

Second Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew, Hon.	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Point Douglas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 1, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam 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 and 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.

Please be seated.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a statement for the House. I must inform the House that Kevin Chief, the honourable member for Point Douglas, has resigned his seat in the House effective January 9th, 2017. I am therefore tabling his resignation and my letter to the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council advising of the vacancy created in the House membership.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs

Second Report

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the Second Report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- December 14, 2015 (5th Session—40th Legislature)

- January 23, 2017 (2nd Session—41st Legislature)

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015*
- *Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016*

Committee Membership

Committee membership for the December 14, 2015 meeting:

- Mrs. DRIEDGER
- Hon. Ms. IRVIN-ROSS
- Mr. JHA (Vice-Chairperson)
- Hon. Mr. KOSTYSHYN
- Hon. Ms. MARCELINO (Logan)
- Mr. MARTIN
- Mrs. MITCHELSON
- Hon. Mr. SARAN
- Mr. SWAN
- Mr. WIEBE (Chairperson)
- Mr. WISHART

Committee membership for the January 23, 2017 meeting:

- Hon. Mr. FIELDING
- Ms. FONTAINE
- Mrs. GUILLEMARD (Chairperson)
- Mr. KINEW
- Mr. LAGASSÉ
- Ms. LAMOUREUX
- Mr. MARTIN
- Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE
- Mr. SMITH
- Mr. WIEBE
- Mr. YAKIMOSKI

Your Committee elected Mr. LAGASSÉ as the Vice-Chairperson at the January 23, 2017 meeting

Official Speaking on Record at the December 14, 2015 meeting:

- Darlene MacDonald, Children's Advocate

Official Speaking on Record at the January 23, 2017 meeting:

- *Darlene MacDonald, Children's Advocate*

Report Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015*

Report Considered but not Passed

Your Committee considered the following report but did not pass it:

- *Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016*

Mrs. Guillemard: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Vital (Mrs. Mayer), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Second Report

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the Second Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its second report: Meetings—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- *December 7, 2016 (2nd Session, 41st Legislature)*

Matters under Consideration

- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015*
- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016*
- *Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2014*
 - *Section 2 – Mandatory Legislative Reviews*

- *Section 5 – Compliance with Oil and Gas Legislation*

- *Section 9 – Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Reporting*

- *Section 11 – Winnipeg Regional Health Authority – Administration of the Value-Added Policy*

- *Section 13 – Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions*

- *Section 22 – Taxation Division, Audit Branch*

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the December 7, 2016 meeting:

- *Mr. ALLUM*
- *Mr. BINDLE*
- *Mr. HELWER (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. JOHNSTON*
- *Ms. LAMOUREUX*
- *Mr. MALOWAY*
- *Mrs. MAYER*
- *Mr. MICHALESKI*
- *Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE*
- *Mr. WIEBE (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. YAKIMOSKI*

Substitutions received prior to committee proceedings on December 7, 2016:

- *Mr. ALLUM for Mr. MARCELINO*
- *Ms. LAMOUREUX for Ms. KLASSEN*

Officials Speaking on Record at the December 7, 2016 meeting:

- *Mr. Norm Ricard, Auditor General of Manitoba*

Agreements:

Your Committee agreed to conclude consideration of the following Sections of the Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2014:

- *Section 2 – Mandatory Legislative Reviews*
- *Section 5 – Compliance with Oil and Gas Legislation*
- *Section 9 – Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Reporting*
- *Section 11 – Winnipeg Regional Health Authority – Administration of the Value-Added Policy*

- *Section 13 – Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions*
- *Section 22 – Taxation Division, Audit Branch*

Reports Considered and Adopted:

Your Committee has considered the following reports and has adopted the same as presented:

- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015*
- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016*

Reports Considered but not Passed:

Your Committee has considered the following report but did not pass it:

- *Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2014 (Section 2 – Mandatory Legislative Reviews, Section 5 – Compliance with Oil and Gas Legislation, Section 9 – Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Reporting, Section 11 – Winnipeg Regional Health Authority – Administration of the Value-Added Policy, Section 13 – Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions, Section 22 – Taxation Division, Audit Branch – concluded consideration of)*

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development

First Report

Mr. Dennis Smook (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the First Report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on SOCIAL AND

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- *December 14, 2015 (5th Session – 40th Legislature)*
- *December 2, 2016 (2nd Session – 41st Legislature)*

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015*
- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016*

Committee Membership

Committee membership for the December 14, 2015 meeting:

- *Mrs. DRIEDGER*
- *Hon. Ms. IRVIN-ROSS*
- *Mr. JHA (Chairperson)*
- *Hon. Mr. KOSTYSHYN*
- *Hon. Ms. MARCELINO (Logan)*
- *Mr. MARTIN*
- *Mrs. MITCHELSON*
- *Hon. Mr. SARAN*
- *Mr. SWAN*
- *Mr. WIEBE (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. WISHART*

Substitutions received during committee proceedings on December 14, 2015:

- *Mr. PEDERSEN for Mrs. DRIEDGER*

Committee membership for the December 2, 2016 meeting:

- *Mr. ALLUM*
- *Mr. CURRY*
- *Hon. Mr. FIELDING*
- *Ms. FONTAINE*
- *Ms. LAMOUREUX*
- *Mr. LINDSEY*
- *Mrs. MAYER*
- *Hon. Mr. MICKLEFIELD*

- *Mr. SMOOK (Chairperson)*
- *Hon. Ms. SQUIRES*
- *Hon. Mr. WISHART*

Your Committee elected Mrs. MAYER as the Vice-Chairperson at the December 2, 2016 meeting

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following reports as presented:

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015.*
- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016*

Mr. Smook: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Ivan Grimolfson

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Gimli): I rise in the House today to honour the late Mr. Ivan Grimolfson and the contributions he made to this province.

Ivan was raised on the family farm in Hecla, in Manitoba's Interlake. His grandparents were among the first Icelandic immigrants to settle on the island at the end of the 19th century. Ivan moved to Riverton as a young man, where he and his wife of 49 years, Kristine, lived and raised their family. Ivan was a fourth-generation commercial fisherman on Lake Winnipeg, and spent over 60 years working in some of the harshest conditions Manitoba has to offer. At six-foot-four, with thick grey hair, a long beard, piercing blue eyes and the hands of a giant, he was a man who exuded strength, stamina and rugged determination.

To meet Ivan was—you feel you were standing before the descendants of Vikings. Yet, it was his gentle demeanour, friendliness and unwavering commitment to family, friends and community for which he will most fondly be remembered. He was a long-time member of the Riverton Elks and spent

many hours fundraising and helping with special events.

He was on the board of the Gull Harbour authority, the Riverton Co-op, the Riverton Handi-Van, the seniors' resource and the Riverton friendship centre. Ivan Grimolfson strongly believed that Riverton, Manitoba, was a great place to live. He did his part to ensure that the future would be bright for generations to come.

Heiðruð sé minning hans. [*Honoured is his memory*].

Honoured is his memory. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Gimli.

Mr. Wharton: Madam Speaker, I ask leave to have the family members entered into Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to have the names of the family members entered into Hansard? [*Agreed*]

Kristine Grimolfson; Shara Selkirk; Darren Selkirk; Jenna Selkirk; Jane Selkirk; Chris Grimolfson; Terri Demman; Derek Grimolfson; Cindy Grimolfson; Kendra Grimolfson; Marilyn Baldwinson; Dennis Baldwinson; Michelle Baldwinson; Glenda Melsted; Cara Enns; Lucielle Gislason; Mylinda Gislason; Geraldine Selkirk; Keith Selkirk; Thorarinn Grimolfson; Aidan Grimolfson; Grimolfur Grimolfson

Festival du Voyageur

Mr. Greg Selinger (St. Boniface): Madame la Présidente, au cours de ses 48 ans, le Festival du Voyageur est devenu un point culminant des hivers manitobains. Ce festival célèbre non seulement l'histoire et la culture franco-manitobaines et métisses, mais sert également comme occasion de souligner l'incroyable talent qui existe dans notre province. De nos artistes à nos artisans et artisanes, le Manitoba a tant à offrir.

Dans l'esprit du Festival du Voyageur et de la saison hivernale, le Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard a tenu sa propre Soirée fléchée pour célébrer le 10^e anniversaire de l'école. Plus de 300 personnes se sont réunies pour déguster des repas canadiens-français traditionnels, alors que d'être diverties par les élèves de l'école Léo-Rémillard. Le fait que le Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard fête son 10^e anniversaire souligne les progrès réalisés au

cours des années dans la lutte pour les droits linguistiques francophones. Les enseignants et enseignantes comme ceux et celles du Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard continuent à jouer un rôle indispensable dans la promotion de notre patrimoine francophone.

Au moment où nous célébrons ce 150^e anniversaire du Canada, les événements tels que la Soirée fléchée et le Festival du Voyageur contribuent à nous rappeler la vision de Louis Riel, et l'héritage du peuple métis et canadien-français et indigène dans la fondation du Manitoba.

J'aimerais souligner le travail et dévouement des organisateurs, bénévoles, partenaires, et personnel du Festival du Voyageur et de la Soirée fléchée. Grâce à vous, le Festival continue à maintenir sa réputation comme étant le plus grand festival d'hiver dans l'Ouest, et le plus grand party de cuisine au Canada.

Hého à une autre saison du Festival remplie de succès.

Translation

Madam Speaker, for the past 48 years, the Festival du Voyageur has been a high point of our Manitoba winters. Not only does it celebrate the Franco-Manitoban and Metis history and culture, but it also provides an opportunity to showcase the unbelievable talent in our province. From our artists to our artisans, Manitoba has so much to offer.

So in the spirit of the Festival du Voyageur and of the winter season, the Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard held its own Soirée fléchée to celebrate its 10th anniversary. More than 300 people gathered to enjoy traditional French-Canadian meals and were entertained by the school's students. The fact that the Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard is celebrating its 10th anniversary highlights the progress achieved through the years in the struggle for French-language rights. Teachers such as those at the Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard continue to play a key role in promoting our Francophone heritage.

As we celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary, events such as the Soirée fléchée and the Festival du Voyageur remind us of Louis Riel's vision and the legacy of the Metis, French-Canadian and Indigenous peoples in the foundation of Manitoba.

I'd like to acknowledge the work and commitment of the organizers, volunteers, partners and staff of the Festival du Voyageur and of the Soirée fléchée. Thanks to you, the Festival is maintaining its

reputation as the greatest winter festival in the West and the greatest kitchen party in Canada.

Hého to another successful Festival season.

Greendell Park Community Centre

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize Greendell Park Community Centre which is in the hub of community life in the heart of Riel.

Since Greendell opened in 1947, the centre continues to provide recreation services to youth, adults and seniors, and is a vibrant place of activity for families. Greendell is a non-profit organization that sees over 45,000 people access various activities, programs and services throughout the year. At the heart of the community centre is a dedicated group of volunteers and staff, many of whom have grown up in Riel and now build and cherish new memories where they watch their children enjoy the riches of the community.

Madam Speaker, one of the highlights of the year at Greendell is the annual Santa breakfast where I have had the pleasure of volunteering and meeting many great people. This event is generously supported by local businesses, where pancakes are served, dance-school students showcase their talent and families are entertained. Another highlight is the Winter Carnival that hosts one of the largest jam can curling tournaments in Winnipeg. The Winter Carnival is the main fundraising event of the year.

Madam Speaker, the community centre is also home to the Greendell Tiny Tots preschool program, and badminton, pickleball, square dancing and other fitness activities.

Recently, Greendell invested in substantial renovations of the gym, kitchen and multi-purpose room. This could only be possible by the commitment, vision and dedication of the board of directors, volunteers and staff, and in partnership with the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, as the MLA for Riel, I am proud to honour the contribution of Greendell Community Centre, which is an example of the great community spirit in Riel, and I thank them for being here today.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Madam Speaker, I know that many of you have loved ones with serious health issues, and I thank the many of you who have reached out to help us, encourage us and pray for us as our daughter, Jessica Stobbe, has been on dialysis for the last 14 months.

In June of 2010, Aynsley donated a kidney to Jessica. Unfortunately, Jessica's IgA Nephropathy eventually attacked the healthy kidney, so she found herself back on dialysis just before Christmas 2015. Aynsley was our first hero, our first living kidney donor; one of our sons, Andrew, would become the second. Just under two weeks ago, Andrew underwent laparoscopic surgery to extract one of his kidneys with Drs. Nayak and McGregor.

Dr. Koulack was the surgeon for Aynsley and Jessica in 2010 and he was again Jessica's transplant surgeon. Thank you to all the surgeons, operating room nurses and staff, and the nurses and staff on the wards. They work in a very challenging environment and we were able to see just a small part of their world. Jessica's husband, Nevin, and I agree that we've seen enough hospitals for a while. Jessica is recovering in their home on the farm in Boissevain with regular trips to see the nephrologists in the kidney clinic at HSC as they adjust her medication.

She is fortunate that she had living donors, but many do not. We don't have enough organ and tissue donors in Manitoba to meet the demand. Recently, a wealthy entrepreneur in Brazil buried his million-dollar car. Why waste such a car? He said: we bury something much more valuable many times every day, the organs and tissues of those that have passed away that could help save many lives.

Jessica has a new kidney thanks to Aynsley and Andrew. We would do anything to help our families. I encourage you and your friends to help others. Please, visit the website and sign up for life as a donor and tell your friends and loved ones. I have. We are working on many other ways to increase organ and tissue donors, but this is a start.

Thank you to Aynsley, Andrew, and our family.

Madam Speaker: Private members' statements, we have one more—no.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Jessica Stobbe, Andrew

Helwer and Aynsley Helwer, who are the daughter, son and wife of the honourable member for Brandon West.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Wages and Services Government Priorities

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, our caucus stands in solidarity with Manitoba workers whose wages may be frozen.

Members of our caucus will take a wage freeze, but the Premier believes he is entitled to a 20 per cent pay increase.

The Premier believes that he is entitled to two months' vacation every year. The Premier seems to believe that the job of premier is a part-time job. The Premier believes Manitobans deserve to have their wages cut and frozen. He believes that Manitobans deserve to have their services cut.

Why does the Premier believe that Manitobans do not deserve what he takes for himself?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Before I address the inaccuracies and falsehoods in the assertion of the member opposite, let me welcome everyone back to the Chamber, including our staff, pages and so on, members of the media, as well.

Let me also offer our genuine condolences to the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston) on the passing of his father, J. Frank Johnston, a 19-year veteran of this place, and also our sincere condolences and prayers and thoughts to the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) on the passing of his brother recently.

This should serve to remind us all of the importance of families in our lives. And, my family being very important to me, I, as all members of this Chamber do, wrestle with the challenges of work-life balance. But I would want the people of Manitoba to know that I am totally focused on doing the job that I was hired to do. And, when I am focused and with a team of people who are focused, I tend to get results. I'll be measured by those results.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: Since this Legislature has last met, we have seen how out of touch the Premier, is with Manitobans. The Premier takes a 20 per cent pay increase and then says he needs to spend two months a year in Costa Rica without using email.

Don't worry, Madam Speaker, he assures us he's working while he's away.

But Manitobans do not get this treatment. Instead, the Premier forces Manitobans to accept cuts to community clinics and personal-care homes. The Premier is threatening to cut Manitobans' paycheques by opening contracts and freezing the minimum wage. And he is forcing our schools to move—to do more with less.

When will the Premier realize that his focus should not be on himself, but the real priorities of Manitobans?

* (13:50)

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate a question from the member on priorities because we know that we inherited a province where, after a decade of decay, the services need to be repaired. And we are focused on repairing those services, Madam Speaker. After a decade of debt, doubling of our debt and two credit rating downgrades, we are focused on fixing the finances of our province, and we have taken steps to do just that because we understand that Manitobans' future depends upon better management, better leadership, a more compassionate approach and a more long-term approach in terms of thinking about the future, not ignoring it.

The member opposite and her colleagues took pride in calling themselves today's NDP, Madam Speaker, for good reason: because they want us all to forget about the past, and they themselves have forgotten about the future.

