



First Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky, Hon.	Inkster	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary	Tuxedo	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean, Hon.	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
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LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PENNER, Jim	Steinbach	P.C.
PITURA, Frank	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
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SMITH, Scott	Brandon West	N.D.P.
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TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, November 29, 1999

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister of Labour):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to table the following reports, copies of which have been previously distributed: The Public Service Group Insurance Fund Benefits Summary and Auditor's Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended April 30, 1999; the Civil Service Commission Annual Report; the 1998-1999 Manitoba Labour Board Annual Report, the Office of the Fire Commissioner Annual Report; the Quarterly Financial Report for Manitoba Public Insurance for August 31, 1999; and the 1998-1999 Department of Labour Annual Report.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): I am pleased to table the following annual reports for the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, copies of which have previously been distributed: Consumer and Corporate Affairs 1998-1999 Annual Report; Companies Office 1998-99 Annual Report; Manitoba Gaming Control Commission 1998-99 Annual Report; Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission 1998/99 Annual Report; Residential Tenancies Commission 1998 Annual Report; Residential Tenancies Branch 1998 Annual Report; The Property Registry 1998/99 Annual Report; and the Vital Statistics Agency 1998-99 Annual Report.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am pleased to table the following reports, copies of which have been previously distributed: The Manitoba Human Rights Commission Annual Report 1998; Justice and Justice Initiatives Annual Report 1998-1999; Office of the Commissioner Law Enforcement

Review Agency 1998; the Manitoba Law Reform Commission Twenty-eighth Annual Report 1998-99; The Public Trustee Annual Report 1998-1999; Civil Legal Services Special Operating Agency (Revised) Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1999; Legal Aid Manitoba Twenty-seventh Annual Report March 31, 1999, Criminal Justice Division victims services Annual Report 1998-1999.

I am also pleased to table, pursuant to The Regulations Act, a copy of each regulation registered with the Registrar of Regulations since the regulations were tabled in this House in April of 1999.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Driver Licencing Information Security

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Highways and Government Services): I have a ministerial statement.

Mr. Speaker, I am informing Manitobans today about the loss of a data tape by Elections Canada which included personal information of 675,000 Manitoba drivers. The information went missing in January of this year during the transfer of data from the Division of the Driver and Vehicle Licencing to Elections Canada. The provincial Ombudsman recently provided my department with a report on the results of the special investigation conducted by the Ombudsman's office regarding this incident. I believe it is extremely important that the public know that the missing tape contained drivers' names, addresses and drivers' licence numbers. The information provided to Elections Canada did not include the names of any voters on Election Manitoba's obscured public electors list who did not wish to share their personal information in support of the National Register of Electors, nor did Elections Canada receive any personal information from the driver licensing protected database which includes the names of any persons who requested this personal information not be released.

* (1335)

The loss of this information is, however, of great concern to me as minister and of great concern to our government. The former government of Manitoba approved the disclosure of personal information for drivers' licensing records to Elections Canada in 1998. The department provided quarterly updates of information to Elections Canada headquarters in Ottawa under an interim agreement. Upon notification of the security breach last January, no further information was provided to Elections Canada. The public was never informed however that the information went missing and remains unaccounted for.

Our government is also extremely concerned that many Manitobans were unaware of the agreement to transfer data to Elections Canada. Instead of obtaining direct consent from motorists prior to disclosing the information, they gave notice of the agreement by way of newspaper advertisements. The driver licensing information that went missing was provided last January in support of updating the National Register of Electors, which was established under the Canada Elections Act. Other data sources used by Elections Canada include Revenue Canada from tax returns, Citizenship and Immigration Canada for new citizens and Vital Statistics for death registrations.

The provincial Ombudsman's investigation was initiated to determine whether the personal information had been protected by the department in accordance with The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The report findings into the security arrangements of Driver and Vehicle Licencing resulted in several recommendations made in the public interests of improving security of Manitoba's personal information in the custody and control of my department.

I take the incident and the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations very seriously. I have met with the Ombudsman and the Chief Electoral Officer for Elections Canada, and the missing information still cannot be accounted for. Therefore I have ordered independent, external reviews by the private sector to address two areas of concern. First, the legislative

authority and consent matters are being reviewed by independent legal counsel for the government; secondly, I am having a comprehensive security audit of Driver and Vehicle Licencing conducted by an independent firm. This review will include security arrangements for the collection, storage, use, disclosure and destruction of personal information. Until these reviews have taken place and we have responded fully to the Ombudsman's report, I want to assure Manitobans that no further drivers' licensing information will be provided to Elections Canada.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): I thank the minister for his statement. I think the first thing that one would observe is that one would assume that Elections Canada was a reasonable place with which to share information. I share his concern that we now apparently have no accurate trace of how that information has been used or stored and cannot be retracted or retrieved apparently in a form that is acceptable to us. I would support that we seek the information as to what may have happened to this information and ensure the public that it does not happen again.

* (1340)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, may I direct the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today forty Grade 9 students from Boissevain School under the direction of Ms. Donna Woodcock, Mrs. Joanne Cuvelier and Mr. Allan Stewart. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire).

We also have in attendance eighteen Grade 5 students from Royal School under the direction of Mr. Greg Carpenter. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Filmon).

Also, we have nineteen Grades 4 to 10 students from Waldheim School under the direction of Ms. Wanda Penner. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Morris (Mr. Pitura).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Government Hirings Approval Process

Mr. Gary Filmon (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

Given that this government and this Premier already have broken their first election promise by abandoning their commitment to balancing the budget this year—[interjection]

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

Mr. Filmon: —and given that the only information that the Premier could provide about measures that his government has taken to control expenditures and to avoid a deficit was to place a hiring freeze when they took office on October 5, I wonder if the Premier can explain why there have been 57 job postings in the pages of the Winnipeg Free Press, in Saturday editions, between October 9 and November 27. Did he or his Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) approve every one of those postings?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we have reduced the size of cabinet from 18 to 15, from the former Premier's cabinet size. We have reduced the number of special assistants. We have reduced the number of executive assistants. We have reduced the number of deputy ministers already from 24 down to 19.

We would note the Deloitte and Touche document outlined by the Leader last week, and again I would refer to it this week, speaks to expenditure commitments that have been made by the previous government. It clearly delineates our commitment on hallway medicine versus the commitments of expenditures that we inherited from the previous government.

We are going to do everything possible, Mr. Speaker, to deal with the situation we face. As I outlined on Friday, we are quite worried about the agricultural support programs, and we do

note that part of the deficit has been created by a legitimate payment of the \$70 million, which we are now trying to renegotiate. We are very concerned about the issue of the liability of pensions which has gone up from \$1 billion to \$2.5 billion, as noted by the Deloitte and Touche report that we have received. We are also very concerned about the connection between the responsibility for the expenditure of funds in this Legislature and the authority to expend funds that we see all the way through health care.

Mr. Filmon: Of course, Mr. Speaker, everyone took notice of the fact that the Premier did not answer the question. It was a very straightforward question: 57 job postings in the Winnipeg Free Press in Saturday editions; did he or the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), given his instructions to freeze hiring, approve that those hirings continue?

Mr. Doer: I said on Friday, and I will say it again today, that we are not going to go into this absolute pre-election binge of spending in the election campaign, running the deficit up and then—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable First Minister, please continue.

Mr. Doer: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

—go into a massive starvation action such as firing a thousand nurses, as they did after the last election campaign, which has led to double and triple time payments in our health care system because of their absolute starvation budgets for health care, combined with their binge spending that took place in the six months before the election.

Mr. Speaker, I have said and we have stated before that essential positions will be filled. I have also said that we are going to reduce the size of government in a systematic—

An Honourable Member: Is that a hiring freeze?

Mr. Doer: Well, the members of the former bloated cabinet do not need to give us any advice whatsoever, Mr. Speaker. We have reduced the size of cabinet and we have reduced the number of deputy ministers. We will continue to find long-term solutions to provide services to the people of Manitoba and reduce the deputy minister level from the former government's levels that we inherited.

* (1345)

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, it now appears as though there is not a hiring freeze except in essential positions, so I want to ask the Premier: was the extra communicator in his office an essential position that they have hired over and above those who were there?

I want to ask him: is the co-ordinator of the Business Start Program in the Department of Industry, Trade and Mines an essential position, since that is a program that his party said they were going to eliminate as part of their reduction of business subsidies?

Finally, I want to ask him: given that during the election campaign they said that they would merge the Winnipeg Hospital Authority and the Winnipeg Long Term Care Authority, and three of the positions in the November 20 and 27 Winnipeg Free Press are for senior positions in the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, how does that square when a week earlier or 10 days earlier the minister said that he was going to merge the two and eliminate many, many senior administrative positions? How does all of this work?

Mr. Doer: I notice he did not ask any questions about SmartHealth or Faneuil or \$55 million of wasted money authorized by members opposite and kept secret from the people of Manitoba when they decided to write it off before the election campaign.

Mr. Speaker, we have reduced the number of communicators from six to four. We have reduced the number of deputy ministers from 24 to 19. We are reducing the number of assistant deputy ministers. We have reduced the number of cabinet ministers. We are going to reduce the number of people working in the two health authorities. We are combining the two health

authorities that were established by members opposite. If there are positions that are proceeding from those authorities that do not make sense to the public, we will look at them. Our Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) will look at those bulletins because we are going to have more nurses at the bedside and less bureaucrats in government, unlike members opposite.

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

Mr. Filmon: As usual, a lot of hot air, because the ads are calling for more administrators not more bedside nurses, Mr. Speaker, and that is the truth.

On the government's website for hiring, of the 38 jobs posted today, seven are from the Department of Family Services and Housing. Given the Minister responsible for Family Services and Housing's (Mr. Sale) unalterable opposition to balanced budgets, has he been given an exemption from this hiring freeze, or are they anticipating a greater workload because they have cancelled the workfare program?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, he would note that we have reduced the number of deputy ministers from Housing and Family Services. We have eliminated one deputy minister position under the Ministry of Family Services and Housing, and we have not stopped yet to combine the layers and over the long haul make efficiencies in government. As I have said before—
[interjection]

But I want to say to the former First Minister and Premier that we would love to find out where they got the money to pay \$33 million to SmartHealth without any authority from the people of this province through this Legislature, why they did not tell us before the election that they planned on an exit ramp that would cost us \$33 million, Mr. Speaker, why they ran up \$20 million in taxpayers' costs in Faneuil.

The answer to the question is we have already reduced the number of deputy ministers under the Ministry of Family Services.

* (1350)

Deficit Reduction Departmental Expenditures

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, can the Finance minister indicate, in general terms, what instructions have been given to ministers, deputy ministers and other managers in order to manage expenditure pressures that he has alluded to?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I thank the honourable member for his question. Two days after the financial report was announced, we put out a statement that indicated the measures we are going to take to address this issue. We said we would do a careful review of all vacant positions to ensure only those providing front-line service delivery are filled immediately, allowing senior management positions to be reduced in keeping with election commitments. All cabinet ministers are aware of this and are proceeding accordingly to only fill those jobs that they think are essential to providing essential services to Manitobans.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Speaker, a question to the same minister.

There are departments with discretionary spending, areas that can counterbalance the expenditure pressures that he has referenced. Is he assured that he has the full support of his cabinet colleagues to create a lapse factor to offset expenditures?

Mr. Selinger: Thank you for the question. This notion of a lapse factor is one that I just recently became aware of. The way we are proceeding is as follows: Any new expenditure that we make, we are looking for an offset so that, as we go forward, we balance out all our commitments going forward this year. So we are looking for an offset to any new expenditures, and we are hoping that will generate a lapse factor as in previous years.

Balanced Budget Government Commitment

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the Minister of Education.

In the Brandon Sun of November 19, it says NDP Education Minister Drew Caldwell said the new government has no plans to start cost cutting. Is this indicative of the lack of will to balance the budget this year?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education and Training): I cannot be accountable, Mr. Speaker, for what appears in the press that is not attributed to me, and that particular comment was not attributed to me.

I can recount for the Legislature two particular editorials from November 18, entitled Fiscal mess left behind, which condemns the outgoing government for the absolute disaster in finances that has been left with the incoming government and also, on November 27, Saturday just past, Filmon passes budget buck—[interjection] Very, very many of them. Conservative Leader Gary Filmon says he would have been able to balance the budget if only voters had given him a fourth term, reads the editorial.

Sorry, Mr. Filmon, we are not buying it, not for a second. We are sorry, Mr. Filmon, we are not buying it, not for a second. The Brandon Sun, of course, Mr. Speaker, is notable for not being particularly favourable to the policy of any parties, and it is good to see that the responsibility for the current fiscal mess in this province is being laid firmly at the doorstep of the members opposite.

Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Recommendations

Mr. Darren Praznik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, we see it again here today, the member of the cabinet being quoted in his hometown paper saying one thing and coming here today and denying it and pretending he did not say it because he is now in trouble with his Premier (Mr. Doer). This is about credibility. It is about what they say, what they mean and how they say it.

Mr. Speaker, today the First Minister, along with his Justice critic and Minister of Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Robinson), had a press conference

announcing the creation of an implementation commission on the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the course of that press conference, the First Minister was asked a very simple question many times by members of the media: did this implementation and did this government support a cornerstone of that particular report which was the creation of a separate justice system or systems for aboriginal people? The First Minister waffled on the answer, would not answer it, denied it. I ask him today here in the House: does his party stand by that recommendation?

* 1355

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the fact that even members opposites' allies in Alberta have announced major reforms in aboriginal justice to move their province ahead into the next century. Regrettably, members opposite are still stuck in the past. We want to work on a positive relationship with aboriginal people. The recommendation that was implemented today was Recommendation No. 1, to establish a joint commission. The recommendation says that the terms of reference include working within the existing criminal justice system. I am proud of the announcement of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) today. I am proud of the fact that we have chosen Paul Chartrand and Wendy Whitecloud to proceed with this, and I think all members should be proud that, after one party neglected working with First Nations for 10 years, we are moving forward.

Mr. Praznik: So, Mr. Speaker, what the First Minister is telling this House today, which the First Minister would not say to the media in the press conference, is the recommendation on page 642 of this report is rejected by the New Democratic Party government. Yes or no?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we made a promise in the election campaign, and we made a promise when the report came out that we would implement Recommendation No. 1, to establish a joint commission to look at all the recommendations in the Justice report and come back to Manitobans with a long-term plan to be

recommended to government. That is the only recommendation we implemented today. The terms of reference developed in consultation with the First Nations communities, the aboriginal communities, and the commissioners today include the terms of reference within the existing Criminal Code.

If the members opposite cannot stomach the honour of us just coming forward with Recommendation No. 1, it is too bad for them. I think it is good for Manitobans.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Speaker, the First Minister forgets that the other cornerstone recommendation was a settlement of land claims that this administration did. But I ask him, again, to confirm—so we are absolutely clear—that the terms of reference given to the commissioners will preclude them from acting on the recommendations—

Mr. Speaker: Question, please.

Mr. Praznik: —contained on page 642 of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. A yes or a no.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I have answered that question twice. The recommendation and the commitment we made during the election campaign was Recommendation No. 1, numero uno, Recommendation No. 1. You can go through every page of the Justice Inquiry and ask about every sentence in that report, but what our commitment today was and what we brought forward in an honourable way today was an honourable way to move forward with First Nations and aboriginal people in Manitoba by proceeding only with the recommendation to establish a commission.

I am proud that Wendy Whitecloud and Paul Chartrand have joined us in this regard. You know, you look at Ralph Klein in Alberta that is going ahead. If you want to stay back in the past, go ahead. We are going forward, working with mutual respect with aboriginal people in Manitoba.

Flooding Agriculture Disaster Assistance

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pose a question to the Minister of Agriculture today, and it is in regard to the flood

in southwest Manitoba and in southeast Manitoba that we all experienced this spring.

I want to, first of all, ask the minister: were you in the House when the budget was voted on this spring, and did you vote in favour of the budget that the previous government implemented in the House?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the critic for Agriculture spoke up, but I had expected he would ask a substantial question and that he would ask a question to deal with the real farm crisis that our producers are facing and that the federal government is refusing to address and one that we have asked all members to stand together on and fight for our producers to ensure that we do not have a majority of farmers going under because of lack of support by the federal government in this crisis.

* (1400)

Mr. Penner: I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the honourable minister and the Leader of the Opposition were present in Melita when there were 3,000 people who met and voiced their concerns about the difficulty they were facing in that region. I believe the now Premier of the province—

Mr. Speaker: Question, please.

Mr. Penner: I want to ask the—

Point of Order

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, this is just to remind all members—and many here are new to the Chamber, but members old and new alike—of Beauschiesne Rule 410: "Preambles to questions should be brief . . ." and, as well, 409: "The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence."

Mr. Speaker, it is the practice in this House that there be a preamble in the first question, and subsequent supplementary questions have no preamble at all.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable House Leader for his advice. The practice of the House has been a short preamble to the initial question

and no preamble to supplementary questions. So I would just like to offer that advice to all members.

* * *

Mr. Penner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to abide by those rules.

