

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
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SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
VACANT	Kirkfield Park	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 5—The Personal Investigations Amendment Act (Identity Protection)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 5, The Personal Investigations Amendment Act (Identity Protection); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les enquêtes relatives aux particuliers (protection de l'identité), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this bill today. The bill gives people who are concerned that their identity is being used by someone else the ability to place a security alert on their credit report.

The security alert notifies the credit granters that they must take steps to verify the credit applicant's identity before extending credit.

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

PETITIONS

Headingley Foods

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 owners of Headingley Foods, a small business based in Headingley, would like to sell alcohol at their store. The distance from their location to the nearest Liquor Mart, via the Trans-Canada Highway, is 9.3 kilometres. The distance to the same Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard is 10.8 kilometres. Their application has been rejected because their store needs to be 10 kilometres away from the Liquor Mart. It is 700 metres short of this

requirement using one route but 10.8 kilometres using the other.

The majority of Headingley's population lives off Roblin Boulevard and uses Roblin Boulevard to get to and from Winnipeg rather than the Trans-Canada Highway. Additionally, the highway route is often closed or too dangerous to travel in severe weather conditions. The majority of Headingley residents therefore travel to the Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard, a distance of 10.8 kilometres.

Small businesses outside Winnipeg's perimeter are vital to the prosperity of Manitoba's communities and should be supported. It is difficult for small businesses like Headingley Foods to compete with larger stores in Winnipeg, and they require added services to remain viable. Residents should be able to purchase alcohol locally rather than drive to the next municipality.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister charged with the administration of The Liquor Control Act (Mr. Smith), to consider allowing the owners of Headingley Foods to sell alcohol at their store, thereby supporting small business and the prosperity of rural communities in Manitoba.

This is signed by Sheryl King, W. Armstrong, Mary Armstrong and many, many others.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from Arthur E. Wright School 47 grade 4 students under the direction of Sylvia Shore.

This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for The Maples (Mr. Aglugub).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Privacy Commissioner Establishment of Position

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): As all members know, across Canada today, governments of all political stripes and parties of all political stripes are embarking on initiatives to reform the democratic processes to make governments more accountable and more transparent to their citizens.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we see in our own Progressive Conservative Party, democracy thriving; 1,200 people, 1,200 Manitobans in a hall last night in Altona; 1,200 members of our party paying tribute to the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner). They gathered to pay tribute to the Member for Emerson and to select our party's next candidate for the great constituency of Emerson.

Now we've got 1,600 members gathering tonight in the constituency of Ste. Rose to pay tribute to the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), and to select our PC candidate in that constituency for the coming election.

Notwithstanding the Premier's newfound and highly selective interest in democracy as it pertains to federal issues, democracy under this dome is not doing as well as it is in other places. Critical to a strong democracy is transparency and access to information as well as protection of personal privacy.

In the 1999 election campaign we all remember the broken promise on hallway medicine, but there was another promise that was broken in 1999, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier promised in 1999, completing a survey where he said that he would provide the Ombudsman of Manitoba with the power to order the release of information, and he also promised that his party would establish a privacy commissioner, as is the case in other jurisdictions. A privacy commissioner could deal effectively with both matters of access and matters of private, personal information. Manitoba is one of the last jurisdictions in Canada to not have an independent officer charged with the responsibility of dealing with issues of access to information and privacy.

So can the Premier please explain, seven years later, why he hasn't kept his promise to make government more accountable? Why hasn't he granted the necessary powers to the Ombudsman? Why hasn't he established a privacy commissioner for the people of Manitoba?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): We have legislation that we are preparing for the freedom of information, and we will be including a privacy commissioner in that legislation.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we see with the growing litany of scandals, seven scandals in seven years under this NDP government: from the Crocus scandal to the Burntwood health care authority scandal; money being spent on tobacco and trips rather than health care; the floodway fiasco, their mismanagement of this important project; mismanagement in health care, the second-highest spending in the country with the worst results; and the tragic results of their mismanagement in Child and Family Services, the need for transparency, the need for accountability in Manitoba is greater than ever before.

So, in light of these many serious breakdowns, in light of the culture of secrecy that he has created, why will he not, and why has he not established an independent office to deal with important matters of access and privacy?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we will, as I say, be proposing that in the legislation, the amendments to the legislation. The issue of public hearings took place on the freedom of information act, and it also took place on the confidentiality and privacy act. The Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), in co-ordination with our minister responsible, has discussed that in forums and we are certainly proceeding with that.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, before the member opposite gets holier-than-thou, that public opinion polls paid for by the provincial government when the member opposite was chief of staff for the former premier, all the public opinion polls, including questions on satisfaction with the former premier, went from the Department of Health directly to the chief of staff and were never released to the public. Now we're not perfect, but we know the member opposite is saying one thing and acted a different way when he was in his office.

* (13:40)

Public Accounts Committee Reform

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Premier to check the facts. That information was released to the public. The Premier is running around fighting old wars. I know he's stuck in the past, and he is

running around and nobody's told him that the war ended seven years ago as he runs around firing shots left, right and centre. Let's bring it forward to 2006. He's had seven years to deal with these issues, seven years of stonewalling, seven years of secrecy. It's time for this Premier to get serious about democracy and accountability in Manitoba.

Further on the same question relating to Manitoba's dysfunctional democratic track record, I would like to ask the Premier about his commitment to reforming our Public Accounts Committee. Manitoba admittedly, and I think all members of this House would agree that we have the weakest Public Accounts Committee in Canada, and is therefore one of the least accountable governments in the country. Mr. Speaker, I know the studio audience is chattering from their seats because they don't want to hear the question.

The question is this: Given that we have what is widely acknowledged, and I think agreed by all members, to be the weakest Public Accounts Committee in the country, and as an indication of how weak this committee is it has met only twice this year compared to some provinces where they'll meet many, many more times, some of which meet as many times as twice a month, and our Public Accounts Committee, Mr. Speaker, lacks the powers of many other committees to call witnesses, conduct research and issue reports. Now, we know, because members from all parties—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) is sensitive about his years of mismanagement of our health care system. I know he doesn't want Public Accounts to be able to look into the fact that, under his lack of leadership in the Health Department, we are now the last-place province in Canada when it comes to health care even though we spend the second most, so I can understand why the minister doesn't want to hear these questions.

But, if I may, Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is: Given that all members of the House recognize the weakness of the committee which shows up in terms of our difficulty in scheduling meetings because nobody, and the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) made the point in the media, nobody takes this committee seriously, today will the Premier commit his caucus as we are

prepared to commit ours to a process of reforming the Public Accounts Committee so that we can have a committee that has the power to call witnesses, has regular meetings and has the ability to hold this incompetent, wasteful, neglectful government to account?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have been very frustrated with the frequency of Public Accounts meetings. We have gone from 1.4 Public Accounts meetings on average a year in the '95-99 period to about four a year. That's not good enough. I've asked our House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) to bring in legislation immediately to have fixed and definite Public Accounts meetings scheduled in law because right now—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, in all fairness, on one occasion it's somebody's party's inability to attend. Then it's somebody else is on holidays for a month in Hawaii, and somebody else is going to be changed as chair. I believe this is a problem for all of us. I have asked our House Leader to bring in legislation immediately. If it's the first Tuesday in every month, or whatever it is, when we should have in law six meetings scheduled, so we don't have to say that three parties have to agree or disagree on a meeting date, which has proven to be ineffective in my view. We are going to have six guaranteed dates a year, and we are going to have it in legislation.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Mr. McFadyen: We know that the issue of setting dates is a challenge, but it is much broader than this, Mr. Speaker. The reason members of this Assembly don't take Public Accounts seriously is because it doesn't have the power to call witnesses, to compel evidence. It doesn't have the power to get answers from ministers, from deputy ministers and others who have important information about scandals such as Crocus: Who is the higher authority that was in the know when Crocus was melting down who didn't do their job in government? Who are the people who are responsible for the loss of millions of dollars on the part of 34,000 Manitobans? The reason we don't have answers to those questions, part of the reason is that we don't have an effective Public Accounts Committee.

So, Mr. Speaker, on a new question: Given the record of scandal and mismanagement under this

government, and there seems to be a sudden interest in accountability and democracy coming from the Premier, in light of this new interest can we seize the moment? Can we ask the Premier to stop being a speed bump on the road to the future, and will he commit today to a reform process that goes beyond the setting of dates, that goes to giving real power to Public Accounts to call witnesses, to bring forward evidence, to ask questions of people who have information and to provide it with the resources it needs to do its job to hold this government to account?

Mr. Doer: I seem to recall last year, Mr. Speaker, that the Auditor General was at Public Accounts. The deputy ministers that the members opposite wanted to ask questions to were at Public Accounts for the first time ever. The members opposite will recall that we had one meeting a year under their regime. We also could not call deputy ministers.

The meeting was called. So they asked the question about the e-mail. The answer they got, they didn't like. They asked the question about the implementation team and its recommendations in December. They didn't like the answers. They go to the meeting in March, and they huff and they puff and they walk out of the meeting room. They have deputy ministers in front of them—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We need a little decorum here.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bottom line is deputy ministers can be called. They were called and people walked out. So we are all accountable. We have gone from about 1.4 meetings a year, when the member opposite was chief of staff, to four. That is not good enough. That is why we are passing legislation because this idea of getting three parties to agree on a date and disagree on a date; and we are all responsible for it, I will admit we are all accountable for it, that is unacceptable. We are going to change the law.

Fixed Election Dates Provincial Elections

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I think that any member of this House who is being honest knows that the reason this committee doesn't function is because it is viewed as a complete and absolute, to use the word of the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), a complete farce, Mr. Speaker. That is why we have situations where we have deputy ministers responding, with

ministers looking over their shoulders to make sure that they don't say anything that the minister doesn't want them to say. That is why we have a committee that I think is widely regarded by members of this House as being ineffective, in particular, compared to committees in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, again, a supplemental question on the issue of accountability and democracy here in Manitoba. We know today that there are jurisdictions across the country moving to establish set election dates. The federal government introduced a bill this spring to implement set federal election dates. British Columbia, Ontario and Newfoundland have already implemented set election dates.

The Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) tabled private members' legislation in 2005 calling on the government to set our province's election dates to afford Manitobans with a level of predictability around the timing of provincial elections.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, under this Premier—I know they don't like hearing the questions which is why they chirp from their seats incessantly. But if I could put the question: unfortunately when the Member for Ste. Rose tabled that legislation, the Premier didn't permit debate on the legislation, let alone bring it to a vote.

So, Mr. Speaker, now that the Premier seems to have a newfound sense of appreciation for democracy, will he commit today to setting election dates in Manitoba?

*(13:50)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, let's deal with the inconsistency of the member opposite from when he was chief of staff to now in the House. Number one, when we had Public Accounts committees in the past, the only person, the only individual that was allowed to speak at the committee from the government side was the Minister of Finance. Every other minister, and even previous ministers which we've allowed to speak at Public Accounts Committee, was censored from doing so. We allow ministers to speak at that meeting, MLAs. The deputy ministers now have been called.

I don't know whether the member opposite walked out of the committee, I'll check *Hansard*. But I know all the members over there, they walked out of the committee. They weren't interested in asking questions, in-depth questions, of deputy ministers,

because they wanted to walk out and put out a press release. That's all they were interested in.

Mr. Speaker, I would also point out that the ability of the Auditor General to follow up on companies that got money from the government, for example, companies that lost money on MIOP loans, we have a situation when we came into office where up to \$40 million was lost. Isobord, Westsun, Winnport didn't get a lot of coverage in the media; \$40 million of taxpayers' money was lost by members opposite. The Auditor General could not follow the money. Why would they not want the Auditor General to follow the money? Were they protecting their friends in those investments? We changed the law to allow the Auditor General to follow the money.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition—oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Doer: Dealing with elections, if I recall correctly—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It's my error. I thought the member was going to sit, but he didn't. He still has the floor. So the honourable First Minister, to continue.

Mr. Doer: I seem to recall the last election the members opposite called was over four and a half years. I think the term before that when they got a majority was over four a half years. I think I have been accountable in a much earlier period of time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Again, it's clear, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier is obsessed with the past. We all acknowledge, and he was critical in the 1990s of elections not going ahead so why doesn't he put his money where his mouth is today? He's in a position to do something about it now. He's in a position to put his money where his mouth is, to stop the hypocrisy and to move Manitoba forward. Our party is standing ready to move Manitoba forward, looking to the future. So let's talk about 2006 and the future. Let's get out of the 1990s. Let's move to 2006.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier now is in a position to do something about all of those things that he was unhappy about when

he was the Opposition Leader. So why not, as a legacy, why not take the opportunity to think about his legacy to future generations of Manitobans, move us forward as a province? Why not commit today to do the right thing?

We know, Mr. Speaker, that set election dates can help remove seasonal obstacles to voting. We know that they can reduce voter cynicism. We know that we can allow candidates or potential candidates to better plan well in advance of election dates. We know set election dates work well at the municipal level. We know that initiatives can be taken to increase voter turnout if we know in advance the date of elections. The Premier has an opportunity today to show leadership. He has an opportunity to look to the future, get out of the past, to show leadership. Will he today commit to set election dates and move Manitoba into the future, leave a positive legacy for young Manitobans?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I always understood why the former premier did not fix election dates. *[interjection]* Well, you know, the member opposite is taking a shot at Ralph Klein. I just want to say, when the BSE crisis was taking place, all western Canadian premiers no matter what their political party, Ralph Klein and everyone else worked together to get that border open. I am shocked that the member opposite, who couldn't carry his briefcase, would take a shot at that premier in Alberta.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. McFadyen: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. McFadyen: I wonder if the Premier, in his defence of Premier Klein, also endorses the Premier's joke about Belinda Stronach, Mr. Speaker. Since he views himself, he is almost the dean of Manitoba premiers, I wonder if he views himself as being in the same mould as Premier Klein.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, it is

not a point of order. It is clearly a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable First Minister, to continue.

Mr. Doer: I will tell the member opposite where obviously we disagree and that is on the Canadian Wheat Board. I would think, given the kind of absolute surrogate status of the Leader of the Conservative Party in Manitoba to the federal Chuck Strahl strategy in Ottawa, the surrogate nature of the Conservative Party, Mr. Speaker, they have no ability to stand up for Manitoba.

I would point out that in western Canada; Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, we are faced with later harvests sometimes, earlier planting other times. I think there should be a range of time when the democratic accountability can take place. I would point out the former members went close to four and a half years both times, Mr. Speaker. I have gone closer to the four-year period of time, but obviously, if the planting was slower in the spring of '03, that would affect our timing. I think it affects Saskatchewan and it affects Alberta as well. Now that is part of the reality of running a province in western Canada, a prairie province where agriculture is so important. That is why we have to be very careful.

Privacy Commissioner Establishment of Position

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, this government has an appalling record when it comes to access to information. There is a lack of transparency, a lack of accountability and many roadblocks thrown in the way of Manitobans who want access to information to access what the government is hiding. Less than half of information requests are fully granted.

Will the Premier direct his government to stop denying access to government records today? Will he commit to elevating the importance of access to information and protection of privacy by establishing a privacy commissioner today?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): A privacy commissioner will be in legislation that we will introduce. I said that six questions ago, Mr. Speaker. When the journalists in Canada did a review of access to information, we were rated just below

Alberta. It does not mean to say that we can't do better.

I would point out that every adjudication made by the Ombudsman, we have supported and acknowledged. There hasn't been an occasion to have to go to court. I think there were four or five occasions to go to court in the past. One was to get the VLT revenues by community, which were denied. One was to get the Jets' operating loss agreement which was announced at \$4 million and ended up being at \$43 million. There was another set of announcements that I recall, polls being released. The former chief of staff got the polls from the Department of Health and wouldn't release them to the public.

I think we have had a practice of releasing stuff. We are not perfect, but I would suggest that 99 percent of the questions members opposite ask based on FIPPA, coming out of all the information we provided health care were not available. In fact, I still got a FIPPA request signed by the Conservatives that said the information on waiting lists here, there and everywhere else is not maintained, not kept and not released. Again, we're not perfect, but we have made massive improvements in freedom of information.

