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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, September 24, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom, know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I seek leave to move directly to Bill 239.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to move directly to Bill 239? Is there agreement? [*Agreed*]

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 239—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Seizure of Vehicles and Suspension of Drivers' Licences Arising from Drug Offences)

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), that Bill No. 239, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Seizure of Vehicles and Suspension of Drivers' Licences Arising from Drug Offences), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to bring this bill before the House.

I believe it's timely always to—unfortunately, timely in Manitoba when we're dealing with issues of drug addiction and gang activity. And certainly we've seen over the last number of months an escalation of violence on the streets of Winnipeg and I would say, in fact, throughout the province of Manitoba as a result of increased gang activity.

I appreciate the fact that some of the leadership candidates for the New Democratic Party have acknowledged that crime is skyrocketing in the province under the NDP government and, while that

acknowledgment is positive, and I see the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) shaking his hand, he may want to speak to his constituents and others in the province and tell them that crime isn't out of control and he might be surprised at the response he receives.

But the member may also want to talk to his former Cabinet colleague the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) who held a news conference and suggested that crime was skyrocketing. Those are his words, not mine, skyrocketing under the NDP government in Manitoba.

I also know that the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), speaking about crime yesterday, indicated that our seniors should take part in a government program that offers them secure deadbolts so they can lock themselves in their home at night in a way to try to protect themselves.

And so, with those sort of comments and those sort of suggestions from the NDP, it falls to us as opposition to bring forward legislation that can make a difference on crime in the province of Manitoba.

I know, Mr. Speaker, in speaking with people throughout Manitoba, it is, if not their top concern, then certainly one of their top concerns.

This particular piece of legislation targets those who are using their vehicles to traffic in drugs, and so it goes after one of the tools that drug dealers use in the commission of this crime in selling horrible drugs, including methamphetamine, crack, crank and other sorts of drugs to our children and to other vulnerable people within our society.

And we know that drugs is one of the things that fuels—that fuels the activities of gangs because it provides them with resources—certainly one of the things that fuels the activity of gangs.

So, when you speak to those who are dedicated to reducing gang activity and crime in our province, and drug addiction, they say you need to go after the tools that those who are selling these drugs use in the commission of that crime. That would include vehicles, obviously, and, also, driver's licences.

So I'm sure that no member opposite will be opposed to this legislation. I'd find it hard to believe that any New Democrat could stand up in the current

environment we are in in Manitoba and say that we should leave, in the possession of drug dealers and gang members, their vehicles so that they can continue to commit these crimes, so that they can continue to get money into the hands of their criminal organizations and that they can continue to deal drugs to our children.

If that's the response, and I don't want to presume that will be the response from the ministers. If that is their response, then they are far more out of touch with Manitobans than even I believe they are at this current date.

You know, I'm never opposed to the government taking up an idea from the opposition. I don't think that they should simply take it over for the sake of claiming their own credit. I believe that a good idea is a good idea is a good idea, regardless of which party it comes from. I know my friend from Inkster has brought forward various private member's bills and some of them, I think, are good bills, and I am proud to be part of a caucus that brought forward a number of private members' pieces of legislation that the government has either—not many have passed. But they often take the idea.

One of those, not so long ago, was the idea of having a testing on bodily fluids, when they come into contact with police officers, paramedics, firefighters, victims of crime and Good Samaritans. And we brought forward that legislation for a couple of years, and the NDP government declined to bring it into law and then, finally, they saw the merits of it. No doubt because they were getting calls and letters of support for the legislation, and they finally took it up and tried to claim it as their own.

And, ultimately, it doesn't really matter where the credit goes. We're just happy some good ideas come forward and get passed. And I hope that this would fall under that category. I hope that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) and the NDP caucus would say, well, we're gonna support this. Maybe the NDP leadership candidates, since they seem to have no ideas on crime themselves at this point other than acknowledging that the problem has gotten much worse under the NDP government, they could take this and other ideas that we brought forward. I wouldn't take offence to that. I don't think that I would necessarily stand beside any of the NDP candidates when they brought forward our legislation, but I wouldn't be opposed to them bringing forward this particular idea.

I think last night they elected one delegate in Steinbach, based on the 14 NDP members that they have in the constituency, and I've identified seven—I've identified seven of the 14 and I'm working on the other seven. But I would be happy to go to the one delegate, whoever that is, and lobby on behalf of the three leadership candidates if they support this legislation, and that they could take this idea. And when that lone NDP candidate drives in from Steinbach, probably with his hand on the horn, with his hand on the horn, for whichever leadership candidate he's supporting, Mr. Speaker, they can go blasting the horn saying that they've taken the legislation from the member for Steinbach, and I'd be happy to support them in that, whoever that lone wolf from Steinbach going to the leadership candidate will be. *[interjection]*

* (10:10)

Well, I know that the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) says that they're taking them one at a time, and maybe she can take these ideas one at a time, because I know that there aren't a lot of ideas left when it comes to law and order on the government side.

And we saw the confusion yesterday in the House when we challenged the Minister of Justice to bring forward a gang strategy, a gang strategy that he talked about in the middle of summer, he had sort of written on the back of a napkin. Hadn't talked to the police, hadn't talked to the City, and then had to quickly backtrack on that.

And then yesterday he indicated that there might be a crime strategy coming forward. And I think it sort of got leaked out to some members of the media although we don't have, sort of, concrete details on it again. It was like a flashback to what happened in the summer.

And then the Premier (Mr. Doer) was on the radio saying, well, actually we have no responsibility; it's all over to the federal government. And then the Minister of Justice sort of picked up on that messaging and said, yes, it's all the federal government's fault, but then went into the hallway and said, well, maybe there are things that we can do. I think he said that they had a three-plank strategy of suppression and intervention and prevention.

But he forgot the fourth plank which is deflection, which is the plank that the NDP government on gangs has been using for years under the former Minister of Justice and the current

Minister of Justice, trying to deflect the responsibility, trying to ensure that there was good media but no real strategy behind what they're doing, and we've seen the result of that.

And so this, of course, this particular piece of legislation, I don't propose would wipe gangs off of the street but it's not about one piece of legislation. It's about ensuring that you have a comprehensive strategy, a comprehensive strategy that isn't designed simply to get you into the newspaper for one day and try to convince people that you're doing something but ensuring that over time, the problem is going to get better, where under the last 10 years of NDP government, according to the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) himself, the problem has gotten worse and worse over time.

So they've come to the point of acknowledging the problem. They've come to the point of acknowledging that they failed over the last 10 years, led by the course of the member for Thompson and other leadership candidates, but they haven't come to the point of determining what the solution is. This is one piece of that puzzle. The members opposite can indicate today that they're serious about getting tough on gangs, getting tough on those who are selling drugs to our children by at least adopting this idea.

And I will go to the one, the only, the single delegate for the NDP in Steinbach coming to the convention and say, you should support this; it would be the right thing to do. Get in your car, drive into Winnipeg, put your hand on the horn and support this bill.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, as an optimist, I do my crosswords in pen. I would say to the member for Steinbach that if there's a delegate from Steinbach, look at all the room for improvement, look at the great potential that lies ahead for Steinbach for New Democrats.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has, as we know, with his hand on the horn full-time, been saying about gangs, do something, do something. Now whenever I hear about—whenever I hear language like that from the member opposite, yelling do something, do something, I know that, in fact, they don't know what the something is. They just are calling, they're just screaming, they're raising the decibel level of the debate without any substance and now, without any practical solutions.

Mr. Speaker, I know that what happened in the '90s—I was a close observer of what the former government decided to do about gangs and that was one big zero. Although I do remember—aside from the court house, where they didn't have to use it because they pled everything out—but they did do something about gangs in the '90s that is worth recalling, and that is they put in place a confidential gang hotline so that Manitobans could call in and give tips on gang activity and that could be then a tool for police efforts. It was a forced discovery, much to the embarrassment of the former government, just heading into the '99 election, that the phone was never answered for up to five months at a time. It was ringing in a corner somewhere. I remember the *Free Press* editorial having a picture of a phone dangling, you know, the receiver dangling off the hook. So that was their effort. They couldn't even put in place a hotline. They insisted it was a cold line and indeed it was.

But Mr. Speaker, let's deal with the issues at hand which are most serious. When we came into office we realized that there had to be a comprehensive strategy, so we went to work to ensure that the federal government and the Criminal Code paid attention specifically, and in a targeted way, to the challenge of criminal organizations.

For the first time in Canada, we introduced a series of provincial laws to counter criminal organizations, making sure that they were constitutionally sound. We reorganized the justice system and, working with police, including the Integrated Organized Crime Task Force, which has really come to the—really come to the attention of Manitobans through some very successful charges and prosecutions, Mr. Speaker, and hats off to them, but, as well, reorganizing the Justice Department as well.

The fourth thing we did, of course, was to, at historical levels, increase supports for the police and prosecutions as well as Corrections. And finally, Mr. Speaker, and not least, is an effort to ensure that our approach of getting tough on crime and getting on the causes of crime embraces crime prevention initiatives. And I can go through a list of those but I want to address the bill now, specifically.

The opposition has been calling for a gang strategy and, of course, we have had a gang strategy. We're continuing to build on it and more components, Mr. Speaker, are being announced imminently. But, finally, we have in this House the

tabling of the Conservative gang strategy, and it is Bill 239, I take it.

