser, which is in that area that does have significant impact on that particular municipality. I do want to thank the minister for his letter that he sent to Rosser on support of our question that we had during the briefing and my subsequent meeting with the R.M. of Rosser for their inclusions in the first directors. I know it seems insignificant, but it is very important to them. I think it's also very important to the minister; otherwise, he wouldn't have brought that forward.

I did have one already drafted. We will keep it in the bank just as a backup, but we certainly do recognize the importance of having Rosser at the table, and I know that this has been an issue that's been talked about for a long time. It's good that it's at the table for reality. I know that, being in business in the past number of years, going back to the late '70s and early '80s, coming from the centre of the United States all the way up to Teulon where I had my business, I know that I took a significant amount of usage out of the middle of the United States, starting with Highway 81, eventually becoming Highway 29. I know that the impact that it has on the economy, the impact it has on those towns and communities as you go through those particular communities–I know that when I was fortunate enough to take a product on the world market, actually down into Mexico and to South America and to Europe, we'll also use that same destination through the centre of the United States. Of course, with our location, as a number of the members have already spoken about–about Winnipeg and Manitoba being central, and certainly this does have an impact on Manitoba as a whole, not just on the city of Winnipeg and the R.M. of Rosser.

The Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), talked about this making us a have province, certainly the money's not at the bank. We have an awful lot of work to do. We also have an awful lot of planning to do and we have a great team that's been put together, led by Chris Lorenc and Barry Rempel, whom we met with just the other day, who highlighted a number of issues that were important to them that we certainly take very seriously and would

like to support in the days and weeks and months and years ahead.

We notice that the road that the Member for Arthur-Virden talked about on Inkster being twinned–in fact, the Minister of Transportation was there at the announcement along with Vic Toews, Alice Bourgouin, the reeve of Rosser, and myself. I know, looking at the map that has been part of the infrastructure plan will now deviate from that particular construction, and quite rightfully so. I know that the authority has to have the roads in place in order to make this happen, and when we look at it, it's actually quite exciting when you look at the overall depth that's gone into this already at this point in time, and we know that this will change as they move forward.

***** (15:30)

One of the things that came very clear, very clear, indeed, was that they need the authority to act in a way of which they have the authority. Certainly, that's why we on this side of the House feel very strongly and support the fact that the bill does give them that authority. I am concerned about the infrastructure, the way that's going to be laid out. The R.M. of Rosser doesn't have sewer and water, but they have seen significant growth. It's a large portion of their tax base in the R.M. of Rosser and as we look and move forward, the powers that be within CentrePort and the commission, the establishment of those boards is going to be significant enough that they're going to have to ensure that the infrastructure is in place, be it transportation, rail, sewer, water, all those things that are so important and to make this project actually become a reality.

I know that Edmonton and Regina have moved forward in a very significant manner. In fact, Alberta had $1.5 million from the Western Economic Diversification for a business plan back in March. I know that we've been working in harmony with these particular communities, but that certainly means that we need to be out. We need to be the leaders. We need to show the initiative that needs to take place in order to make sure that we, in Manitoba, do get our share of the businesses, the growth that we certainly want to see here in Manitoba.

Also, the single authority jurisdiction with 47 is actually, as I say, the first step. Of course, the board will have to work with the City of Winnipeg and the R.M. of Rosser in order to achieve this goal, but it actually goes farther than that. It goes out into rural Manitoba. You know for those communities in Headingley, Elie, Grosse Isle, Teulon and Warren, Stony Mountain–all those areas that are going to be adjacent to the particular parts of the CentrePort, which will have a significant impact on their ability to be able to raise taxes, again be able to handle infrastructure that's actually in place.

I know that those municipalities are very excited about that. We looked at the Capital Region as a whole, which has been taking place for the last number of years. In fact, I notice that the current chair of that, Steve Strang, has had a number of meetings, a number of issues, and they meet on a monthly basis in order to ensure that they're up to date with each and every one of those issues that come forward, because it's much bigger than just Rosser and the city of Winnipeg.

So I know it's important–even those areas outside the Capital Region, that we do have, in fact, a good communication strategy, a strategy that will be able to keep everybody in the loop, that we're not going to miss somebody. I know that, as Bill 47 does give the authority to CentrePort, I know that the board members there will do a great job in order to ensure that, in fact, the rest of these municipalities, the other locations, the other cities and the districts surrounding the city of Winnipeg certainly will be in place in order to make sure that that does happen.

We are also very concerned about the economic growth, the GDP, whenever we look at the province as a whole. We need to ensure that we have the immigration in place, we have the people in place, in order to be able to sustain these industries whenever they come to Winnipeg, and certainly see Manitoba and Winnipeg grow and prosper in unison.

When we look at the trade that's being created, a lot of it is just waiting to explode, and I know using myself and my business as that example. I know that prior to me selling out in 1999, we were just on the tip of seeing things expand. I had the opportunity to get that market started, and the people that bought me out have certainly seen that grow and prosper. I think that we can work with the United States, our biggest trader partner to the south, certainly ensure that we do see those goods and services move freely in a way that's going to be beneficial for both places.

When we look at Saskatchewan and Alberta, I certainly want to make it very clear that we are in support of seeing Manitoba move forward in a very timely manner. We know that they're going to be very aggressive as well, but with the team that we have in place, the people that have the opportunity

with CentrePort through Bill 47, have the ability to bring on extra committee members where they do need and require the expertise that's required in order to see CentrePort move forward in a timely manner.

I know that one of the other criteria is that they have someone from the rail line sit on that particular committee. Certainly, I agree with the fact that they can't be employees of the government, employees or elected officials of the governments, and I think that's imperative that we make sure we have a fair balance, a fair representation for all those concerned.

When we did meet with Barry Rempel, he talked about the Winnipeg Airports Authority and what's happened with them and their growth as a result of the Winnipeg Airports Authority to have the ability to grow and prosper. In fact, they have a number of agreements in place and are moving forward in a very timely manner; the information they passed on to us was that just the freight alone in the last few years has more than doubled.

Also, on top of the exciting news of the Winnipeg airport being expanded and a new airport being built, it gives us the atmosphere as a growing and prosperous province, which we know that we need to see developed in a way this could be meaningful and, as I've said before, certainly sustainable.

We believe we need to make sure that we have consultation with those businesses in order to ensure that we have whatever expertise that's certainly required in order to see them come to Manitoba and get tied in with the jobs that are going to be tied to trade and, of course, the Manitobans who should see significant impact as a result of their incomes and their housing and businesses grow and prosper.

I do want to conclude by saying that we on this side of the House and certainly our leader have seen significant changes. We know that the federal government needs to be at the table, and they have certainly shown they have that opportunity and hunger to see Manitoba become that inland port and CentrePort of Canada.