I want to ask the Premier, then, whether he was present and whether he voiced his strong commitment at that meeting of 3,000 people in Melita the day when they asked for support from this government, which would eventually cost some \$70 million or more, and whether he voiced his support for that expenditure of money after the budget had already been passed in this House.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I just said in the answer to the first question from the honourable Leader of the Opposition that we had in fact supported that, so it is not necessary to ask it again. But I will repeat that I was proud to be in Melita with a number of members here. I was proud to work with the Leader of the Liberal Party and the member for Arthur-Virden, to go to Ottawa with all our producers in a united way.

I was disappointed in the response we received. The adjustment to AIDA of some \$200 million I think is inadequate and unacceptable to the producers in Manitoba and in Saskatchewan, if not in other provinces. Last week we worked on a communique to the federal government which included the agricultural crisis as part of the communique to the federal government. I remember speaking in Melita saying that the people there deserved the same support under the disaster assistance program that was recommended and fulfilled to some degree in the Red River Valley in 1997. I remember at the time the irony of course was when the federal government was looking at supporting the NHL hockey franchises. I thought it was wrong to look at money for NHL hockey players and leave western Canadian farmers down. That is why we are going to continue to fight.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, if the now Premier knew that we had passed a budget and he committed his party to support the disaster aid

program, can the Premier explain then why is there a projected \$66-million variance that has been listed for the 1999 flood emergency expenditure and why was it included as an additional expenditure when the previous government committed to collect the money from the federal government or take it from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund? And why are you adding \$66 million to create a deficit based on that expenditure that could not have been forecast in the budget of 1999-2000?

Mr. Doer: We did not add the variances in the Deloitte Touche report. The variances were added by Deloitte Touche. They were done so in consultation with the Provincial Auditor, with the deputy Finance minister who had been appointed by the previous government and maintained by us, by the head of the Treasury Board who had been appointed by the previous government, same individual maintained by us, and the Clerk of Executive Council who has worked on federal-provincial affairs. That is the committee that is dealing with the variances from the budget to the actual expenditures.

The other expenditure, of course, that is way beyond the budget is in the health care field. We can see from April, May, June and July from memos that we have that systematically month by month by month members opposite knew that the spending and expenditures were going up in health care way beyond the budget.

Having said that, I answered the member's question in the first question that the Leader of the Opposition asked. The government signed the Order-in-Council, I believe, the day of the election. We support the fact that they have set that money out, and we are doing everything we can to recover our share from the federal government as members opposite had committed themselves to. I would like to recover all of that money from the federal government but, beyond that, we are working very hard for long-term programs so that we do not have to have short-term, emergency, ad hoc payments.

Nortel Plant Closure

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question is for the Premier. The Premier has travelled twice to Ottawa on behalf of the farmers; he has been to Washington and Devils

Lake on behalf of environmental issues. I would like to ask the Premier what he did to keep hundreds of high-tech and high-wage jobs in Manitoba which were lost when Nortel left.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I really feel, as all Manitobans feel, that the decision by Nortel a few years ago to send some of their staff to Calgary and their subsequent decision to send other staff remaining to Ottawa is very, very unfortunate for Manitoba. We were advised that it might happen or might not happen in the transition period from newspaper articles from Martin Cash. I believe at the end of September he indicated that this was going to happen.

We do believe that the jobs are important to Manitoba. We believe the jobs in Pinawa, the 1,100 scientific jobs that we have lost in Pinawa, are really a blow to Manitobans. So we are hoping now, as a new government, that part of what we can do for high-tech jobs in Manitoba is to increase training at community colleges and universities, but there is no question we were disappointed, in the transition period, to hear of this loss of jobs. We were further disappointed when we heard that Atomic Energy of Canada was pulling the final plug out of Pinawa where we have lost close to 1,100 high-skilled, well-trained people.

Mr. Gerrard: Again for the Premier: why, when this is an area which has such rapid growth potential, as Nuala Beck and others have pointed out, was this the first export, under his premiership, of jobs and future job potential?

Mr. Doer: I think—

An Honourable Member: Poor start.

Mr. Doer: Well, we can talk about the 1,100 jobs that went from Pinawa to Chalk River from Manitoba, and we are certainly disappointed. I would certainly want to indicate my disappointment at that decision about the loss of scientists here in Manitoba. We were advised by newspaper articles in September, before we were sworn in, that the initial decision to transfer employees to Calgary had taken place, the purchase of Mr. Graves's company, the new Nortel company, would result in the R & D jobs going to Ottawa, the manufacturing jobs, I

believe, going to Calgary. I think it is regrettable.

* (1410)

I think that this national country, Manitoba included, needs a national vision on high-tech jobs, including our universities, our community colleges, on the fact that we get less research and development on a per capita basis than the province of Quebec, on the fact that more support from the federal government in R & D is going into certain areas in Canada that already have a cluster of R & D jobs.

It did take place. The minister asked for a meeting on her day of being sworn in. The decision had already been made, but the first action she asked of the president, upon her swearing in, was for a meeting for her and myself with the president. We were told the decision was made even before we were elected.

Throne Speech High-Tech Employment Strategy

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Why—again for the Premier—given this is such an important area for him, was there no mention of developing a high-tech, high-wage economy in the throne speech? Has the Premier given up already? We would have expected a plan.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, coming from the member for River Heights who cut close to \$240 million of money out of the budget for universities, post-secondary educational facilities, I do not see that as very much part of a plan either.

Mr. Speaker, we did say in the Speech from the Throne that we believe the best economic strategy is an education strategy. We are committed to trying to lower the cost of tuition over time. We think it is important for young people to have hope in Manitoba. We are committed to doubling the community college spots, which will include, over five years, a strategy on high-tech jobs.

We agree with the member that we need a high-tech strategy for Manitoba. There are lots of small businesses that are doing very, very

well, but there is a lot more that we can do in government. We have met with the Innovations Council. We have met with the head of the Innovations network. We are going to continue to work with these people to develop those high-tech synergies and training. We are going to provide the training of young people to go along with the ideas of business people here in Manitoba.

Health Care Facilities Bed Openings

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): My question is for the Minister of Health.

During the election campaign, Today's NDP promised that they would immediately reopen a hundred hospital beds and staff them to end hallway medicine within six months. Within two months after their taking office, we now hear that a net 18 new beds will be added to the system, 10 of those beds in Brandon—which did not ask for them—another four in Thompson, which means a net four new beds in the city of Winnipeg to end hallway medicine. Mr. Speaker, that is a far cry from the hundred beds that were promised by Today's NDP during the election campaign.

Will the Minister of Health now tell Manitobans that he misled them during the election campaign with that promise, a promise that he cannot fulfill?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that particular question, because it is clear from the member's own confusion that she is having real difficulty understanding. I understand, given the difficulty that members opposite had in terms of the numbers.

As the member knows and as the members on the other side of the House know, when the government closed over a thousand beds during her reign, they created a terrible situation, a terrible situation that resulted in long line-ups in our hospital hallways. Our commitment during the campaign was, when we assumed office, we would open beds to try to clear the hallways. That was the directive that was sent out last week.

I will deal specifically with the beds because clearly the member is confused in terms of the numbers. As we indicated in our press conference last week, we are going to open a hundred beds, and net we are going to open permanently 138 beds. We are going to try to do what we can, despite the fact that this government treated nurses without respect and laid off so many nurses. We knew that that would be a problem, and we are working on that problem. We will have further announcements in that regard.

But I am sorry to hear that members opposite failed to note that we are expanding the number of I.V. programs. We are expanding the day surgery for cancer patients. We expanded options to patients all across the system. We are expanding home care to deal with the other side of the equation.

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, Beauschiesne 417, answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate.

The minister seems to be wanting to relive the election. All we have asked is a direct question about what their promises were, and he is still not answering the question.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): A question was asked that was straightforward, and there was a straightforward answer. They just do not like the sound of it.

Mr. Speaker: On both points of order, can all members keep their questions and answers reasonably short and deal with the matter that is raised. Thank you.

* * *

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health, indeed, who is confused? Is it the Winnipeg Hospital Authority and all Manitobans who knew that the 120 beds that he announced were already in the plans and would be opened in April of this year once the new personal care home beds came on stream, or

is it this Minister of Health who is confused? Who is it? Is he saying that the Winnipeg Health Authority and those Manitobans who knew that these beds were already in the system are wrong or that he is confused around this issue?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, two points, and I will try to be brief to explain it to the member for River East.

Firstly, the former government's plan that was released in the spring talked about a net total of 60 swing beds—60 swing beds; secondly, I checked and I canvassed this very carefully with department officials who said there was no funding for any beds under the former government.

We have remedied that situation.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Health confirm that 120 of those beds that will open as a result of our plan to build new personal care homes will come on stream sometime in April, which is in the new budget year, that those beds will come on stream and that the announcement that he made the other day was an announcement around phantom beds within the system?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the member asked three questions, and I will try to deal with them as asked. I canvassed the department. There was no plan, there was no budget, except for the former Premier's billion-dollar fantasy to find a billion dollars. There was no commitment to open any beds by the former government.

Point 2, Mr. Speaker, on assuming office, we canvassed the system and asked the system: can you come up with a hundred-plus beds or as many beds as necessary to deal with the situation until permanent long-term beds can be funded and opened by this government? They came back with the beds that were announced last week.

The third point is, Mr. Speaker, dealing with the question that was raised by the member for River East, the former government put out a plan, and they said 60 swing beds, and there was no commitment and no funding. We came into

office and said we would find beds, we would try to staff them, we would do what we could to end the hallway medicine crisis that had been built up after 11 years of neglect, downsizing and cuts by government members opposite.

Mr. Speaker: The question has been answered.

* (1420)

Income Assistance Reform Legislation

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): For the last two decades we have seen an increase in the number of people on welfare. It was not until 1996 when our government took action and implemented welfare reforms that we began to see a decrease in the number of people on welfare. In fact, since 1996, Mr. Speaker, 21,000 people have moved off welfare and into the dignity of a job.

Can the Minister of Family Services explain why it is that, prior to the election, the new NDP in part supported Bill 40 by bringing forward some amendments that they felt would improve it, but now that they are elected, they have scrapped the workfare legislation or, as mumbled in committee by the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), the amendments were put forward for public-perception purposes?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, there are still more people on welfare today than there were during the NDP government of 1988. Everyone also knows that Bill 40 was a completely redundant piece of legislation, and if it were so vital and so important, why did this government not proclaim it? Because they simply knew that the business community did not support it and the volunteer community did not support it. That is why it was never proclaimed. It never made sense in the first place.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, could the minister, the one who claims he has never met an able-bodied welfare recipient who does not want to work, explain why potential savings from welfare programs were not built into the Christmas wish list forwarded by Today's NDP

to Deloitte and Touche for the financial review—review, not audit?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear from all of the memos that this is no wish list. The commitments that the former government made, far above any budget entitlement, far above any resources that were being provided for, are very real, as attested to by Deloitte and Touche.

In terms of savings, there have indeed been some reductions in the expenditures, in mostly very short-term reductions, because, although there have been a large number of cases, most of those cases were people who were able to work. They have gone to work. The savings are very small.

We are looking for permanent bridges for people to make the transition to employment that is long term, stable, into good jobs, Mr. Speaker, not into short term, not into temporary, not to come back on at the first ill wind, but real jobs from real training for a real future. That is our commitment.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Aboriginal Justice Inquiry

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): The provincial government has appointed Paul Chartrand and Wendy Whitecloud as commissioners of the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission. They are assisted by two elder advisers: Doris Young and Eva McKay. This is excellent news both for aboriginal people and nonaboriginal people. The two commissioners will recommend priority areas for action that are practical, obtainable and within provincial jurisdiction. They do not include the Criminal Code which is under federal jurisdiction. The cost of not proceeding with AJI recommendations is far higher than acting. That should be obvious to everyone given the staggering failure of the system over the past decade.

The AJI on page 1 stated that: "The justice system has failed Manitoba's aboriginal people on a massive scale. It is not merely that the

justice system has failed aboriginal people, justice has also been denied to them."

After almost nine wasted years, Manitoba now has a government that is prepared to make much-needed changes to that justice system. We should all welcome such changes which make the justice system more community driven. The goals of restorative justice and accountability to the community are ones that everyone can agree make common sense. I look forward to the work of the commission and wish them well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Income Assistance

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I am very disappointed that all we are seeing from members opposite is the same old NDP with no direction or plan. By moving to strike the workfare bill, the NDP is sending the wrong message to Manitobans. They are telling Manitobans you do not have to work for what you receive. This government is also robbing social assistance recipients of their self-reliance and their dignity. How can a person learn to accept responsibility if they are never given responsibility? We know that it is not easy to break the cycle of poverty and dependence, but it is impossible to break it without motivation, a feeling of self-worth and encouragement.

Our government offered a plan that ensured that able-bodied social assistance recipients would have to perform community service work in return for the support they receive. I believe that nothing instills more pride in a person than the satisfaction of a job well done. Social assistance recipients need a hand up not a handout. Today's NDP obviously disagree.

During the last NDP term in office, from 1981 to 1988, welfare caseloads in Manitoba grew by 170 percent. Nonetheless, the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Sale) insists that he has never met an able-bodied welfare recipient who does not want to work. I am not sure where he has been living, but we know that from time to time some people require more encouragement to get involved in Manitoba's growing workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 40, The Employment and Income Assistance Amendment Act, offers that

assistance. There is a familiar expression: If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. I think yesterday's NDP have once again clearly demonstrated which philosophy they accept.

Health Care Services—Interlake

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw the attention of the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the honourable members to the positive actions of the Minister of Health, Mr. Chomiak, in resolving a health care crisis that threatened the quality and the continuation of health care services in the Interlake earlier this month.

Mr. Speaker, we had a situation in Arborg earlier on where our two doctors, after negotiating unsuccessfully for over seven months were prepared to leave our community and our province for Alberta. It was thanks to the intervention of the Health minister that their contractual disputes were resolved and they agreed to stay in our community. I would like to draw the attention of the House to his actions, and I thank him on behalf of the people of the Interlake.

* (1430)

Throne Speech—Economic Growth

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, we in this House listened intently last Thursday during the Speech from the Throne to hear what plans this new government had to ensure that Manitoba's economy would continue to prosper and grow. Unfortunately for all Manitobans, especially Manitoba's business community, the NDP felt that the future of the province's economy was not important enough to merit more than three lines in the speech and in those three lines the NDP failed to offer a plan for Manitoba's economic future. In order for this government to provide the public services that all Manitobans need and deserve, our economy must continue to expand. In the last 10 years, government revenues have increased by more than a billion dollars, despite massive cutbacks in federal transfer payments. That increase in revenue, due to the expansion and growth of our

provincial economy, allowed us to invest in important public services.

One role of the government is to create an environment in which business can succeed. A strong and growing economy allows government to invest in education, to invest in health care and to invest in our community. Running a deficit this year certainly will not help Manitoba's business community continue to keep Manitoba's economy as strong as it has been over the last few years. The Premier (Mr. Doer) promised during the election campaign to take a balanced approach when dealing with business and labour. Balance, however, does not mean completely ignoring the business community in Manitoba. It is time for this newly elected government to listen and to work with Manitoba's business community to ensure the province's economy remains strong. Thank you.

North End Community Ministry

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the 90th anniversary of North End Community Ministry located at 470 Stella Avenue in the constituency of Point Douglas. It was built in 1909 by the Methodist Church and was originally known as All People's Mission, Stella Avenue. The first superintendent was the Reverend J.S. Woodsworth. It was patterned on the settlement house movement which provided recreation and social services as well as opportunities to worship. Part of the United Church of Canada since 1925, it has continued to provide a variety of charitable activities, community development and work on social justice issues, the latter being my portfolio when I was there from 1980 to 1990.

A hymn writer has said that new occasions teach new duties. Ministry with residents of the north end has changed over the last nine decades. Originally it was ministry to and with immigrants from Eastern Europe. Today North End Stella, as it is known, works in partnership with aboriginal people.

I look forward to helping the United Church celebrate the 90th anniversary of North End Ministry tomorrow and pray that we will provide many more years of service to marginalized

people until a society based on justice and equality is established for all people.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you could canvass the House to determine if there is consent of the House to deal with an emergency debate and resolution regarding farm prices and, second of all, that the matter of the debate be concluded and a vote be taken before the adjournment tomorrow for the next sitting.