This is the Conservatives' response to the gang challenges that are facing Canadians, Mr. Speaker. It is an amendment to The Highway Traffic Act for the seizure of vehicles and suspension for drug offences when the conviction relates to a drug offence. So, if that is their comprehensive approach, I lament that. We see the bigger picture. We have a multifaceted approach. They bring in a bill.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to belittle any effort, though, that may be helpful for police and that is why we are compelled to look seriously at this bill. And our initial review of it says two things. First of all, on the issue of forfeiture: it appears that that part of the legislation has not been thought through. There are serious concerns that provincial legislation of forfeiture and drug offences would create serious problems and, indeed, may benefit an accused because there would be conflict with the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and, indeed, even The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act. But there are federal provisions about forfeiture of vehicles dealing with drug offences and, as well, of course, our own provincial legislation which fills some gaps in the federal scheme.

So it is not, Mr. Speaker—it is a concern that is very real on the part of both police and justice officials that a provincial approach on this one is, may well be redundant because of the federal presence and the strong provisions that are available for police.

The second part of the legislation, however, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the efforts of the opposition on, and that is with regard to the idea of licence suspension for the use of a motor vehicle in the commission of a drug offence. That, I think, is a very attractive proposition and perhaps it is a rare moment in this Legislature where we, on this side, believe that that part of the legislation deserves a very close analysis and action on.

Now there are some concerns about that. First is the licence suspension periods. Now I don't know why they would suggest that there be a one and two year—or two years on a repeat offence, Mr. Speaker. That seems very odd and, in fact, it seems rather weak. I don't know why they would take a weak approach on the licence suspension period. That needs to be analyzed.

Yes, indeed, there should be symmetry with the other offences for license suspension periods, but the periods proposed do not seem to be designed to send a strong message and, Mr. Speaker, the impact of drug trafficking on the well-being of our youth and the population generally. It is undermining our communities, and to have that kind of licence suspension period has to be questioned.

The other part, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of making sure that it comes into force at a—in a way that is surefooted but it is our early view that the provision may well help to prevent drug traffickers from renting vehicles. It could be another tool for investigation by police and what we are putting on the record is an offer to the opposition that we, with the opposition critic, meet with the police, representatives of the RCMP and Winnipeg police to analyze the potential for the licence suspension regime as proposed and as needed, and involving justice officials and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak). And that would be with a view to coming back into this House with legislation on the licence suspension piece as soon as reasonably practicable.

*(10:20)

So that is our view, Mr. Speaker. It is an offer to the opposition to work across party lines to bring another tool into the tool kit of the police across Manitoba to counter drug trafficking, which is at the root of so much—so many other challenges facing our communities and particularly our youth.

So, with those words in mind, I trust that the opposition will heed that offer and we can get to business and we can establish through the Justice Department some meetings involving the critic and get this tool moving along.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) for bringing forward this private member's bill and, certainly, Bill 239, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, seizure of vehicles and suspension of drivers' licences assisting from drug offences, is something that's timely and appropriate for him to bring forward.

And, as we saw yesterday in question period, you know, the escalation of crime within this province is going up. It's not going down, and we've had many attempts by the government of the day—at least they say they have legislation brought forward in order to deal with the escalation in crime—and yet we see nothing happening. And that's not only the

members on this side of the House who are saying that. If you look at the papers on this and to the news, it's on there on a daily basis, and this is certainly something that is alarming. And, Mr. Speaker, it certainly—the alarming part of it is that it's so rampant within the city of Winnipeg and we see it moving into rural areas now as well, and somewhere something needs to be done.

And so the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has been using all tools available to him in order to put something forward that would help and assist this government in putting something in, some legislation in that would have some teeth to it.

And so, Mr. Speaker, certainly it's something that we want to support, and I think I heard from the member opposite, the minister, as he was speaking, that there was—I think there's a mellowing out there of going to be accepting some of the points that the member for Steinbach is bringing forward.

And certainly the member from Steinbach also indicated that he was quite prepared to work together with him, and if they wanted to, as he called it—I don't think it's steal, but take some of the ideas that he had, maybe talking about crime and so on. "Steal" would be—would be the appropriate word to use. *[interjection]* "Poaching," another person has indicated. If he wanted to take some of these ideas, put them into legislation, certainly I know that they work together with people who are involved in the law enforcement officers. These are the people at the front who see what's taking place. They have ideas as well. Let's get together. Let's work on something that we can put forward so that there is legislation that has some teeth to it which is going to be supportive of what the member for Steinbach has put forward.

But, Mr. Speaker, when you travel across Canada, or even if you go into the U.S., people know where Manitoba is, and so, you know, they indicate—well, how do you know where Manitoba is? Well, all you look at is the crime that's taking place out there. I was—had to be able to go and had the privilege of going to a CPA conference in Yellowknife this past weekend, and when I introduced myself as the—an MLA from Manitoba, oh, well, that's where you have all that crime, the city of Winnipeg, a dangerous spot.

You know, these are the kinds of—this is the kind of reputation that we have throughout Canada. People are aware of what's taking place here. And so there is something that we need—we need to do

something in order to try and curb what's taking place out here.

Mr. Speaker, it almost seemed as though it was something that was mocking yesterday. I was listening to the Premier (Mr. Doer) on the CJOB Premier's talk in the morning, and, anyway, you know, he just sort of, off the cuff, well, you know, if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it's a gang. Like, we're starting to say, well, really, what's the big issue? That's the way people are looking at it.

And so the member for Steinbach has come forward and said, listen, let's do something in order to curb the addictions that are taking place, the drug, the violence that's out there that's rampant within this city.

And, Mr. Speaker, I go for numerous walks. I go down the Assiniboia here and up into St. Boniface, and it's almost on a daily basis. I have to indicate that along Assiniboia there's a vehicle that comes driving by and there's someone that seems to be just lurking in the shadows along the curb there and quickly runs to the door and picks something up, and the vehicle is gone and away they go. These are things that are happening throughout the city. I see it happening. I know that others see it happening.

Our officers within the city of Winnipeg know that this is taking place. They need to have tools within their disposal that they can use in order to apprehend those people who are continuing to promote these kinds of activities.

We know also that when drugs are involved, this is due to gangs within the city. And so, Mr. Speaker, I know that there are others who want to talk to some of the issues that are out here as well. I just want to say that I support our member for Steinbach in the private member's bill that he has brought forward, and I would encourage the government to look at this bill, to look at it very seriously because if there is some way that we can somehow curtail the activities that are taking place within this city, we should do it. We should take every bit of information that we have, put it together, put forward some solid legislation that would be able to counteract the activities of the gangs within this province. Thank you very much.

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to be able to stand here and put some thoughts on the record about Bill 239, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Seizure of Vehicles and Suspension of Drivers' Licences Arising from Drug

Offences). Under this bill, a person can have his or her vehicle seized if a peace officer, on reasonable grounds, believes that the vehicle was being operated in the course of committing a drug trafficking offence under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which is a Canadian government act. The bill also provides for the automatic suspension of a driver's licence of a person convicted of a drug trafficking offence if the offender drove a vehicle while committing the offence.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, first of all, preface some of my comments around our antigang strategy. I want to talk about a couple of things that I think the members have forgotten in putting their thoughts on the record. I want to talk about prevention. I want to talk about intervention, and I want to talk about suppression.

When we talk about prevention, I think that it's recognized across the country that our government is a leader when it comes to prevention. When I look at our ALL Aboard poverty reduction strategy, I must say, Mr. Speaker, that it's all encompassing. It looks at issues like housing. It looks at issues like families and violence prevention in relation to families. It looks at issues like healthy living. That kind of ALL Aboard poverty reduction strategy is very key in prevention and, I think, the members on the other side sometimes forget about that kind of thing and I think it's working very well actually, I would say.

Our position here on the government side is that we support the intent of this bill, but we have some problems with implementation. Both the Criminal Code and Manitoba's Criminal Property Forfeiture Act already contain provisions for the forfeiture of vehicles used in drug trafficking. It's not necessary to create a new forfeiture law which could create conflicts with other forfeiture laws and result in confusion between police agencies and officials, which leads me to point No. 3, Mr. Speaker, which is suppression. And I often sit on this side of the House and I have to question when the critic for Justice, the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), asks our Justice Minister to get directly involved in cases, and sometimes I have to say to myself, being a lawyer, I'm not sure I understand his questions.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that suppression is really important and we know that the police are targeting the top 50 adult gang members. And parents are going to be encouraged and going to be active in enlisting their support in combatting gang recruitment, and that's important because suppression

is something that is a challenge, and I'm not going to say it's not. It definitely is a challenge.

Gang mentality is something that has been studied all across the world. Having been involved in recreation, I would have to say that gang associates put out challenges to their members, and those challenges are something that we, on this side of the House, are addressing. We're looking at interventions, interventions like enhanced recreation.

*(10:30)

On July 10th, we undertook a new initiative, and we are funding a new initiative called SPIN. Mr. Speaker, SPIN is Sport Programs in Inner City Neighbourhoods, which provides a free summer soccer league and a free-structured volleyball, basketball and table tennis programs in the fall, winter and spring.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there's programming that is needed in recreation, and that is the kind of thing that is an intervention. Winnipeg's inner-city youth will see quality and diversity of their recreation program options improve because of the Province, the Province that is funding directly additional programs and enhanced recreation opportunities for people here in Winnipeg. Quality recreation programs are the nucleus of community services in our inner-city neighbourhoods and I'm pleased we have the opportunity to enhance these services. That was said by the mayor, Mayor Katz, and he said that for many of our highest-needs citizens this is really, really important.

We know that we need to work with the police. We know that we need to work with social service agencies. We know that we need to work with the City of Winnipeg, with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, with, also, our Family Services and Housing staff. These are the kind of interventions that are successful.