We certainly feel that we on this side of the House need to move this bill forward in a timely way. Certainly, I know that the mandate is 90 days. We do know, with the federal election on, that they're going to be busy trying to get that when the new government does get in place–and we're sure it's going to be a Conservative government–in order to ensure that we get through with a majority on that issue. Certainly, we'll make sure that Manitoba is well represented in the government in order to make sure that that does happen.

So, with those few comments, I'll let my other colleagues have an opportunity to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): I wonder if I might have leave of the House just to deal with House business for a second, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to announce that, for the meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts tomorrow at 7 p.m., the following witnesses are being asked to appear before the committee: on the Hecla Island report, the honourable Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) and the Deputy Minister of Conservation; and on the Workers Compensation report, the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan), the Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration, and the president and CEO of the Workers Compensation Board.

Madam Deputy Speaker: For the information of the House, the meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will be tomorrow at 7 p.m. The following witnesses are being asked to appear before the committee: on the Hecla Island report, the honourable Minister of Conservation and Mr. Don Cook, Deputy Minister of Conservation; and on the WCB report, the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, Mr. Jeff Parr, Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration, and Doug Sexsmith, President and CEO of the Workers Compensation Board.

* * *

Madam Deputy Speaker: We're resuming debate on the bill.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm actually very pleased to stand to talk to this bill, although somewhat disappointed that members opposite, ministers of the Crown, would not, in fact, stand in their seats and explain to Manitobans exactly how it is that their departments are going to be impacted by this piece of legislation, Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada Act.

I wonder why the Minister of Labour cannot stand and, in fact, tell this House how labour is going to be impacted in a positive fashion, where, in fact, it could be, Madam Deputy Speaker, additional jobs,

numerous additional jobs that are going to be developed throughout this concept of CentrePort Canada.

***** (15:40)

I wonder why the minister whose name the bill is in, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) cannot stand in this House and explain exactly the infrastructure requirements and improvements that will be made not only in Winnipeg, but outside of Winnipeg at the airport site itself. Why can't the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation not get up and actually take some pride in a piece of legislation that's been tabled before this House and not only take pride, but explain to us where it is that he sees those infrastructure improvements being made, whether it be at the port of Emerson, whether it be at Highway 75, whether it be internally in the transportation area in the city of Winnipeg, whether it be externally in areas outside of the city of Winnipeg that are going to be affected in a very positive fashion?

Why can't the minister, whose name this bill is placed in, stand and tell us exactly why it is that this bill is so important to him, but, Madam Deputy Speaker, even more so, why can the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan) not stand and say that this is going to be the cornerstone of their economic development strategy for the province of Manitoba going forward decades?

Why can the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade not stand up today and say to us in this House that this is going to be his nirvana, if you will, that this bill is required in order to put Manitoba–are you ready for this, Madam Deputy Speaker?–in a have category? Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing that Manitoba could no longer be seen as the poor second cousin, that we could be seen as a have province within Confederation, that no longer would we have to depend totally on the federal government for handouts on an annual basis so that we could provide services, sometimes services that aren't as good as what they should be, but services nonetheless on taxpayers of Canada's back?

Why can't the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade stand and say that we are now going to use this piece of legislation to be able to develop the have strategy that we've so desired here in the province of Manitoba? But, no, they sit there and they won't stand, Madam Deputy Speaker, and they won't give us what their views are, not only on this piece of legislation, but what their vision is for the future.

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) could stand up and say how this is going to affect her department in such a positive vein, how in fact CentrePort Canada is going to allow us to export, allow us to import, allow us to be the centre of trade within the country. Isn't that exciting? I would think they would be dying to get up and share that with us right now, but, no, I guess we have to sit here and we talk about a bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in fact should have been before us years ago.

I am very disappointed that it is today that we're talking about this after the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) had to stand in this House and chastise the Premier for not having more initiative in putting forward our thoughts and our beliefs and our desire to have CentrePort Canada. Uh-uh, the government of the day decided to sit back on their haunches and let others take the advantage, Madam Deputy Speaker, of a CentrePort Canada.

We know that that competition is out there. We knew that competition was out there years ago. We knew that Edmonton and Alberta particularly were head and shoulders above us when they thought of this wonderful concept of a free trade zone in CentrePort–well, this was Alberta port. We know that Regina and Saskatoon are sitting at the table almost weekly with the federal government and the ministers of that government lobbying to have the very thing that we would like to have here in Manitoba.

You know why this government didn't have more initiative? Because they said we're the natural choice. We have the transportation networks here in the province of Manitoba, in Winnipeg. We have all of the natural Port of Churchill that is just so obvious that we're going to be the ones that we were able to attain CentrePort Canada. The problem that they didn't realize, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that there are many others out there fighting for the same thing, and legitimately so.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This is our tar sands to Alberta. This is what Manitoba should have been as the gateway to the west. We should have been able to develop that years ago. Now we're given an opportunity again to be that gateway to trade in North America and in Europe. We have the opportunity, but they sat back, they waited, they dilly-dallied, they dithered and now, all of a sudden, Bill 47 appears on our desk and says,

isn't this a wonderful document; isn't this a wonderful piece of legislation.

Well, I have to admit, if it wasn't for my leader, if it wasn't for us at this side of the House, we probably still wouldn't be talking about Bill 47. They aren't talking about Bill 47. I guess we have to talk about it and tell Manitobans exactly what it is that it means and how it's going to affect them, hopefully, in the not-too-distant future.

I find it also somewhat ironic that one of the absolute necessities of bringing CentrePort Canada to life, to breathe life into it, is that there has to be the designation of a free trade zone, referred to in a lot of cases as foreign trade zone, for those people on the other side who don't understand what the bill means. A foreign trade zone, the reason the terminology of a foreign trade zone is because, again, the irony is that this government doesn't believe in free trade. The Premier (Mr. Doer) is on record many, many times when the free trade negotiations were ongoing with the U.S., being opposed to free trade. They're still opposed to free trade. They're opposed to interprovincial trade. They're opposed to labour mobility. Although they'll stand in their seats, Madam Deputy Speaker, and pay lip service to it, the fact of the matter is there's no real desire on their part to get involved in these wonderful global issues of free trade, foreign trade zones, labour mobility and the like.

So I find that very ironic that they bring forward a piece of legislation that absolutely hinges on the identification and the declaration of foreign trade zone. For those again on the other side who don't know what I'm talking about, this whole concept of CentrePort Canada is not about a fence and an area. It's about an area that will be designated a foreign trade zone, which means that manufacturers, distributors, other private-sector corporations can set up operation in this area and not be impacted by the onerous tax regime not only from Canada, but especially from the Province of Manitoba.