Mr. Speaker: Does the Government House Leader have leave to move a motion respecting agriculture, and for the Speaker to interrupt the proceedings to put all questions? Does the Government House Leader have agreement to set aside the regular business of the House to consider a motion on the farm crisis, to bring the debate on the motion to a vote before the normal adjournment hour tomorrow? Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House agree with what the honourable minister is bringing forward at this time, but the only thing I would like to say is that we will have the regular 40-minute time limit on the speeches.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed? [agreed]

GOVERNMENT MOTION

Manitoba Farm Crisis

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that

WHEREAS Manitoba's total net farm income is projected by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to drop by at least \$287 million below the previous five-year average; and

WHEREAS low commodity prices, caused by export subsidies in the United States and the European economic community, have made it difficult for our producers to make a living on the farm; and

WHEREAS Canadian farmers only receive 9 percent subsidy on wheat compared to 38 percent received by American farmers and 56 percent received by European farmers; and

WHEREAS the loss of national supports over the past few years has cost Manitoba farmers \$350 million each year; and

WHEREAS the cancellation of the Crow rate subsidy alone has caused transportation costs of Manitoba farmers to triple; and

WHEREAS our producers are some of the most efficient and technically up to date in the world; and

WHEREAS the crisis facing Manitoba's agricultural producers will continue to have an effect on the entire Manitoba economy, including communities, businesses and services which rely on a healthy farm economy; and

WHEREAS a Manitoba delegation consisting of representatives from producer organizations and elected representatives of all three political parties met with the federal cabinet ministers and made a joint request for an immediate \$300 million bridge funding; and

WHEREAS this request has not been satisfied;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly continue to work in a nonpartisan way to make the federal government aware of our serious farm crisis and the urgent need for federal government action; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly strongly urge the federal government to take immediate action and grant our request for \$300 million for Manitoba's farm families.

Motion presented.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I want to express my gratitude for all members of the House today to agree to set aside the business of the House to deal with a very important matter.

Mr. Speaker, we have been dealing with this matter since we have taken government in

recognizing that the farming economy of Manitoba is very important not only to the farmers but to the economy of the whole province, and the situation that has arisen is causing a serious problem not only for our farmers but farm communities. We must get the federal government to recognize that they have a responsibility in this matter. It was the federal government that made the changes that resulted in many of these supports being taken away from the farming community, and it simply is not working. It simply is not working for producers. We have to get the federal government to recognize what is happening here. Certainly, when you see the net income of producers dropping to levels that were not heard of since the thirties, when you see the prices of grain declining substantially while input costs increase, you know that our producers cannot continue.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity over the last summer to talk to people in the southwest part of the province, who are suffering not only because of low commodity prices but because of the flooding problems and the heavy rainfall that they have had in that area, and we continue to address that and we continue to address that issue. We certainly want the federal government to recognize that there is an issue in that area that must be addressed, just as the federal government recognized that there was an issue in the Red River Valley, and they were prepared to put support in for the producers in that area of the province. They must recognize their responsibility in the crisis in the southwestern part of the province. It is unfortunate that that issue has not been addressed to date by the federal government, but I want members across the way to know and I want Manitobans to know, particularly the farming community, that we have not given up on that issue. We continue to pressure the federal government to recognize their responsibilities, and hopefully we will get the kind of support that we need.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the supports that other communities are getting, the support that the American community and the European community are getting, it is unbelievable that the federal government would expect our producers to compete in that environment. Just on one commodity, if you look at wheat where, in

Canada, our producers receive a support of nine cents on the dollar; in the United States, it is 38 cents on the dollar, and that is probably a little higher right now because the federal government in the U.S. just put in additional money. In fact, the money for North Dakota was around \$200 million, which was announced about the same time that our federal government announced the \$170 million over two years for all of Canada through AIDA.

So you can see that there is a tremendous amount of support on the part of the federal treasuries to support farming communities in other countries, in the United States. In Europe, it is as high as 56 cents on the dollar for wheat. Again, if countries want to support their producers to grow grain for their domestic market, that is one issue. But when they start to put subsidized grains into the international market at that level, it is very, very difficult for our producers to compete in that environment, and they should not have to without federal government support.

* (1440)

Mr. Speaker, from the time that we took office, we recognized this as a serious problem. We called on the federal Minister of Agriculture to recognize this as an issue and asked them to look at the crisis in southwestern Manitoba. We then led a delegation jointly with Saskatchewan to have producers and business people go to Ottawa to raise this case with the federal government.

I want to tell you that I was very impressed with the delegation and Manitoba producers on how well they stated their case to the federal government, whether it was the Brandon Chamber of Commerce where Lori Dangerfield stated the case of the impacts on the city of Brandon of the declining rural economy, or whether it was Maxine Routledge who spoke on behalf of the Women's Institute and talked about the pressures on families, that families are feeling because of the financial crisis that is in the community. But our delegation stated the case very well, and I was hopeful that we would by this time have a more positive answer from the federal government on the issue.

The federal government has announced additional money for AIDA. I look at the comments that have been made by many producers, and certainly AIDA is not the answer. When I listened and looked back at the announcements that AIDA got, quite frankly, I think it was a good publicity campaign for the federal government to be able to say that they were supporting farmers and putting a lot of money into the West, but in reality the program has not worked. In fact, when we were in Ottawa, one of the producers told the federal government's agriculture committee that AIDA was a four-letter word that was not accepted and was considered a swear word in western Canada, and they just thought it was a terrible program.

In fact, it has not been working, because if you talk to the people who are applying for the program, people who are in most need of money, they are not getting it. It is not flowing to the people who most need it, and we have to look at designing a much better program. Certainly, those are negotiations that are going to be taking place. We should have had a long-term safety net program in place by now. We do not have that program. We cannot go from ad hoc program to ad hoc program to address the farming crisis. So those are things that have to be done.

Certainly, world subsidies have to be reduced. But until such time as world subsidies are reduced, our federal government has to recognize that they were part of creating this problem and they have a responsibility to address it. We, as government, are not prepared to let our farmers go down. We are not prepared to see our small communities suffer and lose services in rural areas, and we are going to continue to pressure the federal government to be sure that they address this issue.

We had, Mr. Speaker, last week a House of Commons committee on finance that was in Regina to hear what the concerns are. Two members of our delegation went to Regina. That was Andy Baker and Maxine Routledge who went to Regina to again state our case and outline how severe the situation is in Manitoba. As I say, they indicated in their presentation that Manitoba producers are facing a severe farm income situation well beyond what has been

experienced in decades, and it must be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that all members across the way realize that it is important that we have all parties standing together on this issue. We should not be looking at ways to divide one another on this issue or try to take credit for numbers that the members of the opposition have, that they have more rural representatives. What we have to do is stand together on this issue and say we are going to fight for Manitoba farmers; we are going to ensure that we do not let the federal government off the hook because it was the federal government that did create this problem.

Let us look at what caused the problem. The federal government wanted to meet its commitments to its world trade requirements and reduce subsidies. So the federal government ended the Crow benefit. I remember members across the way indicating that the elimination of the Crow was going to be very good. We were going to see all this value-added. Certainly it will happen, but now in the short term our farming community and our rural communities are in a real crisis. The removal of that subsidy could not happen in the way that it did while other countries continue to subsidize. We can see that it is not working, so we need some short-term bridge financing. We need bridge financing to get through this crisis and we need long-term safety net solutions, is what we need. We do not have those right now. We do not have them. We have to work on them. That is why it is very important that we all stand together and insist that the federal government recognize their responsibility in this matter. From there we have to work towards long-term safety net programs, Mr. Speaker, which we do not have either. Those are in negotiations. Hopefully, we will have them.

Certainly as we go into the next round of world trade talks, this is a very important issue. What are other countries going to do? Are other countries going to reduce their subsidies or is Canada going to be at the short end of the stick and have no supports? That again is a very important topic of discussion over the next little while.

We have to look at the economic impact of this crisis and the impact not only on the farm and on the rural community, but the impact on all of Manitoba. We know that one in eight jobs in Manitoba is related to agriculture. That is pretty significant. However, I do not believe there is enough recognition on urban residents in recognizing how important the agriculture economy is. Very soon we are going to see the impacts of that as we see farm machinery dealerships having a real difficult time; manufacturing businesses who produce for the farming community not being able to sell their equipment. That effect will certainly move down the line and more people are going to feel the impact, but the impact will be felt much more quickly in our smaller communities. There is a very serious concern with the loss of services and loss of skilled labour in rural communities.

When you look at it, Mr. Speaker, when one or two farm families go out of business, certainly the land is going to be farmed. Somebody is going to farm it, but is the answer larger farms? My vision is not to see larger farms; it is to see more families that want to live in rural Manitoba have the ability to live in rural Manitoba and make a living there. But what people in rural Manitoba are worried about, particularly this year, and I will refer to the southwest part of the province again where there was no crop. [interjection] Pardon me, the member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) is correcting me. The flooding did take place in the southwest part of the province, but the flooding and the high water problems stretched far beyond. They stretched into the Neepawa-Minnedosa area, the Grandview area. Certainly there was even some flooding in the Swan River area where people were not able to put their crop in.

The impacts on those businesses are there. Farmers are not buying equipment; farmers are not doing any repairs to their equipment. The service sector is starting to lay off people, in particular mechanics. If these mechanics leave the area, find jobs somewhere else, how are we going to attract them back to rural Manitoba? That puts additional pressure on the communities. Soon you are having farmers having to drive farther for repairs. Pretty soon there are not enough children there to have a school

viable, and certainly health care becomes an issue. All of these have to be addressed. We do not want to see our rural communities facing those kinds of challenges. That is why it is very important that we put in place a plan on how we can have people living in rural Manitoba and do so with assurances that they have supports there.

* (1450)

One of the most important ways to do that is to have our federal government recognize that they have a responsibility in this whole issue of putting some supports into the farm community until such time as farmers can earn their income from the marketplace, because I can assure you that every farmer, every farm family, would prefer to earn their money from the marketplace. They are very good and efficient farmers, and they can do that, but at the present time the playing field is not level. The level of supports from other countries is driving our prices down and causing very serious problems. There are things that have to be done. In the short term, we have to get the federal government to address this.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I have to say that when we were in Ottawa, I was very disappointed in Minister Vanclief's attitude toward us, when he came to the meetings and said our numbers were wrong and went to the media saying that our numbers were wrong when in fact we were using his department's numbers. It was unfortunate that the federal government tried to play those games because at the end of the day the numbers, where we were right asking for \$300 million, were very reasonable numbers and ones that we could justify very easily. So that was certainly a disappointment on the part of the federal government to try to imply when we were there and to discredit people by saying that we did not have our facts right when in fact we did.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the crisis in Manitoba is very real. There is a very real shortfall in the income of producers. We would hope that this is going to turn around very quickly and that we will have a levelling off of subsidies from other countries. I am not very

hopeful that that levelling off is going to take place very quickly. If you just read the articles that were in this week's paper as we prepare for the world trade talks, the European community has indicated that they do not even want the subject of agriculture subsidies put on the table. So there is some indication to you and to all of us here that there is not going to be very much movement on subsidies. If that movement on subsidies is not there, then we are going to have to address this.

I want to tell the members opposite that I think that we should have been addressing this issue much sooner. I recall in the last session where we suggested to the government that we put together an all-party delegation. The member for Interlake will recall when we talked about that, when we suggested, let us put together an all-party delegation, let us lobby Ottawa on the crisis in the southwest part of the province, let us start to address these issues, the former government refused to do that.

They did not want to recognize how serious the situation was. It was our government that took the step to pull together people, to pull together the business community, the farming community, and take the issue to Ottawa to say that we—[interjection] It is interesting that the member across the way should say that we are not getting anywhere. In fact, I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member across the way should—[interjection] Certainly Manitobans did pay out the money to help farmers.

The members opposite are hanging their hats on the fact that they put out \$50 an acre for farmers who could not seed. We said that that had to be paid out. That was the support that had to be there for producers, but that is the government opposite. The then Conservative government refused to take hold of the issue that the federal government had a responsibility. It is the government opposite.

When the government was changing the Crow benefit, when the government was changing the Crow package, it was members across the way who said, oh, this is going to be good for rural Manitoba, this is going to be good. We are going to have all this value-added here and everything is going to be wonderful.

Well, I can tell you, farmers are suffering. This government has to take some responsibility for not standing up for producers when the federal government moved to triple the transportation costs for producers. They certainly have to stand up for that.

Certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite should think twice about their position on the whole issue of the Kruger report and the position they took on that issue, which is going to, if not addressed properly, cause problems for our producers as well. This government, these members across the way, when they were in government sometimes did not think far enough ahead about the impacts of some of these changes was going to have on the farm community.

Our farming business is very important to the economy of this province. There are a lot of jobs. There are opportunities for value added in this province. There is no doubt about that. Because of the changes to the Crow, we are going to see changes in what we produce in this province. We will. The livestock production is going to increase, and we are going to have to look at other ways to improve the economy.

What we have to look at is how we are going to support our farmers in the short term. That is why we have to continue in this effort to get this federal government to recognize that in the short term there has to be some support. In the short term there has to be, and then we have to, along with looking at how we can diversify the rural economy, we have to put in place safety net programs, long-term safety net programs certainly.

* (1500)

The former minister talks about the \$50-an-acre payment. I have to tell him that had we had the \$50-an-acre unseeded acreage payment that he had the opportunity to negotiate previously, we would not have had to put an ad hoc program in. That is certainly a program that has to be put in place. The unseeded acreage, my understanding is that the previous government had the opportunity to negotiate that as part of crop insurance. It was their decision not to include it as part of crop insurance. Had there been that

program, we would not have had to have ad hoc programs, but certainly we are going to work towards having that. I understand that the minister, in fact, consulted with some groups in the province and they encouraged him not to bother with the unseeded acreage payments. [interjection] The member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) continues to say that is a rumour. In fact, I think that if he checked back a little bit, that proposal did go to the farm organization, to Keystone Agricultural Producers. In certain parts of the province, they discouraged the then Minister of Agriculture from signing up for the unseeded acreage payment. Had we had that, we would not have some of the problems right now. We are going to work to correct that.

We are going to work to correct that, and we are going to work towards a better long-term safety net program that we have. Now I know that is not going to be an easy situation, because other provinces have different agendas than we have here. That will certainly be a challenge, but I hope that we can work to ensure it. I hope the members across the way will support us in this, as we would certainly support any effort. We have called on the previous government to ensure that we had a long-term safety net program for producers rather than ad hoc programs. I hope that we would have the same support from members across the way as we begin these negotiations.

There are many challenges against it in the farming community. So I hope that the members opposite will continue to support us and that we will have a united effort to get the federal government to recognize that there is a very serious crisis in rural Manitoba. Our farming community is suffering, but also the business community is suffering. There are social problems that are as a result of this. We have to recognize that when we have a healthy farming economy, we have a healthy rural economy. When we have a healthy rural economy, it spins off to the province as well because agriculture is one of the key industries of this province. So I again want to say that I think that it is very important that we address this issue in a nonpartisan way, continue to lobby the federal government in our efforts to get them to recognize that there is a farm crisis.

Certainly, it is our hope that we can convince Mr. Vanclief that his tough-love attitude towards the farming community is not the answer, because we are not in support of his comments where he says, well, 35 percent of the farming population is not affected and we should just help them get out of farming. That to me is not a solution. We want to urge the federal government to look at their surpluses because certainly the federal government has a surplus, a surplus that I believe has been built up on the backs of western Canada. Because if you look at the amount of money that the federal government has saved by reducing its agriculture budget, the amount of money that they have saved when they reduced the transportation support, that has helped build up the federal government's surplus.

It is time for the federal government to look at western Canada. They indicated they were looking for suggestions on how they could spend this surplus. Well, we have an answer for them. One of the ways that they can spend their surplus is put in a support program that will help western Canadians. We have to look at how we can get that money to those who need it the most. Certainly, there are sectors of the agriculture industry that for the time being are doing well. The cattle industry is doing well; the grain industry is not doing well.

An Honourable Member: How are the hogs?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member asks how the hogs are doing. I hope that the price of hogs will come up a little more, because hog producers are on the margin line where they are on the verge of making some money. I hope that return will continue so that we will not have to support them, but the changes that the previous government made have certainly caused some concern for some producers. Small operators are the ones that are talking about the changes that are concerned, and it is an issue that we will be talking about to hog producers. Certainly, we will give hog producers the opportunity to have a say in what is going on. [interjection] We will give them a say, we will give them a say. But I listened to the member across the way and I would hope that he would also support this effort that we are making to get the federal government to recognize their responsibility because

certainly people in his part of the province are the ones that are suffering

We just attended the AMM conference and I want to say that the support that we got from AMM was very gratifying. They appreciated the work we were doing. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, municipalities are passing resolutions to support this effort for support in the farm crisis. There is a letter-writing campaign that is beginning to send a message to the Prime Minister that he has to recognize this. There have been meetings held across the province. It is a letter-writing campaign where people tell us about their own personal stories. People tell us about how difficult it is going to be for them. People tell us about losing their equipment. People tell us about not being able to pay their taxes. If people are not able to pay their taxes, that is going to have an impact on the municipalities. For that reason, I think that it is very important.

I talked about the southwest part of the province, but I also want to emphasize the calls we are getting are not only from the south-western part of the province. It is right across the province. I look at people who have called from Grandview, Roblin and Ste. Rose, and certainly the Swan River area, people who are worried about losing their land. People are worried how they are going to feed their families this winter. It is a very, very serious situation. Although the federal government tries to hang their hat on AIDA, that in reality is a false hope and an excuse for the federal government because that program is not working. It is not getting the money to those people that need it. Particularly in the grain industry, there is a problem. Because of the decline in grain prices, they are not able to access the money and as someone across the way just said, the program is really quite a disaster. It has helped the hog producers, there is no doubt. The hog producers have benefited from the AIDA program, and if you look at it, it would help those producers because when those producers took a cut in price, it was a short-term decline and they were able to take advantage of the program.