Having the member for Steinbach stand up and say that his bill that he is introducing is going to address all the issues of gang violence, I think I must say, Mr. Speaker, on the record, is somewhat naïve, and I know that that sounds frustrating, but I think when we look at the success of our Winnipeg Auto Theft Suppression Strategy, which the members on the other side made fun of, I think that we have to take a look at the kinds of things that we've been successful with. The Winnipeg Auto Theft Suppression Strategy began in 2006 and, as a result of it, auto theft has dropped 70 percent, including

reductions for 32 consecutive months, to the lowest auto theft rates since 1993. These are the kinds of programs that are successful. These are the programs that we are going to be modelling our next intervention on.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at gang intervention, we know that it is something where we have to involve the youth in the success of the program. You have to talk to the kids. Having been the Youth Services Coordinator for the City of Winnipeg, I know involving the kids in what it is that you present to them makes a intervention strategy a success, and that's what we are going to be doing.

I don't want to speak too much about the announcement that is going to be coming, because I don't want to undermine the announcement, but I do want to say that we are working very hard on this side of the House. I think the members on the other side have great ideas. We need to talk about their great ideas, but we need to have it in a more global sense; a sense of not just looking at the intervention, but looking at the entire piece of gang involvement, including prevention, including suppression, including intervention.

So, with those few thoughts, I would like to say that, on this side of the House, we're open to sit down at any time with members from the other side and talk about the ideas that they have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I did want to put a few words on the record in regards to this bill and, actually, to kind of reflect a little bit in the sense that we all are aware—and I want to use the example of automobile theft because I think it's very symbolic in terms of the direction that this government has actually taken on many issues facing crime.

In the '90s, the car—automobile theft was somewhere around that 7,000, you know, give or take a couple of thousand type of thing. Then when the NDP took office, there was a spike where automobiles were being stolen by huge numbers. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think it was 2004, or right around 2004, it really hit that peak. It was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 14,000 vehicles that were stolen in that particular year. Now, it might have been '04, '03, and the government was being soundly criticized by opposition, justifiably so.

And it was through the opposition and the public pressure that government ultimately had to do

something. And what it did is it came up with, for example, the demobilizer of vehicles and, ultimately, a year or two later, it came up with the specialized unit to protect consumers and Manitobans from auto theft, and it appeared to work. It appeared to work because the numbers actually went back down, Mr. Speaker, and the government then would glow. They would say, well, we have cut back automobile theft because of good government policy from 14,000 high; now we've cut it back to 25 percent, 30 percent, 40 percent, and so on. And they would glow in terms of how much they've brought down automobile theft in the province of Manitoba.

In reality, Mr. Speaker, all they've really done is automobile theft was somewhere in and around that 7,000 mark into the '90s—what they've really done is they've brought it back down to the norm of what it was during the '90s. They created the problem. They've allowed the problem to fester and grow to the degree in which it was totally unacceptable, in which there had to be action taken on the file, and it was opposition and the public and the uproar that ultimately got the government to take some actions.

Prior to that, Mr. Speaker, it was, it was all talk that we were hearing from the government, and they would blame Ottawa. They would say, well, it's not Manitoba, it's Ottawa, Ottawa's got to change the system. Well, what do we hear today? We hear the same sort of thing. Yesterday, in question period, it's passing the buck. It's not accepting responsibility. That's the same arguments they were using with the automobile theft. They were saying today that the gang problem isn't in Manitoba, it's Ottawa, that Ottawa's got to fix Manitoba's problem. Well—*[interjection]*—and the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) says it's federal laws.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that when we were the car theft capital of Canada—and we still might be today; I don't know for a fact, so I won't say that—but when we were the car theft capital in Canada, we had twice as many cars being stolen in Canada than any other province in Canada. We had twice as many automobiles being stolen. It was a Manitoba problem. It wasn't a Canada-wide problem, even though Ottawa was attempting to address the issue too. But it was focussed here in the province of Manitoba, but Manitoba politicians in government were saying, at that time, blame Ottawa, just like they're today. Just like today, we have the former Minister of Justice, we have the current Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) blaming Ottawa.

Well, Mr. Speaker, much like automobile theft, all we have is a government that's in denial. A government that refuses to take the responsibility that Manitobans have entrusted in them in terms of being aggressive in dealing with the problems that we have on crime.

The former minister, the member from St. Johns, had dozens of press releases go out while he was Minister of Justice, talking about how he's fighting crime in the province, fighting gangs. And it was interesting when he was speaking on it, he was talking about, well, you know, in the '90s, the Tories did nothing. They had this emergency—or this hotline. Well, I cannot recall, and I was here throughout the '90s, and you were too, Mr. Speaker, for a good portion, I think, since 1990s when you were elected. I cannot recall, between 1990 and let's say 1996-97, gangs being brought up on a regular basis inside the Chamber. It wasn't until the tail end of the '90s where it seemed that the gang issue started to really surface in Manitoba. I'm not too sure why, but that seems to be when it really started to become more of an issue.

*(10:40)

And I can tell you, in terms of my own constituency, and every day or every other day, I am driving in Winnipeg's North End, and I've witnessed first-hand in terms of the types of activities that I have seen, Mr. Speaker, where people are becoming more and more concerned about the activities of gangs.

I look at the bill that the member from Steinbach has brought forward, and I see it as a positive. I see this bill as a positive tool that should be used, Mr. Speaker. It's not going to resolve all of the gang problem issues that we have, but it will add to the tool box in terms of being able to combat gang activities in the province, in particular in North End Winnipeg, and it's well beyond just North End Winnipeg, but this is the area that I am most familiar with.

I truly believe that crime, in the minds of Manitobans and the public, is completely out of control, including myself, Mr. Speaker. I believe that crime is a serious issue. Manitobans, you know, you talk to Manitobans, they might say, well, health care is my No. 1 concern, or some might say, well, education is my No. 1 concern, and they'll want to talk about that—health care or education.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that everyone is concerned about crime, even if it's not their No. 1 concern, it definitely is their second or it definitely is an issue that they would like to talk about. And the reason being is because everyone knows of someone, and we constantly hear of individuals that are being victims of crime. We constantly hear about the criminal not being held to face a consequence even though he or she has committed a crime, and that is totally, absolutely, unacceptable.

If you commit a crime, there needs to be a consequence, and far too often in the province of Manitoba there is no consequence. Many of our laws are being perceived as a joke, Mr. Speaker, that even if the police get you for violating the law, there is no consequence to it. And the Department of Justice and the Province of Manitoba have a role to play in terms of ensuring that there is a consequence to crime in the province of Manitoba, and I believe, and I share, what many of my constituents believe, is that we need more of a consequence when crimes are being committed.

I support the legislation. I believe that this type of legislation can go a long way in terms of assisting and combatting gang activities. It sends a message. The next, without saying, is not only to pass it, but also to start acting on the legislation, Mr. Speaker. And I look forward to the government bringing in legislation. I would prefer that they would support this bill. They don't have to bring in their own legislation. Bring in this legislation.

I don't have any objection in terms of, if a gang want to attempt to sue the government, I would welcome the opportunity to see a gang sue the government. Let's bring in this legislation. I believe it'll make a difference, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): To echo some of the comments that my colleagues have put on the record, we support the intent of this bill, but we have some problems with the implementation, as my colleagues have stated.

Both the former Minister of Justice, the current Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) has talked about this bill favourably in that we support the automatic suspension of the driver's licence of a person convicted of a drug trafficking offence, but we need to ensure symmetry with existing federal laws and work in consultation with the police to make sure that we get it right.

That's what we need to do. That's our responsibility in this government. We are asking the Justice Department to look at licence suspension and work in co-operation with the police and in consultation with the opposition to bring forward legislation to achieve this.

So it's been interesting to listen to the arguments made by members opposite and, of course, as Minister of Education, one thing that I have always believed is that education is the great equalizer. And when I hear the members talk about putting – I believe it was the member from Pembina who said that the member from Steinbach is putting all tools forward. Well, we have a much bigger tool chest that we're working from, Mr. Speaker, because this tool chest deals with prevention, intervention and suppression initiatives. And if we want to talk about prevention initiatives, I can talk about that from the perspective of Manitoba's Education Minister.

Now I know that the members opposite have been quite critical of education funding, which is a little ironic, given our record compared to theirs, but if you look at what happened in the last couple of years with our announcements, what's been happening over the last 10 years with how we funded education, we put in over \$50 million this year and that included, among other things, an intensive newcomers support grant. And the intensive newcomers support grant was to support individuals who've come from war-torn countries, war-affected children who find themselves the most vulnerable to the predatory nature of gangs and find that the gang might be quite appealing as an option for them when they've come from such an incredible circumstance that they've experienced in their war-torn countries. That was part of an over \$50-million announcement.

Members opposite promised \$10 million for schools of excellence. That would not have addressed war-affected children. That would not have addressed intensive newcomers support initiatives that our government put forward and that a lot of people are taking a look at because it's the first of its kind. We're being trailblazers in this particular initiative to provide targeted support for individuals from war-torn countries.

Part of our \$50-plus-million announcement included community schools initiatives. And the notion behind the community schools is to target low socio-economic schools to engage community in the schools because we know that more participation in the school within the community, the better off our

learners will be and the more engaged our learners will be in their school and in their community. Would that have been covered with the \$10-million schools of excellence announcement? I don't think so.

Part of our \$50-plus-million investment included support for student community-led conferences on gangs, where the community has said we need to take a look at this issue and we would like your support in addressing this issue. And they've taken that initiative and we are expecting recommendations to come from the community on how to address this issue specific to their community and their needs. Would that have been included in the \$10-million schools of excellence funding? I don't think so.