We have not, Madam Speaker. We'll build a stronger future. We're on a road to recovery in Manitoba right now.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: Over the past few months we have seen the priorities of the Premier. He takes trips to Costa Rica and makes inflammatory comments for which he will not apologize. He takes a 20 per cent pay increase and then threatens workers with pay cuts and unpaid days off.

He makes a billion-dollar cut to our health-care system and then refuses to actually reveal his plans by presenting a budget to the people of Manitoba. The Premier, Madam Speaker, seems to think that he has a part-time job. Manitobans deserve better. They deserve a government that will invest in important services rather than cuts.

Will the Premier reverse his course and stop these damaging cuts?

Mr. Pallister: I know that the member and her colleagues are still grieving, Madam Speaker, and that they refuse to accept the verdict rendered by the people of Manitoba quite justifiably this past spring. Manitobans deserve better; in that, she is right. In the rest of her assertion, she is wrong. Manitobans are getting better now.

Madam Speaker, what Manitobans had to deal with was a descent into mediocrity under the previous government: 10th in social services; first in poverty; 10th in health-care access and delivery; 10th in educational outcomes; first in tax hikes. Manitobans saw what the short-term thinking of the members opposite, what the willingness to divide and to be divided looked like.

They saw it, Madam Speaker; they are not seeing it now. What they see is the united and focused group determined to put us back on a road to recovery, and that is where we're going, with or without the members opposite.

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

Health-Care Services Funding Cut Concerns

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): This government is more focused on cutting our health-care system than making it stronger. The government pretends that the health-care system is the most important priority, but then, for partisan political reasons, makes deep cuts to health-care services that Manitobans rely on. Manitobans have made it clear that health care is their No. 1 priority. But rather than listening to the priorities of Manitobans, the Premier is out of touch. He is unreachable for two months in Costa Rica each year.

Will the Premier reverse these damaging cuts to our health-care system?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, actually, Madam Speaker, reversing the previous

government's failures in health care is a monumental challenge and we're prepared to accept the facing up to that challenge. That's exactly what we're going to do. We're doing that, of course, by working diligently on behalf of all Manitobans to encourage the federal government to partner, as was the original design in terms of support of health care.

Members opposite would be wise to take some steps, some measurable steps to demonstrate that they understand the importance of fighting for that partnership. We're fighting on behalf of Manitobans to see a sustainable health-care system. Members opposite shouldn't sit quietly by and do nothing while we try to repair the damages they created to our health system, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: The Premier has decided to keep Manitobans in the dark. Rather than presenting a budget so that all Manitobans can see what is in store, he has refused to make it public. He has refused to make public the reviews of government in health-care system, which have cost millions of dollars. He refuses to tell Manitobans what cuts he has planned for our health-care sector.

What we do know now is not good: cuts to CancerCare, cuts to clinics across Manitoba and in the North, cuts to personal-care homes across the province.

Will the Premier stop hiding and actually tell Manitobans what other cuts he has planned for our health-care system?

Mr. Pallister: The restoration of quality health care in our province is a significant priority for this team of people, Madam Speaker, in part, at least, because of the significant deterioration that occurred under the NDP over 17 years.

The member speaks about transparency in respect of a study that the previous government never did, that it failed to do. It failed to even examine the frailties of its system.

Madam Speaker, we have, frankly, a system that we have to repair, because what has happened under the previous administration is that, with two credit ratings, we're now exporting a school and a hospital every year in just the additional transfers-out of money from Manitoba to happy moneylenders in Toronto and New York City, because of what the

members opposite did, which was think solely about one day as opposed to the reality of creating sustainable health care moving forward.

We're about sustaining health care moving forward. We're going to work in partnership with our union leaders and members to make sure that we have a system that delivers on the promise of better service at the front line, less red tape, less ambiguity and less overlap and duplication.

Madam Speaker, that progress is being made. It wasn't made for 17 years under the previous government.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: Manitobans rely on their health-care system. But the Premier is causing uncertainty by refusing to reveal his plans for cuts. And he is doing real damage to the health-care system by cancelling projects like CancerCare, community clinics in St. Boniface and St. Vital.

Those investments are the real priorities of Manitobans. But the Premier is out of touch with those priorities. He seems more concerned with vacations and pay raises for himself than making real investments in health care.

When will the Premier realize that he needs to put the needs of Manitobans before himself?

Mr. Pallister: Proud to do that, Madam Speaker; relish the responsibilities that were given to me and my colleagues by the people of Manitoba; ready to face up to the challenges. We're doing that. We're doing that today by setting an example of a proper tone at the top. We are demonstrating the courage of our convictions with our behaviour and with our decisions every day.

I want to congratulate, if I might, Madam Speaker, two members of the Chamber, on recent weddings: the member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) was just married, and also the member for Southdale (Mr. Smith). And I think we should congratulate both of them on that undertaking.

Madam Speaker, just as an example—just as an example—the three provinces to the west of us have a total number of bargaining—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —a total number of bargaining units of less than 20, fewer than 20. And so they spend, naturally, as a consequence, less money and time and

effort in respect of the bargaining process. It's more respectfully conducted, and relationships are enhanced by it.

However, in the Winnipeg RHA alone, we have over 160 different bargaining units today. Now, we're working with union leaders to find a way to make sure the system works better. We just don't need that old, antiquated system to continue any longer, because it steals services away from front-line workers and the people they provide services to. We're fighting for them, Madam Speaker.

Health-Care Services Funding Cut Concerns

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, a billion dollars in health-care cuts, cuts to capital projects like CancerCare, cuts to local clinics like in St. Vital and shuttering QuickCare clinics, like in the community of St. Boniface.

These are services that Manitobans count on, that they need. And the need for these projects is not going away.

Manitobans feel betrayed by a premier who promised to build health care in this province, not to cut it. He promised to protect our front-line services. Instead, he misled and he disappointed Manitobans.

Will this Premier (Mr. Pallister) stand in his place and apologize?

* (14:00)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): What Manitobans know, clearly, is that over the last 17 years the former government made promises, promises that they never planned to keep, promises that they never actually put any money aside for to fulfill, Madam Speaker.

Now, perhaps the members opposite want to redefine the definition of compassion. But compassion is not telling people that they're going to get a project that you never ever intended to do; that you never planned for; that you never put any money away and that you lied to them about, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

I would just caution members on the use of the word lie in the House. The other word that is taking a little bit of a chance, in terms of language that's acceptable, is the word falsehood. So I would just encourage all members—we're here for the first day,

and if we could just be a little bit more aware of those two words that are really not words that should be used in this House. They do tend to be inflammatory.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, ultimately these cuts hurt families, and yet this government has presented no evidence as to why these projects have to be cancelled. Instead of actually reviewing the projects and assessing the need, they just shut down the projects across the board. Communities were counting on these investments and the minister has yet to offer any real solutions for these communities.

Will the minister at least stand and acknowledge that these cuts are going to mean less services for families and less access for care for seniors?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, for 17 years the former government made promises, said that these projects were coming, said that money had been put aside, sometimes even made ground-breaking ceremonies four or five years ago, and still nothing happened.

They made promises. They made commitments. They raised false hopes for communities knowing that they would never come through.

We're being honest with communities. We're working with communities. We're looking to the future, not just for tomorrow, but five years, 10 years—making sure that the sustainable health-care system for the children today and their children, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, make no mistake, this minister had a choice. He had a choice either to invest in the health-care system, to build on our health-care services, or to cut that system. This minister chose to cut services for families and he needs to take responsibility for the damage that he's created. He's damaged programs that Manitobans count on—even to the crucial CancerCare program.

Will this minister just take responsibility and apologize to the people of Manitoba for the real damage that his cuts are causing?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, we—we're proud to invest in the health-care system. I'm glad to have announced the new MRI for Brandon, in no small part from the two wonderful MLAs from Brandon.

Proud that we're moving forward with capital in Dauphin—great MLA in Dauphin, Madam Speaker. And we're even moving forward with a good plan in Flin Flon—and I won't speak to the MLA for Flin Flon—but we're working in every part of Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

Northern Manitoba Health-Care Cuts

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Access to health care in the North is difficult. The previous government made important investments in health care in northern Manitoba. But the attitude of this government is different. It has cancelled a clinic for The Pas; it has cancelled a clinic for Thompson; it's put the future of northern health care in jeopardy and hurt families who need it, including mine.

Will this minister reverse these cuts and start making real investment in northern health care?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, and my friend opposite, she says that the former government—she's incorrect when she says the former government made investments. It made false promises. Madam Speaker, they made all sorts of false promises without actually have any plans or any means to be able to fulfill those promises.

I don't think that that served anyone well in the communities that may have been looking for projects that we're happy to continue to have discussions with, Madam Speaker. But we're going to do so on an honest basis knowing that the health-care system in the south, and in the north, and in Winnipeg, and in the east and the west of Manitoba has to be sustainable today and tomorrow.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lathlin: Families in The Pas and Thompson need improvements to primary health care plus greater access to specialists. And these new clinics would have gone a long way to meeting their needs.

Madam Speaker, we now learn that this government is forcing northern RHA to cut \$6 million from its budget. This will hit northern families hard.

Will this minister reverse these damaging cuts and actually invest in health care for northern Manitobans?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and Madam Speaker, I outlined earlier some of the investments we continue to make and will continue to make throughout Manitoba in health care, and many of them are in the North, and I reference those as well. But we also recognize that the sustainability of health care, not just for today, not just for those who need it today, but those who need it in five and 10 years from now, is important.

We also know that we need a partnership, a partnership with the federal government—a partnership that is slowly being eroded each and every year. And I would hope that the members opposite would stand up and speak with us as we look for a real partnership in Ottawa so that Manitobans can get the partnership they were promised when their last federal election happened, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lathlin: Not only is this government cutting community clinics for northerners, we have just learned that the government is forcing millions of dollars of cuts on the northern RHA: cuts to services like home care and mental health.

I would like to table this letter from the CEO.

Will this minister recognize that the cuts to health they are engaging will hurt northern seniors and families?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, the greatest harm that came to health care was over the last 17 years when reckless spending and overexpenditures resulted in increasing deficits each and every year, which resulted in the increasing debt of Manitoba each and every year.

That increasing debt was money that can't go to fund things that many people would like to see in the province of Manitoba. Now we have to correct that course, Madam Speaker, and ensure that health care is sustainable for the future.

If she's looking for reasons why it's so difficult, she can certainly look to Ottawa and the difficulty we have in getting a real partnership, but she doesn't have to look far from her to realize that much of the money that was squandered over the last number of years can't go to health care because of the former government, Madam Speaker.

Provincial Nominee Program New Application Fee

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has implemented regressive and unnecessary changes to Manitoba's successful Provincial Nominee Program, including a costly \$500 application fee.

Manitoba's PNP has long been praised by the business community for attracting skilled newcomers to our province who put down roots and grow our economy. PNP has some of the highest retention and employment rates in Canada.

Does the Premier really believe that his new PNP \$500 application fee will actually attract skilled workers to Manitoba?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): It's a pleasure to rise today to answer the member's question.

The PNP program in Manitoba continues to be one of the more successful programs when it comes to immigration across this country. We absolutely accept that. In fact, we're very proud to be part of that and part-proud to be part of a government that actually designed the program.

But we heard from people involved in the program that they found the long waiting lists very disrespectful and very disruptive of their lives. So we changed the program to make sure that it will improve, and we can improve it and we can get rid of the very long waiting lists that I'm surprised this member wants to defend.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Premier's Comments

Ms. Fontaine: Well, speaking of disrespectful, the last time we were in the House, the Premier used disrespectful language, accusing newcomers of relying on welfare and insinuating that they were a burden on Manitoba.

Provincial nominees have balked at this accusation, citing Manitoba's PNP 85 per cent employment rate and extremely low rates of social insistence. On a cultural level, nominees have told us that working is a point of pride for them and the few who can't work are supported by family and community.

* (14:10)

Can the Premier prove his accusations are, indeed, true, and where are he getting these so-called facts from?

Mr. Wishart: The member's actually misleading members of the House.

We certainly know that people that come under the Provincial Nominee Program do find jobs in our marketplace, and I—[interjection]—absolutely. And we do know that very often they are underemployed because they're not connected with jobs that are equivalent to their skill levels.

So what we're trying to do with the changes in the program that we are proposing, that we will make sure that they actually find the type of employment that is appropriate and they will start their business careers and their employment careers here in Manitoba at an appropriate level with the skills that they have. That is very respectful of those people.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Oh. I would just like to caution the House to be careful with some of the flippant remarks that sometimes get thrown across the way. It is not creating a very respectful environment and does tend to be inflammatory, and I would ask all members for their co-operation, please.

The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

New Application Fee

Ms. Fontaine: The Premier has a responsibility to position Manitoba as a welcoming and supportive province to both skilled workers, their families and newcomers as a whole, who will grow our province and economy. Instead, the Premier has made it exponentially harder for people to choose and gain access to Manitoba which has a direct, negative consequence to our economy.

Will the Premier immediately rescind the discriminatory \$500 application PNP fee and reverse the criteria changes so that Manitoba can continue to attract and keep skilled newcomers to our province?

Mr. Wishart: On this side of the House we're—I am very proud to be part of a government that supports newcomers of—in this province whether they come of the Provincial Nominee Program, whether they come here as refugees.

We have made many—[interjection]—we have met many changes Provincial Nominee Program to make it work better and to be much more respectful

of the applicants in that program like that, something the previous government, frankly, allowed to go on and on with the long waiting lists. And we are also working very hard with the—[interjection]—we are working very hard with the refugee programs to make sure that in Manitoba we are a welcoming province and respect refugees.

Mental Health Funding Request for Action Plan

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): As a gesture of leadership, our Liberal caucus will take the wage freeze.

A couple of months ago I joined northern leaders in a press conference to talk about Manitoba suicide crisis. This is a silent but deadly emergency. Manitoba has the second highest youth suicide in Canada. There is federal money on the table, but this government is stalling.

Premier, how many more suicides will this government allow on their watch before they sign the health-care accord?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): The member raises a significant point about the need to have full support from Ottawa and to have a real partnership as so many of these issues are across jurisdictions, and we understand that and we recognize that. We want to work with Ottawa. We want to be a partner with Ottawa. But it really requires two people, two parties to have a partnership, and right now we're hearing silence from the federal government. There isn't a willingness to have a discussion, the negotiation that was promised during the previous election.

I hope that the member, if she stands with us in solidarity on the wage freeze, will also stand with us in solidarity in calling on Ottawa to be a real partner to address these very serious concerns that she's raised, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Kewatinook, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Klassen: This government accuses the federal government of slashing funding, and yet that's exactly what they have done to services here in Manitoba.

Manitoba—Madam Speaker, this government promised Manitobans that they would develop a mental health and addictions strategy. We need that plan on the table today. But, once again, we see this

government stalling as we are told not to even expect a draft of this until the end of the year, nearly two years into this government's mandate.

When will this government take the mental health care crisis seriously, sign the health-care accord and come up with an action plan for Manitobans?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm glad that the member has raised the fact that we are developing a mental health and addictions strategy, and that that is already well under way in terms of seeking the individuals who will perform that review. And so I am pleased to see that that is happening. I'm sure that she will be pleased to see that that is proceeding as well.

But she does raise a good point about the fact that we need a true partnership, that there are serious things that are happening, and not just in the North, but certainly in the North as well, Madam Speaker. But to have that partnership requires federal government to come to the table and have a discussion. We've asked for that discussion to happen at the level of the premiers. I'm sure that she would join us in calling for that discussion to happen not any later than today.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Kewatinook, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Klassen: I would go to Ottawa today. Please provide me with the plan so that I know what I'm asking for.

Madam Speaker, The Premier (Mr. Pallister) talks about his support for mental and brain health, and yet, in an interview last Saturday, the Premier referred to mental health as a token category. Brain health needs full support. It is not a token category. All those who suffer from brain health issues need active support, including the funding.

This funding for mental health is on the table. Will the Premier include this funding and a plan of action in his upcoming budget?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, I would hate to not have the member here in the Chamber for the days ahead if she was off in Ottawa, but I'm happy to provide her with that plan. The plan would be to call for the Prime Minister to have a discussion with the premiers to have a real partnership in health care.