We recognize that we do have a fairly onerous tax regime here in Manitoba so we're inviting people to come in–private sector, which, again, this government really doesn't have a good feel for the private sector, for private entrepreneurs, for private business. They don't like business, quite frankly. In fact, quite the opposite. They would like to see more public civil servants as opposed to private enterprise, as we've seen in the statistics themselves. Manitoba is one of the lowest private-sector investment areas anywhere in the country, and there's a reason for that. It's because this is not a very friendly business environment, not only friendly business from a taxation perspective, which is very important, but also not very business-friendly from labour legislation, not a very friendly business environment from competitiveness, training, and trade. This is not a friendly business environment, as we've seen. We do not have the private-sector investment that we see in other jurisdictions. Other jurisdictions, by the way, they do not have the socialist bent of this particular government.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I find it very interesting and very ironic. Here we have a free trade zone that has to be dedicated. We have private sector that's being encouraged to come into a province that doesn't encourage private-sector development in the first place, and we're already behind the eight ball because we have other people out there that are well ahead of us, certainly in the identification of a free trade zone, or a CentrePort Canada.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I was very, very happy to hear the proponents of this, who are private sector, say that this could make us a have province, and that, in fact, is a saleable point to any Manitoban. I wish this government would stand and tell Manitobans that. It can, in fact, make us a have province, but it's some time down the road. It's a vision right now that has to be capped off with a business plan, and that's what this piece of legislation speaks to. It speaks to a business plan. It gives the corporation an opportunity to develop its board of directors, to identify its board of directors, and put forward a very complete business plan, not only out of concept, not only out of application to the federal government for the free trade zone, but also from a financial perspective where they can put forward a financial business plan as to how this is going to operate and how it's going to work.

***** (15:50)

We know we have the area that's been identified. We don't know where the dollars are going to come from. I say now to the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan) and to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux), there is an investment requirement from the provincial government. You have to come to the table. I haven't seen the numbers. I haven't seen the dollars. I haven't seen, obviously, the business plan because it hasn't been developed yet. But this government has to be a partner in that. They have to

find that capital investment in some way, shape or form or fashion. We'll talk about that on another bill, Bill 46, which I don't think is the end all and be all. This government has to come up with infrastructure dollars themselves in order to invest in this product.

Also, the federal government has to be at the table. They have to have infrastructure dollars identified to come to make this project work, to make this vision, in fact, a vision that we can achieve.

Now where are they? Have they been at the table with the federal government? No. They would rather sit back and let somebody else like Alberta or Saskatchewan beat them to the punch and be at that table. So I say to this government, when this legislation is passed, this is only a first, minor step. You have to change your political ideology. You have to change the issues that are going to be identified as being roadblocks to CentrePort Canada. If you can't get your head around that, this legislation doesn't mean anything.

So you have some changes that have to happen in this government. So you have to change your political ideology in order to make it work. It's a first good step; we will support the first good step. But, from that point on, it lies at your feet. If you cannot be successful in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, it's going to come home to roost with a government that, in my opinion, doesn't even know what they're getting involved in right now. They have to be aggressive. They can't just sit back in their offices and let people come to them because it's not going to work that way. You have to be out in front. That means you have to be more than what you've been in the past. That may be hard to expect because, quite frankly, there hasn't been much in the past. There's nothing really that we can point to that shows a terrible amount of success.

We have to change tax law here in the province of Manitoba in order to make it work. We have to be available to change our ideas and our thoughts and our minds as to how taxes are going to be assessed on these new properties that are going to be located on CentrePort Canada. The advantage to this may not well be the taxes that are generated from the free trade zone, the advantage is to the number of workers that are going to now be located in the province that we're going to attract. The advantage is going to be the taxes that you're going to generate off personal income tax. The advantage is you're going to get an economy that's built around the private sector. Isn't that a wonderful thing? That we could actually depend on the private sector to develop an economy here in Manitoba because we haven't depended on that, we haven't encouraged that. We haven't even asked for that over the last 10 years. Quite the opposite; we've tried to throw roadblocks in front of the private sector so they'll leave this province. I can name names. I can remember that we used to have a corporation called Agricore. It's now in Regina. I remember–

An Honourable Member: United Grain Growers.

Mr. Borotsik: United Grain Growers is gone as well.

An Honourable Member: MTS.

Mr. Borotsik: It's still here, actually. It's got head offices in Manitoba and it's got many, many, many more employees right now and the value of cheap– that's what I'm trying to say. You don't believe in the private sector. You want to nationalize everything. You can't nationalize CentrePort Canada. That's not what this is about. If you keep on talking about the way it used to be a hundred years ago, this is not going to be successful.

If they're going to continue with that kind of an ideology, they're going to continue with that kind of an anti-private-sector mindset, it's not going to work. That's the danger that I see. The legislation's very good, but they won't even speak to it because they don't even want to be able to tell us what it is that they're prepared to change in their own philosophical mindset or political mindset to make it work. That scares the heck out of me.

We'll support 47 because it's the right thing to do. It should have been done a year and a half ago to be perfectly honest, Mr. Speaker. We should have been out in front of what's there right now, but, unfortunately, it's here now and fortunately we do have an opportunity. I like the people that are named to this piece of legislation, who are going to take this forward. I like the private-sector mindset that's identified in this legislation but, if they don't have the tools given to them by this provincial government, it's going to fail.

First and foremost, get your minds around free trade zones, foreign trade zones and, if labour can't accept that in Manitoba, then we're already dead in the water. If this Province can't accept the free trade zone or a foreign trade zone as it's identified as–if you can't accept that, we're dead in the water. So

don't waste our time, don't waste Manitobans time by putting in a piece of legislation just to let it die.

What we need is we need a Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan) who's going to stand up and fight for this legislation, fight for the proposal that's there for CentrePort Canada, and I haven't seen it. I haven't seen it and it scares me. *[interjection]* Oh, yeah, he's going to hire people to sell it.

How are you going to get people down in Mexico? Oh, Scott Smith's going to go down to Mexico, no doubt. Keep looking, brother, is what I heard from the minister. Keep looking, brother. Well, I haven't seen anything, so I'd love to look at something.

We're losing Air Canada. We're losing our Air Canada attendants' base. We're potentially losing Air Canada pilots. That's wrong for the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. They say, keep looking, brother. We've got people leaving the province. We've got Loewen Windows doing their production down in the U.S. right now. We've even got Western Glove going to China, and he's saying to me, keep looking, brother. I hate to see what we're going to see in the next five years or three years or two years, if that's the attitude.

Anyway, Bill 47 is the right way to start, but it's only a start. If we have to depend, I'm afraid, on the government to take it to the next stage, next level, I'm afraid I don't have a lot of confidence in the government. We will give them every opportunity to have the tools to go forward. Thank you for the opportunity for me to speak to Bill 47, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to put a few comments on the record on Bill 47 and indicate my support for the long-awaited legislation that's before us today.

When you look at the timing of this legislation coming into the House, you know it's at the 11th hour, Mr. Speaker. It only proves that this was not a priority on this government's agenda. You just have to look at other legislation that was brought in in the spring, some of it held over until this fall and, if it hadn't been held over to this fall, we wouldn't see this legislation on the table today.

