



First Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, November 26, 1999

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Seated in the public gallery, we have with us today 40 students from Luxton School under the direction of Ms. Ellen Kolisnik and Ms. Sandy Bissoon. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Deloitte and Touche Financial Report Premier's Comments—Audit

Mr. Gary Filmon (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, if I may, at my first formal opportunity, congratulate you on behalf of all my colleagues as you assume this high office.

As you might expect, Mr. Speaker, my first question is to the Premier, and I will begin by congratulating him on assuming his new office.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is that there has been considerable discussion in reference to a financial review that was performed by Deloitte and Touche recently and tabled by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). In the course of discussing that particular review, I have heard the Premier on numerous occasions refer to it as an audit. In fact, on CJOB radio last week, in speaking about the financial challenges facing his government, the Premier referred no less than 14 times to this financial review as an audit. If I may, I would like to quote from the first page of the financial

review, and it says, quote, this is a financial review; it is not an audit of the government of Manitoba or any of its entities.

So will the First Minister verify, Mr. Speaker, that this was not an audit but a financial review based on projections given to him by the senior officers of the government of Manitoba?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Certainly in 1988, in the Speech from the Throne presented by the former Premier and now opposition leader, the term "audit" was also used by the government of the day, and I think the words "review" and "audit" have been used interchangeably. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is whatever you call it, Norm Cameron said, and I quote, that this government—we knew this government was spending money hand over fist to win the election campaign and whatever this is. We were surprised that they gobbled—and he uses the word "this"—they were gobbling up money from the one-time-only payment of the federal government and expending it in the election campaign.

What we need in Manitoba is a long-term approach to deal with the short-term crisis in agriculture. We need a long-term approach to deal with the starvation and then binge spending in health care, and we need a long-term approach to deal with the unfunded liabilities and pensions. That is the real message to all of us, Mr. Speaker, and that is what we are committed to doing for the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Filmon: The Premier has, of course, not answered the question. Given especially that he and his party publicly accepted and approved of all of the major expenditures that were in that financial review: farm aid, emergency expenditures, the money for settling labour agreements with nurses, doctors and allied health workers, we find his comments somewhat less than credible. But the point is, will he tell us whether or not the statement that is contained in the

financial review by Deloitte and trouche—truth—Touche—

An Honourable Member: Truth is right.

* (1005)

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what we are looking for from that side and not finding it.

Given the statement by Deloitte and Touche, this is a financial review and not an audit of the government or any of its entities. Will he withdraw his comments that he continually makes that this was an audit of the Province of Manitoba's expenditures?

Mr. Doer: The previous First Minister used the term "audit" as well in 1988 dealing with the financial review, and unlike the '88 review, we actually have the Provincial Auditor, the Clerk of the Executive Council, the head of the Treasury Board, the Deputy Minister of Finance all on the committee reviewing the situation left to us here in Manitoba. He mentioned that we in fact had voted for the expenditures that were revealed in the truth from the Deloitte and Touche report. I would like him to comment on a fact that his government received a memo in July of 1999 indicating that already there was a \$48-million deficit in health care spending in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Why did he not tell the people that?

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): Beauchesne 416, as pointed out by the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), clearly states that it must deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate. The honourable First Minister is attempting to prove to us that he is still in opposition by putting forward a question to opposition. Could you please bring him to order?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, just to respond, the Leader of the Opposition asked a question about the review, the audit that was taken. The First Minister replied specifically. The minister is doing exactly what he was asked to provide to

the House. That was information. The information was full because that was the nature of the question asked, and the question and the answer are in order.

Mr. Speaker: I would like to thank the members for their advice. The honourable opposition House leader does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, I know he wants to talk about all sorts of things, except that the Premier has been asked a direct question, that is whether or not he is refuting the comment that is in the financial review on page 1 by Deloitte and Touche that says this is a financial review and not an audit of the government of Manitoba or any of its entities.

It is a very direct question. It is a simple question. Will he say whether or not Deloitte and Touche is telling the truth when they put this forward or whether or not he is being accurate in calling it an audit? If he wants to rely on the fact that in 1988 something was said or something was done, he is the one who ran on the basis that he was going to change things, that they were going to do things differently, that they were going to be open and candid and honest.

So let us just ask whether or not he is prepared to be open and candid and honest and give us a direct statement whether or not this is an audit, or is it a financial review as Deloitte and Touche have said on page 1.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I was using the Webster's Dictionary definition of audit, a formal examination of an organization or individual's accounts or financial situation.

We would love to discuss the financial situation left by the previous government. I am shocked that the Leader of the Opposition would not want to deal with the horrible numbers out of the truthful document received by the people of Manitoba. I am shocked that we are not dealing with the fact that this government knew in July of 1999 that it was running a huge deficit in the health authorities in Winnipeg and refused to tell the people of Manitoba that their own budget

was being broken by actions made and decisions made by members opposite to, as Norm Cameron said, win the next election campaign.

I accept Deloitte and Touche's analysis that this is a financial review and the Webster's Dictionary definition, and I accept the fact that Deloitte and Touche is telling the truth about what it is and the truth about what the numbers are.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the official opposition, with a new question.

* (1010)

Mr. Filmon: I accept the Premier's half-hearted admission that he was in error in calling it an audit. If he wants to go to Webster's Dictionary, which he refers to: a formal examination. I will quote the page at the conclusion of the financial review in which Deloitte and Touche say, Mr. Speaker: given the tight timing, Deloitte and Touche LLP has relied essentially on information and records provided by Treasury Board staff and by senior officials from each entity. As a result of this approach and particularly the abbreviated examination that was necessary to be able to produce this interim report, the numbers referenced in this document have not been verified by a detailed analysis of individual program files.

In other words, it does not meet Webster's Dictionary definition either. So why does the Premier now not just fess up and apologize to the people of Manitoba for misleading them?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, it does deal with the financial situation of the Province of Manitoba. I have already stated that Deloitte and Touche uses the term "financial review," and I accept that. The bottom line though is what is the financial situation of the Province of Manitoba? That is the real issue.

I have memos from 1999, in July, indicating that this former Premier knew that they were running at that point, two months after their budget or less than two months after their budget, a \$48-million deficit over and above the expenditures in the budget. I think it is time for the people of Manitoba to stop having this shell

game, this shell game of having massive cutbacks after an election campaign and massive increases because there is no system in place in the election campaign.

As Norm Cameron, the former Premier's own appointee to the Lower Tax Commission, said, this group of people was spending money hand-over-hand to get re-elected. That is not good enough for the people of Manitoba.

Deficit Reduction Departmental Instructions

Mr. Gary Filmon (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, given that he has now acknowledged that there was no formal examination, that there was not an audit—and he has somewhat apologized I think or at least retracted his words—and given that the Premier and his colleagues publicly acknowledged and supported and approved of the major expenditures that were highlighted in the financial review—the Farm Aid, the emergency expenditures, the settling of labour agreements with nurses, doctors and allied health workers—now I would ask the Premier what direction he has given to cabinet and Treasury Board to limit expenditures and help eliminate the projected deficit that he is talking about.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. During Estimates last year, we were told that there was money to deal with the labour disputes or the labour settlements in the budget, Mr. Speaker, and then we find out after, based on the financial review, that there was not money in the budget to deal with it, and there was not money to deal with the deficits run by members opposite.

What we need now is accountability. Mr. Speaker, we have reduced the size of the cabinet. We have reduced the number of deputy ministers. We have cut \$7.5 million out of the government's Millennium Fund. We are working through the departments to get long-term solutions to the agricultural ad hoc programs and long-term solutions to the firing of a thousand nurses after the election campaign and paying them double and triple time during the election campaign because they have all their nurses burned out or leaving the province. That is what

we want, long-term solutions, not short-term fixes during election campaigns.