We have to get our federal Liberal M.P.s as well to recognize this issue. When we were in

Ottawa, we had the opportunity to meet with those M.P.s and discuss it with them. We also hope that we can convince the lead minister for Manitoba, Mr. Axworthy, to recognize that this is a very serious issue and that we have to address this crisis.

I think by working together and getting members from all parties, hopefully people will use their influence on the people that they know in the federal government to ensure that this issue is addressed. There are going to be committee hearings here in Manitoba over the next while and I hope that people will get their constituents to attend those meetings and outline again to the federal government how serious this is.

I wish that the members across the way, as I said, had taken a stronger position on this issue earlier and addressed it, but we have the opportunity now to work together. I hope that we can continue this, to stand together to ensure that in fact the federal government will recognize that subsidies around the world are much higher than Canadians, and that cannot continue. I hope that the federal government will recognize that a drop in income, \$287 million below the five-year average, is unacceptable.

We have very highly skilled producers. Our producers are not afraid to take on new technology and take on new challenges. They can take on any producers in the world in producing a high quality crop, but they have to have a level playing field. Until such time as that playing field is levelled off, we have to have support from our federal government. That is why it is important that we get the bridge financing that we have asked for to help farmers through this crisis.

The distribution of that money is an issue that can be easily resolved. It is first of all getting the federal government to make a commitment that they recognize this as a serious problem, and then getting them to recognize that they have a responsibility here. They have a responsibility because they are the ones who reduced the support and who have been balancing their budgets and building their surpluses on the backs of western Canada.

*(1510)

Their reduction in support to the farming community, particularly through transportation costs, is what has created a good portion of this problem. The lack of a long-term safety net program is another issue that we have to address, but in the meantime let us look at this and stand together to do whatever it is we have to do to get the federal government to recognize that they have a responsibility. When the United States got their payment of I believe around \$200 million for North Dakota, it was not the Governor of North Dakota that signed the check, it was Bill Clinton that signed the check. In the European communities, it is not the provinces, it is the states that are signing the check. Here in Manitoba, it is time for Jean Chretien, the Prime Minister—

An Honourable Member: And Paul.

Ms. Wowchuk: And Paul Martin, the Finance minister, certainly—it is time for those people to recognize that they have a responsibility to western Canada.

There is a quality of life, there is a culture in western Canada that we are not prepared to give up on. Western Canada plays a very important part in the economy. When you look back at history, it is the grain of western Canada that has put Canada onto the world market, and it is our high quality grain that has given us a lot of the credibility that we have right now in the world market.

Because of changes made by the federal government, this part of the country is suffering. That is not acceptable. We have to ensure that families who want to farm, families who want to continue to make a living in a very important industry, will have that opportunity. We do not want to see smaller farms gobbled up by larger farms, because, as I say, somebody is going to farm that land. It will be farmed, but what will happen to the culture of the small communities and to the services in the rural communities if we have fewer and fewer people there?

One of my other concerns is, if people go out of farming, where are they going to go? Farmers are very aggressive people. Right now

they are working for nothing, in many cases, just to keep in the business. If they get out of farming, they are going to find another job. If they move into the cities, they will find another job, even if it is a minimum wage job. If they have to, they will take two jobs. But what is that going to do to somebody else?

Not everybody is happy moving into the city. There are those people who live in rural communities who are happy living in rural communities and do a good job. They do a good job of producing high quality food, and they are part of a rural way of life. They are part of that infrastructure of rural Manitoba and western Canada. We are not prepared to give up on those people. We want to stand up for them so that those people who want to farm, those people who want to raise their children in rural Manitoba, can continue to do it.

Part of our campaign should also be how we get urban people to recognize the importance of agriculture to this economy. I think that is something that we as rural people have failed on. We sometimes do not boast about what we do. We do our work, we produce our food, we sell our food, and somehow we have to find a way to ensure that rural Manitobans and urban Manitobans recognize the value of the high quality food that we produce and that it is a very important part of the economy. That is a challenge for us. How do we get urban Manitobans and cities to support us as well?

Certainly, we have the support of the city of Brandon, because Brandon recognizes that agriculture is an important part of their economy. I think Brandon is suffering a little bit this year. I heard the discussion about the sale of cars decreasing in Brandon. Certainly the sale of cars is decreasing because farmers are not coming into town to buy those vehicles. We have to figure out a way to get that message out to Winnipeg, to get more urban support for the farming community and more recognition of how important we are.

That is a challenge for us as government, that is a challenge for us as rural people, to get our message out about what role we play in the economy of this province. The province does not end at Winnipeg. The province includes rural

Manitoba and northern Manitoba. I think when there is a crisis such as this we have to get the support of all Manitobans on it.

So in closing I would just like to say that I think that this is an excellent opportunity. I thank all members of the House for setting aside the ordinary business of the day to talk about what I believe is a real emergency and one that has to be addressed provincially but also addressed federally. I hope that we can continue in an all-party fashion to get the federal government to recognize their responsibility and ensure that that \$300 million that we are asking for comes to this province so that we can have the bridge financing in place so that our farming community can continue to produce this high quality food that we do until such time as we come onto a level playing field and our producers can compete equally with producers around the world. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I rise in this Chamber to second this important resolution to request additional aid from Ottawa for our farmers at a time of great difficulty.

An Honourable Member: Where were you when we needed you, Jon?

Mr. Gerrard: I have been pulling for farmers for quite some time, Harry.

As this is the first formal speech in this Chamber, I want to express my appreciation to the people of River Heights who elected me to this Legislature and thank them for their support. I also want to point out to the others in the Chamber that there are many in River Heights who are very concerned about farmers. I think that this in fact is true of many in Winnipeg, that people throughout Manitoba are concerned about this urgent situation.

I would like to thank the House leaders for coming to an agreement on where I am sitting in the Chamber. I must admit it is very cozy. It is clear that both parties want to keep a close eye on me, with the member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer) looking over one shoulder and the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) on the other shoulder.

The farm crisis strikes to the heart of who we are as Manitobans. The history of farming in this province goes back to the Selkirk settlers in the early 1800s. A large proportion of those who came as immigrants to this province in the early part of this century and the latter part of last century came because of the opportunities in farming, and they have made an incredible contribution to the rural economy and indeed the whole economy of Manitoba.

Though it is imperative now that we seek to diversify our Manitoba economy, agriculture will remain one of our rootstocks and it is vital that we never forget that. It was for that reason that I joined the all-party delegation some short while ago to go to Ottawa to press the Government of Canada for additional support for farmers in Manitoba. It is urgent. It is a pressing need, and it is for this reason that I am seconding this resolution today. There are Manitoba farmers who are in dire need of help.

I have visited farms. I have spoken to farmers from many parts of Manitoba over the last little while, and since the spring of this year indeed I have spent quite a number of days in southwestern Manitoba, indeed standing in boots in the mud in the fields looking in dismay at the weeds and the other problems that are there. There is a lot of hurt in the farm community. There is a lot of hurt in many rural communities which depend on agriculture and on the farm communities.

But it is also true, as the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has indicated, that there are some farmers who are doing well. The prices for cattle are good. Prices for table potatoes indeed have gone up some 30 percent this year, and these are examples. Some yields have been very good. I think it is important that we recognize that the crisis has not hit all farmers equally, and as the minister has pointed out, that we seek in making this request to Ottawa to find ways to deliver it to those farmers who are in real need and to those communities who are in real need, where we can make a difference.

* (1520)

I think it is important to note that over the last little while there are programs like those run

by the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council which have been very important in allowing some farmers to be very innovative in finding new solutions in this environment where we stand at the moment which is difficult times for agriculture, but these new solutions, even though some are being creative in finding ways to make a living on the farm, that there are still large numbers of Manitoba farmers who are having very difficult times, some because of the flood and wet weather earlier this year but many because of the low commodity prices for wheat and canola and oats and barley.

This fundamentally is one of the major problems, one of the major problems, that world prices are low and that other countries, notably Europe and the United States, are subsidizing to an inordinate extent, the root cause of much of this problem.

I think it is important to recognize the positive contribution that was made by the previous government in providing farmers with unseeded acres this spring with a payment of \$50 an acre. I would like to compliment the members of the then government, including the now Leader of the Opposition, for making this positive contribution to farmers who were affected by the flood and the wet weather.

I think it is also important to recognize that AIDA has been a help to some farmers. AIDA has, in fact, contributed and helped some farmers who have had a drastic drop in their income in doing quite well, but AIDA clearly is not sufficient. AIDA does not help those who have had several poor years in a row, and it is in this context and the context of the low prices for wheat and barley and canola and other commodity crops that I come out supporting this resolution.

My objective in supporting this resolution is to help farmers and to help rural communities in Manitoba, communities which have suffered from a loss in population, rural communities which are struggling because there has been an outmigration of people from their communities. Our objective must be to get dollars to the farmers who need it, must be to sustain those rural communities which are hurting and losing people. Our objective must be to help young

farmers, for they are the future, as well as to help farmers with a smaller land base, if we are going to arrest rural depopulation, because in helping farmers to do better on a smaller land base we in fact can increase the population of smaller communities and allow for more vital rural communities.

I support this resolution because it is an important step. We need to get the financial support, but at the same time I think it is very important that we in Manitoba realize that in making this request we have to indicate as well to Ottawa some details of what our business plan is, precisely how we would propose to spend the \$300 million, hoping that we are able to receive it from Ottawa. Accountability is clearly important, and a good business plan for spending that money for farmers is important. It is important to spend wisely. It is important if we are going to make the case and be successful in getting the money from Ottawa.

I will offer in my remarks some ideas, and I hope that others who speak will also make suggestions, will also provide their concepts of what should be in that business plan that we present to Ottawa in making this request for \$300 million because all of us want to be responsible. We want to spend wisely. We want to get the money to where it really is going to do the most good.

Now I know that there are many in the farm community who would like to see an acreage payment of \$20 an acre for every farmer in Manitoba. That, of course, has been the tradition of acreage payments and this kind of support. But as I have said, the hurt is not shared equitably at the moment, and when I talk to those in the farm community, there are many indeed who argue against an acreage payment. They say does a farmer with 5,000 acres who had a good year and has done well this year need a government cheque for \$100,000 on top of doing well now? You know, these kinds of payments in the past have been used by farmers to buy the farms of their less affluent neighbours and in this way contribute to rural depopulation. It is a sad fact of life, an unfortunate fact. As Conway, who has looked at this carefully, indicated in the Free Press on November 8, cash payments to all farmers on an acreage basis are

an unwise use of public funds. So indeed we need to look further. We need to develop a business plan, and we need to look at the impact of that business plan on rural depopulation and on farmers.

I would like to point out an example of rural depopulation. The constituency of Arthur-Virden, from 1988 to 1998, lost some 10 percent of its population during the period when the former member was in the Conservative government and was, for much of that time, the minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism, the minister for Economic Development for the province. The former minister did very well at his job. So well, as I have indicated, that his own constituency lost some 10 percent of its people. This was not economic development in the way that I would like to see it for rural Manitoba. Indeed this change, this decrease in population of some 10 percent in Arthur-Virden, it is notable, occurred during a period of high farm subsidies, so that high farm subsidies in and of themselves, if not given wisely, are not enough to stabilize and increase—which is what we want to do—rural populations. We need to make sure we have effective plans for farmers and for rural communities.

In this framework, I think we need to look at other options. A considerable number of the farmers to whom I have talked have urged the provision of support to those with a smaller land base, for we need to help such farmers make a reasonable living and help keep our communities viable. Others have emphasized support for young farmers.

Farmers I have talked to have put forward three alternative options. One, a conservation reserve program based on one in the United States has been promoted by Ian Wishart, a farmer in the Portage area. Under such a program, a farmer could receive, for example, \$30 an acre for up to 20 percent of their farmland to put the land into grassland or pasture. In the United States, such a program has been very effective in allowing farmers to take a portion of their land, usually the most marginal and unproductive land, out of grain and oilseed production and into pasture or grass. Delivery, for example, of such dollars before seeding in the spring could provide important

cash for farmers to enable them to put crops on the remaining land. This would be one alternative.

* (1530)

Others have suggested a western farm transition program which might be modelled on the support provided by groups like the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council, helping farmers based on need, on a business plan to adjust the farming approach to a sustainable approach, given the difficult circumstances that we are in. This has the advantage perhaps of using the judgment of peers, other farmers in awarding financial support where it is really needed. It could be targeted to assist young farmers, for many young farmers are having a particularly difficult time. They often have high mortgage levels, yet those young farmers are really our future, the future for Manitoba, and they need to be helped.

A third option that has been presented to me as I have talked to farmers around the province is a gap support initiative for farmers in difficulty who are missed by AIDA. Farmers who are most affected by the current crisis are often those who have had several poor years, so that the AIDA program does not help much.

Under the gap support program proposed by Allan Chambers, a farmer in the Arnes area of Manitoba, the gap coverage would provide, as it were, something equivalent to a minimum net income for farmers and ensure critical support to those who are having the most difficult time of all.

As well, I suggest, as looking seriously at the business plan, at how we might best expend \$300 million to help farmers, if the federal government would make it available as indeed it should, there are some other items that need attention. The minister has already alluded to the cost-sharing of the existing programs of \$50 an acre. This should be sewn up, and we should have federal support coming in to work with the provincial support which has already been formalized.

I think it is also notable that it is unacceptable that farmers in southwestern Manitoba are

still treated at this time by both provincial and federal governments less well than farmers affected in the '97 Red River flood. There were many who had expensive chemicals and fertilizers washed away in the '97 flood as a result of the flood, chemicals that they had applied the fall before, and there was compensation provided. There needs to be similar compensation provided for those who were so affected in the 1999 flood and wet weather conditions in Manitoba.

As well, support should be provided for businesses in communities like Melita. I was at the farm rally in Melita and spoke strongly in support of farmers. Gary Doer, the Premier, was there, not yet Premier at that time, but when he was there, he spoke about providing such help to the businesses in affected communities if he were in government. Now it is time for the NDP to produce.

I would note that there are some additional ways that we can stand up for farmers. You know, it is time to get serious in tackling this problem of subsidies by Europe and the United States. The United States has taken us to court, as it were, a number of times over the Canadian Wheat Board. It is time for us to look at particular instances where the United States or Europe in fact are causing problems and may in fact be breaking trade rules.

In Altona most days this fall U.S. canola trucks have lined up to deliver canola in Canada. U.S. farmers, thanks to their subsidy, effectively receive, I am told, about \$7.50 a bushel for canola, while Canadian farmers delivering to the same site, the same place, receive only a little more than \$5 a bushel. It is time for the federal government to forcefully take up the charge, to take up and take the United States to task for the sort of subsidies that they are creating which are making or giving an unfair playing field.

As well as reductions in European and U.S. subsidies, we need to improve global food security. You know, the real root of the subsidy war is the desire of nations for food self-sufficiency. With increased use of just-in-time delivery systems, global food reserves are in fact low by many historic times and levels. It is time, perhaps, to look at creating a global food

reserve, which would ensure food supplies globally in the event of a major disaster on a global extent. Such a strategic reserve in food and grain could in fact dampen price fluctuations, as has occurred with the oil stockpile created by the U.S. in the 1970s.

There is another fight that we must prepare for, and it was in the news this morning, out of the Kruger review process. There is indeed an opportunity to get a better deal for farmers from the railways. But, and it is a big but, there is going to be a big fight if we are going to get that better deal. I support those who are working to get that deal, our members of Parliament, Reg Alcock and Lloyd Axworthy. The possibility of saving \$250 million a year for farmers is not to be sneezed at. We should be working hard and committed to getting a much better deal from the railways.

There are many other jurisdictions which have moved to open running rights on railways, for example, to ensure real competition. This is one of the things that could give us significant help and we need to be fighting for to lower transport costs. Westerners are going to have to get together and work hard together to get a better deal for farmers from the railway. We must not underestimate the forces that are lined up against us, the railway interests, many eastern interests among them.

It is also important that with the end of the Crow rate and the WGTA that we still are entitled to a better deal than we have now. We need to work hard for that better deal to help our farmers. It is a fight that we must work hard for, and it is one more cause that we need to undertake to help farmers in Manitoba and indeed throughout western Canada.

In talking today, I think it is important to put on the table the story of another country faced with a similar challenge to what we have in Manitoba today, and this was more than a hundred years ago in the country of the Netherlands. Desperate farmers at that point approached their government for traditional subsidies to support the existing forms of agricultural practices as they were then occurring. The then government of the Netherlands in its wisdom said no to traditional-

type subsidies but said yes to vigorous support to farmers to adapt to the changing environments through the support of research and other adaptation programs.

The result, interestingly enough, is that today the Netherlands has agricultural and agri-food exports which are more than three times greater in dollar value than the agricultural and agri-food exports of all of Canada. It is rather an incredible story, almost unbelievable that the Netherlands, with a tiny land base only a fraction of the arable land of Manitoba, could have achieved agricultural and agri-food exports which are far greater than all of Canada. We need to learn from such stories to facilitate adaptation to a higher-value agricultural economy, an economy where farmers on smaller acreages can survive and prosper and an economy where rural communities can grow, an economy where rural communities, instead of shrinking, can be at the forefront of the growth of the whole province and the whole country.