Mr. Speaker, part of our \$54 million includes the continued support for Safe Schools Manitoba. Part of our \$50-plus million includes the implementation of our Safe Schools Charter and the expectation that school divisions have policies and procedures in place to deal with gangs, to deal with drugs and alcohol abuse, and to deal with violence in the schools.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, having taught school for 13 years, I taught at a time where teachers were concerned about escalating violence and we were ignored. Surveys were done by the teachers' society. That was the No. 1 issue, violence in our schools. Nothing was done by the government of the day.

But it was this government that introduced the Safe Schools Charter. It was this government that supported teachers to deal with issues. It was this government that provided the policies and provided the initiatives that would support a safe learning environment.

Mr. Speaker, as a teacher, two years into my career, I was shocked to learn that there was no policy on drug and alcohol use. Part of this bill speaks to driver's licences being suspended for arising from drug offences. Well, where are people going to be exposed to drugs where they become addicted to drugs? Usually it's very early on in their lives. So we came up with a policy and a law to deal with drugs in our schools. There had been no policy. No such policy existed in the '90s when they were in office, but we came up with that policy and we worked with the school divisions very hard to ensure that every school has a policy on drug and alcohol use.

Now the other initiatives that we've undertaken is working with the Justice Department. We now have certified teachers delivering the programs for students who—or for young offenders who might be incarcerated in a youth detention centre, Mr. Speaker, so they have better educational opportunities in that facility. Would that have been covered in the \$10-million schools of excellence award? I doubt that very much.

And another initiative, working in co-operation with the Intergovernmental Affairs Department, is the special resource officers in school. I've always believed that a student's first contact with a police officer should not be that police officer reading them their Miranda rights. They should be in the school working as resource officers, which is a program that we see throughout the country. Manitoba is one of the only places where the Province actually co-funds or funds the lion's share of that initiative. Other urban police forces see the merit in the program, and it's funded through the City funds, but we see the value in that program, and we're supporting our city police officers, as we always have, and we'll continue to do so.

*(10:50)

The special resource officers in the school has had an incredible impact on the school culture. There's been less vandalism; there's been less violence; there's been a very good working relationship with the police officer, the school and the community, Mr. Speaker. Would that have been included in a \$10-million schools of excellence announcement? I doubt that very much.

So we're looking at a prevention approach to this very important issue. Prevention is key; intervention is essential; and, unfortunately, suppression is required on occasion where individuals do go beyond that scope and that scale of that which is acceptable in society, and find themselves incarcerated, or charged with criminal offences, Mr. Speaker.

So we have a number of initiatives that we've undertaken in the Department of Education, in partnership with Intergovernmental Affairs, in partnership with Justice, in partnership through the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, to look at ways that we can prevent this. Even funding earlier intervention with counselling. Now we have fully funded counselling positions in early and middle years schools. That was not the case where school divisions saw the need and were funding it on their

own, and they asked us to increase their funding to support counsellors, because children, at a younger age, were being identified to have some needs that required the guidance of a counsellor. So we're doing that. Would that have been part of the \$10-million elite schools announcement? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

Now I also heard from the member opposite from Inkster, talking about federal and federal laws, and how we're blaming the federal government. We're not blaming the federal government. We're trying to work with the federal government. I had the opportunity to serve on the Gimli youth restitution and reconciliation committee when the Young Offenders Act actually enabled us to work with and prevent repeat offenders, prevent recidivism, because those young offenders had to come to our panel of community people, look us in the eye, and tell us what they did and why they did it, and they had to face the consequences that was determined by the youth criminal justice committee.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I hate to say it, but when the youth criminal act came out, the successor to the Young Offenders Act, the wheels fell off that youth criminal justice committee, because police did not feel that they were empowered under the current federal law to bring these young offenders to this committee. There was no teeth in that act that would ensure that these children would have to come and face the consequences of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

And so, you know, I caution the member from Inkster. I did teach this in Canadian history, the judicial system, when I taught in grade nine. I did teach this in Canadian history in grade 11 that there are some very distinct responsibilities between the federal and provincial government with respect to the laws. And our Justice Minister has been an incredible leader nationwide in what he has asked the federal government to do, with his colleagues, justice ministers from across the country. He's been a leader—asking them to pressure the federal government to change the laws so that if we do find ourselves at that point where suppression is necessary, that those students or those, pardon me, those young offenders are held accountable for their actions in a more meaningful way. And that's what our federal Justice Minister's been asking them to do, change the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and make it more meaningful to those individuals that might commit the crimes.

Put some power back to the community, perhaps, for these restitution and reconciliation committees, so that they can face their community members in the eye, and talk about what they did, why they did it, and face the consequences that are deemed appropriate by that particular committee. Restorative justice is a very powerful tool that we are sadly lacking now under the current Youth Criminal Justice Act. It did work under the Young Offenders Act.

The federal government has to make amendments to that act to empower people to take justice matters back into their own hands under the restorative justice model, which works very effectively for young offenders, because it is the young offenders, when first exposed to drugs, who are highest at risk of becoming addicted to drugs. So, Mr. Speaker, we do take this issue seriously. We'll continue to work to improve life here for Manitobans and our justice. Thank you.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to put a few words on this private member's bill, and it's an interesting bill, because what it's basically trying to do is have a person who is committing or is believed to have committing on reasonable ground, believes that a vehicle, as it was being operated in the course of committing a drug trafficking offence, under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. What it would do is allow the police officer to seize the vehicle. It also provides for the automatic suspension of a driver's licence, or for a person who is convicted of drug trafficking offence, if the offender is the driving a vehicle while committing the offence.

I'd like to put a few words on the record, saying that it's a very, very interesting bill. It's sort of following the process, the same thing that we did for prostitution, same thing that has happened in drunk driving offences. So it's an interesting bill, and it's sort of saying that there has to be punishment beyond a certain court objective and there has to be real immediate consequences.

So I—we support the intent of the bill. It's an interesting bill. It is talking about having consequences beyond just the legal ramifications as far as a court sentence or fine. So it's talking about having a person who's doing—selling drugs out of their car, et cetera, actually have consequences, and I think that's appropriate.

But, you know, we also have to look at other things, and we have to make sure that the bill makes sense as far as other suspensions. So, although you look at the suspension—automatic suspension of a driver's licence for a person who's convicting—convicted of drinking and driving, that should be similar to the person who is doing some sort of offence as far as selling drugs.

So the driver licence suspension for impaired driving causing death or bodily harm is five years on first conviction and 10 years on second. For impaired driving, it's from one year on the first conviction, five years on second, 10 years on third. For refusing to take a breathalyzer, it's two years on first conviction, seven years on second and 10 years on third.

What we want to do is have some symmetry between the drug law and the seizure and, also, on the drunk driving law, et cetera. So what we want to do is make sure that we have symmetry. We want to talk to the police and justice officials. We want to talk to community people, because what we want do is make sure that the seizure and the suspensions make sense. You certainly wouldn't want a system where, if you're convicted of selling drugs out of your car you have much lesser sentence than if you're caught drunk driving. So, therefore, we want to make sure that there's symmetry.

We also want to make sure that we target a whole bunch of sanctions that, again, we want to have proper definitions. We want to make sure that people understand the law, and we want to make sure that people are aware.

An example of making—expanding it, was when we took a wider range of vehicles for drinking and driving sanctions, including off-road vehicles, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes, construction and farm implements. We want to make sure that all vehicles are included in this, and that would make absolute sense, because, after living in the north for many years, I realize it's not just cars that people use to transport. People use many vehicles.

We also want to make sure that we don't have any conflicts with the Victims' Bill of Rights. We also want to make sure that it doesn't have any conflicts with any other laws in Canada, so it's not thrown out by the Supreme Court or other courts.

So what we want to is we want to make sure that we chat, we have discussions with the police, with

community organizations, with groups like MADD, groups like that that haven't got the community's ear, to make sure that we have a good law.

The other part of the law is dealing with the property of an individual who's a member of a criminal organization that is presumed to be the proceeds of crime. Basically, what it means is that they can be—lose their—the item. And what we want to do is make sure that they have—illegally obtained funds can be taken by government. I think that this is very interesting. What we want to do is make sure, again, that this is constitutionally valid. I think what we want to do is make sure that the bill, although the intent is very, very good, we want to make sure that it fits within the judicial system where there isn't any conflicts, and we want to make sure that it's done appropriately.