Balanced Budget Legislation Government Commitment

Mr. Gary Filmon (Leader of the Opposition):

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has thrown up his hands and has taken no responsibility and has given absolutely no instruction to the departments to seek any ways of limiting their spending and reducing any exposure to deficit. He has given no instruction whatsoever. That is the kind of concern I think that most Manitobans have, that there is no commitment, there is absolutely no commitment to a balanced budget over there.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier then if he will indicate to us and to all Manitobans that his government is still committed to the balanced budget legislation as it exists in the province and that he will not amend it during his term of office.

* (1015)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I notice that members opposite, who were running a deficit in July of 1999, did not follow their own legislation by taking a pay cut.

Mr. Speaker, we believe strongly that governments should live within their means. It is interesting to note that the one-time-only payment from the federal government of \$131 million was gobbled up in three months by members opposite, according to the financial situation.

We have sent out instructions to departments. All nonessential staff positions are frozen. We have reduced the number of deputy ministers. We have reduced the number of departments. We have cut back \$7.5 million out of the Millennium Fund. We have cut the bureaucracies in health care.

There were two health care authorities in the Winnipeg Health Authority that together their salaries were half a million dollars a year. We are changing that, Mr. Speaker. We want more nurses at the bedside and less bureaucrats that

have been created by members opposite in health authorities. That is what we are going to do about it.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, well, of course, we would ask the First Minister to table those instructions and those memos that he has sent out to the departments, but he still has not answered the question. That is: is his government committed to the balanced budget legislation that exists in our province, and will they assure Manitobans that they will not amend it during their term of office?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to living within our means, but we said in the election campaign and we said after the election campaign that we will amend the balanced budget legislation to prohibit the sale of a Crown corporation. We will prohibit the sale of a Crown corporation going into general revenue, into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and then being manipulated in a dishonest way, flowing into the operating revenues of government.

That is something that the financial review will identify, Mr. Speaker, and it is something that has created deceit and dishonesty about the books in Manitoba. We are going to bring honesty back to the financial situation.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, what we are looking for is a straightforward answer. Will he say that the balanced budget legislation that exists will not be amended? If he wants to give an exception for the terms of a Crown corporation, I will accept that. But will he otherwise say that that balanced budget legislation will remain as is?

An Honourable Member: What absolute hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker. What absolute hypocrisy, because they took the money from Telephones—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable First Minister, I have not recognized you yet.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the hypocrisy of members opposite. This is part of the problem we are dealing with because they in fact have used the sale of an asset, which was

a one-time-only revenue, as an operating revenue in the budget. That is part of the problem.

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, it is my duty to bring to the attention of this House that the honourable First Minister should choose his words very carefully. "Hypocrisy" has been ruled out of order on a number of occasions, and I would ask if the Premier could remove that from the record.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): On the point of order, again, I think we are having points of order raised from the other side, Mr. Speaker, not because of any rules but because they do not like the sound of the answers.

In terms of use of the word "hypocrisy," first of all, the Premier did not refer to any members opposite. Second of all, Beachesne says that the word "hypocrisy" has been ruled parliamentary.

* (1020)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. I would caution all members to pick and choose their words very carefully.

Mr. Doer: I did not refer to any individual member, but I do withdraw it, Mr. Speaker. I will apologize in the order of having better decorum in the House as we approach the next century. I think all of us should strive towards that. I do not want to have as many rulings as my predecessor.

* * *

An Honourable Member: I was there a long time.

Mr. Doer: That is true, and he is to be congratulated for that longevity.

What we are also concerned about, if you read the financial review or audit as the former Premier used in the '88 Speech from the Throne,

in 1988 it identified a billion dollars unfunded liability of pensions. If you read the Deloitte and Touche report, 10 years later they identify I believe it is \$2.5 billion in unfunded liability of pensions. That was not covered by the so-called balanced budget legislation.

We feel that there are three major problems with the finances here in Manitoba: (1) we need long-term solutions to agricultural ad hoc payments; (2) we need long-term solutions to the responsibility of paying money and the authority to pay money in health care. These creations of these new bureaucracies have created costs to the taxpayers in health care without the results of nurses at the bedside. We have got to do something about that, and we are pledging long-term solutions. We could not close every hospital in Manitoba for the next four months in order to deal with the shortfall left to us that was known by the government in July 1999.

The third issue we have to deal with is long term, and we do not suggest for a moment short term, but long term. In the early '60s or the mid-'60s, the previous Conservative government changed the employer portion of unfunded liabilities of pensions. It has gone from a billion dollars when members opposite were in office to \$2.5. We corrected that with the Crown corporations, and the previous government, to their credit, continued it on in paying that in Hydro and Telephones and other Crown corporations. So we are looking for the financial review to come up with some long-term ideas and solutions, financial solutions, for the people of Manitoba so that we can all maintain the priority items, health care, education, strong economy, a decent justice system and hope for all of our people.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, all of the things that the Premier referred to, of course, can be done within the balanced budget legislation. That is what the Fiscal Stabilization Fund is there for, so that you do not have to close hospitals, so that you do not have to make dramatic changes in any of your programs, so that you are able to carry on with the funding available to you.

I guess that we take from that answer that the members opposite, just a matter of weeks into their term, having promised that they will

maintain the balanced budget legislation and the commitment to balanced budgets, are now abandoning that commitment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the balanced budget legislation requires that if a government runs a deficit, the cabinet will take a pay cut. I can assure members opposite that when we promised to keep balanced budget legislation, we also promised to have the numbers be honest and accurate, and we will not be running a \$48-million deficit over the budget in July of a new budget year and not be prepared to swallow the medicine required in the balanced budget legislation, which is a pay cut.

I wonder if the former First Minister is going to follow his own balanced budget legislation and take a pay cut for the deficit they left us.

* (1025)

Budget Departmental Instructions

Mr. Eric Stefanson (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the new Minister of Finance.

I would hope that the minister understands—I am sure that he does—that a budget is a financial plan that must be managed continuously throughout the year just like we do in our households, just like we do in our businesses, and that in all of our budgets, every budget that we have brought down, including our four audited balanced budgets, Mr. Speaker, we always faced issues such as spending increases in some areas, spending lapses in some areas, spending deferrals in some areas, spending reductions, revenue adjustments, transfers from the savings account, which now stands at \$270 million. Those are all parts of issues that you have to deal with if you are going to govern this province.

I want to ask the minister, very clearly: when do he and his colleagues intend to start governing and outline for this House and the people of Manitoba the steps that he and his government are taking to ensure that they keep their election promise and balance the books this

year, just as we would have done if we were returned to office, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the day we took office was the day we started balancing the budget of Manitoba. The first step in that process, the first step in any proper management process, is to do an assessment of the situation that you inherited, and that is why we decided to appoint an independent financial review committee.

The chair of that committee is Mr. Ron Hikel, the same person who did the review in 1988 for the Conservative government. He has the confidence of our government; he had the confidence of the previous government, and we decided that in order to proceed, we should do this as independently as possible. We appointed along with him to be on that committee the Deputy Minister of Finance, the Provincial Auditor who has had many concerns over the years that have not been addressed; the secretary to the Treasury Board, an independent management consultant from the community. This group of people was then given terms of reference, which are remarkably similar to 1988, to give us an appraisal of the situation that we have now in terms of our finances, and then after that first phase is completed to recommend how we can improve the budgeting system.

