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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 9, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Speaker: Bill 205, The Elections Amendment and Elections Finances Amendment Act. Are we dealing with that?

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I would ask for leave that we consider Bill 242 at this time.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House for us to go directly to Bill 242, The Electoral Divisions Amendment Act (Population Variances for Southern Rural Constituencies)? [*Agreed*]

**Bill 242—The Electoral Divisions Amendment Act
(Population Variances for Southern
Rural Constituencies)**

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I move, seconded by the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), that Bill 242, The Electoral Divisions Amendment Act (Population Variances for Southern Rural Constituencies); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les circonscriptions électorales (écarts démographiques pour les circonscriptions rurales du Sud), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of the House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, this bill that was brought forward by myself, is one that, I think, recognizes the demographic situation that we have across the southern rural part of our province.

I know that it was a Supreme Court ruling that established population variance for northern constituencies some 25 or 30 years ago. Mr. Speaker, as a result of that, we have respected the fact that northern representatives have to travel great distances in order to be able to equitably represent their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, as the population map changes in Manitoba, especially in rural southern Manitoba, we are seeing the same kind of thing happening as has

happened in northern Manitoba, although there are some differences. In the southern constituencies, we find that the population is dispersed throughout the constituency, so it's not as though there are vast regions of no population but rather we have sparse population scattered throughout the entire region.

Mr. Speaker, when you talk about getting elected in a constituency, it's one thing, but being able to represent a constituency is an entirely different matter. It's also, I think, important that people have access to their MLA. I have represented the constituency on the west side of the province now for a good number of years and I would have to say that, as the constituency expands in size, it becomes more and more difficult to try to make sure that people are represented in a fair way and in an equitable way and in a way where they have ready access to their MLA.

I know that there are members on the opposite side of the House who probably face that same kind of challenge. I look at the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk) and I know that she has the same sorts of challenges in the Swan River constituency as I have in my constituency. So does the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) who also serves a large geographic area.

I think citizens of Manitoba deserve better. They deserve to have access to their MLA. They deserve to have access physically to the MLA, not just by telephone or by e-mail or through electronic means but, indeed, the reality is that people expect the representative for the area to attend functions, to be there when important events occur in the constituency. If you're going to do that, Mr. Speaker, you have to make yourself available.

I know that, for example in my constituency, I would probably have to travel a good hour to an hour and a half to be able to cross my constituency from one end to the other—just driving time—and that's along good highways. If I have to go into some of the smaller communities that are off the major highways, then it takes considerably longer. Although we have improved the remuneration for travel, that's not the issue. The issue here is to make sure that people have access to their representative, that the representative is able to adequately cover the area as he should or she should.

It is for this reason that I think it's important for us to take a look at a different formula in terms of variances of populations when you consider electoral boundaries. Now the Electoral Boundaries Commission is confined to looking at variances that are not more than 10 percent but, generally speaking, they try to live with the rule of a 5 percent population variance. We look at the electoral map that has been proposed by the commission at this time. It pretty much limits the population variance to that 5 percent.

Mr. Speaker, when I spoke with the Boundaries Commission, they said that they are not allowed to go beyond the 10 percent because of the mandate that is before them and because of the legislation. If we are to change this, it has to be changed in the House. Now it doesn't matter whether it's changed by a bill from the opposition or a bill from the government. The reality is what we're talking about is better representation for the public of Manitoba.

I have spoken to members of the government and I have encouraged them to support this bill, not on the basis that this is a partisan bill because I recognize that there are members on the opposite side of the House—excuse me—who have the same challenges as we face on this side of the House in representing rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I have said that rural Manitobans deserve the same kind of access to their MLA as people in the city and smaller constituencies have. There are postage-stamp constituencies around this province where it doesn't take very much to go out and represent the public but, when you have a constituency that is larger than 5,000 square kilometres, there should be a different formula attached to the population variance.

*(10:10)

I am recommending through this legislation that we look at a 15 percent population variance for constituencies that are larger than 5,000 square kilometres. It still, I think, respects the fact that within smaller constituencies there is no reason why we need to take a look at variances greater than 10 percent, but indeed, when there are large distances to travel, that we should be reasonable, that we should respect what Manitobans would expect of us and that is to make sure that they have equal access to their representative as the rest of the population in the rest of the province has.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to belabour this. I think this is a straight forward piece of legislation

that doesn't call for a lot of complication. I know that if we were to give this mandate to the Boundaries Commission, that they would respond very positively. I got that sense from the presentation that I made before the commission. They are very open to ensuring that they do the right thing because this is a decision they're making for 10 years. I am not calling for larger numbers of seats in the House or greater numbers of MLAs. All I'm saying is that we have to be conscious about the fact that physically, MLAs should be able to represent, in a fairly equitable fashion, their constituents, regardless of which constituency they represent.

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to a bit of debate on this private member's bill. But I would encourage the government to look positively at this piece of legislation and to allow it to pass into committee stage and indeed, give some direction to our commission that is sitting currently, to be able to be more flexible in the way that they draw our electoral boundaries so they better represent the realities that are out there in the rural part of the province where we see some depopulation, especially on the western side of the province. Sure, it impacts on all of us, but, I think more importantly, the impact on individual citizens, ordinary Manitobans out there, is very important and that's what we should be considering in this piece of legislation.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for his comments as they relate to the election boundaries review. That review is in place right now. The member is asking for a change in legislation that covers this and I think it's very difficult to make those changes when there is a commission that is operating.

The act currently does provide for a deviation for 10 percent for constituencies in the south and 25 percent for constituencies that have a portion or above the 53rd parallel. I want to say to the member, I represent a very large constituency and I understand many of the issues that he is talking about. It's very different for us in rural Manitoba to try to meet with our constituents than it is for an urban member. I'm often envious of some of my colleagues that can leave the Legislature here and go and attend one graduation and then go and attend another graduation, whereas in my constituency, I

could have a graduation in Winnipegosis and in Grand Rapids at the same time. That's a distance of four to five hours to get to that other one. So it's literally impossible.

However, we as rural members have learned to live with those challenges because that's the challenges that have been put to us by the Boundaries Commission and they are working under a particular act. They have started their process and I believe that the work that they have is very important. I think when you're setting up this, it's important that the commission have representation from across the province that can bring different views and that's why it was important to add representation, like the Brandon University and University College of the North, to the commission to bring that broader perspective of people to the commission to make their decisions.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House I want to say that we respect and we have every faith in the commission that is doing their work right now, in fact, has done most of their work, and are just reviewing comments that were made during the hearings. I have a lot of faith that they will make the right decisions, and they will base them on real principles of democratic representation.

Mr. Speaker, these are very important issues, but we have to ensure that we are not interfering in this process as elected officials. The recommendations that they make are the ones that we will live by. I think it's very difficult to try to make changes in mid-stream, so to speak, when the commission has been doing their work for some time, and now to try to change an act during the middle of that process I do not believe would be a reasonable thing to expect.

I want to say, as well, the member talks about our constituencies in rural Manitoba, and they are large constituencies. People in northern Manitoba even face bigger challenges. For example, Flin Flon is 21 times larger than the proposed constituency of Minnedosa-Russell. We are looking at how we can improve because it will be more difficult for rural people. There has to be, also, an understanding that we have a diverse, spread-out population.

The member says he's not looking to increase the number of seats, to try to work within the existing seats. If you are going to start to make changes to allow for 15 percent deviation in the southern seats, there's going to have to be some other deviation in other parts that will probably make the constituencies even larger, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the member is speaking in reaction to the decision to remove Minnedosa from the proposed boundaries due to the declining population. I think back when one seat from the north was removed. This is many years ago, but a seat in the north was lost because there was declining population. There used to be the seat of Rupertsland and the seat of Churchill. Those were brought together, but we didn't hear much reaction from people in southern Manitoba at that time that they were going to speak out for the people of the north because they were going to have to travel greater distances.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, on this side of the House we take very seriously the recommendations from the independent commission to adjust population variations. I believe that this House should not try to pre-empt the commission that is already working under an existing act. Very difficult to say now, yes, we're to amend the act, now you go back and do all of that work over again, because that's exactly what would be required.

If there were to be changes made to the act, they should have been made before the commission began their work, not in the middle. Should it be that after the boundaries are changed, and the next time, in 10 years, when we're looking at reviewing the boundaries then, prior to that, perhaps there should be amendments made to the act that will then allow for a different framework for the Boundaries Commission to look at. It's based on StatsCan records, as my colleague says, and there is a framework within the act that has been spelt out for the commission to work on. Now is not the time to be changing the act to allow for some deviation because the boundaries didn't come out quite the way we had expected them to.