What were this government's priorities in this legislative session? Well, one of their priorities was Bill 17–Bill 17 that was brought in to kill jobs and to kill economic opportunity in our province. We saw Bill 38 introduced–Bill 38 that literally guts balanced budget legislation and allows this government to run our province into deficit and debt once again.

We saw Bill 37 as a priority, Mr. Speaker, a bill that was brought into line political parties' pockets and to raid money once again from the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba. We saw Bill 31 brought in, which limits accountability and transparency, and it will provide less information to Manitobans, not more.

***** (16:00)

It really is a shame that Aboriginal people, especially Aboriginal women, will not have the opportunity to hold their governments accountable for the scarce resources that are available to some of those that are the most needy in our province. They won't be able to get information as a result of Bill 31 when it passes. We saw Bill 45 come into legislation, which punishes retired teachers in this province and shows very little respect.

So these, Mr. Speaker, were the bills that were this government's priority. If we hadn't raised the issue, if our leader hadn't raised the issue of an inland port here in the Legislature earlier this year, before we rose for the summer, I don't think we would have seen this legislation on the table, because it wasn't a priority for this government. I'm glad that government has seen the light. I'm glad that even at the 11th hour we have a piece of legislation on the table today that is a first step in the direction of getting an inland port in our province, which is the right place for an inland port right across the country.

We know that we have the advantage here with rail and truck and air and bus transportation, Mr. Speaker. We have the property adjacent to the airport. I do want to commend the Airports Authority for the good job that they've done in developing our new airport and the vision that they have for what Manitoba could be.

I want to give a lot of credit to the private sector, Mr. Speaker, and this will be private sector driven. The only way it will work is if it's private sector driven, as it should be. But I have concern that we have a government in place that is bound and determined to drive the private sector out of the province of Manitoba. We just look at the regressive taxes. We're the highest-taxed province west of

Québec. We have the regressive payroll tax in place here that's going to present many difficulties for businesses or for Manitoba to attract business.

There's a major job for the private sector to do in our province when we've got a government that doesn't believe in the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector and would prefer to see government run everything. You know, government that supposedly has all the answers. Well, we know that that isn't true and that we have an opportunity here with a government with a vision that should be able to make this happen. But a big concern, and I think it's a question that the Premier (Mr. Doer) is going to have to answer, because he purports to be a friend of the private sector; he works and meets with the private sector and says all of the right things. But, to date, we haven't heard him say that he supports a free trade zone here in the province of Manitoba.

As a matter fact, we know, Mr. Speaker, that while Alberta and Saskatchewan were moving aggressively ahead to develop proposals for an inland port, Manitoba was sitting back doing absolutely nothing. We know for a fact that the inland port issue was not even on the list of priority issues that this Premier and this government took to the federal government. We know that Alberta has been aggressively pursuing it. We know that Saskatchewan has been aggressively pursuing things. We know that Manitoba was sitting back and not even placing it on a priority agenda for discussion with the federal government, and that's why we found ourselves behind the eight ball, and that's why we're now seeing legislation at the eleventh hour, which, by the way, is a good first step in the whole process of developing and promoting Manitoba as the best place for an inland port.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that we are not too far behind the eight ball today and that we can make up ground and be a true contender, because this is the right place to have an inland port in Canada. We want to see an aggressive approach by this government. We want to see the private sector with the vision flourish, and we want to hear from the Premier (Mr. Doer) that he is moving forward aggressively and asking the federal government to declare Manitoba a free trade zone, a foreign trade zone. We want to hear those words out of the mouth of this Premier in the province of Manitoba because that is the only way that we're going to see this initiative succeed here in our province of Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're waiting to hear that. We're waiting to see our Premier fight aggressively and utter the words that need to be heard that we will ask for a declaration from the federal government to declare Manitoba a free trade zone.

With those comments, I want to say that I support this legislation, and let's move forward aggressively to try to get on track and catch up to others that were out there ahead of us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to rise to say that Liberals support the concept of an inland port and a free trade zone. We are looking forward to hearing certain of the details, the financial analysis, et cetera, because we think this is actually quite important in ensuring that this is going to be a success.

One of the things which I didn't see here, which I did expect to see, was some discussion in terms of appointment of board members of a conflict-of-interest issue. Will somebody who's a landholder in the area to be developed be allowed to be a board member? If so, what are the provisions with respect to buying and selling property, and so on, when that person who is a landholder in the area is involved? So I think that there should be something amended or added here to discuss and to deal with conflict-of-interest issues so that the government and the Province doesn't get itself in a sticky mess because of the problems of conflicts arising.

Second, I would hope that the government will present to the Legislature, either during debate or at the committee stage or sometime along the process, some financial analysis in terms of how this will work. The reason that I bring this up is that we want to promote the free trade zone, jobs, opportunities, manufacturing potential for export as you would get in a free trade zone, but, at the same time, we want to make sure that companies inside the free trade zone don't have a situation where it does harm to existing Manitoba manufacturing operations outside.

You have to remember that most Manitoba operations outside are going to be operating outside the free trade zone. They're going to be exporting to the same market in the United States or elsewhere, and it's pretty important that in setting this up we don't create problems for existing manufacturing operations and problems that will be damaging to manufacturing operations that are already under way.

It may not deal just with export. How is this free trade zone–we're so close to the United States that it would be very easy for a product to be produced in the free trade zone, exported to Pembina and then imported back in and sold in Manitoba. How is this going to be handled? I think that the government, in putting this forward, owes all members and all Manitobans the due diligence of providing some answers to some pretty important questions in terms of how the free trade zone will operate.

So we are very much in support of the concept. That is what the second reading is about, but we really are hoping that the government will provide a lot more details, more analysis, much more sophisticated material than they've provided to date in this bill to back up this approach.

***** (16:10)

I know that there are some in the community who are very strongly in favour of such a free trade zone, and I think it offers tremendous potential. But I do think that we need to make sure that we are doing the due diligence and that it is a free trade zone which has positive, but not negative ramifications, shall we put it, for Manitoba businesses.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I would like the opportunity to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada Act. I am quite proud to say that our leader brought this forward in the spring session and spoke quite extensively about it and put some pressure on the government to be paying attention to this bill and to this concept of having an inland port in Manitoba. If that had not happened, where would we be today? I mean we wouldn't–as the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) pointed out–if we hadn't had such regressive legislation tabled in the spring, we wouldn't even be sitting here right now, which really would've put us behind the eight ball in terms of our timing, in terms of other cities in Canada that would be vying for the same kind of inland port in their areas.

I know we are glad, finally, to see that the government has moved ahead on it, but we're questioning why it would take so long and why they would drag their heels on something as important as this that will create the economics for this province, which has been likened to Alberta's oil. Certainly, as it's been explained many times, it will move Manitoba into being a province that will be in a have position instead of a have-not position, although I'm not sure that this government wants to move aggressively in that area because they certainly enjoy the federal transfer payments and handouts from Ottawa that they get right now in their designation as a have-not province.