So that is the first step in a good management process. We have taken that and we will follow through on it.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question, it appears, and I will ask the minister again: has this Minister of Finance provided any direction, and I repeat, any direction, to departments and organizations that receive obviously their funding from the taxpayers of Manitoba? Has he provided any direction on expenditure controls and expenditure reductions, and would he outline those very clearly for members of this House and for all Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for Kirkfield Park for his question. Perhaps he missed the press conference that we held last Friday afternoon where we announced 10 measures to start grabbing control of the budget of Manitoba. The first measure was a Health Care Financial

Management and Accountability Review. That is the most serious exposure that we have in the budget, and that group has brought itself together under the soon-to-be-announced chairperson. The Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) may make that available as early as today.

So the first thing to do was to grab control of what is happening in health care. Secondly, we announced last Friday that we will amalgamate the Winnipeg Long Term Care Authority and the Winnipeg Hospital Authority to take the first step in reducing administrative duplication, a promise that was announced during the election and that will be followed through on. Thirdly, we announced that there will be a careful review of all vacant positions in government, while making sure that we keep front-line positions in action, in place to provide the services that Manitoba needs. Fourthly, we announced a reduction in expenditures in the millennium projects. We have reduced the budget from \$10 million to \$2.5 million. We have already had letters coming in, people concerned about those cutbacks, but we had to take a tough decision there and we have.

I would be happy to outline further details if I have any other questions.

* (1030)

Departmental Expenditures Information Release

Mr. Eric Stefanson (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I have had a chance to look at this press release from the minister, and again there is not a great deal of detail.

My final supplementary question to the minister is in reference to this Deloitte and Touche report, which is a summary of many potential expenditure requirements for the months ahead. Will this minister be less secretive and start to provide not only this House but all Manitobans some more detail backing up these future expenditure requests that are outlined? I know everybody is wanting that—media, public, ourselves. We are all asking for it. When is this minister going to provide greater detail around all of these issues raised in this report?

Mr. Speaker: The question has been put.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): It is fascinating to me that the member opposite asks for less secretiveness. Perhaps he forgot that he signed an agreement with the Manitoba Nurses' Union, which is going to cost \$24 million this year, for which there was no budget allocation. Perhaps he—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Selinger: The Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) informs me that it was alleged that all these agreements were covered off in the Estimates. The financial review indicates that they have not been provided for in the Estimates. We will try to do better than that. We have another agreement here with CUPE and other trades, \$23.3 million of commitments, nothing in the budget for it. A reduced workweek, a reinstatement of costs of \$16 million to the Nurses' Union and CUPE—nothing in the budget for it. That is a total of \$63.2 million right there for which there are no budget expenditures. We would be happy to make further information available.

Deloitte and Touche Financial Report Verification Process

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, by way of introduction, after 25 years in the private sector, 20 of those years spent working closely with the firm of Deloitte and Touche as our auditors, two years spent as the laymember on the Manitoba Institute of Chartered Accountants, I find it very unfortunate and quite dismaying that the members opposite do not have a full understanding of the difference between an audit as conducted by an auditing firm and a financial review.

If I can speak to page 5 of the financial review, which is not an audit, where Deloitte and Touche states, and I quote: we have not conducted a verification process with respect to expenditures or revenue projections for the individual departments and programs. It is under a paragraph entitled reliance on information provided by provincial officials.

My question to the Minister of Finance is: can the Minister of Finance confirm that the verification process for this Christmas wish list has not taken place?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I would like to thank the member for Fort Whyte for his question. The methodology used in this financial review is exactly the same methodology that was used in 1988.

The point is this. This methodology will be firmed up as we move to the final report in December. They make it very clear that it is not an audited value for the money processed for effectiveness and efficiency is being looked at. They are looking at the difference between the budget and the expenditures which have been committed which are not budgeted for. That is exactly what we asked them to do, and that is what they have provided us. Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: There has obviously not been enough time for anybody to do a verification process.

My supplementary question to the Minister of Finance is: when will the verification process be conducted?

Mr. Selinger: The member opposite seems to be both wanting an audit as well as a financial review. If he wants a verification process, we will do that with our annual audit. In the meantime, we are going to conduct an independent financial review. The independent financial review will verify the numbers through the proper procedure of doing a financial review which includes interviewing the senior officials in the government, senior officials appointed by the former government.

Budget Departmental Instructions

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the Minister of Finance. Will the Minister of Finance ensure that the various departments, who have submitted this Christmas wish list for the financial review, be instructed to live up to the original budget as it was passed last spring and to live within the means of that budget which all members of this House agreed to?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I wish the former government would have asked the government that they were managing at the time to live within the budget. We would not have this problem that is in front of us today. The numbers which have been provided to us are numbers for commitments that had been made before we took government amounting to at least a minimum of \$262 billion. If they would have done their job, we would not have been confronted with this problem.

Health Care System Expenditures

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Just before the election when I visited Victoria Hospital, there were many patients in the hallway. I would like the minister to confirm that immediately the election was called, the taps were opened wide. It was huge binge spending; the hallways were cleared. As soon as the election was over, the patients were back in the hallway. Is this an example of the sort of binge spending that caused the deficit? Did you approve, as the Leader of the Opposition said, of this kind of expenditure?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): As the member knows and actually as I recall campaigned on, one of our goals in this province is to move this province toward a system where we are not into binge spending that follows an election campaign, followed by a huge spending prior to an election campaign, followed by starvation that occurs after an election campaign, which unfortunately has been the pattern of operation of this province. As the member knows and as the member is aware of, Mr. Speaker, in the last year's budget there was an increase in Health expenditures of \$195 million, which members on this side of the House agreed on, because for the first time in years in this province we had actually seen some money going into financing.

What we were not aware of was the fact that the government, unbeknownst to us and not publicly stating, Mr. Speaker, put in place expenditures of which we had no knowledge. We are now faced with the prospect probably of deficit funding, and still people are in the

hallways left as a legacy of the 11 years of disregard by the previous government.

Expenditure Management

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My supplementary to the Minister of Health. I would like to know, with the huge cost overruns in places like the Deloraine clinic, more than 100 percent, what expenditure management was there when you were elected, and what have you done to put in place a health expenditure management system?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I do not think it is a public secret that when we came to office and we saw the briefing notes that were provided, the same notes and the same information that was provided to the government, about the first quarter variance which indicated an overexpenditure of \$170 million in health care unaccounted for, that we were quite shocked. One of the first steps that we took, and one of the first steps that there will be action on in order to deal with this was the establishment of a Health Care Financial Management and Accountability Review. Now this is not going to be one of these processes that is going to go on for a long period of time that is going to be hiding the issue.

We are putting in place individuals that are respected in the community that will quickly provide us with the controls and the accountability to get this runaway situation under control because it is not just a question of numbers. What has happened is not only had this government poorly spent and poorly planned, but despite doing that we do not have enough nurses, we have people in the hallways, and we have long waiting lists. We have to address those issues not only by putting people in place and programs in place but by getting accountability and responsibility back into the health care system.

* (1040)

Balanced Budget Government Commitment

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My supplementary to the Premier: I would like to

know why, given there is such a big room for improvement, given that there are four months left in the year, you are not going to turn every stone possible to balance the budget? Why are you not going to try and balance the budget?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): We have reduced the size of cabinet, we have reduced the number of deputies, we are freezing all nonessential staff. For example, if you are a jail guard, you will be replaced in a facility, but if you are not, you are in an administrative position, the position is frozen if it is vacant. We are cutting things like millennium funds, and we are going through every budget, as the member opposite said, to uncover every stone to find money to deal with the situation left to us.

But I want to deal with the gravity of the situation left to us. If we were to say take the money in health care that is a deficit and deal with it in the health care budget, we would almost have to close every hospital in Manitoba for the next three months without paying severance pay.