I want to say, again, I have a lot of respect for the people that are on the commission: the Chief Electoral Officer, the Chief Justice of the Manitoba Appeal Court, president of the University of Manitoba, as well as presidents of Brandon University and the University College of the North. I look forward to the final results of the commission when they come forward. I think that we will all live with whatever they recommend, because it's an independent body. They will make the decision and then we will have the decisions. And, no, it will not be easy.

*(10:20)

Every time there's a boundary review, somebody's constituency changes, and it may not work best for you or for me, but they are independent. They make the decision, and that's what we have to live with.

I want to say that the member has one opinion, and I think he's made that to the commission, but I know that the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), on Tuesday, the 23rd, appeared before the Boundaries Commission. During his presentation, he commended the commission for having removed a seat from southwestern Manitoba and placed in southeastern Manitoba.

So, one member opposite is saying it's a good thing. The other member is looking at how it can be changed. I know the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) is trying to address a different area and that is size of constituency, but, again, those parameters should have been—if we were looking for some deviation in the legislation and wanted to give them different direction on how they should be working, we should have made those changes. I would suggest to the member that these kinds of changes have to be done long before the commission begins their work, not in the middle of their work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I, too, would like to put some comments on the record regarding Bill 242 that the Member for Russell has put forward, and I think it's a bill that should have been before the Legislature months ago, maybe even years ago. The Member for Swan River has indicated that it's too late. I disagree. I think it's a step forward and we need to be forward thinking and moving these issues forward. This needs to be addressed. Members on all sides of the House who represent a rural riding understand the difficulty that we face in representing not only rural but northern ridings and the inability at times to be everywhere and representing every event within our communities.

I know my communities have indicated that this is more than worrying about the vote on election day. It's about earning that vote. I think we, as elected officials, understand the significance of earning that vote and realize that election day is the report card, but it takes four years to pass the grade. What has happened with the Boundaries Commission's work over the last several reviews have seen ridings lost in many areas of the rural areas as well as the north.

The Member for Swan River spoke about the riding in the north that was lost. I think that it should

be put on the record that we lost four ridings in the southern area in the last few boundary changes. That is a significant number. If you lose one riding, it's too many, but if you lose four, I think that speaks volumes to the lack of taxpayers to actually have a voice at the Legislature on their behalf.

The Member for Swan River talked about, learn to live with those challenges put forward by the Boundaries Commission. I attended the Boundaries Commission meeting in Brandon, and we spoke to the commission in between presentations. They were encouraged to know that there would be legislation considered to change the variants to actually help with their mandate because they too see the challenges that the northern and southern parts of Manitoba face in representation. They understand the variances that are currently in place for rural ridings in particular are a major challenge and are going to be working against the best interests of communities.

I believe that the Boundaries Commission would embrace a clearer mandate in providing fairness to communities not only in rural Manitoba but in northern Manitoba because, if you do look at increasing the variants in southern Manitoba, there are ways that this could actually benefit and help the ridings in the northern part of the province by shifting population and moving communities of interest together.

We've talked about graduations, and other members have talked about the graduations and the town councils and municipal councils and the challenges in meeting those types of events. I believe that, in rural communities, we are seeing some very strong and serious challenges in infrastructure needs.

The Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) I know receives correspondence from many of the communities that I represent and understands that the recreation facilities, roads, those types of things are all very serious issues. The communities, I think, that have been in communication with myself and also with the minister and other ministers, have indicated that by taking one voice away from the Legislature to put on the record that these issues that need to be looked at and need to be put on the forefront to the government is going to make it even more of a challenge for these communities to succeed and grow.

I know a lot of the communities that I represent have seen modest increases in their population. I believe that they're very proud of any successes that they have. I believe that, when you work with

communities, you should be looking at communities of interest. We spoke to the Boundaries Commission about that. In my riding alone, there are three or four school divisions; there's 20-plus municipalities. We have two RHAs; we have three to four conservation districts.

I believe that, when you start limiting the mandate of the Boundaries Commission and not moving forward and providing them with stronger tools to work with, you take away that opportunity for communities of interest to continue to be connected and work together.

I know that, in the recent boundary changes, the community of Rivers, for example, is put in with Turtle Mountain. That makes it extremely difficult for that community, who is looking at some very serious infrastructure needs in their community, to continue to connect with communities like Cartwright and others along the U.S. border.

So I think that what the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) has put forward is something that the Boundaries Commission would embrace. I think that we shouldn't assume that they would not be receptive to this type of legislation coming forward to assist them. Based on what I've seen and heard, I think that they are looking for ways to strengthen decision making within their mandate and I think this could only assist them.

I think that communities are seeing more and more centralization of services within urban centres and this is just evident in the assessment branch, Crown Lands and, obviously now, Manitoba Hydro are consolidating or centralizing their staff. I think that communities are taking all of these as major hits against them, Mr. Speaker.

I think that the Boundaries Commission sees that. I think that they would be encouraged to see a bill like this come forward. I think that they would look forward to the opportunity to review the work that they've done in this area. I think that it can only help strengthen all of Manitoba by having this specific issue addressed and presented to them to review what is currently before them.

If it doesn't, I think that they will embrace this and certainly be pleased to have this bill and this mandate enhancement at their fingertips, because I do believe in discussions with them that they encourage this. They supported the concept, and I think that Manitobans deserve to be represented

365 days of the year, not just on election day, Mr. Speaker.

So on that point, I want to support the Member for Russell's bill and I think that members opposite, the government side especially, should be embracing this bill. I look forward to its expedient passage and move forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (10:30)

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 242.

A number of very good points have been raised by the MLA for Russell, the MLA for Minnedosa, also the MLA for Swan River, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives with regard to this issue.

As MLAs, we do indeed have many, many challenges before us in rural and northern Manitoba. But I just want to touch on the point of some of the MLAs, many of the MLAs, are from the city. They have different challenges than we have. We have the distances to travel. I know, in my particular constituency of La Verendrye, it stretches all the way from Falcon Lake, West Hawk, right on the Ontario border, it goes west to the edge of Winnipeg and then goes south to south of St. Adolphe, almost to Ste. Agathe, which takes approximately about an hour and 45 minutes to travel from one end to the other. Not as long as other constituencies in northern Manitoba or rural Manitoba, but it does present a bit of a challenge.

The point I think that is really pertinent to this debate is the one that the MLA for Swan River, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives raised: that the next Boundaries Commission review will be around 2018, in approximately 10 years' time. We're going to have StatsCan and other stats looking at population differences prior to that. As was pointed out by the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, that the Boundaries Commission has completed its independent review, and that initial draft map that came out was just a draft. They went to community to community, consulting with Manitobans to determine what their views were.

Mr. Speaker, I think the importance of this debate is about the independence of that body. The electoral commission is an independent body, as was pointed by its representatives, which now takes into consideration the University College of the North in Brandon. We have a good representation on that

body. They've had an opportunity to speak to the citizens of the province of Manitoba directly. They've had an opportunity to engage the presenters in many ways and better than what MLAs could do, because what MLAs will do—and I don't believe any MLA on the government side presented to the commission. In part, I believe it's because we believe that the commission has a difficult job enough without having to listen to partisan arguments.

It might have been a slip of the tongue by the MLA for Minnedosa when she said: We lost a fourth of our constituencies in rural Manitoba. But it's actually Manitobans lost a representation. It's not a particular party that lost, but I'm sure that's what she meant. I'm sure she was referring to a corner of the province that lost population, and by their losing redistribution, to loss of constituencies.

Now, StatsCan has shown that the southeast portion of the province has grown tremendously, that the most growth that's taken place in the province, as I understand it, is in the southeast region. As was pointed out by the MLA for Swan River, the MLA for Steinbach pointed out to the commission that they made a—and I don't want to quote because I wasn't there, and I don't know the specific details, but I've been advised that he actually stated that they made a good choice in separating the two constituencies—or joining them, I should say—of Russell and Minnedosa because of the loss of population.

Again, the MLA for Steinbach was looking at his own particular region and knows the growth that's taken place there and why a constituency was added. As I stated, I wasn't there, and I don't know how it was phrased or how it was worded, but I know the essence of his remark was that they made a very difficult but wise decision to move constituencies around based on population changes.

Mr. Speaker, the commission has a very, very difficult job. I don't think very many people would like to sit on that commission and have to go around and make those kinds of choices of splitting constituencies. I can speak as the MLA for La Verendrye today, but in a couple of years or when the next election is called in 2011, the current constituency that I have is going to be Taché and La Verendrye, which causes some difficulty because, over the last three elections and since I first was elected to this body, I've had an opportunity to meet many elected officials and citizens in the current La Verendrye constituency.

It's very difficult because you build up personal relationships, you work very well with people, not that you're aligned politically in the same way or have the same political affiliations or belong to the same political parties, but you do build up a good working relationship with people. You feel you have their confidence and they have confidence in you as well as you in their decisions that they're making and what they're talking about when they raise concerns with you.