I think—the other final thing that I would like to chat about, Mr. Speaker, is we also have to look at—

* (11:00)

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

The hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with rule 31(9), I would like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Recognizing the Benefits of Traditional Chinese Medicine, sponsored by the honourable member from Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Speaker: It's been announced, under 31(9), the resolution for next Thursday will be—will be brought forward by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou), and it will be titled Recognizing the Benefits of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

RESOLUTION

Res. 21—Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food Needs to Be Convened

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we'll now move on to resolutions, and we'll deal with resolution No. 21.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I move, seconded by the member from Ste. Rose,

WHEREAS Manitoba's agricultural sector is a key economic driver, creating thousands of direct and indirect jobs, and generating hundreds of millions of dollars annually for the provincial economy; and

WHEREAS Manitoba pork producers are facing physical challenges due to factors such as the H1N1 outbreak, country-of-origin labelling, Bill 17, The Environment Amendment Act, high input prices and low commodity prices, among others; and

WHEREAS the cattle industry continues to be adversely impacted by factors such as the lingering effects of BSE crisis, other trade issues, high operating cost and low commodity prices and among others; and

WHEREAS severe weather-related challenges such as flooding, excess moisture conditions or drought are having negative impact on livestock and crop producers in different regions of Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has failed to develop effective strategy to attack these worried—wearied challenges; and

WHEREAS legislators have a duty to thoroughly examine these issues, to seek input from affected stakeholders, and to develop strategies to help the industry deal with them; and

WHEREAS the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food has not met since the spring of 2001 to pacifically address the factors negatively affecting the agriculture sector to examine possible strategies to manage them.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the provincial government to consider convening the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food as soon as possible to examine the serious challenges facing Manitoba's farm families, and to consider developing strategies to address these issues in order to ensure the continued success of the province's agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to accept the resolution as printed, not as read? *[Agreed]*

WHEREAS Manitoba's agricultural sector is a key economic driver, creating thousands of direct and indirect jobs, and generating hundreds of millions of dollars annually for the provincial economy; and

WHEREAS Manitoba's pork producers are facing fiscal challenges due to factors such as the H1N1 outbreak, Country of Origin Labelling (COOL), Bill 17—The Environment Amendment Act, high input prices and low commodity prices, among others; and

WHEREAS the cattle industry continues to be adversely impacted by factors such as the lingering effects of the BSE crisis, other trade issues, high operating costs and low commodity prices, among others; and

WHEREAS severe weather-related challenges such as flooding, excess moisture conditions or drought are having a negative impact on livestock and crop producers in different regions of Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has failed to develop effective strategies to attack these varied challenges; and

WHEREAS legislators have a duty to thoroughly examine these issues, to seek input from the affected stakeholders, and to develop strategies to help the industry deal with them; and

WHEREAS the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food has not met since the spring of 2001 to specifically address the factors negatively affecting our agriculture sector and to examine possible strategies to manage them.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the provincial government to consider convening the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food as soon as possible to examine the serious challenges facing Manitoba's farm families, and to consider developing strategies to address these issues in order to ensure the continued success of the province's agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker: So it's been moved by the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), seconded by the honourable member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese),

WHEREAS—dispense?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Eichler: I want to, first off, thank the members on this side of the House for moving this motion forward, this resolution, in regards to calling the agricultural committee back and to—into—so that we can debate these important issues in regards to—mentioned in the resolution.

And I want to make it very clear: what we're calling for is debate just on the agricultural sector, not on bills. We have a number of issues in regarding the country-of-origin labelling, the flooding, a number of other issues in regards to the pork industry, where we see the H1N1, and also the BSE that came about in regards to—back in 2003; we're still feeling the effects of that in yet today's economy. And also the flooding issue that's happened in the Interlake region, the Westlake region, and also the drought that's happened in the western part of the province, and I know a number of my colleagues'll be wanting to speak in regards to that.

I know that I did offer the member from Interlake the opportunity to second the motion, and he has declined, unfortunately, and shared with me the fact that last year was a record year in calling the agricultural committee. But that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about bills. We'll talking about the Standing Committee on Agriculture where we can deal just with the issues—*[interjection]*—that in—I know, he said he's not gonna tell me no more family secrets.

But here's the deal: the deal is, is that we need to deal with these issues. No one has a monopoly on good ideas. We need to consult with those stakeholders. We need to ensure that we have the best possible solutions for these producers. In fact, I know that the issues in regards to the flood in Interlake is one that has been ongoing since last year and, meeting with the producers on Tuesday when I was up there, you know, this situation is not gonna just go away next year either, even with the Forage Restoration Program. It can't be for one year. They can't afford to go in and just tear those fields up and not have any hay for next year. It needs to be a two-year, a three-year program. It needs to be monitored, there's no problem with that. I certainly understand the, you know, the hurdles that have to be kind of gone over in regards to that.

And, also, with the cereal crops, that's another serious issue where the farmers have had to get the crop off in order to claim the crop insurance so that you have the yield that they'd be able to calculate that insurance payment on. Those tracks are gonna be there again for two to three years so this is gonna be an ongoing process. It's gonna be a process that needs to be followed up, and I know the easiest part is because it's already been through federal Treasury, and also through provincial Treasury, is to just leave that the same.

Unfortunately, the \$40 per acre is not enough with the high input cost, field cost, and other costs that's incurred. We would like to see that increased to \$60 an acre, Mr. Speaker. We feel that the current cost that it costs to go on that land, recover that land and get it back into production, and we also know that the particular issue in regards to, you know, the cattle producers, this year in particular, on the flooding in that area, they're making some hay, and yesterday the minister in response to my question said, you know, we can't blame 'em for the good weather—which I haven't—give 'em credit for the bad weather, or either one. But there is some hay being made but the quality is not there. It's bulk, it's roughage, which is great and muchly appreciated. I know a number of producers are actually smiling as a result of that. They just feel that they're at the time that they need to get out and have that final opportunity to get some of the feed on stock, on hand, for those cattle for the winter. But what they need is an answer from the government today, not next week, not next month, not next spring, in order to make those decisions because these guys are trying to contract straw; they're trying to contract hay outside the area. They want to bale that straw, but they need to know whether or not there'll be have enough money to get it home.

One thing to put those input costs in to wrap that straw up, move it from wherever they're going to have to move it from and whether or not they get the money to do it. So it's imperative that they make a decision very, very soon in a timely manner, and that's actually even too late for the agriculture committee which this motion is about in reconvening it. But also that decision has to be made by the minister and her staff and through Treasury Board. But I encourage to do that very, very soon.

Also, in regards to the issue in regards to the flooding up in that Interlake region and the Westlake region, is the fact that we need to look at long-term strategies as well in regards to drainage, and a number of the issues that come about is, also, is the high lake level. It's not become just a lake anymore, it's a reservoir, and it's a water-storage mechanism for Manitoba Hydro. They have a certain responsibility for that storage of that water. A lot of that water as a result of the high lake level becoming a reservoir has backed up into the farmer's field, and, as a result of that, a number of those acres have to be pumped. They have to get that water off the land back into the lake, and so some of those drains have to be looked at. The lake level needs to be looked at,

and that land has not become near as productive as it used to be as a result of the high lake level. I believe it's something like 715 right now. The regulations, I believe, is anywhere from 711 to 715, so it's right at the maximum point, and we know traditionally that the storms come in October, and with the lake level where it's at it's certainly going to have some substantial damages if it's anything like it has been in the past, and we need to be ready for that. We need to do some preventive measures in regards to that.

And, again, that's where we come back to the whole concept of calling an agricultural committee so we can deal with some of those issues that are so important and, in the past, we haven't filled those shorelines in with a rock base, we filled it in with a soil base. That don't last, and what happens is that nutrients get washed out, the soil gets washed out, so we have to go back in five years or two years or one year and restore that shoreline.

* (11:10)

Also, in regards to the drought, I know the member from Arthur-Virden will be talking about this, and we've said this very clearly, a disaster is a disaster, whether it be a drought or flooding, tornadoes, whatever you want to pick, we need to make sure that we have those protections in place so that whenever those disasters come forward we're able to deal with those in a very timely manner.

And I certainly know that we on this side of the House recognize the hurt that's been going on down in the Arthur-Virden area. In fact, I got a call from a cattle producer there that in 2002, just prior to BSE, they were 40-some years old and decided to expand their herd. They went out and borrowed a bunch more money. BSE broke out in May of 2003. Unfortunately, after the BSE breakout, of course, those values on those livestock went next to nothing, and this year with the drought they just don't know what they're going to do with those cattle.

They don't know whether to sell them off; the market's down. They don't know whether or not the feed stock's going to be available. They don't know whether or not there's going to be freight assistance. Again, the minister and her department need to be very clear on their position in regards to this so that they're able to make those decisions. I understand that the federal government has announced that the tax exemption will be extended for next year so those'd be able—those that did sell out will be able to get back into the business, but as we know, we lose the genetics and that's what this is all about.

Farmers work so hard at getting their herds built up. They get so—they work so hard at making sure they get the right breeding programs, and we have a member from Emerson here that has a great Charolais herd that he's built up over the years. I used to have Simmentals. That's something you just don't jump in and jump out and whenever you do that, those types of things, you lose your whole program. And that's something that we as cattle producers, grain producers going back to the flooded acres, we get our rotation set up and you just can't get in and out of business, especially in the farm business. And that's wrong on the government's part for not being there for him whenever we're trying to make sure that we have those programs in place that are predictable, that are bankable.

Also, I just want to touch on regards to the AgriStability program, and I know the minister is very much aware of this. And I know she's said that they'll be talking about it in regards to the AgriStability program in January, the negative margins especially in the BSE since 2003, 2005 the cattle producers somewhat, most or a lot of them broke even but since that time they have not had an opportunity to make money.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So their margins are not being able to trigger a payment for them, which is so unfortunate, and that's what they need when they go to the banks, to be able to say I have a payment coming of X number of dollars and that's so important.

And on the grain sector, up in the Interlake region, in particular, and the Westlake regions, those margins have now dropped from 2008 and 2009. So those margins that—where they, just for example, they used to get \$100,000, dropped to \$80,000, for example, down to \$60,000, and that's not going to be enough for these producers to be able to get a crop in next year.

Unfortunately for those producers, as a result of that, a number of them when they go to the bank to try and leverage money they'll say, well how are you going to pay it back. They just don't have any guarantees any more under the AgriStability program and that's why we need these programs to be—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer): Order, order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Eichler: I ask leave.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer): Leave has been requested. Is there leave? [*Agreed*]

Leave—it's agreed.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Chamber. Thank you, members, for allowing me to wrap up here in regards to the stabilization program.