Right now in Manitoba, there's 19 per cent—only 9 per cent of the funding comes from Ottawa to pay for the health-care needs of Manitobans, and that'll

continue to slide every year. There was a promise by the previous federal Liberal government to have that at 25 per cent, Madam Speaker.

So I offer the member that plan: to go to Ottawa, to speak to the Prime Minister, to seek 25 per cent. She would be joining us then. But I'd miss her here if she was gone to Ottawa tomorrow.

New West Partnership Benefits to Manitoba

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Madam Speaker, the New West Partnership is an important trade agreement that greatly benefits our province. This agreement reduces barriers to interprovincial trade, harmonizes regulations with our western neighbours and diversifies markets with support and job creation and economic growth.

These benefits of promoting interprovincial trade with our western neighbours will benefit many businesses in the constituency of Emerson and southern Manitoba: Conquest Homes, for instance, Pioneer Meat, Bridge Road construction, Grandeur Housing. Unfortunately, the previous NDP administration stood idle to trade opportunities for the province, holding back economic growth and putting Manitoba jobs at risk.

Could the minister of growth, entrepreneur and trade please inform the House of the New West Partnership Agreement and the benefits to Manitoba?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I appreciate the member from Emerson's question today.

Clearly, we believe the New West Partnership is a great deal for Manitobans, and we look forward to the enabling legislation being debated this afternoon. We recognize the concept of partnerships is foreign to the previous government. We firmly believe that positive partnerships will lead to prosperity for Manitobans and for Manitoba's new government. Clearly, goods and services will be traded more easily under the New West Partnership by reducing these trade barriers.

As we move to build the—rebuild the economy, the New West Partnership will allow new opportunities, new investment, grow the economy, create jobs here in Manitoba—this, Madam Speaker, on the way for us to grow Manitoba's economy and be Canada's most improved province.

* (14:20)

Crown Services Layoffs Cabinet Ministers' Salaries

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Today we learned, a mere 20 minutes before we came into the session for the first time after months and months, that the Premier (Mr. Pallister), along with every single Cabinet minister, will lock in the raise they gave themselves while at the same time planning to cut the jobs, services and programs that Manitobans rely on.

Now, the Minister of Crown Services went overboard in the last session, saying he would not interfere in the affairs of Crown Services, and yet we know that 900 jobs at Manitoba Hydro will be lost and 15 per cent of jobs will be lost at other Crown corporations.

Will he give back his 20 per cent raise for violating his mandate letter not to interfere with Crown corporations in Manitoba?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Well, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that question, because the previous NDP government, of which he was a member, took front-line dollars and put it into Manitoba Hydro vice-presidents. In fact, our government got a Manitoba Hydro that had 11 vice-presidents.

Under our government's leadership, that's been reduced by three. Our government is going to take money—our government's priority is to take money from vice-presidents and put it back into front-line services. We will repair the finances of this province.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order, please.

The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Allum: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, you have to wait to have asked the question for the Premier to complete his comedy show on the other side of the House. I would ask for a little bit more respect when we get up to ask questions on this side of the House.

Now, the question here—well, Madam Speaker, this is a Premier who gave himself a 20 per cent raise, took two months off while in Costa Rica, and at the same time is asking Manitobans to buckle down, lose their jobs and not have the services and programs that they rely on.

So I'm asking him now—I'm asking the Premier (Mr. Pallister): Will you take a 20 per cent cut in your salary for not doing the job and violating the mandate letter he sent out to the Crown Services Minister and every other?

Madam Speaker: Just a reminder to members of the House that questions are to be directed through the Chair and not directly to members of the government whom the—who the member is trying to ask a question of. So, rather than referring to somebody as you, could the members in opposition please remember to direct your questions in a third-party manner through the Chair. Please.

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, under our hard-working and diligent Premier, we have now reduced the vice-presidents at Manitoba Hydro by three.

And, in fact, Madam Speaker, we got an endorsement. And I would like to read that endorsement publicly—comes out of the Hansard—in which it says: Re—we reduced—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler: —the number of vice-presidents and put more of those resources back to the front lines.

Who gave us that endorsement? The former premier of Manitoba, Gary Doer.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Allum: This side of the House will take a wage freeze if that's what is required to stand in solidarity with workers across this province—with workers across this province—to stand in solidarity—*[interjection]*—Madam Speaker, I think I have the floor here—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —to stand in solidarity with workers across the province who are—whose jobs are under attack by a government that simply doesn't care about them, doesn't care about their families and doesn't care about their communities.

So I am asking the Premier today: Will he step aside from the 20 per cent increase in salary that he's given himself and do what's right for Manitobans and make the same sacrifices as every other Manitoban that he's asking to do?

Mr. Schuler: Well, and again, Madam Speaker, our government has reduced 11 vice-presidents at Manitoba Hydro by three. We are taking dollars from

the top and putting them back down to where the services are most needed, and that's at the front line.

But we have another endorsement, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to read this endorsement: There were more vice-presidents than virtually any corporation in this city or this province. We have no apologies. By the way, saving millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, who gave us that endorsement? Former NDP Hydro minister Dave Chomiak.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Manitoba Hydro Vice-President Layoffs

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, the government's plan to cut 900 jobs from Manitoba Hydro doesn't make sense. Cutting 900 good-paying jobs will hurt 900 families.

Will the minister for Crown Services please explain why he interfered in the removal of—what, eight vice-presidents from Manitoba Hydro? Was it—did he direct that?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Well, Madam Speaker, our government inherited a situation where we had so much bureaucracy at the top that we decided to indicate to our Crowns that we wanted to see a reduction at that high level, particularly in Manitoba Hydro where there were 11 vice-presidents; we've already reduced that by three.

We are going to take money from the vice-president positions and put it back where it belongs: into front-line services. That's what Manitobans elected this government to do: to fix the finances of this province, to fix the finances for the Crown corporations, and that's exactly what this government's going to do.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Bell's Purchase of MTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of the petition is as follows:

Manitoba telephone system is currently a fourth cellular carrier used by Manitobans, along with the big national three carriers: Telus, Rogers and Bell.

In Toronto, with only the big three national companies controlling the market, the average five-gigabyte unlimited monthly cellular package is \$117 as compared to Winnipeg, where MTS charges \$66 for the same package.

Losing MTS will mean less competition and will result in higher costs to all cellphone packages in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government do all that is possible to prevent the Bell takeover of MTS and preserve a more competitive cellphone market so that cellular bills for Manitobans do not increase unnecessarily.

And this petition is signed by many fine Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I move—on a MUPI—seconded by the member for Kewatinook (Ms. Klassen), that under rule 31 the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the lack of attention being paid by the Manitoba government to mental and brain health, and to home care, and the urgent need for the Province to act to ensure the federal funding of \$40 million toward these issues is not lost due to this government's inaction.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for River Heights, I should remind all members that under rule 33(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of 'urgic' public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

* (14:30)

As stated in Beuchesne's citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate

will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, the government has been very slow to present a plan to address mental and brain health in Manitoba and to address home-care needs. And, indeed, in contrast to other provinces, this government has failed to reach an accord with the federal government so that money for mental and brain health and for home care can flow to Manitoba.

Indeed, this is of urgent importance because we expect an imminent federal budget and we want to make sure that that money is present in the federal budget for Manitoba.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, on this past Saturday, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) referred, on CBC's The House, to mental and brain health and to home care as token categories. Manitoba Liberals object to the categorization of brain and mental health and home care as token categories. It speaks to a dismissal of these areas as less important and less deserving of attention to other areas. And it is, in part, for this reason that it is urgent we have a debate today.

Let me summarize some of the events surrounding brain and mental health. In the provincial election of April 2016, the Conservatives, who are now the government, promised to develop a comprehensive mental health and addiction strategy. The Conservatives had 17 years in opposition to put together a plan for mental and brain health in our province, but failed miserably in this effort. Finally, after almost a full year in office, the Conservative government has tendered a contract to have an independent person or company develop such a strategy for them when they failed to do it themselves. The deliverable now is a draft of a strategy which is not due until December 31st, 2017, which will be almost half the government's four-year mandate. If the government takes half its mandate to get to step 1, many Manitobans are very concerned about this delay and about the lack of priority on brain and mental health care given by the government.

This lack of prioritizing brain and mental health as important issues has been further reinforced by the Premier's dismissal on Saturday of brain and mental health as a token category. In home care, Liberals hear from many, daily, about this issue in Manitoba's home-care delivery. For example, one major concern is the lack of adequate home care in many rural areas

and in many First Nation and Metis communities. Home care should've been a priority for this government, but it has not been.

In contrast to the Conservative government of Manitoba, the federal Liberal government has put a priority on ensuring mental and brain health and home care are addressed. The federal government has signed agreements with Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Nunavut, Yukon, Northwest Territories, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador and, most recently, British Columbia.

We are due to have a federal budget and a provincial budget soon, and it's imperative that decisions be made about the support and a plan for mental and brain health and home care, and that is why this is such a critical and urgent need.

The Conference Board report of last year says that depression and anxiety add \$50-billion costs and loss of GDP to the Canadian economy. This, for Manitoba, is more than a \$1-billion cost to the Manitoba economy. By not addressing these concerns immediately, we will have costs added to our economy and costs to our health-care system, which we can no longer afford to delay. This is another reason why this is an urgent matter and needs to be debated today.

Surely, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) should never be dismissing mental and brain health as token when it is so important to the health of Manitobans, when addressing this properly can prevent problems and reduce health-care costs and addressing this issue well can result in such a big gain for our economy.

Madam Speaker, the issues in mental and brain health are urgent and pressing. They include addictions, such as with fentanyl and the fentanyl addiction crisis. They include suicides. They include depression and anxiety. They include learning and behavioural disorders, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders and many more.

Mental and brain health conditions, indeed, the optimization of brain health, is just as important as addressing physical health disorders and in optimizing physical health. And yet this government, in its first budget, significantly underspent on brain and mental health, compared to physical health. Brain and mental health are not token categories. It's time this Premier stopped dismissing them as token categories. We real-need a real plan for mental and

brain health now, not at the end of this year or half way through the Premier's mandate.

Why was the Premier not ready, after his party was in opposition for 17 years to deliver a plan immediately for brain and mental health, instead of waiting for half way through his mandate?

Madam Speaker, we have a very urgent matter that needs to be debated today: the lack of support from this government for brain and mental health. The issue is urgent and vital because when it is addressed it will improve the brain and mental health of Manitobans; it will save overall health-care dollars by preventing mental and physical sickness; and it will improve our economy through increased productivity.

Madam Speaker, we need this today—debate today because the decisions on budgets at the federal and provincial levels are coming very, very quickly, and that's why we are calling for this debate today. I hope that we're all—be all-party support for our matter of urgent public importance to be debated today.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all members to recognize a guest that we have here. With us today is Gerry McAlpine, the former MLA for Sturgeon Creek, who is sitting in the loge to my right, and we'd like to welcome him here today.

* * *

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): It's a privilege to make some remarks in response to this alleged matter of urgent public importance.

We do not believe that this is a matter of urgent public importance for a variety of reasons. You know, our government is focused on ensuring front-line health-care services. We want to make sure that they're sustainable today and secure for tomorrow.

After the NDP decade of debt, decay, decline, Manitobans saw our debt double in a few short years. Tax hikes for families, all the while our front-line results in health care fell not to the middle of the pack, not to towards the bottom, but, sadly, 10th out of 10.

So now we're confronted with a Liberal federal government that's turning away from its responsibility to partner with Manitoba families to sustain and secure front-line health services. So the federal government partnership, already at historic lows regarding its shared costs, continues to decline. Our Premier (Mr. Pallister) has made repeated requests for real dialogue with the federal government on the need for partnership, so we have had opportunity to speak about these matters and we will continue to do so.

On today's notice paper, however, I'd like to draw attention that there is a government resolution that speaks to this very matter. And I'd also like to draw attention to rule 38(5)(d), and I'll read it for all of us: The motion shall not anticipate a matter that is—that has previously been appointed for consideration by the House.

I would certainly argue that this is such a matter—we have that in black and white on today's Order Paper—or with reference to which a notice of motion has previously been given and not withdrawn. So we don't feel that this is a matter of urgent public importance. We look forward to a robust debate tomorrow on some of these very issues, and we certainly want to acknowledge the federal government is falling terribly short and does need to step up.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): In relation to the MUPI call by the— or requested by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), you instructed us before that we were to discuss the urgency of debate, not to be making political speeches on the subject matter of the resolution. And there is a—as the Government House Leader (Mr. Micklefield) just pointed out—there is a government resolution on this very topic, on health care, on the notice paper for tomorrow, and I believe I just heard the Government House Leader indicate that he was preparing to call that resolution tomorrow afternoon about this time.

So—and, certainly, that resolution is certainly more expansive and all-encompassing than the member's resolution, and it better deals with the health-care issue than just this particular resolution does. The member and all the members here will have all the time they need to debate this resolution tomorrow afternoon.

* (14:40)

Madam Speaker: There are—order, please. Order, please.

There are two conditions to be satisfied for this matter to proceed. The first condition has been met, in that I did receive the proper notice from the honourable member of this motion. The second condition is that debate on the matter is urgent and that there is no other reasonable opportunity to raise the matter.

I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable member for River Heights should be debated today. I would note that the notice required by rule 36(1) was provided. Under our rules and practices the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I do not doubt that this matter is one that is of serious concern to all members of this House, as all forms of health care are a key concern of Manitobans and of this Legislature. However, I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward and I was not persuaded that the ordinary business of the House should be set aside to deal with this issue today. I would note that there are other avenues for members to raise this issue, including questions in question period and raising the item under member statements and also grievances.

Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I rule the motion out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I'd like to call Bill 7, The New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act, for debate and second reading.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that we will consider second reading of Bill 7 this afternoon, The New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act (Various Acts Amended). So we will go to Bill 7, The New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 7—The New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act (Various Acts Amended)

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 7, The New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, it's indeed a pleasure to kick off this portion of the session with a very important piece of legislation pertaining to our New West Partnership Agreement. Obviously, this particular legislation and this particular endeavour has been a lengthy discussion, not only certainly in the Chamber, but certainly discussions amongst other provinces as well. And certainly Manitoba, I will say, from the—at the forefront of our discussions, is a trading province. We certainly rely on trade for prosperity here in Manitoba. And trade is fundamental to our prosperity in Manitoba and we, as a government, view that we should be taking every endeavour that we can to promote trade, to allow trade to happen, whether it be to our neighbours to the west or whether it be our neighbours to the north and the east.

We certainly believe trade is important and certainly the business community will tell you that, and we are listening to them as well, and certainly when good things happen in the business community, good things will happen for Manitobans. We believe this is a—one of the key pillars of our foundation, in terms of growing the economy here in Manitoba and we think it is the right thing to do.

Clearly, our neighbours to the west, who have been involved in the partnership agreement for many years, believe this is a strategic opportunity for them, and they certainly embraced us coming into their partnership wholeheartedly. So we are very excited to bring forward the enabling legislation to allow this legislation to move forward and, in fact, to confirm our intent to enter into the New West Partnership as of January 1st.

In terms of the explanatory note, this partnership was a trade agreement between British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. This bill amends three acts so that Manitoba can join the agreement as

well as participate in other future domestic trade agreements.

The Proceedings Against the Crown Act is amended to enable orders made against the government of Manitoba under a domestic trade agreement to be enforced as a court order. Further, The Consumer Protection Act and The Prearranged Funeral Services Act are amended to ensure that the provisions of those acts will not constitute barriers to trade.

And, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, that is the intent of the New West Partnership Trade Agreement is to eliminate as much as possible the barriers to doing trade with our neighbours to the west. We certainly have signalled that to our counterparts. We've also signalled that, certainly, to other jurisdictions across Canada. And having this agreement come into effect January 1st is very important. Obviously, there's some amendments that I want to get into a little more detail in terms of what the context is in this particular legislation.