In my own constituency, currently I have five school divisions: The Francophone School Division, Seine River School Division, Hanover School Division, Sunrise School Division and Frontier School Division. I also have the R.M. of Reynolds, Taché, the town of Ste. Anne, the R.M. of Taché, the R.M. of Ritchot.

So, Mr. Speaker, yes, the constituency is large, but I knew that going in, prior to becoming an elected official. I knew the ground rules. I knew exactly what they were. I knew that it would be very difficult to service those communities as an MLA. But those are challenges I realized going in.

I think the point that is key here is that the MLA for Swan River raised that the commission has done their work. They've done their work, they've completed their work and as I understand it, prior to January, they will have a recommendation to this body. It's a recommendation I believe we should all accept. It may be not what some MLAs would want, but on the other hand we have to respect their independence.

When you're talking about Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal, the president of the University of Manitoba, the president of University College of the North, president of the Brandon University, these people are independent in the truest sense of the word.

They are taking a look at rural, northern and city constituencies, listening to the people of Manitoba. The average citizen, the ordinary citizen of Manitoba speaking out. Whether it's related to cultural issues, whether they feel there's a cultural, economic, social issues that join communities together and the reason why they feel those communities should be joined or why not.

I believe that is hugely important, and the weight of those citizens and their presentations to the commission is truly valuable. Sometimes in this body, in this Legislature, we do have our own biased

opinions with regard to how we see it working better for us as elected officials or how it may work better for us in two years or even further down the road.

An independent body such as the electoral commission, I believe, has the wisdom. They also have the consultation that they've done with the citizens of the province to determine how it should work for the next 10 years.

They have our trust. They have our total support in the independent body. Not to take away from what the MLA for Russell is trying to put forward because I know we've heard him say passionately before about how difficult it is for him to service his and work with his constituency and his constituents. I understand it as a rural MLA. Certainly the MLA for Swan River has those challenges as well but we knew the rules going in.

On this side of the House anyway, I can certainly say that we respect this body, their independence. We will go with whatever decisions they make. The people of Manitoba have spoken. They have given the recommendations to this body and how they feel the division should be made up. We know that they are the wisdom of their decision; we will certainly respect and live with.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, their final report is going to be coming forward. That's something that we will see, the final report and how those final boundaries will be drawn out. That is something that all members in this Chamber should respect that report. We will go by whatever they decide. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I thank the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou) to allow me to speak just ahead of him. I won't be too long.

This is a significant piece of legislation that has been brought forward by the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) and seconded by the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat). I listened very intently to the Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) and the Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) as well.

I also come from rural Manitoba and very proud to represent as the third MLA in the history of Lakeside. We've seen changes there over the number of years as well from my two predecessors, D.L. Campbell and Harry Enns. D.L. was there for 47 years and Harry for 37, and we have seen significant changes in regard to those boundaries over that time—[interjection] Well, I'll be here longer than the Member for Swan River, anyway. I know

that because I certainly have no intentions of retiring in the next short while. But, anyway, I do have the age factor there.

* (10:40)

But back to the points. My particular riding is actually one of those that is shrinking in size, and I'm very concerned about the size of constituencies. I know the Member for Swan River said she's envious of the people in the city. Well, I'm not. I'm very proud of the fact that I represent rural Manitoba, as I know she is as well. But we have different things that happen. We have things like graduations, Christmas concerts, personal care homes, roads issues, a number of issues that we have to represent our people in rural Manitoba on.

I know that people from Winnipeg, the MLAs from there, those areas, have their areas of which they have to try and look after. But this is about representation and it's not anything but that. It doesn't have to take an effect now. This bill would be referred to committee. It doesn't have to take an effect in this particular boundary review, and the Member for Russell made that very clear in his opening comments. So, I do want to correct the record on that.

Whenever we look at the variances of the size of the constituencies—in fact, I was at Eriksdale last night at an Emergency Measures meeting, and I clocked the Caldwell, which is one of the areas that is going out of my particular constituency and going into that of Interlake. It's 21 miles, 21 miles off Lakeside that's going to have to be now added onto Interlake.

I would think the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) would stand up today and say, hey, we think that there should be some changes to this. He's got a very large area, as I know a number of other MLAs do. The Member for Swan River talked about Flin Flon—[interjection] Well, you know what? The Member for Interlake says, I can handle it.

It's not just about handling it. It's about being there for the people. It's about being there for the constituents that elected you. It's about being there for the services and the things we need to do as MLAs, and I think it's very important that we do have the time in order to do that.

So, the amendments that have been brought forward in Bill 242 by the Member for Russell allow that 25 percent variance—and I know that we have

significant changes in populations from area to area. We're not asking the commission to get involved in that. What we're doing is giving them one more tool in order to allow them the significant change from that variance to go to 25 percent.

I know whenever we look at those boundaries—and the commission has done a great job. I think that the commission has the best interests of all Manitobans when they look at this. I certainly hope so. They're very important people. They're very good at what they do and they have the staff resources to give the information to them in order to make sure they do have the right boundaries in place.

I know they sometimes get disappointed by the lack of submissions that they do receive. In fact, I know, I look back in 1998 at the submissions that were there. In fact, I think there was a very limited number. I think this time there was a significant more number of presentations put forward which is actually, I think, a good thing. We need to, as legislators, give them the tools. This is one of those tools we're able to give them. Let them make those decisions. We're not saying put it at 25 percent. What we're saying is let's give them the opportunity to say, look, from 15 percent to 25 percent is one of those tools that we need to make sure that they have. We're not saying you have to abide by that. It simply gives them that tool in order to put in their tool chest in order to make those decisions in a way that's going to be beneficial.

Yes, we're going to abide by what they bring forward. I never made a presentation to say I didn't want Caldwell. I did want Caldwell. That is made by the people in those areas, and I think it's important as MLAs we let the commission do their job. I think that's very important. But what we need to do as MLAs in representing our areas is give the commission those tools and those municipalities and those cities and those LGs the necessary tools in order to ensure they be able to do that.

So that's simply all this Bill 242 does. I know the Member for Portage wants to put a few things on the record, so we ask this government to have a look at this, listen to what we've had to say because it doesn't have to take effect this particular commission but certainly in 2018, as the Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) pointed out, it certainly will be one of those tools we need to be looked at in our tool box. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, Bill 242, The Electoral Divisions Amendment Act,

proposes to give future Boundaries Commissions the authority to use a 15 percent deviation for any constituency over 5,000 square kilometres below the 53rd parallel.

Now the fact that one seat was eliminated should really be no surprise to anyone. I talked to a very well connected member of the PC Party who predicted a year ago that one seat would be dropped in southwest Manitoba, and he predicted that one seat would be added to Winnipeg. So everyone knew that probably one seat was going to be eliminated in southwest Manitoba.

Now we all support the independent Boundaries Commission on this side of the House. This is a big improvement over the old system where the government of the day, the party in government, set the boundaries. There was a word for how those boundaries got arranged, and the word was gerrymandering, when it suited the interests of the governing party.

I know an interesting story about that because, in 1975 my wife and I were on holidays. We were in Ottawa and we went to the House of Commons for a tour. I got talking to the security guard and he said: Where are you from? I said: Well, my wife is from John Diefenbaker's seat. He said: Well, sometimes he invites people up to his office; would you like to meet him?

Well, I'd already met him three times but I said: Yes, I'd like to meet him. So they phoned up and we got invited up to his office and spent about 20 minutes with John Diefenbaker, which was very entertaining. The entire 20 minutes he told stories about himself, but one of the stories he told was about how his seat of Prince Albert was divided in four. They were trying to get rid of him, a popular Member of Parliament.

So I said: Well, that's what you call gerrymandering, and he said: No, I called it jimmyandering—because it was Jimmy Gardner that did it to him in Saskatchewan.

Now it's interesting to see how the boundaries have changed in Burrows constituency, because I will have run under four different sets of boundaries in 2011—

An Honourable Member: It's more Inkster than it is Burrows.

Mr. Martindale: —over four decades. The Member for Inkster is in this speech because, yes, I'm going to

talk about how the boundaries of Inkster changed. When I first ran in 1988, the eastern boundary was Salter. In that election, I lost that election to Bill Chornopyski, the Liberal candidate, by 109 votes.

Well, in 1990, I ran again and the boundaries changed and they moved two blocks to the west. Interestingly, the Manitoba NDP made a submission to the Boundaries Commission and, at the request of St. John's NDP, they said, we think that all of St. John's Avenue should be in St. John's constituency. So the boundary was changed by one street to Mountain Avenue.

Well, I lived on St. John's, so I wasn't in the constituency of Burrows for the 1990, '95 and '99 elections. So every election my opponent says, Martindale doesn't live in Burrows, as if they shouldn't vote for me, but, of course, when people found out that I lived in the North End, it wasn't an issue, although I do remember that in the 1999 election, the Liberal candidate told people I didn't live in the area and he told at least one voter that I lived in the south end. In the end, it didn't matter because I beat him by 3,000 votes.