*(14:00)

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, this government has had seven years to address this information privacy commissioner and they haven't done it. It always takes pressure from the opposition until they react. At the same time that this government is denying access to information on what it is doing, it's also allowing personal information of some Manitobans to be at risk.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* asked Manitobans if they trust the government to protect their privacy and 90 percent of respondents answered, no. This is a resounding statement on the lack of respect and attention the government has put into the protection of privacy of Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, will this Premier commit today to increasing the privacy protection of all Manitobans and become open and accountable for information about government which it continues to hide from the public?

Mr. Doer: I would point out that we agree with the change on the privacy commissioner idea, but I would point out the Ombudsman has the role of the privacy commissioner. It's the same role now maintained by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman

has not been overruled by us. In other words, when the Ombudsman makes a recommendation we follow it. There has been no occasion that I am aware of where people have had to go over the Ombudsman—for us in government, denying what the Ombudsman has decided and therefore people having to go court to get an adjudication that the Ombudsman recommends.

Having said that, the authority that rests with the Ombudsman now can, in fact, be delegated in law to the commissioner as indicated by the member opposite. If the commissioner ruled in such a way that people didn't agree with, there's still the appeal of the Court of Queen's Bench.

I can recall four occasions, including times that we asked for, and communities were asking for, the VLT revenues. It was sitting in a computer in Morris, Manitoba. All the information was available. We couldn't get it and it was denied. You could get it in a five-second nanoflick of a computer to get that information. The operating losses of the Jets, the operating loss agreement of the Jets, it was portrayed at \$4 million, it was \$43 million. We couldn't get that number. In fact, the Auditor General had to go out and dig it out and then stated in the report that this information was available and it should be released.

The authority of the Ombudsman won't be changed with the commissioner. It will just make it easier, but the authority of the Ombudsman, we have never overridden that. I would point out the FIPPA request we had in June of 1999, when the member opposite was chief of staff of the former premier, Mr. Filmon, the request for wait lists was denied in June of 1999. Access to specific information concerning the number of people on surgical waiting lists cannot be granted as this information does not exist.

Bridge Inspection Reports Request for Information

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Well, Mr. Speaker, talking about the five-second flick, this fall we found a freedom of information request to the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation for copies of the annual inspection reports for Highway No. 1, the CNR overpass on Highway 1 at Portage la Prairie. The request was refused, citing disclosure of this information could reasonably be expected to harm or threaten the security of government property, namely this bridge structure.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation agree that providing Manitobans with access to these bridge inspection reports will threaten the security of this bridge?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): We have provided information to many individuals on when a bridge was last inspected, the condition at the time and the work that's been done on those particular structures. What I would like to comment further on, Mr. Speaker, is the amount of work that's taking place in Manitoba with regard to those structures. We talked about the Letellier Bridge, the Bield bridge, the bridge over the south perimeter. We have a budget now of \$400 million per year in infrastructure.

The members opposite, why do they not want to talk about the 1990s? They ran down our medical system; the hospitals were falling apart; schools were falling apart; universities were falling apart. I often wonder what did they do in the 1990s.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether Roadblock Ronnie really believes that that was an appropriate issue or not, but we were refused this information in a letter that we received yesterday. Part of the minister's proposed construction projects for '07, which he announced just last week, part of that was that would be the demolition of the existing bridge, the Portage la Prairie bypass, the CNR overpass.

Given that this minister has slated that this over-40-year-old bridge will be up for immediate demolition, does the minister still believe releasing the inspection reports will jeopardize the future condition of the structure?

Mr. Lemieux: You know, Mr. Speaker, the discussion we're having currently, and I can't wait to see how they vote, quite frankly, on the Speech from the Throne on the announcement on \$4 billion over 10 years. Consistently, they have been not in tune with Manitobans. They had the opportunity in the 1990s where they raised gas tax by a cent and a half, I believe, in 1991; another cent in 1993. They raised \$200 million. What did they do with that money? They wasted it. They had an opportunity to put it into infrastructure and they did zero, zilch, nada, not a single thing in the 1990s. They stand up here trying to make a case with regard to bridges that we are addressing and fixing. Repeatedly, we're fixing up their mess that they created in 1990.

Assiniboine River Water Quality Study Request for Information

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Clearly, this government has a history of cover-ups and deceit, and the Water Stewardship Department is no exception to this. On August 8, 2006, Neil Christoffersen filed an application for access for freedom of information. It was in regard to a study on the Assiniboine River regarding water quality and water quantity. I'd like to table this application for access for the House and for the minister.

Despite numerous calls to the department, this particular individual has received absolutely no response to his request. I am asking the minister: Why is the government holding back this study?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, I believe a response would have been sent. I will look into this and get back to the House.

Mr. Cullen (Turtle Mountain): We've heard a lot from this minister about process over the years in her previous department and, obviously, the process isn't working in Water Stewardship, Mr. Speaker.

The government is proposing to take more water out of the Assiniboine River. There is currently a process going forward. There is a municipal hearing coming up in early December. The residents of the area want to hear the results of this particular study because it is very important in making the decisions going forward. I ask the minister to release the information in this study immediately.

Ms. Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this request says that the report is, in fact, on the Water Stewardship Web site, but, again, I will check this out and confirm it.

Public Accounts Committee Reform

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Today the Premier stood in his place and, with a lot of huff and puff, indicated that he wanted more accountability from Public Accounts. I hope that his House leaders, former and present, were listening carefully because I want to ask the House Leader whether he's prepared to call the Rules Committee on PAC to allow the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the PAC committee to take responsibility for determining when meetings

are convened, including meetings agenda as recommended by the provincial auditor, something that side of the House disagreed with in the last Rules Committee meeting.

* (14:10)

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the Member for Russell is asking the question, because he's not Chair of PAC. I believe the member for Niakwa is the Chair of PAC—[interjection]—of Southdale is the Chairperson at PAC.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I can indicate to the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate. We have tried to schedule a number of meetings. Three meetings have been set up. One our party had difficulty attending. One, tomorrow, I believe, another party of which the member might be familiar had difficulty attending. The third, another individual had difficulty attending. That's why we're going to bring in legislation to fix dates, to fix PAC meetings so we can fix that problem and get on with doing the business.

I am happy to talk about it to the member and the Chairperson of the PAC committee, who is a member of the opposition, the Member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer).

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the Rules Committee on PAC has not been called for at least six months, and it was at that last meeting that the government members refused to give the Chair and the Vice-Chair any authority to call meetings or agendas.

Mr. Speaker, the government must allow the PAC committee to do what it was created to do, and to hold government accountable for the stewardship responsibilities. Those are the words of the Auditor General. The Auditor General has also recommended that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) cease to be a member of PAC in order to allow for a more independent and transparent process.

I'm going to ask the minister, who is responsible for PAC, whether he will allow the Rules Committee

to be called so that the committee can change the rules to take the Finance Minister off the committee, as has been recommended by the provincial auditor.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated we're prepared to fix the dates for timing. I will talk to the Chair of the PAC committee who represents—talk to the Chair of PAC. The Member for Southdale and I will meet with my Vice-Chair to talk about the rules, which I think is appropriate.

If the Member for Russell wants to attend a meeting or make a suggestion that's fine, but I will meet with the Chair to talk about that, which is what we normally do in negotiations and not on the floor of the House and not in the media when we try to plan events. But because this difficulty has occurred, we'll make sure we legislate the meetings as they occur, and there are fixed dates for fixed meetings.

NDP Nomination (The Maples) Premier's Involvement

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to raise serious concerns with regard to the inappropriate behaviour from the Premier's Office, which includes bullying, intimidation and possible bribery with respect to at least one candidate that was seeking the nomination in The Maples.

My question to the Premier is: Will the Premier explain to this Chamber if he or any member of his staff has been involved directly or indirectly in influencing the outcome of the NDP nomination in The Maples?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, any innuendo or any issue of allegations that deals with any breach of The Elections Act, I refer immediately to Elections Manitoba.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I understand there has been some sort of a referral to Elections Manitoba.

My question: I believe that the Premier was fully aware of the discussions that his chief of staff was having on behalf of the Premier's Office, and I believe that the Premier needs to make a clear statement as to his involvement and tell this House why Michael Balagus is still working for this Premier.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, any allegations made by any individual dealing with any matter of Elections Manitoba I refer immediately to Elections Manitoba. There is a process in place that deals, separates innuendo from fact. The bottom line is I have seen

other nomination races where it gets animated. Well, you probably have some yourselves this evening. There is one we have tonight in a riding that I've read about. Certain people are supported by other people which is not entirely, in fact, not true at all, and nomination races take place under the law, and in our party they take place under the constitution of the party.

Mr. Speaker, the issues will be dealt with. There have been people before who have been found in our party to be contrary to the constitution. So I would caution the member opposite very carefully because there have been, and I am not talking about this instance, where people have had dual memberships in different parties, and we have acted accordingly.

Mr. Lamoureux: I believe that this Premier is fully aware of a situation which reflects very poorly on his office and on his chief of staff. The Premier, I believe, is aware of this because, Mr. Speaker, there is a letter I believe that is circulating out there, and the Premier's Office, from what I understand, has, in fact, advanced it to Elections Manitoba.

My question to the Premier is to come clean with this Legislature and confirm that, in fact, there has been serious allegations and that the Premier has advanced the letter that's out there to Elections Manitoba. Yes or no? Have you advanced that letter to Elections Manitoba, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Doer: I can't confirm any of it except to say that any time I come in possession, including in Liberal nomination intentions, any matter dealing with The Elections Act, and I have had material dealing with people intending on running for the Liberal Party, I treat all of them the same way. I immediately send them to Elections Manitoba. That way the facts can allow due process and not innuendo. I always refer anything, any suggestion, anything in writing that comes to me goes that day to Elections Manitoba. That's the way I've always acted, and that's the way I will always act in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Candidate Nomination (Emerson)

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I were privileged to be part of a great democratic event in the constituency of Emerson last night. I want to thank the president of the riding, Rick Martel, all the PC executives, the volunteer staff from 23 Kennedy and the local volunteers who

organized and conducted a nomination for a new candidate in the riding of Emerson.

More than 1,300 people jammed the Pioneer Centre in Altona to hear candidates, Tammy Smook, Larry Tetrault, Ronn Smith, John Stephen and Cliff Graydon. The contest needed four ballots and finally wrapped up around 12:30 a.m. In the end, Cliff Graydon of Green Ridge, Manitoba, was selected as the next candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba in the constituency of Emerson.

I want to thank publicly all the people who took the time out of their busy lives to participate in the selection process. I also want to thank my colleagues for coming to Altona to show support and congratulate the candidates. Above all, I want to thank our leader, Hugh McFadyen, for delivering a strong message to the gathering and telling the people of the constituency of Emerson that we will be the next—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Could we have some co-operation, please. I've had to shout "Order" to get members to pay—I'm rising because there's a breach of a rule. I need to be able to hear if there is a breach of a rule so I can draw attention to the individual to make sure it's not repeated again. I am asking the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

The honourable Member for Emerson, when referring to another member in the House, it is by the portfolio of a minister or the constituency of members, not by individual names of that member. So I ask the co-operation of the honourable member and all members in the future.

Mr. Penner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize to the House for that mistake. I was referring to the honourable Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen).

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank all the people of the riding of Emerson, and I want to indicate to this House that they are ready to enter the next election with a strong candidate to change the party that will govern the province of Manitoba and make a true Tory government responsible to the people in the next government of Manitoba.

*(14:20)

Bruce Park Cenotaph

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, this past Remembrance Day I was reminded, once again, by St. James constituents how

caring and civic minded Manitoba's young people can be.

Over the course of the last three years, students from St. James Collegiate have devoted time and energy to completely and authentically repairing the cenotaph at Bruce Park in the heart of St. James. This was the site of a recent Remembrance Day service.

The cenotaph is more than a commemoration of those who have served and sacrificed. Now restored, it reflects young people working together to reclaim not only a community monument, but also our shared history. They did this out of respect for their elders and, indeed, their peers who serve today.

Programs such as the Veterans Affairs Canada's "Share the Story" illustrate the benefits of building relationships between generations. When youth is inspired and trusted, as in this case, our faith is rewarded.

Mr. Speaker, on November 24, 2005, the St. James Legion Branch No. 4 honoured the students with a plaque commemorating their work. Today, I invite my colleagues to join me in recognizing the civic pride and public spiritedness of St. James Collegiate students: Bobbie Side, Nona Flaherty, Michelle Penner, Mandy Figueiredo, Justin Harrison, Chad Kipling, Jona Pangilinan, Shannon Fraser, Kyle Beel, Kevin Lane-Praest, Jimmy Chau, Megan Burland, Thomas Tipple, Joe Antonio, Cesar Najera, Carlos Salermon, Laura Thiessen, Hilary Fardoe and Lynn Mantik. Thank you.

Malachi Alexander Goertzen

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I rise to advise the House of a very significant occasion that happened on September 30, 2006, when my wife gave birth to our first child, Malachi Alexander. Despite difficulties in both the pregnancy and the birth, I am happy to report that Malachi was a healthy eight pounds and 11 ounces, and both mother and baby are doing very well.

I want to thank all the members of this House in my party and also members opposite for their congratulations and their well wishes. They have been passed along, and they have been appreciated by all members of my family.

We are thankful for the efforts of the staff of the high-risk labour ward of the Women's Clinic at the Health Sciences Centre for all the efforts that they made to make sure the birth was a success.

I also want to advise members, because I know they will be interested, my leader talked about the growth in party membership and, in fact, Malachi received his membership card to the PC Party of Manitoba making him now, officially, the youngest member of the PC Party of Manitoba. Thank you.

Seine River Book Swap

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I am all aflutter after that last speech, actually.

I am pleased to report today that the Seine River Book Swap took place on the afternoon of October 14 at the Dakota Community Centre. The event was designed to promote the joy of reading broadly and family literacy, in particular.

The community of Seine River was decidedly generous with book donations this year, and as a result many families were sent home with new books to enjoy together. It was a pleasure to also have in attendance the Literacy Partners of Manitoba proudly represented by the lively and engaging Word Monster.

Low literacy levels form a significant barrier to economic and social well-being and limit people's ability to participate fully in the workplace and in a broader society. Forty-two percent of adults in Canada have literacy levels below the level considered the minimum to fully participate in a knowledge-based economy such as ours. Given cuts made by the federal government to literacy programs, it is exceedingly important that literacy be promoted as a family value, and that people be encouraged to enjoy the pleasures of reading.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in this year's Book Swap. The support of our sponsors and partners, as well as our volunteers, was instrumental in the success of the event. I would also like to particularly mention the student volunteers from Collège Jeanne-Sauvé who demonstrated leadership and, indeed, all throughout the afternoon. We hope the Book Swap event will continue to grow, and that more and more people will be able to enjoy the gift of literacy with their families. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Meir Kryger and Dr. Maria Melanson

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the life and work of Dr. Meir Kryger and Dr. Maria Melanson, and to express my deep sadness at their upcoming departure from

Manitoba. There can be no doubt that Dr. Kryger is an internationally renowned authority on sleep disorders. He's been a leader in this field in Manitoba, in Canada and around the world. Indeed, it's been wonderful for Manitoba to have a specialist of his stature practising here in our province. Dr. Maria Melanson, the team leader for the multiple sclerosis effort in Manitoba, has helped many Manitoba patients with multiple sclerosis, about 1,500 Manitobans, as I understand it.

It is sad, indeed tragic for Manitoba that both Dr. Kryger and Dr. Melanson are leaving Manitoba to go to the United States. We wish them both well in their future careers, but, at the same time, they will leave major holes in health care and in the forward-thinking approaches to health care delivery in our province. It did not have to be this way.

The sad and sorry truth is that in seven years the present NDP government has completely and totally failed to establish the framework for health care delivery that will allow and facilitate the building of effective teams co-ordinating care in areas like sleep disorders and multiple sclerosis. The Tories were no better when they were in power in the 1990s. It is one aspect of the Manitoba system which needs to change fundamentally.