This amendment is necessary to provide that the order for monetary penalty or cost order issued by a panel on the domestic trade agreements may be filed with the Court of Queen's Bench in Manitoba and would be enforceable as an order for the payment of money made by the court against the Crown. This means that if a private individual or a business can successfully prove to a panel that a measure has contravened a domestic trade agreement, they may be awarded a cost order to recover reasonable costs incurred to bring a complaint.

Madam Speaker, as a background, if a dispute resolution panel finds that a government measure contravenes this agreement, they will issue a report requiring changes to that measure within a certain period of time. If the government does not change the measures or changes it in a way that is still not compliant, a compliance panel could award a monetary penalty against that particular government. A similar provision exists under the agreement on internal trade which currently exists between provinces and territories and the federal government. In the unlikely event of a penalty being awarded against Manitoba, the level of the monetary penalties could be up to a maximum of \$5 million under the New West Partnership Trade Agreement.

Madam Speaker, this amendment also simplifies the act by amending it to allow for a general reference for any similar awards under domestic trade agreements. What this does, this will allow for

possible future domestic trade agreements to then be added by regulation. For instance, this would greatly assist in adding the—what is proposed as the Canadian free trade agreement which, for all intents and purposes, will probably replace the agreement on internal trade. And, certainly, the existing agreement has similar dispute resolution provisions.

Just as a note, Madam Speaker, I do want to say that Manitoba has taken a very ambitious stance in terms of our negotiations with the new Canadian free trade agreement. We have encouraged our neighbours and provinces and territories—and, certainly, the federal government—to come to the table and being as open as possible to the trading of goods and services around our nation. We look forward to having that particular agreement ratified by the premiers and the federal government in the very near future, and at that time we could bring that particular domestic trade agreement under this legislation as well.

In keeping with our commitment to honour our obligations under domestic trade agreements, I would note that there has never been any domestic trade dispute panel regarding a Manitoba measure. Madam Speaker, that—I think that speaks volumes for Manitobans—Manitoba's reputation, and we certainly don't see that changing. Clearly, if we have positive consultations, positive dialogues with our neighbours, we believe that we can get over any outstanding issues that may exist.

*(14:50)

We are certainly fully supportive of efforts to open internal trade, and I am pleased to say that we will continue doing our part to ensure compliance with our obligations. We expect all other parties to domestic trade agreements to do the same and ensuring a strong and enforceable dispute settlement system will help ensure that result. This, in effect, Madam Speaker, act as a—acts as a deterrent, acts as a stick, if you will, to keep provinces in line.

As part of joining the New West Partnership Trade Agreement, Manitoba also agreed to change two additional acts to remove residency requirements so that businesses are treated in the same fashion in all four provinces. These changes do not, however, diminish protections under the existing acts. And there's two acts that are going to be changed under this particular amendment.

First of all, The Prearranged Funeral Services Act: this act is being amended to remove a

requirement to maintain an establishment in Manitoba to be a funeral director. The remaining provisions of The Prearranged Funeral Services Act must continue to be followed, which will ensure that consumers who purchase pre-arranged funeral service plans in Manitoba continue to be protected. So, in essence, what it does, it takes out that residency requirement, that you actually have a residence here in Manitoba.

The second act that is amended under this proposal is The Consumer Protection Act. This act is being amended to replace the requirement that every collection agency maintain an account in Manitoba with an account in accordance with the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation Act.

Madam Speaker, this will ensure that the requirement to hold monies in a trust account is maintained, however, no longer requires that this account be held in Manitoba. So, under this provision, there still is certainty around the collection and maintaining of any monies, and also under the parameters of the Canadian deposit insurance act.

So we believe what it does, it reduces those residency issues. And, again, this will put us in line with our neighbours to the west are doing. In fact, both of these changes to these specific acts will now put us in line with what's transpiring in the western provinces.

Madam Speaker, with the introduction of this bill, Manitoba is demonstrating its further leadership on internal trade by joining the New West Partnership Trade Agreement. As we promised Manitobans during the campaign, we have moved quickly to join this agreement, further eliminating trade barriers in the West, enhancing the opportunities for Manitoba businesses and ensuring a strong message is sent that Manitoba is, in fact, open for business.

Madam Speaker, we're hearing already this agreement bearing fruit. I was just at a meeting of the Electrical Association of Manitoba just last week. After a presentation, I had a president of an—a company, an apparel company in Manitoba, come up to me and said, you know, the New West Partnership is—looks like it's starting to pay dividends already.

A conversation with Brian Gibson, president of MWG Apparel Corp., attended that meeting, and he said: We have been trying for years to get into the Saskatchewan Crown corporations market. We

haven't been successful to this point in time until just recently.

And, actually, they just received their first contract with Saskatchewan energy. And clearly they're optimistic—obviously, that will help create jobs and do business for his company here in Manitoba. And they're clearly optimistic they can do more in the future with other agencies to the west. So good things are happening out of this agreement already.

Another point of contact in this one is in regard in terms of understanding what regulations are being brought forward by other jurisdictions. Those in business that want to trade goods and services with our neighbours to the west recognize that we do have different regulations, and obviously different regulations can be a burden to trading goods and services. So the sooner we can get regulations compatible, it will be easier to do business across those borders.

So part of the provision of the New West Partnership actually asks individual provinces, when they are making changes to regulation, that they supply those particular changes to their neighbours. And we've seen this happen already in terms of some of the regulations that are being proposed to the west.

So the provinces will supply us regulation. That provides our departments with an opportunity to review their regulations, have a look at our regulations and see how they can be made more compatible. And by bringing these standards closer together it makes it easier for trade—goods and services to occur. So this is a very key important piece of this particular legislation.

I will say, Madam Speaker, that business owners, community leaders, chambers of commerce from across Manitoba have long been calling our province and our government to pursue new opportunities for growth and to reduce trade barriers. Certainly, joining the New West Partnership will bring these advantages. We're clearly looking forward to working with British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan to expand opportunities and certainly support stronger economies right across western Canada.

Clearly, there are advantages to the New West Partnership, and I just want to outline a few of these now, Madam Speaker.

Clearly, this agreement will provide stronger and more uniform coverage of procurement across our provinces. The New West Partnership Trade Agreement involves a comprehensive coverage of all government entities and coverage of more contracts, thereby opening up more opportunities for Manitobans.

I did mention the regulatory reconciliation process involves closer co-operation without large administrative overhead. Clearly, this is a step in the right direction to reduce red tape and eliminate unnecessary conversation, if you will. So we certainly look forward to that.

This—the partnership also calls on reconciliation of all standards and regulations, as I did mention. And, clearly, if we can eliminate those differences in standards.

Madam Speaker: *[inaudible]* I have to start over because I forgot to put my own mic on.

Just, if everybody could please take their conversations either to the loges or to the back of the room. I'm having trouble hearing the minister in his debate, and I'm sure it makes it a little difficult for the minister to get his points across, too, if there's all this noise flying.

So I'd appreciate everybody's support in this. Thank you.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I know it's been a long two months; everybody's trying to have a chance to get together and catch up on everybody else has been up to, so I certainly understand and appreciate some of the conversations here today and certainly looking forward to the next several months as we debate some important legislation.

In terms of the New West Partnership, we have unified corporate registration and, clearly, this is an advantage to the business community. You know, once they sign up in Manitoba they will automatically be signed up in other jurisdictions to the west, thereby eliminating duplication of that particular process. That particular process will come in—be involved at a later date and time. Obviously, we have some systems we have to work out between jurisdictions, but I think that is clearly a step in the right direction.

We also—under this agreement we'll have full and free registration reciprocity for temporary inter- and in provincial—intraprovincial vehicle

operations. Clearly, we understand the importance of trucking within not just Manitoba, but certainly across the provinces to the west where we do a lot of trade. So, clearly, this is a step in the right direction for the transportation industry and we look—looking forward to the comments from the industry on that.

And I did talk about the dispute settlement. Obviously, there's strong monetary penalties in place which I think will deter any province from undertaking anything that is non-compliant, and I think those provisions are fundamental to moving forward. And I think you'll also see as time goes forward, under the Canadian free trade agreements, those also consider stronger penalties in that regard as well. So, firmly, other provinces believe that is a step in the right direction as well.

There is an accessible bid protest mechanism allowing suppliers to challenge procurements undertaken by a public entity as well, another important provision under this particular partnership.

* (15:00)

And, also, I just should mention, too, there's stronger disciplines on business subsidies. The agreement prohibits governments from providing business subsidies that offer a competitive advantage over distorted investment decisions. Again, I think, another—a key provision.

Madam Speaker, I know there's others that want to get involved in debate on Bill 7. We think it's an important piece of our foundation moving forward in terms of growing the economy. We, clearly, as a government, feel we are on the road to recovery. We are interested in getting the foundation right, and this is a key part of that foundation.

We are looking forward to working with our partners, whether they be partners to the west, to the east or to the north, our partners in business, our partners in labour as we grow the economy and put people back to work in Manitoba. This is a positive step forward for Manitobans. It's something that Manitobans have asked us for, and this new government is delivering on what we said we'd do during the campaign.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition

critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Can the minister tell us: What guarantees will the government give Manitobans that human rights, environmental protections and public services won't be injured by the northwest–New West Partnership?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I thank the question from the new critic, and I certainly want to acknowledge the previous—my previous critic from Point Douglas who has moved on as the vice-president over at the Business Council of Manitoba. So I certainly wanted to wish him success as he goes down another path on a new venture, so I appreciate the work with him over the past several months and wish him all the best in that regard.

Clearly, when we talk about environmental regulations and whatnot, those sort of things still fall under the jurisdiction of the individual province. Obviously, there's rules and regulations pertaining to the environment that still have to be adhered to within the respective provinces, so those issues will be dealt with by individual—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Allum: Can the minister identify what concrete commitments the government will make to pursue a national trade agreement?

Mr. Cullen: I do appreciate the question. It's a very good question. And sometimes the dynamics will be, what does the New West Partnership offer versus what a national agreement would offer?

The member probably recognizes that the premiers undertook a review of the existing Agreement on Internal Trade about two years ago, and there has been some—quite a bit of dialogue back and forth between provinces, territories and the federal government on what a new agreement would look like.

We believe we, as Manitoba, have taken the most ambitious view in terms of what the new true–trade agreement will look like.

Mr. Allum: The minister's welcome to continue his answer as we go forward here.

I do want to ask him, though, if we are pursuing a national free trade agreement—for lack of a better word—then doesn't it stand to reason that the New West Partnership would be rendered redundant if not obsolete in the future?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate that question and it's a very valid question.

If every province and every jurisdiction took the most ambitious trade agreement going forward, it could be possible the New West Partnership would be obsolete, as you say. However, not every other jurisdiction is as ambitious as what Manitoba is. Manitoba took the most ambitious in terms of free trade agreements; not every province has stepped up to the plate. There's going to be certain issues that, under the new Canadian Free Trade Agreement, are still going to need some further discussion, further agreements. So we're not to a point where they're a level playing field.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): Fourteen million was promised during the election campaign. Can the minister tell us if this was fulfilled?

Mr. Cullen: I have to seek clarification on that question.

Ms. Klassen: During the elections we heard that this agreement would benefit us—14—or expend—that the government would expend 14 million in producing this agreement. So I'm just wondering if that was—has been fulfilled?

Mr. Cullen: I'm still not sure I understand the question. Whether there was money spent in terms of getting this agreement together, a lot of this was obviously done by staff internally in terms of their discussions with our provinces to the west. Clearly, our other provinces who have been in this agreement for some time now have a pretty clear understanding of how the agreement works and the framework was in place. It was just a matter of how we, as a province, would fit in, in terms of what the existing agreement was and what some of those differences were.

So it was more of a matter of our staff, who are experts in this field, discussing with other provinces those particular differences. So, in terms of the cost, there is a minimal cost to the province.

Mr. Allum: I'm wondering, in light of our conversation and discussion just a few minutes ago around a national free trade agreement versus a balkanized agreement that the government is

entering into in the New West Partnership, wouldn't it make more sense for the government to commit itself to working on a national trade deal rather than this isolated, regional, balkanized deal that they're putting forward today?

Mr. Cullen: Actually, we've been working diligently on both fronts in this regard, and relative to the New West Partnership Agreement, I think it's about 62 pages in that agreement. So, obviously, there's a lot of things discussed within that agreement in the context of the four provinces. We look at the new Canadian Free Trade Agreement, it's over 300 pages, and the new Canadian Free Trade Agreement is not near what is in the New West Partnership.

If we were to a point where every jurisdiction in Canada was open and there was no barriers to trade, there was no differences in trade, yes, there would be an obsolete New West Partnership. Ultimately, we'd like to get to that point but that depends on what other jurisdictions will be in terms of their discussions on trade.

Mr. Allum: And so I just heard the minister say, Madam Speaker, that lots of energy has been put into the New West Partnership Trade Agreement. Additional significant efforts have been put into a national free trade agreement, and we're loosely calling it that because I don't know if that's the name of it or not.

And yet the government spent almost no time on the Port of Churchill. Wouldn't it be better to facilitate trade relationships for the government to focus on ensuring the sustainability of the Port of Churchill?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the member's comments. Certainly, there's a lot of moving parts in northern Manitoba that we're working on—working on those as well. And certainly we think, as a government, we can walk and chew gum at the same time. So we're obviously interested in creating a positive framework for trade because Manitoba is a trading province. We rely on trade, absolutely we do, and if we can come up with some kind of a business plan for the Port of Churchill, which we've been looking for for four years now, we would do that. In fact, we're still attempting to do that, in terms of not just the Port of Churchill but all of northern Manitoba, and how the Port of Churchill would fit in to economic development for northern Manitoba, indeed all of Manitoba.

Mr. Allum: That doesn't really answer the question because here we are in the House today, a government year into its mandate, and nothing of substance, nothing concrete, has happened with the Port of Churchill, which, by the way, went down under this government's watch.

* (15:10)

So I'm asking the minister, instead of getting us involved in regional, balkanized trade agreements, shouldn't he focus on the real trade that matters by focusing on the Port of Churchill, or on CentrePort and other trade-related activities that can only create jobs for Manitobans?

Mr. Cullen: Well, I understand the member's political slant on this, calling this a balkanized agreement. I mean, talk to people like Brian Gibson, who says I just got a contract from Saskatchewan because—he thinks because of the New West Partnership. So here we are creating jobs under the New West Partnership.

And I look at the Port of Churchill and the situation that the previous government left it in. I mean, here we are as a new government dealing with lawsuits that came about as a result of their action—or lack of action—relative to the Port of Churchill.

Mr. Allum: I remind the minister that when we left government the Port of Churchill was open, and while he's in government as the minister, the Port of Churchill is closed. And I know that he wants to be able to walk and chew gum; he might want—at the same time, he might want to set the bar just a little bit higher.

So I ask him: Has he consulted with rural municipalities and school divisions and other public bodies that may well be affected by this kind of trade agreement?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker—and the member could have a look at the entire agreement and—I think it's 62 pages in terms of the agreement. He, I think, will recognize there's certain thresholds that have to be met before, you know, provisions for tendering can—have to take place. So I think it's something that he can have a look at.

We haven't had any negative feedback from municipalities or school divisions in terms of the provisions in the New West Partnership.

Mr. Allum: Good piece of collaboration going on along our bench right here, right now, and appreciate that.

I wonder if the minister could tell us what kind of protections are built into this agreement for workers here in Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: Well, let me say, Madam Speaker, again, we believe this is key to helping us grow the economy. Manitoba believes on trading goods and services. We are a trading province. This framework will help us trade with our partners to the west. Clearly, we do a lot of business with our partners to the west.

This—by allowing business to happen, goods and services to trade back and forth—making—reducing the regulatory burden, we will create jobs. That's what it's about. That is worker protection at its finest.

Mr. Allum: I fail to understand how a 60-page–62-page trade agreement does nothing more than create more regulation, create more red tape in—quite opposite to what the minister is suggesting.

If you go on the New West Partnership website, you won't find any information about the agreement at all.

Will the minister commit today to publishing an annual report on the results of the new—north—New West Partnership?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the comments—question from the member opposite.