In 1999, there was a major change in the boundaries and so a big chunk of Inkster, 14 polls in Inkster were moved out of Inkster and into Burrows. I think it was 14 because the Liberals in 1995 won seven polls and the NDP won seven polls. But what happened in 1999? The NDP won all 14 polls, so it really didn't make too much difference in Burrows.

Now, interestingly, sometimes Boundaries Commissions in their wisdom, I think, need to be a little more cognizant of physical barriers and take those into account. For example, from 1990 to '99, Burrows constituency went south of the CPR marshalling yards to Notre Dame, from Sherbrook to McPhillips. Now the marshalling yards are a big barrier in the inner city of Winnipeg, and many of us would like to get them out of the inner city—I was actually on a committee that worked on that in the 1980s—but those two communities are very much separated by that boundary.

In a similar way in the federal boundaries, Kildonan-St. Paul's is divided by the Red River, so there's East and West Kildonan and East and West St. Paul, and that Red River is a very big barrier. It doesn't make sense to have a federal riding, straddling the Red River.

* (10:50)

Fortunately, after the boundaries changes, the area south of the CPR marshalling yards was dropped and, instead of going south at CPR, it went west into Inkster, which turned out to be a good thing.

Now, in the next proposed boundary changes, once again I've lost two blocks on the east side of Burrows. Well, coincidentally, that tends to be the lower-income area and a better part of Burrows for the NDP and so, when we lost the McGregor Street polls, we lost the best poll in Burrows. I think we lost four votes in a nine-storey seniors building. I don't know the percentages anymore.

This time I'm also losing the best poll in Burrows, Millenium Villa, and I'm going to miss the residents there. I've gotten to know many of them. I have coffee parties there, and I know many of them through the church that they attend next door, St. Mary The Protectress, Ukrainian orthodox church, and I'm going to be sad to hand that off to the constituency of Point Douglas.

What we are gaining, we're losing about 10 polls on the east side, we're getting 10 polls from The Maples. Well, The Maples is ethnographically very different than Burrows, but it's very interesting. I've been campaigning there for Judy Wasylcia-Leis and going door-to-door to get acquainted, and so far I've known somebody on every street. The first street, I knew five people.

People there are very hospitable. In fact, two people invited me in for a drink. The first person I said no. The second person, I said, well, when I'm finished the street, I'll come back. So I went back, and he offered me a Crown Royal whiskey. I had the opportunity, I guess, to help create jobs in Gimli constituency, but I said no.

He offered me a beer, and I said no. He offered me juice, and I said yes and had a good visit with someone who will be, I hope, a future constituent after the next election, assuming that these boundaries go through the way they have been proposed because I don't think that there will be big changes after we see the final boundaries for constituencies, notwithstanding the lobbying that the opposition members are doing.

I know that other people want to speak in this debate, so, in conclusion, we support an independent Boundaries Commission. We think we should let them work under the existing legislation. It's a good system. We are, I think, one of the first jurisdictions,

if not the first jurisdiction in Canada, to have an independent Boundaries Commission; I believe it was brought in by Duff Roblin. We should keep the system that we've got. It's working and we shouldn't interfere with it politically.

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to rise this morning and participate in debate of Bill 242, The Electoral Divisions Amendment Act (Population Variances for Southern Rural Constituencies).

May I compliment at this time the honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) for having the foresight to bring before us and provide us with the opportunity to discuss the challenges of rural constituency representation. So far, everyone that has spoken to Bill 242 has, in fact, spoken positively and the need for changes to the legislation and wanting to have other dynamics considered when drawing one's boundaries between constituencies.

The honourable Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), even though the legislation before us does not speak specifically to urban constituencies, he too recognized that there are physical barriers to overcome and should be considered when establishing constituency boundaries.

Now, I do want to compliment the individuals that have spent lengthy time studying and providing for us changes in boundaries that are recognizing of population shifts. However, the legislation does actually provide for variances, but the language, really, for the commissioners to make a variance does not, by convention, truly allow them to do that. The current legislation says that they may vary, but without any guidance, as this legislation provides for, the commissioners are very, very reluctant to indeed make that variance call.

So, with this legislation, it gives parameters where the variations can effectively take place because it speaks to a geographic area and the limitation of that. Also, all of the members in the Chamber recognize when establishing boundaries that there are other considerations for this decision making and that is, in fact, the area where people go for goods and services, how they travel and do their shopping. It also should recognize where the schools and rural municipalities or urban municipalities are already established, so that there is actually harmonization between where one's elected official comes from versus where all the other services are delivered.

I might take this opportunity to actually compliment from the constituency of Portage la Prairie. The redrawn boundaries are, in fact, harmonized with the rural municipality of Portage la Prairie. That makes it much easier for persons to know that they are voting for a representative that is encompassing of all Portage la Prairie. Before the proposed change, many residents of Portage la Prairie had to travel down to No. 2 highway to Haywood, to St. Claude, to Elm Creek, in order to take the opportunity to cast a ballot. That just didn't seem right when persons were much closer to Oakville, or much closer to Southport or Edwin and were not able to vote there.

But I would like to take this opportunity to say that we truly need to amend the legislation. As good as it is and it is leading edge as it was, we do have to make changes because I personally would like to take this opportunity to state for the record that I support proportional representation.

The first past the post has served us quite well, but there should be some mechanism in order to reflect the wishes and desires of the electorate here in Manitoba. Currently we do not have a mechanism in order to do that. I might cite the 1999 election where, in fact, the members opposite formed a majority government, yet they did not have support of the majority of Manitobans. Again, that was true in 2003, that they had a massive majority in members but did not have a massive majority of support from Manitobans. This is something that I would like to see considered when we're looking at the electoral reform here in the province of Manitoba.

I also would like to say that Manitoba was unique in coming into Confederation with a bicameral electoral process, and upper and lower Houses here in Manitoba and, perhaps the students that are watching here this morning might have taken that in our history, that we had an upper Chamber and a lower Chamber here in the province of Manitoba. The upper Chamber was, because of cost-cutting measures, lost to us in 1876.

Mr. Speaker, with those few short comments, I'd like to once again encourage all members to support this private member's bill. Thank you

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): I hear the members calling question to try to deny the government member a chance to speak to a legislation. I was here in the Chamber for most of the session and I hear

members always encouraging members of the government, challenging the members of the government to speak to different bills and resolutions, and now when I'm trying to, Mr. Speaker, they're trying to take away my right.

I think what is—*[interjection]* Well, we all have to speak in here, Mr. Speaker. We all have the right to speak, and the members again are challenging—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

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

* (11:00)

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 27—State of Rural Health Care

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions and we will deal with the Resolution 27, State of Rural Health Care.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I move, seconded by the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), that

WHEREAS rural health care has not been a priority of the provincial government; and

WHEREAS shortages of doctors, nurses, lab technologists, and other health care professionals have threatened the stability and accessibility of rural health care; and

WHEREAS there are currently 17 emergency rooms closed throughout rural Manitoba due to these shortages, with many more operating on reduced hours, leaving tens of thousands of Manitobans without access to emergency care; and

WHEREAS Emergency Medical Services in various parts of the province have been suspended due to ongoing shortages of personnel; and

WHEREAS a lack of access to emergency care threatens the safety and health of rural Manitobans; and

WHEREAS rural Manitobans face wait times of many weeks, months and even years for diagnostic tests, appointments with specialists, and surgeries; and

WHEREAS these wait times are detrimental to rural Manitobans' quality of life; and

WHEREAS nursing shortages have forced personal care homes throughout rural Manitoba to

stop admitting patients, even though there are beds available; and

WHEREAS this has forced seniors to move away from their communities and created significant hardship for these Manitobans and their families; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has failed to significantly increase the number of nurse practitioner positions in rural communities and thus failed to make good use of Manitoba's health-care resources; and

WHEREAS certain health-care services are not available throughout rural Manitoba, including midwifery, which is only available in seven of the 11 rural health authorities; and

WHEREAS the provincial government's health-care record, particularly in rural communities, has been a profound disappointment to Manitobans.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba condemn the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) for this failure to resolve the very serious problems facing health care in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose, seconded by the honourable Member for Charleswood,

WHEREAS rural—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Briese: It's a pleasure to rise today and speak on the condition of rural health-care facilities. We're in dire need out there; we're in terrible shape. Rural health care is certainly not a priority of this government. They like to talk about, put blame back on anybody they can put blame back on. They talk about the former government. In '99, rural emergency rooms were operating. Today, 17 or 18 of them are closed. Tens of thousands of rural Manitobans are without ER services. Some of them were already great distances from ER services, and now the closest point that they can go to is closed. So you just added more travel time to somebody that's in serious problems.