Indeed, that's one of the reasons I entered politics, because I realized as a physician that if I wanted to build a long-run, sustainable team that was an international league-leading team, I would probably have virtually no option but to leave Manitoba. Instead, I chose to enter politics and fight to change the way the system works. I'm still here fighting for change, and I will continue to fight because the system in Manitoba needs to change. Indeed, it's time to remove the present inept government, which can't get the job done, and to elect a Liberal government in Manitoba that can do a proper job of looking after health care in our province.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on House business, prior to dealing with the Throne Speech, I just want to indicate that it's fairly obvious that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that was scheduled to meet on Thursday, November 23, and Thursday, November 30, will no longer meet. It's cancelled.

What we hope to do is to be able to reach some accommodation so that we can have the requisite

number of meetings this year. We are also bringing in legislation to set set dates for meetings of the Public Accounts Committee, Mr. Speaker, so that the difficulties we're experiencing with organizing these meetings will no longer occur. There'll be some assurances for all parties as to fixed dates for the meetings of the Public Accounts Committee. So thank you.

Mr. Speaker: So the meetings for November 23 and November 30 for Public Accounts, they've been cancelled, for the information of all honourable members.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE

(Fourth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick),

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

We, the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at this Fifth Session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislature of Manitoba, and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), who has seven minutes remaining. [*interjection*] No? Okay. We'll go to the next.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): It's a privilege, as always, to stand in this House to put some words on the record in my support of the Speech from the Throne.

I, of course, would like to begin by paying tribute to the constituents of Seine River, a lively and vibrant community of which I am so proud to be a part. They have instilled their faith in me, and I continue to work on their behalf for issues that matter to them most.

I want to take a moment to say thank you to my staff in the Seine River constituency office, to Ross and to Sarah, who work tirelessly every day for the people of Seine River. They are excellent representatives, excellent workers, and I am so proud to be part of that team.

I also would like to acknowledge the very serious and profound responsibility that I've been given in the portfolio of Health. It is, indeed, an incredible honour to be given this responsibility. It's one that I take seriously and one that I'll speak more about later.

I would like to take this time, though, to say that in my initial days in the Ministry of Health, the staff, the deputy minister, the assistant deputy ministers, administrative staff and political staff with whom we work so closely every day have been working tirelessly for the people of Manitoba. They are, indeed, inspiring, Mr. Speaker, and I consider myself privileged to be working with such individuals.

* (14:30)

I would also, in my response to the Speech from the Throne, prior to that, like to pay tribute to my family, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, none of us could sit a day in this House without the support of our loved ones: my husband, Sam; my son, Jack, on whom the sun rises and sets; my Mom; my brothers; my sisters-in-law. I truly do feel grateful to have their support and, of course, the support of my close friends who remind me when I'm not doing my best and encourage me when I am doing my best.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak on this Speech from the Throne because I really do think it does embody the kinds of things that the constituents of Seine River truly do value and care about. I begin, first, by saying, of course, our continued investment in education, in post-secondary education in particular, we saw with this Speech from the Throne that, for the first time in Manitoba's history, we'll see that all post-secondary students who stay and work in the province of Manitoba, a great place to be as we know, will receive a 60 percent tax rebate on their tuition fees. We're delighted to be putting forward such a notion in the Speech from the Throne, and I know that the people of Seine River will be very pleased to see such a movement going forward.

In addition, we're very pleased that, at the University of Manitoba, with a \$50-million contribution by the part of government, it has triggered a total of \$237 million in fundraising to improve that campus. It continues to show our commitments to investing in infrastructure, to higher learning and to ensuring that Manitoba is even better going into the future.

I also know, Mr. Speaker, that the investments in infrastructure that we're making are very important to my constituents. Our infrastructure commitment of \$4 billion over the next 10 years is going to continue to build a strong Manitoba. Three hundred million for highways capital and maintenance over the next two years, building on the 50 percent increase in highways funding since '99. When I go door to door and talk to my constituents, they tell us that they care about their ability to travel smoothly and safely throughout Manitoba, and we know that these kinds of investments are going to help us going into the future.

Another thing that I often hear at the doorstep from my constituents, Mr. Speaker, is their absolute value for going forward on renewable energy here in Manitoba. My constituents, no doubt, will be delighted that the announcement of the Conawapa Dam to proceed will be so important for the future of Manitoba, for the investment in Manitoba. We're committed continually to ensuring that Manitoba Hydro and its assets will remain owned by Manitobans for the benefit of Manitobans. It is a value that my constituents hold dear. It is one that I will protect fiercely for them.

It is also encouraging and exciting to speak at the doorstep with my constituents on the full development of Manitoba's wind energy, which is expected to generate \$2 billion in investment, \$100 million in wind rights payments to landowners, and \$150 million in property taxes to local government. The good constituents of Seine River, like all Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, care about being green going into the future and taking care of our province and, indeed, our planet.

I know, also, on the subject of literacy my constituents will be very pleased to know that, announced in our Throne Speech, there will be a new program for literacy introduced to provide every child born, even the tiniest and youngest of Progressive Conservatives, every child born in Manitoba with an early start on reading.

The public library system will be extended with added funding for municipalities, and we'll be providing enhanced programs for families on literacy, on nutrition and on positive parenting. The introduction of an Adult Literacy Act will help prevent adult Manitobans from being left behind due to a lack of reading skills, Mr. Speaker.

Our government, of course, has made an additional commitment of \$42 million to child

protection services. The people of Seine River care deeply about their families, Mr. Speaker. They'll be very pleased to know that, going forward, this kind of investment will continue to assist those families that need some help in times of difficulty and struggle.

I am also very pleased to know that new initiatives for Healthy Living, a continued passion of mine, Mr. Speaker, will target community exercise options, will help people participate in physical activities and will address healthy food choices in our schools.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that the constituents of Seine River care very deeply about living in even safer communities. We know that the focus in the Throne Speech on prevention, on a presence and on consequences for offenders is going to go a long way to assure the constituents of Seine River that indeed they are in hands that will be looking forward and taking care of issues concerning their well-being and their safety.

It's also important to acknowledge that the constituents of Seine River care very deeply about living in an affordable environment. We know that Manitoba's small business tax will be lowered again on January 1 to 3 percent, taking it from the second highest level in Canada to the second lowest rate in Canada, something that we can be very proud of as a government.

Also on January 1, the middle-income tax rate will be lowered again to 13 percent, a 22 percent cut since '99. These are conversations that my constituents want to have and we'll be having them indeed.

It's also important to note, Mr. Speaker, for the seniors in Manitoba and in my constituency, that our government will bring in further measures to ease the tax burden for seniors. Starting in 2007, seniors will be allowed to split eligible pension income when calculating their provincial income tax. This tax break matches the federal tax changes just announced and it will save pensioners an estimated \$11 million annually.

I think it's very important, as well, to take note of the fact that our government continues its commitment to health care and continues its priority to health care. I think that it's fair to note that in a speech yesterday when the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), the official Health critic was speaking, she made some mention of my performance thus far. I think she might have used the

word "arrogant." I think she might have said some other unflattering things and that's her job. That's the job of the member opposite, to hold the government's feet to the fire and to challenge them on issues, and I can respect that, Mr. Speaker. I can respect that that's her job. Although I don't necessarily agree with her characterization, I can respect that that is what she has to do, but I will acknowledge that I believe that the member opposite has a point about how we comport ourselves in Question Period.

I think that I can say that we all get swept up into the blood sport of Question Period and I would consider myself to be no different. But I can take advice from the member opposite, and humbly I do. She has had some years of experience here at the Manitoba Legislature. Regardless of our political stripes, I think it's appropriate to take lessons from those who are more experienced, to respect those who are more experienced, and I'm going to heed her words and endeavour to focus on the purpose of Question Period and not necessarily the blood sport of it.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that there are ideas and issues on which the members opposite and our government do passionately disagree. Of course, that would be our job, to stand firm on what our ideas are, on what we truly hold as a priority for government and to make sure that we continue working to ensure that what we know Manitobans want from their health care system is delivered, and on this we do passionately disagree.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say I was disheartened if not shocked when I read on November 1 in the *Winnipeg Free Press* that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) had, in fact, on behalf of his party, abandoned health care as a priority. I found this to be particularly disappointing when, in fact, he appeared to be throwing up his hands, saying that there had been too much money spent and it was time to turn his attention to other things.

*(14:40)

Indeed, it was shocking, and I wanted to make sure that the people of Manitoba understood that on this side of the House we make health care a priority. We make it a very important vision going into the future and I think that Manitobans would be very disheartened to know—I think actually Manitobans would be disheartened to know that when the members opposite did make health care a priority, let's say, for example, back in the 2003 election

campaign, they committed a paltry 1 percent increase to health care. Now, this is shocking indeed, Mr. Speaker. I suppose if we do some casual arithmetic in looking at what that might have meant, heaven forbid, should the Tories have taken power in 2003, what that 1 percent increase might have meant, I believe, the basic arithmetic is about \$260 million down for health care, and that is when they were making it a priority. I think when we do basic arithmetic on \$260 million, that's the equivalent of closing the Grace Hospital altogether, most, if not, all rural hospitals altogether, or if they don't like that, maybe \$260 million is about the equivalent of cancelling home care entirely, and this was when it was a priority. But, by the Leader of the Official Opposition's (Mr. McFadyen) own admission, it's not a priority anymore, as he says in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on November 1.

But I want to talk about what happens when you do make health care a priority. Mr. Speaker, when a government makes health care a priority, you can see, like on this side of the House, more than a billion dollars being invested to build and modernize health facilities since 1999, over 65 health care facilities around the province receiving upgrades, renovations needed so that Manitobans can get that care sooner and closer to home. We also know that in our Throne Speech we've seen a commitment to emergency room upgrades. We've seen a commitment to expanding training for emergency medicine physicians and for the recruitment of such specialists like oncologists. I think this is critically important that we continue to make health care a priority.

I think within that context, it must be said, Mr. Speaker, that since 1999, the number of graduates from nursing education programs under our watch has more than quadrupled. The University of Manitoba's medical school has, indeed, expanded by 40 percent. I had the privilege of attending the white coat ceremony of first-year students entering medical school, a class of over a hundred individuals, the largest class since 1976. I regret that back in the time when the opposition was in power, they actually cut those spaces. They stand up every day they can to complain about shortages of doctors and yet, they cannot acknowledge that we are reaping what they have sown, but we are changing that because we're looking forward. We're looking forward to adding those medical training spaces, quadrupling the number of nurses and ensuring that we're having training in areas where we need it the most.

Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite was speaking the other day about health care, she made reference, of course, to a very serious issue and that is the issue of times that people may have to wait for service. One reference she made, in particular, was to a wait time that existed for a medical oncologist most recently. I must say to the member opposite that we share her concern. All of us regrettably in one way or another have been touched by cancer; our mothers, our fathers, our partners, our friends. It is a terrifying and difficult time in any of our lives, and so any wait that someone has to go through to receive the kind of service that they need is very, very challenging, very disheartening and just plain scary. That's why when we saw a blip in the numbers this summer for people waiting to see a medical oncologist, we worked swiftly with CancerCare Manitoba. The incredible work of oncologists that's been done since that time has reduced an uncharacteristic waiting list for medical oncologists by 70 percent since August, and they're not finished yet in working on this. We continue to work on recruitment, but I say to the member opposite, we concur with any family who is going through that kind of a difficulty that they need swift service.

I'm also proud to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that recently in *The Globe and Mail*, as recently as yesterday, in fact, Manitoba was cited as being apart from the pack when it comes to access to radiation therapy. While people are struggling across Canada to have timely access to radiation therapy, Manitoba has consistently been under the benchmark since making adaptations to the program. In fact, we're lowest in the country. We're proud of that, but we're not finished that work yet.

I would acknowledge that we continue with successes in the area of health care. There are things we're very proud of, Mr. Speaker. I cite not only *The Globe and Mail* calling us a provincial star in its bid to reduce health-care queues. I refer not only to doubling our target for increased orthopedic surgeries, which is something. You know, we're not finished yet, but we've made incredible progress going from a wait time of some 44 weeks to 24 weeks in just one year. We also know that we're going to be performing additional surgeries with the unbelievable efforts that are being shown by our orthopedic surgeons, by the nurses that support them and by the clinical assists that are really making the model here at Concordia Hospital, the two-OR model, one that is causing people from across Canada to come and take a very close look at so that

they can duplicate that model. We're very proud of that, but we acknowledge that we continue to have work to do.

We have work to do in the areas of sleep; we have work to do in the areas of pain. We're committed to ensure that we go forward in reducing those wait times, Mr. Speaker, and ensuring that those people that are awaiting service are going to get it. It's a plan that we've had in place since taking government, first starting with the life-and-death treatments like cancer and cardiac, moving into quality of life like hip and knee replacements where we continue to work, and other quality-of-life issues, including pain and including sleep.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would say with enthusiasm that I'm very proud of the Speech from the Throne. I'm very proud of the forward-looking, forward-moving, forward-thinking plan of this government. I would acknowledge that we all have a great responsibility as we stand in the Manitoba Legislature and represent the desires, the needs and, indeed, the dreams of our constituents. I take that responsibility very seriously. Whether it is a responsibility to promote the health and well-being of all Manitobans, whether it is a responsibility to take on the care for those people in Manitoba that are not feeling as well as they wish they could, and whether it is a responsibility of representing individual families, it is something I do, indeed, take very seriously. It's not one, really, on which I would take a calculated risk.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) calls abandoning health care as a priority a calculated risk. It's not a risk that this government is prepared to take. I read from that article that the member opposite decides to take that calculated risk because he thinks that young people just don't care about health care. He says that they care about other things. Well, I don't know which people the member opposite is talking to or talking about.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that when I go door to door and I speak to young people, and I have a conversation with them about their grandpa, for example, who needs to have a hip replacement in a timely manner, this is something that they care very deeply about. I know that when I speak to young people at the doorstep and they have a mother living with cancer who needs timely access to care, and needs access to pharmaceuticals and needs access to experts, these are things that those young people care very deeply about. I know when I talk to these young

people and they have a sister, a sister who has a young child who's in need of some specialized care, that they care very deeply about the kind of service and the kind of health care that they are going to receive. I don't know which young people the Leader of the Opposition is talking to, young people that purportedly don't care about health care in Manitoba. They're not the young people that I talk to.

They're not the young people that I know. They're not the young people that I believe are going to be leading our province into a very prosperous future. The young people I talk to care deeply about their family members, about their own health. So, when we look forward to building an even greater Manitoba, a Manitoba with young people with hearts as well as minds, we care profoundly about health care being a priority here on this side of the House. Woe will be the day when there's a party in power that doesn't give health care a priority.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:50)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk for a few minutes about the government's Throne Speech that was presented last week. What we saw in the Throne Speech was the Premier (Mr. Doer) standing on the back of his campaign truck, shovelling money in programs out of the back end, unfocussed, poorly thought out.

Quite frankly, let's look at the record. For seven years, this NDP government has said that they were going to fix health care, but they haven't. It's still a mess. For seven years, they said they would fix the roads and highways in this province, but it's been more of a mess this year than before. For seven years, they've said they would clean up Lake Winnipeg, but we have more algal blooms and more problems this year than ever. For seven years, they said they would create an environment to keep young people and attract young people, but when we look at the interprovincial statistics, a movement of young people, we see that the movement out of Manitoba to other provinces is as bad as ever.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Let me begin by talking about health care. As I said, for seven years this NDP government has promised to fix health care but, indeed, has failed miserably. The wait lists are far too long. The government has taken a policy of rationing care by having long wait lists. It is bad policy. It is costly

because people have to have extra doctor visits, extra medications because of pain while they're waiting. We have extra dollars of cost and poor quality of life because of the policy of this government.