Winnipeg is the natural centre for such an inland port. It has the geographic advantage–located in the centre of Canada and on the mid-continent trade corridor and also it has a sea port, the Port of Churchill. Interestingly, Winnipeg has just named itself, renamed itself, re-branded itself, if you will, the Heart of the Continent. But I just want to make a comment here that Ed Russenholt, a long-time member of Headingley, a resident of Headingley, coined that phrase many years ago, and coined the phrase Heart of the Continent, related to Headingley. Headingley, Heart of the Continent, and Headingley used to have Headingley days and they were called Heart of the Continent days. I also want to make special note that the longitudinal centre of Canada is marked by a cairn and that cairn is on my brother-in-law's property on his farmland in St. Francis Xavier, just outside of Headingley and outside of the city of Winnipeg. So we certainly know that we are the centre of the continent here and makes it very logistical in terms of geographic location for the inland port or CentrePort Canada to be located here. We believe it is the right move.

We already have the infrastructure in part. We have the rail lines, we have a sea port and our expansion of our James Richardson airport. Ironically, though, we know that there are several flight attendants going to be having to move to another location to work or lose their jobs because Air Canada is going to close their flight attendant base here, and there's some question with the Air Canada pilots as to whether they might be next. It doesn't seem to be the way we should be going when we are looking at expanding an inland port, the airport being part of that on one hand, and yet regressively closing down flight attendant bases and pilots' bases here in Winnipeg. What message does that send about our province of Manitoba? What does that say? We should be very aggressive in maintaining and building on what we have here in Manitoba, instead of allowing us to slip into second-string status.

I also want to say that this will be a private-sector-driven enterprise, as it should be. The private sector is the one that can respond quickly and without fear of political ideology getting in its way or the repercussions of government actions. We do

need to see the private sector flourish in this province.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there are many things that this government has not done to stimulate the growth of the private sector in this province, and it wants to and believes in settling for public-sector growth over private-sector growth. But we know that private-sector growth, the small businesses, the entrepreneurship that we have here in this province, if allowed to grow, will stimulate the economy much more than the public-sector growth can because that is just not sustainable.

Recognizing the need for the free trade zone, I certainly note that it's been called a foreign trade zone now, just to get away from the actual wording of free trade which we know that this government and the Premier are on record in not supporting free trade. So certainly changing the name to a foreign trade zone is a good spin on this government's part, but, nevertheless, we support the idea of the free trade or foreign trade zone.

We recognize that there's world trade with the trade from Mexico all across Canada, the opportunities here in Winnipeg and foreign trade beyond our continent and to overseas areas in the Pan Pacific, Mr. Speaker, that we will seize many opportunities here and, hopefully, drive Manitoba towards a have-province status. Hopefully, that will be where we can get to from here.

I'd like to say that we support this legislation. I wanted just to say though that there are certain parts I'm looking for more specifics on. I represent the constituency of Morris, and certainly Highway 75 is a major trade corridor all the way up from the States, I-29, and into our city of Manitoba and to the inland port, as is Highway No. 1 which goes through Elie and St. François and Headingley from the western part of the city, certainly looking at what expansions will be looked at in terms of infrastructure for both these major routes.

Highway 75, as we know, has been upgraded and is still in the process of being upgraded but, if it's going to have the volume of traffic that will be anticipated, we need to know whether there's going to be a bypass around Morris or whether these trucks are going to barrel down the main street of that small town.

Now I know that the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Lemieux) keeps saying, oh, the people of Morris haven't decided what they want. I think the minister should meet with the mayor of Morris who's been asking for a meeting with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation since February and has not been able to get a meeting with him. He's been asking for that long. He wants to know the situation and the status of Highway 75 running through his town.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's very important for us to know the details of the infrastructure being built to support CentrePort Canada, the inland port here in Manitoba in Winnipeg. Also, we do know that the highway from Headingley to Winnipeg is not fully divided and has been the scene of numerous collisions and fatal collisions. That highway–we've been petitioning for that and I have to say that the government did put rumble strips down the centre of that highway.

We think that's a first step, but not what is necessary if you're going to have a major trucking route going this route along that particular highway, which is already, in everyone's minds, an unsafe stretch of highway.

***** (16:20)

Second to that, if there's going to be an offshoot from the Trans-Canada Highway going north to tie into another route into the inland port, which will bypass some of the section in Headingley and go the other side, go on the west side of the Assiniboia Downs, I think we need to know those things so that the communities can plan and know where they stand.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, those are parts of the total infrastructure that needs to be addressed when we're speaking about this inland port. I know that there was $85 million designated from the federal government for Highway 75, so there should be some plan as to what is going be addressed for Highway 75 in conjunction with the inland port in Winnipeg and CentrePort Canada.

I'm looking forward to hearing what the government has planned for these major, major transportation routes, Mr. Speaker.

With those comments, I would just say that we support the legislation, look forward to more detail and I'll allow others to have a few opportunities for comment. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, want to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 47. I think it's one of those pieces of legislation that is actually

fairly simplistic in terms of being able to understand it. The principle that is ultimately being put before us is something that generates, and has the potential to create, a great deal of optimism. What we want is to feel that there is the hope to be able to become a have-not province or to see the economy do well.

There are certain what I would classify as little nuggets of gold that are strategically well-located in our province. One would talk about hydro and hydro development as one of those nuggets. I would suggest to you that the geographical location of Winnipeg and whether it's the Churchill port, whether it's the Winnipeg international airport, whether it's the trucking industry and other natural things that we currently have here, Mr. Speaker, I think speaks volumes in terms of the potential. That potential is what ultimately generates the hope.

When we talk about a free trade zone, there are a couple of things that come to my mind right away. One is the potential of adding value. When you have that potential, you're talking about hundreds, if not even thousands, of jobs into the future.

Even if you were able to somehow negotiate the waiving of tariffs in that free trade zone, if we can call it that, Mr. Speaker, for all intents and purposes, what it would have to be in order to be able to attract what it is that we want here. Well, those jobs and the generation of those jobs have such a wonderful long-term impact on our province in many countless ways.

I can remember years back where then, I think it was Premier Filmon, had talked about Nova Scotia where, in the province of Nova Scotia, I think it was a 747 that they were flying lobster overseas into Europe. It was literally an opportunity, an economic opportunity. Why not Manitoba flying 747s of pork? Now, whether it was the former premier or whoever it was, the idea has been there for a long time. Let's take advantage of our airport and the fact of where we're located and the resources that we have that are around us.

There are certain things that we need to do in order to make it happen. The first and most important thing is to recognize that we should not take things for granted. We know the potential of political lobbying and the impact that could have. If we see a decision that, ultimately, and I use it as a hypothetical example, the province of Saskatchewan may be, or the province of Alberta becoming very aggressive and pushing it. Well, it would be sad to see that we were not able to get what we could have got if, in fact, we would have been prepared to be more aggressive at trying to make this project work.