I guess, if he's really interested in creating red tape and bureaucracy, then we could put together another annual report.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Kewatinook.

An Honourable Member: Well that's unworthy—

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Kewatinook.

Ms. Klassen: That's fine. Thank you, I just wanted to clarify my questions.

Under the better plan, better Manitoba, the value-for-money review, it states that \$14 million will be saved from the New West Partnership, and that's what I would like clarified. Has that been realized?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the clarification on that question.

We just signed onto this agreement January 1st. Obviously, we've heard evidence of some positive

things happen in terms of Manitoba businesses being allowed to do business. They attribute that to the New West Partnership. I would suggest it's too early to reflect on the actual \$14 million, but we certainly look forward to hearing more success stories, you know, as this agreement unfolds. And there's a lot of work to do between jurisdictions, but I think it will be—we'll prove successful in the end.

Mr. Allum: I think it's my turn now, and my apologies to my colleague for getting up there.

It sounds like the \$14-million savings is one of those alternative facts we've heard so much about, since the minister's not able to verify it. But this is why we're asking him, Madam Speaker, if the minister would just commit today to publishing an annual report so Manitobans can see the results that he's bragging about.

Mr. Cullen: I certainly appreciate the opportunity to respond to that question. And we know previous governments had the ability to spend money. They did spend money, but they were never focused on outcomes or results. And I will tell the members opposite that this government is interested in strategic investment of money with a focus on results, and that is the mandate of our government.

Mr. Allum: Well, Madam Speaker, the minister says he's going to focus on results, and yet he's going to make sure that no one in Manitoba knows what those results are. So it's a very simple proposition, and I think that he could accept this and should stand in his place today and give Manitobans the assurance that a year from now he will publish a report on the New West Partnership that will outline the successes and the failures. Could he do that and make that assurance to us today?

Mr. Cullen: Clearly, we're focused on growing the economy here. We believe this is an important measure as we move to recover the economy and build the economy here in Manitoba. This is part of our vision of the road to recovery. And we think good things are happening. We're hearing good things are happening already, and I know we're only two 'mints' into this particular agreement.

So we—obviously looking—we're going to be monitoring this agreement, monitoring success of this agreement, and we're going to be speaking to Manitobans. We will be consulting with Manitobans, and we'll be looking forward to the feedback that Manitobans give us. And we just think this is a great agreement, the right step forward for Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has ended. The floor is open for further debate.

Debate

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Madam Speaker, I should say that I'm, of course, pleased to be back in the House with all members of the Legislature. I know that all of us have been busy during our time outside the Chamber, but it's good to get back in here and to debate the issues that are critical to the people of Manitoba.

I know you yourself, Madam Speaker, were quite busy during the time in the House. I attended a number of events that were organized by you to promote women's place in politics, which surely should be in my opinion not merely 50 per cent but more than 50 per cent, and so I give you great credit for your leadership on that particular file. It's a matter of utmost importance, and as a father of a couple of daughters who are quite interested in politics, I can say that your leadership makes a difference to them as well.

I also want to, of course, acknowledge our fantastic table officers who do extraordinary work on our behalf, both when we're in session and when we're out of session. I had the privilege of being elected twice, and I've gotten to know them all very well. And I appreciate them greatly and thank them for the services that they provide us each and every day, as well as the good comradeship and the friendship that they show us.

Today, of course, I'm obliged to talk about the New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act that the minister has brought forward, and he was quite right to acknowledge the absence of the former critic for jobs and the economy. I can't always remember what the minister's title is. It's growth, something and something. *[interjection]* Well, good. At least—I was just testing the House to see how well they knew what that stood for. I notice the minister didn't answer me right off the bat, so there you go.

But I do want to acknowledge my friend from Point Douglas, as we know, Kevin Chief, a good friend of all of ours and a leader in his own right in his community for his people and, I dare say, for Manitobans. I know we on this side of the House will miss him very much. I'm sure the minister won't miss him as much just because the member, Mr. Chief, had an excellent ability to communicate his ideas, to ask hard questions, but he always did it in a most

collaborative and collegial manner. And I suppose, Madam Speaker, it's fair to say we might miss that most of all about him.

* (15:20)

But I know that he's gone to take care of his very young family, and those of us with a family in politics know just how difficult it is when the kids are so young, as all that. Mine are growing up, so they don't cause me all that much grief anymore, but I know his family is very, very young. And so it makes sense for me, as a dad, and I know as many other of us in the House would want to put family first at all times. And, indeed, he's gone on to a good, new job, as well. We're certainly going to miss him, but we wish him well in his future endeavours.

I know that my friend from—the former member from Point Douglas was also skeptical about the New West Partnership. He, like all members of our caucus, believed that we needed to focus our attention on removing trade barriers regionally from this country, for promoting trade from north to south, from east to west to all parts of Canada because, in fact, Madam Speaker, we're all Canadians here. I know the member—former member from Point Douglas felt uncomfortable with joining in a regional, balkanized trade agreement that really doesn't promote the well-being of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, but, in fact, seems to have one benefit in mind, and that's to benefit the elite few who can afford to make bids and entertain potential contracts in other provinces. But for the vast majority of Manitobans who are focused on creating good jobs or having a good job, supporting their family, making sure they can pay their mortgage, making sure they can put bread on the table, making sure that they have sufficient funds in order to send their kids to college or university, ensure that their children have the opportunity for a job in the future, something like the New West Partnership Trade Agreement is obscure, in fact, lacks meaning, and we would suggest could potentially compromise those opportunities for Manitobans and particularly for young Manitobans in the future.

I asked the minister about whether he consulted with rural municipalities, with school divisions, with other public bodies who may find themselves wanting to promote their own areas, their own communities, their own neighbourhoods, their own towns and whatnot, and then find themselves compromised by this particular kind of agreement, hamstrung over this kind of agreement that will force

them into making deals they may not want to make in the best interests of their community because the government has quickly—and rather haphazardly—jumped into agreement which they really, really don't understand the implications of.

I said to the—asked the minister about providing an annual report because this has been something that, in my five years in the Chamber, has been something of—something quite disappointing to me. Because the member—the government, when they were in opposition this was—this partnership—this trade agreement was a big deal to them, and now that they're in government it's a huge deal to them. But, yet, if you go on the New West Partnership website, you learn absolutely nothing about what this deal has accomplished over—since it was signed in 2009, or really came into effect in the years immediately following that. You can look in vain for an annual report that tells us how much—how many jobs is being created or, conversely, how many jobs had been lost. There's no indication in any kind of report about the amount of economic activity that's taken place under this agreement or, conversely, how little economic activity has been undertaken as a result of this agreement.

There's no annual report to say who the winners have been. There's no annual report to say who has lost out in this. And so the—at its origins, and its very beginning, Madam Speaker, the agreement fails the fundamental test of transparency and accountability and openness, which this is the government that made a big deal about how they were going to be so open and transparent and accountable. And yet the only thing they've accomplished is for the minister to put his signature he—on an agreement he doesn't actually understand or the implications of it that he doesn't understand and, yet, at the same time, is not able to report on the activities of that agreement prior to putting his signature on it so that Manitobans are left to wonder, well, just what's the point of this? What does it accomplish? What has it accomplished?

It might be helpful to put some evidence on the table, to put some information on the table, to give us the kind of statistics and information and data that it can all help us to understand whether or not there's actually any kind of value to it.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And, in fact, what we've learned—what one learns as a citizen who, if I was a citizen just to go on the website and to check out what's happened, what I would find, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker—I welcome

you to the Chair, as well—what you would find is that in the—since 2009 when the agreement was signed and then thereafter, what you'll find is after seven, eight years of activity, three press releases.

Now, that suggests to me that there hasn't been a whole lot of activity under this agreement because it's in the nature of trading partnerships to talk and talk loudly about the accomplishments, about the good things that might have occurred to the various jurisdictions that are signatories to the agreement. But, in fact, you won't find it there, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. In fact, you won't find any information about that agreement at all. Sure, there's a slide about the perceived benefits but anybody with a—able to put a couple of sentences together can write that kind of thing. But on the substantive details of the agreement, on the things that has resulted—that have resulted from it are not transparent, are not open and are simply not available to the people of Manitoba.

So, in that first instance, in that most important sense of a government that pretends to be interested in openness and accountability and transparency, this agreement, and the government's decision to jump into it right away, fails a fundamental test of governing in the 21st century.

So we're going to continue to ask the minister to produce an annual report on the benefits to Manitobans, on what has resulted from the province's participation, so that Manitobans can actually judge for themselves what the results would be, rather than relying on answers from the minister that are simply not going to be forthcoming. As he himself indicated in the—at the end of the question and answer period, that he's going to engage in secret conversations, report secretly and otherwise keep most things about that agreement a great big secret from the people of Manitoba. And that—that's a terrible shame and not the kind of governing that we would expect from a government only a year into its mandate and 'alraily'—already failing the test of 'openness'—openness, transparency and accountability.

But then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you also have to reflect on why this agreement is so important to the government side and question their priorities when it comes to governing on behalf of all of the people of Manitoba.

In the 2011 election campaign, and I'll never forget this, the now-government identified five priorities, and you—one of them was signing the New West Partnership, but it didn't include a priority

around health care. It didn't include a priority around education. It didn't include a priority around child care. It certainly doesn't include any priorities about ensuring sustainable work for working families in this province. It didn't include any priorities around climate change or addressing that most incredibly important issue in our time. There was no priority around reconciliation, of responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, of promoting indigenous affairs in this province.

* (15:30)

In fact, all of those things, in 2011, and, again, I might add, in the last election campaign, were put to the side, ignored, not acknowledged, all in favour of an agreement, which no one actually knows what it's actually ever accomplished.

Now, this is a government that gets really excited about this agreement, notwithstanding the kind of Perry Como routine we got from the minister earlier when we were having a little trouble hearing what he was saying. That's from Second City TV, by the way. If it's not Seinfeld, it's SCTV, you know.

But it's quite interesting to me that the government, as the first order of business in a new session, or continuing on as first of order business as we return to session, puts this agreement front and centre, at the very time every other agreement of national importance, they've either been late to sign on to or not sign on to at all. None of us on this side of the House will forget the fiasco related to the Canadian pension plan national agreement several months ago when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), I think, went to Vancouver, found that every other government in Canada was interested in improving and enhancing the CPP; he didn't know what to do. He stepped out from the media part of the program, did a disappearing act, came back to Manitoba, had to ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister) what he should do, realizing they'd made a classic mistake in not being onside with the Canadian pension plan. Then the Finance Minister tried to act like a New Democrat and tried to provide additional suggestions. He got a letter from the—from, I think, maybe the Prime Minister. The Finance Minister, he waved around with the Finance Minister saying, yes, we'll look at some of these things in the future, but could you sign the document? And, finally, finally, finally, the Finance Minister signed on to enhancing and expanding the Canadian pension plan with every other government in Canada, and yet, really, made a number of errors along the way, including showing

that he was, at that point, anyway, not up to governing.

But then we have not only that example, we have the actually ridiculous spectacle, then, of the Premier (Mr. Pallister) heading to a all-premiers conference on climate change. And he goes there and he says, well, I—until I get a health accord, I'm not signing on to the climate change accord. Now, I don't think any of us on this side of the House think that the climate change accord is the be-all and end-all, but we know that it's part of the evolutionary progress toward ensuring some kind of climate sustainability and stability in our time; much more work needs to be done in that regard. But here it is that they've brought this first piece of business, the New West Partnership, to our attention; they haven't even been able to sign the national climate change accord. And that kind of disconnect suggests to me that it's a government, again, just like with the CPP, doesn't have its priorities in order, is not prepared to govern on behalf of all of the people of Manitoba in an inclusive way to make sure that everyone has opportunity, but, in fact, always works to put its own self-interests above those of ordinary Manitobans, and that it's a classic example with the CPP, which benefits all Manitobans. It's a classic example with the climate change accord, which benefits all Manitobans, and yet, here we have them trumpeting the New West Partnership, but not being able to be engaged in the critical issues of our time.

And so the Premier, then, engages in this game of chicken with the Prime Minister, and the Health Minister says, I'm not signing the climate change accord 'til I get some agreement on health care.

Well, how's that worked out for them? It hasn't worked out very well at all either because they're not signatories to that agreement either.

Now, the members from the Liberal—small Liberal caucus here think that, you know, Manitobans should get on board with whatever the Prime Minister wants to, even though it's a significant cut to health care. The—on the other hand, the Conservative government puts on a big show about wanting their fair share and, meantime, making cuts and important cuts to other levels of governments, to other school boards here in Manitoba, offloading their problems onto others while at the same time asking the federal government to step up.

And so you have this very strange combination of the government pushing us desperately to be

involved in the New West Partnership over five years, yet they couldn't get their act together on the CPP and haven't got their act together on a national climate change accord or a national health-care accord either.

And so you have to ask yourself, what's wrong with the priorities of this government that put an obscure trade agreement forward as their first priority, most important priority, when the health care and the—and climate change and protection for seniors in those later years in life all get shunted off to the side?

I would suggest to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is a government whose priorities do not match those of Manitobans, that, in fact, it's a government that's already one year into a mandate out of touch with Manitobans. And there's no greater example than that than the bit of Broadway we saw earlier today—Broadway, not Broadway Manitoba, but Broadway New York—where the Premier gathers the media together 20 minutes before question period on the first day back into session, gathers together to make a big spectacle about how he's going to—has beat everyone over the head to freeze their salaries when, of course, New Democrats are never in this business for money anyways, so it really inconsequential to us what the Premier says he's going to do.

But then he doesn't actually address the real issue, which is that he gave himself and the chosen 12 and a half a raise, and they locked it in beforehand while asking everyone else to suffer the indignity of austerity that the Finance Minister is preparing for this province in the weeks and months ahead.

And so we have a government that is not only out of touch with the needs of ordinary Manitobans, with working Manitobans when it comes to health care, when it comes to education, when it comes to child care, when it comes to labour relations, when it comes to climate change, when it comes to reconciliation, when it comes to immigration, the government has lost touch with the people of Manitoba on all of these questions, all to focus their attention on an agreement for which we have no information, no data, no statistics on what it's actually accomplished before Manitoba was a signatory to this agreement.

And so they—a government has gone in, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with blinders on unsure what the implications will be for working families across

this province, unsure what the benefits will be for working families across this province, and unsure of what potential pratfalls there could be in the future for working men and women and working families across this province in the future.

And I think that suggests a government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only as I said out of touch with the priorities of Manitobans, but, in fact, is focused on what we call elite accommodation in political science, making sure that elites are taken care of and forget what everybody else gets. Maybe there might be some trickle down, but, you know, this was identified as voodoo economics 25, 30 years ago. It hasn't changed. This is the same kind of routine. We've seen this movie before and it results in hardships for Manitobans, hardships for Manitoba families that I can tell you we're going to stand up here and oppose every single day because what we want is a Manitoba that's more equitable, a Manitoba that's fair, a Manitoba that's more inclusive for every single person, and not simply give in to this elite accommodation that's happening on the other side to give into a very small fraction of business interests without actually knowing what the implications could be for Manitoba into the future. And I think that is a great, great shame.

* (15:40)

But I want to speak about one other point, and then I'm going to give some opportunity for others to say something. You know, I didn't grow up in Manitoba; I moved here about 20 years ago. And one thing that people know about me, I think, most of all, is I wear the maple leaf on my sleeve and on my heart and on my head and everywhere else, and maybe a little overboard in that regard. I'll admit to that. A good example of that would be that when I'm in my hockey pool, I'll only choose Canadians, no matter that—if that means I'm going down to defeat or otherwise—usually, it does mean that.

But the point is that I am—I'm a proud Manitoban, even though I didn't grow up here. I'm a proud Ontarian because that's where I did grow up. I have family all across the country, friends all 'across' the country. So I can say I'm proud of their areas of the country. But I'm a proud Canadian, first and foremost.

And I don't believe for a moment that we should be entering into this kind of balkanized trade agreements that separate Canadians one from another. I think this is as a terrible way to operate a country. Sure, we can cut some deals, as we have;

our record on trade was very strong. But I think it's a Canadian act when we sell hydroelectricity to put coal out of business in Saskatchewan and ensure clean, green energy for other Canadians that we can provide. I think that's a smart deal.