The former Premier always used the term \$240 million cut from the federal government represented all the health care hospitals in rural and northern Manitoba for a whole year. The hospital budget is about \$1.3 billion, \$1.4 billion. If we were to try to recover the \$300 million to \$400 million left, it would be massive, massive reductions and closures of hospitals for three months. We are not going to go through the absolute firing of 1,000 nurses after an election and binge spending before the election. We think that is the wrong way to go.

Mr. Speaker, we are also trying to get a handle on things like SmartHealth, \$37 million that has been spent by members opposite without any accounting, without any responsibility, the scheme-a-dream Tories. Their regime is over. We have never been able to find the billion dollars that they promised in the campaign, but I want to promise the member that we will turn over every stone to look at every scheme that we can cancel, every boondoggle that should be cancelled, every bureaucrat that is not necessary. We are going to make sure that there is less administration and more nurses in our health care system in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Speaker's Statement

Manitoba Legislative Internship Programme

Mr. Speaker: I would like to draw members' attention to the Speaker's Gallery where the six young persons who were appointed to the Manitoba Legislative Internship Programme for the years 1999 and 2000 are seated. In accordance with established practices, three interns were assigned to the government caucus and three to the official opposition caucus. Their term of employment is 12 months. They have been performing a variety of research and other tasks for private members.

These interns commenced their assignments in September and will complete them in August. They are, working with the government caucus, Ms. Jennifer Nguyen of the University of Manitoba. Please stand. Mr. Jonathan Hildebrand of the University of Manitoba, Ms. Jana Saunderson of the University of Manitoba.

* (1050)

Working with the caucus of the official opposition are Ms. Christin Didora of the University of Winnipeg, Mr. Lachlan McInnes of Brandon University. Please remain standing, and Mr. Jonathan Friesen of Brandon, who is unable to join us today.

Copies of their biographies have been distributed to all the members.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

New CAT Scanner at the Dauphin Regional Health Centre

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin-Roblin): I am very pleased to rise today with a member's statement.

Tuesday, October 26, was a big day in my constituency and in my hometown of Dauphin, and also a big day for our region in terms of health care. On the 26th of October, I helped to

cut the ribbon for the CT scan that was installed at the Dauphin Regional Health Centre. I would like to congratulate the people who played an awfully big role in establishing this.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Struthers: Before members opposite get too hot and bothered over it, I want to also remind them that a lot of the fundraising was done locally, and it was the former government that delayed and delayed in the establishment of this CAT scanner in my community.

I want to thank the staff at the Dauphin Regional Health Centre for the work that it did in persevering on this problem and making the day possible. Fundraising efforts on their part and of the citizens of the region started back in the late '80s and resulted in \$450,000 or so being put forward to this good cause.

I want to thank the Parkland Regional Health Authority and its staff for its work in this effort, and I want to think back to when I was a school principal at Rorketon. A little girl came to me with a pledge sheet at that time, in 1990, and the citizens of Rorketon had put together a walkathon to raise money to fund this CT scan. Many communities in our area did this throughout the early '90s.

So I think it was a very, very good effort on the part of our Parkland citizens, and I want to point out that this opening of this CT scan really does signify this government's commitment to improving health care for rural Manitobans and bringing these kinds of services closer to the people all across this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Throne Speech—Rural Manitoba

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Yesterday in this House, indeed, we and the entire province had the opportunity to taste today's Manitoba NDP legislative menu known as the Speech from the Throne.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that it appears the NDP are on a serious diet when it comes to new ideas. In fact, I would suggest that the speech should have been printed and read 50 percent

fewer ideas. As one reads the speech, which, we all know, lays the foundation for the government's agenda in the coming year, I am astounded at the weak structure they are attempting to construct.

Firstly, I thank members opposite for their acknowledgement that the progressive and fiscally responsible policies of the previous Progressive Conservative administration have provided them with a strong base on which to build, as well as their willingness to follow through on our '99-2000 budget commitment to further reduce Manitobans' personal income tax by a further 1.5 percent. I worry, though, along with many Manitobans, that this tax cut may be the last one we see for quite some time, as today's NDP appears more concerned with fulfilling their Christmas wish list while they still have a loophole to take advantage of.

As the member for Turtle Mountain, I must say that I was very disappointed in the lack of mention of rural Manitoba. Throughout the entire speech there are only two references to rural Manitoba, equalling a whopping four sentences. Just four sentences are dedicated to addressing the critical situation facing Manitoba's farm families and rural communities that rely on them. Today, after Manitobans have had the opportunity to watch the news and read the papers, they are left wondering where all the ideas the NDP formulated during the dozen years they were in opposition have gone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Air Rescue Search

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, the feared and possibly tragic crash of a single-engine Cherokee airplane en route from Poplar River to Fairford reminds us once again of the often dangerous conditions travellers face in northern Manitoba. Our hearts go out to the families of passengers Mary Sinclair, Katy Mitchell and pilot Milton Menzies. Mary Sinclair, mother of four, was returning home to Lake St. Martin after visiting her daughter Katy at Poplar River.

We note that Mr. Menzies, with the Pentecostal Church at Fairford First Nation, had flown to northern communities such as

Shamattawa, Red Sucker Lake, Garden Hill and northwestern Ontario reserves nearly every week for the past 16 years. He had set up a camp for youth at Poplar River and used to travel to there from Fairford regularly to conduct church service. He and his late wife, Wendy, were very respected by aboriginal people throughout this region.

We, along with friends, families and the communities of Lake St. Martin, Poplar River, Fairford and many other communities, await the results of the air rescue search. Meanwhile our prayers and thoughts are with all those involved. Thank you.

Education Funding

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, yesterday afternoon I had the opportunity to listen to the Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Caldwell) as he provided his spin to his government's Speech from the Throne.

What struck me in particular were two things the Minister of Education and Training said. The first was that the NDP would be providing stable and predictable funding in accord with economic growth. Well, when one reviews his comments you are reminded of the fact that the NDP are currently in the process of defining exactly what constitutes economic growth. Again they are attempting to discover another loophole through which to crawl.

May I remind the member that during the PC administration, we in our 1998-99 budget provided a 2.2 percent increase. In our 1999-2000 budget, we provided a further 2.6 percent increase, and we made a commitment to increase overall education funding again in 2000 and 2001 by at least 2 percent.

Unlike members opposite, we did not scramble to find the ejection seat by redefining economic growth. Instead we provided school divisions with the ability to plan in advance by making a commitment of a minimum 2 percent increase in the following year. Forcing school divisions to wait until the new government tries to decide what they meant by economic growth fails to provide students and educators with a measure of stability.

Secondly, the minister talked about how the PC government issued directives in relation to education. Now, talk about the pot calling the kettle black. Let us review for a moment. Immediately upon assuming office, the NDP issued a directive to all school divisions who had signed contracts at YNN that they must end the contract after a six-month prior period. As well, today's NDP are now talking about forcing school divisions to amalgamate. If these are not examples of issuing directives, then I do not know what qualifies. Maybe members opposite can provide Manitobans with their latest definition. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery, where we have with us today the Honourable Chris Axworthy, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the Province of Saskatchewan. Please stand.

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

* * *

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): We are going to be asking leave on a resolution. Mr. Speaker, my capacity is Deputy Government House Leader. I believe the Government House Leader will be putting forth the specific motion.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I understand that there is agreement to set aside the reply to the Speech from the Throne and proceed with an emergency debate on the issue of farm prices, which will be introduced by the honourable member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) and seconded by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

I also understand that there is a consent to putting the matter to a vote on—

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Mackintosh: —Monday, I understand, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate there has not been an acceptance by the Opposition House Leader's caucus. It is my understanding that that is the nature of the understanding.