But it's critical that whenever the minister is going back, and I know that it's not just that easy to make these changes, there's all the other ministers that have to agree to it and I know that the minister has the best interests of Manitobans at heart whenever she negotiates these. I ask her to consult through the Agriculture committee in favour of this motion. And thank you for leave, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Lakeside for bringing this issue forward and expressing his concerns about the Standing Committee on Agriculture and the need to consult, and I can assure him that this government and myself as a minister consult very thoroughly with the industry when we are bringing those issues and programs forward. And the member may want to call a committee and sit around the table and argue back and forth, but I say to him, my door is always open. He can come to my office. We can sit in the loge. He can give me his ideas on where changes have to be made, and I will certainly take his comments seriously.

But he knows full well that the tradition of this House is not, as it is in Ottawa, where standing committees are called to debate issues. They are called to deal with bills, Mr. Speaker, and that's the way it was in the past and that's the way it is now. But I welcome his ideas and I want to say—for example, he's talked about a few things and certainly there are challenges in the pork industry, and we have to continue to work with our federal colleagues to ensure that the issues of country-of-origin labelling are addressed, and country-of-origin labelling doesn't only affect the pork industry; it does affect the beef industry, as well, and all of those are feeling impacts.

The member referred to—the I'll try to touch a few points he raised. He talked about the Interlake, and I want to assure this House that my staff in this department are doing an assessment on the Interlake, and the weather that we're having right now is

certainly a blessing, and I know that people are making every effort to roll up or collect any feed that they can in order to keep the herds going, Mr. Speaker. And that's why my staff is working with producers to look at rations, at how livestock can be fed through winter—or winter them this year.

But producers will have to make some decisions, Mr. Speaker, if there isn't enough feed, and producers do this all the time. They adjust their herds according to the feed that they have, and that's where the federal tax deferral comes in to help them, and I want to tell the member that we are looking at the area that the federal government has put in place for the tax deferral, and we're looking to what adjustments might be made.

According to the assessment that my staff have done, the north Interlake does have a serious problem and we have to—and West Lake, but the north Interlake on the assessment that we have, the staff have done, is the most serious one as far as feed supply, and we are working with them. In fact, we have—are doing the assessment as to whether an AgriRecovery program will have to be there. But the member knows that this program is a federal-provincial program, and an assessment has to be made on it before you can announce any programming. So that's what—we're looking at whether the tax deferral has to be extended. We're looking at whether we can bring in an AgriRecovery in a particular area that's being the hardest hit. So we're working on those.

I have some concerns with the issues that the member says about crop insurance, how crop insurance isn't working, and then he says that AgriStability isn't working, and I've told him before that we are reviewing them and we are trying to make some changes. But he is right, this is a national program and changes have to be made across the country.

But I have to wonder what the member is thinking, because some of the things that he has said, I almost feel that what he wants is to go back straight to ad hoc programs, take away all of those regular programs, put in place an ad hoc program. Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you, that is not what producers want. Producers want stability, and they want to be able to have programs that are predictable, and that's what we have now.

But the member keeps talking about how programs aren't working, how you haven't made a payment in one area. The decisions, whether it be in

the Interlake, whether at West Lake or in Arthur-Virden, southwest part of the province, those programs and ad hoc programs such as AgriRecovery are made through a lot of work and information gathering done, both by the federal and provincial government. But you cannot just say, well, let's take away—this program's not working; this program's not working.

I can tell the member also that there has been a lot of consultation. He wants an Ag committee to stand so he can talk. I tell you, Mr. Speaker, when there is a new program coming, such as AgriStability, AgriFlex, AgriInvest, the industry comes together. It is the industry that has the opportunity to have input into these programs and get information about how they are developed.

Mr. Speaker, the member also said we have to look at drainage, and, indeed, I'm very proud of the record of this government, and I wanna recognize my colleague from the Interlake, who has certainly raised the issue of drainage. But I would encourage the member to go back to the '90s, just for the record's sake, and just check on what kind of—
[interjection]

* (11:20)

No, no, the member is excited here. I'm proud of our record of what we've done during our term of office. I want the member to look back at what some of his colleagues did. He wasn't there, so we can't blame him, Mr. Speaker, but we can look back at how the Conservatives, when they were in power, cut the drainage budget. And if you look at the Interlake, they never did one drainage project. We're doing work. We're trying to catch up. It takes a long time to catch up on 10 years of negative government. Jack Penner talked about this. Your predecessor talked about how the Conservatives had cut the drainage budget.

With regard to the level of the lake, I want the members opposite to know that the level of the lake is not being held back by hydro dams. It is not being held as a reservoir. There are—there are two drainages—two outlets out of the lake, Mr. Speaker, and, in fact, if the lake was draining in a natural way, it would be higher than it is now, but with the drainage, there are two outlets on the lake to control the level and it is being drained much quicker than it would be drained under a natural state. There is very high water. We have had a lot of rain and there is work that has to be done to try to improve that situation.

But, Mr. Speaker, yes, the member opposite called the Ag committee so we can sit around the table and he can talk about how high the lake is or how much drainage should be. This government is an active government. We have work to do and we will sit around committee tables when it's important and when there is legislation to deal with, or like Public Accounts, last night, but to call a committee to just talk about things, I invite the member to come over, come to my office, come anytime, and I will listen to his suggestions. But his suggestion on AgriStability, that it isn't working, is one that is being reviewed. It's being reviewed across the country and there will be some recommendations, and I'm hoping that there will be some changes made that will better meet the needs of our producers.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, I know that this is challenging times for the pork industry and this is challenging times for the beef industry. Many of the challenges are related with trade actions by other governments, and that's why we have to continue to work to develop new markets, and that's the work that is happening. That's why we have to continue to have more processing.

I wonder if the member opposite realizes that since this government has taken office, that we have doubled, doubled the food processing in this province, double. And that's really important, because as we look for markets, we cannot only ship out raw material. We have to look at how we can add more value to these products, create new markets for farmers and create more jobs, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we have been doing and we will continue to work in that vein to ensure that we can work with the producers to address some of the challenges that they're facing. Government can't do everything, but we can put in place tools to help deal with it.

I want to give the farmers as much credit as I can for the way that they have been working, particularly in the Interlake-Westlake area since this nice weather came along, and trying to, first of all, roll up hay, get off what crop they have and to prepare that land for next year's crop, because they have had a couple of very bad years. So I give them credit, and the department will work with them, and we, as a government, will continue to address the issues of programming for farmers to give stability to their incomes through AgriStability and Growing Forward. And we will continue to work on the international scene to address issues like country-of-origin labelling and Buy America, we will continue to add those, but we will also continue to ensure that

there is safety nets and we will continue to make improvements to crop insurance. We will continue to work to further allow more processing, to continue to have new markets—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer): Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

An Honourable Member: I wonder, since we gave leniency to the introducer that we might give, by leave, one minute to wrap up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer): One moment, I need to recognize you so we can record it.

The honourable minister, please repeat what you were saying.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Deputy Acting Speaker, I want to know if—since the House has been so lenient to give my—the introducer of the resolution a minute to complete his comments, whether I might have that same minute.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Altemeyer): Leave has been requested. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been provided. You may continue.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, thank you very much. And that just shows to you, Mr. Speaker, how people in this House recognize how important this industry—the tremendous impact that agriculture has on the economy of this province, that there are thousands, some 62,000 jobs related in the industry and more than 30,000 employed indirectly, Agriculture commits \$4.4 billion in cash receipts and \$3 billion in services and additional work. I say to the member opposite, you have ideas, share your ideas. We will work with you.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It's my privilege to stand and speak to this resolution as well, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food Needs To Be Convened, brought forward by my colleague from Lakeside. I just want to say a couple of things that this committee hasn't sat since 2000, the spring of 2001, and I was on that committee, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think that it's imperative that the minister do the same again, but obviously there's a reason why she doesn't do it, and she just explained it in her comments. She doesn't know what a committee does. She's saying we're going to go out and sit around. We're going to call a committee so we can sit around a table and discuss with each other what the issues are. A committee is

so you can listen to people come and make presentations from real farmers, come and make presentations around the table so that you can actually get an idea of what's going on out there in the country.

So, Mr. Speaker, No. 1, she's got a false premise as to what the rules and responsibilities of a committee are when you take it out to the country. Now, we have had opportunities to do that and you don't have to go out to the country to do it. You can call a committee right here in the Legislature and demand that farmers, at least give them the opportunity to come and speak to us as a body and as politicians so that you can understand what the concerns are out there today, and under the tremendous pressures that are being put on the industries and livestock and trade issues with COOL, or country-of-origin labelling, recovering from BSE, recovering from floods and droughts across the province of Manitoba over the last number of years, the higher dollar value, the high input costs. These are all reasons why we should have a committee called either in here or a committee that could go out to the country and actually listen to the concerns of these individuals first-hand as they struggle in their farming operations, particularly on the livestock side.

I only want to say that the minister talks about tradition, and Madam Deputy Speaker, if she's going to rely on the traditions of Ottawa, then she would call these committees on a regular basis so that we can hear because the tradition is that Ottawa does do that, and it's not a hidden agenda or anything, it's just an opportunity for those who are concerned about their livelihoods to come and talk to us as politicians and tell us what their concern is.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the history of the facts are that when our government was in power, they brought forward a \$50 an acre for unseeded opportunity in Manitoba and actually paid it out. It was put on the books, and it was so good that this government adapted it and put it into crop insurance, and I think that they can learn from some of the good policies that the Conservative government brought forward. And I think that, however, she needs to get in touch with the policies that are out there today because she's told the severely stricken—drought-stricken farmers in my southwest area that their region was too big to start with. Their region was too small in finality to actually receive any kind of drought assistance even though several cattlemen in that region had to haul water for over 18 months to keep the herds going. And I think that the minister

knows this. I don't know why she wasn't able to get any support from her colleagues and her government to support this area in southwest part of Manitoba.