We've seen the situation in emergency rooms over the summer with the shortage of emergency room physicians, a critical entry point for those who are particularly sick, and very poor management. We have recently two major specialists, Dr. Meir Kryger and Dr. Maria Melanson, leaders of teams in sleep disorders and in looking after multiple sclerosis, leaving our province. What more can one say? We should have had a situation in the government which would nurture the building of teams but we've got a government which is chasing the leaders away.

I talked, for example, to people in multiple sclerosis and in concern with patients with multiple sclerosis on a number of times, particularly recently. What's very clear is that Dr. Melanson had been asking for proper support many times over but never had been supported by this government. Multiple sclerosis is a condition which has a much higher incidence in Manitoba than almost anywhere else in the world. We should be at our very best in looking after patients with multiple sclerosis in preventing this condition, in having the integrated approach to research, care and prevention that is so badly needed, but we have been very badly let down by this government.

Quality controls are not good enough. There are still far too many medical errors occurring. Access to medical information is not quick enough. It should be very quick where a patient is in hospital. This business of having to wait for 30 days is totally unacceptable.

The government has shown a very poor ability to work with the federal government in dealing with First Nations' health care issues. Indeed, what I hear from people is that this is the worst government in all of Canada, the worst provincial government, in how it deals with the federal government relative to First Nations people. We've seen that in Cross Lake with the disaster that's occurred over the last few months there in the provision of health care. We've seen it in the refusal of this government to even accept the principle of accountability in health care as was so firmly recommended by the Romanow Commission. Bad news; this government is for health care. We need to move on. We need a new government.

As far as Lake Winnipeg, we've had a government which said they were going to clean

Lake Winnipeg up for seven years, but the algal blooms, as I've said, are worse than ever. After seven years, what we have is more consultations and the only positive step was the NDP's buffer strip policy. On the flat landscape of Manitoba, the water runs off a field down a little drainage channel into the ditch. It doesn't run off through the buffer strips. If you want to catch the phosphorus, you don't build up the buffer strips; you do some other things to make sure that the phosphorus doesn't get into the water.

The fact of the matter is that there've been good studies by Jeff Long and Steve Sheppard of Pinawa, and what they've shown is that when you build up the buffer strips, at most, you get a 4 percent reduction in phosphorus. When you combine that with our understanding that the capacity to affect the agricultural phosphorus, it would only influence, at most, about 10 percent of the phosphorus going into Lake Winnipeg. The buffer-strip policy of the NDP government will reduce phosphorus expectedly by 0.4 percent, much less than banning phosphorus in dishwasher detergent. It's a huge effort and a pain to a lot of people without getting practical results. There may be some more research that could be done to make it work better, but, certainly, the way they're proposing to do it is ineffective. It's poor management. It's poor policy.

When it comes to the environment and climate change, we've had a government which has said for seven years that they're going to reduce greenhouse gases. Well, guess what, greenhouse gases production by Manitoba are going up, in spite of the fact that at time and time I've risen in this Chamber to tell the government that they'd better be paying more attention. They haven't and the greenhouse gases under their watch are going up, and up, instead of down, and down.

They are totally ineffective in managing the things which are critical to the people of this province. They've got lots of words and lots of rhetoric, but when it comes to real action they are among the worst, the worst government that this province has ever seen.

When it comes to roads—let me talk about roads. My goodness, what a year we've had with the roads and bridges that have had problems, Highway No. 1, the Trans-Canada Highway, the bridge at Portage la Prairie. I was out there with a fellow who's experienced in inspecting bridges, and we had a look at it. That bridge should have been identified months, and months before it was identified as a problem,

and the process put in place to replace it without having to have this last minute catastrophe, as if it came out of nowhere, because they weren't paying attention.

Bridges in southeast Manitoba, Dominion City area, a major problem; Letellier Bridge, major problem that this government has not been on top of. You only have to go down Highway No. 2, there are huge signs; there are big craters in the road. There are huge signs to the minister of highways: Why don't you come and drive this road because it's a mess? Everybody call up the minister of highways because this road that he's responsible for has got more craters than the moon. It's a mess. He is unable, totally unable to get a grip on what needs to be done in this province when it comes to roads.

When it's in northern Manitoba, they're no better. I was on the road to Moose Lake, the road to Easterville and a lot of other roads which are in terrible shape. This government pays no better service to the people in the north than the people in the south. They just don't know how to look after roads properly.

There are a lot of roads which are RTAC roads, or should be RTAC roads, which are not up to standard. It's forcing people to go miles, or kilometres and kilometres, huge distances out of their way, burn up lots of greenhouse gases just because this government is not looking after the roads properly. They've done such a terrible job that just about everybody in rural Manitoba is upset with them, and I know that their vote in that part of Manitoba is going to go down because of their ineptness.

Young people in Manitoba have been leaving. The only saving grace is some more immigration. But the fact, when you look at interprovincial migration, we have been losing young people. We have had too many of our young people who come up to me and say, look, I don't have any choice; I've got to leave because of this inept government which can't put a sensible policy together and can't implement. They have no understanding of entrepreneurship and of how to support business in this province.

* (15:00)

Just look at what they have done to business after business after business in this province which has left, which is putting employees and workers elsewhere rather than putting them in Manitoba. No

wonder that young people have been leaving. They have done nothing with the payroll tax, to reduce the payroll tax, the tax on people which is driving businesses and people out. They have done nothing to build the careers and opportunities for young people, young people who want challenging jobs, who want jobs where they're going to do well and have great opportunities. You know, this government just can't cut it. They haven't done it. They need to move on.

When it comes to democracy, it's interesting that, when it's a federal issue like the Canadian Wheat Board, they're front and centre cheering for a better democracy in a vote, but, when it comes down to a provincial issue, oh boy, they don't want anything to do with better democracy. They don't want a vote when it comes to cattle producers. They don't want a public inquiry when it comes to Crocus. They don't want to call the Public Accounts Committee when it should be called 20 times a year let alone six, and we've only had it twice so far. What a terrible record when it comes to democracy. Why won't they call elections on a set date so that everybody knows what's coming up and be fair, instead of trying to rig the process as they've done time and time and time again in the past? It's time for this government to move on.

When it comes to things like fetal alcohol spectrum disorders where you might have expected them to have some understanding, some ability to do something, they have been worse there than just about anywhere else. We still don't know how many people there are in Manitoba with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders because they haven't even funded the registry; they haven't supported screening. There are still too many people with FASD who are not even being identified, even at a time and a place and a date when we know that, if you can identify somebody early on, you can give them much better opportunities, much better chances. There are still too many people who are not being identified and not being supported who have FASD, who have ended up in the criminal justice system instead of being looked after properly and supported properly.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

There isn't even screening of those who come in contact with our criminal justice system for FASD before they are sentenced, before we know what their medical problem is. This government doesn't know what it's doing. We see it day after day and time after time and day after day. It is deplorable what they are

doing in this province. They are, indeed, by their lack of attention to mental health problems, from FASD, to schizophrenia, to all sorts of other things, that we are resulting in more problems and more extra police work dealing with health problems. We are having more problems with people who are getting into trouble with the law because this government is not even looking after health care properly.

Under this government, they are not supporting children properly. The result is that we've got far too many children coming into the Child and Family Services system. Far too many children are being put into hotels. The answer to hotels is to provide better support to family. I have family after family coming to me, and they are saying that the only option we had because of a lack of support of this government is to have our children taken over by the Child and Family Services system. It's been estimated to me that you might be able to reduce the number of people in care by 30 percent or more if there was proper support for children in this province, but this government won't do it. This government doesn't know how to look after children. This government has got to go because it's not doing what Manitoba needs.

When it comes to the Child and Family Services system, what we saw in the last seven years of their tenure is 31 children murdered who were in care, and huge numbers more of children in the care of the Child and Family Services system. Let us face the facts. Let us face the facts. This government is not good at facing up to the facts. Far too many children in our Child and Family Services system have died. This government will not face up to the facts. It will not face up to the responsibility that children who are in care should be looked after the best that they could possibly be looked after, instead of what has been happening recently. There are a lot of caring foster parents. There are a lot of parents who are doing and trying to help children in many wonderful ways, but they are certainly not being helped by this government.

When it comes to agricultural policy, we saw the lack of democracy when it came to the approach to cattle producers. When it comes to agricultural policy, this is a government which wants to put a hog plant in the middle of Winnipeg rather than in an agricultural industrial park outside. They are so worried about losing jobs that they want to put a hog plant in the middle of town.

Well, I've got to tell this government that we don't need a hog town. We want a high-tech modern future, a city that is going to be a leader on the globe rather than a city that is trying to move into the past. We want an agricultural industrial plant outside of Winnipeg, just like the hog plants currently are outside of Brandon and are outside of Neepawa.

The present NDP policy toward the Capital Region has been grossly deficient. There has been so little ability for the province under this government to show any leadership in bringing people together that the situation is as bad or worse than it's ever been, and certainly this government is not paying attention to how you bring people together. They are dividing people and that's obvious. That needs to change in our province.

When it comes to the Métis people of Manitoba, this government is refusing to properly consult them about issues on which they should be consulted. When it comes to the Métis people of Manitoba, this government has refused not only to consult but to work with the Métis to implement the harvester card system and a responsible co-management system for the resources in our province. This government, time and time again, has been irresponsible. They have not been able to work with people like the Métis community in Manitoba and they've shown it. It is sad that, in fact, that is what has happened.

When it comes to tourism, the best this government could do was to offload it to a special operating agency. Well, the problem is, Mr. Speaker, that there is totally inadequate attention being paid to tourism in this province, and we can see it in the statistics which have been going down and down under their watch. We can see that they don't know anything about tourism, that they've not been able to develop an adequate plan, that they're hopeless when it comes to attracting people to this province. There are issues and problems that this government doesn't seem to pay any attention to. Even though they've got a number of MLAs from northern Manitoba, the last thing that they seem to be able to do is to pay any attention to a plan for tourism to bring people to northern Manitoba.

You know, it is sad, and we see it time and time and time again, the incredible opportunities that there are in this province for tourism, from the Morden museum which has got fossils, incredible numbers of fossils of marine reptiles, to the opportunities in northern Manitoba with lakes and fishing and wonderful opportunities, when you get to, for

example, Lynn Lake, which calls itself the fishing capital of North America. It is a wonderful place to fish, but the problem is that, when tourists and fishermen come there, the first thing they see is a disaster, the mine tailings which are spread all over the place, the problems that are up there. I was there to see exactly what this government was not doing, and this government was not looking after things properly.

They were promising to clean up at Leaf Rapids and there was nothing going on this year. I was talking to the councillors in Leaf Rapids, and they were saying, we were told that there was going to be some action this year, but there was no action. There were more promises. There was more throwing of money around but there was no action.

This government certainly isn't able to do the job properly. That is for sure. They are still talking, seven years after they got into power, about the problems of Sherridon and the mine tailings, and although they finally, after I brought it up time and time and time again, went to Sherridon and made an announcement, we still aren't seeing any effective containment of the mine tailings there. What is still happening is the water is still running off the mine tailings. It's still going into Kississing Lake. There needs to be a lot of improvement. There has been some sort of a commitment, but there has not been the action that is needed. There has not been the effective change.

* (15:10)

Seven years, seven years and this government knew all about the problems because the MLA for Flin Flon knew all about the problem before they even came into office—seven years. The MLA for Assiniboia had talked to people up in Sherridon, had visited people up in Sherridon. He even knew about the problems before he came into office in 1999, but for seven years, seven years, there was no action. Finally, after I raised the issue time and time again, he went to Sherridon to make an announcement. Well, we're pleased that finally they're going to get a better water treatment system and be able to improve in that respect. We are apprised that, finally, the Minister of Industry was there to make an announcement, but an announcement is a long way from getting the job done, and this government has been very, very poor in getting the job done. We need to face up to what has happened and what has not happened. Certainly, there is a lot that should have happened that has not happened. I could go on

and on and on about what needs to be done. I could go on for a long, long time.

What I am going to do, Mr. Speaker, is I am now going to move a subamendment. I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster

THAT the amendment be amended by deleting items (a), (b), (o) and (r) and by adding at the end of item (v) the following words:

(w) the government's failure to provide meaningful tax changes such as elimination of the payroll tax that would make Manitoba more economically competitive;

(x) the government's failure to resolve the underlying cause of the unprecedented number of children in care, housed in hotels, namely its failure to provide adequate resources and assistance to help keep struggling families together in the first place;

(y) the government's failure to provide a stable policy environment to promote growth in Manitoba's agricultural sector, one that involves genuine consultation with agricultural producers and representatives from rural municipalities;

(z) the government's failure to commit to the principle of accountability in the delivery of public health care services in Manitoba;

(aa) the government's failure to legislate a legal right to timely access to quality health care and to provide the public police framework required to implement this right.

(bb) the government's seven years of neglect of the importance of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in Manitoba, their connection to criminal activity and the desperate need to diagnose and treat this condition;

(cc) the government's failure to properly address the issue of phosphorus loading into Lake Winnipeg, because of its preference for hollow policy announcements, such as buffer zones;

(dd) the government's absurd decision to place a moratorium on all hog plant expansions after blatantly ignoring widespread opposition to locating the OlyWest pork processing plant inside the city limits of Winnipeg;

(ee) the government's failure to facilitate the creation of an agri-industrial park outside of the

city of Winnipeg to support developments such as the OlyWest plant;

(ff) the government's failure to respond to the health care state of emergency declare by Cross Lake as well as its failure to resolve the difficulties in the provision of basic health care services to other First Nations communities in Manitoba;

(gg) the government's failure to work cooperatively with the Métis people of Manitoba;

(hh) the government's failure to adequately promote and encourage the tourism across all of Manitoba; and

(ii) the government's refusal to commit to a process leading to meaningful electoral reform and improved democracy in Manitoba.

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

THAT the amendment be amended—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? *[Agreed]*

The subamendment is in order. We will resume debate.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak on the main motion on the Throne Speech today and our vision for the future of Manitoba. I'd first of all like to welcome the pages and the table officers, and of course I would also like to acknowledge the new municipal officials and trustees in the fine constituency of Gimli who have now been elected to that position of trustee, councillor and reeve, as I have a tremendous amount of respect for anyone who is prepared to put their name on a ballot and provide public service.

It is indeed a pleasure to serve the constituency of Gimli and the communities of Gimli, Winnipeg Beach, Dunnottar, St. Andrews and West St. Paul, and I would also like to, at this time, acknowledge my family and the unconditional support that they have given me in this wonderful journey over the last three years: my wife, Joanne, my son Kieran, my son Dane, and my daughter Iris and the support that they have shown me in this journey.

It's a pleasure to rise after the former MP of Portage-Interlake, who was my representative. I hate to disappoint him: when he was my representative for the constituency of Portage-Interlake, I did not vote for him, but he did talk about what inspired him to get into politics. Mr. Speaker, at the time that he was the member of Parliament representing my federal constituency, he was part of a government that was cutting funding to the provinces that was much needed in the health care system, and that's one of the things that inspired me to enter the political field.

What I am going to do today in the context of the Throne Speech is tell a little story and put it in the context of my friends, Manny Toban and Winnie Peg. Manny and Winnie met at university in September of 1999 and, unlike many Manitobans, they chose to stay in Manitoba in 1999 because it was September of 1999 when they enrolled in university and there was some hope on the horizon that there would be a change in government. Like many Manitobans in 1999, they were thrilled that there was a change in government because, as they proceeded through their careers in university, one of the things that they saw happen very shortly after the election of the new NDP government in 1999 was the fact that tuition fees were rolled back 10 percent, that tuition fees were frozen for the duration of their time in the universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg when they attended those fine institutions. As they proceeded through their university careers they saw a government that was steadily increasing the minimum wage which would cause other service sector areas and industries to increase their wages as well, making Manitoba more competitive with other jurisdictions and making it more attractive for young people.