This government promised to fix health care when they went into power in 1999. We all remember the old promise that they'd fix hallway medicine with \$15 million in six months. That hasn't happened. None of the other fixes on health care have happened either. This is at a time when we have

record transfers from the feds. No workable plan is there to keep doctors and nurses and techs in rural areas.

So what happens? Communities go out and develop their own methods of trying to attract people to their communities, the professionals, that the Province should be providing to those communities. This puts communities into competitions. It eventually ends up back with the cost on their property taxes, which this government always likes to think they should have a claim to. The communities will put bonuses out, supply homes, do any number of things to attract some of these professionals to their communities. Those costs are part of health-care costs and they should be carried by the Province.

In my own community, we are finally, just now, getting a new personal care home built, but one of the requirements on that personal care home—this is, by the way, after 10 years of promises, finally it's being built. In those 10 years, that home was first promised to be built at \$13.5 million. The price now is \$29.5 million. It was also first promised as a 125-bed unit. It's now been reduced to a 100-bed unit. The current personal care home in Neepawa, the one that will be closing, was a 125-bed unit, and we don't believe there is room to reduce that many rooms, especially with baby boomers arriving in the age group that will soon be coming seniors in this province.

One of the requirements on new health-care facilities in a community is a 10 percent contribution from that community. Well, not only did the price tag go up on the personal care home in Neepawa, that 10 percent contribution went up, and that 10 percent contribution now is close to \$3 million, which results in a cost where every resident of that area, of the rural municipalities and the town of Neepawa, have an extra \$525 that has to be raised in that community toward that personal care home. That, once again, is a cost that shouldn't be raised by the individuals in that community, shouldn't come off property taxes, should be part of the cost of health care in this province.

One of the things they've done in the old personal care home is, a year ago, they closed one whole floor in it, supposedly for a shortage of nurses, but that wasn't really the reason. The real reason was that they're going from a 125-bed to a 100-bed home. They have to justify that you only need 100 beds, so you close one floor of the personal care home. You

keep anywhere from 10 to 20 people that should be in the personal care home in the local hospital, and you say, well, there isn't a need for these extra beds. Then we can now justify the reduction to 100 beds. That backlog is kept in the hospital and it creates problems in the hospital system.

One of the things that were promised and we've seen very little results from it yet is that there would be more assisted living. Three and a half years ago, the minister made the promise that one of the things that was going to take the need for the extra personal care beds away was an upgrade in assisted living units in Neepawa. None of it has materialized yet, although I understand they are now looking at nine units in Manitoba Housing property in Neepawa called the Yellowhead Manor.

Another of the shortfalls for our elderly, Yellowhead Manor has a wheelchair ramp, has an access ramp. It's been roped off for a year now. It's in no condition for the residents to use so they're bypassing it. They're going onto the grass with their walkers to try and get around this roped-off access ramp. There have been several falls. This is certainly no way to treat our seniors.

Another example out there in my constituency, there's a 12-unit, 55-plus unit in the community of Crane River. It has no handicapped access. It seems to me that when you have elderly people that you want to provide units for, you should at least have some handicapped access. That particular building is only half full. It would be full if there was access.

My own family, my father, is in the personal care home in Neepawa. He's just about 92 years old. My mother is 91 years old. She still lives in an apartment on her own. She religiously goes every day by Handi-van down to be with him. She's recently been assessed to go into the personal care home. There's no room in the personal care home. If she was to need to go into the personal care home sooner rather than later, she'd probably be put in the hospital for quite some time. My father spent nine weeks in the hospital before there was room for him in the personal care home. This, keeping in mind even though one of the floors in the personal care home was closed.

* (11:10)

If she might have a lengthy stay in the hospital, or she may be put in the personal care home in another community, this is a couple that have been together for 64 years, and because of the shambles

our health-care system is in, may be separated, and I just don't think that's appropriate.

My father was a long-term municipal councillor out there. He was on the first board of directors of the personal care home when it was built. He had a dedication to the community, eventually went on and chaired the board for quite a number of years. My mother was a nurse in that personal care home. These people—my mother, my father—had no idea we were going to be running into the problems with health care in rural Manitoba that we are today. They dedicated themselves to working with facilities and making facilities at that time that really worked well for the elderly in our community.

I asked questions a year ago about three constituents in my riding, my constituency, who required knee surgery, who were waiting anywhere between 18 and 25 months, not for the surgery—they were waiting that long to see a specialist. That wait time is totally unacceptable. People are in pain. They're unable to do their job properly and that places added cost for all Manitobans.

I had a recent meeting with the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority. We were told they were 103 nurses short in one RHA. We've had 1,471 doctors that have left this province since this government came into place. The health care that's being provided in rural Manitoba is totally inadequate. This government has mismanaged. We have not got the service we need.

I appreciate the time to put a few personal stories on the record here today. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I'm privileged today to have an opportunity to provide some clarification on some points and to speak to this resolution.

I want to thank the member for raising a few constructive issues in his speech. I think that when we collectively work together to look at some of the needs that we have for seniors in our communities, whether they are our own parents, our aunts, our uncles, our grandmas or grandpas, it is motivating to try to work harder to provide a wider range of options for people living in our province.

I commend the member opposite for raising some constructive ideas, and certainly we'll continue to work on expanding supportive housing, work on expanding options for seniors. So I want to say that at the outset.

I do want to put on the record that I noted, in the resolution, a very curious bit of wording, and that is the member suggested that rural health care was not our priority. I thought it was a peculiar word choice, Mr. Speaker, in that it was the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) himself that said, shortly before the 2007 election, that health care broadly would not be the priority of their party. This wasn't a conversation at a cocktail party. It wasn't a conversation in a hallway where the Leader of the Opposition might be concerned that many would hear him. This was something that he said essentially as an election platform for all of Manitoba to pass judgement on, that health care would not be their priority.

To signal, of course, and suggest with that particular choice of words is very curious indeed, and certainly I would say, Mr. Speaker, that we have made our commitment to working to keep emergency rooms and strengthening health care in rural Manitoba as one of our commitments, and it has been challenging on the front of human resources. We don't deny that. We know it's a challenge to find doctors that are prepared to work on call in ERs in rural Manitoba, and we're going to continue to recruit and retain medical staff across Manitoba.

I will absolutely concede a point, Mr. Speaker, that there are communities in rural Manitoba today that have fewer doctors than we did when we started. A good example of that would be the community of Virden. They are facing a real challenge right now with keeping their emergency room open because of having fewer doctors than they did some years ago. But we also need to acknowledge, and we know the members opposite will not do this, that there are many communities in rural Manitoba that indeed have more doctors than they did when we started. We know that Brandon has gone from three full-time emergency room doctors in June of '07 to 10 in June of '08.

I can hear people chirping from their seat, Mr. Speaker. I know they're very sensitive about this subject and, you know, somebody has to put the facts on the record, and we know we can't count on members opposite to do that.

We know, of course, that Steinbach has gone from 2.5 to 8.3 doctors, The Pas, which has gone from two doctors to six, and we know that Thompson which has gone from one emergency room doctor to 5.5. We hear members opposite, of

course, speak about an out-migration of doctors citing numbers of doctors that have left, but consistently we know that they never talk about in-migration of doctors and, of course, there's a reason for that. You can hear the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) moaning about that particular issue. It's, I believe, simple arithmetic, Mr. Speaker. We know that we have 288 more doctors today in Manitoba than we did in 1999—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member.

Ms. Oswald: We know that we have 288 more doctors today than in 1999, but we know that we have to do more. We know that this is a time of intense international competition for doctors and that, while we have shown a net increase in doctors every single year, we certainly do know that we need to be making plans to grow the number of health-care professionals that we have.

While we can go on the record to show that our commitment to rural Manitoba includes investing in new or renovated hospitals in Brandon, in Swan River, in Thompson, The Pas, in Beausejour, in Pinawa, Gimli, Morden, Winkler, Ste. Anne, Steinbach, Shoal Lake and one on the way in Selkirk, we know that our commitment to expand and redevelop the emergency room at Portage is underway. We know that we've added diagnostics in the form of CT scanners in Brandon, Steinbach, Thompson, The Pas, Selkirk, Morden, Winkler, Portage la Prairie.

We know that the first MRI outside of Winnipeg was installed at Brandon and at Boundary Trails. We know that there's a new mobile ultrasound program launched in Ericksdale, 160 new ambulances, most for rural and northern Manitoba. We've worked on eliminating the fees for ambulance transfers between hospitals, worth about \$7.2 million a year; new community CancerCare programs in Neepawa, Russell, Hamiota, Deloraine, Pinawa; the building of a linear accelerator to treat cancer patients in Brandon; dialysis units in Garden Hill, Norway House, Portage la Prairie and Swan River; the building of a new ambulance station in Grand Rapids, and I could go on, Mr. Speaker.