But that's not a balkanized trade agreement in the way that the northwest–New West Partnership is. And I am very concerned about a country that splits itself up into sub-regions and doesn't think about the greater good of all Canadians. And there's nothing, nothing in this act, nothing in the agreement and nothing that's transparent in reporting on the New West Partnership that tells us that the needs and interests and aspirations of anyone are first and foremost. And that's not the kind of Canada I want to live in.

Our government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over 17 years, we're builders. Unlike that side of the House, which—

An Honourable Member: Debt—builders of debt.

Mr. Allum: —yes. Well, the member for Brandon West, I was in Brandon just a couple of weeks ago, asking—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Allum: —oh, my daughter, my oldest daughter went to Brandon U. I spend lots of time in Brandon. I like it.

And I ask him what he's been doing, because I was told that there's no progress on the North Hill at all, there's no progress on a new school and infrastructure spending in Brandon has been reduced. So I'm asking the member for Brandon West, what is exactly has he been doing while the Brandon has been failing under his watch?

But the point is, and I want to end on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we put our emphasis into making sure that we reduce trade barriers in a fair way for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. And the—this is the point: we're not only proud province builders here in Manitobans, we're proud Canadians and proud nation builders. And we think this agreement is a mistake for Manitobans and for Canada into the future.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Well, I listened intently to the questions from the opposition and from the speech that I just heard, and I—you know, I've always been confused about the NDP. And, actually, that was something that was quite thrilling to me that I learned in the last session, was that I do

not understand the NDP mindset. I'm thrilled by that. I am quite thrilled by that because I do understand the business mindset. So obviously the speech there, we just heard that again, that he seems to be confused.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do have to remind people that the closed-for-business sign has moved from Manitoba to Alberta. We are now open for business. So that's what's happened there. It's gone to Alberta. And we see the things that are happening there or not happening there.

And the previous speaker talks about, well, we need a report on this, see how we're doing. Yes, that would talk about a report that was generated from new hires, probably, for the government. And then someone has to read the report and analyze the report and report on it to the minister. Job creation in the former government was all about government. Job creation was not about the private sector. And that's where we see the New West Partnership as being an opportunity.

You know, if I look at—the NDP, federally and provincially, has fought against every trade agreement that I am aware of. And they must be thrilled now that they have a president in the United States that thinks the same way that they do. He's fighting against trade agreements just like they did. And he wants to be a protectionist. So that's what we saw in Manitoba, here, a very protectionist government. And that's not what's going to happen here.

You know, the member's concerned about, well, we shouldn't make a trade agreement with our neighbours until we have a national one. That's like saying, you know what, I want a friend in every province of Canada, and until I have that I'm not going to make friends with my neighbour in Saskatchewan. I'm not going to make friends with my neighbour in Alberta and I'm not going to make friends with anyone in BC. That's kind of the same analysis there.

So we want to make trade agreements that will work for Manitobans and that means that we're working on this one with three provinces to the west. We're also working on a national trade agreement; TPP was on the list, there, until the president that is a favourite of the NDP government here decided that he doesn't want to support it. So now we have to work from ground zero on that again.

Trade agreements benefit workers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's the things that they don't seem to understand. I could never figure out what was the opposition to the New West Partnership from the NDP benches. They really couldn't seem to come up with anything—a lot of fear, like they seemed to use all the time, a lot of fear. But I think it seems to come down to union jobs maybe. Maybe they're listening, as they do in their leadership contest, to the union leadership on how things should be done, as opposed to people in Manitoba.

When I travel around Manitoba and I speak to my colleagues that are in business—and I have many of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker—they want to see opportunity for their businesses. They want to see opportunity for their staff to grow. They want to see opportunity across the board where they can bid without barriers on government contracts, where they can compete with other businesses from across the country, because competition is good for business. It is one of the best things. If you have a business that has no competition, they get pretty lazy.

So I want to make sure that we have the opportunity here for businesses in Manitoba to thrive, and that is something that the New West Partnership will start on. When's the best time to plant a tree, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Twenty years ago? When's the next best time? Today? Well, when's the best time to sign a trade agreement? Twenty years ago would have been great—seventeen years ago. But today would be just as good, and we can start building from here forward because we are on the road to recovery, and that will create a tremendous amount of confidence in the economy of Manitoba. If the member from Fort Garry wants a report, all he has to do is watch the economy, watch the jobs build, watch the businesses thrive, watch his own little jurisdiction in Fort Garry begin to develop and create new jobs in that area. That is what we will see with trade agreements like the New West Partnership.

Does he want particular statistics? I'm sure he does. And those are usually generated by government and—I mean, NGOs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And those are all great jobs. But, you know what? The proof is in the jobs that are out there, and the people that are going to earn the money, that are going to build the companies, they're going to create wealth and they're going to build their families in Manitoba and in western Canada. And, if we can take this trade agreement or other ones that will augment it across Canada and reduce barriers to trade, so much the better.

The protectionist mentality, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is one that damages economies. It damages consumers. The consumers are the ones that pay the price for protectionism. We saw that just recently with the tariffs that went up on drywall that increased costs by 20 to 40 per cent for new housing. Who pays for that? The consumer, the buyer at the end of the chain there, that's who pays for that. And those barriers are ones that cost all economies. They don't benefit the Manitoba economy, certainly, and we want to make sure that we have that opportunity that we can be a place that people are interested in investing in.

Even just recently as, I think, today, yesterday we saw announcements that Manitoba had become the second-best place to invest in the world in the mining and resource sector. How about that?

* (15:50)

The MLA for Thompson is happy with that one. We're happy to see growth around Manitoba. We were 19th under the former government and falling. And mining is something that creates so much wealth in northern Manitoba, creates so much 'melth'-wealth in southern Manitoba. It's an opportunity that the former government just ignored, and they moved on elsewhere.

Because they are, I would say—and if you look in the mining sector, the people that invest and put that money at risk to discover the resources, to develop the resources, to build the mines, that is by far the most aggressive risk-takers that we have in the world, I'd say, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And those are the ones that we're starting to attract back to Manitoba that will help to build our economy. And they will drive economies such as Churchill that are an opportunity to export. If there's something to export, then it can go through there, as opposed to forcing a product through there with a subsidy. That's not the way to develop trade.

So we want to make sure that create—we create this stable base, this stable economy, that people are willing to come to. We look at, recently, the announcements that we had in Portage with the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) there. Companies are looking at Manitoba because they know that that open-for-business sign is here. The old one, the closed for business, as I said, it's moved to Alberta; it's going to be there for a while, but we're going to make sure that we attract companies here that will create employment, will hire people and promote them and make sure that those families can

grow and develop their own wealth. And then we see that just throughout the economy, Mr. Speaker.

I know that we're going to hear a lot of bad news that the sky is falling this afternoon, and, you know, we do need more taxpayers in Manitoba, because we have a high-tax economy that we're trying to change. And that was something that we've, you know, gotten from the previous government. So, well, we're going to look at how we can reduce those taxes, and one way of doing it is bringing more taxpayers into the province. You got to grow the economy, Mr. Speaker.

An Honourable Member: Immigrants.

Mr. Helwer: And immigrants as well, I hear from the leader of opposition. Absolutely. We have a great immigrant 'econcomony'—economy in Brandon and in Neepawa. We've seen all the immigrants to come in there not only in the health-care sector but in Maple Leaf and in the hog plant in Neepawa, great—great—opportunities for them in Manitoba. They're thrilled to be here. We are thrilled to have them here because they work hard, they build families, they build communities, and when they build those communities, they attract more people from their immigrant community.

We see them with the Muslim community in Brandon, because they have a cultural centre there. It's not a mosque. But they are bringing in people from across Canada, from other international communities because they know there is a hub in Brandon that they can come to and they can worship in that cultural centre. It's—those are all things that attract people to Manitoba, and the New West Partnership will give us more of those opportunities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. As I said, the closed-for-business sign is gone for Manitoba. We've moved it away. We're open for business. We're willing to talk. Come and talk to us and we'll see what we can do to make things work.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Let me start off by saying what a pleasure it is to be back here and see everyone's smiling faces as we attempt to actually build a better Manitoba in spite of what this government is trying to do to Manitoba. I'm back.
[interjection]

Negativity, it—you're correct. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) talks about negativity, and, unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's really what this trade agreement is, is negativity for Manitoba workers. Nowhere has anybody ever said what the benefit is going to be to Manitoba workers. We've heard a lot about what the benefit will be for Manitoba businesses. But make no mistake about it, what's good for business is not always good for workers, but what's good for workers is always good for business.

You know, there's a lot of laughing and catcalling going on, because people don't understand or don't want Manitobans to understand the difference between creating a low-wage, low-skill job and creating high-wage, high-skill jobs. This trade agreement is not about creating good jobs. It may create some low-skill jobs. I hear people talk about the mining industry. I haven't seen this government create one single job in the mining industry. In fact, my own community is looking at devastating cuts, and this New West Partnership certainly won't help create jobs in Flin Flon. There's no part of this government that talks about creating things in the North.

You know, we want to talk about trade. We have a seaport in Manitoba that this government refuses to acknowledge, refuses to help, refuses to make sure that that seaport is available for trade. They're fine with it being shut down. They're fine with not being able to ship grain out of it. They're fine with all of that.

While they're talking about trade one of the valuable trade routes for products from Manitoba is through the Port of Churchill. But we don't see any mention from this government about doing anything to protect the Port of Churchill, to protect the working people at the Port of Churchill. We've heard from Keystone Agricultural Producers early on that the Port of Churchill is a vital part of their trade route. That it is a vital part of shipping grain.

We actually hear from Saskatchewan farmers, and you'll have to excuse me because I was born and raised in Saskatchewan though I've lived in Manitoba forty-some years. So I do still have some connections with the farm community in Saskatchewan, and they're quite upset that that Port of Churchill is not available for small family farms to ship grain because that is the most economical place for them to ship grain.

So, while this government talks a lot about free trade and trade being good for business, they're very specific about what business they're talking about. They're not talking about the small family farm; they're talking about agri-business. They're not talking about good-paying workers' jobs in this province; they're talking about making sure that their friends in business can make more money. That more money doesn't translate into a better province for all Manitobans and we should be very clear about that: that there's nothing in those trade agreements that protects Manitobans' jobs. It leaves it up to the free market to bid the lowest possible, which will drive wages down not just in Manitoba but all across western Canada, and someday with other trade agreements across Canada all over—sometimes to look at it on a bigger scale, free trade agreements across the world.

Did they create more good high-paying full-time jobs in Canada? Well, the evidence is clear, and the answer is no.

Young people today do not have the chance of getting those jobs that used to be here because manufacturing doesn't happen in this country. Those jobs have been traded so that multinational corporations can make money with the vague concept that somehow, once they make money, that'll trickle down to the rest of the world and people will be able to pick up the scraps that falls out of their money belts, I guess, and somehow try and survive. That myth of trickle-down economy has been disproven time and time again.

And, well, I heard a previous speaker talk about, you know, the NDP listen to their union bosses or listens to union people, like, somehow union people in this province are not Manitobans, don't have the same weight of opinion that a business person in Manitoba has, that somehow a government shouldn't listen to working people in this province they should only listen to business people. And that's just plain wrong. Working people in this province are who this government should be supporting—who any government should be supporting.

* (16:00)

So we've heard absolutely no possible benefit to workers in this New West Partnership. What we've heard is, well, it's going to be good for business.

When we ask about, well, things like community benefit agreements, will those still be allowed to happen? And the answer is well, yes, kind of, but

there's certain caps that you'll be allowed to provide to local contractors, but those caps are so low that, really, what you're protecting for Manitoba workers is the scraps, not the good part. Those jobs will be tendered and contracted out to outside firms. And we start to see that in other jurisdictions already, which is why the previous government was opposed to the way those free trade agreements were structured because it didn't protect Manitoba workers. It didn't protect Manitobans.

So we start to see why this government wanted to make sure that they froze minimum wage because now, with lower wages, Manitoba businesses will be able to bid successfully on jobs somewhere else and help cut somebody else's wages, so the race to the bottom continues—well, unless you're some of the elite, the business people that are going to enjoy the fruits of everyone else's labour, kind of like the Premier (Mr. Pallister) giving himself a 20 per cent increase while telling people on minimum wage that no—no increase for you.

And yet, somehow, we're supposed to buy into the fact that that's fair. You know, if he wanted to be fair, he could have froze his own wages prior to taking the 20 per cent increase. But, no, that's not how that concept works. When you're part of the elite, you want to make sure you look after the elite while the rest of society suffers. And, really, that's what this agreement, kind of like most free trade agreements, have done. And they accuse us of fear mongering, and unfortunately everything that we were afraid of comes to pass, that it's not good for working people in this province, as free trade agreements have not been good for working people in this country while companies have made a lot of money manufacturing things somewhere else.

Once upon a time I remember somebody saying we didn't want to be left as the hewers of wood and the haulers of water, and really that's where we're becoming. Everything that governments, particularly right-leaning governments have done, have been to undercut average citizens, to undercut people's ability, that people aren't working, they're not paying taxes, they can't afford to send their kids to school, they can't afford to get a better life.

You know, we talk about, well, we're going to make some education things available for people in the North, which is good, but then the hopelessness sets in once more when they very quickly realize that I've got an education, I've got a trade, I've got the ability to work, but there's no jobs left to work at.

That's what's wrong with these agreements and that's why the NDP stands against these kind of trade agreements because they're not good for any people, other than the elite few at the top of the pile, certainly not good for anybody else.

So, we've asked: Can the government tell us how many full-time jobs they think will be created by this New West Partnership? And the answer is, well, no, we don't know.

Well, we do know. We know on this side there won't be any. They'll be low-wage, part-time jobs and a lot of those working people will come from somewhere else. They won't be paying taxes in this province because that's the whole beauty of this trade agreement for businesses, is whoever comes in the lowest will be who gets the contract, so Manitobans will lose out and, in the process, workers all across the West will lose out. Businesses will benefit, consolidation of businesses will probably take place, small contractors will disappear—they'll also become unemployed, or part-time, picking up the pieces that are too small for anybody else to bid on.

That is not a way to build a better province, certainly, not to build a better province for hard-working Manitobans. It might build a better province for the few, but it won't work for everybody.

You know, what protections are built into this? Well, none. There's some really low numbers for contracts that would be allowed to be tendered locally. How many local reeves are aware that Joe's trucking won't be able to get that contract to haul their gravel anymore? That it'll be somebody's trucking firm from Alberta that gets that contract. Joe will have to figure out how to compete or go out of business, lay off whatever workers he actually has working for him in that municipality—in that small community in northern—or in rural Manitoba. That won't be good for small communities; it won't be good for municipalities. It will be just more bad news upon more bad news upon more bad news.

So what protections have been built in for the environment? None—none whatsoever that I've seen. Certainly, nobody has been able to tell us what protections might be in there because, I guess, there are not any.

Let's be able to look at what this government's infrastructure budget might be. They've already made cuts to that budget and how much they're going to spend, so Manitoba workers, Manitoba small contractors are already going to be in trouble based

on the amount of money that this government isn't going to spend maintaining this province. Now, along comes the New West Trade Partnership that will make sure that those jobs don't go to Manitobans, don't go to Manitoba companies, that will ensure that less becomes the answer for everything in Manitoba. So with less people working, less people paying taxes, less people able to participate in a vibrant economy, there won't be a vibrant economy.

As I said earlier, when we look at the facts of free trade agreements on a national or international scale, they have not been good for workers. They have not been good for families. They have not been good for the future of this country or this province because the benefit has gone to so few people the economy has picked up and rebounded. Well, except for the majority of people whom it hasn't picked up for. If you look strictly at trade numbers and companies' growth charts—yes, it's been pretty good for some, but it has not been good for the majority of people. Those are facts. Those are indisputable facts that this government doesn't want to recognize because they have their own agenda set and they'd mold the facts—or their version of the facts—to fit what they want.