She actually told Mr.—you know, she had a review that was going on for the drought-stricken area of southwest Manitoba, but in the middle of that review she made a personal phone call to a Mr. Allan Downey, in that area, a cattle rancher, and told him that his numbers were all wrong. Stay home, don't bother us any more. And I thought that was an insult to the farmers of southwest Manitoba, for Mr. Downey and Mr. Sterling [*phonetic*] and others, the eight other reeves of that region who had sent her letters requesting drought aid support in that region, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think that in the middle of her review she could have at least let the review come to its fruition, and I think that they would have had a lot more respect for the minister if she'd have done that instead of making personal phone calls to tell them to quit and desist and decess in the middle of this whole catastrophe that they were facing, and still face.

* (11:30)

The results of that are still going on today, and I know that the flooding in the Interlake is a great concern to everyone, and I don't think you got enough good days left this year either to dry up the conditions to allow these people to get on some of the land. And, even if they do, several crops are lost and much of the hay for the livestock industry is already in bad condition, enough that it will be spoiled for this year, anyway, and even for the little bit that may have grown in some of those areas.

So that is why we are urging the provincial government to consider convening the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food as soon as possible to examine the serious challenges facing Manitoba's farm families and to consider developing strategies to address these issues in order to ensure the continued success of the province's agriculture sector, which is extremely important. I don't have to—I hope I don't have to, at least, list all of the reasons why the—whether it's the hundreds of millions of dollars to the Manitoba economy, or the tens of thousands of jobs created by the agricultural industry and the processing industries, the warehousing and the trucking industries, and everything else in this province, from the railroad industry all the way through, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to list—it goes on and on in regards to the spinoff, the positive spinoffs from the agricultural industry in this province.

And I just want to say that I concur with the member from Lakeside, and I know that this motion was seconded by the member from Ste. Rose, both farmers themselves, as I have been, in my life previous to getting into the Legislature here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well. And I know that these gentlemen understand this—these issues, as I believe I do. And I've heard from these farmers personally, as my colleagues have, and I just can't believe today that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) is turning a blind eye on these issues, and not willing to help these individuals in their day of need.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I would like to begin my remarks by saying that I am the long-serving chair of the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Food, and I would like to correct the record when members opposite suggest that this committee has not sat since the spring of 2001. They are wrong. This committee sat as recently as March the 17th of this year. We sat for an extended period of time last year.

And I know that they qualify their remarks in their WHEREAS, where they say, to specifically address, et cetera, et cetera. But we know that when they go out into the public and they talk to their supporters, that qualification may not necessarily be there. They will be saying, well, the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Food hasn't stood since—or hasn't sat since the spring of 2001, period. In the resolution they may go on and clarify that remark, but we know that they can be somewhat disingenuous at times, and their propensity to put maybe a false impression in the minds of the public needs to be corrected.

So I just want to state definitively that this committee has sat this year, sat last year, sat in previous years. So, just to clarify that point and I—and I see the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) is nodding his head, so he is—he understands this concept.

In terms of public consultation, I would—I would also like to make the point that this government bases a lot of their decisions, all of their decisions, on public consultation. We view that as a very important part of the democratic process, and I just have to look to the number of consultative committees, many of them bi-partisan, I might add, that have gone out into the public and have sought information. And I have sat on a number of these committees. The Minister of Agriculture put together

a committee called the Creating Opportunities Committee a couple of years ago, which I served on. It was chaired by Susan Proven, had cattle producer Gaye Lenderbeck on it, and a Forage Seeds producer, Paul Gregory on it, as well. So we consulted across the province in this regard as to how we can add value to our product, and also that the general challenges that our agricultural producers face, as well.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I was also a member of the Biodiesel Task Force. This is an example of a government that is seeking to add value to primary product, which is the true solution to the problems in agriculture today. This idea that we're hewers of wood, the drawers of water and so forth as we've been in the past, this idea that this suffices and will continue to suffice into the future I think is a false premise, Mr. Speaker, and trying to diversify into biofuels to try and meet some of our own needs, to give farmers different opportunities is a good strategy. I also served on the beef task force at the beginning of the BSE crisis, and there's been some mention of infrastructure as well. And I would point to the Vision 2020 task force that went out to look at our highways infrastructure. And our conclusion as a result of that was that members opposite, having ignored the needs of infrastructure for an entire decade prior to us coming to office, left our highways in such a deplorable state, that roughly 70 to 80 percent of our highways were in the last five years of a 25-year life span. How irresponsible of them.

And I look to the drainage sector as well. I know we've mentioned this in times past when Filmon was the premier. Did they increase their drainage budget year after year like we have and substantial increases to it? No, they didn't. They reduced staff and they reduced the drainage budget by 70 percent from when they came to office to when they left office. So they do not have a leg to stand on whatsoever when it comes to investments in infrastructure.

I look to the Interlake, my riding, and the "crises" that we have faced over the years. I look back to 2003, May the 20th, the day that BSE hit us and the borders were closed. This government stepped up to the plate. We stepped up in terms of—*[interjection]* Oh, the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) laughs, but if it hadn't been for the \$100 million in loans that were made available at a time when the banks had closed their doors to people, if it hadn't been for the freight assistance, the feed

assistance program to not only buy the feed but to transport it hundreds of miles, they would have been—there would have been no cattle industry left in the northwest Interlake, I can say that. So we are not ashamed of our record in any way, shape or form in that regard. And we continue on.

I look to the BSE recovery loan and how we were shafted by the federal government. I know that the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the Province of Alberta and the federal government cooked up this program, guaranteed us access to slaughter capacity in Alberta and that was never delivered on. Forty-some million dollars that was supposed to come to this province never did as a result of their renegeing on that deal. But did we take our money off the table? No, we put it into other programs and delivered in that year as we have up until the present.

You know, I look to the heavy rainfall and the impact on our grains producers. And again, ad hoc programming, that's the Tory way of doing business. Farmers have to get their tractors, come to Winnipeg, circle the buildings to get their attention to get them to deliver. That's how things were done under the Tory regime.

And one of the first things that we did when we became the government here, was to put—the first province in the country, I might add, that put excess moisture insurance on the table so that producers have some predictability, have some stability. No going into the season that if they can't get seeded by the crop insurance deadline, that this program is there for him and this year it proved very, very helpful. Of course, it's never enough.

And I might add that we had a lot of ruts from attempted harvests last fall. We went to the federal government. We asked them for an AgriRecovery program to remediate the annual crop fields. They said no. We went back to them again. We asked for money through disaster financial assistance, if we couldn't do it through AgriRecovery let's do it through the FA. They say no again. And this government delivered. This government stepped up to the plate. We had \$670,000 on the table for DFA in the Interlake area. We boosted that number up to \$3 million to address this particular need. So this government, when the federal government ignores the needs of producers, has stepped up to the plate once again.

* (11:40)

But I would like to look to the root problems here. And this is something that members opposite never really dwell on, unfortunately, and it's the fact that, you know, this country is faced with the industrialization of the production of food, the corporatization of agriculture. This is the real challenge that we face, and we only have to look to the cattle sector where now, in essence, we have two major processors: we have Cargill; we have XL Foods. Those are the two. They do 95 if not more percent of the slaughter. They set the prices. They have captive supply. They own a lot of the fatted cattle out there and whenever prices start to get a little too high for the producers, what do they do? They draw on their own supply to drive the prices down. Now they're trying to buy the auction marts across the country. If that isn't integration, vertically and horizontally across the board, that is the reason that farmers are in trouble today, because of the corporatization of the industry.

Why are members opposite so adamant, so determined to kill entities such as the Canadian Wheat Board? That is the bottom line. That is a very important question here, not to mention the Canadian Grains Commission. The federal government is making drastic cuts to this entity, a lot of jobs here in Canada, in Manitoba, here in Winnipeg, an entity that serves grain producers well in this country. Why are they so intent on gutting these very valuable tools for farmers, for producers that just play into the hands of the transnational corporations? That's the true essence of the problem, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for the opportunity for putting my thoughts on the record.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure I rise to speak to the resolution put forward by the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

I listened closely to the comments of our member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), and one of the things that I was drawn to that he said was, we delivered. I would encourage him to stop delivering before he gives us total destruction of the livestock industry in this province. We're moving that way with their delivery.

You know, this resolution that was brought forward by the member from Lakeside deals with calling the Standing Committee on Agriculture, and I listened to that too, and I heard the member for Interlake talk about the standing committee sitting in

committee hearings dealing with legislation, and neither him or the Minister for Ag are getting the concept of public consultation here. We're not—we're talking about the committee sitting and talking and taking presentations, not dealing with bills, but dealing with how to improve the industry.

The economy—the livestock economy in this province, the farm economy in this province—has taken a 38 percent drop in ag returns in the last year. The big driver in Manitoba, of course, that dropped is the livestock industry, which this government has worked very hard to destroy. They put in the hog moratorium bill, got rid of—downsized the industry and that destroyed the large producers, and they put in enough regulations that the small producers in hogs cannot meet the regulations, and so they leave the industry.