They also had bursaries introduced that had been cut by the previous government. So, for the time that they spent in university, they not only enjoyed the ability to earn more income, they also enjoyed the fact that their tuition fees were frozen. They also enjoyed the fact that they were eligible for more bursaries. So, what happens to Manny and Winnie? Well, Manny goes on to be a nurse and he gets a job. Unlike the thousand nurses that had been cut in the 1990s, Manny goes on to find employment, and Manny finds himself working in a brand-new hospital under our ambitious capital plan. He is working with the equipment, working with the specialists. He can pick and choose where he would like to work in Manitoba because of the expansion of

our health budget and the commitment to Manitobans to provide quality health care. He chooses to settle in Winnipeg and work at the brand new Health Sciences Centre, an unprecedented capital project.

But what about Winnie? Well, Winnie goes on to education with ambitions to become a principal, and she goes through the Faculty of Education. She ends up graduating and finds herself a job in one of the schools here in Winnipeg, and she could have worked in one of the 10 new schools or one of the 13 replacement schools, but she is in a school that has seen the benefit of our capital plan where we have had over 600 renovations completed in our time in office in our real commitment to the capital program here in Manitoba. So Manny and Winnie are very thrilled with what's been going on the last seven years.

*(15:20)

Now we find ourselves in rather interesting times because, unlike many Manitobans, they have cousins throughout the province of Manitoba. One of them happens to be a wheat farmer, and here we have an opposition government now that's advocating on behalf of the federal Agriculture Minister to disband the Wheat Board. So they're somewhat concerned about the future for their cousin, the wheat farmer, who lives in the Interlake area.

They have a cousin who had some difficult choices to make in life and, when they made those choices, it had an impact on their education. As a result, they're in need of support for literacy programs. Well, unfortunately, we have a federal government that's cut adult literacy programs. But there is hope for these cousins because we have a provincial government that's prepared to make a stand on behalf of Manitoba farmers and stand up for the Wheat Board, and there's a provincial government that's introducing legislation for a literacy act. So Manny and Winnie have enjoyed the last seven years.

Manny and Winnie have cousins who, like many other Manitobans, have some questions and some concerns about the next few years under the present direction under the federal government, but they also have some hope and some vision that they share with the government in Manitoba as we bring forward our proposals for the province of Manitoba as a growing province.

Manny and Winnie are going to enjoy travelling throughout Manitoba on a lot more new roads as a result of our infrastructure program, an unprecedented \$4-billion commitment over the course of 10 years. They're going to enjoy driving on those roads, and, by the way, Mr. Speaker, they're going to be driving on those roads in cars that are among the cheapest to insure in the entire country. Oh, in fact, like many other Manitobans, they'll be getting a rebate cheque, and they'll see that their auto insurance rates are going to go down.

Where are they going to drive? Well, they might drive to St. Leon and see this incredible wind farm. They might be buying a hybrid to do that travelling as well because they would be eligible for a neat program that would support that initiative to purchase that hybrid.

Mr. Speaker, then they'll soon have an opportunity to drive up the east side and enjoy an area of Manitoba that's being designated as a world heritage site through UNESCO. So they've got incredible opportunities ahead of them. They might have an opportunity to go to Churchill and see that beautiful \$12-million addition and renovation to the town complex while they go and see the whales, or perhaps see the polar bears. The future looks very bright, indeed, for Manny and Winnie.

An Honourable Member: Tell them to stop in Dauphin.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, indeed, they'll stop in Dauphin, and they'll see things are getting done for the Ranchers Choice program moving forward with the renovations, also to the wastewater treatment plant. They might go spend some time in Gimli, as many Manitobans do, whether it's Gimli or Winnipeg Beach or any area along the south basin of Lake Winnipeg where they, like many other Manitobans, share a concern for the quality of water and for the current realities of our situation in Lake Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker. They know that there's a government that has introduced legislation to address 30 years of neglect with respect to that particular body of water, and they know that this government's on track to make it right. It took 30 years to create the problem, and it'll take a commitment of government to fix that problem. They might walk down the dock in Gimli and see the *Namao*, the research vessel that we've been funding to provide us with the science that's necessary to understand the nature of the problems of Lake Winnipeg. They will certainly understand that

this is a government that's committed to fixing the problems that this lake has encountered.

So it's not about what we've done in the last seven years, Mr. Speaker. It's about where we are going in the future, and this is, indeed, a Throne Speech that speaks to the future of this province and the vision of this government in making Manitoba a competitive place for young people, in making Manitoba a safe place, in making Manitoba an attractive place.

Like many Manitobans, they subscribe to magazines. Perhaps they look at the *BusinessWeek*, which has talked about Manitoba being a leader as a regional government, the best regional government in the world with respect to clean energy and with respect to addressing issues of concern as raised by the Kyoto Accord.

They also have some concerns about the federal government now looking at clean air, and the fact that they're satisfied with a 50-year time frame within which to solve a problem. Well, it's a bit of hot air that's dusted off old legislation, and that's going to do nothing for the quality of air in this country. It's a commitment to clean energy. It's a commitment to the Kyoto Accord, and it's going to make this province and make this country a better place to live. It's our commitment to the clean energy and our commitment to our environment, our commitment to our lake that Manitobans believe in and Manitobans see as the party of the future with respect to the environment.

This has been a very interesting week. Rather interesting to see the members of the opposition and some of the things that they've been talking about, Mr. Speaker, and talking about accountability. The members of the opposition don't like to talk about the past, because, you know, as a history teacher, I know that it is the past that makes us accountable. We're certainly accountable for the last seven years, and we'll be accountable for the future of this province as Manitobans go to the polls, whenever that might be. I certainly look forward to the outcome of that election as we will see that Manitobans see this Throne Speech as a vision for the future of this province.

When we look at our strategy around education, if I may talk about my portfolio briefly, Mr. Speaker, it was with interest that I read the article that was referenced by my colleague the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) where the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) said that it was a calculated risk to look at education as a priority and other priorities in

government versus health care, that they're satisfied that enough money has been expended in health care and that we have to look at other priorities, in the words of the Opposition Leader. That's rather curious, given the fact that we, as an NDP government, have definitely made health care a priority and we have been recognized in *The Globe and Mail* for the work that we're doing, and we know that we have more work to do and we're committed to doing that. Now, members opposite, if it's a calculated risk, I think the only calculated risk is for Manitobans who value education to support the members opposite in this next election. That is the calculated risk.

It was the members opposite over 11 years who put a net investment, a net investment of \$7 million into our education system. We've increased funding every year for seven years at the rate of economic growth. We've increased funding. The last announcement included \$155 million more in the base compared to the previous administration. Now I haven't got the final figure, but if we do a net increase in the education funding, I believe it will take us well over \$650 million net.

And what has that meant for Manitoba students, Mr. Speaker? Well, what that has meant for Manitoba students is a 10 percent increase in graduation rates. What that has meant for Manitoba students is they're going into a system where we've rewritten curricula that have been left on the shelves for over 20 years. One of those curricula is technical vocational curricula. What that means for Manitoba students is the fact that we have been recognized internationally as leaders in education for sustainable development. What it means for Manitoba students is that we've been recognized nationally, where our model for civics education through our citizenship agenda has been held up as a model for students across Canada. What it means for Manitoba students is that we have a world-best system that offers them as many opportunities to succeed as possible, and that includes valuing the arts, valuing physical activity, valuing music in our schools. So the opportunities for students to succeed have been increasing with our commitment to our students, and our commitment is reflected in the way we choose to fund education as compared to the members opposite and their choices on how they chose to fund education.

So, Mr. Speaker, indeed, the issue would be that a calculated risk, as mentioned by the Leader of the

Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), the calculated risk for Manitobans would be to believe that education would be a priority for members opposite because they did not show that over the course of 11 years in office. Members might remember, at the rally on October 18 where the retired teachers said: We remember, we remember what you did to the education system in the 1990s; we remember and we will hold you accountable, when the members opposite were there masquerading as advocates for teachers.

Halloween came early, Halloween came early because they were up there disguised as advocates for teachers, and as a former teacher who was in the system while they were in office, they were truly my inspiration to get involved in politics. They were truly my inspiration to stay in politics and be part of the NDP government and advocate for teachers and advocate for students and advocate for parents across this province. So I'm really thrilled to be on this side of the House, with a vision for the future of this province, which includes a strategy to keep youth in this province, which was something that was seriously lacking under the former government. The fact that we're resourcing our school system, it says to our students we believe in you, we believe in the youth of our province when we're building new schools, when we're providing more opportunities for students to succeed.

* (15:30)

We are providing safer environments in which our students can learn. You know, I was a teacher saying to the provincial government of the time that we need your support in making our schools safer environments, and they did nothing. We as a government have shown leadership as a government not only through the work in my department, obviously, Mr. Speaker, but through the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet with all of the resources that we are putting in to making our schools and communities safer places to be. That includes supporting the RespectEd program through Red Cross; that includes the Triple P Positive Parenting initiative that we've introduced, that has statistically proven to address issues around conduct disorder.

We've supported a number of other initiatives, Teen Touch and Teen Talk, that are making our community safer places for children. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) has spearheaded the program for Lighthouses so kids have safe opportunities for recreation, structured or unstructured, outside of

school time so it gets them off the streets and gives them opportunities. We are supporting community school initiatives to build capacity in our schools, where lower socio-economic classes, lower socio-economic status, I should say, Mr. Speaker, where barriers might exist are given more opportunities to be engaged in the school and to support their children, support student successes through learning. We are supporting Aboriginal academic achievement outcomes, an area where one of the questions that I got about the budget a couple of years ago was why are you spending more money on Aboriginal education. That was one of the questions they asked.

Well, hey. That reminds me that last year, Mr. Speaker, through the Estimates process, not one single question, not one single question about the budget for the Education Department, the second largest expenditure. I say expenditure, but I always talk about education as being an investment. Not one single question about the budget for the Department of Education. That is scandalous. That is scandalous, and they talk about education being a priority. I don't understand that. I don't understand how they could possibly say that education is a priority.

Let's talk about renewal energy as well. We have a lot of renewable energy on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, and we're certainly looking forward to the future of this province and what that means for the province of Manitoba when we build, as Wuskwatim is under way, and as we announced that Conawapa will be built, and the fact that we're committed to more wind farms, the fact that we're committed to a variety of different renewable energy sources, the fact that we've got a memorandum of understanding with Iceland with respect to hydro-cell technology, the fact that we are looking at biofuels and the expansion of that particular industry. These are all going to go a long way in making us truly a very competitive province.

Speaking of competitive, our commitment is very clear with respect to innovation and competitiveness through the establishment of the new Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade. What we've seen in terms of innovation and competitiveness, Mr. Speaker, is a provincial investment in bio-technology and research and development that has increased by 60 percent since 1999.

An Honourable Member: The fastest growth.

Mr. Bjornson: It is the fastest growth that we've ever experienced in this province. Private investment and manufacturing increased by 1.7 billion dollars since 1999, a 14 percent increase. And, as I said, a new Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade leading a campaign to reduce red tape into a focus on the creation of a single window for service with respect to government services for businesses that are available.

Of course, people are seeing the good work that's been going on because we are the second youngest province in Manitoba, and the province is growing. Now, I know the members get rather sensitive about comparing records, but the statistics are quite clear that there was a net loss of 9,763 people over the previous six years previous to the year 2000; whereas, between 2000 and 2006, we recorded a net population gain with 6,683 more people coming to Manitoba than left. So I don't know how the members opposite can possibly say that we're losing population. The statistics are there. We are the second youngest province in the country. We have more people living here. So it's rather interesting that they would stand up and complain about this.

Boy, am I glad that we're on this side of the House, because I remember the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) standing up and saying: How can I get my own child to stay in the province of Manitoba? She obviously doesn't have that faith in this province that we have as a government. As a member of the opposition to stand up and say that, I'm glad we're in government, because she obviously doesn't have faith in the ability of this province to move forward and become competitive. So for her to say that I found rather strange. We are working very hard to ensure the future of this province and attract more young people to the province of Manitoba.

With our healthy families initiatives, Mr. Speaker, introducing the legislation which will be introduced to enshrine our Healthy Child strategy, something that many provinces have taken note of and we've been recognized for, the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet and for our Healthy Child strategy.

As I mentioned already, The Adult Literacy Act, and the fact that we know that it is a barrier for many Manitobans who lack the reading skills. We know that that's an important part of who we are as a government, and who we are as a province to support that initiative.

An additional \$42 million to child protection services, Mr. Speaker. New initiatives to target community exercise options. Of course, we did have the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force, which has meant that we're going to be exploring more ways to engage students in physical activities in our schools and physical activities in our community facilities.

Health care. Again, it was really disconcerting, Mr. Speaker, that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) would say that health care is no longer a priority. Well, actually, we've seen that signal; we've seen that for 11 years when the Tories were in government. We've seen that when they produced their budget, their phantom budget, which paralleled our budgets during the election campaign when, I think, they talked about a 1 percent increase in health care expenditure. We know that we need to invest more in our health infrastructure and invest more in our health supports, and for them to say that enough is enough now is what they are saying with respect to how we've invested in health care. But that was the attitude that cost us 1,000 nurses in the 1990s. That was the policy that had over 100 doctors leaving in the 1990s. That was the leadership, if you will, if I can use that term with respect to health care in the 1990s, which saw the creation of incredible wait times.

But, as we talk about accountability, that FIPPA request the First Minister referenced earlier today, they didn't keep wait time lists. They didn't care. It wasn't an issue because this is an opposition party that's advocating for private health care, Mr. Speaker, and that is not acceptable to Manitobans. We're going to continue to work to improve the public health care system.

So, if you look at the plan of this provincial government, that plan which includes putting more emergency services and more surgeries in rural Manitoba, you know the members opposite talk about being the champions of rural Manitoba, and they keep talking about our government and our record with respect to rural Manitoba. Well, I don't know if they notice, but Gimli is rural, Dauphin is rural, La Verendrye is rural. We do have rural representatives. In fact, I believe there are about nine rural representatives in our caucus, if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Speaker. We do recognize the need to improve health care services in rural areas. That's why we're putting equipment in rural Manitoba; that's why we're putting more services in rural Manitoba. Better care sooner. That's what we're

seeing happen with respect to emergency room and surgery provisions in rural Manitoba.

So, if you look at what that has meant by virtue of expanding our health care services into rural areas of Manitoba, including CT scans and whatnot, the wait time for CT is 11 weeks, which used to be 14 weeks only 2 years ago, Mr. Speaker. MRIs is 8 weeks and that used to be 15 weeks only a year ago. Bone density is three times lower than it was a year ago. These are all priorities that we have as a government to make care more accessible, better care sooner. We're seeing that with respect to our initiatives around rural health and providing better care throughout the province of Manitoba.

*(15:40)

Let's talk about safer communities as well. Manitoba has, as I mentioned, a Lighthouse program which offers opportunities for students after school, students who might be at risk. Now they have an opportunity to go into an unstructured or a structured environment where they can participate in a number of different recreation options, as opposed to being on the streets and susceptible to behaviours that might find them on the wrong side of the law, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to add resources to the police services in Manitoba. We continue to provide programs such as Turnabout, a recognized program that is the only program of its kind to help address supports for children under the age of 12 and to identify consequences for children under the age of 12, and 90 percent of the youth sent by police to Turnabout have not re-offended. Recidivism is a huge issue in crime, Mr. Speaker. If you can get children to avoid re-offending, avoid being part of the system through recidivism, then you've done a tremendous investment at the front end of this support for young people, as opposed to dealing with them when they end up in the court system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as someone from rural Manitoba, I am absolutely delighted with what we have been talking about with respect to growing rural Manitoba, and as I said, we are not going to accept the elimination of the Wheat Board for solely ideological reasons. We have been supporting Manitoba farmers through crop insurance supports and significant contributions to the Canada Agriculture Income Support system. We're looking at improved drainage. I mean, in my constituency, my area of the Interlake had been largely ignored by the

previous administration. We've tripled the money for drainage projects to help our farmers in the Interlake area, tripling it from \$600,000 a year to \$1.8 million a year.

Of course, taxes: We've made significant inroads in taxes, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the 60 percent farmland property tax rebates, and we've also kept taxes flat, as the members opposite have difficulty recognizing that we've kept property taxes flat versus the time when they were in office when they went up by 68 percent across the board.