Interesting, just prior to the election the Fraser Institute, that non-partisan group—which I say with my tongue firmly in my cheek because they're anything but non-partisan—changed Manitoba's ranking for mining from—I think it was No. 4 down to 16, and don't quote me on those numbers, I may be off. But now, all of a sudden, the Fraser Institute says that, well, Manitoba's No. 2.

* (16:10)

So I challenge anybody on the government side or anywhere else in the province to tell me what the government changed to all of a sudden make it No. 2. Jobs have disappeared—well, I see the minister from—or the member from Thompson looking at massive job cuts in his community, in his riding in mining. I come from Flin Flon, I see massive job cuts coming in Flin Flon.

What I don't see is any growth in the mining industry, nor do I see a government stepping up to say we're going to help mining improve. We're going to help create jobs in mining. We haven't seen that. *[interjection]* Ah, the member from Thompson says we're going to get rid of red tape. Well, we don't know what red tape and we don't know how that's going to actually create a mine. I suppose if we

create or do away with all the red tape that involves protecting the environment and protecting water for future, if we take all the rules and throw them out the window and say come and mine, it doesn't matter what you do to the environment, then, I guess, maybe, we'll create some jobs.

But so far there has been nothing of that nature. All we've seen is so far a reduction in some—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It's hard to listen to the speaker at the—the person who's talking right now so if we can quiet down a bit I'd appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank you for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I really want the members opposite to listen and be able to hear what I'm saying and maybe it'll help convince them of the wrongness that their government has undertaken.

The only thing we've seen so far from red tape reduction is a change in trucking regulations that will allow heavier loads on our roads which ties in with some regulations in Saskatchewan, Alberta. What will that do for our infrastructure for our roads? Well, not much in the way of improvement I can tell you that.

So, at the same time this government is cutting the budget for maintaining infrastructure, they're going to allow heavier trucks to beat our roads up more. So I come from Flin Flon where there's concentrate trucks and ore trucks pounding over that road every day of the week. If we allow those trucks to be heavier, which theoretically will help mining, it will damage the infrastructure even more and trust me we can't finish building the road to Flin Flon because it keeps getting beat up so that you have to go back and fix what you did last year all the time.

So just saying that, well, as part of this New West Partnership we're going to go through and reduce red tape which will change the rules and throw away the rules that are there to protect the environment, that are there to protect the infrastructure, that are there to protect workers.

I personally spent a lot of time in a previous career ensuring that workplace health and safety rules were there to protect workers, to keep workers alive. So, now this government says, well, we're going to reduce that red tape. Is a workplace health and safety regulation just red tape? I'm sure some members opposite who haven't had the pleasure of

carrying a dead body out of a mine will say, well, that's just a rule we don't need that, we'll leave it up to employers, because somewhere in BC they've cut that regulation and, oh, wait, sometimes things in BC don't pan out that well as far as workplace health and safety. So we need to be very careful to just say we're going to cut red tape.

We've seen this government suggest that they're going to cut some of the regulation or some of the act around the building code for rural farm buildings. So the question is: What are they going to cut there to make building buildings on farms compete with buildings somewhere else? Will it lessen the protection to farm workers? Will it lessen the protection to farm animals? Well, we don't know that. All we know is that they've decided they're going to cut because we have to compete. We have to compete our way to the bottom, not to the top.

So, as we carry on talking about a New West Partnership Trade Agreement, I cannot stress this often enough or strong enough that this agreement is not good for Manitoba workers. While it may create some low-paying, low-skilled jobs, it will not create good jobs that will lead to a better Manitoba for all Manitobans. I cannot stress that often enough, that this does nothing to enhance workers' lives in Manitoba. This will undermine workers' ability to get ahead. This will be bad news for workers in Manitoba, and somewhere down the road, when that comes to pass and we're back in government, we'll be able to say, see, we told you so. Now we need to do the same as what happened in the 1990s, we need to rebuild the province so that it will work for all Manitobans.

Unfortunately, this government is going to destroy the province in the process of feathering the nests of the few. And this, this free trade agreement, is one of the steps that they're taking to build a worse province for Manitobans. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we spend money on education, where will our educated youth go? Because the jobs that this trade partnership creates are not high-skilled jobs, they will not be high-skilled jobs, so our children will be forced to leave this province. With that will go the future of this province, except for the few.

So as I come close to wrapping up my comments here—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I'm glad to hear that some of the members opposite have said they were going to start

to listen. I appreciate that because it's time for them to start listening, to start listening to Manitobans, to start listening to what's good for all Manitobans, not just for the few. So, I thank you for that. *[interjection]* No, I'm not.

We need to make sure that this doesn't pass because it's not good for Manitobans.

The other thing that I haven't touched on yet is the enacting legislation that will allow all future trade agreements to pass by order-in-council or regulation without ever having to come to this House to be discussed. That is even scarier than this because we don't know what's going to be in future trade agreements, that it'll be bad for working people, it'll be bad for average Manitobans. But this government wants to make sure that that doesn't have to be discussed in this House, that they can just do it behind closed doors and claim to be open and transparent while doing the complete opposite.

The doublespeak continues and prevails with this government, which is too bad because Manitobans deserve better from their government, quite frankly, and they're not getting it. This trade agreement is bad, bad for Manitobans, bad for workers. It offers nothing to encourage Manitoba workers. It may be good for some businesses, will very well be bad for other businesses.

* (16:20)

Like I say, Joe's trucking may not be hauling your gravel in your community anymore, and, when you go back to your riding and tell people that, well, yes, this free trade deal is going to be really good for somebody but not for you, Joe, not for your business, not for your company, not for your workers and not for your community, I challenge you to try and get elected again once that comes to pass, because, quite frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people will begin to realize that they've been sold a bill of goods by this government that isn't, in fact, what's going to come to pass.

I hope, and sincerely hope, that people will realize that what they're being told is not good for them, and they will stand up and say: Wait a minute. This is not what we voted for. This is not the change that we want. This is not the change that's going to build a better Manitoban for everybody; this is a change that's going to continue to build a better Manitoba for a very elite few and not for the people that voted for the members opposite. Many of them are going to be heartbroken to discover that perhaps

what they voted for is not what's going to come to pass, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]* No seniors home in Lac du Bonnet, no. They're beginning to realize already that, oh, wait a minute, that isn't really what we wanted. That isn't the change we wanted.

So I just want to wrap up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and say that I hope the members opposite 'hactually'—actually have been listening and have actually come to realize that this trade agreement is not good for Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Gimli): It's my pleasure to rise today in the House and put some facts on the record for Bill 7 and the New West Partnership.

The New West Partnership Trade Agreement, of course, is an agreement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, intended to eliminate trade barriers and promote labour mobility in western Canada.

Manitoba recently announced, as we know, they were successful in negotiating membership in the agreement and will be joining the—effective January 1st, which we have done. With the inclusion of Manitoba, the New West Partnership is now the largest trading force in Canada.

There are many, many options that we're going to discuss today, and have been discussed already, by the way, by members on both sides of the House, and I'm, again, privileged to be able to bring some to the record today.

Some of them are the procurement opportunities that will come into play: enhanced procurement process would be strengthening government buying power and providing savings for taxpayers.

Well, we know how important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, taxpayers' money is, and finding savings for taxpayers is extremely important in—especially in today's economy. The New West Partnership will provide stronger and more uniform coverage for procurement, enabling the Province to capitalize buying power and save taxpayers' money.

Regulatory reconciliation—the New West Partnership will allow for closer regulatory co-operation between provinces. The New West Partnership will eliminate red tape for businesses by streamlining standards and regulations across the four western provinces.

Well, we know red tape is very much a hindrance. I know in my business, for 35 years in the trucking industry, red tape we ran across on a daily basis. And I can tell you that it took a lot of resources and a lot of time and a lot of money that could be better spent creating jobs and helping grow the economy locally.

The New West Partnership, of course, for example, would be—some of those regulations would be in agriculture, food production.

An Honourable Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Wharton: And—yes, agriculture, as the Minister from Agriculture alludes to, very important for an industry that makes up a large part of our GDP here in Manitoba.

Of course, it would affect cross-border complications with services in the trucking industry, as I alluded to earlier, facing different rules in different provinces. Well, those different rules now will be gone. So, basically, we'll have a collective group of rules that will be fair to all partners in the New West Partnership.

Unified corporate registration—again, an issue that I can relate to in my business days as the owner of a transportation company—under the New West Partnership, if a business meets requirements in its home province, registration in another province can be initiated in the home jurisdiction. Any—pardon me, a new integrated registry system will allow for streamline of corporate registrations for business in the four western provinces.

So, about 20 years ago I went to expand my trucking firm in Canada, and I was looking west at the time and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we looked at opening up a small office in Saskatoon, in Saskatchewan. And I can tell you that the challenges that we went through, not only with insurance, but just registering our name in Saskatchewan, simple things like applying for permits, was a big challenge.

And I can tell you that, now, with joining the New West Partnership with harmonized rules, that we'll have a better opportunity. And I know that my business would have had an easier opportunity to open up and grow our business and create jobs. Not only in Manitoba, but also help our neighbours to the west, in Saskatchewan and Alberta where we have franchise opportunities now, where will we have streamlined opportunities to open up right across western Canada. And, of course, as a former business

owner, medium- to small-sized business owners are going to be happy, and they are happy to hear that.

Through this agreement, of course, simplified corporate registrations will reduce red tape. I spoke about that earlier. It was a big issue with us.

Provincial borders attract more investment and growth into Manitoba.

Full and free registrations, full and free registrations for temporary inter- and extra-provincial vehicles. Essentially, this would eliminate a fear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of trucking firms crossing borders through into Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC, fear of getting a ticket for non-compliance with respect to insurance violations, overweight because loads are not the same weight restrictions in Manitoba as they are in Saskatchewan or Alberta or BC. This will benefit over 1,000 for-hire trucking companies in Manitoba, including six of Canada's largest trucking companies will benefit from this provision.

The member from Flin Flon had mentioned that Joe's trucking will have—will likely have to shut down, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of this New West Partnership. Well, quite frankly, the consultations and the discussions with the trucking industry quite clearly the opposite to what the member from Flin Flon has mentioned here. And, you know, harmonizing the—as a member from Lakeside mentioned—that'll definitely help move forward. And Joe's trucking is welcoming the opportunity to grow his business and create jobs, not only in Manitoba, but across the west. So that's a good thing for business.

Labour mobility—under the New West Partnership, of course, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba regulatory authorities must certify each other's certified workers without requiring additional training or examination. So, as the minister spoke about in his opening comments, this, of course, will make the tendering process quite more attractive for Manitoba businesses. Case in point where the—one of our Manitoba companies was successful in a Crown RFP, in acquiring it, and now will be working through filling—fulfilling that RFP and ensuring that they continue to hire and, of course, are sustainable for the long haul. The New West Partnership agreement will make it easier for Manitobas to attract workers and all workers to have great access to opportunities.

Trade and investment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the New West Partnership includes joint trade and investment missions to international markets to enhance business competitiveness and market Manitoba on the world stage, attract international investment and growth opportunities for all Manitoba businesses.

The New West Partnership, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will help reduce red tape for businesses by streamlining standards and regulations across the four western provinces. The member from Flin Flon had mentioned, again, in his comments that the New West Partnership will not create jobs. Well, quite frankly, the inclusion of Manitoba—the partnership creates an open common market with more than 11 million people with a combined GDP of \$750 billion. And I'll tell you, those 11 million people are looking forward to creating jobs, not only here in Manitoba, right across our partners to the west.

By joining the New West Partnership, we are reducing trade barriers and red tape, we're harmonizing regulations and diversifying markets while supporting job creation and economic prosperity for Manitobans. Manitoba has some of the most challenges—most challenging red tape across the nation.

* (16:30)

We know that our government is working hard in collaborating with stakeholders across Manitoba to ensure that we can—to ensure that we will move forward and they can continue to grow their business and create jobs, because that's what businesses do in Manitoba. They're job creators, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Business owners and community leaders and the chamber of commerce from across Manitoba have long called for our province to pursue new trade opportunities and reduce trade barriers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are also simplifying the act by amending it to allow for general reference for any similar awards under domestic trade agreements, which will allow for possible future domestic trade agreements to then be added to the regulation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this will assist in adding to the proposed Canadian Free Trade Agreement, which may replace the agreement on the internal trade in 2017 and has similar dispute-resolution provisions. Manitoba has been fully supportive of efforts to open internal trade, and I am pleased to say that we will

continue doing our part to ensure compliance with our obligations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we expect that all other parties to domestic trade agreements do the same. Ensuring a strong and enforceable dispute-settlement system will help ensure the results.

The amendments we are introducing today will be helpful to Manitobans' commitment to honour the obligations required in—under the New West Partnership Trade Agreement. With the introduction of the bill last spring and, of course, this second reading today, we're demonstrating its leadership on internal trade by joining the New West Partnership, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As promised, Manitobans in the campaign—we have moved quickly to join the agreement, further eliminating trade barriers, enhancing opportunities for Manitoba businesses and ensuring a strong message is sent that Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is open for business.

By joining New West Partnership, it will bring these advantages to Manitoba. We are pursuing opportunities for growth and reduced trade barriers, allowing for business—expand and create jobs. And, really, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's what this is all about, is good-paying jobs for Manitobans and for business to expand and grow.

We look forward to working with British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and to expand opportunities and support stronger economic—economies right across western Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In closing, our government has begun the hard work required to repair damage, correct the course and move toward balance in a sustainable way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are working to fix our finances and repair our services by controlling costs and introducing new, innovative ways of delivering government programs. And, finally, the New West Partnership is a kick-start in rebuilding Manitoba's economy.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): You know, it's great to be back in the House today. I missed all of you guys very much. I'm pleased to stand before the House today and offer comments on record for Bill 7, The New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act. The bill enables Manitoba to participate in the agreement as well as future

domestic trade agreements with British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

This bill amends the preceding acts—the Crown act, enabling orders against the government of Manitoba to be enforced as a court order. The Consumer Protection Act and The Prearranged Funeral Services Act are amended to ensure that the provisions of those acts will not constitute trade barriers.

On April 30th, 2010, the governments of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan formed the economic union, New West Partnership Agreement. This historic and unprecedented partnership establishes Canada's largest open, efficient and stable market. The basic premise underlying this agreement is that economic integration and co-operation will improve economic prosperity, thereby improving quality of life for all signatories and the people living in these provinces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the New West Partnership Agreement operates under several principles in order to bolster the economy of parties involved. In an increasingly competitive and globalized economy, the agreement seeks to strengthen and promote the region in an increasingly competitive global economy. It seeks to improve competitiveness and productivity. It aims to attract business investments and talent. It supports and builds capacity for innovation. It strengthens and it diversifies the economy of the region. Lastly, it achieves efficiencies and cost savings by capitalizing on the combined buying strengths of the provinces involved.

On November 17th, 2016, it was announced that Manitoba has joined the New West Partnership Trade Agreement. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I, along with my Liberal colleagues, are of the opinion that the trade is beneficial to Manitoba's economy. Opening up trade with British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan gives our province access to 'cohesion'—cohesive, vibrant, diverse, and strong economic regions. Our province has much to contribute to the West. Allow me to elaborate on a few of the key industries.

Our value-added food and beverage processing industry is the largest manufacturing sector in the province. This industry's contribution to Canada's food and processing industry has been growing in the past decade. This is due in large part to a strong agronomic environment supported by diversity of crops and livestock. Our food and beverage industry

can be an important player in providing agriculture products to the west.

Our province's state-of-the-art aerospace industry is the largest in Western Canada and home to world-class manufacturing and repair and overhaul services. Its competitive strengths include leading capabilities with respect to manufacturing, engine repair, and overhaul, and the state-of-the-art training. The inclusion of Manitoba's aerospace industry to the west will improve innovation. The resulting advancements, in addition, will make our aerospace program even more attractive to international markets.

Another is Manitoba Hydro, is the province's sole electrical utility. Our power supply is generated from renewable and clean sources of energy. In light of climate change and the movement towards sustainable and green energy, the energy provided by Manitoba Hydro becomes very attractive.