* (1540)

We need at this time, when there is real need to work together, to think of farmers first. The federal government needs to change its approach realizing that AIDA alone is not good enough. The federal government needs to start sending more financial support but send also a message of hope and opportunity looking at new options to help farmers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The provincial government at the same time, I suggest, needs to get serious in putting together a business plan, a strategy for how we can best spend that \$300 million as part of the case that we make, that we are going to be wise stewards in how we help farmers and help rural communities in the best possible way.

As all of us know, the days for blank cheques are gone, and we need serious and accountable business plans which are going to make a difference. I challenge others who speak in this debate to give their view of how the money should be spent. Both the NDP and the Conservatives share with us your view of where we should go. Should we support large farms to get bigger and promote rural depopulation, or should we target specifically those who need

help, many who have a smaller land base, so that we can help maintain the rural population and our rural communities?

It is time for the province, as well, to look at measures such as providing rebates for PST paid on business inputs to farmers, or reduced education taxes for farm land, increased research in critical areas like low-input agricultural practices, new types of crop rotations. It is important in all this to provide effective financial supported-with-dollars solutions but with a good accountability process and a good business plan. Let us work together as Manitobans and as western Canadians to provide hope and opportunity for farmers. Let us work together to make a difference for our rural communities and indeed for our whole province. Thank you.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to put a few words on the record in regard to the farm crisis that is currently going on in rural Manitoba and many of our urban communities in rural Manitoba.

I believe that the situation that the farm community faces today is not a manufactured situation. It is a crisis brought on deliberately by two huge nations or groups of nations doing battle for world market share. When we consider the European Union and the tremendous changes that they have made, the deliberate policies that they have developed, the direction that they have taken to ensure that their communities will never go hungry again, the political will that is there to ensure that they support initiatives to see food production at higher levels than ever before in all of Europe, and when one sees the results of the efforts of the farm community in Europe, when you travel around Europe and you see the tremendous amount of advancements they have made in production, you have to recognize how terrifically successful their programs have been to encourage production.

I truly believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that whatever we do in Canada or whatever the Americans do or attempt to do, the Europeans will not easily back off from that position because their people and their countries have experienced hunger and starvation, the likes of which we have not seen in North America.

So we really do not know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the absolute effects of those policies will be and how vehemently the farm community in Europe and many of the countries of Europe will protect those policies. I believe, as one of the politicians said to me during a trip to Germany this summer, he said we as politicians would be quite willing to enter into negotiations and debate about lowering the Export Enhancement Program that we have, or eliminating it, and we would be willing to and would want to lower the subsidies and the tariffs that they use to protect their production, but, he says, if we did without entering into proper debate and having somebody else to blame it on, he said our farmers would probably hang us, unquote. I think that is right because when you speak to the farm community out there, you recognize how protective the farm community has become of its policies and its right to be well paid for producing food for the nation.

That is the dilemma that we face in this House today. That is the debate that we are into between Canada and the United States. That is the debate that we are into between Canada and the European nations, and that is the debate that will emanate forthwith, that will start within the next week, to see whether we can in fact negotiate ourselves into a position where all of the agricultural producers in all of the nations of the world can actually live in harmony and side by side and survive. It is called the World Trade Organization negotiations, and I think we need only, as a province, to recognize how important those discussions will be. We also need to recognize how absolutely intricate those discussions will be and how delicate the negotiations will be. Maybe, just maybe, at the end of the debate, the Europeans will have enough fodder out of the debate to be able to blame other nations for having to reduce the tariffs and the subsidies, and we can in fact lower them and cause again a competitive mechanism to be replaced by what is currently in place. That would be then the price-setting mechanism for food. We, as farmers in Canada and in Manitoba, would then have a different kind of a scenario than we have faced for the last 10 or 20 years.

We have seen all too many times where the Europeans have produced huge surpluses. We

have read where they have dumped butter into the ocean and where they have dumped beef into all kinds of programs and indeed given it away and where they are currently and constantly paying buyers to come in and take commodities off their hands, whether it is canola or rapeseed or wheat or grains. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is what is causing the decline in prices that we and our grain farmers, especially our grain farmers, are facing today in this province.

I was a bit surprised, and I in fact told the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), when she phoned me and asked whether we would support a debate on the crisis in agriculture, I asked her to fax over the resolution that she was proposing. I phoned her back and I said I would not put my name to that resolution because I think, quite frankly, it missed the point. I still do, and I will get into that a little later, because we can talk about all the current programs in Canada, and we can point fingers, and we can talk about flood aid, and we can talk about short-term programs and all the current or long-term programs that other governments have tried, but what we need to do is recognize that if we want to protect our farmers, if we are serious about protecting our farmers, that we have to then, after the negotiations of the debate on the trade agreements are over and if the support mechanisms remain in other countries as they did in the United States, as they did in Europe, we then, as a nation, without the involvement of our provinces, without asking our provinces to contribute, need to then, as a nation, say, yes, we will be into that same sort of a program.

* (1550)

I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we need to sincerely make a point and make the argument with Ottawa that they have, our Liberal government in Ottawa, walked away from its responsibility to support the food producers of this nation to the point where many now are talking about not seeding a crop at all this year. I would venture to say to all of you that if our farmers, and there are only roughly about 200,000 of them left in western Canada and probably even less than that, decided this year not to seed a crop, where would the feed grain come from to feed the livestock herds?

Because we are in a situation where the surpluses that we have talked about for many years are no longer existent. We are working, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a time frame that the population of this earth has never seen before. It is called on-time delivery, and we only have 19 days of grains on hand at any given time to feed the world. That has never, in the history of this world, happened before. Remember some 20 years ago when we dropped to 28 days of supply, and everybody says, whoa, this cannot happen, we cannot allow this to happen. Maybe it was more than 20 years ago, but we created then the green revolution, did we not, because we had to produce and produce and produce to avoid the huge hungers that were predicted to happen by the year 2000. We have not seen those hungers, because technology was brought onboard, farmers were encouraged, and they produced. Whether it was European farmers or Canadian farmers or American farmers, they did produce, and they produced enough to feed the world. The distribution system is another matter that we should be discussing at some point in time, but they did produce. They met the needs of the population, and yet the farmers in this country have been ignored.

Our federal government, under the guise of balancing budgets, did something that I think they will regret during this trade round. They removed virtually all the programs that previous governments had put in place historically, and they did it under the guise of meeting the WTO requirements by the year 2000.

They did away with the Crow benefit when they need only have removed 20 percent of the Crow benefit to meet the requirements of the year 2001, but they removed the whole thing. What have they got left to negotiate? They removed all the other programs, GRIP, you name it, the subsidies that have been in place, and they removed them and without consideration of where they would be when the next round of negotiations would be put in place.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say to you that Canada has very, very little left to negotiate except supply management and the Wheat Board. That is all that is left, and the Wheat Board is not an organization that has traditionally been highly subsidized or has been

a vehicle to highly subsidize its wheat growers. They are a marketing agency. Yet there will be those at the negotiating table that will point fingers at the Wheat Board and say, that vehicle has to go. They will point fingers at our supply management system and say, that vehicle has to go. What else do we have to negotiate?

That is the problem. That is the problem that this Liberal government in Ottawa got ourselves into. Then they came back to the provinces and said, well, if you want to support your agricultural community, you have to get involved.

You know what that did, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It put us into a very, very delicate position vis-a-vis our American farmers, American political systems, and the challenges that have constantly come our way. They pick the highest province with the highest amount of contribution to the lowest number of people and/or industry and then challenged the beef industry, the pork industry, the lumber industry, and we could go on. They challenged.

I think we have to give credit to Mike Gifford, the chief negotiator under the Brian Mulroney administration, who put in place the FTA and was part of the negotiating team for the WTO, to have negotiated well, because every challenge that has been put by our American friends, we have won. The trade dispute settling panels that were criticized so highly by some in this room when they were first established were very highly successful. They were given the powers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I never thought the American government and/or the people of the United States would ever give a panel. They were given supremacy of rule over the courts.

The American people cannot go back to their courts and challenge the panels, the first time ever in the history of the United States that that has happened. Those panels have served well. They were negotiated by our Canadian negotiators under Brian Mulroney and his government. Let us give credit where credit is due.

Now, why are we here today? Why are we debating this issue? Because our farmers have

been put into a competitive position that they have never ever had to face before. They, as individuals, I, as a grain producer, every day of the week face the challenges, the competitive challenges of the EEC economy. I face the challenges of the United States government, not the states governments, not the German governments or the Italian governments, or the French governments but the whole combined economy of the EEC. As an individual I compete against those forces. Can I do it and sustain my industry? No. Can our provinces effectively ward off challenges time and time again by becoming involved in the debate and saying yes, we will contribute to the programs that a deficient bi-federal forces? No, we cannot do it, because what we have done, we have relegated the province of Saskatchewan into a position where they cannot afford to pay their producers because roughly 50 percent to 60 percent of their economy is ag related. How can you ask 40 percent of a province to support 60 percent of an economic base through their taxpayers?

Ontario is less than 2 percent dependent on their ag communities, so 98 percent of their taxpayers can support 2 percent. Does that work? Yes, it does. Manitoba is roughly 18 percent ag dependent, maybe more if you go beyond the outside realms, but you could say in round numbers 20 percent ag dependent. Can 80 percent support 20 percent of an economy? Maybe. But where are the disparities? Or how do you balance? That is what is wrong with this whole scenario. Canada must take its rightful position at the trade talks, but Canada must also recognize at the end of the day when the deal is done that they have the same responsibility, or should take on the same responsibility, that other nations do, and that is where this Liberal government in Ottawa has failed miserably. They have no idea. They do not understand agriculture. They do not understand the rural western economies, nor do they understand how much we contribute as farmers to the balance of payments and the huge amounts of foreign currency we earn by our exports of our raw commodities, of our manufactured products, and how much we contribute to the economy by the job creation that we have entered into over the past number of years.

* (1600)

The provincial government that was just defeated knew what this meant. I give Gary Filmon a tremendous amount of credit for the stand he took during the Premier's conferences and the negotiations with the Prime Minister, and I will never forget in 1988 when we were just elected, the flood that we had in the Swan River where the minister's own home is. I went and visited her farm and watched the huge devastation, looked at the huge devastation that the flood had caused. Who picked up the bill? This government came to the aid and the rescue of those farmers. We, that same year, had one of the worst forest fire seasons that his province had every seen. Who picked up the bill? Gary Filmon's government did. Did the federal government come to the table? No. It took years of negotiation, hard-nosed negotiation for them to pick up their portion of the cost.

The same thing applied again in 1997. The Red River Valley has had four floods out of the last six years, four floods out of the last five, and the province was always there. We said yes we will and then went back to the feds to say you must, and they argued and argued until '97 when the election was called and Mr. Chretien came and threw that famous bag of sand and they paid. Where is the federal government today when we face that same kind of disaster in western and southeast Manitoba? Where are the feds? When is the election call going to come? When is the next bag of sand going to be thrown? That is the problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we face as farmers, as rural communities, as provincial taxpayers each and every one of you.

So I say to the minister be very careful how or what you ask for. Make sure you have your i's dotted and your t's crossed because somebody might come along and say, yes, we will and you are going to pay, and that is not where we want to be as a province. That is why I told the minister that I would not sign her resolution because I think it misses the point. The numbers that are quoted in that document are estimates, guesstimates. How can we guesstimate at what the real hurt will be before the end of this crop year is over?

You know, I have been in the agriculture business for 39 years and never have I been able to determine clearly what my end net result will

be before the year end is over and everything is sold. How are we going to say to the federal government we need \$300 million based on what? I say to you that we should be very, very careful how or what we ask for before we ask because we might get it, but will it be \$300, will it be \$500, will it be \$700, will it be the equal amount of the Crow benefit? How much are farmers paying today after one decision was made by Ottawa? The elimination of the Crow—and I will never forget when we in this Chamber sat and debated and there was some mention made of the Crow benefit having disappeared and everybody sort of yawned and farmers yawned and said—because prices were going up, and we lost \$700 million; \$700 million we gave up like that, and we yawned.

I think that is a lesson that we should learn because the year after the prices started coming down and today farmers pay two-thirds more or three times more, I should say, for their freight on the grain out of Manitoba than they only did a few short years ago, three times more. Did that hurt? You bet it did. Does it hurt today? You bet it does. See, the cost of production on an acre of land or a bushel of grain has increased steadily without any relenting, and just watch this year. We all cringe when we fill up our tank with gasoline at the bowser because it went up two cents a litre, right. But can you imagine a farmer putting 10,000 gallons in his tank twice a week? That is 4.2 litres per gallon twice a week and then you calculate 10 cents a litre extra and look at the cost. Look at the cost, and then we cringe when somebody says, you know, maybe we should give those farmers a hand, and Ottawa has walked away. Ottawa does not understand.

So where do we go? Should we target? Should we short term? Should we offer relief tomorrow by doing a policy that will put \$300 million in farmers' pockets before the end of the year? You know, this government, this minister could make that decision tomorrow, if she could ever convince her Premier and her Finance minister because there is enough money in the bank that you could do exactly that. Then you could go to the federal government later and say you owe us. That is what Gary Filmon did when the forest fire was on. That is what Gary Filmon did when the flood was on. Will this minister have the backbone to convince her Premier (Mr.

Doer) and her Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) to do that? I doubt it. I do not think the commitment on that side of the House is there that was there when the forest fire in 1988 was on. I do not think that kind of commitment is there. I think there is a whole bunch of rhetoric here.

* (1610)

When I look at the resolution as put forward by the minister, who puts forward a whole bunch of iffy numbers, I would say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we should be very careful before we accept those iffy numbers.

Point of Order

Ms. Wowchuk: I want to just remind the minister, the minister indicates that we are putting forward iffy numbers. These numbers are numbers that are taken out of Agriculture Canada's foods projections for all provinces to base their facts on. These are numbers that his party supported when we went on an all-party delegation to Ottawa, so if they were iffy numbers, they should have looked at them before.

Any numbers in here, the numbers related to the subsidies are in fact numbers that can be substantiated. The numbers on the \$287 million is also a number that can be substantiated, so I would ask the member to correct the record because, in fact, these are not iffy numbers. These are facts put forward by the federal government.

Mr. Jack Penner: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on that same point of order.

An Honourable Member: He already said it is not a point of order.

Mr. Jack Penner: On another point of order then. I would suggest to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the issue that has been brought forward by creating these numbers in a resolution gives substantive measure to the numbers. I say to you just because they were brought forward by the federal government demonstrates how iffy they are, and for this minister to accept them verbatim without

questioning, without having done the proper research, is what I am calling into question here.

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask you to substantiate the point of order that I am making on this because I think there is a lot of fact here.

* * *

Mr. Jack Penner: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can talk about all the issues that have created the prices in agriculture that we face today. One of them is the transportation costs, a huge \$700 million of additional transportation costs now added to every farmer's cost of production.

The floods that have devastated western Manitoba, southeast Manitoba, have created substantive costs to individuals that they did not have before. The elimination of the programs that were there before in supporting the farm community, are gone, which has added substantive costs to the production of food in this province. The business plan that we talk about, that the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) talked about that needed to be put in place, is used by farmers every day of the week. They have a business plan, but every year that bottom line decreases and decreases to the point where this year there are no bottom lines any more. We have children that might in fact be relegated to the point that they would have to go to the food bank to have food in some of the communities. In some of the farm homes farmers cannot pay their bills.

If we, as a province, and if the previous government had not done what they did, the situation would even be far worse. When Gary Filmon, the then-premier of the Province, appointed the value-added task force which toured Manitoba and asked Manitobans what kind of programs do we need to put in place, what kind of processes do we need to change, and what kind of legislation do we need, the rural people of Manitoba answered and responded. The task force report had some 25, 27 recommendations, I believe. I believe that most of them have been implemented, which has caused very substantive secondary industries to have been developed in rural Manitoba. Were it not for those secondary industries and many of

those businesses that have been created that have created jobs for the women on those farms, for the men on those farms that they could work at other jobs in winter, the situation would be much, much worse. We understood.

I believe that it is time that we recognize how serious the problem is. It is time that we recognize the changes that are needed, and it is time that the federal government recognize its responsibility to the people of Manitoba and the people of western Canada. We truly want to be part of Canada. We truly want to be part of the Canadian economy, but we also want to be treated as equals.

I think, Madam Minister, that is going to be your main challenge, that is going to be your Premier's (Mr. Doer) main challenge, to convince the Prime Minister of Canada, to convince your colleagues in Ottawa, your counterparts in Ottawa, that there is a position that needs to change and that they have a responsibility to support, as the Europeans do, as the U.S. does, programs that in fact can work.

As I said before, I wanted to move an amendment to the resolution, that was put forward. The amendments are as follows:

I move, seconded by the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), that the resolution be amended as follows:

THAT the first WHEREAS clause be deleted and the following substituted:

WHEREAS farmers are the primary source of food production; and

THAT the fourth WHEREAS clause be deleted and the following clauses substituted:

An Honourable Member: Make sure it is the right one.