We know that we have made commitments to rural Manitoba and that we absolutely need to continue particularly on the recruitment of health human resources. But I want to stand today and offer the members an opportunity. I know that in the

debate of this resolution there will be a chance for members to answer or at least to clarify and explain for us all that, while we have been clear on what our commitments are to rural Manitoba, we wonder.

We wonder why, Mr. Speaker, in the aftermath of that pre-election statement, that health care would not be their priority, that we also saw a series of extremely reckless tax-cut promises. I think they totalled \$800 million and while we'll never know, thank goodness, what they would've done with those \$800 million of tax cuts, what I can only surmise is this. We know, of course, that \$800 million would be salaries for over 10,000 nurses in Manitoba. That's two-thirds of the work force. We know that it would be the total amount paid for all Manitoba doctors. We know that it would indeed capture in full the budget for all rural and northern health-care services.

* (11:20)

So, while they can construct a resolution on one day during the time when they want to put their best foot forward, Mr. Speaker, to the Manitoba public, this is what they did. They said that health care wouldn't be their priority. They promised \$800 million in tax cuts that would result in the kinds of things that I've listed here further.

We also know that, during the election campaign, we saw that the Tories didn't promise to hire one single doctor—one single doctor. Nor did they promise, Mr. Speaker, to train a single nurse, and while we can talk about challenges that exist on the human resource side, we know, of course, that that's not a plan that Manitobans could accept.

But they don't like me talking as far back as the election campaign. How about just the last budget, when the Leader of the Opposition suggested he hold health spending to the rate of economic growth, meaning an instant cut of \$135 million, which we know is the salaries of almost as many nurses as they—or a little over the number of nurses they fired when they were in power.

Mr. Speaker, this is an opportunity for members opposite, today, to stand up during this resolution and to explain to Manitobans how they can suggest \$800 million in tax cuts, or \$135 million out of the health budget. They can say they'd never—they'd never—hire a doctor. They wouldn't hire a nurse. They can explain to Manitobans how that can be their platform one day, and then this can be their resolution on another.

Mr. Speaker, it just doesn't make sense to people that are thinking, thoughtful people in Manitoba.

So, I'm an optimist, Mr. Speaker. I want to give them a chance to explain these facts that are just absolutely not in tune with one another. I can't wait to hear from them. I think they should take this opportunity to clear the air about their past record, about the statements that they make today, and, heaven forbid, what they would do in the future.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, this minister sounds foolish in her comments when she stands in this House and makes some of the silly comments that she makes here.

Mr. Speaker, it is silly and foolish for this Minister of Health to say that we don't care about health care. We wouldn't be standing almost every day in this House asking about health care if we didn't care. We wouldn't be sending letters to her offices, meeting with constituents, phoning her office begging for help for some people if we didn't care.

Mr. Speaker, it shows every day in everything that we are doing that we care very much about health care and very much about the patient, and we have not forgotten that the patient is the centre of all of this. That is where we put our efforts and that is working on behalf of patients. I wish this government would focus in and make patients the centre of their universe instead of all the politics they play around it instead.

Mr. Speaker, actions speak louder than words and we speak—[interjection] the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) sat there all alone and he had a little clap. But he should—[interjection] oh, that didn't sound right. Sorry, I should have maybe phrased that a little differently.

But, Mr. Speaker, to them, action is throwing money at health care. What they've done is they've ramped up spending. But have they looked at outcomes? Have they looked at what the money is buying for health care? They seem to think that if you throw money at health care that's action and it's automatically going to improve. It's not. All that they've done is propped up the status quo in health care. It hasn't fixed the nursing shortage, the doctor shortage, the pharmacy shortage, the lab technology shortage. Money hasn't done that. Money hasn't eliminated waiting lists. Money hasn't improved some of the outcomes in maternal health care in Manitoba. Money has not fixed a lot of the problems. But to them, throwing the money at health care

seems to be what they consider to be action. Well, it doesn't work. You need to follow that with a plan. You need to follow that with some aggressive, innovative ideas to make health care better.

Mr. Speaker, we see with the doctor shortage, here's a really good example: 1,471 doctors have left Manitoba under their watch. Even Tim Sale indicated that his government does a poor job of retaining doctors. He said that on record at a meeting in southeastern Manitoba, and he's right. Manitoba does a very poor job of retaining doctors. We don't even keep half of our medical graduates from here. Why haven't we found out why? Why don't we talk to them, and say, what do we have to do better to keep you in Manitoba? What does Manitoba need? We still do not see any improvement in keeping new grads.

Mr. Speaker, to have a 60 percent turnover of doctors in nine years is absolutely outrageous. If we didn't have that many doctors fleeing Manitoba to other provinces or countries, we wouldn't have a doctor shortage right now, but we've lost almost 1,500 doctors under their watch. Do they not understand the ramifications to the health-care system of what that does to the system? It destabilizes the system.

They've had almost a decade to turn that around. Have they turned it around? No. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) has been sitting lately a lot chirping in her seat. This member, who messed up Child and Family Services, had to be removed as a minister from that portfolio, has nothing to chirp about.

Mr. Speaker, right now, if we look at the nursing shortage in Manitoba, the MNU says that there is a massive nursing shortage in Manitoba. Why doesn't this government come out and tell us what numbers the MNU have that they are using to say we have a massive nursing shortage in Manitoba today?

How could that possibly be after this government came in, in 1999, and said they were going to fix health care? The Premier said, if we need a hundred nurses, we'll hire a hundred nurses. Then, when he found out there weren't a hundred nurses to hire, he started to find wiggle room, and he said, well, we just can't add water, stir, and get a nurse. Where are the hundred nurses? Why are we not seeing a fix that this government promised to—fix health care in six months with \$15 million, end ER hallway medicine. Nothing's happening in those areas other than it continues to exist.

Mr. Speaker, there are 17 ERs closed throughout rural Manitoba. I don't think we should be having a government sit here and find any consolation in that. The Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) has gone out and she has said, well, we didn't close any in Winnipeg. Well, maybe she needs to get out a little bit more, visit some of the rural areas, get a feel for it. I would also suggest that maybe her and her Premier go out into the ERs in Winnipeg and have a look around. Have they ever done a tour of all the ERs? Do they even have the guts to do that and go and talk to the front line workers about what is happening out there? I don't think that we will see this government with the courage to do that.

Mr. Speaker, they've had almost 10 years to fix it and, if you look at all of these comments and all of these WHEREASes in this resolution, you can see where there is an incredible lack of progress by this government to fix what they promised that they were going to fix. They've never had a plan. They've managed everything by crisis. We've seen that over and over again. Red flags were raised when the cardiac program was crumbling. Red flags were raised when the ER program was crumbling. They ignored both of them till the crisis happened and patients died.

We asked a question the other day, Mr. Speaker, about the pandemic. Where is the completed pandemic plan by the WRHA, for instance? Manitoba Health. Manitoba Health should be the leader through the province in putting this forward, and they laughed at it. That is nothing to laugh about because, when a pandemic hits Manitoba, it's going to affect almost half a million people in this province—410,000 people by their own Web site. That's a lot of people. That is going to become a disaster and they do not have a pandemic plan ready.

An Honourable Member: False.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, they could say false but, according to the outside accreditors, outside experts, who came in to accredit the WRHA, they said it there—

An Honourable Member: I'd like you to table that document. Remember what you're saying.

* (11:30)

Mrs. Driedger: Well, the minister could say table. I have to FIPPA it. Maybe he should FIPPA it, too, then through the WRHA. He can pick up a phone and get Brian Postl.

Actually then, the number of recommendations— if the government doesn't have it, I would be extremely, extremely concerned that they didn't have it, because there are a lot of things that point to what they need to do to fix the health-care system.

They like to sit and chirp over there, and I don't think they have much to chirp about because they have not been fixing health care as they promised to fix it. Manitobans today are having to fight for health care. Some of them are having to beg for health care. What kind of a health-care system do we have when we don't have a system that people can rely on?

In rural Manitoba, highway medicine has taken over. People are afraid. I have been listening to what the people in southwestern Manitoba have to say. There is such fear down there.

Because this government has hardly any rural members, I don't think they've got a feel for what this means to rural Manitoba, to have a health-care system that is not there for them despite all the rhetoric from this government that they were going to make health care more available, closer to home.

By this resolution we can see they have failed, and they have failed in their promises.

Every day we come to this House and all of us here ask questions about health care. This Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) basically dismisses the questions, makes fun of the questions, her colleagues sit and laugh at what we're asking. Mr. Speaker, coming from a Minister of Health and a government that's suppose to care about health care, those are not very appropriate responses to very, very serious questions that come forward.