But our vision is not just for rural Manitoba and not just for the youth of our communities, but also for revitalizing the cities here in Manitoba. We continue to do that through the incredible support for community initiatives in Winnipeg and in Brandon, and, of course, the provincial-municipal tax-share agreement that was first introduced by Premier Edward Schreyer is the richest model for tax-sharing agreements between the provinces and municipalities of any jurisdiction in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to stand on this side of the House as a representative for the Constituency of Gimli. I am very proud to be part of the New Democratic Party, and I thank my local association for nominating me to continue to carry the banner for the NDP in the next provincial election, whenever that might be.

I look forward to the initiatives that we have brought forward with respect to a green and growing environment, with respect to a competitive province, with respect to a province that has, in the past, supported its youth and will continue to support its youth and make our province an attractive place for Manitobans to stay upon the completion of their university or college training, as well as the vocational training that will be required to support our ambitious infrastructure programs, Mr. Speaker.

So, with those few words, I am very pleased to stand on this side of the House in support of our Throne Speech and our vision for the future of this great province that we like to call home. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): It certainly is a pleasure to speak on the Speech from the Throne. Well, it's awfully nice to talk after a history teacher. *[interjection]* Thank you very much. We know there's a lot of history there, and the one thing about history we should remember, Mr. Speaker, is that what goes around, comes around. So we're looking

forward on this side of the House to a change in government.

I think one thing we're finding around the province is that Manitobans are starting to see through the smoke screen that this particular government is putting forward. I think Manitobans are seeing through the politics of this government. They are starting to recognize that they're putting ideas forward that aren't really in the best interests of Manitobans. In fact, they're playing politics with Manitobans and I, certainly, throughout the course of the next few minutes, I want to discuss some of those issues specifically.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to acknowledge you and I appreciate your direction and guidance that you will have for us over the next few days. I do want to make the comment that the current government is allowing us a very short time of debate in this fall session. We're happy to be here. We know there are a lot of issues that Manitobans would like us to address, but we're obviously going to run out of time to do that.

Also, I want to acknowledge the table officers and their diligence during the sessions and certainly their knowledge of the proceedings. I want to welcome the new clerk, Tamara Pomanski to the table, as well. I want to acknowledge the Sergeant-at-Arms and the staff for keeping the tradition rolling along and for the people down at *Hansard* making sure that the comments get put on the record; of course, the gallery officers upstairs who are making sure that things are working properly upstairs.

I also want to welcome and congratulate the pages, our new pages here who will be joining us for the next few weeks and congratulate them on their opportunity to be here. I also want to acknowledge the interns who are working on all sides of the House to assist our researchers, to assist us as well. I know it's a tremendous experience for them, a tremendous learning experience, and I'm sure we can work together. We will both learn as we go through the process.

It really is an important part of history that we're in the Chamber these days. Certainly, it's great to be a part of this democratic institution, and I know it's very, very rewarding for the young people to be a part of it, as it is for all of us.

I do also want to mention the Lieutenant-Governor in Manitoba. It's always a pleasure to meet His Excellency, whether it be in the hall or over at

his residence. The Lieutenant-Governor is actually a Glenboro boy, a farm boy from the Turtle Mountain constituency, and it really hits home when I have a chance to visit with him and I look at the whole democratic process here in Manitoba. His background was certainly meagre beginnings in rural Manitoba on a small farm, and, as we know, he's grown to the position where he is now the Queen's representative in Manitoba. So I think it really reflects, Mr. Speaker, on the democratic process that we have here in Manitoba and it's certainly a pleasure to be a part of that.

I do want to talk a little bit about some of the members in the Chamber. Obviously, for some of them, the days are winding down as we draw closer to a new election. Certainly, it's a privilege for me to serve as the Member for Turtle Mountain and I do want to base some of my comments as the member for Turtle Mountain.

I guess my first involvement, if you will, Mr. Speaker, with politics was on the constituency executive, going back quite a few years, probably in the area of about 15 years ago. At that time the member for the Gladstone constituency, who is now the member for the Carman constituency, I was sitting on his executive at the time in the early 1990s. Mr. Rocan has certainly represented a number of constituencies—

An Honourable Member: Member for Carman.

Mr. Cullen: The Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) has represented a number of constituencies over the years, and I think on behalf of all the different constituencies he has served in and the people he served, we do want to certainly wish him the best in the future and thank him for all he's done in the past and certainly wish him the best in the future.

Obviously, we're going through the nomination process throughout the province as we get ready for a provincial election. Obviously, it's a very exciting time in Manitoba. I had the ability and the fortune to attend a Progressive Conservative constituency nomination meeting in Arborg a few weeks ago where there were about 500 members in attendance where they brought forth a new candidate for that particular area. So we're looking forward to that.

Last night in Altona, there were close to 1,100 voters in attendance there to bring in a new member for Emerson.

* (15:50)

I do want to mention, of course, the current Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) for all the hard work and dedication to his constituency over the years. He certainly has a strong history in serving agriculture. He has a tremendous passion for agriculture and for the environment. We also reflect on his time spent as the Minister of Natural Resources. So we certainly want to extend to him and his family all the best in the future as well as he goes down the road in seeking new opportunities.

Tonight, we're going to have the ability to attend a nomination meeting in the great constituency of Ste. Rose. We're looking forward to having another thousand or so people attend that particular event where five candidates are vying for that particular nomination.

The current Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), I know it was nice to ride in the vehicle last night with him to share some of the stories of times past. It was great to share those stories with him and to reflect back on his time and his role as the Environment Minister back a number of years ago. So, again, we thank that particular member for his service, and thank his family for all they've done. All the best in the future.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the Speech from the Throne, the one comment, and I guess it was the closing comment in that particular document, referred to the fact that Manitobans are looking forward. I think Manitobans are looking forward. In fact, they're looking forward to a chance to get out and vote and make some changes in Manitoba. We hope the government of the day will see it verily close that there will be, and maybe feel that there is a time for change. I'm sure they probably are. When we reflect back on some of the municipal elections and civic elections that took place this past fall, we certainly recognized a change. We feel that change is in the winds here in Manitoba, and I'm sure it will be a change for the good.

It appears from the Speech from the Throne that this particular government is in denial. They're in denial that we are an overtaxed province. They're in denial that we have a crisis in health care. We still have hallway medicine. We still have extended wait times that are unacceptable to Manitobans. They're still in denial that they have a disconnect with agriculture. They're in denial that there is a problem in terms of economic development in Manitoba.

They're in denial that many of our cherished young Manitobans are leaving the province. They have a denial that there's a crisis in Child and Family Services. They're in denial that there is crisis in the justice system in Manitoba. They're in denial that we've had at least seven scandals in Manitoba over the last seven years. They're in denial over admitting any wrongdoing in the Crocus scandal. They are in further denial of mismanagement on a number of issues, including the floodway and other water issues.

This government is in desperation, and they're in lack of denial on all these serious, serious issues that are facing Manitobans. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think it was the AA's policy, that before you can actually resolve the problem, you have to admit there's a problem. So there was a little hint today in the First Minister's statement that, yes, we're not perfect, and we recognize the government of the day is not perfect. So we're hoping that there may be now some resolve to actually admit there's issues in rural Manitoba, in the city of Winnipeg, that have to be addressed, and they will take steps to change.

We recognize that Manitoba is not competitive. People are leaving Manitoba; our taxes are the highest in western Canada. We've accumulated a debt close to \$21 billion, of which Manitoba Hydro alone has a \$9-billion debt. What do we have to show in Manitoba for this burgeoning debt? Very little. Where are we getting value for our dollars? Are we really getting value for our dollars, Mr. Speaker? That's really what it's all about, and that's what a Progressive Conservative government would do for Manitoba, is bring value to the dollars that Manitoba taxpayers are spending.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk briefly about infrastructure and, in particular, a couple of highways that come to my mind. In particular is No. 2 highway where it's in tremendous disrepair that many Manitobans in southwestern Manitoba have to travel, and we have seen very little production in terms of funding for that particular highway. We have another provincial road, 340, of which two ends are paved and 13 kilometres in the middle of that particular provincial road are not paved. It really doesn't make any sense to us in rural Manitoba what's going on with that particular road. Again, it's about vision, getting value for our dollars and a wise financial investment in Manitoba. We know we're losing our railways in Manitoba, and we're hoping that the provincial government will take steps to take a look at some of the issues there regarding railways,

and we can work with our federal counterparts in that regard as well.

I appreciate the minister's comments about Manitoba Public Insurance, where we're going to be getting these rebates. Well, the fact of the matter is if the Crown corporation was diligently looking after the claims process, there probably wouldn't be such an excess in funds coming back to Manitobans. As the previous critic for some of the Crown corporations, I hear these complaints day in and day out. So it's something that should be addressed, I think, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the Crown corporations and how they deal with the problems Manitobans face on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about water and sewer issues too, which I feel are a part of the infrastructure deficit we have here in Manitoba. Clearly, we have very little direction in where the Province wants to go in terms of their water idea and their water portfolio. We do know that, on the farm side of things, Manitoba producers are actively involved in the Environmental Farm Plan process. That's primarily federal money that comes back to address environmental issues on the farm. The provincial government doesn't seem to be buying into that particular program, and would prefer to come out with the heavy-handed regulations to really hog tail, if you will, expansion in rural Manitoba. *[interjection]*

You didn't like that? And the other thing I think that we're lacking in terms of the infrastructure in water is the infrastructure in sewer. We know there's a tremendous need for management of our lagoons in rural areas. Now, the city of Winnipeg, we're looking at a \$1.8-billion deficit there for adequately dealing with our wastewater treatment. I think that's where the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba will come out ahead of the current NDP government in terms of a vision and a real need to watch, and a desire to solve those environmental issues.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about value added. We believe, as the opposition, that the economy could be much better off if we had some value-added productivity and some enhancement in value added throughout Manitoba. But there has to be the political will to make that happen. For instance, we spent a day here debating the Canadian Wheat Board. We all recognize that the Canadian Wheat Board is, in fact, a federal jurisdiction. But the government of the day in Manitoba wanted to bring it to the front to have some discussions on it. Now

we know Manitobans have a very varied ideal of where they want to go with the Canadian Wheat Board. Quite frankly, what we are saying is the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba feels producers want a chance to voice their opinion. They also want a choice in where they market their grain. On most commodities they do have that choice to market their grain, and right now it appears that the NDP government does not want farmers to have a choice on how they market their wheat and barley. They say they want to let them have a vote on it, but, in actuality, they do not want a change from the single-desk concept in Manitoba. The bottom line is that it will be a federal issue that will be dealt with by the federal government as we move forward. We as Progressive Conservatives understand the farm and agriculture business. We're the people that talk to them on a daily basis. Just the other night when we discussed the Canadian Wheat Board, I was happy that 15 of the Progressive Conservatives did talk about the Wheat Board. Only three of the governing party actually made the attempt to get up and go and talk about the Canadian Wheat Board. So where is the energy that we need to discuss the issues that are really valuable and that Manitobans want to hear?

Speaking of economic development, when I reference the Speech from the Throne, the only reference to economic development was having wind energy and, possibly, ethanol in rural Manitoba. Well, if the government of the day would just get out of the way, there's private investment that wants to invest money in Manitoba. For some reason, the government, through Manitoba Hydro, wants to be holding this investment back. Unfortunately, if this investment is held back, it will go to other provinces. So what we're saying here is let's get on with development of wind energy. We think it can be a great resource for Manitoba. Let's not stop and hold the process back.

*(16:00)

In terms of ethanol development, we know we have companies talking about ethanol development. We don't see the incentives or the assistance coming forward from the government in terms of development on ethanol. Very little investment went into the Mohawk plants, very little provincial investment into the Mohawk plants, and really, it was more of the private sector getting that ball rolling. So, we hope, even with the government of the day in place, that Manitoba's entrepreneurs will come forward and invest money in ethanol plants and we can actually drive the industry.

The same thing can be said for biodiesel. They talked about biodiesel in Manitoba, but nothing has happened in terms of biodiesel development. Then again, we know the Americans are big on ethanol and biodiesel development, and they again have taken the lead role in that and what do we have in Manitoba? Zero. We have zero development in ethanol and biodiesel in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

One of the success stories we have had in economic development here in Manitoba has been the pork industry. We've had Maple Leaf develop in Brandon. We've had a proposal from OlyWest to develop a processing plant here. I guess the question is and Manitobans are asking: Where is the credibility on behalf of this government coming forward to foster development of these types of industries in Manitoba? Well, what we have is the government saying: Hold it. We want to have a pause or we want to have a moratorium on the expansion of the hog business. So, when we do have something going constructive in Manitoba, the government of the day wants to stop and have a look at it. Well, we're not saying that stop and have a look is a bad thing. We can stop and have a look, but we don't want to shut the entire business down by way of a moratorium. The idea is to have a look. We are fine environmental stewards of our land. We know that. The new developments in the hog industry will be state-of-the-art facilities. They will have the highest environmental standards that we have. We have established a technical review to process now, which is the strictest in the land. So maybe if there are issues out there, and there may be, in fact, with the facilities that are up and running now that should be looked at. That's where the staff should be directing their energy, in working with these producers to see if there are issues out there that should be addressed.

Through a week, the hog producers, the pork industry, they're prepared to bring their industry to the table and bring it forward to the Clean Environment Commission and have a review of the process going forward. But putting a moratorium on there, just adds uncertainty to the entire industry. We don't know how long this moratorium will last and what it does it puts restrictions and uncertainty in farm families. Again, it's just another excuse, Mr. Speaker, for the young people, Manitobans, to leave Manitoba and seek other alternatives. We know that Saskatchewan is open for business in the hog business. They'd love to have more hog industry develop in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make reference here to one article that was in the paper and the headline was "Angry producers say hogs used as scapegoat." This is a direct quote from the chairman of the Manitoba Pork Council. It said that the government ban has caused irreparable damage to a multimillion-dollar industry. This is devastating. They've already caused a lot of damage to the industry that can be repaired. They're accusing us, saying you're guilty and now we'll have a trial. It's very frustrating.

That's the feedback that we're hearing from the hog industry on this moratorium that the government has proposed.

Further to that, it's not just the hog producers that are saying, you know, we have an issue with this particular idea. There's an open letter in a number of papers today, in fact, to Manitobans from Manitoba farmers. Basically, what they're saying in this particular letter is that a complete freeze on the development of the pork industry for an undetermined period of time has really undermined the entire industry. The quote, we agreed, is this: Despite our best efforts to work together, the government's plan for a pause is devastating to the pork industry and to agriculture as a whole. Mr. Speaker, this particular letter is signed by the Keystone Agricultural Producers, Dairy Farmers of Manitoba, Manitoba Cattle Producers, Manitoba Egg Producers, and the Manitoba Pork Council. So clearly there are some repercussions to the whole agriculture industry by what this government is doing. Quite frankly, the only reason the government has introduced this moratorium is for completely political reasons. There is no science-based information to put forward on the table that this is the reason for this moratorium.

Mr. Speaker, I want to mention the beef industry for a second too. We obviously missed the opportunity in terms of value-added for the beef business when we went through the whole BSE crisis. There is still a crisis in rural Manitoba in terms of the beef business, and this particular government will miss that, miss the whole opportunity to add value to our industry.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little about another sector of agriculture and some of the real issues we should be debating in the House. In terms of the Speech from the Throne, there was one mention of agriculture and it was an addition of \$10 million into the CAIS program. Unfortunately, the Speech from the Throne did not talk about the fundamental issues that farmers want to talk about.

There is a fundamental flaw in the entire CAIS program. It's not a bankable program. It's not something that farmers can take to the bankers and say: Worst case, at the end of the day this is what I am going to have.

So the government of the day here should be addressing those fundamental issues and not trying to throw in Band-Aid solutions. Again, Mr. Speaker, the entire uncertainty over the industry is still there. It is alive and well, and this particular government has done nothing in the Speech from the Throne to address that uncertainty in the agriculture industry.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the health care, we know there is a crisis in health care, there appears to be no vision for health care repair in Manitoba. We are facing emergency room shortages on a daily basis: shortages of doctors, nurses, technologists, many specialists, and in fact it's a very serious crisis. The Conference Board of Canada has ranked us dead last in terms of health care in Manitoba, and we know we're spending probably now the most per capita across Canada, and we are still dead last in health care. Manitobans are asking for value for their dollars.