I think the government and the departments need to work in co-operation and start communicating in a very real and genuine way in terms of how they're going to be able to ultimately assist the CentrePort to become a huge success story in the province of Manitoba. We need to see signs of the government making that communication, that they're putting in the efforts that are necessary in order to put Manitoba on the map in regard to this whole issue.

I'll give you an example. A couple of years ago, I was in the highways Estimates and I was asking the minister of highways questions in regard to Inkster Boulevard. Just a month or so prior to me asking the question, there was an announcement that Inkster Boulevard was going to be twinned. Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister of highways had no idea in terms of what was happening around Inkster Boulevard and the twinning of Inkster Boulevard between Keewatin Street and Route 90 and just said, well, that's the City of Winnipeg's responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that we've got to get over that issue and those type of issues. We have to start working with the municipalities, in particular, the Rural Municipality of Rosser and the City of Winnipeg, looking at the infrastructure, working in co-operation with the government in Ottawa and support CentrePort and the types of things that CentrePort is going to want to do.

The legislation itself, in principle, is very encouraging. I've read the mandate and I applaud the individuals that came up with the mandate. I thought it was fairly effective. The makeup of the board itself is very encouraging. It leads me to believe or to have optimism in terms of this could work.

The missing point or the potential that concerns me or the area that I'm most concerned about is the attitude, and what attitude the government of the day is going to have at really wanting to be aggressive in making this project work, because I realize that time is the scarcest commodity that we all have. This is going to take time from different ministers within this government, including the Premier (Mr. Doer), to be able for the province to maximize the benefits of CentrePort.

I think that there is some good news, good news being issues like Greyhound moving into the area, the post office moving into the area, but there are also areas that I think we need to be concerned about.

opposition members have talked about Air Canada and those bases that they're looking at being relocated. I shouldn't say being looked at–that are going to be relocated.

I think the Premier (Mr. Doer), for example, should take both the Liberal Leader and the Conservative Leader's offers to be able to work with the Premier and try to get this decision reversed. Mr. Speaker, I think that that would send a very strong, symbolic–and more than symbolic, it would have a real difference in terms of how the Province is approaching issues that affect the CentrePort.

This is a good opportunity for all political parties to get onside. I would go beyond that as the act refers to–whether it's the City of Winnipeg, the Rural Municipality of Rosser, Destination Winnipeg, the Chamber of Commerce–both the Winnipeg and Manitoba–the trucking industry, the Business Council, the Airports Authority and the Federation of Labour, getting these people together and saying that it's not acceptable for Air Canada to be doing what it is doing in regard to the flight attendant base and potentially the pilot base.

It's a very important step and it would be wonderful to see strong leadership coming from the government, taking advantage of this particular bill and the offer that's been put on the table by the opposition parties. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to this bill, Bill 47, of course, The Centreport Canada Act. Certainly, on this side of the House, we want to see this particular piece of legislation move forward.

***** (16:30)

It's been very interesting this whole development and the discussion of the CentrePort initiative and the whole idea of an inland port. It's something we on this side of the House have been promoting for several months now and it seems like the government of the day came into this thing dragging its feet and almost kicking and screaming at the concept of having an inland port here in Manitoba.

I do applaud some of the comments the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) put on the record here. It's all about our government being aggressive and really seeking opportunities for Manitobans. That's something, I think, that has been lacking in this government over the last number of years. We don't see them moving forward in terms of economic development, whether it be here in Winnipeg or throughout rural Manitoba. We view this as a tremendous opportunity for all Manitobans, the development of an inland port here in Winnipeg and next to Winnipeg.

But it really takes an attitude, Mr. Speaker. It's really all about attitude, and I think if you look back on history, this government hasn't had the right attitude in working with business, working with other governments in trying to move initiatives forward. We think this is a real opportunity, and this time has come for us to be aggressive in marketing this concept here in Winnipeg because we know that other jurisdictions to the west here are looking for the federal money, and they want to take that federal money and invest it in their infrastructure in their respective provinces.

Now, clearly, we know that Winnipeg is in a very good position here geographically to take advantage of initiatives such as an inland port, but we can't just rely on that geographic advantage that we have. We have to be out there lobbying the federal government, lobbying other jurisdictions for this port and to get the buy-in for this particular port. This is where the government of the day plays a very critical role and a very pivotal role in terms of getting this thing done, getting this job done, Mr. Speaker.

It was certainly nice to see, finally, a framework put in place under Bill 47 to see this initiative move forward. Again, it's something that probably should have been addressed, you know, many months or maybe even a year ago. When you look at the bill and the number of institutions that are involved in this particular piece of legislation in terms of the nominating organizations within the framework of the bill, certainly there are some very good organizations there who have a real vested interest in moving this project forward. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, they recognize the advantages for the taxpayers, for the residents, for the business community of Manitoba in terms of making this particular inland port concept work for us here in Manitoba.

We know that the government here doesn't have a very good history of dealing with infrastructure within Manitoba. For instance, I know the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurschou) raised the grievance today, and part of the grievance he was discussing the infrastructure of Manitoba. We know the highway infrastructure has been certainly let go

over the last number of years, and there's a tremendous capital investment required in our highway infrastructure here in Manitoba. That all plays a very pivotal part of how the inland port structure can operate. So, again, the onus here is on the government to come up with funding to make sure that our infrastructure is in place, that we'll work intertwined with the concept of an inland port.

I know the Member for Portage la Prairie also talked about the rail-line abandonment situation that is occurring and has occurred throughout Manitoba, and we know this is an ongoing issue. Up till now, the provincial government has basically refused to enter into any serious negotiations in terms of trying to keep our rail-line infrastructure alive and well in Manitoba. Certainly, that railway infrastructure, again, plays a very pivotal role in the success and the development of an inland port here in Manitoba.

As we speak, and as the Member for Portage la Prairie indicated, some of the elevator structures, the green elevator handling structures in Manitoba are being torn down. In conjunction with that, a lot of the rail-line spurs are being torn up as well, and we know for a fact that those lines will never be replaced because of the financial cost to replace those particular lines. Certainly, we have concerns from this side of the House that the infrastructure may not be forthcoming when we look at the government of the day because of their previous history.

Now, when we talk about this inland port having the potential to be Manitoba's oil, if you will–and we've heard that concept debated for some time now–originally, we talked about Manitoba Hydro being the same as Alberta's oil here, but if you look at the NDP track record with Manitoba Hydro, it certainly raises some more questions going forward.

We know that the provincial government has gone further in debt over the last nine years. Now we know that Manitoba Hydro has gone further in debt over the last nine years. We're just wondering about where all this spending is taking us in the big picture. That's one thing that this bill here, Bill 47, does not allude to is the financing of this particular project. Clearly, when we open the doors to new ventures, we, being fiscally responsible on this side of the House, like to have a bit of a clear understanding of who's going to finance this project, what the taxpayers are going to be on the hook for, and what the repercussions are for years down the road. That's an important part of the equation that is missing in Bill 47.