Mr. Jack Penner: That is what I am trying to do. I think there should be another one. I will give you this one right here. There is another one here. I think you need three, right?

WHEREAS the farmers are the primary source of food production; and

THAT the fourth WHEREAS clause be deleted and the following clauses substituted:

WHEREAS the European Economic Community has decided to produce enough food to ensure starvation will never again occur in their countries; and

WHEREAS the European Economic Community ensures an adequate income for its farmers while at the same time maintaining low food prices at the grocery stores counter through direct commodity supports and acreage payments to its producers; and

WHEREAS surplus European production is exported using price reduction incentive programs such as the export enhancement subsidies; and

WHEREAS the United States government, without individual state support, is using similar methods of supports for its farm community to ensure the survival of its agricultural sector and low food prices for its citizens; and

WHEREAS this food price war has caused a huge reduction in commodity prices, thereby reducing Manitoba farmers' income to a level that farms and food production cannot be maintained; and

* (1620)

THAT the following WHEREAS clauses be added following the sixth WHEREAS clause:

WHEREAS Canadian farmers must compete with the government treasuries of European nations and the treasury of the United States federal government; and

WHEREAS the federal Liberal government in Ottawa has constantly insisted that the provincial governments must bear a large part of the cost of food price reduction programs; and

WHEREAS there is a huge difference in the ability to pay for these measures among individual provinces; and

WHEREAS the federal Liberal government in Ottawa has removed virtually all levels of support to its farmers; and

THAT the eighth and ninth WHEREAS clauses and the two BE IT RESOLVED clauses be deleted and the following substituted:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba strongly urge the federal Liberal government in Ottawa to assume its responsibility to the food producers not only in Manitoba, but the rest of Canada; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the federal Liberal government be urged to mirror the level of support to its farmers as provided by the European Economic Community and the United States government; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that through this action, the people of Canada are assured a continuation of a quality food supply.

Motion presented.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order.

House Business

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask if you would canvass the House to seek consent to waive private members' hour today and tomorrow?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? [agreed]

* * *

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin-Roblin): I rise today very much pleased that we can debate this important issue here in the Legislature. I cannot help but think that if we in this House were to think like farmers we could come up with a solution to the problem that plagues us in rural Manitoba.

It is my experience that farmers in our province rely on their experience over years to make good decisions in their operations. They rely on the experience of farming and producing for generations in our province to come up with very unique and creative, in some cases ingenious, solutions to problems that have been

plaguing the agricultural sector recently here in Manitoba.

The first thing that I would point out is that farmers learn from their mistakes. That is something that I wish the federal government and certain others would also learn as well, to learn from their mistakes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have some very practical experience when it comes to learning from my mistakes. When I was 15 years old, my dad decided it was time that I learned how to handle a tractor. He decided I was going to be out onto the old quarter-section and learn how to harrow. Well, it turned out to be a harrowing experience all right. By the time I was done at the end of the day, I had caused some damage to the harrows, and I had caused some damage with the relationship between my father and me because I had made a mistake, but my dad was absolutely determined that I was going to learn from that mistake.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, early one morning, my dad put me up on top of a John Deere (R), the old John Deere (R) that has been given credit for breaking open the western plains and turning a lot of bushland into productive cropland.

An Honourable Member: Nothing runs like a Deere.

Mr. Struthers: Nothing runs like a Deere, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs points out, but this was an old John Deere. It had the hand clutch. I had the harrows on the back, and I was cruising up and down. My dad had gone up and down the field a couple of times with me. He felt that I knew enough about operating this equipment that he could let me off on my own.

So away I went, all day, up and down the field, and I was getting pretty sure of myself closer to the end of the day, and I got a little sloppy, a little cocky like 15-year-olds are wont to do sometimes. I ended up wrapping the cable twice around the tire and the axle of the tractor, hauling the whole harrows up towards the tractor, and this was a tractor without a cab, so I was very much in peril, unbeknownst to myself

until I turned around and looked and saw the harrows coming up at me as I was driving along. So quickly I grabbed the hand clutch, pulled it in, jumped over the front end of the tractor, scared as anything, landed face first in the topsoil and looked around, and into the beautiful Manitoba sunset I saw my dad's harrow sticking straight up in the air just wavering back and forth.

That is the first time that day I almost lost my life. The next time was when I saw my Dad's green half-ton flying across the quarter-section to come and see what I had done to all his equipment. The first thing my dad asked me was: are you okay? I said, yes, a little bit shaken and nervous. Then the air turned quite blue as he tried and attempted to get the harrows untangled but, you know, it took us almost the rest of that day to undo the mistake that I did.

My dad had two things he wanted to get across to me. Number one, he made sure I got right back up onto that tractor and did at least another round. I gotta tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was not big on that idea. I did not really want to get back on that tractor, but he said that I had to, but he again taught me the proper way to take the corners without wrapping the cable around the axle of the John Deere.

*(1630)

So the two things that we learned, No. 1, you persist. You keep going and going and going despite the fact that you have got some obstacles in the way. I guess Dad could have just let me quit that day and I would never have got on a tractor again in my life, but he was not going to let that happen. But No. 2, he corrected the mistake, so you can bet that I never again wrapped the harrows around the John Deere.

Now, you may ask: what has that got to do with the debate today? Well, we are doing it again. The federal government is making the same mistakes that they have made over and over again in the past. They are not paying attention to the needs of farmers in our province. Now, if they would only learn the lessons that we have learned as rural Manitobans on the farms, I do not think that there would be a problem here.

I disagree a little bit with what the member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner) said when he said that the federal government does not understand. I wish it was only that easy, because I believe the federal government does understand. I do not think they care very much, though. I do not think they really are too worried about those of us who live in rural Manitoba. I do not think this is particularly a political statement. I know I have some constituents who say, well, there are 31 members of Parliament in Toronto itself. There are not even that many in Saskatchewan and Manitoba combined. There could be some truth to that political statement.

But, you know, I do not think the federal government cares too much about what happens out in rural Manitoba. I think they understand how important agriculture is to our economy here in Manitoba. I think they understand how important it is to the economy right throughout Canada. I know they understand that. They cannot help but see that. I really wish the Prime Minister would come out and talk to some of the people that I talked to last spring and through the summer when we realized that certain parts of our province were really in a lot of problems when it came to the amount of rainfall that they have received not just last spring but the fall before and the amount of snowfall that the southwest corner and parts of western Manitoba received over the course of last winter.

Last May I took it upon myself to drive from the Legislature here down through the Pilot Mound-Cartwright area, further west to Deloraine and to Melita, and had the opportunity to talk to a lot of farmers and business people in the southwest corner of the province of Manitoba and had an opportunity to fly over the flooded area and see first-hand the amount of water that was lying in the fields. It was amazing that day to take off from the airport at Deloraine and, as we took off heading west, to look out the left side of the plane on the Turtle Mountain and see dry fields and farmers working their land and then to look to the right to see what reminded me of lakes in northern Manitoba when I lived in the North and saw the number of small lakes and ponds and streams and rivers. It was just two different worlds. It was because on the left we were on the slopes of Turtle Mountain and on

the right we were looking at quite a horrendous flood situation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that we in this province are going to learn from the mistakes of the past, unlike our federal counterparts. I hope that we will learn from those times when the federal government has tried to drive a wedge down the middle of this Legislature. I hope we learn from the time that the federal government has tried to divide and conquer the farm groups of this province. I hope we do not let that happen today. I hope that we do have a strong, united force that will contend with the federal government. I hope that this debate in this House today can draw us closer to an all-party stand on such an important issue as agriculture in Manitoba.

Agriculture in Manitoba, after all, is our No. 1 economic activity. It is even more important for my constituents, constituents who farm south of Grandview, who experienced as much water as farmers in the southwest corner, constituents who even today continue to experience some horrible, awful conditions on their land, conditions where crops could not be seeded, the crops that were seeded could not be harvested, and the land that was flooded in the spring is now infested with every kind of weed you can name, pretty well. So there is a lot of hurt throughout the farming community in Manitoba.

Having said that, it is not just a problem of the drought that we have experienced. The price of wheat was low before the water began to fall and it is low after the water began to fall. Primarily the source of the problem is an international one. It is primarily a problem of international trade and it is a situation that we as legislators have to take seriously.

I want to congratulate those people with the foresight and the common sense to work together on this important prospect. I want to commend our Premier (Mr. Doer) and minister and commend the members opposite, particularly the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), for attending with the members from our side of the House to try to arm-twist the federal government into doing the right thing. I want to take this opportunity as well to

congratulate other municipal and farm group leaders, Wayne Motheral of the AMM, Don Dewar of Keystone Agricultural Producers, and others who have stepped forward to go on these missions to put forth a united Manitoba alternative that I hope, despite the last speaker, is still intact today. Because the last thing we need, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to have people playing politics with an issue as important as the farm income disaster that all of us as legislators have to deal with.

I want to also encourage those who have the wisdom to work in co-ordination and in conjunction with the Saskatchewan government, the Saskatchewan government who also has taken an all-party approach, the Saskatchewan government who has included its opposition parties, included Saskatchewan farm groups and municipal people. I believe that the only way we are ever going to receive satisfaction on this issue is if we all stick together—[interjection]

The member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) wants to know what the point is. The point is quite simple and I appreciate the help from members opposite. Maybe it will become a little more clear when they explain some of the comments that were made by the speaker that preceded me who introduced an amendment to the motion. I want to say, flying in the face of the co-operative nature in which we have approached this, I would have loved to have seen the amendment well before it was introduced today in a spirit of co-operation which, I was to understand, was the way we were going to approach things on this farm income disaster problem that we are facing, but maybe the speaker following me will be able to make that a little bit more clear because it has not been made clear yet just where it is that the members opposite stand when it comes to helping out our farm community.

* (1640)

Now, I am very willing to give credit where credit is due. Like the previous speakers before me, I will be the first to stand and say that \$50 an acre is a good idea, and I gave credit then and I give credit now to the former government who did do that. Now, the question is: where do you go from here now that you are in the opposition?

Will you be supportive of the measures that we take as a government, or will you hang back and try to score political points?

You have a real decision in front of you, and I look forward to seeing the thought processes you go through. I look forward to seeing what kind of results you come up with. The ball is in our court. When I say our court, I include members opposite because we are taking a co-operative approach in trying to co-ordinate the statements that we make to the federal government so that we do not fall victim to the government's divide-and-conquer mentality, divide-and-conquer approach, that they use so often to put us in a bad light. So I encourage the members opposite to make it very clear exactly where they stand in terms of the resolution that we have put forward here today. Are you with the farmers or not, that is what it is going to come down to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to make it clear that the scope of the problems that we face today in agriculture, the scope of the problems are severe. We cannot say this loud enough, and we cannot say it often enough to the federal government and to anybody who is willing to listen how severe the problems are in the agricultural world here in Manitoba. It is not just the agricultural world. When I was visiting in Melita last year, I had a great conversation with a fellow who runs a small engine repair shop and a tire shop. I talked to several business people in Melita who indicated to me that even at that time back in May of 1999, even then they were starting to feel the pinch. Now, that was at the beginning of this crisis. Where are they now? People whom I have talked to in the area have indicated a number of shops that have closed. They have indicated to me shops that are on the verge of closing because they do not have the business coming from the producers in the area because the producers in the area do not have the money to be paying for the kind of repairs that they need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other point that I want to make is that the current safety nets are unable to cope with the problems that we are facing today in agriculture. We have to come to grips with this. We have to understand that the safety nets that we have right now are not going

to cut it. If we can provide safety nets to other groups, to other professions, to other people in the province as we do, why can we not do that for farmers? Why can we not guarantee to farmers that they are going to have a chance to make a go of it? What could be more important in our province, politicians included, than farming? There is nothing. People cannot convince me that there is a more important profession in this province than the people who produce the food that we eat.

Contrary to popular belief in some circles, the food that we eat does not get put together in the back of the Safeway. It is grown. Contrary to popular belief, chocolate milk does not come from brown cows and white milk from white cows.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

You know, we have to get to a point in our society where we can talk about some solutions in an all-party way, in a nonpartisan way, and come up with some solutions that are going to be fair and treat farmers with the kind of value that I think they need to be treated with. That, Mr. Speaker, is not something that has happened to this point.

Now, my encouragement is that we continue to operate in a nonpartisan, co-operative way. My encouragement is that we do that so that we do not fall prey to the federal government's divide and conquer tactics that we have seen in the past, that we know are there, that we know will be employed by the federal minister and by the Prime Minister.

Having said that, I am very glad that the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) had the wisdom to second this resolution here today. I am very glad that the Manitoba Liberal Party has decided that farming is an important endeavour in this province and that it is worth supporting.

Having said that, I want to remind everyone of the massive reductions in federal support for our farmers over the last while. It has been pointed to before; I will point to it as well, the approximately \$720 million that was taken out of our western Canadian economy when the

federal government moved to make changes to what was known as the Crow rate.

That, Mr. Speaker, meant not just the loss of that money but that farmers in western Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan were now facing the largest transportation costs to either the Port of Vancouver or through the St. Lawrence Seaway. I was hoping that what it would mean is more tonnage of wheat that would go through the Port of Churchill, which would have helped many of my constituents a lot and many of the constituents of members opposite. That has not panned out as much as I would like it to pan out, but maybe there is hope there yet, but we did a great disservice to Manitoba farmers when that Crow rate was taken from them.

I want to also make sure that we understand that when the federal government is approached to provide a contribution of \$300 million to the farm community, that of several things we need to keep in mind, No. 1 is the distribution of federal money that I hope will be agreed to eventually by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Vanclief. I want to make sure that everybody understands that that money should be provided to those farmers who need it the most. I do not want and I cannot imagine why anybody would want to see the bulk of that money go anywhere other than farm families who farm in rural Manitoba. I cannot imagine why anyone would want that money to go to corporate farms who already have many of the advantages put in place by the former government which is now sitting opposite or by any federal government who has skewed the balance in favour of corporate farming. So, Mr. Speaker, my hope is that, No. 1, we can attain a level of funding from the federal government, and No. 2, that that money can be fairly distributed so that those in farming who need that kind of help, that kind of support, are the ones who actually receive that money.

The other point that I think needs to be made is that if the federal government should see their way to do the right thing and ante up some funds—and the figure we have been bouncing around is \$300 million—I hope everybody understands that that kind of a commitment would not violate our trade commitments. I want people to be totally understanding of that, that that does not mean that we somehow are in

violation of the agreements that we have signed in the area of trade. This is not the European Union; this is not the United States of America. We have been playing by the rules. We have signed some agreements, and, heck, Mr. Speaker, in some cases we have tossed things out that were of benefit to farmers before we even signed those agreements.

We were so honest on the international stage that we bailed out on our farmers on a couple of occasions just to get into the talks in the first place. I did not really like that when we did it, but looking back on it now, we have done it, and our so-called partners around the world have not. They have not even, in my estimation, lived up to the agreements that we signed since we tossed out the two-price system of wheat and other things that we gave up before we entered the negotiations for the free trade agreements and NAFTA and World Trade Organization talks.

* (1650)

So, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the \$300 million that has been asked of the federal government, I want you to remember that that \$300 million, whatever amount the federal government does eventually put forward, that it is distributed fairly and it goes to those farm families who need the support the most and that we remember that this does not violate our commitment to any trade agreement that we are party to.

I want to, as well, state that last spring when I visited many of the communities in the southwest part of the province to talk about the problems that are facing farmers, that there were a lot of things that farmers in that area made clear to me. They made clear to me that they were not looking for handouts. They made clear to me that this was money, that they needed a hand, that they did not want something that was not due to them. It was not just the southwest part of the province. A farmer in Reston who I thought was very astute pointed out to me that it was not just his part of the province that was suffering and that it was not just the suffering because of the drought—sorry, because of the flood. I think there were people looking for a drought about June last year maybe, but it was not just the flood that was the problem. The

problem had been occurring well before the flood of water that hit parts of our province last year.

He was very astute in pointing out that other parts of the province as well were being hit. I got to learn that very quickly because I, myself, as the MLA representing the Grandview-Gilbert Plains area, found out when a group of municipal people, both R.M.s from Gilbert Plains and Grandview, along with a number of producers in the area, approached me to see what kind of help I could arrange for them through the government of the day.

At that time, I remember bringing forth their concerns here in the House during Question Period last spring, and I must say that I was very impressed with Premier Filmon's answer and also the answer I got from the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) who was at that time the Minister of Agriculture. They recognized then that the problem had to be addressed, and they treated my constituents in this case very quickly and I think in a straightforward way.