Mr. Speaker, those are a few of the points that I did want to address in regard to the Speech from the Throne, and I know there are many other members on our side of the House that want to speak to the Speech from the Throne. Obviously, there is very little vision in terms of that particular document going forward.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We are excited about Manitoba's future, and Manitobans are excited about having the opportunity to make some change in Manitoba, and we look forward on this side of the House when that particular day arrives. So thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to begin by saying just how pleased I am to—*[interjection]* Maybe I should quit while I am ahead here actually, with the enthusiasm of my colleagues and members of the Legislature, but I do want to begin by saying that it is always an honour to speak in terms of the Throne Speech. I have had the opportunity to speak to a few in the past. I am always reminded when we do have this opportunity, because this is really the most broad-ranging debate that we

have in the Manitoba Legislature. It allows us to talk about not just the Throne Speech but our vision for this province, and I want to say that my vision starts with something that I will never forget. That is, first and foremost, no matter what role I am privileged to play in this Manitoba Legislature, I am the MLA for Thompson first, and I want to again thank the people from the Thompson constituency for having the opportunity to represent them in the Legislature, including this upcoming session.

I do want to pay tribute to some members of the Legislature who have indicated they are not running. We have, of course, in politics, two categories of retirement. There is the voluntary and then there is the involuntary.

* (16:10)

Certainly, I want to acknowledge the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Sale), who is voluntarily retiring, a fine member of the Legislature and someone who did a tremendous job, I believe, in a number of areas. I particularly want to thank him for the work he did in terms of northern health, and I do hope he has the opportunity to come and visit some of the new facilities that we are going to be seeing over the next period of time.

I do also want to acknowledge other members who are retiring, the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner). We have had a few disagreements on issues in the past, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I want to wish the Member for Emerson well, along with the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), who gave a fine speech yesterday.

You may notice I am not referencing other members who may or may not be in the involuntary retirement category. The Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) comes to mind. I did note the other day there were some fine comments made about the Member for Carman. I went up to him afterwards, and I am not giving away any confidences, but I do point out that I assume they were not condolence speeches. My prediction is that if anybody knows the Member for Carman, put on your seatbelts, hang on, we will not know for some time what is happening there.

I do want to say, also, quite frankly, how much I appreciate the efforts of the staff in the Manitoba Legislature, our table staff, the Speaker. Your role, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is very difficult.

But I really want to talk today a little bit about some of the vision. I am struck, by the way, throughout history how we have seen at various

times some real contrasts, some real differences, some real choices, and I have rarely seen more of a clear choice in this Manitoba Legislature. At a time when there is going to be an election at some point in the next period of time, I have never seen such a closer example here, a more significant example of that difference in vision or, dare I say, lack of vision.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was struck, by the way, that for a while there I think members opposite were competing with each other in terms of negativity. I was listening to a number of the speeches. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) spent quite a bit of time talking about the voting habits of prisoners. It reminded me and he may want to check—I can't vouch for it because I don't canvass prisons in Manitoba. Maybe he has, but I was always struck by the fact that probably the one province where there was a difference in terms of voting patterns—I always used to say that the Conservatives probably won the prison vote a number of years ago in Saskatchewan because a lot of their MLAs were put in prison. So I was struck by the Leader of the Opposition talking in those terms. I will get back to the Leader of the Opposition in a few moments.

But I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thus far there is not much doubt in this debate that the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) has I think established the benchmark for the most negative speech I have heard in quite some time. I actually heard the Member for Charleswood talking about the last person out of Manitoba turning off the lights. That is a phrase I have heard before. We used to talk that way in Thompson when I was first elected when half the community had plywood boarded-up houses and apartments, when we saw a drastic drop in our population.

But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our population is on the rise. This is a dynamic province. We have the second youngest population in the country. As for shutting off the lights, I will say not only are we not shutting off the lights in Manitoba, but thanks to this government and Wuskwatim and the announcement that we are proceeding with Conawapa, we are going to be lighting up lights in Ontario and Minnesota, across North America, that big switch called Manitoba Hydro, again that switch that can only get turned on by the NDP. That is the truth.

I do want to say to the Member for Charleswood, she may want to go and visit some of

her constituents and just ask them how they are doing, because what I am struck by, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is wherever I go throughout this province—I love talking to people at events here in the city of Winnipeg. I am from Thompson. We have a booming economy. I have never seen that kind of optimism, not since the 1960s probably. But here in Winnipeg, I remember eight, nine years ago you could start a discussion at any event in Winnipeg by just asking people, what's the value of your house nowadays? People remember in the '90s just how low it would go.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you walk around Charleswood, or, dare I say, any part of the city from the core area to the suburbs, and I say to the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), you will find people that are saying they've seen the difference that's happened under the NDP in the last seven years in the most significant asset that they have, the value of their house.

Well, the Liberal Party, they are—you know, the Premier (Mr. Doer) pointed this out the other day, and I know, probably, their big goal in the next election is to get a third member so they can break the ties in their caucus. The Liberals have a great way of being on both sides of every issue. I got a real kick out of the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) the other day getting up and talking about phosphorus in detergents because there's the Leader of the Liberal Party who in Selkirk will be opposed to the floodway, but in Winnipeg in favour of it. The Leader of the Liberal Party who in rural Manitoba says scrap water regulations, but here in the city says, oh, we have to protect our environment. I have always said the difficulty if you are a Liberal is actually talking about your principles because Liberals traditionally have two sets of principles. It depends on whom they are talking to.

But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not going to spend all that much time on the Liberals. I respect the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and the Member for River Heights and, certainly, their contributions in debate, but I want to focus in on the Conservatives.

I want to focus in on, you know, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), and I want to start from the premise—have you noticed how the Leader of the Opposition is kind of caught a little bit here. On the one hand, he has no elected office experience, other than walking into this Manitoba Legislature. I don't know about you, but, if I'm flying on a plane, I

don't want somebody who just came straight out of flight school saying, I want to pilot the 757 here, but that's the choice that the Conservatives made. The Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), who did pay his dues in this Manitoba Legislature, found that out the hard way. He is a chastened person, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Weren't you getting worried about the Member for Springfield?

But, you know, the bottom line is they made that decision, but you notice it puts them in a bit of a dilemma because on one day you'll find the Leader of the Opposition wants to pretend that he has no history. Have you ever seen those movies where somebody appears without any memory, and people try to figure out who they are? Well, in his case, have you noticed recently he says, well, we're not dwelling in the past? We don't want to talk about the 1990s.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've got to admit, in my community now the big thing that's in vogue is having socials from different eras. You know, there are the '80s socials. I actually went to that, and that's another story in terms of some of the depictions of the '80s. But the one thing I know is that, in the Tory caucus, if they get invited to a '90s social, they will not be going because in their political vocabulary now, you know what's happened? The 1990s just didn't exist. Eleven years, you know, I don't blame them.

The Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Lemieux) was saying: Well, what did they do in those 11 years? Whenever I go around—I can go to my community, and they didn't even show up in the community, let alone do anything, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I could point to project after project, after project, but you could take virtually any area of public policy, anything, and ask that question in any region, and people would be scratching their heads and saying, you know what, what did they do?

People remember some of the negative things. It was 10 years ago this month that they were ramming through the sale of MTS. People will remember that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. People of the Interlake, any time the Leader of the Opposition talks about fixing elections, people in the Interlake don't quite catch the date part because they are used to Conservatives trying to fix an election.

But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, health care—if you mention about health care, they'll say Connie Curran; they'll talk about the home care, efforts to privatize home care. Of course, they won't

talk about the waiting lists because the Tories, you know, they didn't have a problem with waiting lists because they just didn't keep them. They just didn't worry about them. Right? They'd say it didn't happen.

In other issues, environmental issues, it was interesting even just on the news recently with the City of Winnipeg wastewater treatment. You know, what's the Tory record? In 1992, it was supposed to go to the CEC. It took an NDP government, 2002, to send it to the CEC and make sure we have proper wastewater treatment that I think every Winnipegger should be proud of because it is going to help protect Lake Winnipeg and the Red River and make the city of Winnipeg a leader in terms of that.

* (16:20)

But, you know, issue after issue after issue, if you ask people what happened in the 1990s, the only things they'll remember about the Tories will be, quite frankly, the negative side. The negative side. I mean, we built the arena working with the other levels of government and the private sector. Remember in the 1995 election, they were going to save the Jets. Not only did they not save the Jets, they couldn't even build an arena, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They criticized it. It's ironic.

But do you really think things have changed? Well, I'll tell you one thing. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), when he tries to pretend he has no history, we know better. I mean, it's funny, every so often he has to prove that he might just be considered for Premier, and I guess to be Premier you have to sort of point out that you have had some real experience making tough decisions. Now, he hasn't been an MLA before being elected to the House, and that is fine, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You don't necessarily have to have prior experience in a CEO's role in any business organization, but what's interesting about the Leader of the Opposition is he's the former chief of staff for Gary Filmon. It wasn't that long ago when he was running for leader, it was like, oh, I was there for every one of the tough decisions that was made by the Filmon government.

I want every Conservative MLA to repeat that, because you know what? If they're not going to repeat it, we're going to repeat it time and time again. You can run but you can't hide when you were the chief architect of the policies that led to the rejection of the Filmon government in the 1990s. Guess what? You may not want to talk about it, but we will.

I say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he has another legacy as well. You know, it's interesting, he made a big deal about how he came back to Manitoba despite the government. You know what? I thought that was really unfortunate because I'm a really proud Manitoban. I have stayed in this province over the years. I came back after my Master's from Lakehead. I'm really proud of this province. You know what? It doesn't matter who is in government. This is still the best province in Canada that has one of the best quality of life anywhere.

But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's not forget there's another reason why the Leader of the Opposition was a little bit sort of restless in terms of his past, and that was because he used to work for Mike Harris. He used to advise Mike Harris on privatization. Mike Harris. You know, Mike Harris and Preston Manning are arguing that Stephen Harper isn't right-wing enough. I mean, that's a scary thought. But, you know, that Mike Harris was someone that the Leader of the Opposition was proud to say he worked with in terms of privatization, the common sense revolution. Well, we saw revolution, sure enough, after eight years of Conservative government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he may want to forget about the '90s, but increasingly we're seeing that they have the 1990s agenda for this province. Now, I'm not going to just talk about the background of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) or any of the members here. I want to talk about how the Leader of the Opposition argued during a very recent leadership race, and it always struck me, by the way, that when Tories talk to Tories, that's the time they really let their agenda out. They had some interesting choices. I mentioned the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler). I know Ken Waddell whom, certainly, I have a lot of respect for but quite a few disagreements with on policy. He wanted to fire any civil servant who couldn't say what their job was, and what an assumption, you know, really. I mean, we have a lot of fine civil servants in this province and I'm really proud of our civil service.

But I want to talk about what the Leader of the Opposition, the would-be Premier, was talking about. Now, what were the three things? By the way, I've got the clipping in the *Brandon Sun*, if anybody doubts that this is what he said. When he was out talking to Tories, talking about their real agenda, what were the top three things he wanted to do, the real winners here? Well, No. 1, he talked about

restraining public-sector wages. Whoa, flashback time. Filmon Fridays. Freezing public-sector wages.

Members opposite who were around in the 1990s will remember those days. Manitobans will. But they want to go after the public-sector workers. Now, that was a real winner in the 1990s, wasn't it? I mean, a province like Manitoba with our 1.1 million population, let's just sort of divide off a section of our community and let's go right after them, and sure enough they did, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You wonder why any of us over here might want to remind anybody in the public sector, and I include the more broad public sector, teachers and people working in the health authorities because they were all impacted by that attitude towards the public sector. That's No. 1.

Number two, guess what it was? They were going to scrap our water regulations. Now, this was earlier this year. We hadn't even brought them in, but here's the government of the 1990s, right, the architect to the policy saying that the first thing he was going to do was to scrap regulations that weren't even in place. You know back to the future—*[interjection]*—exactly, exactly what happened in the 1990s.

The other thing, by the way, now, this is No. 3, and this one sends shivers down, I think, my spine, but, certainly—private delivery of health care. Hey, that's what he ran on, private delivery of health care—*[interjection]* Oh, and I hear somebody across talking about Manitoba Hydro. *[interjection]* Well, I'm getting to—Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), I'm getting to Manitoba Hydro. Be patient, because we're seeing the top three of the Conservative list.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you have any doubt that that was their true agenda, just look at the member, the Leader of the Opposition's comments both in the Throne Speech and around this province. You know, he's not talking about Manitoba Hydro. "Public-private partnerships" is the phrase he's talking about; private, you notice that private word. You know we have been saying, every day there's an NDP government in office you can be guaranteed of one thing: We will not sell off Manitoba Hydro. We see, now, the Tories will sell it. Public-private partnerships, that's a potent word for the Tories, to privatize Manitoba Hydro by stealth. *[interjection]*

There is a lot of wind energy coming from members opposite, some references here. But, you know what's interesting is, right in the Throne

Speech, well, it seems that they haven't learned, even, again, about hydro development.

Now, here's a trick question I ask, and members opposite may not be able to answer this, but name me one hydro dam that the Conservatives developed in this province since 1969? It's a trick question. The answer is none. Name me two dams that they mothballed. Limestone and Conawapa. Name me one dam that the NDPs already built of those two and one that we're going to build. We've already built Limestone and we're going to build Conawapa. I have news for members opposite, if you want hydro development you vote NDP in this province. If you want mothballs, you vote for the Conservatives.

Now, I love, also, the Leader of the Opposition's rather rambling comments because he also got into highways and transportation. Oh, I love this. You know, it's interesting he'd refer to the Premier as being a speed bump. You know what? The symbol of the Conservative 1990s when it came to highways was the pothole, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they raised taxes; they pocketed the money. They didn't fix the potholes.

When they got money from the federal government in 1997, they pocketed it. They didn't spend it. No wonder we had difficulty negotiating federal-provincial agreements. What's interesting, by the way, is the criticism of the Leader of the Opposition. Well, what is this \$4-billion figure? Was this put together, you know, whatever?

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a copy here of 2020 - Manitoba's Transport Vision. The Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) was the chair of that; Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) and Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) were part of that. I would invite the Leader of the Opposition, also, see the representation that was there from municipalities, from the Trucking Association, and the hearings, the meetings that were held around the province. What did the 2020 vision identify? An accumulated deficit and a need over the next 10 years of \$3.1 billion to fix the deficit, very much the legacy of the Tories, and to maintain our bridges, our highways and our transportation system.

You know what, \$3.1 billion, we've exceeded the vision of 2020 - Manitoba's Transport Vision. Over the next two years, we're going to have the largest single highways budget in the history of this

province, and you ain't seen nothing yet, because over the next 10 years we will rebuild transportation in this province.

Now, I know someone is going to say there's a gap there. Well, we're keeping up with the costs on the transportation side, but we're also doing something. I refer people back, by the way, to the origins of this. A few years ago, when we released the east side road study, actually, I was the minister at the time. We said at the time this was important. We had the east side planning process as well, respecting the people of the east side of Lake Winnipeg, and you know what? We are now undertaking, I think, what is one of the boldest visions we've seen in many years in this province. We're extending the all-weather road network through the Rice River Road. The community of Bloodvein will be hooked up to the all-weather road network, and I have every confidence that over the next numbers of years, because of our vision in the NDP and the desire of Manitobans, that we will undertake what should be the challenge of this province right now which is to extend all-weather road access to every single Manitoba community. We're starting on the east side this year, Mr. Speaker, again the vision of the NDP.

* (16:30)

Mr. Speaker, I heard, again, the comments from members opposite, I look around this province. We're undertaking a whole series of challenges. I want to talk about water just for a couple of minutes. I'm very pleased to see the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick), now the Water Stewardship Minister, but you know what? The members opposite can't hide from their true position. We saw earlier today the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen) speak and we know this is the case. He said he wasn't necessarily against the pause in the hog industry, but then he spoke against it. He was rolling through that stop sign; then he attacked it. Well, I don't know which side he's on. We've got the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) sort of pretending that he's in favour of it.