We certainly look forward to the government coming forward in the future with some answers in terms of the financing going forward. Certainly, I just want to wrap this up because I know we have other legislation to talk about, but we, certainly, on this side of the House look forward to having this particular bill move forward to committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

House Business

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Mr. Speaker: On House business.

Mr. Chomiak: I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Thursday, September 25, 2008, at 6 p.m., to consider Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada Act.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Thursday, September 25, 2008, at 6 p.m., to consider Bill 47, The CentrePort Canada Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 48–The Animal Care Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: Now, we'll move on to Bill 48, The Animal Care Amendment Act, second reading.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin), that Bill 48, The Animal Care Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to the committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of the bill, and I table his message.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of this bill, and the message has been tabled.

Ms. Wowchuk: The Animal Care Act has helped us as Manitobans to protect the welfare of animals in this province, and it complements the federal animal cruelty legislation, as it emphasizes the prevention of animal neglect, abuse and cruelty. However, this act is also unique because it goes beyond the prevention of animal cruelty through ensuring that owners meet a minimum standard of animal care to prevent suffering.

The area references the most up-to-date standards in the codes of practice for every species of animal, thus ensuring that the current standards for animal care are always enforced in Manitoba. The act also makes Manitoba unique, as it requires the licensing of breeders and kennels and ensures that dogs and cats are raised under suitable conditions.

However, experience has shown that there are gaps and deficiencies in the act that need to be addressed. These amendments will address the gaps and deficiencies and provide animal protection officers with new progressive tools to protect animal welfare. With these amendments, Manitoba will continue to lead the way in Canada in the area of animal care and animal welfare.

***** (16:40)

The Animal Care Amendment Act includes a new requirement for veterinarians to report suspected cases of animal neglect and abuse and for the prompt investigation of these reports. New measures will also be put in place to deal with livestock unfit for transportation. These measures will complement existing federal regulations under the Health of Animal Act governing humane transportation of domestic animals. Animals unfit for transport will be prohibited from being transported except for the purpose of medical treatment or slaughter, providing that these such animals can be loaded and moved humanely. Animals unfit for transportation will also be prohibited from being unloaded and accepted at auction marts and assembly stations for resale or further transport. An operator of a market or assigned assembling station that receives an unfit animal will be required to report that animal to an animal protection officer.

Animal protection officers will now have the authority to deal with abandoned animals. The licensing regime will be streamlined and will no longer be limited to premises dealing with cats and dogs. Kennels, companion animal breeding premises, and pet stores dealing with small animals and other pets will be required to be licensed. Pounds, animal shelters, pet rescue stations, and other such facilities will also be required to be licensed and to meet appropriate standards.

In addition, a registry for licensed premises will be established, and the information of this registry will be made available to the public. This is important because it will allow potential buyers to make sure that they are buying animals from a licensed operation that is taking proper care of these animals.

The director appointed under this act, who is the Chief Veterinarian officer, will also be able to issue orders to owners regarding the care of their animals in situations where animals are in distress or where owners are not properly caring for their animals and they are in danger of becoming in distress. Failure to comply with these orders may result in charges or in seizure of animals. In the case where a person has had animals seized before or has surrendered them because they have too many to properly care for but continue to collect more animals, a justice may make an order restricting the number of animals that a person may have to prevent the situation of abuse happening again.

Entry and inspection authority for animal protection officers will be updated and will be strengthened. Animal protection officers will now have specific authority in the act to inspect licensed premises as well as places where they believe there may be unlicensed businesses that are operating. They will also have specific authority to monitor the compliance with orders of the director or of a justice.

The animal care appeal board will be established. This is a new, independent board that will hear appeals of seizures, orders, and licensing decisions. The measures to deal with owners convicted of offences under the act will also be strengthened. Fines will be doubled to $10,000 for the first offence and up to $20,000 for second offences.

Jail time will be doubled to a maximum one year for a second or subsequent offence under the act. The maximum prohibition of an owner will be extended to life if a person is convicted of an offence.

In summary, Manitoba has the reputation of having one of the most stringent and effective

animal-care systems in Canada, a regime that many other provinces have looked to us. In fact, we are leaders. These amendments under The Animal Care Amendment Act have re-established Manitoba as a leader in the standard of animal protection legislation in this country, and the regulatory regime that we have will be second to none.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), that we adjourn debate.

Motion agreed to.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 46–The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to resume debate, second reading of Bill 46, The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

What is the will of House? Is it the will of the House for the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes or no? Could we just have–

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. So it will not remain standing, and the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden to speak.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on Bill 46, The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act, as brought forward by the government, Mr. Speaker. I know that there's a sincerity in the government to bring this type of legislation forward around the financing of particular projects in the province of Manitoba. I know that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton), I believe, when he brought this in last June 12, brought it forward once he made those comments that the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) has indicated that this was much needed legislation to make sure that they were able to move forward with Bill 47 that I just spoke to–and many of my colleagues–in regard to the CentrePort and inland port, The CentrePort Canada Act, Bill 47, for the province of Manitoba, a very important bill to move ahead in regard to making a competitive Manitoba a have province and a very competitive province that will allow us to have not thousands or hundreds, as I said earlier today, but tens of thousands of jobs in Manitoba.

Bill 47, an extremely important bill to move forward with, but, as many of my colleagues indicated, just putting a bill forward like this certainly does not mean that it's going to happen. My caution is that we have to make sure that every opportunity to make this bill happen is provided, and I understand that that's where the government wants to go in regard to Bill 46 with tax increment financing funding.

So, Mr. Speaker, before I get into the nuts and bolts, I guess, if you will, or the particular issues of Bill 46, I just want to go back to saying that I want to reiterate that just passing Bill 47 won't make it happen, although I am very committed from our side of the House to the commitment that the private sector and the people are making in regard to this bill coming forward. As I said, we unanimously moved it forward to committee this afternoon, looking forward to committee to see if there are presentations on this particular bill from those involved to provide input and insight into it and how quickly they see this moving forward and how quickly the business plan can be brought forward. I am hoping that not only can we have the board together by the end of the year, but, perhaps, the real nuts and bolts of a business plan will be put forward by then and we'll be able to move further ahead of other provinces, because there are many others working on this.

I just wanted to say that the government cannot take success for granted in regard to Bill 47, and they cannot say that it will succeed just because they feel that they're ahead of others. Others are out there working very hard to make sure that their inland port areas move forward. We need to make sure that we don't just see the government sitting on its laurels and saying, well, we've got the natural advantage geographically to have a CentrePort here in Winnipeg, and we'll move forward on that.

I concur with those who are in the industry, today, hoping that this will move forward, Mr. Speaker, and I only say that I look forward to the private-sector involvement, some of it already going

in regard to the expansion of the airport. It is a big part of the 20,000-acre development that could potentially be there down the road. It isn't going to happen overnight. We know that in regard to private enterprise setting up, many decisions have to be made that will allow them to have a better atmosphere tax-wise in Manitoba to come here over other provinces and jurisdictions. We've been fighting an uphill battle for nearly a decade.