After 10 years, there hasn't been the progress they planned. They have failed and this minister deserves to be condemned for her failures.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): As a member from rural Manitoba, I'm absolutely delighted to stand here today to speak about this resolution. Certainly, as a member of the government, I'm absolutely delighted to stand on this side of the House, where we have seen incredible progress in improving the quality of health care in Manitoba under this government's watch and the stewardship of former Minister Sale, the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), now my colleague from Seine River and the incredible work that we have done to improve the quality of health care in the province of Manitoba.

I'd like to start by thanking our health-care professionals for the excellent work that they have done. As I, as many, have experienced the need to go to hospitals and clinics—certainly the work that our health-care professionals do is outstanding and they should be commended for their commitment to care here in Manitoba. On behalf of all Manitobans, I thank them for that.

I know the members opposite, they're kind of recent converts to being advocates for the education system as was demonstrated recently: recent converts advocating on behalf of teachers. I found that rather interesting that that would be the case, but I guess it was politically expedient for them to do so. Now members opposite are sudden advocates for the health-care system.

I know they don't like to talk about history, so I'll go from being a history teacher to talking about math. Quite frankly, if you look at the math that members opposite keep bringing into this Chamber as part of that discussion when they talk about the number of doctors that have left the province, they conveniently leave out the number of doctors that have come to the province. We know here, statistically, that there's been a 21 percent increase in doctors in rural Manitoba since 1999, double the rate of growth as Winnipeg at 12 percent. So there's been an increase in the number of doctors. There are 288 more doctors across Manitoba now than there were in 1999.

Now the math skills members opposite bring to this Chamber every day and talk about it in those simple terms, in simple math issues, with math skills like that they'd be hard pressed to get a job as a price checker at a Dollar store, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, because they are only using part of the equation here, talking about the number that left versus the number that have since come to Manitoba.

Let's talk about the number that left, the number of nurses that left during the 1990s compared to the number of nurses that have come back into employment here in Manitoba. As my colleague from Kildonan mentioned, about a thousand fired, about 500 who were forced to leave the field because of lack of funding, because of lack of support for a public system.

In fact, we have an opposition party that is ideologically driven towards a private health-care system, and we know that they would like to see more for-profit clinics, more for-profit hospitals in

Manitoba which does not serve the best interests of health-care needs in the province of Manitoba.

Now, I'd like to reiterate what my colleague from Seine River has said. Let's look back at the promises that were made. We promised to increase the number of nurses. We promised to increase the number of doctors. We promised to increase the spending and support for the health-care system. We're delivering on increasing the number of nurses. We're delivering on increasing the number of doctors. We're delivering on increasing the financial supports for the health-care system.

But what did the members opposite promise? Instead of promising doctors and nurses, they promised 23 professional hockey players would be returned to Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps that would include one full-time physician, I'm not sure, but they did not promise any more doctors. They did not promise any more nurses. I see they managed to deliver part of their commitment to bring back the Jets. I see Thomas Steen is running for the Conservatives, but I didn't know that's what they meant in their promise to bring back the Jets, Mr. Speaker.

As a rural member, I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, I can list just a few examples of what's happening in my own community of Gimli and the benefits for our health-care vision for this province in Gimli. I was very pleased to be there with the Premier (Mr. Doer) when the ribbon was cut on the new Gimli hospital, a \$13-million project. It is a beautiful facility and it serves the needs of the community very well.

In the year 2000 in Gimli, there were four doctors. Today, there are seven. We will be soon bringing a dialysis unit to Gimli. That was announced last September, a \$1.5-million expenditure. Now, to put it in math that members would understand, that's half the amount they spent on the Connie Curran inquisition, Mr. Speaker. So there's been a significant investment in the community of Gimli, serving the needs of my constituents, and it's been the vision of this government and the commitment of this government to provide better quality health care throughout rural Manitoba.

Now, the members opposite must not have read the *Free Press*. Perhaps they're fans of the *Winnipeg Sun*, but there was a wonderful picture in the *Free Press* showing my colleague from Seine River, our Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) with seven new oncologists, Mr. Speaker. Pardon me, the Premier

(Mr. Doer) was in that photo with seven new oncologists, and if the members would have read the caption of those oncologists, I believe three of them were from outside of the country and a couple were from other provinces coming here to practise here in Manitoba. Some were coming home to Manitoba because they know that there is an environment and a government that supports a public health-care system and supports it appropriately.

Not only have we seen that in my community, Mr. Speaker, as a rural Manitoban, as a minister who has happened to have the opportunity to travel to many rural communities and visit our schools—which members opposite would be fine with closing, by the way—but having visited many schools throughout rural Manitoba, I've also had the privilege to tour the communities and see the good work that's been going on with complements of doctors growing in Brandon, Winkler, Thompson, Swan River, Morden, and Portage, seeing the new facilities that are being constructed, the new hospitals that have been built, seeing an increase in medical school spaces since 1999, which was a very good idea, when members opposite bought into the notion that cutting medical spaces would be a good idea.

The recognition that population in a stable economy will grow, perhaps we should have had some foresight to address the needs of those individuals in the medical fields and other professional fields and support the increase in the number of medical spaces. We've gone from 70 in 1999 to 110, and this year's largest-ever medical class includes 26 students from rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I know, as someone from rural Manitoba, the probability of having someone practise in rural Manitoba is greatly increased by the fact that those members might have grown up in rural Manitoba. These doctors might have grown up in rural Manitoba so they know the quality of life that can be afforded to them in rural environments. They know what opportunities are available for them to pursue as medical professionals in rural Manitoba, so having 26 members of this largest medical class graduating coming from rural Manitoba bodes well for rural medicine here in Manitoba.

* (11:40)

Of course, in August, the announcement of a \$220,000 boost to our medical student resident financial assistance program, first introduced in 2001, increasing one-year rural return of service grants for third-year medical students from

\$15,000 to \$25,000. In response to the increase to the grants, a third-year medical student told the *Central Plains Herald Leader* and I quote: Now that they've upped the amount, people are scrambling to try for it. I think money's a pretty big motivator. It's an extra \$10,000. That's huge, it's very huge.

These types of grants did not exist before 2001. We recognized that in order to entice medical professionals to the rural area, there would have to be some other incentives that would encourage them to be there. Again, when you look at other professionals, I hear the members opposite talking about the nurses. Well, our record is very clear; 1,789 more nurses practising in Manitoba than in 1999.

We've committed to hire an additional 700 nurses, expanding the training by adding 100 new nursing spaces over the next four years. We've already added over 40 of these, and the Tories didn't promise to train a single nurse in the 2007 election.

Again, I think the record's clear. The way the issues are covered during the election campaign, the members opposite, their leader said, health care is no longer our No. 1 priority. Well, that's why, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans felt, and they spoke loud and clear by electing more New Democrats, as the party founded on the principles of a public health-care system with the CCF and our predecessors, as a party that is committed to providing public health care to benefit all Manitobans and all Canadians. I am very pleased to see the results of the last election.

If the members opposite continue to place health care so low on their priority list, I think we'll see more New Democrats sitting on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to have had this opportunity to speak on this resolution.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I applaud my colleague from Ste. Rose for bringing forth this resolution that we're discussing in the House this morning, the state of rural health care because the state of rural health care is in great decay in rural Manitoba. I certainly agree with this resolution, Mr. Speaker, and I will be voting for it, if it ever comes to a vote, if the government will allow it to come to a vote in this House.

They talk a lot about how health is their No. 1 priority. I know it is our Progressive Conservative priority, our No. 1 priority on our side

of the House. That's our leader's priority. That's our Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), our critic for Health, has done a remarkable job in regard to holding the feet to the fire of the government on this issue.

Myself, Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity of listening to the people of southwest Manitoba and rural Manitoba on this particular crisis that we are faced with. As this House opened, the first question that I had the opportunity of asking on the very first day was one of a crisis on health care in rural Manitoba. Five weeks later we've received no answers. It's a sad day in Manitoba when you've got a situation where 17 emergency rooms are closed in rural Manitoba. Never had an emergency room closed in the City of Winnipeg. We have a Minister of Health for Winnipeg, but not for the rest of the province.

I just want to advise her that there's still 17 rural emergency rooms closed in Manitoba. This is not about a short-term locum requirement for holidays for the summer, Mr. Speaker. This has turned into a much greater debacle than that. What is really needed is long-term planning around this crisis in health care in Manitoba, and the government in spite of doubling the budget from 1 billion in 1999 to 4.1 billion now, health care is way worse in Manitoba today than it's ever been in the history of the province. I cannot reiterate enough or state enough times that we've got a situation here where we used to think that the Minister of Justice was in charge of cutting down trees just to make announcements in this province, but I'll tell you today our health care is being run on photo ops and press releases, and it's damaging to the health care of every rural Manitoban, in fact, every citizen in this province.