* (1100)

Point of Order

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Our group is most anxious to discuss this very serious issue. We are still privileged, thank you, for the vote of September 21 to have a preponderance of rural members on this side of the House. It is hardly fair to talk about introducing a resolution, where we are looking at adjourning this House within a short hour, prior to any serious agreements being made.

I certainly want to give an undertaking that we look forward to entertain and to speak to that resolution at an early date as agreed to by the respective House leaders and have that serious discussion that agriculture deserves.

I might also remind you, Mr. Speaker, that we have the latitude of a throne speech to raise the issue of agriculture on every day for the next seven days. Sir, in having some understanding and empathy for your position as the first day in the Speakership Chair, I do not particularly want to challenge you to accept a motion that is clearly out of order so early at this time of your Speakership.

The motion that is being suggested is out of order with accordance to our rules. We have an opportunity during the throne speech, all of us, to raise the issue of agriculture, and I would ask our respective House leaders be given an opportunity to negotiate an appropriate resolution to this, rather than doing it in the manner that it is being presented.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the speaker for his advice. On the same point of order, the honourable Government House Leader.

Mr. Mackintosh: I just want to describe the arrangement that was entered into late yesterday between myself and the Opposition House Leader and, I understand, the Leader of the Liberal Party in the House. Recognizing that

this is a matter of urgent public importance, rather than go by way of that procedure it was thought that it was important that there be a resolution that was voted on by the House, a substantive motion. Under the MUPI procedure there is a maximum of 10 minutes per member, as we all know, but we thought there would be some more latitude by proceeding in a somewhat different way. So as a result of discussions entered into, there were two, actually there were three, decisions that were arrived at yesterday.

The first one is that there would be unanimous consent to introduce the resolution following Routine Proceedings today. The second decision, an agreement by consent, was that the matter would be put to a vote before adjournment today. The third agreement—well, I am speaking from my personal involvement—was that there would be a time limit of 40 minutes for the government side, 40 minutes for the opposition side and 10 minutes for the member for River Heights, and that was how the matter was to proceed today.

I regret that the opposition House leader has not been able to get the support of his caucus. That was the agreement, and that is how we came into the House today. We are prepared to give consent to debate this serious, serious matter affecting all Manitobans now.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): On the same point of order, I am new at this, as the House leader is new on the other side. We have had some discussion over the past couple of days on this issue. I know that the minister—[interjection] Excuse me, if you would mind letting me finish—I know that the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has had a discussion with my critic of Agriculture in opposition. From the discussions I had with my critic I was of the understanding that he was agreed that the debate could come forward. I had brought that to the attention of the House leader on the other side of the House yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that yes, we could bring the debate forward.

I did not, as he stated in No. 2, that it would be put to a vote. I think there is a misunderstanding or a miscommunication between himself and me and it could have been the

telephone communication that we had this misunderstanding, but I remember that I said, yes, we would allow it by unanimous consent to be brought forward, but on such an important issue to Manitobans, my colleagues were very directed this morning that they could not accomplish what is needed within the farm economy in an hour-and-a-half debate. So, Mr. Speaker, I was hoping to be able to negotiate with my House leader but the time was running out.

I would like the opportunity to sit down with the House leader and negotiate a resolution to this concern. I think that we have to work together if we want to have an orderly fashion in this House, and if he and I have had a misunderstanding on this agreement, I apologize for any errors I might have done or said upon this, but I would like an opportunity to work this out and see if we can come to an understanding to bring forward a debate that is urgent to all Manitobans. So give us an opportunity to get together and see if we can work something out. This debate could carry forward.

Mr. Mackintosh: Perhaps if there can be the will of the House expressed in this way that there will be further discussions then. We will renegotiate this matter, and perhaps there can be a focusing for Monday to bring this matter forward depending on further discussions. Then we will proceed with the throne speech reply today.

Mr. Speaker: The opposition House leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Laurendeau: It might be on a new point of order. I think we have probably run out of points of order.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot rule on a new point of order until I rule on the old point of order.

Mr. Laurendeau: On the same point of order then. Seeing as we seem to be dealing with where we are headed here, I have some concerns with what the House leader from the other side is putting forward at this time. Once we start in to the throne speech, then we would be missing some days at the tag end because we only have eight days of the throne speech, eight days of

debate. But if we move into the debate today, the clock starts and the dates further would be tied into it.

An Honourable Member: It is actually days of debate. It is days of debate, so it is not proper.

Mr. Laurendeau: That is right. It is days of debate.

Mr. Speaker: I thank all honourable members for their advice. [interjection]

Order, please. Negotiating on the floor may not be the best way to deal with this. House leaders could perhaps meet and come back to the House with a suggestion for all of us.

On the point of order raised by the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns), he has a point of order, and today the business of the House is the throne speech.

* (1110)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE (First Day of Debate)

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): I am honoured to move, seconded by the MLA for Brandon West (Mr. Caldwell), that the following address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at this First Session of the Thirty-seventh Legislature of Manitoba.

Motion presented.

Ms. Allan: It is an honour, Mr. Speaker, for me, as a newly elected MLA to speak in this historic Chamber. The day you were elected as Speaker in this Chamber was a very symbolic day for Canada, and I was honoured to be part of that very special occasion. By coincidence, I had read your inaugural speech the night before and learned more about your personal background, the fact that you were one of 12 children raised

in a northern community in our province. I know you will bring respect and dignity to your position and preside over the affairs of this House with fairness and impartiality.

I would also like to convey my congratulations to the First Minister (Mr. Doer) of our province. I had the privilege of working on his leadership campaign as the Leader of the Manitoba NDP and have every confidence that the First Minister will provide Manitoba with competent and compassionate leadership.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Clerk of the House, Mr. Binx Remnant, for his dedicated service to this Legislature and wish him all the best in his retirement. His professionalism and sense of humour have served the members of this Legislature well. I worked with Binx during the '80s, and I am pleased to be back in time to say thanks and farewell.

Being elected to the Legislature and representing my party is an honour for me because of my personal background. I was born and raised in MacGregor, Manitoba, a real hotbed of socialism, a small farming community halfway between Winnipeg and Brandon. My mother, Hazel Allan, who will be 83 on Christmas Day, was one of the first women to run for the CCF when she was my age. Her opponent was formidable, the then Premier of this province, Douglas Campbell. My mom was a pioneer for women in politics. I congratulate her for her courage. She paved the way for women in our party because of her heartfelt conviction that the left-wing movement would make a difference for everyday people. I will carry forward the same values that brought my mother into politics. The day I won St. Vital, she penned me a note and expressed how happy she was that I had been elected and that I had fulfilled her dream for her.

One of my earliest childhood memories when I was 10 years old was sitting in the backyard one day with my mother and the leader of the CCF before Tommy Douglas, M.J. Caldwell. They were having a glass of lemonade in the backyard, and I knew this was a very important man because they were drinking lemonade out of glasses that came out of the

china cabinet in our dining room, and no one ever got to drink out of those glasses. He accidentally leaned over and dropped the glass and broke it, and my mother—I had to phone her actually yesterday and ask her what the note said inside—saved that glass all these years, and there is a note inside that says: M. J. Caldwell broke this glass on June 11, 1962.

I would like to thank the people of St. Vital constituency for their confidence in electing me as their MLA. It is a privilege to be given the responsibility of representing the New Democratic Party and the St. Vital community in this Assembly. I assure all those who have placed their trust in me that I will work to the best of my ability to represent their interests. A special thanks to my family, Neil, Joel and Jessie, for all their support and encouragement.

I would also like to congratulate my fellow MLAs on their election to this Assembly. The effort put out by members on both sides of this House during the election and by those who were not elected is a testament to the health of our democratic system.