But you know what? We have a situation where if we do this right, we can ensure through the Clean Environment Commission that we have sustainability not only of this particular industry, but, more generally, we can make sure we have sustainability of water in this province so that in 20, 30 and 40 years—this is vision. Many of us may not even be around to see it, but our children, our grandchildren

and future generations will be able to enjoy the quality of water that we expect in this province. That is a huge matter of vision. But each and every time we propose anything, members opposite find the short-term politics, the short-term negative attack. I say to them, if they want to fight an election on environmental issues like water quality, I think they'll find they'll have just as much credibility as Stephen Harper does on the Kyoto Accord, because the NDP has taken on the challenge and made the tough decisions in terms of water quality.

I've got to mention the Wheat Board, by the way. I loved how members opposite the other day whipped themselves up into this frenzy of Stephen Harperish right-wing rhetoric. Market choice. You know, that's a legitimate argument for them. We expect that. Market choice. We know what that means, gut the Wheat Board. But what I love, Mr. Speaker, is they're twisting and turning trying to support the federal Conservative position. They're going to have a vote on barley first. They're striking off a good chunk of the wheat farmers from even voting.

I don't know how many people were into the Rhinoceros Party a few years ago. Well, you know, the Conservative position on the Wheat Board reminds me of the Rhinoceros Party, and the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) may want to listen to this, because they actually argued that we should switch to driving on the other side of the road, but in good political fashion they were going to phase it in, so they were going start by moving the trucks and buses over to the other side of the road first.

Well, that's the Conservative position on the Wheat Board. They know they can't win a vote amongst producers if it's put to a fair vote. I think Stephen Harper was in China probably learning about how to run elections, because what they're doing is they're going to strike off people that don't agree with them, and then they're going to put a vote first on barley, mostly Alberta producers, where they might even win the vote there. But, quite frankly, a lot of Albertans support the Wheat Board as well.

So I just have one message to members opposite: You may have felt good about that debate the other night, but we will debate you anywhere in rural Manitoba, in northern Manitoba, in the urban communities, because the Wheat Board is important to farmers and it's important to Manitoba. Members

opposite should learn the lesson: it's time to stand up for Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? I could speak at length about the vision that's included in each and every aspect of what we're doing as a government. Education: We dramatically increased our funding for our public schools. We put in place capital for our universities and colleges. I'm really proud that in this Throne Speech—and I know members opposite don't like this because they wanted to get rid of the UCN—we are going to meet the capital needs. We're going to be providing the tools to do the job for the University College of the North, again one of the legacies that will last for generations because of this NDP government.

I look around my own community, and I look around this province. Health care: I can point to anywhere in this province and ask people what has the NDP done in terms of health care, because you know what? Brandon General Hospital. Thompson, the personal care home and the new dialysis unit; the new AFN building. You can go around the province, here in Winnipeg, the Health Sciences Centre.

Mr. Speaker, we didn't just sit back and talk in terms of rhetoric. We have, in seven years, rebuilt and renewed the health infrastructure, and we're undertaking many of the other challenges in terms of waiting lists, in terms of preventative health care. I'm really proud, by the way, of the fact we're bringing in legislation that will enshrine what we're already doing in terms of healthy children, in terms of wellness, because those are areas where we are visionary. We are getting recognition from throughout Canada in terms of that.

I could point to many other areas. I know there's been some controversy at times, but I am very proud of the work we've done in terms of Family Services, in terms of devolution, because I really believe—*[interjection]* I know the member opposite disagrees with that, the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu). But, you know what, again, we are working in partnership for the first time with Aboriginal Manitobans.

Now, I want to just finish, by the way. I want to finish my speech—

Some Honourable Members: More. More.

Mr. Ashton: I know members opposite would like me to continue some more, but I just want to finish on this note. I look forward to fighting an election. I know there's sort of that smell in the air. You know,

it's like Manitoba, it's November. It's even plus-12. People are in a very optimistic mood.

But I see in my own community that for the first time in a long time we've got growth thanks to what's happening in the mining industry, thanks to Wuskwatim, thanks to the confidence the people have. But I see this happening more and more across this province.

I mentioned earlier, by the way, we have the second-youngest population in the country. We've got one of the most diverse populations. There are a hundred languages spoken in this province. What a unique opportunity here to build on a partnership that starts with our First Nations, Métis and Canadians from across Canada. People come from throughout the world to build this province. I am very optimistic.

I want to finish by just reminding Conservatives opposite that we look forward to a debate on vision. You know what? If you want to sum up where the NDP stands in the year 2006, I think I can do it very simply, Mr. Speaker. I want to quote two great Manitobans, one that typifies our philosophy, not only as the New Democratic Party, but as a province: J.S. Woodsworth, a great Manitoban, the first leader of the CCF, the forerunner of the NDP, who said: What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all.

But I also want to quote another great Manitoban, someone that I'm really a big fan of. This, I think, probably sums up where we're at and what will happen if we receive the confidence of the people of Manitoba in the election that I'm sure will be coming soon. You know who that great Manitoban is? It's Randy Bachman and it's called: You ain't seen nothing yet.

That's the theme of this Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker. You ain't seen nothing yet.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Well, it's my pleasure to respond to the Throne Speech today. I first want to say my congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, on your ability to preside over this Chamber and keep some semblance of order here. I know that I occupy a seat that was once occupied by the former Member for Fort Whyte, and when I first sat down I felt like I was quite a few number of feet away from my desk, him being a lot taller than I, so I asked if you could please move my chair up and it was done immediately.

I just want to begin by saying to the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) and to the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) who spoke yesterday—and it

may likely be their last response to the Throne Speech—that in my very short time in the Legislature I've enjoyed working with both of them very much. You've both been very supportive and both of you have offered great assistance to me when I was a brand new member and still continue to do so. I want to wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

I also want to say to the Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan), the Member for Carman has always been a very upstanding member of this Legislature for many, many years, Mr. Speaker, and an exemplary Speaker when he once occupied your position as Speaker in this Legislature. He is a man of passion in his beliefs, and we saw that with his proposal of the no smoking in Manitoba, which did result in a non-smokers' protection act. I want to recognize him for all his long service and his commitment to the legislative process.

* (16:40)

I also want to congratulate the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) who's celebrating his birthday today. Well, we won't mention the number of years, but I also should say to the table officers, the officers in this Legislative Chamber, and to the pages, I want to thank you for all of the things that you do for us in this Legislature.

Now, listening to the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), he first stood up and said that he wanted to congratulate the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) for having the most negative speech that he has ever heard. Well, I want to congratulate the Member for Thompson for having the most fearful speech, the speech that has exuded the most fear of our new leader. It shows how the members opposite must be very, very afraid of our young, dynamic new leader as they look at their old, tired one.

They wanted to talk about vision. Well, I think they were having a premonition, and that premonition says that our leader, who they are so afraid of, our Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) will be the next premier. That's vision, and that's finally—glad that the members opposite can see what other Manitobans are seeing, and that the member from Fort Whyte, the Leader of the Official Opposition, will be the next premier in this province in the next election.

I want to congratulate our leader, the Member for Fort Whyte, on his Throne Speech debate, on his great intelligence. He's a lawyer. He's a great orator.

He has an extreme depth of knowledge. He shows great leadership and great vision. I've seen the ability that he exemplifies in this House when he stands up and goes toe to toe with the Premier (Mr. Doer), head to head with the Premier, and I look at the Premier's face and I see mild annoyance, and then I see respect, and then I see fear, and then I see anger because he realizes what a foe he has in our new leader, the one, the new, young leader who's going to replace the old, tired guard.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the blatant political Throne Speech that this government presented to the Lieutenant-Governor to read in this Legislature. I felt that that was shameful to put the Lieutenant-Governor in this most difficult position of reading a Throne Speech that clearly spells the end for this government. It's laden with fear and desperation, much like the speech from the Member for Thompson.

This government has nothing new to offer. Seven years of mismanagement, ineptness, lack of transparency, lack of accountability, all new re-announcement, after re-announcement. There's no vision, no future in this government. Seven years, and all we have is ramped-up rhetoric because the reality for the future for this government is dismal.

As the critic for Family Services and Housing and Persons with Disabilities, I want to speak of the total lack of priority that this department received in this Throne Speech, one small sentence. They have no plan, no plan for child care, no vision, nothing mentioned at all. In fact, they have not made a single announcement since April. Not one single announcement that says any more spaces to day care, anything for early childhood educators, absolutely nothing. There is no plan for children in this province.

They received \$25 million from the federal government this year. What did they do with that money? Right in the budget, \$25 million, \$23.459 million for child care that was to be used in child care. But it appears the NDP have completely dropped the ball on child care and prefer to take that money and use it somewhere else.

With the Universal Child Care Benefit, millions of dollars flowed into this province for child-care options, which could be child centre care, it could be nanny care, it could be care by a relative, or it could be care by the people, the stay-at-home parents. It was intended for people, for parents to have choice,

choice in child-care options. We know that the first choice of parents is, and I don't think anybody could argue with this, but the first choice of parents to look after their children is themselves, Mr. Speaker. Parents, that is what people chose, then they'll choose a relative, then they'll choose a nanny, and then they'll choose another child care centre.

So we know that the federal plan to place \$100 a month for every child under the age of six in the hands of parents so they might choose their own child care options, we know, because Canadians voted in a Conservative government in Ottawa, we know that is the choice the parents in this country have made for child care, Mr. Speaker. But the NDP in Manitoba have found a loophole. When children are in the care of the government, the government receives the Universal Child Care Benefit. This has never been intended to be the NDP government Universal Child Care Benefit. It is intended for families to get the cash in their pockets to be used how they choose their child care options, but this Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) has kept the money. He has not flowed it through to parents. Foster parents have not received this money. I think that the NDP believes foster parents don't have child care options. Many of them do require child care, but the NDP government has taken that option away from them. They don't believe the parents should get this benefit.

The NDP announced \$6.1 million in new government spending for child welfare initiatives. We welcome any reforms that can be made in the child welfare system. We recognize the hard work done by the Children's Advocate, the Ombudsman and everyone else that worked on those reviews. There is a tremendous amount of effort put in there, and there is a tremendous amount of good that will come out of that with the 220 or so recommendations. We applaud that, Mr. Speaker, but what we don't applaud is this government pretending that this money that they are announcing is all theirs. They've got the Universal Child Care Benefit from Ottawa since July 1, and that is, clearly, half of the announcement they made to child welfare. We welcome any initiatives in child welfare, but what we don't like is when they deceive Manitobans into believing that money that is coming from the federal government has actually come from them. Let's not forget that the money earmarked for child care is meant for child care options.

If this government wants to announce spending in child welfare reform, then they should make it

very clear that that is money in the provincial coffers and is not being confused with money taken from the federal government. We know that Canadians in this country voted for that form of child care benefit, the Conservative way. They have deceived Manitobans. They've intercepted the money, and that is shameful, and that is disgraceful. They have an obligation to put that money through to the foster families where it's intended. Basic difference in ideology: We believe families, and that includes foster families, know better how to spend their money, but the NDP does not trust families, does not trust foster families to make the right choices. Maybe they think they'll spend it on beer and popcorn. This government, again, has intercepted this money that was entitled and intended to go to foster families.

*(16:50)

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) is hiding behind the Children's Advocate and saying that the recommendation came forward from the external review of the child welfare system. I do not believe for one moment that when the Children's Advocate put these recommendations forward there was any intention to politicize this, but the minister has drawn her into it. I don't believe that he should be doing that. The Children's Advocate is an independent office of the Legislature, and when we want to talk about politics, we talk about that in this room. He has drawn her into this with their own ideology and I think that is shameful. We have a difference here of ideology. They believe that they know best what to do. We believe families will always make the right choices for their children and that includes foster families.

We look at what has happened over this last summer with 166 kids in hotel rooms on August 31 of this year, at a time when this government had already been receiving this money that they've now announced they're going to give to child welfare reforms. They had the money, and if they chose to not flow it through to families, they didn't use it to recruit foster families at a time when they could have. They could have been recruiting foster families, but instead they left kids to languish in hotel rooms. That is shameful to see, 166 kids on one night. They, when they were in opposition, railed at the government when there were 28 kids in a hotel on one night. They were outraged. Now, seven years later it is almost seven times as high. That is absolutely disgusting and shameful. It is abysmal, Mr. Speaker, abysmal.

Not only have we seen the number of children in hotels rise but we have seen the number of deaths of children in care go to an all-time high, when you have 31 babies, children, die under this NDP watch in the last five to six years, unprecedented numbers, Mr. Speaker. It causes alarm. It causes people to be in shock that a government could let that happen. This little girl, Phoenix Sinclair, this was the ultimate tragedy. A little girl who had been dead for nine months before the system knew she was missing, before anybody recognized she was missing, although she had extensive involvement with Child and Family Services her whole life.

That is an abysmal failure, Mr. Speaker, and, incidentally, we have a public inquiry called into that death. We called for that. We had reviews done which we called for, and we have a new minister, and we called for that as well. I am not confident that the new minister has any more grasp of the challenges in Family Services than the other one judging by the performance in the Legislature in answering the questions that have been posed to him.

Again, in this Throne Speech, nothing to do with fetal alcohol syndrome, a very, very devastating condition that is 100 percent preventable, Mr. Speaker. Not one mention of a strategy to prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, not one. That's shameful. No wonder everyone's quiet over there. And what about the disabled community? Nothing but a ramp into the Legislature? A whole community of people forgotten by this government. They are going to continue along their plan to invest in bricks and mortar and institutions for disabled people instead of addressing the community-living advocate groups who have always supported, recommended and advocated for community involvement for people with disabilities.

In housing, not one word about housing, and I'm not surprised. There's a big hidden agenda in the housing area, Mr. Speaker. This is another area of family services that is in total chaos. Manitoba Housing Authority, now we're having another review. And now, how did we find out about this review? Well, they didn't advertise it through the normal channels. They didn't advertise it through the *Free Press* or any newspaper, but they advertised it on an obscure Web site. Nobody knew about it. They're hiding it.

When did this review happen? It happened at the beginning of June, just a week or two after we grilled them and grilled them in Estimates on the problems

internally in Manitoba Housing Authority. And the former minister sitting over there is the architect, the architect of the problems in family services and housing, in child welfare, in child care, and in the crumbling of our housing infrastructure in this province.

We have seen, in this department, Hydra House, Aiyawin, Child Welfare, the Manitoba Housing Authority, all reviews in one department, Mr. Speaker. When is this government going to get it, that they have a problem? They need a new minister already.

Mr. Speaker, the appointment of a privacy commissioner is something, I think, that is very, very important, and I know when members opposite were in opposition, they thought it was important too. But in seven years they have done nothing, done nothing to protect the personal information of people, protect the privacy of Manitobans, and they've done nothing to advance the forwarding of information to people that want access to what government is hiding. Well, of course, why would they want to give out all their problems to the people that want to find them, right? They want to hide the problems, the many, many problems that this government has committed.

The whole issue of being allowed access to information, not only for opposition members to try and find out what the government is doing, because the government is not forthcoming, will not answer our questions in Question Period, will not answer our letters with any meaningful information, it's just rhetoric. Deny the FIPPA request. So how are people outside of this Legislature to get information when they want it? They could put in a Freedom of Information request, but they get denied as well. This is not transparent, accountable government to the people of Manitoba. Manitobans want and deserve better. As well, we know what Manitobans think about government and their ability to protect personal information and the privacy of Manitobans. Clearly, 90 percent of people in this province think that government will not protect them in their privacy and their personal information.

This government, I've been lobbying for three years, two years now, about a gap in the privacy legislation in the province, and that is the protection of personal information in the private sector.

Even the Manitoba Federation of Labour union will say that they want this legislation. They want the personal information of people in the private sector to be as protected as that in the public sector.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

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