I do not mind saying that, because I do believe in giving credit where credit is due. The problem, however, was that only addressed part of the problem, and to finish off in solving the problem what we need to do is bring that other party to the table, the federal government. It is the right thing for us to do, to keep on pushing, to keep on talking with people representing the federal government, to keep on arm-twisting the politicians at the federal level, to keep on with our lobby efforts to finally get the federal government to do the right thing in this matter. The right thing would be to provide the support that is necessary for our farmers, to provide support in this case to a farm community right across Manitoba that really does need it, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

So I am very hopeful that out of this debate in the Legislature here today we will be putting forth a united, strong, undivided, supportive resolution, supportive of each other in our quest to do what is right for the farm community, a position that we can easily take to Ottawa and say, look, Mr. Prime Minister, look, Mr. Minister, look, federal government, here in Manitoba we are together. We are together with

farmers from Saskatchewan. We are not divided. We are not split. We are doing this because it is the right thing. We are not concerned with partisanship. We are not concerned with scoring our own political points. We are concerned with providing the kind of support that our farming community needs and nothing else.

I would suggest that if we have any less of an attempt, anything less than that, that we will be perceived as weak, that we will be perceived as not together, that we are dividable. I would suggest that the federal government may look at that and say let us just hang out a little longer on this and let the Manitobans divide themselves up even further.

So my advice, my recommendation is that we move forward together with the kind of resolution that my colleague the Minister for Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), supported by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), has put forward today, because I think it does address in a straightforward way the kinds of problems that Manitoba farmers are facing. I think it does address the kind of support that Manitoba farmers need. I think that it is something every member of this Legislature can support. I think all 57 of us have a responsibility. I believe all 57 of us want to do the right thing and supporting the resolution put forward by the Minister of Agriculture allows us to do that.

The amendment that was put forward by the member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner), the Agriculture critic for the opposition, I think is the document that does actually miss the point. It makes me wonder who the critic was listening to, because I do not think he was listening to farmers when that amendment that was drafted. I do not think that farmers are looking to have— [interjection] Somebody across asked me if I am looking to get into trouble. Well, that just happens naturally. That just happens naturally in this building, and there are a lot of people out there worried about my well-being, but I am very, very flattered that members across would concern themselves with that, and that does not however change my opinion that they should have been listening to farmers when they put forward their amendment.

I think what they need to do is ask farmers if farmers are actually really in favour of the kind

of subsidization put forward in the amendment by the member for Emerson. I do not think that is plausible. I do not think that is part of the problem. I do not know if our Treasury can compete with the amount of money that the Europeans or the Americans can put forward. I am very disappointed in the amount of programs that the federal government has pulled out in this area, but I do not know if the members opposite are suggesting we go back into that and then toss some more money on top of that again for more subsidization. That certainly is what it appears to be in the amendment that they put forward, so I think the members might want to think about the approach they are taking.

I think they might want to think about the amendment that they have put forward and reconsider their amendment, and just have the good common sense to support a good solid approach as put forward by the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) earlier today.

* (1700)

I want to just wrap up by indicating to you my support for the resolution put forward by the Minister of Agriculture and encourage this House to take a strong united stand, an undivided strong united stand in putting forth in a nonpartisan way the wants and needs of the Manitoba farmers, and by really going to Ottawa in a co-operative framework to try to convince the federal government that rural communities in this country are important and that they do need our support. So, Mr. Speaker, with that, thank you very much.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): I am pleased to be able to enter into this debate. While it is directly on my mind, there are a couple of comments that have just been made by the member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) that I would care to comment on. In his dissertation the member for Dauphin chose to feel that unless the government resolution is accepted in its entirety, that that somehow means there cannot be unanimity in the House in terms of supporting agricultural policy that we would like to see implemented in this province. I would challenge him on that because, first of all, neither side of the House probably has all of the answers in this debate because we are involved in a debate that

is truly national, truly one that has very direct and far-reaching impacts in the near and far term for our farmers in the area that many of us on this side of the House represent.

It also is a debate that in many respects reaches right back into the roots of the structure of this country. It seems to me that our television has been inundated for the last couple or three years, in fact for almost the last decade, on some occasions with the problems on both the east and west coast fisheries and other areas where resources and the harvesting of those resources have been under pressure.

In many respects what we are dealing with in this farm issue is a similar type of a debate that needs to occur about how does Canada view their basic producers of agriculture commodities and how do we encourage and assist them so that they can move forward into the new millennium not having to be saddled with the same type of baggage that they have been carrying for the last half a century in this country where we have seen far too much ad hoc response. We have seen far too much response after the fact.

There have been some valiant attempts made at long-term stability and the debates that have occurred at GAAP, debates that are about to occur in terms of future trade around the world are extremely important. In the meantime, I have to say clearly that it appears to me that Canadians as a whole, and probably this particular government that we have in Ottawa today, has been acting more like a bunch of boy scouts on the international scene than they have been worrying about what is happening to the scouts back home, because back home on the ranch things are not going as well as they might think down on the banks of the Ottawa River.

I am not nearly as generous as some of my colleagues are with whether or not we should clearly lay the problems that we are currently facing in the grain sector in agriculture at the feet of the current government in Ottawa. They cannot avoid the fact that debate was occurring about changes in the national transportation system when they took office. If I remember some of the discussion leading up to the election which would be two elections back, they did not indicate that they were in support of eliminating

the Crow rate that I recall. They certainly did not indicate the dramatic effort that they were going to make once they got into government, at least nothing that crossed my political vision, and I am not exactly colour blind when it comes to that debate.

We need to remind ourselves at a time like this, and I think the members on the opposite side want to talk about an all-party agreement. I think the members on the opposite side, save for the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), would agree that at one time the farmers of western Canada were offered something like \$8 billion phased in in order to deal with the potential of making transportation much more competitive. The present government in Ottawa gave us something like 10 percent of that and said take it or leave it. That is part of what we are dealing with today, that dramatic reduction in support.

Now, we need to recognize that we cannot subsidize transportation inevitably in order to compete on the world market, but it is compounded by all of the other situations that farmers, particularly the grain sector, are faced with. When we look at the AIDA program, which I think if you are sitting in a dark room in the back of some office in Ottawa probably looks like a logical program, but try applying it in reality.

The member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) said let us think like farmers. Well, I am not too sure if I agree quite the way he characterized some of the thinking that I have done on my tractor seat as the same as what he was thinking about, but I will say this, that in trying to apply the AIDA program to the real factors that are on the landscape in terms of grain production, in particular in western Canada, it just does not work.

In Manitoba and in parts of Saskatchewan, we have a compounding problem. I think we have to be very clear for those who might be following this debate or those who might some day, if they have nothing better to do and they are bored to death, pull out the Hansard and want to read what we might have said at some point, we need to make it very clear that there are two debates. One is the problem of those

who had production problems this year, severe, radical problems, and require radical action. The other is the current problem that has been building, the ongoing problem that we are facing and, frankly, one that only the most optimistic believe they can forecast an end to in the short term, and that is the price structure of our product in the world market.

Leaving aside the debate which is a whole other topic which I hope we will have a chance to debate in this Legislature at some point, perhaps during the Estimates of the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) to determine if she is still in support of value-added diversification and all those other things that we need to do to make Manitoba agriculture viable and everything that it can be and will be if it is given the opportunity and an appropriate framework within which to work—but more importantly, what we need to know is whether or not we can provide information to Ottawa and provide unanimity to a position that says they have got to recognize the short-term problem of the pricing structure that we are dealing with; they have got to realize the inadequacy of AIDA.

* (1710)

I heard one of the federal M.P.s representing Winnipeg—I forget the name of his constituency—at any rate, as a spokesman for the federal government, speaking on behalf of the federal government, implying that they had now come to the conclusion that AIDA had a lot of warts, that it was not now functioning. I would hope that from this debate this province can go forward to provide recommendations to Ottawa on dealing with AIDA.

When I said I was not so generous as to let Ottawa off the hook, neither am I as generous that I am entirely prepared to let the current government go without encouraging them to make sure that they do not overlook some of the aspects of their responsibility in this debate. They are the government. They came forward smiling, rosy cheeks, ready to go to work. Well, here is your first major test in rural Manitoba. The first test I am not sure whether you have passed or failed yet, because I am not sure if the comment that was made about Manitoba refusing to participate in the next tranche of

money out of AIDA, whether that is a sign of this current government welshing on participation in AIDA or whether or not they are going to recognize, as the previous government did, as our administration did—when we put forward the emergency dollars for southwestern Manitoba, we said damn the torpedoes, we have got to go on this, because the farmers are not going to be able to make a decision on which way they are going to move. Ottawa surely understands or has enough people who understand the dire situation that those producers were finding themselves in that they would accept their share of the responsibility. Neither am I convinced that they have yet recognized their share and their real responsibility in the correction of AIDA and how they can support that short-term effort that was made, and let me put it in—

An Honourable Member: Wish we had more money.

Mr. Cummings: Well, the First Minister (Mr. Doer), I know, is enjoying this, but let me put it into perspective because my feet were fairly close to the fire in the Red River flood. One of the things that amazed me, and frankly I was pleased about, was how quickly the federal government leaped into the breach. They were breaking down the doors to be able to provide assistance to the farmers in the Red River Valley—and some of my colleagues here represent the Red River Valley—and they understood the dire consequences that were being brought to the doors of their constituents at that time.

But frankly, the federal government was tripping over each other in order to put in place programs which, in my view, were not clearly thought out and had some consequences which are now coming home to roost. Yet the farmers in the southwest corner of this province and the whole western side, to be frank about it, where the seeding problems were enormous, they were not given the same consideration. In fact, the reaction of the federal government was simply unacceptable until more recent times when I would—in giving credit to the farm organizations, to the loud and competing voices across this province, both governmental farm organizations, individuals, continuing to bring the issue

forward—it has finally attracted national attention and has started to elicit some reaction out of Ottawa. When I say out of Ottawa, I mean out of those who I would anticipate should be the spokesman or women on behalf of this situation in western Canada.

Now, Mr. Vanclief made some interesting comments in defence of where he found himself, including the fact that he has experienced the dire consequences and the gut-wrenching problems that are associated with having to give up title to some family property as a result of difficult times in the agricultural community. In listening to him, I was impressed that he had that depth of understanding. Yet I am not sure that he has been able to translate that into reality and in terms of policy definition on behalf of western agriculture.

So I suggest that in this debate we have to come to an understanding, and that is why I want to caution the member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers), the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), let us not get hung up about whether or not every clause of this resolution was their idea or whether there were contributions from the opposition, as our critic made when he proposed the amendments. I know where the Minister of Agriculture probably is coming from. Gol-darn it, we were putting forward a resolution. We were taking the lead on this. We are asking for your support; let us get on with it, and we will put all-party unity forward.

I am suggesting that if we truly are talking about a unanimous approach out of this Legislature, seconded by the lone Liberal member in this House, that we need to be open to the amendments and truly structuring an all-party resolution. The resolution amendments that our critic has put forward are put forward with an effort not as was said to do something in a void where presumably we have not talked to some of the agricultural community, but in fact to put forward what we believe is the perspective of many in the agricultural community.

Look, I of all people know the diversity within the agricultural community itself. The very definition of what is a corporate farmer, I would suggest, if you ask 10 different members in this House, you would probably get 10

different definitions of a corporate farmer. I can tell you that most of my neighbours in the area in which the current Premier (Mr. Doer) likes to say that he is familiar with—he mentioned Neepawa many times during his ads in the campaign. I started to think he was running in Neepawa not in Concordia.

But at any rate, the fact is that several of my neighbours, I am sure, if you just looked at their bottom line or looked at their gross or looked at the magnitude of their operation, your first reaction would be, well, gol-darn it, they are a corporate farm, but probably they are not. Because they are family owned, they are the version, in many respects, of today's family farm. They have reacted to the pressures that they are being faced with out there by structuring themselves within their family holdings. Instead of having four different brothers establishing four different yard sites with four different line-ups of equipment, a simple version, they come back with what in the eyes of people from the outside might very often be considered a corporate farm.

So I suggest to the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) and to any others on the other side who care to listen and involve themselves in this debate, let us be careful about what we are talking about when we say that we want this to go to the family farm and not to the corporate farm. Let us be very careful about what we are talking about because in some respects that implies targeted relief, targeted relief to those who are the most deserving of help in this situation.

And it is a dilemma. I do not necessarily have the answer, but I want to point out the dilemma. In fact, it should come very close to the heart of the current Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), because in the very year when there was a drought payment being made in southern Manitoba, the Swan River Valley had a wet fall, and they were highly offended because they were not included in the drought payment. I do not altogether blame them for being offended, but I do want to point that out as being a situation whereby if you are talking about targeted relief, you can inadvertently create problems, just as AIDA has created problems that need to be dealt with now.

* (1720)

When the Minister of Agriculture said he would start looking at negative margins, that is fine. Somebody made the estimation in Manitoba based on the number of applications that came in. I think that was less than a couple of hundred farmers that it would have changed their eligibility. I am not even sure how accurate that number was. I am looking to my colleagues here, if anybody else heard that number. But it was not a large number. It was a few handfuls of people who will be grateful for that change, but that does not in itself make this an acceptable program and make it such that it responds to the needs that are out there today.

I think that when we are looking at Ottawa and asking them what they intend to do about working with us in response to this situation, I think that they need to make a very simple reflection. It is one that our critic referred to in his comments, and it is one that I think all of us should keep in mind in this debate, and that is let us put it into dollars. Let us wind it down to how many dollars for a bushel of wheat. Wheat is not necessarily the only commodity out there that is being impacted, but let us just use it as a benchmark. The Americans, I understand, are putting the equivalent of about \$2 a bushel into the assistance of their wheat marketing situation. In Canadian dollars, that would be closer to \$3. Now, no one in our acquaintance, if you will, in the sphere of this debate, has come forward and said to Ottawa we need \$3 a bushel. No one has come forward and said we want \$2 a bushel. What the farm community is saying is let us recognize that there are things that Ottawa can do that will be of assistance and not be GATT-able, that they have not taken advantage of the flexibility that they have to support this industry.

What we have compounding this—and that is why I mentioned the Crow rate to begin with. There is a factor there that is going to continue to influence for years into the future. It is only fully starting to sting this last 18 months in the agricultural community, because the prices were holding up relatively well so that those who were being the most impacted were able to have that impact mitigated because the prices had not taken that dramatic drop.

That is why the wording of this is extremely important. Let us go to Ottawa and get a commitment from them based on our sound knowledge that they have room to move on this, that they can do some work in this area, some financial assistance. But if we continue to debate this into next April there are a lot of farmers out there that, to use the football analogy, having just come through Grey Cup weekend, there are quite a few of them that are going to be on waivers. Frankly, it is a serious situation, and that seriousness is compounded in the areas where the crop did not go in or where it went in it went in in poor conditions and did not come off in good conditions.

In fact, there is another little quirk that came to my attention this weekend, and I have got to do a little bit more research, though I think the answer is pretty obvious, but it is interesting in terms of the withdrawals from NISA must be part of the overall package. NISA was a program that I supported strongly. I felt that NISA, with provincial participation—that is why I supported provincial participation—was indeed a stabilizing program that would work. For those who have got off-farm income, they can withdraw from their NISA on the stabilization side of their account, but when they get to the net side of their account, if they are earning money off farm, all of a sudden that portion of their account they cannot even withdraw. So they have money in that account that they cannot access, and the question immediately becomes, well, just how much do I have to lose before I can get the rest of the NISA money out?

So there is another example of where a program put in place with the best of intentions, reasonably well structured in terms of gross and total picture calculations, when it comes to the type of individual situation that some of our farmers out there today are facing, it just does not cut it. In fact NISA was and is one of the areas where I imagine Mr. Chretien, our Prime Minister's staff are looking at the amount of money that is in savings in NISA still. Some of that has been withdrawn. Not only has it been calculated as income when it is put into the program, but worse yet, they are looking at the total fund that is available, and they are saying, by gar, there is a lot of money in there. Well, unfortunately some of that money may be in the

hands of producers who are not affected by this particular situation that this debate is around. They may well be cattle producers. They may well be in industries where there is a protected market, any one of a number of variables. They could be farmers who have several generations and decades of farming under their belt and they are better able to weather some of the difficulties. But that again is another factor that I urge the current government and I urge all my colleagues to remember, that despite the best laid plans and the best intentions and the best efforts, any of these programs that we want in place we need to look at them to see if flexibility is real, and I think we also need to be sure, and I want to challenge, this is where I will challenge the members opposite, the current government.

Let us not get too hung up on the aspect of whether or not there is somebody who has 5,000 acres versus somebody who has 500 acres is going to be eligible, because once we degenerate into that debate then we get into situations that I think may become unsolvable in terms of how we provide some fairness across the board.

An interesting comment made earlier today, the member for River Heights saying that he did not want to put people in the situation where they were receiving assistance so that they could buy out their neighbours who were less affluent and who did not get as much assistance. That raises another dilemma, and I do not have the answer for this one either, but I am telling you that there is no agricultural policy that can fix it *carte blanche*. That is the simple fact that if we do anything that reduces the net worth of the land base that many farmers hold out there today, that the next guy to come knocking at their door might well be their banker. It might well be the provincial agricultural finance to say, whoa, just a minute here, the value of your land just went down by 20 percent. All of a sudden you would have trouble covering your loan if you were to be called tomorrow. So just remember, folks, that is the type of situation that a poorly thought out, simple pressure-point application of desire to solve this need will put us.