The NDP caucus elected in September represents the face of Manitoba and the diversity of all geographic regions, including aboriginal, Metis, Inuit, Filipino and the largest number of women ever elected in a government caucus. Our cabinet has the largest number of aboriginals and women in the history of this province. We truly represent Manitoba.

I would also like to pay tribute to those who served the constituency of St. Vital in the past. Too often party differences get in the way of giving recognition to such service. I have no intention of allowing these differences to prevent me from saying thanks to my predecessor, Shirley Render, who, while of a different party affiliation, actively represented the constituency during her term in office.

Mr. Speaker, in what I understand is a long-standing tradition for new members, I would like to take some time to familiarize the honourable members with the constituency I represent. I would like to comment that St. Vital was traditionally an NDP seat for many years until 1988.

I am proud of the accomplishment of my campaign team, a dedicated group of individuals and volunteers that have brought back the riding of St. Vital into the NDP fold. St. Vital is a comparatively old community in terms of western Canadian history, with the first settlement of this area going back just a mere 10 years after the arrival of the Selkirk settlers.

In 1860 Bishop Tache established the St. Vital school. It is said that he chose the name for the patron saint of Justin Grant, one of the bishops who became well known for his self-sacrificing work in Manitoba.

The first settlers to St. Vital were Metis and French who sought to build a new way of life close to St. Boniface, where they had grown up. The Metis, who had focused their lives on the fur trade, now had little demand for their abilities with the influx of white settlers from the south and east. Therefore they turned to farming as a new means of livelihood. The land they broke was virgin soil. In most cases they went in for mixed farming on huge acreage.

* (1120)

This hardy group made their mark on the community and is in evidence throughout St. Vital today. Trails they once used are now highways and residential streets that have sprung up on land that they tilled and worked. Family names that left their mark on St. Vital are Riel, Victor Mager, Mouard, Guay, Gaboury and Major.

The first homes were built in St. Vital around 1822, with retired fur traders claiming their own farms. Lots were generally long and narrow, ensuring each homestead had a ready source of water from the Red and Seine rivers. With its concentration of market gardens, St. Vital provided fresh foods and dairy products needed by a burgeoning city.

Until the 1920s this was the main activity in the community. With changing times, homes began to be built in the Elm Park area until the depression and the second world war slowed development. Following the war, St. Vital saw a burst of development which has continued until now. The three Morier brothers, Olier, Oscar

and Horace, established one of the first and largest market gardens in the St. Vital area, on land bounded by the Red and Seine rivers, Morier and Vivien avenues.

In the early days workers slept overnight in the spring months in the four greenhouses stoking fires to fend off frost. The garden had its own well and windmill which operated until 1955. Morier Park is now located on land donated by the Morier family.

The first agricultural fairs were held at St. Mary's and St. Anne's roads. The St. Vital Agricultural Society was formed in 1909 by members of the Pastime Club, an organization created in 1900 devoted to providing people with the means to relax and amuse themselves.

Holding its first fair in August 1910, this event soon became popular in the St. Vital and Norwood communities. It developed a reputation as the place where friends met. The society works for better gardens and improved conditions in St. Vital and will celebrate its 90th Anniversary this next summer.

Canoes and York boats were the first means of transportation in the Red River Valley, but during the 1850s, hundreds of oxcarts would travel the major trails on what are now St. Mary's and St. Anne's roads. Steamboats arrived in 1859 and by 1885 the CPR mainline had reached Winnipeg. St. Mary's Road was paved in 1912, but vehicles and pedestrians relied on ferries to cross the rivers. The Elm Park Bridge built in 1912 was a private toll bridge, and the Norwood Bridge was built in 1931. In 1913, the first Winnipeg electric streetcar was laid down on St. Mary's Road and an ornate arch was built to welcome visitors.

The first commercial development, a livery stable, appeared in 1870. This was the starting point for weekly summertime horse races to and from the St. Boniface Cathedral. In the winter, races were held on the ice of the Red River. The junction of St. Mary's and St. Anne's roads are recognized as the heart of old St. Vital. This intersection was pivotal in the early days of settlement in the Red River Valley. Two trails that are now marked by concrete roadways were a major means of access to and from Upper Fort

Garry in the 19th Century. I am glad that part of the tradition of a maiden speech is a historical prospective of one's riding and the opportunity to share that history with our fellow colleagues.

A few weeks ago, I was at a luncheon that was actually sponsored by the government. I had a youth that I was sitting with at the table say to me: So what qualifications do you have to have to be an MLA? I kind of looked at him and I said that is a very, very good question. First of all, I told him about my mother who instilled in me an interest in public service, and then I told him a few details about my working career. Throughout my professional life, I have had the pleasure of working extensively with community groups in the nonprofit sector, particularly in the health and cultural industries. This experience has allowed me the opportunity to work with many talented people who are committed to making Manitoba their home, people who believe in our communities.

About 10 years ago because of my involvement starting off volunteering in my children's schools, I became interested in public education. I was first elected as a school trustee in 1995 and spent four years learning first-hand the challenges facing our education community. I ran my own consulting business for the last eight years.

So I said to the young man who asked me what qualifications I had to be an MLA: Well, you know what, I guess, I am a jill-of-all-trades and that my broad experience in the community will serve me well in meeting the needs of the constituents in St. Vital, but my experience as a school trustee was a major turning point in my life.

The direction the past government was taking with public education was very concerning to me. Underfunding of the education system on an ongoing basis, I believe, was putting our public education system at risk. The system was being inundated with change without consultation and professional development opportunities for staff to adjust to that change. Our education system must prepare our youth for the challenges of the new economy. Our children must be invested in so we can build a solid foundation for the future. I have to pay

tribute to my colleagues in the education community that I have worked with over the years: teachers, parents, trustees, administrators and support staff who care and are dedicated to our children.

When I was elected in 1995 as a school trustee in the Norwood School Division, I ran on an amalgamation platform, and within two months of being elected the board started the amalgamation process. July 1, 1998, saw one of the first voluntary amalgamations in Canada between the Norwood and St. Boniface boards. Part of the amalgamation process was a facilities review in Norwood, and we had to merge two schools to find economies of scale. The amalgamation was done to focus on children and put resources into the classroom.

In January 1999, when Linda McIntosh, the Minister of Education, came out with a 2.6 funding increase with only 0.67 percent going to the block and all of the rest of the funding was identified as categorical, that was it. I could not sit at the board table anymore and cut programs and raise people's taxes. It was time for change.

* (1130)

I have to be really honest with you. I never aspired to be a provincial politician. I was very involved with the NDP for years but always in the backrooms. People would ask me when I was going to run, and my response was always "never at the provincial level." My passion for the public education system made me walk a path I thought I would never walk. When I canvassed in St. Vital, and I canvassed every street in St. Vital, actually quite a few of them twice because I started canvassing in March prior to the election, people that I met at the doorstep openly expressed their concerns to me. St. Vital is a very diversified community, but the issues are common to many of the constituents.

The No. 1 issue in St. Vital was our health care system. People would tell me their personal experiences with the health care system and how it had failed them. The most disturbing stories were people who had cancer and had to wait months for diagnostic tests. People told me stories about family members who had to live in hallways to receive medical treatment. Health

care professionals providing bedside care raised concerns regarding workload and how a caring profession had been reduced to administering meds. Quite simply put, Mr. Speaker, the people in St. Vital had lost confidence in the former government's ability to manage the health care system.

The No. 2 issue was education, from parents, teachers, resource staff and retired people who wanted their grandchildren to have access to a system that was meeting the challenges of today's changing society. I heard about the lack of resources, the shortage of textbooks, increased class sizes, teachers having to resort to xeroxing material for classrooms and the decrease in funding for special needs children.