I say that getting a free trade zone in place, having a single jurisdiction are all important issues. But what makes that happen? The government of the day would indicate that, without Bill 46, The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act, CentrePort won't succeed. Well, I've got much more faith in private enterprise than that. I would certainly say that it would make it easier if they can use this kind of tax programming to use as a funding mechanism for the establishment of CentrePort in Manitoba.

I want to indicate that, perhaps, it's not the only way that the government could have looked at this. I wonder that other options the private sector and others have come forward with to the government in regard to financing of an inland port because other jurisdictions have looked at other mechanisms to do this. To be fair, the City and others already have the jurisdiction that they can use tax-increment financing on their portions of the property, but the government has chosen here to move forward in such a way that increases in its assessed value on the property so designated are subject to a community revitalization levy that is imposed at the same rate as, but instead of, taxation for school purposes.

***** (16:50)

While this fund sets up a community revitalization fund and makes grants to help revitalize communities and neighbourhoods–which no one would be against, I don't think, in regard to how it would move forward if there were specific projects like that that it could be used for–I'm saying that those types of projects can be done and are the government's responsibility today with the present legislation we have. If I have any concern about Bill 46, it's about the fact that perhaps it's not needed to move forward in some of the areas that the government is wanting to work at as we speak in this House, and as we move forward with an industry development opportunity that would make Manitoba a have province.

Mr. Speaker, the government has been, as previous governments did, putting funds into housing opportunities, trying to encourage social and economic and cultural development in our province. We want to preserve heritage properties, and, of course, those are items that are in the particular Bill 46 and provide us with the opportunity to develop such areas.

I wanted to just point out to the House, though, that other jurisdictions have had such incremental financing programs in place for a number of years. City of Calgary has one in regard to the construction that they had around the riverfront properties, the Bow River, in that area. Ontario has similar legislation as well, and I don't think Manitoba has taken a page out of those books per se because those provinces are dealing with very specific issues and very specific areas that they have designated the funds to. Maybe that's the intent of the government here in Manitoba, but what we see in Bill 46 is an instrument that leaves it fairly open in regard to the size of the jurisdiction that they're working with, and not all of the incremental increases in taxation, school tax increases, would necessarily end up coming from within the jurisdiction that the development may take place on. I think that's a bit of a red flag for a lot of Manitobans that should be looking at this because, of course, we do not want to set up, basically, for want of another word, a fund that could be abused.

We do want to establish a fund that would be very succinctly designated to certain projects, this one in particular, CentrePort, and, of course, the legislation clearly states that CentrePort, as the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) did when they announced the discussions about the tax increment financing in the House again, saying that when they bring it in, it would be a necessary component of CentrePort. It was one of the first issues that they talked about in regard to the financing mechanisms to develop CentrePort and move it forward.

I just want to reiterate there may have been other options that the government could have used. There could have been government guarantees on loans by the private sector or by the other developments in the jurisdiction. There could have been special tax programs put in place or perhaps even tax credits used for the development of industry in those regions of the CentrePort area, probably not as lucrative because I think that those are specific amounts that

the government would come up with. I think Manitobans would feel that that was a responsible action on behalf of the government to establish an exact amount and let everybody know up front just what it is. But, under this program, if there's a concern with this bill–and I'm not saying that it isn't a good program. I believe that the funds could be used in a manner of prudence in regard to the development of making Manitoba move forward, helping it move forward, but I do not want to take it away, these funds being used from other areas, such as social programming and economic enhancement of what I would call less active and less prolific regions of our province or the city of the Winnipeg, Brandon and others that could be used for rezoning and housing in other areas. There's a concern there, and I think the concern is that we need to make sure that the funds are used in an appropriate manner.

I've outlined a couple of other jurisdictional areas that the government could have used for funding of similar programs, but I want to come back to saying that tax increment financing would allow the government to perhaps go out into the larger market and borrow more money against this program by selling it to the investors in the large investment funds that would come in to help develop the CentrePort act.

They would be able to borrow and sell the idea to these investment companies, that they can pay this back with the increment financing that they would get from a community revitalization tax. That may be their point. It certainly would act, then, as a lever to provide multiples of the kinds of money that would be collected under this act, or under this tax, and if that's the government's intent, then we need to make sure that they are accountable in the House for that kind of documentation, and that the course that–perhaps they would be able to put on the record that that's their intent in further debates in this House in regard to activities or their opportunities to speak on this bill, and I think that that's only fair.

I think that the fact that the government could borrow against future revenue generated through tax and increment financing to invest in revitalization projects within the designated zone is important. I think that the situation we have is we need to make sure that the designated zone, if you will, is defined. I look at designated date, special levy–there are a number of areas under the definitions of the act in 46, but nowhere do I see anything in there that talks about what the designated zone would need to be.

I think that there's quite a difference between developing an inland port and moving toward affordable housing. Of course, there are other areas that the government wants to perhaps look at down the road. These funds could be used in light rapid transit; a bus rapid transit is being discussed now as well. There are a whole host of areas that the government could use this kind of funding for instead of backing it with direct support–backing loans–direct support from the government of Manitoba.

I guess concern arises, for myself at least, around this bill in the fact that we've seen a government wait until the last minute on a number of issues before they got signed, the fact that they brought this in on June 12 or June 11, the very last day that they could bring it in under last summer's session and still have it there to be discussed through the summer. I spoke on Bill 47, saying that it could have been in six, eight months earlier. One of my colleagues today said a year and a half ago it should have been there. If it was a priority of the government, it could have been. If this was a priority of the government, it certainly could have been brought in long before the last day of the session last summer, and I think that that's a concern for all Manitobans, that the government seems to be making its economic policy on reactions to where it thinks it needs to go instead of having a long-term plan on how Manitoba will develop.

I think Manitobans are starting to see through that and see it in everyday issues. The Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) brings it up in the House in regard to agriculture. The Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) brings it up in regard to health. Of course, the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) raised the issues of education in the House in Bill 45. It seems that the government's got a knee-jerk reaction to a number of these issues. I hope that Bill 46 isn't a similar type of venue, type of action, because this is extremely important to the province of Manitoba that Bill 47, the CentrePort bill, go forward.

I want to say that, where we're looking at, a major concern of mine was the fact that government waited until the very last day, in fact, the very last hour before the federal election was called, to sign on to the Building Canada Fund, the Canada-Manitoba building Canada framework agreement, and it was extremely doubtful that the government was even going to be able to get that signed before

the last minute. If it hadn't been for the efforts of Vic Toews, the Member for Provencher, and Minister Cannon, the federal Transport Minister, coming to Winnipeg and getting the government to sit down and sign that agreement, get it on the road so that we could actually get $42.5 million each between the province and the federal government–

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 15 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 22, 2008

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