Of course there are numerous other industries, like agri-businesses, manufacturing and technology, electricity, building products, mining, tourism, transportation, whatever it may be. Signing into this agreement shares Manitoba's economy to other domestic markets. This has the potential to affect economic growth in all economic sectors. All of our industries have unique competitive advantages, and all of them will be enhanced. In turn, this would also create new opportunities for businesses and create new job opportunities for Manitobans.

A final point on how crucial it is for Manitoba to be in the New West Partnership is recently the political and economic climate around the world has undergone significant changes. In order to adapt, Manitoba must co-operate with all other provinces economically and politically.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to conclude on Bill 7, I would like to point out that the trade agreements—any trade agreement, really, whether international or domestic—are like business enterprises. There are risks involved. Benefits come at a price. Bill 7 allows Manitoba to join the New West Trade Agreement and future domestic trade agreements. Access to new markets would create opportunities for economic growth here in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): All right. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak today about Bill 7, The New West Partnership Trade Agreement Implementation Act. The New West

Partnership is a trade agreement now between British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, and this bill will amend three acts which would allow Manitoba to join the agreement as well as participate in other future domestic trade agreements.

So this bill does a few things. It amends The Proceedings Against the Crown Act, which would be amended to enable orders made against the government of Manitoba under a domestic trade agreement to be enforced as a court order. I'll have some more things to say about that, as will some of my colleagues, later on in debate.

As well, there'll be changes made to The Consumer Protection Act and The Prearranged Funeral Services Act, and, of course, the way the government would describe it is they'd be amended to ensure the provisions of these acts will not constitute barriers to trade. We would say they need to be amended to lower protections for Manitobans as a condition to entering into this agreement.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

* (16:40)

The main message every year at the start of session, I always come in here thinking maybe I'll try to do a better job of finding common ground with the members opposite. Sometimes that's been successful, sometimes not so much. But I think there are some things that we can agree upon. We can agree that we are proud Manitobans, and we believe that our geographic location has always been a key advantage in making us a centre for trade. It was that way a thousand years ago; it was that way a hundred years ago, and it's still that way today. And our focus as Manitobans has always been in breaking down trade barriers, whether that trade is flowing to the east, to the west, to the south, the north or anywhere across the globe. And that's why New Democrats have always wanted to see the government of Manitoba pursue a strong, national trade agreement and help our businesses to export their products and to compete from sea to sea. And we have serious doubts about this agreement, and we have serious doubts about this bill, not because we don't believe in trade, Madam Speaker, but because we do. And we need to keep working on breaking down trade barriers across the country for the maximum benefit of Canadians.

Now, I was trying hard to listen to the minister as he was giving his speech, explaining in support of this bill, and I think I must have misheard him,

because I will have to check Hansard. I believe he said that the New West Partnership Agreement was 62 pages, but the Canadian Free Trade Agreement that is, hopefully, going to be in effect very shortly, is 300 pages long, yet the minister, in response to some questions from my colleague, said that somehow the New West Partnership was more complete. So I'm going to check Hansard when I see it, because either the minister has misspoken or I've misheard. If, indeed, this is the case, then I expect we'll have the minister standing up in the House tomorrow and withdrawing the bill, because if that is the case, it is so abundantly clear that this trans—that the trans-Canadian trade deal, which builds on the work of the agreement for internal trade, which has been around for some time, is far more complete and far more important, frankly, and far more fundamental to Manitoba businesses, to Manitoba consumers and all Manitobans than a regional, a balkanized trade agreement, as the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) properly calls it.

And, of course, I had the opportunity, as Manitoba's trade minister, to learn more about the Agreement on Internal Trade, and I appreciate, for many provinces, including Manitoba, for many years, the pace of progress under that agreement was a frustration, and I think that's a fair comment. I think it's only fair to put that on the record. I was actually the minister at a very exciting time for the Agreement on Internal Trade. In fact, I was the minister when there was a new chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade signed to ensure labour mobility for Canadians. And that was only back in the year 2008, I believe it was, or 2009. People were surprised to find that not only was it a problem shipping goods and services across the country, even for people to move, despite the guaranteed mobility in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, there were many, many barriers in place for people being able to do the things they were trained to do in a new province.

So, if a teacher moved here from New Brunswick, or an accountant moved here from Alberta, it wasn't automatic that they would be able to carry on their profession or their regulated occupation. And the Agreement on Internal Trade recognized this, with ministers from across the country. And we recognized that not only should free trade agreements or trade agreements allow the movement of goods and services, to really benefit citizens, they need to also provide for the movement of people.

And I was very proud on behalf of the government of Manitoba and the people of Manitoba to sign on that chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade to have a much more streamlined and much more effective way so that people can come to the province of Manitoba and carry on what they're trained to do. And there, of course, were examples that were provided to me before we signed that agreement. Of course, Madam Speaker, as you know, we have a very proud military tradition in this province, and people are transferred in and transferred out. It's not unusual for families to move three, five, 10 times in the course of a career. We want to make sure, of course, not only that the member of the military is taken care of when they arrive here, but that their families are as well. And sometimes allowing the spouse to work is the biggest way to allow the family to settle in and, hopefully, have a great experience here in Manitoba.

Now, there were not—there were other areas that were not quite so successful, and I know there were frustrations bringing all the provinces together when it came to issues like energy. And I recall being part of discussions where one province in particular—the province I shall not mention—had real issues with attempting to deal with trade as it applied to energy. And the other provinces even agreed to allow that province to opt out of the provisions, and even with that protection, that was not going to happen. But, of course, since then a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, and I understand there has been a renewed interest in building a true Canadian free trade agreement—if we can call it that—to keep building on the agreement on internal trade and continue to improve the way that goods and services and people can move from place to place.

I was interested to hear the comments of the member for Gimli (Mr. Wharton). I mean, he did operate a trucking business. And, as a matter of fact, under the agreement under internal trade, there was a lot of work done to work on those issues so that it's easier for trucks to go from Manitoba to British Columbia without having to have undue paperwork, undue red tape. Yet, at the same time, to suggest that the agreement under internal trade would be a good thing if it simply does away with any of those requirements actually requires a further look.

And, of course, if I own a trucking business, there's nothing more I would like than to load up my truck with the most goods I possibly could and have it shipped as quickly as possible across the Prairies or through northern Ontario—that's actually not the

best thing for Manitoba's roads. And the member—the Minister for Infrastructure, of course, has to deal with a cut in the highway infrastructure budget, which is going to have an impact on roads. And, quite frankly, if we are harmonizing regulations in such as way they move to the lowest common denominator, not only is that unacceptable to be cutting money out of the road budget, this government would actually have to take a mature and serious look at increasing the road budget, if only to cover the wear and tear from heavier, bigger trucks which may be allowed in certain jurisdictions pounding Manitoba roads.

And I think it's really important that we—when we're talking about harmonizing regulations, that we really think about what that means. As New Democrats, there are many ways we appreciate that we can harmonize regulations. We can improve the way that provinces speak to each other, the ways that goods and services and people can travel. But the problem is the Progressive Conservatives believe that harmonizing regulations means taking those regulations down to the lowest common denominator.

And, frankly, I don't want our food safety in the province of Manitoba to suddenly go to the lowest common denominator among the western provinces. I don't want protections for Manitoba workers to automatically move to the lowest common denominator among western jurisdictions. I don't want, whether it's animal safety, whether it's building codes, whether it's any of the other things that are covered by regulations—frankly, Madam Speaker, I don't want Manitoba's new standard to be the lowest possible denominator across the West. That's not aiming higher; that's a straight course for the bottom. And there are some serious concerns about regulation authority under the New West Partnership. I understand the requirements for provinces to share potential regulations with other provinces. There may be an issue that is important to Manitobans. There may be an issue which is a specific response to something which happens in the province of Manitoba. And I am concerned that this agreement will tie the hands of this Manitoba government—and future Manitoba governments—to be able to make regulations for the protection of our people, our environment, our animals, and other things in the province of Manitoba.

And I know that the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) asked some very important questions of the minister in the

question-and-answer period in the Legislature. Frankly, I think adding the question-and-answer period is helpful; it can be useful. I would have expected today the minister would have had some better answers to my colleague's questions.

And, in particular, given the fact that it appears that we are close to having a more comprehensive and positive national agreement, my colleague asked the minister very clearly what concrete commitments this government was making to pursuing a national trade agreement. And we didn't really get an answer. And the member for Fort Garry-Riverview asked the minister about the status of discussions between this government and federal and provincial counterparts to pursue such an agreement, and, rather than get what I think should have been an anticipated question to give an awaited answer, instead the minister moved in a different direction. I mean, it wasn't the worst, most partisan answer we've heard from government members under the system, but it wasn't an answer in any respect to the questions that my colleague asked. And those things are very, very important, and really become part of the question: Why would we be rushing to join the New West Partnership when we have, perhaps, the prospect of a cross-Canada agreement which is going to be so much more important and so much more useful?

* (16:50)

And I know the member for Gimli (Mr. Wharton), he said quite correctly that the agreement of the New West Partnership will be a market of 11 million people. It's important to remember that there are 13 million people in the province of Ontario alone, not to mention another 9 million people in the province of Quebec. Even though we like our western neighbours, we work with our western neighbours—we're very pleased the people in Alberta made the right choice just about a year and a half ago, we're very excited about the prospect of our friends in British Columbia making the right choice in their election coming up in May—so, too, do we like our colleagues and our neighbours in Ontario and our friends in Quebec and points east.

And, at the current time, while 40 per cent of our Canadian trade goes to our western neighbours, 50 per cent of our exports go—exports go to the province of Ontario and the province of Quebec. And we support trade that builds our province. We support trade that works for all Manitobans. But we have to recognize that Manitoba, because of its unique geographic position, is in a tremendous

position to trade in all directions. And I wouldn't want the New West Partnership to restrict our efforts and to stop us from working as hard as we can, and to be a strong voice at the table, to continue to get the deal done. *[interjection]*

Well, and here comes the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), you know, believes he's going to get engaged in the conversation. And why, of course, why would we join the New West Partnership in his view? Well, I think it's because Brad Wall said we had to. And it wasn't that long ago—course it was, I believe, under the previous government—that the then-opposition Progressive Conservatives were howling with outrage because Brad Wall had announced that a Manitoba company could no longer bid on Saskatchewan work because we hadn't joined the New West Partnership. Brad Wall, that paragon of free trade, that paragon of open borders, couldn't find a single positive reason for Manitoba to join the agreement. The only thing Brad Wall could come up with to try and encourage Manitoba to join, to try to give the Progressive Conservative members any justification, was to become punitive, was to be punitive. He didn't have a carrot; all he had was a stick.

Well, I'm sure the member for Emerson will clarify that. Maybe he'll say that I'm wrong. Maybe he'll get up and say that Brad Wall didn't try to cut off Manitoba businesses from selling product at a lower price than Saskatchewan companies within the province of Saskatchewan, but that's exactly what he did, because Brad Wall could not find a single other justification to try and convince Manitobans to come along and join him in his project. He thought it was necessary to threaten Manitoba companies and, effectively, to stop Saskatchewan consumers from getting the best deal, because if those Manitoba companies could sell a product for lower than a Saskatchewan company, under Brad Wall's logic, they should be able to win the contract. But that wasn't the case.

And now what happens is the government of Manitoba wants to just move that drawbridge just a little bit. They want to move it from the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border to the other side to the Manitoba-Ontario border. And that's not what we're about. New Democrats never penalized Ontario or Quebec or Saskatchewan or Alberta or anybody else from carrying on business in Manitoba.

And, you know, the member for Emerson, I'll talk about an issue that I hope is near to dear to his

heart as it is to mine. Canada is a country that has not always been logical when we've talked about the sale of alcoholic beverages. And I know the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston) has some knowledge about this. He's quite aware that each province used to be its own little fiefdom when it came to the sale of alcohol. It meant that every province had to have its own brewery. And yes, that was good for employment. Maybe it wasn't best for beer drinkers who wanted to have a greater choice, greater options. And, indeed, in the area of wine, Manitoba actually—without having to sign on to the New West Partnership—Manitoba actually stepped forward and worked with the province of British Columbia and effectively opened up Manitoba's borders. Until just a couple of years ago, you could not order in a case of wine to the province of Manitoba. You had to go down to the liquor commission and order it in through the liquor commission.

One of my best friends has moved out to Kelowna, and he's an accountant. And he's got a great business, because he is the accountant for a number of small wineries in the Okanagan Valley. So, Madam Speaker, if the parliamentary association ever sits in Kelowna, I will make sure I introduce you to him. And he was actually very impressed to find that the NDP government in Manitoba had been the nation-builders to say, yes, indeed, if you're a winery in British Columbia, we will allow someone in Manitoba to order in a case of product. And we didn't need to have a New West Partnership for that to happen. We had to have some interested vendors in the province of British Columbia and an interested government here in Manitoba. And I know that's very throwing for the member for Emerson and certain members who see the world in their own particular way and get very shaken to discover how well Manitoba was actually doing at trading, not just with the west, but with the east, the north, the south, and, indeed, the entire world.

And, of course, New Democrats have always supported strong businesses; we've always supported a strong economy; we've always supported good, solid, permanent, well-paid, well-protected jobs for Manitoba workers; and we recognize establishing more trade ties helps build our province's economy. And that's why, of course, I know now they'll call it wasteful spending—they didn't like the fact that we spent money on the Trans-Canada Highway from the Ontario border to the Saskatchewan border. They weren't happy that we spent a lot of money rehabilitating and improving and enhancing

Highway 75 from Winnipeg down to Interstate 29 in North Dakota. We also invested a lot of money in Highway 10, in Highway 6, in Highway 9, and other major trade routes to help get goods to market. And we did that because we understand business. And we understand the need for Manitoba businesses to be able to compete. And we invested the money and we were criticized for it year after year after year by the Progressive Conservatives. Every year they voted against record highway budgets; they voted against taking the small business tax rate in Manitoba from 8 per cent down to 7 per cent, to 6, to 5, to 3, to 2 and, finally, to zero. They voted against that as well.

But now they're in government and now they want to pretend that they are the party that understands business. And there we had the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) up talking; and he told us, of course, about his knowledge of business. And what did he say? He said, well, competition is always better. Full stop. No question. And I decided to go back through Hansard and see when did the member for Brandon West get up and say a single word in opposition to the sale of MTS to Bell Canada, to go from four carriers in the province of Manitoba down to three. And, you know, I must have missed it, because I didn't see a single word from the member for Brandon West standing in this House or in the public domain saying: Actually, you know what, I am all for competition, and that's why I'm actually going to stand up to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and I'm going to put on the record my objection to my constituents in Brandon facing the prospect of much higher rates for their cellphones. Not a word about that.

And we heard just a couple of weeks ago the CRTC acknowledged that going from four carriers down to three carriers was most likely going to cost Manitobans a lot more money. But, you know, they're only the Competition Bureau. So, you know, what could they do about it? And they allowed the sale to proceed. So, when the member for Brandon

West stands up as the expert on business, he needs to be very careful when he makes his blanket statements because it's quite easy to expose that the statements that are being made are often being used for a narrow political purpose.

We do, as New Democrats, believe that competition is better. And, as New Democrats, we do believe that Manitoba businesses can compete and should be able to compete from coast to coast to coast. And there isn't very much in the New West Partnership that's actually going to help them achieve that.

You know, I had some opportunities when I was the trade minister to meet with different groups who actually wanted me to sort of brief them on what the New West Partnership was all about. And I said: Well, I'm no expert on it, but if you're a rural municipality in Manitoba, you need to know that you're going to have to be a lot more careful in your tendering practices. And many rural municipalities, of course, rely on hiring local folks to do the work. And it's probably quite understood by rural members—and I look around the room and see so many of them—that that is a major source of employment and income and capital, actually, for a number of Manitobans. And I had to say to rural municipalities that they needed to go and do their own homework on what impact the New West Partnership would have on their own tendering practices. And, in fact, the British Columbia association of municipalities was actually quite opposed to the New West Partnership. They were told there were the opportunities for increased trade, which would be good for their constituents—

Madam Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned, and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 1, 2017

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