Many of the citizens in St. Vital were concerned with the threat of the sale of our Crown corporation Manitoba Hydro. They were furious about the sale of MTS with no public consultation process and did not want to see another public utility sold just to see rates increase.

Because I felt it was critical to canvass every street in St. Vital, I waded into Tory heartland one Saturday afternoon, Kingston Crescent. It was a valuable experience for me. I learned that many of their concerns were similar to the rest of the riding, particularly health care and education. I also connected with them in regard to their very real concern about floodproofing.

When I canvassed the Marlene Street area, women told me their frustration at not being able to find work, and their real frustration with just meeting everyday needs and trying to make ends meet.

I have to say how proud I am of the election campaign that we fought. We focused on five commitments, manageable and affordable.

The billion-dollar promise made by the Tories showed that they were a government that was out of touch. That can happen to governments, and we have to make sure that it does not happen to us. We have to make sure that we do not become out of touch with our constituents and compromise our values.

One of my favourite quotes from one of the people I met at the doorstep was actually a woman whom I met twice during the campaign, once in the spring when I was canvassing, and once during the campaign. She said to me, you know, this government is kind of like a pair of socks. The longer you wear them, the stinkier they get.

People would say over and over to me at the doorstep, it is time for change, and thankfully that change has occurred. My government's throne speech has indicated that there is hope for people in Manitoba.

Since being elected, I have been in touch with the community groups and organizations in St. Vital that provide service to our community. The Youville clinic, the St. Vital BIZ, Lavallee School, St. Amant Centre, École Varennes, Teen Stop Jeunesse, the St. Vital Nurse Resource Centre, Child and Family Services, the St. Vital Historical Society, the Elm Park Flood Committee, Age and Opportunity, Foyer Valade, and Victor Mager School.

I look forward to working and dialoguing with these groups. They are the people who are in touch with the needs of St. Vital.

There are many challenges to meet in St. Vital. My constituency assistant, Grant Prairie, and I cannot keep up with the casework some days. Some people might view St. Vital as an affluent neighbourhood, and there are pockets of the neighbourhood that are affluent, but there are many pockets of the riding where people are struggling to make ends meet, young people, single moms with children, young families and seniors. I have spoken personally with many of them since I got elected just two months ago.

I will never take this position that has been bestowed upon me for granted. I fully understand my responsibilities to my constituents to do the best that I can for them. I will also look for opportunities to develop public policy that better serves our community.

The meetings I have been having with the service providers in St. Vital will make me a better MLA, because they are the experts and

can assist us by providing advice on policy initiatives.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would note that this throne speech marks the beginning of a new era in Manitoba politics. It marks the end of an era of arrogance, and marks the beginning of an era of concerned and active government in Manitoba. The new era is one in which the government is competent, compassionate and open. The new era is one in which the government truly represents northern, rural and urban areas representing all groups of this province from our original people to our most recent immigrants.

I look forward to serving as a member of this government in the next four years. I would like to thank the people of St. Vital once again for their confidence in my ability to represent them. The people of St. Vital can be assured, I and the rest of my government will work on their behalf to provide programs and services that will enable them to lead happy and productive lives. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Smith (Brandon West): Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is incredible when you actually walk into this room. I do not think anything prepares you for the beauty and the ambience that is in this room. I have been in here a number of times, and it still amazes me, the beauty that people worked and toiled hard on to produce this beautiful building that we get the honour to come into and work on their behalf. I do not think I will ever lose that. I certainly hope I will not.

Mr. Speaker, may I begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you on your appointment by election to the highest office of Speaker of this Assembly. It was indeed a proud moment in Manitoba's history, and it will be recorded through the written documentation of the Legislative Assembly. But more than that, it was a privilege that we had, the privilege as members in attendance to be part of and involved in such a positive process in addition to the democracy in the Manitoba governmental system.

Mr. Speaker, of special note was the feeling of the House, not only from the members but

from the Manitobans present here in the gallery, the press, and even the Clerk had a hearty, beaming smile on his face, witnessing one of the great moments in Manitoba's history, and it was a proud moment. To add to the occasion, your family was here. Your mother was present, in attendance, to witness the proud moment with you, and that was extra special.

Mr. Speaker, I am well aware also that your newly elected office will bring challenges. However, I am confident that your honourable reputation and your commitment to all Manitobans will provide fairness to the proceedings of this House. Many of the new members here today, including myself, will be looking forward to your guidance, and I know your wisdom will greatly benefit us all.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the honourable member for Wellington (Mr. Santos), as he has received the honour of being appointed Deputy Speaker.

* (1140)

I would like to place on the record at this time my congratulations to the new First Minister of our province, the Leader of the New Democratic Party, our Premier (Mr. Doer). My confidence in the First Minister was unwavering that he would become the next Premier of Manitoba, and I was correct. I was correct not only because the Premier had put together better ad campaigns or marketing but because the Premier went to the people of Manitoba for direction, Mr. Speaker. He listened to the people, all of the people from every walk of life, and built a campaign on Manitobans' vision for our future. It is the people's voice echoed in the Speech from the Throne, a doable, realistic vision based on strategic, achievable commitments to Manitobans.

As well, I offer my congratulations here today to all the other members who have been elected in their constituencies as well. I know everyone here will represent their constituencies to the best of their abilities.

I would like to thank the many people who worked hard for me throughout the election and all those people who placed their confidence in

me on September 21 of this year. I am truly humbled by the faith that was placed in me to represent Brandon West. However, I can promise you that I will do my best to represent Brandon West proudly, honestly and to the best of my ability.

The last of my congratulations, and certainly not the least, Mr. Speaker, goes to my wife, Val, and my daughters, Caitlin and Ashton, for their love and support. As many of the members can attest, public life does take its toll on private lives, and our families make commitments as well as the elected members. My wife is truly my partner and I thank her for the valuable insight and support. She is the foundation of our family and an inspiration to me. As well, I thank my daughters for their understanding in the many times that their dad could not attend special occasions with them.

Mr. Speaker, it has been mentioned to me that this may be one of the few opportunities I will receive to get the full attention of the House, but it does not appear that way. However, I have chosen to put my thoughts in script, and for that I apologize. However, when preparing this introductory speech as a new member of this honourable House, I realized there was so much that I wanted to say and such a short time to say it in. I did not want to miss the opportunity to make some points that I believe are critical.

It is truly a proud and special day for me as a new NDP member from Brandon West. I would be remiss, and the honourable members from across the floor may want to listen to this, that I would like to thank the past member from the Conservative Party, Jim McCrae, for his time spent representing Brandon West. Although Mr. McCrae and I certainly have philosophical differences regarding policies, principles and direction of government, I respect his commitment to Manitoba. As well, I would like to say and thank Mr. McCrae's wife, Darlene, and their five daughters, who gave precious time away from their father on many occasions.

Mr. Speaker, as is customary and traditional for a maiden speech, I would like to spend time describing the community and constituency that I am privileged to represent. I like to describe Brandon West as a community, as opposed to a

constituency, and in terms of a humanistic approach, as opposed to a physical, geographical location.

Physically, Brandon West and Brandon East could be described by 18th Street being the divisional line separating a city of just over 40,000 people. That line does, however, have major variance in the north end of Brandon that proceeds to 1st Street and out to the Trans-Canada Highway, which places Brandon residents in a place that they describe as the north hill of the Brandon West constituency.