We've seen Hytek, because of the hog moratorium bill, Bill 17, we've seen Hytek move their production barns to Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan said welcome, open arms; we're glad to have you here. And I would suggest that in this time of economic problems that we haven't yet seen the full effect of what's happening in the livestock industry out there. We continue to downsize. I don't know how far the minister wants to see the hog and cattle industry drop, but they're dropping, and that has a tremendous economic effect in this province. The hog industry alone two years ago employed 15,000 people, either directly or indirectly, and that number is dropping dramatically. They curtailed the expansion and, as I said, the big producers a moratorium, small producers regulation—get them out of the industry.

And we're seeing an exodus in the cattle industry of the older farmers, a number of things there, but they're leaving the industry in disgust. There is COOL regulations that are some of the problem, but there's also the lack of faith in this provincial government to do any good to that industry at all.

We keep hearing about the effective strategies that are supposedly there; AgriRecovery, which the minister seems very reluctant to put into place at any time, and it usually takes—AgriRecovery, if you read the terms of reference on it, it's supposed to kick in immediately when there's a disaster or a crisis in a certain segment of the industry. And we're taking six months, eight months, to even look at it or—

An Honourable Member: Two years.

Mr. Briese: —two years, even, and that's not AgriRecovery. That's not dealing with a disaster situation or a crisis situation.

AgriStability is useless when your margins are dropping continuously. We've had the cattle industry in this province, since 2003, continue to lose their margins and most of the margins are non-existent now. So the program can't even kick into place for them; there's nothing there. The program was designed with a five-year rolling average of which the highest year and the lowest year dropped out, the other three years become an average and that determines your margin. It works very well if you have one bad year in five years. It does not work very well if you have five bad years in a row. At the end of five years, you have no margin left.

I questioned the minister a couple of years ago in Estimates about the effect that the drop in the cattle industry would have in this province environmentally, and her response was that she hoped my numbers were wrong. But, what I suggested in Estimates was that, over the next two years, and this was two years ago, roughly a million acres would probably be taken out of permanent cover in this province and returned to crop land or tore up. By permanent cover, I mean pasture and hay.

With the declining cattle herd, I think my numbers are probably very realistic, and I don't think her hope that it wouldn't happen has materialized. We—even on my own farm, I've cut down on my cattle herd, and I've tore up about 350 acres. That's just one small farmer. You start multiplying that across the province, that's fairly—some large numbers, substantial.

I talked to Karin Wittenberg, Professor Karin Wittenberg, about carbon sinks and the impact of permanent cover on the environment, and I asked her what a fair number was to use as a level of carbon sink in an acre of permanent cover, and what she told was that it varies. There's all sorts of variations to it. She said land that is being hayed, the hay is being cut off it or being pastured. With the regrowth of the vegetation creates more carbon sink. Land that sits without any use on it is less of a carbon sink, according to her.

And I said, well, what's a fair number to use? I said, if I said a half a tonne an acre, would I be way out to lunch? And she said, no, you wouldn't. So, if there's a million acres being torn up, you just lost an awful lot of tonnes of carbon sink out there.

Increasing commitments, and I've heard this government talk about the Ag budget going up and increasing. Increasing commitments don't necessarily mean increasing spending. There's a number of ways you can raise the budget in a department. One of the ways they raised the budget in that department was transferring some budget from another department by transferring a section of that department, and that was Rural Initiatives. It used to be funded in a different department, so they moved it over and then they said they had to increase budget.

* (11:50)

Another way is the school tax rebate on farmland. It should be an education expense; they put that in as an agricultural expense, and I think it should stay where it actually was.

I've talked many times about what probably most needs to be done in this province, forms of legislation, is some form of a right-to-farm legislation. I still stand by that. I think that would solve a lot of the problems that are out there.

I hear that the member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) talked about drainage licences and how they're working on the backlog. Well, the last I heard, there were 1,400 applications in the Interlake alone, and a few years ago—and he was referring to back when the Conservatives were in power, but even since that time, there were only 800 applications in the whole province, and now there's 1,400 in the, in the Interlake.

I still question the commitment of this government to the livestock problems that we're seeing right now. Six hundred hog producers in Morris and not a single NDP MLA; 400 cattle producers last fall in Eddystone, not a single NDP MLA.

I think it's very important. There's a lot of expertise on this side of the House in agriculture, and I think it's very important that the minister consider convening the committee, Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food, and taking advantage. We're offering our help. Take advantage of the expertise that's over here, and use it to assist the industry at this time. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I'm pleased to be able to put a few comments on the record today, and most of us—as a rural MLA, I'm certainly aware of the importance of agriculture to our province, and I believe everyone in this Chamber also understands

that and believes that. So I'll try not to take any shots at anyone in the Chamber with regard to their positions, because I truly believe everyone here knows the importance of it, of agriculture to us.

And agriculture is one of Manitoba's most important industries. I believe there's approximately 62,000 jobs related to agriculture, to agribusiness in Manitoba, and just that alone—and the direct employment, about 30,000 people, is a very, very important sector to us.

And the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has touched on that. The member for the Interlake has been strong—has been a strong advocate for agriculture in this province, and I know others know the importance of agriculture.

Now, Manitoba's industry is really a high export-oriented industry and exports about \$4.7 billion in 2008, and is one of the highest single sources of foreign exchange earnings for our province. Manitoba's agrifood shipments to other provinces and countries include—and this is numbers that I wasn't, I certainly didn't know before, but having to do some research, I was really surprised to know how large they are—is that Manitoba's agrifood shipments to other provinces and countries include 80 percent of our wheat, about half of our barley, two thirds of our oats, most of the Canola seed and oil and meal, and over 89 percent of cattle and calves, and over 94 percent of pigs and pork. So agriculture also supports growth in employment in rural economy in providing the market services for the needed industry.

Now, with regard to the pork industry, members opposite have touched on this. And I know, having looked through the *Winnipeg Free Press* and found an article about the Manitoba hog producers are increasingly frustrated by the delays in getting details on an aid package coming from Ottawa. The minister responsible for the Treasury Board, the Conservative government in Ottawa and the members opposite's federal cousins are, for whatever reason it is, there's a delay, delay, delay.

Now, the member for Provencher understands how important the hog industry is in the southeast, and I'm really shocked, actually, to hear that the aid package that was including about \$500 million to \$1 billion in government-backed credit for financial institutions to give loans to producers with a solid business plan, and it also had about a \$75-million transitional fund for farmers who agree to get out of the hog business. Now, we hear from members

opposite often, you know, how government wants people to get out of the hog business, and here the federal government has a \$75-million transition fund for people who want to get out of there and get out of the business.

You know, Mr. Speaker, so we hear members talking on both sides of it, and, but there were no details released on who would qualify, how to apply, how much each producer would get, and so there's a great deal of frustration from the hog industry, because the challenges that they face are not only the high Canadian dollar and the doubling of the cost of feed, and the new country-of-origin labelling, and all those requirements in the United States, and the stigma attached to H1N1 related to the hog business, the hog industry.

So they are really facing huge challenges alone, and what this does, it pokes the industry right in the eye when they put out a package, or some hope for people, and yet there's nothing there. And I know people have been in the hog industry, and their representatives have been approaching the federal government and saying, well, where are you? You know, we need to—they said, well, you know, it'll be soon, and, you know, I'm not sure what the definition is of soon in Ottawa, but I know producers that are from my constituency in the corner of the province that I represent. They mean—to them, soon means immediately, not five, six months down the road, Mr. Speaker, and I know that there's a huge frustration building within the industry, because when you put out hope like that for people, they want you to deliver. They don't want a statement made, and then they'll figure out the details later. We're working on the details—I mean that's what we hear from Ottawa as been advised to me, and it's really disturbing because the industry is really being hard hit, especially the pork industry nowadays, but also it applies to cattle.

And I know the member from Interlake touched on a number of important points related to this, to the industry, and when there was work being done on trying to find an opportunity in Manitoba to have animals processed right here, members opposite seemed to be fighting that tooth and nail, or at every turn where we're trying to make some progress with the cattle industry. And it was really regrettable because there was a great opportunity there, and that did not come to fruition as most people know.

The government of Manitoba has invested a great deal in agriculture in this province. We

recognize the importance of it, and our government has more than doubled the agriculture budget from the \$99 million budgeted when the former government was still in power, and it can't be re-emphasized—the importance of this, because our government, to almost invest \$226 million in this fiscal year, is a huge, huge investment for us, and the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), the MLA for Swan River, deserves a tremendous amount of credit for listening to the industry, stepping up in Cabinet and saying, we've got to put our money where our mouth is, and we have, Mr. Speaker, by putting \$226 million in this fiscal year towards agriculture, and the producers that I've talked to, and we're not perfect, we acknowledge that. There was a lot more to do, but the Minister of Agriculture from Swan River has done a tremendous job, trying to tackle, trying to tackle these very, very difficult times in the industry, and this is not easy.

So, instead of the opposition taking shots at our Minister of Agriculture almost every day, why don't you work with our minister? Talk to Minister Toews. Talk to the federal minister of agriculture, and get on the phone, and stop making glib promises throughout the Interlake, and running around making promises that have no substance to them, and building up hope for the industry, and then there's going to be a huge fall for them.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're just asking the members opposite to get on board with our Minister of Agriculture, and work and pull the—pull this hay wagon in the same direction and get some action out of Ottawa with regard to the hog industry in particular. So, taking shots at our Minister of Agriculture is not helping the situation whatsoever, and all we want to do is—we want to work with the opposition as well. We want to work with Ottawa to do the best we can for our industry overall, and I know that members opposite are making comments about the Wheat Board and so on—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter's again before the House—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member, the honourable minister will have two minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

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