I don't know what the Province is doing in regard to trying to attract and keep doctors in this province, Mr. Speaker. They've got a revolving door that is turning so fast that it makes the windmills in the area of St. Leon look like they're turning in slow motion. The revolving door of doctors, going in and out of this province, is a shameful act of irresponsibility on behalf of the government.

They can talk all they like about how 300-some doctors came into the province. It's an absolute atrocity that we have to have that many new doctors come into Manitoba, and we're not even keeping up. They've had 280-some leave last year. I'm talking about 2007 alone, Mr. Speaker. Over 280 left the

province or quit practising in Manitoba. Out of that, though, 232 left the province to practise elsewhere. It's not that they retired; they didn't retire. They're practising health care as doctors in other regions of Canada or North America. That's sad. The government can go on about all they want. That fact alone is driving rural Manitobans crazy. The government has spent all of their resources to bring 320 new doctors into the province, but let 230 of them leave. There is no plan for retention in this province, just zero. It's a shameful way of managing a system.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with this resolution that condemns the Minister of Health for this failure to resolve the very serious problems facing health care in Manitoba. How else can you justify anything that the government is doing? They need to be condemned for what they're doing. They are not making health care a priority, in spite of the fact that they basically won an election in 1999 saying that they would fix health care in six months.

That was nine years ago. Six months with \$15 million. We know, as I said earlier, they doubled the health budget from \$2.1 billion to \$4.1 billion, and the health-care system is in a complete debacle today in this province.

In fact, I'd just like the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to listen for a second, because I've got a situation where this morning I was called by a constituent whose daughter is in Australia, trying to become a doctor, needs to come back and get some training for that course. Australia is a country that we recognize doctors being trained in to come back to Canada when they can't even get into our own health-care positions here to be trained, Mr. Speaker.

But this young lady is being told by Manitoba that she can't come back and do her training in Manitoba because she needs 16 weeks and they'll only give her eight. So go somewhere else is what she's been told. If she goes somewhere else, what does the Minister of Health think are the chances of bringing that young lady back to Manitoba to be a doctor, where she really wants to come and practise? This is a young lady who is in Australia, practising medicine from my own constituency. So it's first-hand knowledge.

I also was at the Pierson craft sale on Saturday. I was approached by a young lady there who has wanted to be a doctor in Manitoba, and I was sure that she would get into the situation, but she didn't

get into the system in Manitoba either, Mr. Speaker. But she is going to be a doctor and she's going to be trained offshore.

I thought of another constituent that I have who's being trained offshore. The government won't even allow them the opportunity to come back in here and do internships, Mr. Speaker. They've been told to go to the United States, if you can believe it. That's what they've been told.

This has been going on for nine years, Mr. Speaker, and at a time when communities are trying to—if the minister wants, I'll give her the names of these people. I'll do that privately with her. She could probably reply somewhat soon, I hope, to the letter that I wrote her after the public meeting that I held in August on health care in Virden where over 600 people showed up to show their displeasure with the system. I called an information meeting. There was an information meeting held.

I applaud the minister for going out to Virden and having a private meeting with all of those involved in the situation, but there has been nothing done. There are still no doctors in southwest Manitoba. We've been told we'll be waiting until at least February, and there's no guarantee of that, because the last word that I've got is that we need 10 doctors in southwest Manitoba and they're only training eight. So we're 20 percent short in the training. We're going to be 20 percent short before we ever start. I don't know what kind of planning that is.

I think the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), yes, who applauded himself for being a history teacher and was now going to talk about math. He probably should stick to history, because the math doesn't add up when you're only training eight for 10 vacancies, Mr. Speaker. That's atrocious. No wonder the government's in trouble when they've got a minister in charge that can't count.

* (11:50)

I just wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, that this situation is, I guess it's—I'm hoping that there'll be doctors. I know that they have found a lab facility person for the Melita Hospital and I know, due to the great support of a particular doctor in that community, that ERs are reportedly going to be open from 9 o'clock Monday morning until 5 o'clock on Friday once the doctor comes back from leave, but I

find it disconcerting that one doctor has committed himself to staying on leave from 9 o'clock on Monday morning until 5 o'clock on Friday afternoon. That's going above and beyond the call of duty for this particular individual, but that's how much he believes in the community that he's living in and wants to retire in eventually, finish his medical career there at least anyway, and the government is giving him no help at all in regard to other support for other doctors coming into that community of Melita.

You know, he could at least use some support to see as many patients as he's allowed to during the day as well, Mr. Speaker, without having to deal with emergencies that might come in and someone to be able to help maintain seeing people when they come through the door that need more minor concerns or regular medical appointments.

With that, Mr. Speaker, there's so much more I could say. I've also got a situation I'll be bringing to the minister's attention in regard to a missionary that's offshore who isn't allowed to get Manitoba health care because she's been out of the country since March of '07, but of course missionaries don't fall underneath the category of, in our understanding at least, of being disqualified from the six-month rule. So I'm hoping we can solve some of these things amicably with the minister, but I just have to say again that I applaud this resolution and hope that if it does nothing else it will continue to bring attention to the government that they need to—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise to respond to this resolution. It's a pleasure to do so because it gives me the opportunity to draw attention to a classic Conservative strategy that's been used time and again over the years, and that's the best offence is a good defence. Certainly they have a lot to defend as regards their records in times past when they were in government.

I would look back to the year, I think it was 1993 or '94, when not only the Conservative government here in Manitoba but the Liberal government in Ottawa together orchestrated the greatest catastrophe that the health-care system across this country has experienced in recent memory. Mr. Martin was the Minister of Finance at

the time and, of course, in his zeal to cut expenditures, they made drastic cuts to the health transfer payments to the provincial governments across this country. The government of Gary Filmon followed suit here in Manitoba by making not increases to training spaces which you would think was just common sense but actually reductions to the training spaces in our universities to train physicians.

When I read through this resolution, the irony comes to mind. I don't know, I hesitate to use words such as hypocrisy because I don't want to tread on the thin ice of using unparliamentary language, but certainly that concept comes to mind if not to my speech. So when I look, as I said, to this resolution it's a pleasure to speak against it. This type of disinformation, which I think is probably a good word to use, is classic of Conservative strategy. Time and again we see it currently with the federal election and the Harper Conservatives, but we've seen it in times past in provincial elections.

I can look at my own constituency, the Interlake disinformation, for want of a better word. I look to 1995 when I think this province hit an all-time low in terms of democracy and the respect for that institution when the party of members opposite sought to subvert the democratic process and rig elections using the Aboriginal people of this province.

It was the most despicable act, I think, in the history of the province of Manitoba and I didn't think they could top that. I thought that that was the epitome of low, but in 1999, of course, it went even further with the personal smear campaign they orchestrated against myself personally in the Interlake constituency. It was an abominable act and a classic example of Conservatives twisting the facts and putting false information on the record which certainly is the case in regard to this resolution and the performance of this government.

Health care has always been our primary objective and responsibility and our record, in terms of spending increases, in increasing training opportunities, et cetera, certainly speaks for itself. I think this year, we had 110 people who entered into medical school compared to, I believe it was 70, which is the number that it was reduced to during the Filmon years. So, you know, those numbers speak for themselves. Tories going backwards; us going forward on training positions. I don't see how you can dispute that.

I know I don't have too much time, so I would like to really focus on building more than anything. Infrastructure has always been my main objective as an MLA, and whether it's highways or drains or building schools, we have always been a doer government, a builder government. I just look to the assets in my own constituency to speak for themselves. My home community, where I was raised in Fisher Branch, we put a new clinic into place. I look to the community of Riverton, for example, a brand new building was put up, was constructed there. So they have a good clinic there, as well. The Member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) spoke just a few moments ago, a \$13-million hospital built in his constituency.

In case members opposite are going to accuse us of favouring our constituencies, which is something that they practised when they were in office, shamelessly, I might add. I just look to the highways as another form of infrastructure, there was absolutely no building in my constituency in the decade that they were in power.

But when it comes to the building of hospitals, not only did we build one in Gimli, but we've built hospitals in Beausejour, in Pinawa, Morden, Winkler, of all places—certainly not a bastion of socialism. That was a hospital that they had promised and they were going to build as soon as they got re-elected, much like they were going to rebuild the Brandon hospital, I think they announced it no less than a dozen or so times. Well, this government did put that hospital into place. We put a new hospital in the constituency of Steinbach, which is where the member speaks quite eloquently against us. Here's a new hospital in his constituency. We have more to do. The hospital in Selkirk will soon be a reality, as well.

So, from a hospitals perspective, we've certainly pulled our weight. I look to the expansion of ultrasound services as a good example. Just recently, an ultrasound unit was opened up in the Eriksdale hospital which is going to be undergoing renovations, probably as we speak.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 9, 2008

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