Like many things, Mr. Speaker, I have learned that the description of anything carries the personal flavour of the one asked, so the best way to describe anything is to ask many. Brandon West I have heard described as a new end of town. I would agree that a large percentage, probably 70 percent or 80 percent, of the new single-family home construction in Brandon over the last 25 years has occurred in Brandon West. Others describe it as a beautiful, aging community, surrounding a university campus with an architectural ambiance of turn-of-the-century elegance. Others would suggest that the most affluent reside in Brandon West, and there certainly are a number of grand homes constructed in the constituency. Others would describe extremely modest areas with grand, tree-lined boulevards near the Assiniboine River, where Brandon's earliest beginnings of the city originated.

Brandon West has a great number of businesses located within its boundary. Many of these businesses, Mr. Speaker, are new businesses, but many of them are third- and fourth-generation businesses that have been there for a long, long time. It quickly becomes evident, the great diversity of Brandon West. I guess in many ways it is very similar to the diversity of our entire province.

I have had the opportunity to meet with people in the constituency that I was born, raised and received my formal education in. That is Brandon West. As a firefighter, I again had the opportunity to meet many people within the constituency and within the boundaries of Brandon.

Brandon West is a home of people and families in all walks of life and backgrounds. That diversity, I guess, part of which causes it the great beauty that it has.

During my terms on the Brandon City Council and leading up to this election, I had the occasion to speak with many people at their door and to be invited into their homes and to be treated with respect. I will do my utmost to serve these people with the same respect that they have shown me. I met with people with Ukrainian, Polish, Scottish, French, German, Irish, Chinese, Italian, First Nations and many other ethnic backgrounds. That, Mr. Speaker, is Brandon West.

I spoke with high-school students, university students, nurses, tradespeople, doctors, child care providers, bankers, farmers, small-business owners, educators, young families and seniors. This, Mr. Speaker, is Brandon West.

Having an active family has allowed me to spend time with my family involved in a great many activities. I can attest to the excellent facilities in the community, the excellent community centres, the outdoor skating rinks, the splash pools, the ball diamonds, the numerous parks and bicycle paths, as well as a sportsplex facility, a legacy that was left by the 1979 Canada Games hosted in the community. This, Mr. Speaker, is Brandon West.

You find very quickly when spending time in Brandon the feeling of pride that the citizens have in their community, not unlike many of the other communities within this great province.

A large sector of Brandon's economy is based on the hosting of special events, some of which were, as mentioned, the '79 Canada Games, the World Curling Championships, the World Junior Hockey Championships, the 1997 Canada Summer Games, and that is just to name a few.

Many of the people volunteering as well as attending the events from the outlying areas are rural people. The agricultural presence in Brandon is the largest economic engine in our community which serves a trading area of approximately 185,000 people.

An item of great concern to our community is the agricultural crisis, and to say agriculture is important to Brandon's economy is an incredible understatement. Over the last few years, agriculture has accounted for an average of 10 percent of Manitoba's domestic product. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that is probably a lot higher in the southwestern district of this province and certainly in Brandon. Over the last few years, one out of every \$11 of production in Manitoba is a result of agriculture.

Problems in the agricultural community quickly affect every sector of Manitoba society and economy. I can tell you that Brandon certainly has seen and is feeling right now the effects. Our farmers are proven leaders in the efficiency, yet are being hurt not by their own problems or inadequacies but by the extremely high subsidy levels that our international competitors enjoy here today. Canadian farmers cannot compete with the huge amounts of money that the United States and European communities pour into these sectors.

* (1150)

In 1998, Canada only provided 9 percent support for wheat farmers. The United States, on the other hand, provided 38 percent, and the farmers in the European community 56 percent, yet farmers are failing because the federal government has abandoned the producers, producers in my area and around my constituency. Mr. Speaker, that is why so many people from Brandon West have approached me over the last five weeks and are so jubilant at the attention the honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk), the member for Swan River, and the Premier (Mr. Doer) have placed on the issue. They have both been to Brandon a number of times since the election—and that in itself is a bit of an anomaly—and listed by their concerns the people who are affected. They have heard their voices, and they have taken this message to Ottawa that over 75 percent of Manitoba's primary production is exported.

Farmers cannot escape the important subsidies coming from other countries. Our farmers are prepared to compete on the open market, but the federal government has done little to ensure that this market is truly an open

market. The federal government must realize its responsibilities to farmers and to Canada as a whole. It must ensure that trade is conducted in a fair manner. Furthermore, the federal government must also realize that its cuts to agriculture over the years has seriously affected the prairie producers who have had their support cut by some \$2 billion from 1988 to 1998. Manitoba alone has lost as much as all the nonprairie provinces combined. People in Brandon and rural Manitoba know our government, the NDP government in Manitoba, is calling upon the federal government to accept its responsibilities to the farmers of Manitoba and other prairie provinces.

The primary cause of the farmers' problems is international trade barriers that prevent them from competing fairly. This is an area that is solely the federal government's responsibility. The problems that the weather has caused farmers this year is of course also a major concern, but it is not the sole cause of the agricultural crisis. The government of Manitoba has contributed more than its fair share to this disaster. It is time for the federal government to do its share and to ensure that the suffering of western Canada is alleviated in this area.

The throne speech addressed the NDP government's high priority and continued commitment to agriculture and to the fight for the family farms and the agricultural resources in this province. This has sent a positive message to Brandon West residents and rural Manitoba. Another message sent out in the throne speech as well is an extremely high priority and has a high impact on Manitobans' lives, the message of positive health care reform and additional long-term beds that have been so desperately needed in this province; the plan for strategically entering into new initiatives; to have program expansion for nursing students that has a positive impact on communities in Manitoba supplying our province with graduates at a far greater rate over the next few years. Our province desperately needs these graduates to fill the holes in health care that has been decimated so badly in the past decade.

While speaking to people in their homes and on their doorsteps, people reiterated to me that health care was their major concern in Brandon.

One elderly man put it into perspective quite simply by stating: if you do not have your health, what does all the rest matter? A simple statement, Mr. Speaker, but a strong statement.

Manitobans heard a plan to address health care in this province and a commitment by our government to carry out that plan. Manitobans see a commitment, and our promise is being kept in health care. Those working in the health care field see the commitment to reverse the decay in health care with long-term planning, and they are telling me how they are so optimistic that the morale is so high in the health care system now for the first time in many, many years.

Another key point raised on the doorsteps and in family homes was education and the helpless feelings students and families had regarding the tuition hike over the last 10 years. It has been allowed to escalate and escalate and spin out of control for the average family. Over the past 10 years, the tuition in Brandon has risen some 170 percent and our community colleges 200 percent in the last decade.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech shows commitment and assistance to alleviate a portion of these costs. The business community in Manitoba, as well, recognized in the throne speech the commitment by this government to increase the enrollment of community colleges and to provide for skilled graduates to assist the business and industry in this province to move forward and expand and become better situated to compete globally with a highly skilled workforce.

The citizens of Manitoba heard loud and clear the message in the throne speech that this government will vigilantly protect and strengthen the Crown corporations of our province for the benefit and enhancement and

the quality of life for all Manitobans. As well, they saw a commitment to Manitobans of a 1.5 percent provincial income tax reduction in the following year and 150 percent tax credit on properties over the next year.

In closing, the people of Manitoba feel as if they were a part of this throne speech, and I can tell you that they most certainly have been. This government has listened to the people, all the people. Their voices have been heard, and this 37th throne speech clearly indicates that direction. There is considerable optimism and confidence in every sector of society today, and Manitobans see a vision for Manitoba that is clear and clearly indicates a structured plan by a responsible government that keeps its commitments.

The newly elected New Democratic Party is the government of Manitoba, and I look forward to serving as a member proudly of this government to serve the people of this province for the years ahead. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gary Filmon (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if there is a will of the House to call it 12:30.

Mr. Speaker: Is there a will of the House to call it 12:30? [agreed]

This House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Monday next.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, November 26, 1999

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