I am not anticipating that happening, but I could not let that particular comment go by without the reaction that I always have as one

who has, and still carries, land mortgages. One of the best protections you have is the value of your land, and we best not be seen to be supporting ag policies that would do anything to devalue that very valuable asset.

Now there are a couple of things in here that I want to highlight while I still have a couple of minutes left, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that Mr. Vanclief has had a fair feeling of recent months about the situation in western Canada, but I think it is time that Mr. Vanclief had an opportunity to share with his Prime Minister, to share with the Minister of External Affairs, to share with the former Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Goodale, some of the concerns that are going to become apparent.

* (1730)

I know that there has been an appeal on all sides, that this is not a political playpen, but it seems to me we are all politicians and the one thing we understand is political realities and the pressure that goes with those political realities. It seems to me that the agricultural community from Winnipeg west or from the Ontario border west has just about had it with the comments that have been coming out of Ottawa about whether or not there was a real problem, particularly in the grain sector, in western Canada. I think if we can take any comfort from the fact that Ottawa and all of Ottawa spokesmen are now reacting publicly saying that they recognize that there are things that need to be done, they recognize that they have a responsibility to become involved, then we have a very opportune moment right now to continue to press our federal government when they are going to deal with the international trade situation that is before us.

There are some interesting ideas out there which I think our farm lobby groups, the Keystone Agricultural Producers in particular, the one that I believe speaks the most clearly on behalf of the largest number of farmers in this province, they can provide guidance to this government. They can provide support to this resolution. They can provide a voice that we can well work with in terms of making sure that Ottawa understands there are some options available to them, but they have to avail

themselves of that information, and they have to contemplate action in a reasonable length of time. If they do not, then the very scenario that I alluded to earlier where people's land values might drop, where their assets may be diminished, that very scenario will come to pass. If we are truly concerned about the family farm in this province, then we will all be culpable in reducing the number of people who can genuinely participate in what would be called a family farm within the definition of being owned and operated by a family or a group or a family grouping.

I think, Mr. Speaker, if there is one headline that says as much about this as anything and does describe it on a personal basis which everyone, whether they are in agriculture, whether they are in this building or whether they are in our larger urban centres, can understand, that is a headline such as the one at the end of June in the Brandon Sun: Producers keep stress relief workers busier; organizers hope programs meet the farmers needs.

That was the spring situation. Then the people kept busy all summer, and now the fall reality is there. There are an awful lot of empty bins out there, and I suspect if the government today were to talk to its workers in the field, they would probably find that this is still a relevant statement, that they would still find there are a large number of people out there, men, women and children, who need to have some sense that there is leadership being provided, that there is an opportunity for them to move forward and with some optimism for being able to continue their operations next year. In saying that, and I hope the Premier (Mr. Doer) would make note of this—the Premier should make note of the fact that there are predictions today that there could be as many as 20 percent of the current farmers out there who may not put a crop in next spring. Twenty percent is a drop that we can ill afford in some of our more sparsely populated agricultural communities, and, secondly, it will irreversibly remove those people from the agricultural community.

I hope that this headline as well, the one that says government deserves credit for aid—I hope that there will be further headlines that say

government deserves credit for action on behalf of agricultural producers.

I would be more than glad in an all-party way to see a headline like that on behalf of the current government. I think this debate can help set that basis for that so we can in fact assure the communities across this province that there will be another day come the 1st of April. Unfortunately there is, and I want to emphasize this one more time before I have used up my time, a divergence between the farmers out there as wide as wide could possibly be today. Production levels in this province went from people that I know of who said, I can die a happy man; I finally saw the crop that I only ever dreamed about, to those, myself and some of my neighbours and others, who would say, I have never seen it this bad in terms of production. That is the one problem. Now we have to take it the next step, what can be done?

We are all confident the production will change next year, that the opportunity will come back to produce. But what confidence is there that what can be produced can be produced at a margin? So I hope that, if it is the intent that there will be an all-party agreement put forward, the concerns of this province to Ottawa, we very succinctly tell them that this is not a time to wait. This is not a time to sit back and say, well, if we have a little bit more agreement at the international level, prices will start to recover. Well, that recovery, if it is not signalled soon or if something does not come loose in Ottawa in terms of making their programs a little bit more viable so those who need the support can access it in a more reasonable fashion, then there will be no tomorrow for some of the producers that we are so concerned about. Nevertheless, the one thing that the government today has to do if this resolution passes, and in some form I am sure it will, the government today has to recognize that in lobbying Ottawa it must put forward some basis for a plan.

We cannot simply put forward the issues as many of us are wont to do, including myself, the personal issues, what is the loss of the lifestyle and all of those motherhood issues. This is very much a dollars-and-cents issue about the future of our province, about the future of many of our agricultural producers and about the type of

agricultural economy that western Canada is going to have, compounded by the fragilities of the weather.

I suppose you can always find someone who will say that in their years of production, well, there was a worse year at some point. But today, with the narrow margins, with the high amount of leverage in terms of borrowed funds that a lot of our agricultural producers today are dealing with, long-term planning, diversification and some modicum of federal-provincial support in order to make sure that these unanticipated, very difficult issues regarding the combination of world trade and the fragilities of production that they can be dealt with, if we put forward our best efforts in that respect, Mr. Speaker, then I would suggest that we will see those headlines, that I hope we will by the middle of the winter and we will be able to take some comfort that those of us as elected members have done an adequate job of working with the farm leaders to put forward a case on behalf of the grain-producing community that is under such significant pressure today.

There are a lot more issues that we can grapple with in terms of marketing, value added, what are the best directions for this particular province to go. But today our most important issue is to make sure that the decision makers in Ottawa understand this problem, and there are two ways of doing it. One is to make sure that they are aware and understand and, secondly, to make sure that we apply the pressure where it is the most needed. I would suggest that the senior decision makers in Ottawa all the way up to the Prime Minister are now starting to become a little bit more understanding of this problem. It is our job to make sure that that understanding continues and we continue elevating the level of debate until there is some reaction that goes beyond, well, tinkering with the AIDA program and that there is, in fact, the response that will give us some viable alternatives down on the farm.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is my contribution to this resolution. I know that there are a number of my colleagues who want to get into the debate. I know that on the other side the same is true. Before I sit down, I want to acknowledge that the House leaders have given us the

opportunity to have this debate, because in my part of the country this is probably one of the most significant pieces of debate that is going to occur during this abbreviated session, and I want to make sure that everyone understands the gravity of what a number of our agriculture producers are facing.

* (1740)

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a member from a rural constituency, the Interlake, to voice my concerns in regard to agriculture. Now, I am not a farmer, but I have spent my entire life in the Interlake, the first 12 years of my life in Poplarfield and the remainder in the Fisher Branch area. Many of my friends and associates are farmers, so I feel I can speak with some authority on this subject.

Over the course of a lot of conversations with farmers, one of the first points that arose to me was the fact that so often financial assistance to farmers is termed as aid or assistance. In a sense it is a rather demeaning term, implying that farmers are operating inefficiently. The first point that I would like to make is that, particularly in the southwest of Manitoba, we are faced with a disaster situation here. It is not a disaster of the same magnitude, for example, that a tornado is or an earthquake or a flood such as the Red River or the Saguenay River in Quebec. It does not have quite the high profile that the ice storm in Quebec had, for instance, but it is a disaster nonetheless, and I would like to go on record as stating that farmers are taxpayers and citizens of this country and, as such, are entitled to assistance when things go wrong.

My second point is that a disaster can be a man-made thing as well. To illustrate this point, I would just like to tell you a little story about my dad. I know the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) went into his past a little bit, so I would like to do so as well. My father is not a very tall man, short in stature, much as I am. Despite that fact, he was vertically challenged, but when it came to heights he was absolutely fearless. He spent most of his life in construction. He was a steel worker. He built bridges. Among other things, he built grain elevators. He travelled across the country.

Coming from Saskatchewan, he built the elevator in Fisher Branch which was the last elevator he built because there he met my mother and settled down. His travelling days were over.

I draw attention to grain elevators because I think this is indicative of that man-made disaster that I was referring to. One problem that occurs in the Interlake and has become very evident to me is that we are rapidly losing our infrastructure. Our elevators are disappearing. Our rail lines are disappearing. This contributes to the disaster in agriculture more than anything. Along with the rail lines and the elevators, I might add that the infrastructure, the road system, has been crumbling over the past 12 years as well, and that has not helped the situation either.

A lot of comments were made about the diversification of agriculture and value-added processing, which is a good thing. There were a lot of comments made about the corporatization of agriculture as well. I would like to just state that the corporatization of agriculture is not necessarily the best thing for the rural economy, that the support of the small farmers should be our primary objective, first and foremost.

If we want to diversify into things like the hog industry, for instance, which the member for Lakeside was commenting on earlier, I think that is a good idea, but it has to be done with a grain of salt. Now, when we did away with the single-desk selling in the hog industry, for example, and when we encouraged the influx of the large-scale hog operators into the Interlake, I do not think that was necessarily the best thing for small-scale farmers. How is a small-scale farmer supposed to compete with these mega operations? Reality is that sooner or later they go out of business and their land is gobbled up by the large operators to the detriment of the community as a whole.

If you have five farmers like we have in Fisher Branch that are vying with each other to buy up as much land as possible, how does that help the community? When they are going to Winnipeg or places like Niverville for their inputs for their business, that does not help the local economy, and that is one point that I would

like to make very clear. I will not go on at length. There have been several very eloquent speakers before me. I am rather new at this.

I would like to draw our attention to the amendment to the resolution that was made by the member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner). In tabling his amendment he referred to some of the statistics that we had quoted in our resolution as being frivolous and inaccurate, and I would like to take exception with that. These figures were arrived at as a result of intensive research, and the all-party trip to Ottawa was instrumental in arriving at some of these figures. The opposition had their member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) on this delegation as well, so how they can take exception to these figures at this point in time is somewhat questionable.

Secondly, when it gets to the BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, I would just like to draw attention to the second to last proposal there where the federal Liberal government be urged to mirror the level of support to its farmers as provided by the European Economic Community, I would have to take exception with that as well. We are talking about massive subsidies here, ours being at 9 percent and theirs at some 56 percent. For us to realistically think that we are going to increase our subsidies to match the European community, I do not think is feasible. So, on that basis, I would just like to go on record as stating that.

As far as our comments to the federal government and on the basis of our resolution here, I would ask that the federal Liberal government put aside its political affiliations and party differences on this issue, that our leaders in Ottawa stop being politicians and start behaving like statesmen instead and start taking the interests of the country as a whole to heart as opposed to focusing primarily on what takes place in eastern Canada.

Now one thing that I do not think has come up over the course of this debate is nobody has really mentioned the federal fuel tax, which somewhat surprises me. Here is a large, large chunk of money that goes to the federal government. When it was introduced as a tax it was supposed to be put back 100 percent into the road infrastructure, and that is simply not the

case. I think maybe 5 percent of that money is coming back—[interjection] Well, 5 percent, zero, not enough obviously. So I would like to make that point and ask the federal government to start giving back what is rightfully ours because if our rail lines go and our elevators in the periphery go, then we have to develop an adequate highway structure to deal with this problem, and that, I think, is necessary.

* (1750)

Secondly, as we are going into the World Trade Organization talks next week in Seattle, I think it is time that the federal government stand up and start defending us there in terms of these production subsidies, that rather than kowtowing to the super powers like the United States or the European community, I think that our federal politicians should show a little bit of backbone here and stand up for Canadians as they should. We should be negotiating for fair trade not free trade, that is my opinion.

Thirdly, when it comes to giving assistance—and I know I took exception to that word but for want of a better word, and assistance is due in this respect—I do not think that the federal government should respond to us with excuses and doubletalk and start quoting all kinds of statistics to dissuade what we have put forward. I would like to, at this point, quote a British Prime Minister, I think he was a New Democrat, his name was Disraeli. He said there are lies, damned lies, and then there are statistics. I think that this applies to—[interjection] I think that we should take that seriously. I think the Prime Minister was being frivolous when he started quoting counterstatistics to tell us that we are not in a disaster situation here in western Canada. I take exception to that, and I draw that to his attention.

Finally, I would like to state that the federal government and the urban people in general have to realize that the rural way of life is a pillar of Canadian—

An Honourable Member: Society.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Society. Thank you very much—and that we should focus on this, and we should not overlook this and bear it in mind, that

if our rural society dwindles and dies that the country will die along with it. That is all I have to say. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognizing me. I would just like to congratulate the member for Interlake for a job well done in his maiden speech. His predecessor before him probably would have run the clock out, so I do congratulate you on that.

An Honourable Member: Not probably, he would have.

Mr. Pitura: He would have.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this resolution is an important resolution to be debating today. I certainly welcome the opportunity to put a few comments on the record with respect to the resolution and the amendments to the resolution, which I think are very critical to the entire resolution. I think one of the things we probably should spend a bit of time on is going back a while in history in agriculture in Manitoba, and I think even in Canada would apply.

You know, in the 1950s there was this big movement of having a large number of farmers banding together and making this big march to Ottawa to insist that the Liberal government at that time pay \$2 a bushel for hard red spring wheat. That was the big argument and the big, big discussion at that time. I remember the Agriculture minister, I believe, was C.D. Howe, and how the western Canadian farmers said we need to have \$2 a bushel for our wheat. Otherwise, we will not make ends meet. Now, whether they got that or not I really cannot remember, because I was just a young kid, but they made many trips to Ottawa to try to make that argument.

Then we get into the 1960s. You know, agriculture was not that bad during the '60s, but there was, all of a sudden, a huge glut of grain on the world market. It was thought that we could never get rid of this grain. So the federal government of the day brought in an ad hoc program called LIFT, which was the Lower Inventory for Tomorrow program. What they did was they encouraged a lot of producers to

take crop out of production and paid them well to summer fallow land. So what happened was that—I am trying to make, I guess, an example here that you have to be very careful when you bring in government programs, but the result was that the following spring, with a dry spring, we had huge dust storms with all the summer fallow blowing. At the same time, the same summer fallow fields that year produced even more crop. So that did not really cure the glut of grain in the world market.

In the 1970s, Mr. Speaker, we get into a time where there were some good times at the beginnings of the '70s, but again we got into a situation where we had low commodity prices, and the federal government of the day brought in a special Canadian grains program. That special Canadian grains program was to help producers who were suffering low commodity prices to be able to have some propping up with regard to their income.

However, Mr. Speaker, when they devised the program, they devised it on the basis of your previous three years average in your crop yields, and what happened was the fact that they ended up giving more money to the producers who had good crops in the previous three years as opposed to producers who had the poorer crops. So the money went basically out of the program into those areas that had higher yield averages, so that the dollars were not going to the right spot. So that was another ad hoc program by the federal government of the day.

Then we get into the 1980s, where in the early 1980s we had high inflation, high interest rates. It was really tough on farmers to be able to operate their business because of the high interest rates, paying 22 percent, 23 percent interest, and again towards the end of the 1980s we ended up with a drought in 1988, a severe drought, and at that time the federal government of the day again brought in another ad hoc program which was called the drought program—I forget the exact name for it—but it ended up as a drought program that was designed for farmers based on their historic yield averages, and it was paid out on that basis.

Then in the late 1980s, early 1990s, I think one of my former colleagues who was the

Minister of Agriculture, the former member for Springfield, negotiated the GRIP program with the federal government which was the Gross Revenue Insurance Plan, and at the same time the Net Income Stabilization Account was established as a sidebar or a partner to the GRIP program. That program, although it was expensive for producers to participate in the program, did tend to level out their cash flow, so they did not have these huge blips in the cash flow. So in the 1990s we had some good times and we had some bad times within agriculture, but, overall, the inclusion of the GRIP and NISA programs coming out in the early '90s did a lot to help the agricultural industry in Manitoba.

But during that period of time, Mr. Speaker, we also had the Uruguay round of talks that started in 1984, I believe, and they continued on I think for roughly about 10 years before the talks were concluded and a trade agreement was established, and then the World Trade Organization was created as a result of those talks. But the overall agreement was that the 120 or 135 countries that were participants in the WTO all agreed that they would eliminate their subsidies over a period of time.

Now, what has happened since that time is that Canada, I think, has honoured the essence of the WTO agreement, and they have eliminated the subsidies in large part to agriculture in Canada. We saw that with the elimination of the Crow; we saw that with the elimination of the GRIP program. However, what we find, Mr. Speaker, is that over the time that the European

Economic Community and the United States, although they both tended to sign on to the agreement and agreed to have the reduction of subsidies, what happened was they chose not to adhere to the agreement, and especially the EEC started to subsidize its producers to create higher production levels and then ended up exporting this at below world market prices. So it tended to depress the prices throughout the world and at the same time the United States, not to be outdone, was trying to compete against the EEC and also increased its subsidy levels to its producers in order to offset the hurt that was occurring in the international marketplace.

Meanwhile, Canada is sitting there as a country without any kind of agricultural subsidies, with the farmers of this country enduring the greatest share of the entire hurt that was occurring as a result of the international marketplace.

Now, historically, agriculture, has been an industry, Mr. Speaker, unlike any other industry. It is the only industry where the costs of producing keep going up without any kind of control.

Mr. Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Morris will have 42 minutes remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, November 29, 1999

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